

# RELIGION — BEFORE — DOGMA

GROUNDWORK IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY



DOUGLAS R. McGAUGHEY

We are willing to give permission for the use of 11 pages from your work 'Religion Before Dogma: Groundwork in Practical Theology' on your website <https://criticalidealism.org> as outlined in your form. Please just give credit to the original work, including to T&T Clark with a note 'used by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc'.

Kind regards

Claire

Claire Weatherhead  
Permissions Manager  
Bloomsbury Group Agency  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc



t & t clark

NEW YORK • LONDON

Copyright© 2006 by Douglas R. McGaughey

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher, T & T Clark International.

T & T Clark International, 80 Maiden Lane, New York, NY 10038

T & T Clark International, The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX

T & T Clark International is a Continuum imprint.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McGaughey, Douglas R., 1947-

Religion before dogma : groundwork in practical theology / Douglas R. McGaughey.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-567-02523-4 (hardcover)

ISBN-10: 0-567-02523-3 (hardcover)

I. Theology, Practical. I. Tide.

BY3.M44 2006

30.01-dc22

2006024403

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd., King's Lynn, Norfolk

06 07 08 09 10 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The tradition has returned over and over again to Plato's similes of the sun and the line in Book VI of the *Republic* to describe the richness of the spirit and to suggest the awe that spirit can engender. With the sun simile, Socrates turns to a discussion of the sun when his interlocutors refuse to allow him to avoid describing what he means by the "Good." Socrates suggests (509c) that, since the Good is "ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας" ("above essence," to use Jowett's translation), we are incapable of speaking of it directly, because to speak of something we must have an appropriate universal and the Good is not a universal; it is "above" universals: Socrates proceeds to suggest that he can speak of the "child" of the Good in the hopes that learning something of the "child" will teach us something of the "parent" that we cannot know directly.

The "child" of the Good of which Plato speaks is the sun. The sun performs two necessary functions in the physical world: (1) it is the source of all light; and (2) it is the source of all life. Light, Plato suggests, is a "third thing" in addition to the "eye" and the "object" that is necessary for sight. Remove light, and there is no sight. However, light is neither the "eye" nor the "object." The entry into the discussion of the Good teaches us that not only is the sun the source of light and life but also that we must use dialectic to understand the function of the sun with respect to sight: the sun is a "synthesis" (light) of a thesis (eye) and antithesis (object) that is necessary for perception but irreducible to either.

Already with this sun analogy, the notion of the Good generates astonishment in Glaucon, Socrates' interlocutor. Not only is the Good not a universal (it is "higher" than all universals), but also the Good apparently functions like the sun as a source of light and a source of life but in a far higher sense than the sun.

However, Socrates is not let off the hook with this analogy by his interlocutors, so he proposes the use of another simile for speaking about the Good. In the *Phaedrus* 64c, attributed to Plato's middle period along with

---

9. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 190-91, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 235.

the *Republic*, Plato proposes that a narrative account should be structured like the body. This is exactly what Plato does when he turns from the simile of the sun to his simile of the line. The line is an analogy based on the body. Yet, Plato is proposing that there is more to the human "body" than what is visible and accessible to the senses. Therefore, he calls for the drawing of a vertical line that is to be divided into two unequal lengths. The accompanying diagram helps to visualize Plato's description. Plato does not indicate where the longer or shorter lengths are to be located. In contrast to Grube and Reeve,<sup>10</sup> then, the line is drawn here with the shorter segment at the top analogous to the human body.

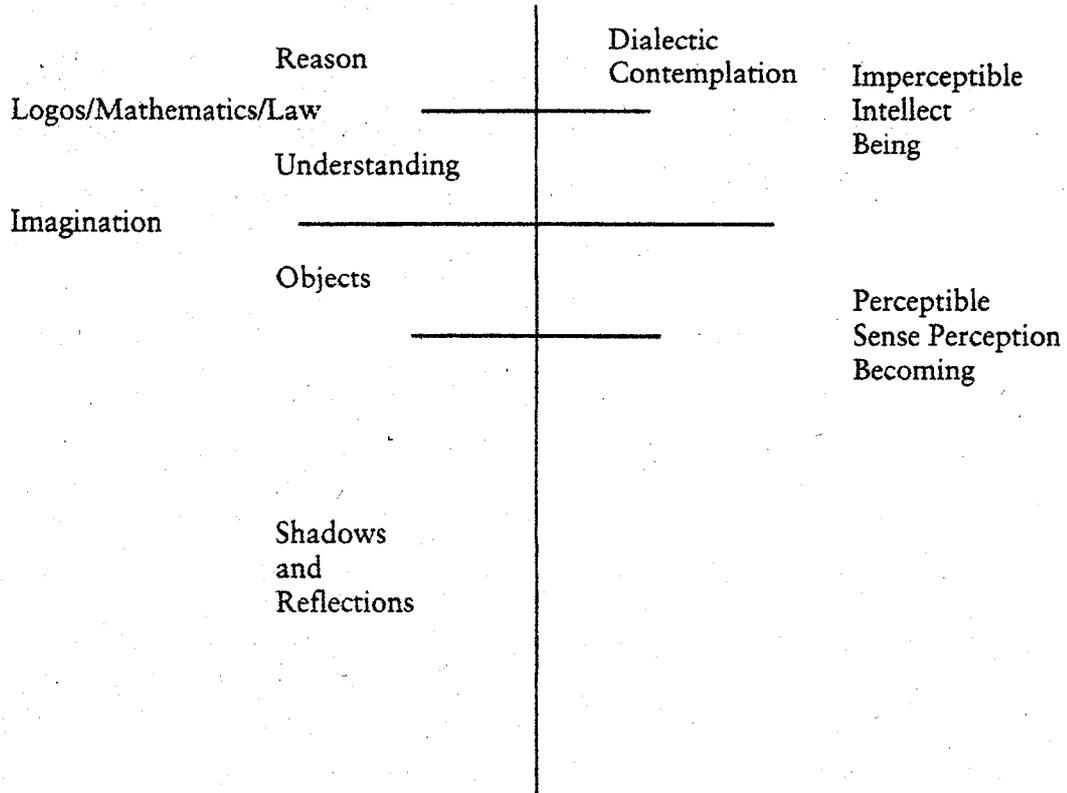
The rationale for drawing the line in this way is that the segments are reflective not only of a narrative based on the human body but also of "quantities." There are more shadows and reflections than there are objects; there are more objects than there are universals. The dominant or greatest activity of the mind is the making sense of objects by matching up their images in the mind with universals. The activity of reason at the top segment of the line, we are told by Plato, is only an activity of the few; and there is only one First Principle of the Whole at the very top of the line. In contrast, Grube and Reeve place the shortest segment of the line at the bottom. In fact though, Grube and Reeve are not consistent with the drawing. Grube's first edition has the line drawing the same as what is offered here.<sup>11</sup> Neither in Grube's first edition nor in Grube and Reeve's second edition do Grube and/or Reeve offer any justification for why the line is to be drawn in either manner. In our case, the rationale is simple and aesthetic: the line segments represent quantities and, as a whole, a representation of "the body."

It might be that Grube and Reeve are reading the line simile through the lenses of the allegory of the cave that immediately follows the line simile at the very beginning of Book VII of the *Republic*. However, the allegory of the cave is talking about the educational process that leads from one's being trapped in the copies and shadows of the physical world to grasping that the real is a world of "originals" outside of the cave (note: *not* outside of the world). In contrast, the simile of the line is talking about what it means to "know." In other words, the cave allegory is using the cave and the surface of the earth to articulate a relationship between copy and original to metaphorically suggest that the real is an original beyond the "cave" of this world. In fact, Plato describes the entire earth is a "cave" in the *Phaedo* (109a-e). If the world is a cave, then the realm of the real "outside of the cave" is nothing physical, and the allegory of the cave is not making a literal claim about the "size" of reality outside of the cave. If the world and the

10. Plato, *Republic*, 2nd ed., G. M. A. Grube, rev. by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 183 n. 26.

11. See Plato, *Plato's Republic*, 1st ed., G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974), 164 n. 16.

PLATO'S SIMILE OF THE LINE  
 First Principle of the Whole (The Good)



cosmos are themselves the cave, then what is “outside” is in a non-spatial dimension, and one cannot indicate size where there is no measurement.

In the simile of the line, however, Plato is neither indicating the size or magnitude of reality nor addressing the process of education but, rather, what it means to know. Whereas the cave is concerned with pedagogy, the line is concerned with epistemology. As a consequence, it is inappropriate to assume that the segment of the line devoted to copies and shadows must be the smallest since the cave is narrow. With such a reading, the allegory of the cave would have to end with the second segment from the bottom of Plato’s simile of the line since the “real” world of objects is represented by the second segment, with shadows and reflections being mere “copies” of objects.

Plato’s line simile, however, does not stop with physical objects of sense perception. It proceeds upward to the intelligible (that which is known but not seen as opposed to that which is seen but not known). Plato labels the “connecting link” between the perceptible and the intelligible (the imperceptible) the “imagination.” Throughout the tradition down at least to Descartes’ *Meditations* (72–73), the imagination has been understood not

as a free-floating fantasy but precisely as that capacity of the human mind to "image" or represent the physical world to the mind since the objects of the world cannot be placed directly into the mind. The imagination is that capacity of the mind that makes it possible for us to have a ceaseless flow of images of the physical world in the mind. Since we cannot put physical objects directly into the mind, we are dependent upon the imagination for our mental access to the physical world.

The overwhelming activity of the mind, according to Plato, is the activity he calls "understanding."<sup>12</sup> Understanding is the activity of the mind that we've described as the non-spatial subsumption of images in the imagination under the appropriate universal in the mind. As we have said, Plato refers to universals as "hypotheses." Universals are hypotheses for Plato because he learned from Socrates that they are incapable of definition. The so-called aporetic dialogues of Plato's early period all illustrate the nature of universals as necessary hypotheses that must be assumed but never known (i.e., defined). Socrates' interlocutors and observers almost always tend to assume that he can define what he illustrates his opponents are incapable of defining. Nevertheless, in the *Apology* Plato through Socrates makes explicit that he, as well, does not know and cannot give a definition for universals.

However, this seamless and illimitable dimension of the understanding does not exhaust all that is occurring in the spirit. Plato proceeds upward on his line to speak of reason as an activity of contemplation (*θεορούμενον*) that consists of dialectic. Yet, here Plato challenges his interlocutor and us because he offers no description of the nature of this dialectic other than to say that it starts with "hypotheses" and goes from "this" to "that" up to the First Principle of the Whole (the Good), and returns downward to hypotheses in an activity that occurs wholly and entirely in the intelligible without any reference to the imagination or the realm of sense perception. The text obviously presupposes an oral teaching about dialectic that is not included in the text. The reader is required today to develop a reading consistent with the hints given by the text. The following seeks to be congruent with the text.

---

12. Here, as well, I have a quarrel with Grube and Reeve because they reverse the labels for the upper two segments of the line to call the lower segment "reason" and the upper segment "understanding." Liddell and Scott give as the example for translating *διάνοια*, Plato's label for the lower segment of the line representing the mind, as "understanding" precisely this passage in Plato. Schleiermacher and Jowett follow the tradition of translating *διάνοια* as understanding and *νόησις* as reason. Perhaps the confusion here is generated by the Latin translations of "ratio" for *διάνοια* and "intellectus" for *νόησις*. See Klaus Oehler, "Der höchste Punkt der antiken Philosophie," in *Einheit und Vielheit. Festschrift für Carl Friedrich v. Weizsäcker zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. and comp. Erharde Scheibe and Georg Süßmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 63; and Oehler's entry "Vernunft und Verstand" in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 3.

What we are challenged to think is a synthesis that is not a universal,<sup>13</sup> a synthesis that cannot change in any way the universals that serve as the thesis and anti-thesis of the dialectic since universals are unchanging, and a synthesis that is similar to the sun in "illumination" and is the source of "life." The gerund *Being* expresses the reality of the intelligible realm and in contrast to the Becoming of the realm of sense perception offers one strategy for fulfilling these criteria. A gerund combines the two major grammatical fields of language: nouns and verbs. The gerund *Being* is unlike all other gerunds in that it applies to all that is. Other gerunds are limited to a specific range of activity like "running," "swimming," "laughing," and so on. Since it applies to all that is, the gerund *Being* satisfies all of the criteria established by Plato for the dialectic of reason. The nominal meaning of *Being* allows us to distinguish universal "a" (e.g., elephant) from universal "b" (e.g., mouse) because each is "a" being. However, the verbal meaning of *Being* allows us to think a synthesis between universal "a" and universal "b" that is not another universal and does not change either universal. Both universals are "united" by the verb *to be*. If either of the universals was not, then we could not think it, and we could not distinguish it from another universal. The gerund *Being* gives us a way to think Plato's dialectic of reason since each universal "is." *Being* as a noun indicates difference; *Being* as verb indicates identity. Furthermore, the gerund *Being* also helps us understand the similarities between the First Principle of the Whole (the Good) and the sun.

The sun provides the physical light for the perception of objects, but *Being* as verb provides an ineffable light illuminating the entire intelligible realm by enabling us to distinguish between and among universals, which we could not think if they "were not." What *Being* provides, then, is a capacity for us to distinguish among universals even though we cannot even determine where one begins and the next starts since universals and the mind are illimitable. In other words, were we to remove the sun from the world, there would be only darkness and no sight. However and similarly, were we to remove "Being" (was, is, will be) from the intelligible realm, there would be no capacity for discrimination between and among universals. Furthermore, the sun is the source of all "life," but "Being" is the source of all that "is." This is a far higher capacity than the source of mere life because "Being" is the ultimate facilitator of the entire, unified line from the darkest shadow up to the bright illumination of the Good. The sun may be the facilitator of the life of plants and animals, but the Good is the facilitator of shadows and reflections, inorganic and organic things, images in the imagination,

---

13. The ability to think a synthesis without a universal is Kant's way of talking about the beautiful. See *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 100, 104, 113, 122–23, 168, 193–94. Plato's connection between the Good and the Beautiful is clear for Kant, at least: Beauty is a symbol of the moral (*ibid.*, 227).

universals and the process of understanding they make possible, as well as the dialectic of reason. Here if not already, we have a strategy to acquire a sense of the richness and the awe-inspiring character of the spiritual realm inseparable from the darkest shadows of the material realm.

Whereas our age is a materialist age that focuses on the quantifiable and the measurable to the exclusion of the immeasurable and the non-spatial, previous ages have understood the life of the spirit to involve far more than the material world. The Spirit was taken to be the ultimate condition of possibility for any and all things "to be." Although our post-Kantian world would insist that any kind of metaphysical "grounding" language is metaphorical, the Logos theological tradition understood the entire cosmos to be rooted in a unitary, non-spatial, illimitable, indivisible, immeasurable spiritual realm that is grounded by universals that are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Furthermore, the condition of possibility for this unitary, non-spatial, illimitable, indivisible, immeasurable spiritual realm is no-thing (neither an object nor a universal), but yet it is the absolutely necessary condition for all order. The Good or First Principle of the Whole is the key to any and all experience and is by no means limited to rationality and virtue. However, rationality here is not a mere human capacity of calculation and critical evaluation according to principles of identity and non-contradiction, all of which turn out to be problematic in and of themselves. Rather, rationality is part of the "given" of the spatial and non-spatial order that serves as the condition of possibility for any and all human experience and critical calculation. *Our experience is dependent upon rationality, not the author of rationality.* As a consequence, past ages (including Plato in the *Timaeus* 69bf) have taken our experience of spirit as a relational order mirrored in the material world to serve as the basis for an anthropomorphic projection of an Absolute Spirit (figuratively described by Plato by means of a myth) analogous to a human mind in an attempt to explain the origin and order of the cosmos.<sup>14</sup>

---

14. David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* offers a thorough critique of such anthropological projection to the point that, if we wish to use an analogy for speaking of that upon which everything depends, we should think of God as a vegetable, since we never experience mind (spirit) independently of a body (Part VII, p. 47 and Part VIII, pp. 52-53).

However, Hume is sagacious enough to recognize that, in the absence of indubitable proof, reason had best conform its judgments to the degree of evidence. Therefore, although there are legitimate grounds for questioning the teleological argument for God based on the analogy to the human mind, one is probably not far off to accept it as a working hypothesis.

[I]f a man [sic] has accustomed himself to skeptical considerations on the uncertainty and narrow limits of reason, he will not entirely forget them when he turns his reflection on other subjects; but in all his philosophical principles and reasoning, I dare not say, in his common conduct, he will be found different from those who either never formed any opinions in the case or have entertained sentiments more favorable to human reason.