

## Ordinary Language, Cephalus and a Deflationary Account of the Forms

---

Joshua Anderson

Department of History and Philosophy,  
Virginia State University

1 Hayden Drive, Box 9070, Petersburg, VA 23806, USA

Email: janderson@vsu.edu

### Abstract:

In this article I seek to come to some understanding of the interlocutors in the first book of Plato's *Republic*, particularly Cephalus. A more complete view of Cephalus not only provides some interesting ways to think about Plato and the *Republic*, but also suggests an interesting alternative to Plato's view of justice. The article will progress as follows: First, I discuss Plato's allegory of the cave. I, then, critique the cave allegory by applying the same kind of reasoning that O. K. Bouwsma used to criticize Descartes' evil genius. Next, I present what I think is a fruitful way to understand Cephalus. Finally, I draw some important conclusions regarding justice and offer some interesting critiques of Plato and Platonism.

**Keywords:** Allegory of the Cave, O.K Bouwsma, Cephalus, Ordinary Language, Plato

Plato's dialogues present one with a unique way of engaging deep and important philosophical issues. The dialogue format draws the reader in in a way that a more formal and analytic essay does not. Instead of just critically engaging the text one becomes part of the conversation. It is not surprising, then, that throughout the history of philosophy other philosophers have also presented their ideas in a dialogical form—a notable example is Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. However, too often it seems that Socrates' interlocutors are not engaged as fully as they might be.

While Socrates is fairly well fleshed-out, his interlocutors remain two-dimensional caricatures and not fully realized characters. Instead of taking the interlocutors seriously, it seems that they are means to Plato's ends. In order to "get Plato right" one focuses on what Socrates is saying and does not give the interlocutors their due. It is with the foregoing in mind that this article begins.

In this article, I seek to come to some understanding of the interlocutors in the first book of Plato's *Republic*, particularly Cephalus. That being said, I do not mean to give the impression that this article will be merely a character study or simply a literary analysis. By engaging and trying to come to an understanding of who Cephalus is and what he is about, I contend that important light can be shed on Plato's motivations and insights. Further, a more complete view of Cephalus not only provides some interesting ways to think about Plato and the *Republic*, but also suggests an interesting alternative to Plato's view of justice. While I believe that this alternative is present in the *Republic*, it

remains in a sense inchoate. By taking Cephalus more seriously, one is pushed to take the alternative his view suggests more seriously.

This article will progress in the following way. I will begin by looking at Plato's allegory of the cave; I will then critique the cave allegory by applying the same kind of reasoning that O. K. Bouwsma used to criticize Descartes' evil genius. While there are important differences between Plato's cave and Descartes' evil genius, the Bouwsma-esque critique helps to understand, in particular, Cephalus' worldview. I will then go on to present what I think is a fruitful way to understand Cephalus. In doing so I will be able to draw some important conclusions regarding justice and also present some interesting critiques of Plato and Platonism. Before continuing, I want to make clear that in all my discussion I will be limiting myself—when it is discussed—to justice as social justice. While I believe that what I present could be extended to an understanding of personal morality, et cetera, doing so would make this article needlessly cumbersome.

### **The allegory of the cave**

I begin by presenting Plato's allegory of the cave. I will then go on to critique the epistemological-metaphysical worldview that the cave allegory implies. One important aspect of the critique will be that the critique will progress in the same way as Bouwsma criticized Descartes' evil genius. I will also point to some important differences between the Cartesian evil genius, and the Platonic cave. While granting that there are important differences between Descartes and Plato, the Bouwsma style critique will be helpful in suggesting how one is to understand Cephalus and Platonic epistemology/metaphysics.

Plato's allegory of the cave starts Book VII of the *Republic* and runs from 514 through roughly 517b, though it is continuously referred to throughout. Plato asks the reader, via his interlocutor Glaucon, to imagine a group of human beings fettered in a cave, and all those human beings are able to do is look at the cave wall directly in front of them. Light is provided by a fire behind them. Plato goes on to have the reader/Glaucon further imagine that there are other people—i.e. non-fettered individuals—“carrying all kinds of artifacts [for example,...] statues of people and other animals, made out of stone, wood, and every material. And, as you'd expect, some of the carriers are talking, and some are silent” (514c) (Plato 1992, 187). The fettered people or, as Plato would like to call them, prisoners have been there since birth and have no non-cave experiences.

Plato has now laid out his view of what the worldview of the fettered people is. For Plato, the fettered people's world is made up of shadows of artificially created objects that are images themselves of actual objects. Further, what the fettered people hear are echoes, and the echoes are, in a sense, completely unrelated to the shadows which the fettered people see. So, for Plato, the entire world of the fettered people is disconnected non-meaningful images of images. As he says, “the prisoners would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts” (515c) (Plato 1992, 187).

Plato then goes on to have the reader/Glaucon imagine that one of the prisoners becomes unfettered and is forced to look at the fire and the artifacts. This is a painful experience for the prisoner because not only is the prisoner's worldview unable to cope with or make sense of what he or she is seeing, but the light from the fire is dazzling to the prisoner's senses. The former prisoner is then further compelled out of the cave into the outside world of actual objects, actual sounds and actual light. At first the prisoner is too overwhelmed to experience the objects directly and must view them indirectly as shadows and reflections. But, eventually the former prisoner is able to view the objects directly and even look directly at the sun—which Plato maintains is the source of all the objects. (516c) (Plato 1992, 188).

It must be remembered that the allegory of the cave is an allegory. Plato maintains it is an allegory of the human condition. As Julia Annas states: “[t]he prisoners are ‘like us’, says Socrates (515a). The Cave is, then, not just the degraded state of a bad society. It is the human condition” (Annas 1997, 153). Understanding that the cave is an allegory, and that it is an allegory of the actual human condition, some important conclusions can be drawn. For Plato, the shadow world of the cave is the actual world of lived experience. That would mean that Plato sees the actual world of lived experience as images of images that are disconnected but loosely held together. Further, it would mean that the basis of the real/shadow world are actual things which are in some sense, at least, connected, stable and meaningfully held together.

### **Bouwsma and the evil genius world**

Now that there is some understanding of the allegory of the cave, I will now critique the allegory in a way similar to how O. K. Bouwsma critiqued Descartes' evil genius. First, as Bouwsma does, I will imagine an extreme evil genius world. In the extreme evil genius world, absolutely everything is illusory, i.e. the evil genius has created and controls everything that is perceived or conceived by a single thinking subject. To be clear, to say that the evil genius world is illusory in this way is to maintain that in some “objective” metaphysical-ontological sense the evil genius world does not have any real existence.

After the evil genius had established the deceived subject—who Bouwsma calls Tom—in the illusory world, Bouwsma imagines the evil genius becoming perturbed that there was no one to appreciate his handy-work. Because of this, the evil genius injects himself into the illusory world and has a conversation with Tom. The evil genius informs Tom “[his] flowers are nothing but illusions” (Bouwsma 1965, 94). Tom is incredulous and points out that his flowers are real while the reflection of the flowers in the mirror is an illusion. In support of his claim, Tom points out that one cannot feel pollen on the flowers in the mirror, that bees cannot suck honey from the flowers in the mirror and he cannot send the flowers in the mirror to his wife, Milly, all of which are possible with the flowers outside of the mirror (Bouwsma 1965, 94). Thus, *ipso facto* his flowers are real and not an illusion at all.

The evil genius then tries to explain that there are two types of illusion. One type are thin illusions, such as the flowers in the mirror. There are also thick illusions, “and the flowers before the mirror are thick. Thick illusions are best for deception. [...] From them [thick illusions] you may gather pollen, send them to Milly, and foolish bees may sleep in them” (Bouwisma 1965, 95). Tom remains unconvinced, stating, “I see what you mean by thin illusions is what I mean by illusions, and what you mean by thick illusions is what I mean by flowers. So when you say that my flowers are your thick illusions this doesn’t bother me” (Bouwisma 1965, 95). Tom concludes that if the evil genius truly wished to deceive, the evil genius “must learn the language of those you are to deceive” (Bouwisma 1965, 96). The point is that for Tom the evil genius world is the real stable world. Because one can act and interact in the evil genius world in important and meaningful ways, that is sufficient to establish the world as real. More importantly, in order to doubt the world one must do violence to the ways which one speaks, means and intends.

I have only briefly sketched Plato’s allegory of the cave, and Bouwisma’s critique of Descartes’ evil genius. However, I think enough has been explained in order for me to present a Bouwisma style argument against Plato.

### **Ordinary language and Plato’s cave**

In this section of the article, I will build on everything that was said above in order to present a critique of Plato’s allegory of the cave. However, before continuing I would like to point out that the critique serves as a tool in order to help come to a better understanding of the interlocutors of the first book of Plato’s *Republic*, and a critique of Platonism generally. I believe that the best way to begin the critique of the allegory of the cave is by quoting Plato.

And if there had been any honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by and who best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and who could thus best divine the future (516c-d) (Plato 1992, 188).

The above quote points to two important things. First, unlike what was suggested above, it would seem that the shadow world does hang together sensibly. Not only is the cave world sensible<sup>1</sup>, but it is also meaningful, understandable and predictable. Of course that would be true, however, because as has already been noted, the shadow world of the cave is the actual world in which humanity finds itself. Second, it is clear that the prisoners have a language with which they can explain, describe and use to make sense of their world.

If it were imagined, as Socrates had Glaucon imagine, that someone descends from the “outside” world, it would not merely be that the other prisoners would ridicule the journeyer. It is not merely that the prisoners would maintain that the journeyer had “returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined” (517a) (Plato 1992, 189). More importantly, it would seem that the prisoners would find what the journeyer was saying did not make sense. If, then, one imagines that the journeyer tells the prisoners that what they are perceiving is shadows of images cast by

artificial light, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the prisoners would respond in a way similar to how Tom responded to the evil genius. So, one can imagine that the prisoners would respond by stating something like: “We see what you mean by shadows is what we mean by objects. So when you say that our objects are your shadows this doesn’t bother us.”<sup>2</sup>

One could go back even further, to the beginning of the cave allegory, and use a similar type of reasoning. First, it should be noted that Plato has set up his allegory to be disparaging of the shadow world—i.e. the actual world. Plato starts out by saying that those in the cave are fettered and are prisoners. Also, he says that the world of those in the cave is a world of “shadows” and “echoes” implying their unreality before he even begins. Further, he speaks of the journeyer as being forced out of the cave, and dazzled by the light of the fire and then by the light of the sun (514-517b) (Plato 1992, 186-9).

Now, if one imagines a prisoner being released and forced to turn around, once his or her eyes became accustomed to the light, in order to make sense of what he or she saw, one could assume that he or she would describe it in terms of the language he or she already knew and used. So, the artifacts would become images of the shadows, and the artifacts would be, in some sense then, less real than the shadows. That is the case because the shadow world would be primary, and in order to make sense of the new experience one would have to describe the artifacts relative to the shadows, and in that sense the artifacts would be derivative. Further, to describe the artifacts as derivative would be to experience the artifacts as derivative. Likewise, as the journeyer progressed out of the cave in order to make sense of his or her experience it would be relative to the world of shadows. Thus, if the human condition is exactly the shadow-cave world, then the Platonic world of the Forms can only in some ways be derivative of the actual world.<sup>3</sup>

This interpretation, that the world of Forms is derivative of the actual world, can be strengthened if one notes as Annas does that “nothing that Plato has said has excluded our having knowledge of things that are not forms” (Annas 1981, 210). “So he [Plato] has not excluded particular objects of experience from being known just because they are particular objects of experience” (Annas 1981, 211). The reason that Annas’ assertion strengthens the primacy of the shadow-cave-actual world claim that is being made here is that even Plato must grant that those in the shadow-cave-actual world do have knowledge. If that is so, and if it is the language of the shadow-cave-actual world that determines the experiences of the prisoners and the journeyer then any knowledge of the “outside” world of the Forms is at least in some sense knowledge based on the knowledge of the shadow-cave-actual world.

I have briefly sketched a Bouwsma-esque critique of Plato’s allegory of the cave. I am in no way trying to prove that this reading is the correct reading of Plato, my intention is to lay the groundwork for establishing the worldview of the interlocutors in the first book of Plato’s *Republic*. Before proceeding to the interlocutors, I will acknowledge some differences between Plato and Descartes. This is necessary because Bouwsma was critiquing Descartes because Bouwsma found Cartesian radical skepticism troubling. Plato was not beginning from radical doubt, so a Bouwsma-esque critique may not be as problematic for Plato.

Julia Annas maintains that “Plato’s search for knowledge is not the post-Cartesian search for a state immune to skeptical doubt. Rather it is a search for understanding” (Annas 1981, 212). Plato’s search for knowledge is for an increasing intelligibility. As one moves from the shadow-cave world to the outside world and eventually to looking at the sun itself<sup>4</sup> Plato is trying to provide an increasing stability to one’s knowledge.

Plato’s view is driven by a principle of “one over many”<sup>5</sup>. So, in order to explain the diversity and the variability of predicates applied to particulars, a Form, as a perfect exemplar of the predicate, is used to ground the variable predication of the particulars. For example, because there are many objects to which one can ascribe the predicate of being square, and those particulars—because of perspective or the objects destructibility—are not always square, for Plato, in order to truly understand what “squareness” is there must be one thing that has squareness perfectly, which is the Form of the square. So, in order to explain the diversity of the application of the predicate “squareness” or “is square” there must be *one* example of perfect squareness to which the predicate “squareness” or “is square” refers. Thus for Plato, knowing the one perfect exemplar of a predicate deepens ones understanding of the predicate and makes the myriad applications of the predicate more intelligible.

An analogy can be made between science and Plato’s theory of Forms. If one wants to build a structure one certainly can—humanity has been building structures from time immemorial. However, if one understands Newtonian mechanics, geometry, et cetera not only can one build a better structure, but one can explain why one structure is more or less stable than other structures.

To return to the “one over many” principle, since the Forms are able to instantiate their particular property perfectly one must have an explanation as to why the forms can have a property perfectly while phenomenal objects cannot. The reason the forms can have their particular property perfectly is because they have “Form-al” ideal properties such as immutability, eternity and the like. So, Plato needs to again explain the diversity of the application of those properties to the myriad Forms. The Form of the Good then provides the ground for the Forms having their ideal properties in the same way that the Forms provide the ground or reference for particulars having particular properties.

Finally, as has already been mentioned, Plato believes that his epistemology/metaphysics provides an increasing and deepening of one’s understanding. One can, on Plato’s view maintain their knowledge of the phenomenal world but just have a clearer understanding of the phenomenal world by moving out of the cave, that is to say, by understanding the Forms. This, then, is much different than radical skepticism. However, it seems that the Bouwsma-esque critique offered above can still be instructive. In essence, what the Bouwsma style critique does is turns Plato on his head, or rather on his feet.<sup>6</sup>

As has already been stated, what the Bouwsma style critique does is give primacy to the actual/shadow world. One’s understanding, knowledge and language there are the basis for an understanding of one’s journey out of the cave and into the world of the Forms. Insofar as “The

Good” or “The Forms” have any meaning or sense it is derivative of ones understanding of the actual world.<sup>7</sup> Thus, what the Bouwsma-esque critique offers is two-fold. First, given the primacy of the phenomenal-actual world, if “The Forms” or “The Good” are meaningful at all their meaning comes from the knowledge and language of the phenomenal-actual world. Second, the critique provides the background for an understanding of how to interpret the interlocutors in the first book of Plato’s *Republic*, particularly Cephalus. I will now turn to a discussion of Cephalus.

### **Giving Cephalus his due**

In this section, I will begin my discussion of the interlocutors in the first book of Plato’s *Republic*. My primary concern will be with giving a fuller understanding of Cephalus. Building on the critique of the cave allegory, I will present a worldview that Cephalus might in fact hold. By focusing on a fuller understanding of the interlocutors, one can develop important criticisms of and responses to Plato as Socrates that were not present when Plato had Socrates engaging them. Finally, some interesting insights will be had regarding some of Plato’s views and about alternative views of social justice.

Cephalus is introduced right near the beginning of Book I of Plato’s *Republic* (328b-c); it is his home and property that provide the backdrop for the dialogue. Further, it is Socrates engagement with Cephalus regarding moderation, wealth and old-age that is the springboard for the discussion of Justice and all that follows from that in the *Republic*. While Cephalus’ presence is short-lived in the dialogue (328b-331d) his importance should not be underestimated. A filling out of Cephalus as a character—his worldview, his motivations and responses he might have made to Socrates had he not left so hastily—can thus be beneficial.

Julia Annas interprets Cephalus fairly negatively.<sup>8</sup> On her reading, Cephalus is seen as morally complacent and philosophically/intellectually immature. I do not believe that this is a fair reading of Cephalus. I am more inclined to agree with C. D. C. Reeve: “Cephalus is an attractive character, portrayed with dignity and respect” (Reeve 2006, 6). Further, Reeve points out that Cephalus poses a problem for Plato. Cephalus “is to some degree moderate, just, pious and wise without having studied philosophy or *knowing* what the virtues are” (Reeve 2006, 6).<sup>9</sup> Reeve goes on to note that there are “striking similarities between the description of Cephalus and the description of Socrates given in the *Apology*, and later in the *Republic* itself. Both men avoided injustice and impiety. Both face death with good hope... Neither knows what justice is” (Reeve 2006, 6).<sup>10</sup>

There is ample proof from the description of Cephalus in the *Republic* that Reeve’s reading of Cephalus is, in general, correct. A few examples from the *Republic* should be sufficient to support the claim that Reeve’s reading is, in general, correct. First, it is clear that Cephalus is a pious person because he is first introduced while engaged in a sacrifice to the gods (328c). Further, despite the pleasure he takes in talk and conversation (328c-d) he excuses himself to return to the sacrifice (331c)—that is to say that Cephalus’ obligations to the gods trump any personal pleasures he might have. Also, Cephalus’ moderation is well established in various places, in his discussion of old age (329d), and in

his relationship to money (330b-c). The examples can of course be multiplied but the ones given should be enough to justify Reeve's reading.

One point that Reeve perhaps did not notice, however, is the fact that Cephalus is intelligent, reflective and philosophical in his own right—though not necessarily philosophical in a Platonic sense. The fact that Cephalus is a successful money-maker/businessman speaks to his intelligence. However, Cephalus' intelligence should not be dismissed as mere cunning or business acumen since it is coupled with reflection (329d, 330b-c), that is to say his intelligence is not merely “knowing how” to be a successful businessman but is tempered by his piety, moderation and justice (330b-c, et al).

A further fact that establishes Cephalus' character as reflective and philosophical in his own right is external to the text. The actual, historical, Cephalus was intimately involved in the democratic movement in ancient Greece.

He sired and raised two leaders of the democratic party [Polemarchus and Lysias]... He appears to support their endeavors and is hospitable, not simply to philosophical discussion in general, but to a particular discussion that resonates, in advance with the themes of Socrates's trial. For all these reasons it is not unreasonable to think of Cephalus as being closely associated with the democratic politics of late fifth century Athens, indeed as being himself a democrat (Steinberger 1996, 185).

Plato's criticisms of democracy aside, what Cephalus' involvement with democratic politics shows is that Cephalus did take seriously questions of justice, for example, and had come to definite conclusions about social justice and the best organization of society.

Now that there is fuller understanding of who Cephalus is, I will look to how this can inform the interactions that Cephalus has with Socrates. To begin, it must be noted the very unnatural way that Plato—as Socrates—introduces the discussion of justice. In his discussion of wealth, Cephalus mentions, in passing, that if one finds “many injustices in his life [... he] lives in anticipation of bad things to come” (330e) (Plato 1992, 5). Cephalus goes on to mention that the greatest benefit of wealth is that it allows a person to be able to pay off their debts, and can thus die in peace (331b). Socrates/Plato pounce on this fairly off-hand remark and suggest that Cephalus is giving a definition of justice. Socrates says explicitly “speaking of this very thing itself, namely, justice, are we to say unconditionally that it is speaking the truth and paying debts” (331c) (Plato 1992, 5-6).

Several things should be noted. First, Cephalus was clearly not giving a definition of justice. Cephalus was talking about old-age, death and wealth not justice. When Cephalus does mention justice, he is talking about particular cases of injustice or wronging someone in particular, not justice in general. Cephalus himself never assents to the definition of justice; it is Polemarchus that comes in to defend the definition (331d). Further, it is clear that Cephalus has a clear understanding of justice or right and wrong. For Cephalus does say that repaying debts is a just act (331b) and that one should not tell the truth to the mentally unstable (331c). Perhaps Cephalus cannot give a rigorous definition of what justice is, but that is not to say that he does not understand justice. In

not being able to give a definition, Cephalus is in good company—consider Saint Augustine’s discussion of time. Finally, it must be remembered that Cephalus is speaking from the perspective of the shadow-cave-actual world, the world of particulars. Justice there, or here, is particular examples of justice, Socrates is trying to introduce the one-over-many principle of the world of Forms, and as was noted above in trying to do so Socrates and Plato are departing from meaningful discourse.

What Plato and Socrates are asking for is a principle that can explain the diversity of the application of the term “justice”. Yet, if one can already successfully and meaningfully apply a notion of justice it is unclear what purpose a broad and general principle would serve. As G. E. Moore has noted “to hold that we do not know what, in certain respects, is the analysis of what we understand by [...] an expression, is an entirely different thing from holding that we do not understand the expression” (Moore 1925, 199). What Moore is pointing out is that in order to successfully use and apply, in essence to understand, how to make a claim one does not need to know what it is that makes one’s successful application of the term true. In other words, in order for Cephalus to understand what justice is, he does not need to know what it is about particular instances of justice that makes them just. This, then, is what is unnatural about Plato having Socrates introduce justice in the way that he does. People in the shadow-cave-actual world—represented by Cephalus—already know what justice is, they just do not have a hard and fast criteria that explains the diversity of application, to ask for that goes beyond what normal people mean when they use the term.

Yet, there is something to the Platonic questioning for a criterion. Plato wants to understand justice, and Plato is uncomfortable with the seeming transitoriness of the shadow-cave-actual world understanding of justice. There is something to Plato’s desire, so in order not to be completely dismissive of Plato’s account there must be something more substantial to the shadow-cave-actual world notion of justice—that is, something that is not just merely critical and defaults to ordinary language understanding. The upshot of interpreting Cephalus as he has been presented here is that Cephalus does represent such a substantial understanding. I will quote Peter Steinberger at length to make this point:

[Cephalus’] friendliness and good humor, his evident devotion to the gods [...] and his interest in moderation make him a fair exemplification of a certain commonsense notion of justice and virtue. It is an idea of reasonableness and avoidance of excess, of the plurality of goods, and a making do within the limits of normal human desire. Presumably, it is something that virtually anyone can aspire to, hence is entirely consistent with, and might even serve as a constitutive principle of democracy as a philosophy of politics (Steinberger 1996, 193).

Thus, Cephalus is an exemplar of an alternative view of justice that avoids the Platonic abstraction to give a firm base to justice. The Cephalian version of justice is acquired “not through the application of the theoretical intellect but through a kind of habituation” (Steinberger 1996, 193)—that is, habituation in a Deweyan sense.<sup>11</sup>

### **A deflationary account of the Forms**

Before concluding, I will discuss some other insights that can be gleaned from the analysis thus far. It has been shown that the shadow-cave-actual world should be understood as primary. If that is so, a better understanding of Cephalus can be had. Further, by giving primacy to Cephalus' worldview it was noted that there is a viable alternative to the Platonic theory of justice. However, questions still remain regarding Plato's metaphysics and the ontological status of the Forms. By giving primacy to the shadow-cave-actual world, it was suggested that the world of the Forms is derivative. It is to the derivative status of the world of the Forms that I will now return.

Plato's motivation for introducing the Forms and in particular the Form of the Good was to explain the seeming diversity in the world. By the principle of one-over-many, Plato maintains that in order to explain the seeming diversity in the world there must be some thing or some things that are stable that under-gird the application of various properties or predicates. As has been mentioned, Annas maintains that moving from the shadow-cave-actual world of particulars to the world of the Forms provides a deeper, more stable and more inclusive understanding. In this section of the article, I will present what I believe is a good way to interpret the world of the Forms. It will be suggested that one can maintain the Platonic Forms, but in order to do so the metaphysical status of the Forms must be deflated. Even the deflated version of the Forms remains problematic, however.

Above, when discussing the explanatory power of the Forms, I drew a comparison to science. I believe the comparison is apt. One comes to know the laws of physics by experimentation and the value of the laws of physics, for example, is that it helps explain and control the world in which one finds oneself—that is, the abstract laws of physics help one better manage, control and understand the actual lived world. In just the same way, Plato maintains that the Forms help one better understand the actual lived world. However, there is a difference, Plato maintains that the reality of the Forms is what give reality to the actual world. In science however, the laws are understood to be abstractions, the concrete particulars of existence help provide ones understanding of the laws, not vice versa.

It might be objected that it is in fact the laws of physics that provide the reality of the actual world, but it must be remembered that the laws of physics are abstractions. When presenting the laws of physics one uses “frictionless surfaces”, “temperatures of absolute zero”, and “objects moving at the speed of light” these are all things that do not really obtain in the actual world. It might in fact be that the actual world is controlled and shaped by laws, but one's understanding of those laws are as ideal abstractions which are not “real” in the way that concrete particulars are.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, if the Platonic forms are to be maintained they ought to be maintained in the same way these laws of nature are maintained. They might have great explanatory value and may perhaps deepen one's understanding of the actual lived world, but it is a mistake to give them a deep, or thick, ontological status, much less one that grounds the ontological status of the actual lived world. The Forms, at best, are abstractions that help explain the diversity of one's application and assigning of properties in a variety of circumstances. So, the form of Justice is not what makes a particular act Just, though it might help explain what it is about many different just acts that make them just, or

how one might decide if a particular act is or is not just. Knowing how an abstract object at rest with a particular mass reacts when struck by an abstract object in motion with a particular mass would move on a frictionless surface helps understand how a particular billiard ball would move when struck by a cue, but one does not mistake the theory for what is actually happening. Further, it certainly is not the case that the particular billiard ball moves *exactly* as it does *because* of the ideal situation or abstract law. In just the same way, an abstract notion of justice might help explain why a particular act is just, one ought not mistake the theory for the particular or claim that an act *is* just insofar as it bears a certain relation to the Form of Justice.

Even granting Plato this deflated version of Forms remains problematic. First, unlike the laws of physics which have been expressed clearly and explicitly, not once throughout the *Republic* does Plato ever present a clear and explicit understanding of what the Forms are. Instead, Plato has Socrates suggest, imply and explain by analogy what the Forms *might* be. The reason that the laws of physics are useful is because they are explicit and applicable. In the *Republic*, Plato fails to make the Forms really explicit, and thus their applicability and usefulness is reduced to that degree.

The second problem with the deflated version of the Forms is that one need not know the Forms, at all, to be successful in the use of what would be their application. One need not know the laws of chemistry to be a great cook. In fact many great chemists are probably terrible cooks. Yet it is the laws of chemistry that are at work in cooking. In the same way, one need not know the Form of the Good in order to successfully be good or pick out good things. That of course is to be expected, since Cephalus is such a person.

It should be noted that both of the problems for the deflated view of the Forms would still be problems for the Forms if one maintained the ontological status that Plato gives them. However, the deflated view has a less complicated metaphysics, and can more easily account for the primacy of the actual world. Further, the deflated view suggests a way forward for the Platonist. Instead of devaluing the actual experiences of the shadow-cave-actual world, one should proceed like science. Instead of resorting to analogy, implication and metaphor, one ought to fully embrace an experimental approach. It would seem that, this would imply a move away from Platonism to Aristotelianism, that is one possibility, but there is potential for a more scientific Platonism.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have tried to come to some understanding of the worldview of the interlocutors in the first book of Plato's *Republic*, particularly the character of Cephalus. The article began by presenting Plato's allegory of the cave and then critiquing the allegory in a way that is similar to O. K. Bouwsma's critique of Descartes' evil genius. While there are important differences between Descartes and Plato, the similarities are close enough to be informative. The main point to take away from the Bouwsma-style critique of the cave allegory is that the shadow-cave-actual world is given primacy, both in meaning and reality. The world of the Forms would thus be derivative.

I then went on to give a fuller characterization of Cephalus. Contrary to Julia Annas' reading, Cephalus should be understood as intelligent and virtuous. By acknowledging the positive characteristics of Cephalus, and the unnatural way in which the definition of justice is introduced, an alternative version of justice was suggested. Opposed to the Platonic ideal of the philosopher-king, Cephalus represents a commonsense, pragmatic and democratic version of justice.

Finally, it was suggested that a way to maintain Platonism would be to make it more scientific. Since the Platonic theory of the Forms is supposed to deepen one's understanding of the phenomenal world and fill an explanatory role in the same way the laws of physics and chemistry do, one should try to come to an understanding of the Forms in the same way one comes to an understanding of the laws of nature. This would of course deflate the metaphysical/ontological status of the Forms, but has the advantage of being a simpler metaphysics—i.e. less complex or ontologically crowded—and acknowledges the primacy of the shadow-cave-actual world.

### **Endnotes:**

1. By sensible I mean that one can make sense of it, not merely that one has sensations of it, which is also certainly true.
2. A paraphrase of Bouwsma (1965, 95).
3. I will return to this point below.
4. I will leave aside the practical wisdom of staring directly at the sun.
5. This phrase "one over many" and the much of the following discussion of Plato's epistemology *cum* metaphysics is based on discussions and so forth I had with George Terzis.
6. Karl Marx makes a similar claim about his project regarding Hegel's idealism. Although, that is not the project here the reference should be noted. See the Afterward to the second German edition of *Capital*.
7. See note 3.
8. See Annas, (1981), Chapter 2.
9. Italics is mine, since as will be suggested below Cephalus does *know*. He just does not know the way Plato believes that one ought to know.
10. Again, knowledge is mentioned, and this will play an important role below.
11. See, for example, Dewey (1988).
12. A full argument of the status of laws of nature extends far beyond the scope of this article. I think it is enough to note that the rough version I have presented here has some intuitive appeal, and *prima facie* does not seem false.

### **References:**

- Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Annas, Julia. "Understanding the Good." Ed. Richard Kraut. *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997. 143-168.
- Bouwsma, O. K. "Descartes' Evil Genius." Ed. O.K. Bouwsma. *Philosophical Essays*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 85-97.
- Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988.
- Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. New York: Barnes & Noble Publishing, Inc., 2006.

- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Moore, G. E. "A Defence of Common Sense." Ed. J.H. Muirhead. *Contemporary British Philosophy, second series*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1925. 191-223.
- Plato. *Republic*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992.
- Reeve, C. D. C. *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006.
- Steinberger, Peter. "Who Is Cephalus?." *Political Theory* 24, no. 2 (1996): 172-199.