

THE AETHETAPOLIS

Notes: Toward the
understanding of
the nature of the
structured
singularity city.

I: INTRODUCTION

At the end of Book Nine of Plato's REPUBLIC, Socrates is describing to Glaucon the object of the intelligent man's life-long endeavors - the acquisition of "... a character in which self control and justice and understanding are combined..." - in essence the principles of self-government within himself.

Glaucon summarizes about the intelligent man saying, "he will follow the same principles over honours, private or public. If he thinks they will make him a better man he will accept and enjoy them, if he thinks they will destroy the order within him, he will avoid them", and makes the point, "... if that is his object, he won't enter politics."

But Socrates counters, "Oh yes, he will, very much so, in the society where he really belongs; but not, I think, in the society where he's born, unless some miracle happens". Glaucon, considering this last statement, says, "I see what you mean, you mean that he will do so in the society which we have been describing and which we have theoretically founded; BUT I DOUBT IF IT WILL EVER EXIST ON EARTH."

Socrates reflecting for a moment on the nature of Glaucon's doubt, replies, "perhaps it is laid up as a pattern in heaven where he who wishes can see it and establish it in himself. BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER IT EXISTS OR EVER WILL EXIST; in it alone and in no other society, could he take part in public affairs." Glaucon qualifies his doubt and concludes Book Nine saying, "I expect you are right." 1

It is this passage in THE REPUBLIC that Plato represents in dialogue form that curious and elusive concept, named in the early 16th Century by Sir Thomas More, utopia or No-place. More used the concept as the motif of his harmonized Christian community.

If this passage had been left out of THE REPUBLIC, the uncertainty of whether Aristophanes deliberately satirized parts of THE REPUBLIC in his play ECCLESIAZUSAE (Women in Parliament) would have been resolved at the normative level, if not at the literary-philological level.

By introducing doubt concerning the physical manifestation of utopia within the realm of human affairs, Plato has allowed the eternal debate as to the existence of utopia to remain within the domain of his thought, not only in terms of him being the originator of the concept within Western culture, but also as a thinker who has something to say in the continual debate, regardless of when it takes place. If he had taken a definite stand one way or another, his thought would have been historically bounded and subject to revivals.

Instead Plato followed a model of creativity based on the Heraclitian continuous tension between opposites, rather than the resolution of opposites into a stable unity. It is the sense of

Note 1: THE REPUBLIC, by Plato, translated by Desmond Lee
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maintaining the plural within unity and unity within the plural that has given his thought the power that it has. If something was unified, he would seek the many things that are the contexts of this unity, or if there were many things, he would seek the something that is the context of the many things.

II:

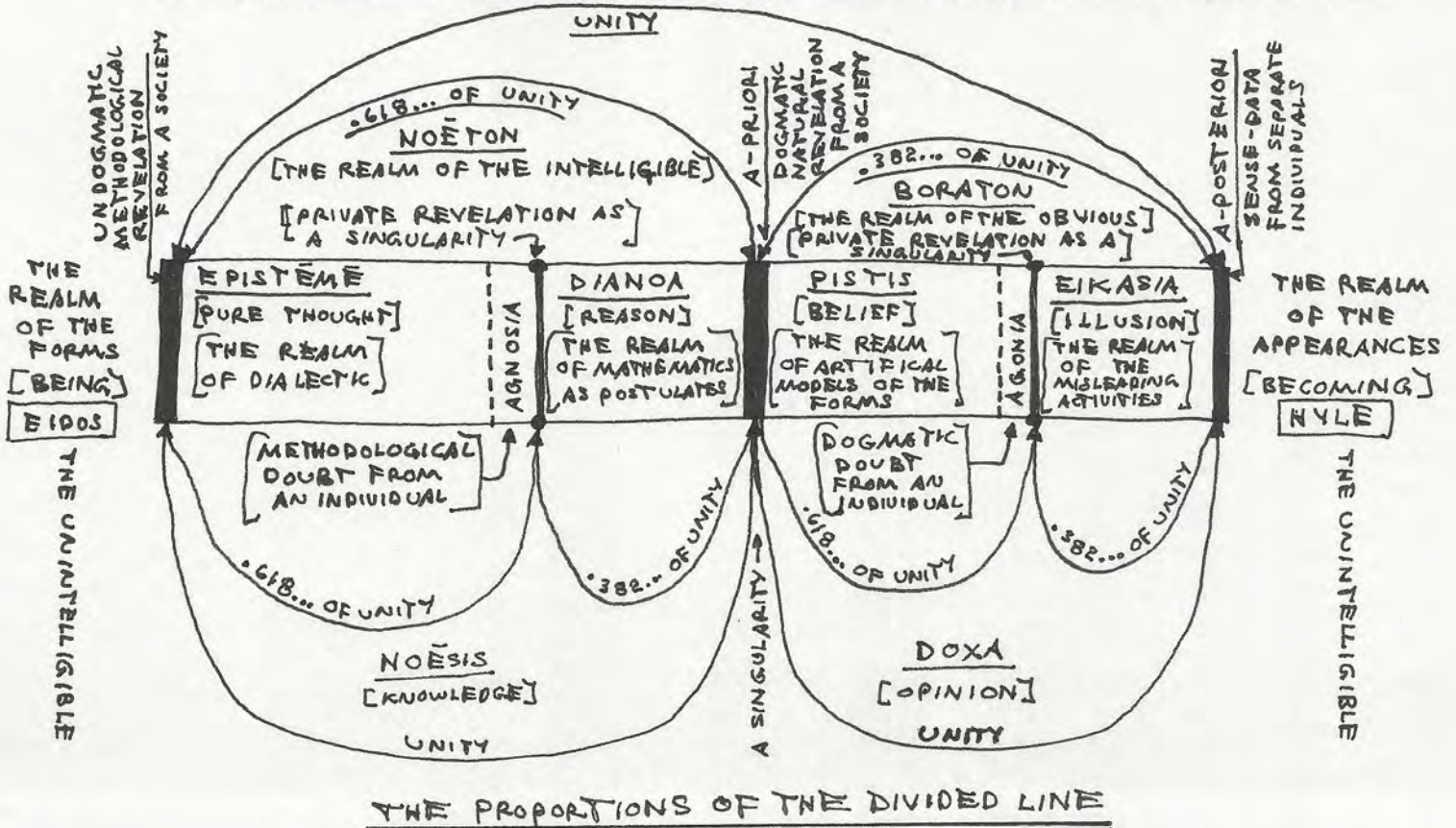
It would seem, therefore, if designers wished to use the Platonic conception of utopia in connection with any community building program, regardless of its scope or architectural modality, they must face first the problem of how to achieve a relationship with the concept of utopia and then second, the problem of how to understand the significance of their own desire to achieve the relationship in the first place.

The two problems are related because of the aura of doubt of manifestation that surrounds the existence of the concept of utopia. Since the idea of utopia can be classed as a form in the Platonic sense, there are hints within THE REPUBLIC as to the solution of the first problem, while the answer to the second problem is essentially the text of THE REPUBLIC itself.

The hints are based primarily on passages in books SIX and SEVEN which utilize the interconnected similes of THE SUN, THE CAVE and THE DIVIDED LINE, in which the conclusion is reached that it is only through the process of "dialectic" that a person can grasp what "each thing is in itself" or its form.

This is the allusion to a theory of knowledge in which the process of dialectic is considered as the culmination of the education of a potential philosopher-king.

Within the simile of THE LINE, Plato establishes four stages of apprehension which are abstractions from the Realm of the Forms:



The proportions of the LINE are divided by the Golden Section, in which unity is divided into two extended fractions. The larger section equals .618..., the smaller equals .382... The Golden Section is PHI, the irrational number that eventually attains rationality in the sense that it is a singularity in nature, whereby a controlled unknowing in one realm indicates the existence of a qualitatively different realm.

According to Plato the process of apprehension from appearances to the forms, therefore, is organic. When PHI is apprehended in empirical nature it is a structural singularity which resolves the doubt or agonia between Eikasia and Pistis as to the growth patterns that are the proper channels for the life force. When PHI is apprehended in non-empirical nature such as in the mental states of dreams or visions, it resolves the doubt (agnosia) between Dianoa and Episteme. In this case PHI is a structured singularity in the form of a symbol which indicates the portal to the Forms.

For the designer of communities, whether natural or intentional, the two forms of doubt must be overcome before the form of utopia can be apprehended. The first and second kind of doubt have a distinction similar to the contemporary distinction in religious theory between dogmatic and methodological agnosticism about the existence of any divinity.

In the section from the end of Book Nine, it is the thought of Glaucon that represents the condition of agonia or the dogmatic doubt of a person on the brink of belief from the circumstances of the illusion of pure sense data. This is the denial of utopia within the realm of genesis (change or becoming) by the activation of the will to believe and the will to disbelieve. If utopia is not seen within the social urban structures that have existed so far in history, it is believed incapable of manifestation.