

Plato's Myth of Er for Psychic Education in the Philosophical Way



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Abstract: Plato's *Republic* is thematically preoccupied with *psycho-paideia* as psychic education that is to facilitate a philosophical illumination of the human soul or human nature in particular. In the final analysis from a teleological perspective, it is intended to nurture good personality and citizenship alike for the *kallipolis* as beautiful city-state above all. As revealed in the structure of the whole dialogue, the implementation of the Platonic psychic education is most crucial and difficult owing to human weaknesses and other disturbances. In order to carry it out in praxis, Plato tends to make his philosophical discourse somewhat intuitional and perceptual with the help of retelling a myth, which is then conducive to his creation of philosophical myths in a relevant context each. For instance, the myth of Er presented at the end of the dialogue is considered to be a myth of psychic education in essence, and designed to enhance philosophical learning *per se*. It involves such three ways as the heavenly, the underground, and the philosophical. Among them the philosophical way entails the becoming of the god-like being as the Platonic philosopher. The becoming as such is corresponding to the development of the perfect citizenship that underlines the fundamental guardianship of the *kallipolis* concerned.

Keywords: Psychic Education; Myth of Er; Heavenly Way; Underground Way, Philosophical Way; Platonic Philosopher; Perfect Citizenship

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1 A Thematic Concern

In spite of the engaging debate on *dikaioṣunē* qua justice from its outset, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that Plato's *Republic* is not a political system as it might be thought from its title, but "the finest treatise on education ever written." [1] This argument is assumed to come closer to understanding the entire dialogue in question. Yet, a thematic concern about it remains open to reconsideration among some Plato scholars with a spectrum of interpretive attempts thereafter.

Here we may take three typical views for example. According to A. E. Taylor, the dialogue as such can be regarded as a contribution to both ethics and politics, because from the viewpoint of Socrates and Plato there is no distinction, except one of convenience, between ethics and politics. "The laws of right are the same for classes and cities as for individual men. But one must add that

these laws are primary laws of personal morality; politics is founded on ethics, not ethics on politics." [2]

In contrast to the foregoing observations, Richard Lewis Nettleship regards it as a book of moral philosophy rather than political philosophy with respect to the question "What is justice (*dikaioṣunē*)?" He proceeds to assert that "it is a book about human life and human soul or human nature, and the real question in it is, as Plato says, how to live best." [3] Thus it draws out an ideal picture of the rise and fall of the human soul or mind (*psychē*), the rise to its highest stage of development and the fall to its lowest depth. In so doing it strives to take account of everything in the human soul. Incidentally, Nettleship claims that the *Republic* itself may be seen as a philosophical work in one sense, and in the other, as a treatise on social and political reform. For it is written in

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the spirit of a man not merely reflecting on human life, but intensely anxious to reform and revolutionize it. It seems at this point that Nettleship's view and Taylor's are somewhat overlapping one another.

Revisiting the primary subject of the *Republic* as a whole, we may look at one more argument offered by Werner Jaeger. That is, Plato has philosophically set forth one of the permanent and essential presuppositions of Greek *paideia*, and meanwhile he "brings out in the form of *paideia* that particular aspect of the state whose weakening he thinks responsible for the progressive degeneration and debasement of contemporary politics. Hence politics and *paideia* that are vaguely related then become "the two foci of Plato's work." Apparently Jaeger resumes Rousseau's line of thought, and concludes that "the ultimate interest of Plato's *Republic* is the human soul" in spite of his adducing the political dimension to reinforce his conclusion aforementioned.

In my mind, I share a bit more sympathy with Jaeger, and treat *paideia* in this case as psychic education above all. Literally, by *paideia* is meant education or growth through cultural cultivation, and by psychic education is meant the education of the human soul or human nature in terms of philosophical learning and moral training. Teleologically and ultimately, it is directed to nurture good citizenship in honor of Plato's *kallipolis* as the beautiful city-state. Incidentally, the *Republic* is originally titled *Politeia* in ancient Greek, and mainly referred to such three things as political institution, art of administration, and citizenship in particular. It covers a dialectical discussion and theoretical formulation of such interwoven themes as politics, ethics, and education altogether. But all this involves the remolding of the human soul owing to the fact that politics is grounded on ethics, and ethics on education, and accordingly, education is pointed to morality, and morality to the soul of individual citizens as is exemplified in the city-soul analogy under Plato's pen.

As evinced in the entire process of human history, it is by no means an easy enterprise to operate psychic education as the vital part of developing good citizenship. In most cases, the human soul or human nature is not merely complicated in view of its composition, but susceptible to change and corruption as a consequence of its hidden linkage with human weaknesses shrouded in a capricious kind of freewill. Such weaknesses are psychologically inclined to avaricious self-interestedness or ambitious egoism, and metaphorically embodied in the

shape of a many-headed beast or in the form of a lion. [4] Plato is highly aware of the weaknesses within human soul such that he grows somewhat pessimistic about human affairs and human beings alike. However, he keeps a constant emphasis on psychic education and expects a kind of harmony within it under the ideal condition of balancing the three parts of the whole, say, the appetitive, the rational and the spirited. Notwithstanding the difficulty in this domain, Plato himself never gives it up at any rate. He attempts to address the problem in its possible aspects so as to evoke in-depth reflections on the correct education of human individuals in general. Noticeably he procures a recommendable alternative in this regard, hoping to expose people to philosophical learning mingled with moral training for the sake of self-improvement and self-perfection, if not self-redemption at all.

In my observation, the Platonic revelation of the main problems with the human soul is most fundamentally explored and articulated in the *Republic* in contrast to some other dialogues like the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Laws*. The whole structure of the given text is philosophically framed, underlined by the exploration of human soul all the way through, and characterized by a chain of thought-provoking allegories. For instance, it commences with the magic ring of Gyges deployed to expose the vulnerable aspect of the human soul as is revealed via the unjust and greedy tendency within the mindset of the sheep-keeper concerned. Then, it intermediates with the tripartite formation that is employed to illustrate the interactive traits of the human soul and its possible consequences. It is rather a challenge to coordinate the three parts of the soul into a harmonious ternion. It is thus allegorized in the myth of three images comprising a man, lion and many-headed monster. And finally, it shifts to the elaboration of the myth of Er (Hyros) when approaching the very end of the *Republic*. Tremendously subtle and significant, the myth is employed to illuminate the postmortem experience of the human soul and its impact on one's lifetime conduct. This experience is associated with the last judgment in an eschatological sense, and with transmigration in the mystic overtone of "the Orphic-Pythagorean conglomerate." [5] On this account of last judgment, the Platonic notion of punish and reward is hereby prone to remind some readers of reincarnation in light of the Buddhist law of *karma* that is stemmed from the right and wrong doings in the past. Yet, it must be discriminated that the law of *karma* is destined to continue one generation after another whereas the Platonic notion of punish and reward is proclaimed to last once for all in the

afterlife of human individuals. No matter what discrimination it may be, it cannot deny the hard fact that the education of the human soul is a big challenge as well as a critical necessity.

As formulated in one of my writings earlier, a scrutiny of the *Republic* has left me an impression that Plato's poetics features moral idealism mixed up with political instrumentalism. It could be broadly divided into two leading dimensions termed as *psycho-poiēsis* and *somato-poiēsis*. These two dimensions are naturally coupled with each other so as to make an integrated whole. In classical Greek, *poiēsis* originally indicates the *technē* or art of creating and making. Accordingly, the *psycho-poiēsis* by means of music-poetry (*mousikē*) education is schemed to nourish a just and good soul, whereas the *somato-poiēsis* by virtue of gymnastic (*gymnastikē*) training is intended to build up a healthy and beautiful body. They are interactive in an organic unity, aiming through correct education and training to facilitate the harmony between the soul and the body, foster the personality of *kalokagathia* as beauty-cum-good based on the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance and justice, and eventually cultivate more qualified citizens for the sake of the ideal city-state in Plato's vision. [6]

This discussion is to tender much attention to the allegorical exposition of the myth of Er in particular. It looks into the three ways of educating the human soul with regard to the primary weaknesses of human nature and the theoretical hypotheses of human perfection tallied with perfect citizenship. The three ways herein encompass the underground, the heavenly and the philosophical. Since Plato himself prefers the philosophical way, it is of need to examine the Platonic philosopher *qua* a god-like being that stands for Plato's highest expectation of perfect citizen or human perfection from the perspective of his moral philosophy.

2 The Myth of Er Revisited

According to the narration nearing the end of the *Republic*, the myth of Er provides a sensational picture of the postmortem experience of the wandering soul in the underworld. [7] More specifically, Er is a Pamphylian soldier who has died in a battle, but twelve days after he comes back to life on his funeral pyre, and recounts what his soul has seen and heard during its sojourn through the underworld. As witnessed down there, the just souls are seen ascending, through an opening in the sky on the right

hand, to a millennium of happiness as a result of external reward for the virtues, whereas the unjust souls are seen descending, through an opening in the ground on the left hand, to a millennium of punishment for the vices. At the same spot, continuous streams of souls are seen arriving, some coming down by another opening in the sky from their travel in heaven, others coming up by another opening in the earth from their journey below. The former enjoy bliss while the latter suffer from punitive misery. As each of them gets there onto a meadow, it rests for seven days before choosing a new life. The punishment allotted to the unjust soul at death is the requital ten times over the evil done in life; and the recompense to the just of the good done in life is tenfold, too. There are naturally some other forms of atonement. For example, someone whose crime or guilt has been extreme are held not to have been sufficiently punished when it returns after a thousand years, are to be sent back again for a second round of a thousand years. As for those who are waiting on the meadow, the critical moment comes at the climax of the story when they are lined up to make personal choices in front of Lachesis, the maiden daughter of Necessity. Having listened to the announcement of relevant instructions that provide all souls with equal opportunity each, they commence to choose their forms of lives one after another by taking up one of the lots casted around them from overhead. They make their choice according to their freewill at a time when the prophet keeps advising them not to blame anybody else but to be responsible for themselves. [8]

As luck would have it, the one who makes the first choice has had a decent background in his previous life. He has lived in a well-ordered polity in his former existence, participating in virtue by habit and possibly moral convention. He is therefore one of the blessed souls rewarded for a virtuous life on the basis of fine conduct in the previous phase, and arranged not to suffer any punishment down in earth but to have a soul excursion up in heaven. Naturally he comes down from above with a happy experience. But unlike those who come up from below and who have themselves suffered and seen the sufferings of others, he makes his choice so precipitately, due to his lack of wisdom and his thirst for fame, that he pays a heavy price of falling into a victim of an interchange of good and evil of the souls. Thereupon he chooses a tyrant's life as his real conception of happiness within his soul leads him to envy the greatest tyrant in view of power, status and other types of privileges. He is

destined to eat his own children and undergo other horrors in his future life. Thus what he is to gain will be cut down and even outweighed by what he is to lose. In short, the underworld implies a place for the last judgment in an eschatological manner, through which the just and the unjust are either rewarded or punished according to what they have done in their lifetime first, and then they proceed to choose their new lives of different kinds in accord with their freewill based on their respective expectations and preferences.

At long last, having witnessed what the celebrities either in history or mythology have transmigrated into varied forms of life for what they have done in their former lives, all the souls that have made their choices are marshalled and go before Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos as three Goddesses of Necessity. Soon after having their destinies fixed in sequence, they all have journeyed to the Plain of Oblivion, and camped there at eventide by the River of Lethe or Forgetfulness. They are all required to drink a measure of the water. They forget all things as they are drinking on the spot. Then they have fallen asleep until the mid-night. All of a sudden, they are woken up by a sound of thunder and a quaking of the earth, and wafting thence this way or that way upward to their birth like shooting stars. As luck would have it, Er is not allowed to drink of the water as he is arranged to return to the human world and to tell his experience to all others. [9]

This myth as a whole is directed to moral teaching and philosophical pondering with regard to the chosen transmigration of the souls into varied forms of lives according to their former-life doings of just or unjust kinds. It is by and large virtue-based and presented in a philosophical context. It hereby touches upon the relationship between myth and philosophy. At this point, according to Aristotle, "the lover of myth (*philomythos*) is in a way a lover of wisdom (*philosophos*), for a myth is made up of wonders. Therefore, inasmuch as men philosophized in order to escape ignorance, it is evident that they learned in the pursuit of knowledge, and not for some useful end." [10] Noteworthy, the Aristotelian way of identifying *philomythos* with *philosophos* has something to do with three things at least. First and foremost, it is pertained to the cultural heritage of Greek mythology mixed up with the advent of Greek philosophy. Secondly, it indicates the Greek mode of thinking in terms of *philomythos* and *philosophos*. Thirdly, it rounds out, deliberately or not, Plato's philosophizing that is characterized by philosophical use of myth here and there

in all his dialogues.

Given the myth of Er, it is more than a story as it seems. It is saturated with diversified figures, startling events and enigmatic images, among others. By means of a serious and dramatized narration of how the reward-punish system treats the just and unjust souls either in the celestial paradise or down in the dark hell according to their doings in their former lives, it creates a four-dimensional world, a world that comprises heaven, earth, deities and humans. Respectively speaking, it is a world of orderliness as a result of the cosmic law that determines the perpetual motion in light of cosmetology, a world of divinity as a result of the divine power that sets everything on its track of destiny, a world of humanity as a result of human beings who reside there to become what they are, and a world of morality as a result of the moral judgment that eventually counts according to the law of karma as is set in a time limit. All this is apt to pump up much sense of wonder among human individuals who are so curious to know what really matters behind the visible and the invisible. Accordingly, with regard to the underlying link between myth and philosophy in light of the hidden connection between *philosophos* and *philomythos* aforementioned, it can be safely assumed that if philosophy is caused by wonder without considering any useful end, myth that readily conduces to a sense of wonder is the best and most inspiring source for philosophizing in any case. However, Plato's use of myth tends to make philosophy more imaginative, intuitive, and poetic in the mythical context, and his use of philosophy works in turn to render myth more intellectual, significant and abstractive in the philosophical context. Such an assumption serves in a way to justify an observation as follows:

A myth is a story whose primary purpose is not to entertain but to enlighten primitive man on matters which perplex him and cannot be made intelligible, as they can to us, by analysis or abstraction, since these are beyond his linguistic and mental resources...where science and the scientific outlook do not exist and every natural event is shrouded in mystery, myths serve at least to make phenomena less formidable by relating them to more or less intelligible stories. In primitive societies myths perform the duties of cosmology, theology, history and science, and have a special round of duty in connection with the weather, the recurrence of the seasons, and the cycle of procreation, birth, growth, and decay in all living things. [11]

Apparently, a myth is taken as a tool of enlightenment rather than a medium of entertainment from antiquity onward. When it comes to Plato's time, the Athenian society is no longer a primitive one due to its all-round development in culture and science. Nevertheless, it continues to make the most of the Greek mythology that remains prevailing in the educational program of the city-state at that time. Plato himself is permanently a *philomythos* and *philosophos*. He uses both myth and philosophy to educate the citizens in his concern. Under such circumstances, myth is deployed now to enlighten his readership in the similar manner as it is invented in the past to "enlighten primitive man on matters which perplex him and cannot be made intelligible." Moreover, both of them are ascribed to "perform the duties of cosmology, theology, history and science" one way or another. They involve an image-based instead of a logic-oriented approach to apprehending the perplexing matters and mystical phenomena. In order to get hold of their relevance and significance, we can not only think logically of cause and effect, but also "try to capture a mood or an atmosphere or an emotional frame of mind, in which individual images count for everything and must be allowed to make their full impact with all the echoes and implications and associations which they evoke." [12]

As regards the myth of Er, it is philosophically framed, more thrilling, engaging and thought-provoking than any other myths in the *Republic*. It is created to evoke much reflection on the polarizable dimensions of the human soul in terms of justice and injustice. In addition, it demonstrates how Plato applies it as one of many typical allegories to his philosophical discourse and speculative pondering with dramatic effect, mystical import, aesthetic pleasure and the like.

Very often than not, the myth of Er is approached from an eschatological perspective. It is conceived by some readers as a "last-judgment myth" to exemplify the cross-shaped structure of Heaven and Hades with reference to the moral law of the cosmos. However, the story seems not to display the last judgment of the final choice in the conventional sense of the term, but to reveal a sort of circular assessment on a changing basis. It is therefore perceived by some others as a "philosophical myth", a myth that is employed to "turn people towards the life of philosophy" as it "achieves its intellectual power by encouraging methodological reflection and self-consciousness about the status of philosophical discourse. It in turn exercises its power on the part of the

philosophically committed interlocutors within the dialogue as well as the readers of the Platonic text." [13]

Most likely, I share sympathy with the second observation. Yet, I consider it to be a myth for psychic education by nature when reconsidering it teleologically and holistically in view of the fundamental theme of psychic education in the *Republic*. In my opinion, the myth itself is designed to help redeem the human soul by keeping it from moral ills and corruptions. As detected in the tale, the different treatments of the different souls in the underworld are corresponding to the varied psychic realms in their lifetime each. All this is measured and complimented by means of justice as the most comprehensive of all cardinal virtues in principle.

With respect to the immortality of the soul, it is largely symbolic of the ever-working virtue of justice as moral retribution and psychic condition. Its import and service may lead people and their souls to go in for an endless progression ranging from lower to higher stages of moral perfection. As stated before, this reminds us of one of the Kantian postulates, that is, the human pursuit of the highest good is practically possible only on the supposition of the immortality of the soul as a postulate of pure practical reason. This postulate is inseparably bound to the moral law in terms of every categorical imperative. Without it, the moral law itself will be completely degraded from its holiness. [14]

In my perception, Kant can be treated as a Neo-Platonist in this scope. He seems to follow up the steps of Plato in the domain of moral philosophy with focus on human perfection one way or another in a broader sense, but he manages to push forward what Plato has ever speculated and offered in this regard through his much more sophisticated articulation, systematic explication and critical analysis. That is to say, what Kant has done is more than providing a footnote for Plato in the eyes of Alfred Whitehead. Notwithstanding this, Plato's original expounding over psychic education stays alive as a milestone in the history of Western intelligence owing to its evocative power and poetic charm.

3 The Three Ways of Psychic Education

As claimed metaphorically and even pessimistically in this remark, out of the crooked timber of human nature nothing straight is ever made. It hereby indicates the

imperfection of human nature as a result of covetous desires or wants that are prone to make and keep the timber of the human nature “crooked” or morally problematic as regards its function in social encounters and activities. In addition, such desires are most liable to seduce avaricious egoisms such that they can hardly produce anything “straight” or morally virtuous in most cases. Above all, they conduce to the difficulty of making the timber of human nature straight in light of justice in particular and moral decency in general. For the crookedness of this kind is inclined to cause not simply wrong thoughts under certain circumstances, but wrong doings of different kinds. The possibility of straightening the crooked timber is often assumed to lie in either right education of good conscience or law compliance with requited punishment. In spite of all this, it is by no means an easy matter to cope with at any rate.

The observation given above turns out to be somewhat corresponding to Plato's conception of human soul. On this account, the remark aforementioned can be therefore rephrased into this: Out of the crooked timber of the human soul nothing straight is ever made. That is to say, out of the problematic soul the virtue of justice is hindered to grow because the human soul is filled with the passionate and appetitive parts instead of the rational part alone. However, Plato himself proceeds to work with a sense of mission, and strives to make “the crooked timber” of the human soul straight by reshaping it into a possible container for such cardinal virtues as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. By so doing, he continuously proposes on correct education through philosophy so as to help redeem the human soul and rectify the political ethics in the social community. It is for this reason that he calls on people to look after their souls against corruption in terms of moral philosophy. He issues his affectionate advice through the mouth of Socrates at the end of the myth of Er: “As the saying is, ‘the tale was saved and was not lost.’ And it will save us if we believe it, and we shall safely cross the River of Lethe, and keep our soul unspotted from the world.” [15]

Then, what should be done to fulfill this task in accord with the moral message of the myth concerned? In other words, what possible ways are hinted by this myth of psychic education itself? Noticeably, there arise the three ways in this sphere, namely, the heavenly way, the underground way, and the philosophical way. The first two ways are not completely separated from each other with respect to the hidden influence stemmed from the merits and demerits concerned. They tend to overshadow

one another paradoxically in terms of cause and effect when it comes to the momentum of choosing the form of life for the next cycle.

Broadly speaking, the heavenly way is smooth and happy as it is allied with the reward system for the just individuals and their virtuous deeds in their former lives. The path of their excursion through heaven is exposed to many delights and visions of beauty beyond words. [16] In striking contrast, the underground way is rough and miserable as it is confined to the punishment system for the unjust individuals and their wrong doings in their former lives. The course of their journey beneath the earth is shrouded in many dreadful experiences and sufferings. [17] According to the general rule of requiting like for like, the just individuals would receive their due reward ten times for each of their good deeds, while the unjust individuals would receive in requital pains tenfold for each of their wrongs. [18]

Apparently, the heavenly way is determined and measured by justice whereas the underground way by injustice. The former encourages people towards the virtues by offering tempting gifts while the latter turns them away from the wrongs by imposing miserable sufferings. They thus compose an acute polarity between extreme reward and extreme punishment. Even though they are schemed to carry out distinct functions according to the law of *karma*, they are all intended to set up similar moral laws for all the souls and beings in the human world and the cosmos as well. One of the leading laws lies in the dominant idea that “Good will be rewarded with good, and evil with evil.” However, when all the souls have arrived at the meadow, no matter whether they are clean and pure as they come down from heaven, or they are full of squalor and dust as they come up from the earth, they are all exposed to free will for making a choice of new life each. This means an equal opportunity for all of them to choose what form of life they would like to live, and what kind of person they would like to become. Such a choice is decided by such an attitude that bears an ontological impact upon what one is to become in a fundamental sense.

On this critical occasion of life-mode selection, a dramatic twist pops out at a time when there is “an interchange of good and evil for most of the souls.” [19] It turns out to be so not simply “because of the chances of the lot”, but because of the recent experience of soul-voyage and “the habits of their former lives.” [20] Thereby Plato gives his dialectic view: the souls that come up from the earth seem to be more prudent for they have had themselves suffered and seen the sufferings

imposed onto others, and the souls that come down from heaven seem to be more imprudent as they are unexercised in suffering at all. In the first case, the souls going through the sufferings in the underworld are exposed to such familiar but notorious figures as war traitors and bad tyrants like Ardiaeos of Pamphylia who are seen being severely punished for their wrong doings. All this not merely warns but also instructs the souls who have encountered the hair-raising scene on the spot to become more cautious and considerate when choosing their lives of the next round. On this account of learning a bitter lesson, they are most likely to select the reasonable kind of fortune because of their experience of the terrible misfortune applied to other evil souls by means of the last judgment in an eschatological sense. Contrarily in the second case, the souls visiting the heaven are rewarded to enjoy nice things or whatever they deserve for their good deeds. They may take it for granted, ready to hope for the best, but not prepared for the worst at all. They are thus exposed to “too good a thing”. Hence there arises “an interchange of good and evil” for some souls, just as the one who has come down from heaven but selected a big tyrant’s life that makes him destined to eat up his daughter on a critical moment for his political survival. Such phenomenon is claimed to be the outcome of “participating in virtue by habit and not by philosophy” (*ethei aneu philosophias arâes meteilephota*). [21] It is for this reason that Plato preferably recommends the philosophical way for the psychic education of human individuals because of its greater reliability and worthwhileness.

Actually, the philosophical way differs fundamentally from the heavenly way and the underground way in at least four dimensions. Firstly, the philosophical way lads people to “love wisdom sanely” (*hugiōs philosophoi*), [22] and to perform virtuous deeds self-consciously in accord with their real knowledge and sound judgment. It therefore makes people wise and righteous, and remains instructive when it comes to making choices or taking actions. In contrast, the heavenly way and the underground way might depend upon one’s deeds or wrongs that would occur as a consequence of either “living in a well-ordered polity in one’s former existence” [23] or “the habits of one’s former lives.” [24] That is to say, one becomes what he is and lives a life as he does by following the tide or habit rather than choosing his own way according to his wise appraisal and righteous initiative.

Secondly, the philosophical way guides people to

develop “a good sense” (*de phronesei*), thus enabling them to drink a reasonable measure of the water and safely cross the last borderline when their souls are escorted to the River of Lethe. They would not “drink more than the measure and forget all things.” [25] This suggests that they still remember what they have learnt from philosophy and be able to recollect the knowledge acquired in their former lives. Reversely, the heavenly way and the underground way would not warrant all this. Hence most of the souls would “drink more than the measure, and each one as he drank would forget all things.” [25]

Thirdly, the philosophical way helps people to keep their souls unspotted from the human world. For it will lead them to “hold ever to the upward way (*ano hodou*) and pursue justice with wisdom always and ever” (*dikaiousunen meta phroneseos panti tropo epetedeusomen*). Consequently they may be dear to themselves and to the gods both during their sojourn here and when they receive their reward, as the victors in the games go about to gather in theirs. And both here and in that journey of a thousand years, they shall fare well. (*eu prattomen*). [26]

To my mind, the philosophical way as “the upward way” is an endless process of pursuing justice with wisdom. In a positive sense, it will connect with the heavenly way by taking up its advantages, while in a negative sense, it will disconnect with the underground way by rejecting its disadvantages. All this will render the philosophical way most constructive in terms of the principle of the golden mean (*mesos*). In addition, the reward system created by the philosophical way is perpetual, and distinguished from the transitory reward-punish system procured by the heavenly way and the underground way. As for the promising prospect of that “we shall fare well (*eu prattomen*)” emphasized at the end of the *Republic*, [26] it indicates the hidden aspect of that “we shall live well”. This idea of quiet solemnity is restated and straightened up in the *Gordias* as that “we will be happy both in life and after life’s end” (*eudaimoneseis kai zon kai teleutesas*). [27] Needless to say, the philosophical way is assumed to work well providing we “love wisdom sanely (*hugiōs philosophoi*).” By “loved wisdom sanely” is meant to love philosophical learning wholeheartedly in the original sense of the Greek expression in the parenthesis. Such learning can be acquired and practiced nowhere else but during the entire process of this-worldly life. It will then conduce to the nourishment of wisdom or knowledge of the soul or mind that is required to make

better judgment and better choice “always and ever”.

Last but not the least, the philosophical way is more commendable owing to its beneficial service. Compared with the heavenly way and the underground way, the philosophical way is, for Plato, more reliable and trustworthy. For it leads people to appreciate and pursue real wisdom or genuine virtue for its own sake, and therefore makes them wise and prudent when coming to choose their future lives or life-modes. As is noted in the story, the philosophical way transforms its genuine clients into philosophers who are promised each to always “fare well and live well” throughout the current life, the afterlife and even the post-mortem future, mainly because they are capable of being really wise and virtuous with the help of self-consciousness and self-motivation. Conversely, those who refuse to practice the philosophical way will become non-philosophers who are destined to live different forms of lives in accordance with their lifetime conduct and related judgment via the divine rule of reward-punish. No matter whether they are led to go along the heavenly way or the underground way, they are thereafter bound to confront with difficulties or frustrations when it is time for them to make a new choice for reincarnation or the next life cycle. For they tend to make their judgment of what is seemingly fine for themselves merely according to their sensible experience and practical desires. All this is due to the fact that they don't appreciate and possess any true wisdom for its own sake. On this account, the Platonic advice of philosophical learning turns out to be not merely a matter of virtue-based epistemology, but a matter of wellbeing-oriented ontology. And accordingly, the former bears a kind of more essential impact on the latter as a result of its cognitive importance and decisiveness. Yet, this gives rise to a formidable question as to how it is possible to educate and convince people into accepting the Platonic advice and picking up the philosophical way according to their free will. It could not be easy if not impossible at all. Naturally, people tend to be different in different ways for different reasons. Among them there are fewer philosophers but more non-philosophers. Hence non-philosophers are advised to learn from and follow after philosophers who are considered to be good teachers and lawgivers. This may echo Plato's advocacy of the philosopher-ruler in one sense, and of the lover of wisdom who commits himself to a contemplative life on the other sense. However, some non-philosophers may refuse to obey philosophers in whatever way they feel up to take,

and worse still, philosophers may be stoned to death by some non-philosophers as it would occur in the Platonic Cave Allegory where most of the dwellers are exposed to shadows and fantasies instead of reality and truth. If this is the case, the philosophical way as Plato champions may lead to a rather skeptical view or unhappy ending, if not a wishful thinking or tragic ending.

As observed in the *Phaedrus*, Plato stresses the philosophical way and likens it to the upward way that is merely second to the divine way. By the divine way one follows after God and attains a view of any of the truths such that he is free from harm and even remains always unharmed. [28] By the philosophical way one may lose his wings and fall to the earth, but gain more advantages at the first birth. Say, “the soul that has seen the most shall enter into the birth of a man who is to be a philosopher or a lover of beauty, or one of a musical or loving nature.” [29] When he returns to the place whence it came in ten thousand years, he will be able to regain his wings and fly up to the heaven again on the condition that he has been a guileless philosopher or a philosophical lover. As for the rest of the souls, they will have to receive judgment after they have finished their first life, and continue to live in different modes in accord with their judgment. [30]

It is noteworthy that the philosophical way or the upward way is to hanker after “justice with wisdom”. Such “justice with wisdom” is the foundation stone for the cultivation of the good, and the education of the soul. In Greek tradition, justice is comprehensive of all virtues. In order to nurture the virtue of justice, it requires two types of praxis. One is *askesis* as exercise and training on the part of individuals, aiming to nourish self-discipline and actualize self-redemption by purifying the soul. The other is *paideia* as education and enculturation promoted and conducted by the polis as city-state, attempting to enable the citizens to use their rights according to the principle of justice proper. Both of them are interactive and interrelated, thus intended to upgrade the sense of individual morality, public ethics, qualified citizenship and the community good altogether.

At this point we may safely conclude that Plato holds an optimistic view of philosophical learning as a result of love of wisdom and correct education of human soul proper. Actually, Plato's recommendation of those who are supposed to “study philosophy sanely” is obviously set out in striking contrast to his criticism of those who are inclined to follow the customs and habits only. Along this line of thought and with reference to its implications

in the context aforementioned, we may take risk to assume that Plato makes his distinction between the three ways concerned in order to justify this argument at least: philosophers have far better prospects than non-philosophers. For philosophers are far better and more reliable models for non-philosophers to take into consideration in the light of how to do well and live well in the world of mortals after all.

4 The Platonic Philosopher as the God-like Being

Ostensibly, Plato prefers the philosophical way to the other alternatives. He therefore takes it as “the upward way” for its huge potential and wisdom-based direction. Literally by “upward” is meant “pointing or going towards to a higher place”. One may wonder what this “higher place” is referred to. If we read through Plato’s dialogues as a whole, we may find out that it is related to the Platonic ideal of becoming divine of the human or the divine dimension of human becoming. In plain language, the ideal as such is mainly concerned about the highest achievement of which human as human is capable by virtue of sincere and perseverant endeavors. It actually represents the ontological telos of Plato’s moral education with regard to human perfection via philosophical contemplation and exploration.

As stated a number of times in the *Republic*, the guardians are expected to be god-fearing and god-like so far as that is possible for humanity through the education of the young. [31] Plato hereby encourages people to honor gods and cultivate the virtue of divine piety, and meanwhile commends the human possibility of becoming god-like via relevant and correct education. Later on, just prior to telling the myth of Er, Plato once again emphasizes this possibility. That is, man who is willing to and eager to be righteous or just (*prothumeisthai dikaios*) will never be neglected by the gods. In other words, by the practice of virtue (*epitēdeuōn aretēn*) this kind of man will be likened unto god (*anthrōpō homoiousthai theō*) as far as that is possible for man. [32] Here “to be likened unto god” is semantically the same with “to be god-like”. The possibility of becoming godlike on the side of humankind consists in the eagerness for justice and the practice of such virtue in the most constant manner. In my observation, this is, for Plato, the highest achievement of which human as human is capable. In order to fulfill such a telos, it requires relevant and correct

education for certain.

Then, what is the “correct education” Plato is talking about in this sphere? I think it is essentially philosophy-directed education as Plato designs and promotes all through his dialogues. Such education is to be carried out in the light of the philosophical way for sure. As stressed previously, philosophy as love of wisdom in its original sense has such conditional properties as the power of reason, the pursuit of truth, and the practice of virtue. The power of reason enables one to think and apprehend the essence of things. It is seen as a divine gift bestowed by god upon human race only. The pursuit of truth is the primary task of philosophy and the mark of philosopher as well. Truth is, for Plato, is real knowledge. Its attainment depends upon reflective reason and speculative thinking. It is therefore open to any test from different angles as it is unforgettable (*alētheia*) and never evades rethinking and criticism. Consequently, it gives rise to theoretical wisdom by virtue of serene contemplation and critical questioning. As for the practice of virtue, it is preconditioned by the cultivation of virtue. It requires cognitive approach to know-why on the one hand, and a practical approach to know-how on the other hand. An authentic synthesis of the two aspects will bring about practical wisdom. On this account, philosophy as love of wisdom cannot do with the theoretical wisdom without its practical counterpart at all. This being true, Plato goes on to declare that the love of wisdom is possessed by the purified soul or mind. The things of which it has apprehensions, and the associations for which it yearns, are akin to the divine and the immortal and to eternal being. Just imagine what it might be under such circumstances? Say, if it followed the gleam unreservedly, and if it were raised by this impulse out of the depths of the sea in which it got sunk, and if it were cleansed and scraped free of the rocks and barnacles. [33] Metaphorically, it denotes how to purify the human soul in an unfavorable environment in one sense, and how to overcome the surrounding obstacles that prevent the purification as such in the other. All this relies upon none other than the love of and search for wisdom.

Characteristically, philosophy as love of wisdom keeps an enthusiastic interest in cognizing the meanings of things, and it is therefore close to what the divine being usually does according to Plato. Accordingly, a true philosopher is godlike in what he does. Observably, “the purified soul” is one of immortality and emancipated from the secular obstacles symbolized by “the depths of this sea”

and “the rocks and barnacles” altogether as Plato describes. I think the notion of immortality is most pivotal in an ontological sense of timeless time or infinite duration. It serves for all souls by providing them with an eternal cycle or inexhaustible chance for choosing a new life. All this is in turn conducive to self-improvement and self-perfection alike.

As far as I could see in Plato, the rationale of becoming god-like is pointed to four conditions at least. The first one is reason (*nous*) as the divine gift given to humankind by god. With the help of such a gift, man follows god and learns not merely to detest and move away from the false, but also to see through the phenomenal or visible world while gaining an insight into the reality of the invisible world. By so doing, he can attain real wisdom, moral or theoretical, that enables him to discover the absolute truth, goodness and beauty in all. Meanwhile, he can go on to seek self-perfection in order to become divine or godlike in a transcendent sense. Eventually he will be able to have wings of reason grow out and fly up to the heaven. On this occasion, he will model upon and live together with the divine beings up there. [34]

The second condition is the immortality of the soul. It enables man to be godlike so far as the span of time is concerned. That is, man is mortal in body but immortal in soul, and thus becomes similar to god on the account of the eternal duration of time. As briefed before with reference to the choice of a new life in the myth of Er, this condition of immortality is applicable to all the souls tending towards either the good or the evil. As warranted by the doctrines of eschatology and transmigration, all the souls have access to rebirth after going through the last judgment either up in the heaven or down in the underworld. Naturally, it calls for sufficient wisdom for one to make a better choice in this regard. In order to do so, it relies on a sensible value judgment nurtured through the philosophical way according to Plato. [35] Such a momentum is not only available to those who are born good-natured and inclined to pursue self-perfection, but also to those who are born evil-natured but liable to turn into a new leaf.

Relatively speaking, the condition of reason as the divine gift for humankind seems more fundamental than the immortality of the soul. For in Plato's view, reason is used either as divine intelligence or thinking faculty (*theou dianoia*). As concerned with all true knowledge (*alēthous epistēmēs*), it holds the region that is visible to the soul, the pilot of the soul (*psychēs kubernētē*). [36] In

addition, the rational element of the soul means the love of wisdom in particular. It longs for what is most close to the divinity and immortality because it knows what is originated from the divine as the most beneficial to human beings. [37] Of course, it must be kept in the soul that virtuous praxis is the one and only way of enabling human to become godlike in finality.

The third factor is leagued with the conviction that gods are the cause of all goods rather than all things (*mē pantōn aition ton theon alla tōn agathōn*). For they themselves are good in essence (*ho theos epeidē agathos*). [38] Whatever they do is inevitably just and good (*dikaia te kai agatha*). Any man who is punished by god for his wrong doings will benefit from it because he is thus taught to improve his conduct and character. [39] In a word, god and all his creations remain in the best possible condition all the time. [40] If man follows god as closely as possible, he will be able to enjoy the same thing and live in the same way.

The fourth condition is connoted in the assumption that men in general and philosophers in particular are all the offspring of gods. As described in the *Phaedo*, human beings are seen as descendants from heaven and left behind in the secular world. When they pass away or depart from the world, they will return to the place where they initially belong. However, those who will be able to go back are conditional to the extent that they must be as wise and virtuous as real philosophers. For they will join those of the same caliber and live a happy life similar to that enjoyed by the divine beings in the heaven. [41]

Proceeding from this line of thought, we may well pinpoint Plato's recommended path for human as human to become godlike. It is the path that leads one to learn from and model himself upon god in order to attain human perfection at his best. More specifically, the path is no other than the philosophical way as it guides human as human to be a real philosopher or real lover of wisdom. Plato conceives the philosophical way as practical and trustworthy such that he repeatedly exhorts people to take it up. In his opinion, the philosophical way is oriented towards the trinity of wisdom, truth and goodness. It can therefore help a person grow into a real philosopher. Consequently, a real philosopher provides human as human with a typical paradigm of becoming god-like. This can be thought of as Plato's logic from an epistemological as well as a teleological standpoint.

As regards the paradigm of this kind, Plato promotes it persistently in a number of his dialogues in order to

convince people at large. In the *Phaedo*, for example, Plato asserts that a true philosopher is adept in emancipating oneself from his body and worldly cares during the process of moral improvement and intellectual cognition of purity, eternity, immortality, invariance and the like. At the critical moment of death, his soul will fly out and reach the divine abode where he will be exposed to the beauty of different colors and floras, rewarding conversations with gods, and a happy life with all the others up there. [42]

As read in the *Republic*, Plato affirms that the philosopher can make the most of their intimate linkage with the divinities and ideas, and thereby gain insights into the cosmic order, achieve divine wisdom, become god-like, and above all, live harmoniously with gods together (*omilōn kosmios te kai theios*). If man imitates what the philosopher does, he will consequently be guided by the divine inspiration (*theias epipnoias*) to love and study philosophy genuinely (*alēthinēs philosophias alēthinōs*).[43] In so doing he will be able to attain wisdom and become divine. And at the same time, he will be capable of conducting human affairs in the *kallipolis* most efficiently and satisfyingly.

As noted in the *Phaedrus* then, Plato categorizes the human souls into nine types, the first sort will be a *philosophos* as lover of wisdom and *philokalos* as lover of beauty; the second will be a lawful king or warlike commander; the third will be a statesman, a manager of a household, or a financier; the fourth will be a trainer who loves exercise or a doctor who cures the body; the fifth will lead the life of a prophet or priest of mysteries; the sixth will live the life of a poet or some other representational artist; the seventh will live the life of a manual laborer or farmer; the eighth will have the career of a sophist or demagogue; and the ninth will be a tyrant. [44] Among them Plato gives more credits to the philosopher. He believes that the philosopher's soul used to be pure before its transmigrating into human form. This soul was once capable of perceiving what Idea and Truth look like. Later on, the philosopher can recall from his memory such Idea and Truth as what he once beheld before. And his soul only can grow wings since its memory always keeps it as close as possible to those realities by being close to gods as divine entities. On this occasion, he will give up the pursuit of fame and wealth in the human world and follow the deities to ascend into the paradise. [45] Noticeably in the mythical description, the image of the upward chariot pulled by the winged horses

is symbolic of at least four functions: firstly, the three parts of the soul are working interactively within the soul for certain, but at the same time they are unified as a harmonious whole in the cosmos from a broader outlook. Secondly, the man-driven chariot that is flying up to the heaven indicates a kind of hidden connection or commonality between the human and the divine, not to speak of that between the earth and the heaven. Thirdly, the mythical depiction in this case reveals a shared feature threading through the soul, the cosmos, and the supreme *eidos* as the most fundamental or metaphysical archetype. This shared feature bears a divine, if not mystical, dimension. Fourthly, with the assistance of all these aforementioned aspects, the motion of the soul is guided upwards the heaven, the cognition of humankind is directed to the *eidos*, and eventually, the highest achievement of which human as human is capable is led to god-likeness.

When reading the *Theaetetus*, we encounter the message Plato attempts to convey. Say, it is not possible that the evil should be destroyed, for there must always be something opposed to the good. Similarly, it is not possible that it should have its seat in heaven. But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth. That is why a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape herein means becoming as like god as possible; and a man become like god when he becomes just and pure, with understanding and intelligence. But it is not at all an easy matter to persuade men that it is not for the reasons commonly alleged that one should try to escape from wickedness and seek after virtue. It is not in order to avoid a bad reputation and obtain a good one that virtue should be practiced and not vice. [46] In a word, it is easier said than done even though the reason of so doing is as plain as "old wives' chat".

5 The Teleological Reconsiderations

On this account, we may wonder what could be the final purpose of Plato's promotion of becoming divine of the human. Apart from his didactic objectives, does Plato attempt to mix up the boundaries between the human and the divine so as to encourage man flee from the secular world and imitate the godlike way of life in the imagined paradise? Or does he persuade man to transcend the worldly constraints and yearn for spiritual freedom? Or does he advise man to indulge in the contemplative life

that a philosopher expects to have? Here are some hints to be noted in the *Republic* as follows:

For surely the man whose soul is truly fixed on eternal realities (alēthōs pros tois ousi) has no leisure to turn his eyes downward upon the petty affairs of men, and so engaging in strife with them to be filled with envy and hate, but he fixes his gaze upon the things of the eternal and unchanging order, and seeing that they neither wrong nor are wronged by one another, but all abide in harmony as reason bids, he will endeavor to imitate them and, as far as may be, to fashion himself in their likeness and assimilate himself to them. Or do you think it possible not to imitate the things to which anyone attaches himself with admiration? Then the philosopher as the lover of wisdom associating with the divine order will himself become orderly and divine in the measure permitted to man. [47]

As discerned in this statement, what is rounded out in the person whose soul is truly fixed on “eternal realities” is no other than the virtue of the philosopher (*ho philosophos*) Plato appreciates most. By “eternal realities” (*alēthōs pros tois ousi*) is also meant “eternal truths” or “truths of eternal being”. And the philosopher of this type is fully engaged in investigating such truths through a contemplative life. He is thus devotedly preoccupied with the nature of *alētheia*, the essence of *eidōs*, and the harmony of the *cosmos* through his reason as thinking faculty. And meanwhile he makes light of the phenomenal phantasies, and despises the human affairs entangled in internal strife for trivial bits or whatsoever. Moreover, he spares no efforts to mimesize what is divine, and hankers after the invariant entity because he himself intends to become harmonious and divine (*kosmios te kai theios*) by all means. Notwithstanding all this, the Platonic philosopher is, in my vision, not detached from the human world and enterprise alike when perceived from Plato's entire scheme of political theory and the proposed *kallipolis*. Rather, the philosopher as such is encouraged to shoulder the social accountability or responsibility as a special mission for the common good of the city-state proper. As widely acknowledged, Plato dedicates his lifetime to constructing an ideal city-state. The reason why he identifies the pursuit of becoming godlike as the highest attainment of which human as human is capable lies mainly in a noble purpose, a purpose that motivates man to be godlike not for the sake of godlikeness alone. Instead, it encourages man to imitate god in order to

become more competent for a better administration of the city-state. In a word, it is to fulfill the political ideal by virtue of establishing the best or the second best city-state according to the blueprints Plato outlines early in the *Republic* and later in the *Laws*. As discerned in what is said about it, the Platonic philosopher sets up a typical example for human as human to follow due to his extraordinary attributes and virtues. The attributes and virtues are not merely the particular fruition of divine inspiration and genuine love of wisdom, but also helpful and supportive to conduct the city-state affairs and make the citizens become more qualified in many aspects. [48]

It must be reaffirmed that Plato has a high expectation of human as human. Even though he is pessimistic about human nature with regard to its weaknesses, and looking down upon human affairs as something not worthy of serious treatment, he remains optimistic about the correct education in the light of human perfection and qualified citizenship through philosophical learning and character training. Actually, his conception of correct education involves two leading components: human education and divine education. The former places emphasis on the relevant functions of music-poetry, gymnastics, sciences, philosophy and law, whereas the latter on the contributive service of religion, spirituality and metaphysical morality. Eventually these two forms of education arrive at the same end by different means. Say, they are intended to help people go beyond their limitations, overcome their shortcomings, improve moral personality, and eventually become as wise, just and fair as divine beings. This being the case, human as human will be able to master the most difficult art of political administration and grow into most outstanding guardians of the city-state. All this is largely dependent, as mentioned before, upon the great potential of intelligence stemmed from *nous* or reason as a divine gift to human race.

This argument presented in the *Philebus* can be well justified by the identification of god (*theos*) with the creative intelligence that is related to the mixture of the infinite with the finite.[49] Noticeably, Plato's notion of intelligence hereby connotes at least four dimensions: first of all, intelligence as such works as the sufficient reason to the extent that it will elicit the best things; [50] subsequently, it resembles god, and dominates forever the cosmos including the heaven, the earth and the myriad things altogether; [51] additionally, it uses a small part of its whole to create a form of health and kinds of order so as to resist against the variety of tantalizing pleasures. In

so acting it assures people to approach the really good, and leads them to make a sound judgment of what goodness itself is; [52] furthermore, the intelligence that symbolizes the divine power or god as such is identical to practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). For Plato, intelligence and wisdom are taken as synonyms, and accordingly, they are often figuratively likened to the two sides of the same medal. [53]

Evidently in the *Symposium*, Plato's idea of becoming divine or godlike is embodied in his formulation of the beauty ladder, the ladder that starts from the bottom of individual beauty and climbs up to the beauty in itself via common beauty, moral beauty, institutional beauty, intellectual beauty or beauty of knowledge, and the like. The result is that the lover of beauty will see the beauty of knowledge and be looking mainly not at beauty in a single example because he is so broad- and noble-souled. He is turned to the great sea of beauty, and, gazing upon this, he gives birth to many glorious beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom, until having grown and been strengthened there, he catches sight of such knowledge, and it is the knowledge of such beauty. [54]

Hereby the beauty ladder is deployed to lead people upwards, ranging from the sensational intuition to its intellectual counterpart. It appears as though it ascends from the earth to the heaven, from the physical to the spiritual, from the visible to the invisible, and from the finite to the infinite. The process of climbing the ladder is somewhat corresponding to a holy pilgrimage or the process of self-perfection in a step-by-step mode. In order to get one up to the top of the ladder, Plato employs beauty (*kallos*) as a comprehensive term composed of different levels. He uses it to cover not only the moral meaning of goodness and the institutional function of efficiency, but also the intellectual value of truth. Moreover, he divinizes it at the final stage of absolute freedom and divine wisdom in essence. If the individual beauty of body is seen as the symbol of life, and the beauty in itself as the *eidos* in its ultimate sense, there arises a hidden feeling about the cultivating process of becoming divine of human as human. [55] Just as Stanley Rosen once put it metaphorically, the bridging between life and *eidos* can be expounded as the subject matter of the *Symposium*. The power of beauty is retained in the flux of being, and serves as the eternal cause of human existence. It thus seems to embody the immediate presence of divinity in both humanity and the universe. Thereby beauty in itself shines on its own, and meanwhile

enlightens others. What it means in this context is probably equal to god. [56]

Comparatively speaking, the most explicit articulation of the relationship between the human and the divine is to be seen in Plato's *Laws* as his last dialogue. Therein Plato reconfirms that the soul cleaves to divine reason and guides everything to an appropriate and successful conclusion. Being a rational and supremely virtuous kind, the soul cares for the entire universe and directs it along the best path. [57] Furthermore, it is far older and far more divine than all those things whose movements have sprung up and provided the impulse which has plunged it into a perpetual existence. It is therefore working as a creative master and responsible for the order in the universe. [58]

For Plato, human life is leagued one way or another with the world of the soul. Although men as mortal beings are treated as possessions of gods, they themselves are the most god-fearing of all living creatures because they are bestowed with reason as the divine gift. [59] Moreover, if a man of a rational type goes in for such things as astronomy and the essential associated discipline, and sees events or heavenly bodies apparently happening by necessity rather than being directed by the intention of a benevolent will, he will turn into an atheist. But he may attain accurate predictions about their motions and thus have the hardihood to assert that it was reason that imposed regularity and order on the heavens. [60]

For Plato again, to become godlike or to be divine is the final destination of human as human. Any man of this kind who aspires to live like a god must try to attain such a stance towards life. That is, he himself must refuse to go looking for pleasure on his own account, and be aware that this is not a way of avoiding pain. He must act upon the principle of temperance, and keep a genial contentment with the state of being between the extremes. Moreover, he must not allow anyone else to go to extremes especially when engaged in educating the young. [61] With respect to the guardians of the laws in particular, they must do their utmost to approach divinity or become godlike, and be fully equipped with genuine knowledge of the real nature about all serious questions, such as those concerning goodness, beauty, one and many, the existence of the gods and the obvious extent of their power, among many others. Above all, they must be adequate enough to distinguish and explicate the real difference between good actions and bad ones, and capable of sticking to this distinction in practice. These are the primary

qualifications of which a candidate is required to have for the important position. Anyone who is not preternaturally talented in this regard or has not worked hard at theology should never be chosen as a guardian of the laws. [62] Noticeably, the guardians of the laws are expected to be both virtuous and competent to the supreme degree. They must be able to use the divine gift to acquire true knowledge of serious matters and great wisdom of political leadership once having accomplished the process of becoming god-like on their own. Proceeding from this stage, they must learn to command the art of how to interpret it to others as well as how to apply it to practice. Since they are highly conscious of the reality of virtue, like goodness and beauty, they will demonstrate godlike performance in political life and social praxis because they possess such extraordinary understanding, judgment and leadership. When engaged in the campaign against injustice in the city-state, they are combating shoulder by shoulder with god. For god is identified with wisdom or intelligence, and co-existent with justice. On this account, to become divine is to acquire wisdom, to follow god is to procure justice, to stay with god is to preserve virtue, and naturally, to preserve virtue is to prevent the corruption caused mainly by sensuous pleasures and the like.

6 The Process of Becoming Divine

According to Plato's logic, human as human can grow into sufficient reason only when he has become divine or god-like, because god is the archetype of sufficient reason. If this being true, god-and-man connection is reflected in the hypothesis that human as human becomes godlike by virtue of imitating god himself. Consequently, man changes into the agent of god, and at the same time into the sufficient reason of the phenomenal world when he has finally become godlike. Even if man as man fails to be godlike no matter how hard he has tried to imitate god, he must have learnt in a way to use intelligence and take some effective action when formulating the world order and the human order alike. As known in the process of trying to imitate god or be god-like, human as human will be most likely, as so expected by Plato, to perceive and understand such qualities as goodness, beauty and temperance within the soul as a micro-world and within the cosmos as the macro-world. What he does in this regard is oriented to secure and retain the world order itself. In any case, man does not need to embrace escapism and justify his motive to flee from the world.

Rather, he must spare no efforts to know and arrange the world no matter whether he likes it or not. For that is where he happens to come from and stay until his final departure.

At this point, it may be concluded that the real intention of becoming divine of the human lies in reducing human weaknesses rather than transforming human identity. That means to let man respect god as the supreme measurement or the ideal paradigm, and meanwhile helps him upgrade his moral conduct and consolidate his personal virtues altogether. Eventually in a teleological sense, it attempts to develop man into a wise, just and happy being. In other words, the topic about that human as human is to become divine or godlike stands for an ultimate concern about human perfection and personality fulfillment. Even though it contains some religious norms related to the nurture of divine piety and the rituals to offer sacrifices to gods, it fundamentally advocates the philosophy of education in the light of loving wisdom and pursuing truth. For this reason, I would treat it as Plato's view of moral philosophy rather than that of anthropological religion.

As signified in the myth of Er, Plato exceptionally articulates the necessity and importance of psychic education as psychic education. In this respect, any wise choice that aims to transcend unreasonable wants and approach goods while evading ills depends largely upon the initiative of free will. Likewise, any spiritual promise that intends to foster virtues and cultivate personality relies upon the idea of goodness itself. These two aspects comprise practically the two essential parts of a good life *per se*, which appears to interact with and even correspond to the teleological pursuit of becoming divine of human as human. However, in Plato's opinion, humankind is short of the ability to sort out human affairs reasonably well. While engaged in search for a good life, he needs to resort to god by means of becoming divine or godlike. In so doing he brings forth a metaphorical kind of link between god and man. This link is to be consolidated by consistent philosophical training. At this stage, human as human is enabled to acquire sufficient wisdom and thus perform an effective management of human enterprise in the city-state. In addition, he can also bring the community into good order and direct people to better citizenship through correct education and just leadership.

Observably, the Platonic notion of being godlike is rather idealistic than realistic, and naturally subject to theoretical limitations as though it is a kind of wishful thinking for its own sake. Yet, it bears profound impact in

history. With respect to the matter of human existence, for instance, Plato considers human as human to be an ontological issue in view of anthropology, and at the same time he channels the pursuit of becoming godlike into an endless orbit, thus encouraging man to head for human fulfillment, spiritual transcendence or moral perfection. During the process, he proposes a shift from the seemingly theological alternative to the philosophy way. Even though the philosophical way does not cut it off from the exercise of religious reason, it devotes much more to the praxis of both speculative reason and moral reason. It is so intended to perceive and obtain three forms of wisdom at its best, say, the divine, the theoretical and the practical wisdom in all. Briefly, the divine wisdom is chiefly concerned with sincere faith and pious attitude to god, the theoretical wisdom with contemplative thinking and reflective analysis, and the practical wisdom with moral self-consciousness and sensible action. To Plato's soul, man learns through the divine wisdom to esteem the absolute principle that god is the cause of all goods; he learns through the theoretical wisdom to recognize the ontological substance that the idea of goodness is the being of all beings; and he learns through the practical wisdom to embrace the doctrine of *eudaimonia* as happiness and wellbeing that one ought to do what is just, and choose what life is worth living. Broadly speaking, the absolute principle is subsequently developed into a primary aspect of the rationale of the Christian theology as is evinced in the history of western thought, which conduces to the archetypal icon of God in terms of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. The ontological substance is then extended to the traditional metaphysics as part of the philosophy a priori, and it then fosters the probing spirit of going down to the bottom as is manifested in the scientific culture. As for the doctrine of *eudaimonia*, it helps open up the exploration of the free will in accord with value judgment and sensible choice, and meanwhile it facilitates the theory of human perfection grounded upon the concordance between virtue and happiness.

In the final analysis, it must be reemphasized that the process of becoming godlike is mostly determined by learning philosophy. It is closely leagued with the devotion to sublimating virtuous cultivation and practical wisdom. And it is teleologically pointed to self-perfection as the highest realm of being human as human. In practice, the process as such involves two most crucial and specific links: one refers to the philosophical way preoccupied

with the love of wisdom and pursuit of truth, and the other to the correct education related to the four cardinal virtues including wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. In the former case, it is intended to bring up true philosophers. Such philosophers are claimed to have at least four characteristics in particular:

- 1) he has a strong *eros* or love for wisdom and truth, and exerts all his efforts to acquire all kinds of knowledge;
- 2) he is ready to accept and transmit the theory of *eidos* or idea, and applies it as the measurement to assessing knowledge and testing truth in any case;
- 3) as far as personal interest is concerned, he is keen on the contemplative life of pure *nous* or reason, and takes it as the supreme pleasure or happiness in his own favor;
- 4) as regards collective interest, he is willing to undertake social commitment and work for the common good while taking account of his contemplative life. That is to say, he takes both of them into due consideration, and retains such a mixed way of life as the supreme pleasure of an altruist type.

Under such circumstances, he dedicates himself to the political administration of the city-state while living a philosopher's life. He himself is not only divinely wise and happy, but also extraordinarily competent and responsible. Anyone who has reached to this level can be said to attain the highest achievement of which human as human is capable. All this aforementioned reflects the Hellenic ideal of enculturation of humankind, and represents the Platonic conception of moral philosophy *sui generis*.

7 Conclusion

To sum up, Plato's myth of Er for psychic education bears a number of messages. It tells us not merely the importance and difficulty in educating the soul, but also the priority of moral education and character building. Since the soul is made up of three parts including the rational, the spirited and the appetitive, it is associated both human merits and demerits in the meantime. That is to say, when the rational part takes the lead in coordinating the other two parts, it will procure a kind of harmony among them and thus leads to merits or good deeds in any case. Above all, it will drive the person to hanker after virtues and wisdom as the first caliber of

pleasure or happiness. Contrarily, if the spirited part is dominant over the other two parts, it will spur military passion and combating ethos, and thus encourage the person to run after fame and victory as the second category of pleasure or happiness. If the appetitive part rises above the other two parts and grows rampant, it will lead the person to indulgence in material gains and physical enjoyments as the third class of pleasure or happiness. On this account of the tripartite soul, human nature is analogized to the crooked timber out of which nothing straight can be ever made. In order to straighten it up, it is not feasible to confine the human soul to the rational part while excluding the other two parts. For this is against human nature in that man is not simply a rational being, but an emotional being at the same time. He cannot live with one part at the expense of the other parts. Such human condition is so paradoxical that it accounts for the possible advent of human weaknesses.

In order to overcome human weaknesses and facilitate human perfection, Plato seemingly commends his philosophical education as the one and only alternative. He is in fact optimistic about its function even though he stays rather pessimistic about human nature at large. He enhances the philosophic education as the upward way deployed to lead human to pursue wisdom, practice virtue and become god-like. He sets it up as the highest attainment of which human as human is capable. As noticed in the *Republic*, Plato hopes that the philosophical learning will enable one to cultivate divine virtues within, practice them without, and eventually become a socially committed “philosopher-ruler”. As perceived in the *Laws*, Plato moves from theory to practice as he shifts focus on the *kallipolis* as the best city-state to that on the *Magneton polis* as the second best city-state. Thus he lowers his criteria and expects to train “perfect citizen” through “right education” that still contains philosophy study. For Plato in his lifetime, what human as human can become is one of his leading concerns. His envisioned image of human as human is one who loves wisdom and longs for truth consistently and genuinely. His line of thought as such not only manifests the ideal pursuit of human enculturation in the Hellenic times, but also represents his typical conception of moral philosophy in the *kallipolis*. As perceived from the perspective of living reality, the Platonic ideal of this kind is by nature unattainable. Nevertheless, it may still work as an object of expectation to the extent that it helps guide the moral praxis of humankind as much as it inspires human thinking in the

domain of what human as human ought to be and ought to do as well. With respect to Plato's promotion of the philosophical learning as “the upward way”, no matter whether it conduces to a skeptical reaction or not, we may assume that those who attempt to live their lives in the most possible worthwhile manner would be most likely to think it over to their own and others' benefit in a reciprocal manner.

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