Surpassing in Dignity and Power

The Metaphysics of Goodness in Plato’s Republic
In the realm of what is known, the Form of the Good is last and is hardly seen; but once it has been seen, it is necessary to conclude that it is in every way the cause of all that is right and fine (*Republic* vi 517b7-c1).
When asked to characterise the good, Socrates initially demurs, lest he be made to look ludicrous and make himself into a subject of ridicule (506b).

Still, he agrees to speak of ‘an offspring of the Good’ (507e3), which is ‘most like it’ (506e3-4).

This is the sun.

Broadly: as the sun is in the visible realm, so the Form of the Good is in the intelligible realm.
An Astonishing Contention

In the case of things known, one is to say, then, that not only is their being known present to them because of the good, but that both their existence and their being is present to them because of that, though goodness is not being, but is still further beyond, surpassing being in dignity and power (509b6-10).
Astonishing, that is, to Glaucon

- Grube/Reeve: ‘By Apollo, what a daemonic superiority!’
- Shorey: ‘Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go.’
- Lee: ‘It must be miraculously transcendent,’ remarked Glaucon to the general amusement.
- Waterfield: ‘“It’s way beyond human comprehension, all right,” was Glaucon’s quite amusing comment.’
- Conford: ‘Glaucon exclaimed with some amusement at my exalting Goodness in such extravagant terms.’
Pre-Sun Characterizations I

- It is the greatest object to be learnt (the *megiston mathêma*; 504e4-5, 505a2).

- It is by their drawing upon the Form of the Good that just and other virtuous things become useful and beneficial (*chrêsima kai ôphelima*; 505a4-5).

- Without knowledge of the Form of the Good, even if we were to know things maximally, there would be no benefit for us—just as if we possess something without its good (505a6-b1).

- Still, if the Guardian in charge of our constitution knows these things, then our constitution will be perfectly ordered (506a6-b2).
Those defining the Good as pleasure are shown to be mistaken by the bare fact of there being bad pleasures (505c6-9).

Those who define the Good as knowledge cannot specify what the knowledge in question is knowledge of; when pressed, they fall back into circularity by suggesting that it is knowledge of the Good (505b8-10).

Every soul pursues the Good and does all that it does for its sake (505d11-e1).
Analogical Characterizations I

- In the realm of reason, the good stands to the objects of reason as the sun stands, in the visible realm, to the objects of sight (508b13-c2).

- As the sun provides the light enabling objects of vision to be seen and the power to see to the faculty of vision, so the Form of the Good gives truth and intelligibility enabling the objects of reason to be known and to the faculty of reason the power to know (507d11-e3, 508b6-7, 508e1-3).

- As the sun can be seen, so the Form of the Good is itself an object of knowledge (508e4).
The Form of the Good is responsible (*aitia*) for knowledge and truth (508e3).

Still, knowledge and truth are not identical with the Form of the Good, it being still more beautiful than they are (508e2-3).

Still, the Good is not being (*ousia*), but surpasses it in dignity (*presbeia(i)*) and power (*duniquei*). (509b5-6).

As the sun provides not only the ability to be seen but also the generation, growth and nourishment to what is visible, so the Form of the Good provides not only being known to the objects of knowledge, but also their existence and being (*to einai te kai tēn ousian*; 509b6-8).
Is the FOG a Form?

- Krohn: ‘The Form of the Good is *not* a Form’ (1876, 146)

- Joseph (1948, 23-24) The Form of the Good then is not one among the other forms, to which being belongs and which are the objects of knowledge. From one point of view, reality is exhausted in them. That which is good, and the goodness of it, are the same; for nothing of what is good fails to contribute to that goodness which consists in its being just all that it is. From another point of view, its goodness is something beyond everything contained in our description of what is good: for we describe it by running over its constituent parts, the Forms which are the various objects of our knowledge; and its goodness is none of these. This, which I think we can understand in principle, though we cannot verify it in a complete apprehension of the real and of its goodness, is what Plato means when he says that this goodness is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δύναμει [surpassing being in dignity and power].
Types of Attributes

- Two Distinctions:
  - Ideal *vs.* Proper Attributes of Forms
  - Systemic *vs.* Dissective Attributes

- The suggestion: the FOG is a systemic feature of all Forms taken together, but not a proper or ideal attribute of any individual Form.

- The FOG is not one Form alongside other Forms, but the structure of all Forms taken together.
The Form of the Good is responsible (aitia) for knowledge and truth (508e3).

As the sun provides not only the ability to be seen but also the generation, growth and nourishment to what is visible, so the Form of the Good provides not only being known to the objects of knowledge, but also their existence and being (to einai te kai tên ousian; 509b6-8).

Still, the Good is not being (ousia), but surpasses it in dignity (presbeia(i)) and power (dunamei). (509b5-8).
Plato does not state or narrowly imply the No-Form Theory of the FOG

- He does not say that the FOG has no being.
- He does not—or does not obviously—say that FOG is not a being (ousia).
- Rather, he contends that the FOG is not identical with Being (ousia).

Still, it remains obscure how the FOG is beyond Being (ousia) in dignity and power.
How is the FOG a cause (aitia)?

- The FOG is necessarily an attribute of all Forms taken individually:
  - For each Form Φ, the Form is paradigmatically Φ.
  - For each Form Φ, the Form has a range of ideal attributes, the explanation of which makes appeal to the FOG.

- So, the FOG is the cause (aitia) of the proper and ideal attributes of all Forms, taken individually.
Still, it is not Being

- In the realm of Forms, Being (*ousia*) and Goodness are necessarily co-extensive.
- Still, Goodness is not Being, but beyond Being in power and dignity.
- That is to say, then, that though necessarily co-extensive, we would be wrong to suppose that the FOG could be identified with Being.
- Rather, the FOG is a cause (*aitia*) in a way that Being is not.