

**Title:** The early Brentano and Plato's God

**Abstract:** The interest of the young Brentano for the philosophy of Plato is linked to his Aristotelian studies. Brentano understands Aristotle's philosophy in deep continuity with Plato's one. This continuity is clear in one of the most controversial points of Brentano's interpretation of Aristotle: the nature of God and the status of human soul. Brentano finds in both Plato and Aristotle a personal, monotheistic and creationistic God who also creates human soul, which is immortal. This approach is explained in some texts from the youth of Brentano, although there are signs indicating that he sustained it until the end of his life. In his interpretation of Plato's God, we see that Brentano identifies Him with the Idea of Good and the Demiurge. The Idea of Good would have even created the other Platonic Ideas, which should be understood as gods.

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## The early Brentano and Plato's God

One of the most important dimensions of Brentano's academic work is his research on Aristotle, who occupied his interest in the first years of his career but was significant for him until the end of his life. Naturally, the study of the Stagirite forced him to pay attention to his teacher, Plato. However, his understanding of Plato's philosophy has not received as much attention by scholars as the Aristotle's. This does not prevent the former from having some relevance given that, as we shall see, for Brentano there is great continuity between both thinkers. This continuity will make him to feel legitimized to hold two eccentric theses in his interpretation of Aristotle that will be controverted by Zeller (and others): the immortality of the human soul and a creationist notion of God. According to Brentano, both theses would have been defended by Aristotle in certain continuity with his teacher. Therefore, it will be of great interest to take into account Brentano's interpretation of Plato, especially as it considers these points. In my paper, I would like to focus on the less clear of both theses in the philosophy of Plato: his conception of God. As we shall see, the peculiar orientation of Plato's interpretation will support the particular view of Aristotle's God held by Brentano.

I will carry out this investigation focusing primarily on the young Brentano. In his early years as a teacher (1866/67) he will impart History of Ancient Philosophy in Würzburg, so that his notes will provide us with a coherent exposition of his view of Plato during the years in which he finished his habilitation on Aristotle. I am well aware of the critical problems that the published version of these notes contains, so I will use the notes conserved in the *Nachlass*.<sup>1</sup> In addition, I will also consider the correspondence of his education years and some manuscripts which reflect the interpretation of Plato received during his studies.

### 1. Plato in Brentano's education

The first course on Plato followed by Brentano was taught by J. Merkel in the *Gymnasium* (1855/56). This teacher was described by Brentano himself as his "Paternal

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<sup>1</sup> The lessons are edited in Brentano 1988. About the critical problems of such publication, see for example Tomasi 2009, 39–45. I express my acknowledgment to the Brentano Archiv of Graz for the access to the manuscripts. When I do not quote any translation, the English version is mine.

Friend” in the dedicatory which he devoted him years later (1867) in his *Psychology of Aristotle*.<sup>2</sup> The topic of the mentioned course was the dialog *Republic* (Baumgartner-Hedwig 2017, 21). Already in the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität of Munich, Brentano studied a course entitled “History of Philosophy” (1856/57), taught by E. von Lasaulx, who also belonged to the social environment of Brentano’s family (ibid., 28). Maybe Lasaulx’s attempt to conciliate classical philosophy with Christianity contributed to Brentano’s first picture of Plato, as both Baumgartners and Hedwig suppose (ibid., 34). The notes of this course are conserved (FrSchr 49) although the lessons on Plato seem interrupted.

In 1858 Brentano began to study in the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität of Berlin, where he followed a course on History of Philosophy taught by A. Trendelenburg and another course on *Republic* taught by A. Boeckh (Baumgartner-Hedwig 2017, 51). At the same time, he followed a course offered by A. Helfferich where Plato was compared with Spinoza and Hegel, whose notes are not conserved (ibid., 52). Instead, we have access to Brentano’s notes of Boeckh’s “Introduction to Plato” (FrSchr 51) and the course of his admired teacher Trendelenburg, who devotes some lessons to the “divine Plato” (FrSchr 50, 102000–9). Although the point of view of Brentano will differ from that of his teacher, he appreciated his classes and he will even quote the notes of this course in his correspondence with Stumpf, as we shall see.

Thereafter Brentano was a student in Münster, where he attended a course on the “History of the doctrine of the Ideas” taught by Schlüter and a course on Plato’s *Phaedo* directed by F. Winieswski (Baumgartner-Hedwig 2017, 63). We have no notes on Schlüter’s lessons but a work apparently linked to the course on *Phaedo* is conserved, the *Conclusiones phaedonicae* (FrSchr 4), where he defends that the main thesis of the dialog is the immortality of the human soul. We will comment later on the significance of Plato according to Schlüter.

In Münster, Brentano wrote an opuscle on the problem of individuation, “De principio individuationis” (1860), which has been recently edited by Hedwig. From this work we can extract some valuable personal thoughts on his early understanding of Plato’s notion of God:

Plato established a similar relationship between God and Ideas, and between Ideas and material things. God is the Being, the One, the Good. The Ideas participate in Him (they are

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<sup>2</sup> See Brentano 1977, v. About the relationship of Brentano with Merkel, see Tomasi 2009, 12–8.

similar to Him) according to their perfection (Greatness) and imperfection (Smallness), so that the Greatness and the Smallness are set as matter, and the divine Unity is set as form, but as form in a Platonic sense, not in an Aristotelian one, according to which it exists in things; on the contrary, such a form is considered as existing outside of things, producing them and being imitated in them. These Ideas are second gods, as they were second units from the first and simple Unity (Thomas de Angelis op. XV, 1.), and as such they are participated or imitated by material things, just as the supreme Unity is participated by them, and they produce the material things, just as they are produced by the divine Unity.<sup>3</sup>

In this text we can already see the main points of Brentano's interpretation of Plato, as it will be developed in his lessons on History of Philosophy as a young *Dozent*: the Idea of Good is described as a supreme God while the other Ideas are understood as secondary gods. God would be a creator of the Ideas in a similar way as they bring the sensible things forth. In this way, Brentano discarded the point of view of his teacher Trendelenburg about Plato's God, according to which the divine mind would enclose the Ideas as thoughts.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, he prefers Aquinas' interpretation: we can appreciate that his commentaries on Aristotle represent a principal guide for Brentano's study of ancient philosophy, since his forecited text tries to extract the main points out of an extensive quotation from Aquinas' *Commentary on Metaphysics*, which appears directly before our text. The explicit allusion to Aquinas in the text is interpreted by Hedwig (Brentano 2017, 508, note 6) as referring to the apocryphal *Tractatus de universalibus*, but it is clearly a mention of *De substantiis separatis*, where Aquinas defended such a thesis: in some old editions, this work is usually called *De angelis* and printed as the *Opuscule XV*. Indeed, we can find such an interpretation (close to the one of Proclus) in the first chapter of the work, as Brentano rightly quotes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Brentano 2017, 508; FrSchr 1, 100006. The excellent transcription of Hedwig which I follow contains an important mistake: instead of *materiellen*, in the last lines he wrote *immateriellen* but the manuscript says clearly *materiellen*, and this reading is much more coherent with the context (the Ideas themselves *are* the immaterial things).

<sup>4</sup> In another version of the same opusculum, he leaves that question open, but he insists on the difference (at least as a *distinctio rationis*) between God and the other Ideas: "[...] wenn ich es auch hier dahingestellt sein lasse, ob er [sc. Plato] die Ideen in oder außerhalb des göttlichen Wesens existieren ließ [...]. Mögen wir nämlich annehmen, daß Plato die Ideenwelt in oder außer dem göttlichen Wesen statuiert habe, so viel steht fest, daß die Ideen ihrem Begriff nach mit Gott nicht identisch sind" (Brentano 2017, 525–6). In the following lines, he repeats the same interpretation where the Idea of Unity would be the divinity itself and the other Ideas *die 2te Classe von Wesen*. Moreover, the mediating role of the Ideas of Greatness and Smallness as "matter" for the production of other Ideas is explained in a clearer manner.

<sup>5</sup> The last sentence of Brentano before the brackets is indeed a translation of the last sentence of this text: "[...] ipsam primam ideam unius, quod [Plato] nominabat secundum se unum et secundum se bonum, primum rerum principium esse ponebat, et hunc summum Deum esse dicebat. Sub hoc autem uno diversos ordines participantium et participatorum instituebat in substantiis a materia separatis: quos quidem ordines

## 2. The historical situation of Plato according to Brentano

To understand the relationship between Plato and Aristotle sustained by Brentano, it is useful to appeal to his later developed notion of “congeniality” (*Kongenialität*).<sup>6</sup> Some years after his teaching in Würzburg he expresses the idea of a certain affinity, a sort of “family resemblance” between several philosophers when they share deep baselines, even when they are temporarily separated and sustain very different theoretical approaches. In this way, Brentano notices a certain continuity between thinkers as different as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke or Leibniz. We have a good sample of this conception in some verses composed during his time as a teacher in Vienna (i.e. from 1874 onwards) which were published by him at the end of his life (1911). Therein he gives an account of the relative historical situation attributed by him to Plato and Aristotle, and even takes position himself as a descendant of them:

I am of Socrates seed through whom Plato came into being.  
Plato begat the Stagirite whose strength has never abated,  
Nor has faded the Bride whom he selected in love.  
Two millennia have passed but the marriage still strengthens and blossoms.  
Even today I can claim that I am of its issue (Brentano 1978, xii).

As one can see, he conceives himself as “son” of the same “family of philosophers” to which Plato and Aristotle belong, since he recognizes a profound “congeniality” among them. This point of view agrees with the account of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy that we find in his early years. As we will soon see, from the time of his education on, Brentano understands Aristotle as an author in great continuity with Plato. So, in the lessons on History of Philosophy in Würzburg he states that Aristotle is the only true heir to Plato among his immediate disciples, although he separated himself from his philosophy more than the other disciples, but he does it only “in the letter,” not “in the spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

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deos secundos esse dicebat, quasi quasdam unitates secundas post primam simplicem unitatem” (*De substantiis separatis*, cap. 1). For old editions of the work, see Aquinas 1562, 113; Aquinas 1587, 155.

<sup>6</sup> For this approach to philosophical hermeneutics, see Torrijos-Castrillejo 2017, 28–33.

<sup>7</sup> Aristoteles “allein hielt den Geist der platonischen Forschung fest, wenn er auch von ihren Ergebnissen kühn sich zu entfernen kein Bedenken trug. Die anderen klammerten sich ängstlicher an die Worte des Meisters, sie entfernten sich weniger von seiner Lehre, waren aber nicht so frei und selbständig im Fluge höher hinauf in das Reich des Wissens [...]. Aristoteles ist der einzige wahre Platoniker unter allen Freunden und Schülern des Platon” (Brentano 1988, 212–3). See H45c, 25571. The text in the manuscript is hardly readable, so I copy the edited text, because it seems to transmit the main meaning.

After the preceding considerations, we can better understand the very significant lines that Brentano wrote at the time of his education. They belong to an epistolary exchange with Schlüter, who in an earlier letter provoked Brentano by telling him that without Plato “there would be no salvation in Aristotle.”<sup>8</sup> Schlüter believed that Brentano was too close to Aristotle and he instead believed that his philosophy could only be accepted if it was interpreted in the frame provided by Platonic philosophy. Thus, our philosopher replied by recalling the efforts of Simplicius and Cicero to show “that the Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy are one and the same.”<sup>9</sup> Brentano confesses that he was “very much in agreement with both men” (Nettesheim 1962, 294). Therefore, he concludes:

The philosophy of Plato and that of Aristotle are One, because, indeed, there is only One philosophy, only One wisdom, as there is only One deity, One truth and, beyond It, men’s thoughts against it are foolishness.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Plato’s philosophy cannot fall into contradiction and antagonism against the one of Aristotle. Where they both contradict each other, they do so not as philosophers; in the same way—to speak like Plato—the physician cannot be called physician to the extent that he does not understand something and performs falsely.<sup>11</sup> The Platonic philosophy and the Aristotelian one are therefore one and the same.<sup>12</sup>

This unity between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle is an exceptional example of the deep unity among all true philosophers in history. In fact, as we can see, his conception of philosophical work is essentially anti-historicist, that is, contrary to the approach supported by many scholars of his time, especially in the German realm. Instead, he thinks of philosophy as a *science* developed over the centuries—with some

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<sup>8</sup> “Nach meiner Überzeugung ist im *Aristoteles* kein Heil, wenn er nicht, in welchen Sinn auch immer, mit *Plato* verbunden wird” (C. Schlüter, *Brief 1. Dezember 1862*, in Nettesheim 1962, 293).

<sup>9</sup> “Der gelehrte Simplicius hat bekanntlich ausführliche Commentare zu den Kategorien und zu den *Auscultationes Physicae* des Aristoteles geschrieben. In beiden Büchern gibt er sich viele Mühe, zu zeigen, daß Plato und Aristoteles wohl zu vereinigen seien. Auch Cicero sagt in gleicher Meinung, die Aristotelische und Platonische Philosophie seien ein und dieselbe” (F. Brentano, *Brief 16. Februar 1863*, in Nettesheim 1962, 294).

<sup>10</sup> See 1Co 1:20.

<sup>11</sup> See *Resp.*, 340d–e; *Charm.*, 170e.

<sup>12</sup> “Die Platonische und Aristotelische Philosophie sind Eine; denn es gibt überhaupt nur Eine Philosophie, nur Eine Weisheit, wie es nur Eine Gottheit, Eine Wahrheit gibt; was außer ihr, gegen sie von Menschen gedacht wird, ist Thorheit. So kann also die Philosophie des Plato nicht mit der des Aristoteles in Widerspruch und Feindschaft gerathen, wo Beide sich widersprechen, thun sie es nicht als Philosophen, wie auch, um mit Plato zu reden, der Arzt nicht, insofern er etwas nicht versteht und falsch behandelt, Arzt genannt werden darf. Die platonische und Aristotelische Philosophie also sind ein und dieselbe” (F. Brentano, *Brief 16. Februar 1863*, in Nettesheim 1962, 294–5). The two former notes are mine.

periods of retrogression<sup>13</sup>—and therefore every philosophical system must be studied as a partial approach to a timeless truth.

In the same letter Brentano explains that, although both thinkers basically shared the same philosophical attitude, it is not always easy to “harmonize” their systems. It is more viable to harmonize the “Platonists” with the “Aristotelians.” Since the disciples must develop the doctrines of each of the two great philosophers of antiquity through the doctrines of the other one, then there are “Aristotelian” elements in Platonism and “Platonic” elements in Aristotelianism. Thus, Brentano reveals the following about himself: “I am proud to call myself so Platonic as Aristotelian, since even Plato was the one who first conquered my heart and consecrated it to philosophy.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, Plato is not favored by devaluing Aristotle, since he was his best disciple. Indeed, Brentano compares the Platonic filiation of Aristotle with the clever words spoken by Croesus to praise Cambyses without reducing the merit of his father, Cyrus.<sup>15</sup> Croesus said that he should consider Cyrus better than Cambyses, because the father succeeded in generating a son as great as Cambyses, something which the latter had yet to achieve. In a similar way we cannot celebrate Plato by disdainful Aristotle, because the former was able to generate such a great disciple as was the philosopher of Stagira, while he, despite having been in some respects better than his teacher, could not generate such a great disciple. In fact, Aristotle also represents the end of a period of growth of Greek philosophy that however had lost all the vigor of its pristine youth:

In Aristotle, without detriment to his greatness, the period of splendor of Greek philosophy approaches its sunset: after him, the flowers, which in Plato already had sprouted with such beauty and joy, rotted and decayed. In this way, one can appreciate how the full youthful strength and freshness of Plato’s philosophy no longer dwells in Aristotle. In him, the philosophy is matured but also aged. Therefore, he remains great and the greatest [...] but in some things he has to give way to Plato and especially in one thing: he did not arouse

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<sup>13</sup> The well-known Brentanian theory of four stages of development and decadence in the history of philosophy was exposed already in his lessons on History of Philosophy of Würzburg: see Kraus 1919, 89–90; Brentano H45a, 25260–5.25312–25 (and also Brentano 1988, 2–3.19–23). However, the theory was already excogitated by him in 1860: see Baumgartner-Hedwig 2017, 79.

<sup>14</sup> “So rühme ich mich ebensogern Platoniker als Aristoteliker zu sein, wie ja auch Plato es war, der zuerst mein Herz der Philosophie gewonnen und geweiht hat” (F. Brentano, *Brief 16. Februar 1863*, in Nettesheim 1962, 295). It is interesting to notice that Przywara designed Brentano as an “Aristotelian Platonic” or an “intellectual Platonist” concentrating himself on Brentano’s personal and most mature philosophy: see Przywara 1928, 270.279.

<sup>15</sup> See Brentano, *Brief 16. Februar 1863*, in Nettesheim 1962, 295. For the implicitly referred text, see Herodotus, *Historiae*, III, 34.

such a great disciple as the one who aroused his master, at least in his time, for we must move many centuries later to recognize such a disciple: St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>16</sup>

These lines already express the main idea of familiar affinity and show very well how Brentano is ready to recognize that the philosophy of Aristotle suffers the defects of his time, which is precisely the end of an era of splendor; that is also seen in the lack of a progeny worthy of him.<sup>17</sup> While Aristotle represents the second period of “splendor” of Greek philosophy (methodical development), Socrates and Plato belong to the first epoch of this philosophy (the attempt to seek the truth for itself).

### 3. Plato’s God according to Brentano

As is well known, Brentano’s fervently Catholic family guided the young philosopher to study in the circle of German “neo-scholastics” of Münster. Indeed, Brentano himself was ordained a Catholic priest and was already a cleric when he was teaching the course on History of Ancient Philosophy. Yet, a few years later, his doubts about the Christian faith led him to abandon the Church. However, his education in the heart of the Catholic Church will mark his philosophy forever (Münch 2004). One can recognize this influence not only in his appreciation for tradition, but, first of all, in his defense of theism and immortality of the human soul. These two theses constitute the *praeambula fidei* (“preambles of faith”) that the Catholic Church long considered “attainable by reason” and also commended the Christian philosophers to defend against their opponents.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, even after leaving the Christian faith, Brentano continues

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<sup>16</sup> “In Aristoteles, wie groß er auch sein möge, neigt sich die Glanzperiode der griechischen Philosophie dem Abend zu; nach ihm welken schnell und verfallen die Blüten, die sich in Plato so schön und freudig entfalteteten. So zeigt es sich, wie wohl schon in Aristoteles die volle Jugend-kraft und Frische des Plato nicht mehr lebt, die Philosophie ist bei ihm gereift aber auch gealtert. So bleibt er wohl groß und größer [...]; aber in manchem und zumal in Einem muß er dem Plato weichen, einen so großen Schüler hatte er nicht erweckt, wenigstens zu seinen Zeiten nicht mehr, wenn wir auch wohl über Jahrhunderte hinwegschreitend in dem h. Thomas von Aquin einen solchen erkennen mögen” (Brentano, *Brief 16. Februar 1863*, in Nettessheim 1962, 295).

<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Brentano thought that Aristotle was the most influent man of all history (with exception of the founders of the great religions), as he said at the end of his life, quoting Lewes: see Brentano 1908, 2. This statement was already defended in his youth: “[...] der Philosoph, dessen nächste Nachwirkung so unbedeutend erscheint, sollte in späterer Zeit herrlichere Triumphe als jeder andere feiern” (H45c, 25707; see Brentano 1988, 309). In the manuscript, the text is written and underlined with pencil. Several quotations from the German translation of Lewes’ book (Lewes 1865) are copied in the following folia: see H45c, 25709–13.

<sup>18</sup> In the time of Brentano this necessity of rational demonstration was experienced in a particularly pressing way, because of the spread of “fideism” among some Catholics: see Denzinger-Hünemann 2009, §§2441.2765–6. Brentano himself expressed against fideism in one of his *Habilitation* theses: “Philosophia et eos, qui eam principia sua a Theologia sumere volunt, et eos rejicere debet, qui, nisi sit supernaturalis revelatio, eam omnem operam perdere contendunt” (*Habilitationsthesen 1867*, in Brentano 1968, 135). See



to act as a “Christian philosopher” throughout his life, by holding that philosophy can sustain the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. The battlefield where he defended such *praeambula fidei* most strongly was not the speculative philosophy but the interpretation of Aristotle. His controversy with Zeller which occupied an important part of his career, constitutes the main realization of this struggle.<sup>19</sup>

From his *Habilitation* about the *nous poietikos* (1867), Brentano will defend against Zeller a creationist understanding of the Aristotelian God that is closely linked to his idea of the human soul as an immaterial substance capable of surviving the death of the body. According to him, one of the strongest proofs to attribute to the Aristotelian God a *creatio ex nihilo* is the immateriality of the human soul, which can only proceed from a direct divine influx. His criticism of Zeller will culminate in the works *Aristoteles und seine Weltanschauung* and *Aristoteles Lehre von Ursprung des menschlichen Geistes*, published in 1911, a few years before his death (1917).

Brentano cannot accept that the Aristotelian God would be inactive and submerged in his self-contemplation. In this case, God could not know anything but himself, and would never do anything but contemplate. On the contrary, Brentano believes that God is truly the first unmoved mover because he creates *ex nihilo* everything and in particular creates every human soul, since the human soul is a spiritual entity and cannot proceed from a physical process of generation.<sup>20</sup> These theses, rather difficult to find in the words of Aristotle, require different lines of argumentation to be proved. The continuity between related thinkers is one of the reasons that convince Brentano of the truth of his interpretation, as he will explain about twenty years after his teaching in Würzburg:

A doctrine enjoys an antecedent probability when it has an affinity (*Verwandtschaft*) in its foundations with the doctrines of the past, so that it can be understood as its development;

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also the declarations of one of the favorites philosophers of Brentano, Descartes, who speaks about such a “mission” concerning “Christian philosophers” of defending the two *praeambula fidei* that Brentano always kept (even after his apostasy), namely, the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul: “Concilium Lateranense sub Leone 10 habitum, sessione 8 [...] expresse mandat Christianis Philosophis ut eorum argumenta dissolvant, et veritatem pro viribus probent hoc etiam aggredi non dubitavi. Praeterea, quoniam scio plerosque impios non aliam ob causam nolle credere Deum esse, mentemque humanam a corpore distingui, quam quia dicunt haec duo a nemine hactenus potuisse demonstrari...” (*Meditationes metaphysicae*, prol. 3, in Descartes 2012, 682).

<sup>19</sup> About this controversy, see George, “Einleitung,” in Brentano 1980, vii-xiv and Torrijos-Castrillejo 2017, 22–7.

<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, this individual creation of the soul is a “Catholic” idea (see for example Aquinas, *STh.*, I, q. 90, a. 2), which is not easy to identify in Aristotle.

analogously, a doctrine similar to the doctrines of the past is probable if the teacher and his disciples hold a similar position or it is already almost present in him.<sup>21</sup>

In the lessons on Ancient Philosophy in Würzburg he already compared the “mental kinship” (*geistige Verwandtschaft*) that would exist between Plato and Aristotle with the less strong “carnal kinship” between Plato and his nephew Speusippus.<sup>22</sup> Of course, this *geistige Verwandtschaft* is equivalent to the above mentioned *Kongenialität*. So, because of the kinship between Plato and Aristotle, members of the philosophers’ family to whom Brentano himself feels to belong, Plato’s doctrines can confirm Aristotle’s interpretation as proposed by Brentano.

Now, it is evident that the soul in Plato has a very clear independence of the body and also there is no doubt about its immortality. In this sense, it is not difficult to find in him a confirmation in order to attribute this doctrine to his disciple (Brentano 1911a, 141–9). On the contrary, the Platonic conception of God is more controversial. For this reason, among the teachings of Plato presented by Brentano in his lessons in ancient philosophy, we propose to focus here on one of the most peculiar of his exposition, namely, his interpretation of the Platonic divinity.

Brentano’s account of Plato follows a very simple pattern. He begins with his life and writings. Then, he divides his teachings into three points: first, the “metaphysics,” where he explains the theory of Ideas, the cosmology and Platonic theology, and also his theory of the soul; second, Platonic “logic,” where he enumerates Plato’s rules concerning the classification of concepts; third, Platonic “ethics” and “politics,” where he recalls the fundamental doctrines of *Republic* and *Laws*. His exposition ends by speaking briefly about the disciples of Plato. As a conclusion, Brentano contemplates the philosophy of Plato considering it as a whole with these words:

If we look again at the whole, Plato shows himself as more rigorous a thinker who designed a fully developed system. An ideal understanding approaches us, showing an inclination to the divinity, since the Idea of Good is the one to which everything is ultimately directed. World, man and State are all determined by the Idea of Good, i.e. by the divinity. It traverses and dominates everything. In this way, the philosophy of Plato possesses a

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<sup>21</sup> “Zur Methode aristotelischen Studien, und zur Methode geschichtlicher Forschung auf philosophischem Gebiet überhaupt,” in Brentano 1986, 18. This manuscript must be composed between 1883 and 1888. See Torrijos-Castrillejo 2016, 671–2.

<sup>22</sup> H45c, 25571. See Brentano 1988, 213.

particular religious character and even antiquity has rightly attributed to him the name of “divine.”<sup>23</sup>

As we can see, Brentano believes that the divinity gives unity to the whole Platonic philosophy, however such divinity is neither the “Demiurge” (understood as a minor deity) nor the “gods,” but the Idea of Good. Like in the manuscript of *De principio individuationis*, this Idea is understood as a monotheistic deity. Let’s see that in more detail.

According to Brentano, the Idea of Good includes every “perfection” in itself.<sup>24</sup> All other Ideas must participate in it in order to be what they are. Therefore it is the model of everything. It is linked to the other Ideas in the same way as they are linked to sensible things. Consequently, even all sensitive things participate in it. The Idea of Good is the cause of all other Ideas, which are not the ultimate causes of reality but are rendered causes by it. In other words, the Idea of Good must be understood as a demiurgic power for the Ideas. Brentano compares such an ideal Demiurge with another Platonic parallelism between the sensible and the intelligible sphere: in the world of Ideas there is a kind of “intellectual matter” that allows the multiplication of Ideas;<sup>25</sup> in a similar way, there must be an element similar to the Demiurge which would be the creator of the Ideas. Brentano interprets the Demiurge as an adoption of the divinity of Anaxagoras and Socrates, who spoke of an efficient cause of the cosmos.<sup>26</sup> Plato would have embraced this intelligent efficient cause.

To demonstrate the existence of this “Demiurge” causing the Ideas, he recalls the distinction between three types of “bed” mentioned by Plato in *Republic*, X, 597b: the Idea of bed, the sensible bed and the bed drawn by an artist.<sup>27</sup> While the wooden bed and the drawn bed are built by human workers, the Idea of a bed is only made by God. To confirm his opinion, Brentano highlights the verb ἐργάζομαι used here by Plato to show

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<sup>23</sup> Brentano 1988, 212. See H45c, 25570. The published text is reconstructed by the editors but the essential meaning about the divine is truthful.

<sup>24</sup> “[...] die Idee der Vollkommenheit, die Idee des Guten selbst” (H45c, 25545; see Brentano 1988, 193; underlined in the manuscript with the same pen).

<sup>25</sup> Brentano speaks of a “Materie der Ideen” (H45c, 25546; see Brentano 1988, 195; written and underlined with pencil in the margin). He seems to allude to an Aristotelian interpretation on the doctrine of Plato: Aristotle speaks of a νοητὴ ὕλη, different from physical matter (sensitive and mobile), which is identified with the Diad. See *Metaph.*, Z, 10, 1036a9–12. Aquinas also sustains this interpretation in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics* quoted in “De principio individuationis”: see Brentano 2017, 506.508; FrSchr 1, 100006.

<sup>26</sup> See H45c, 25539–40; Brentano 1988, 189–90.

<sup>27</sup> See H45c, 25547; Brentano 1988, 195.

that the Greek philosopher was convinced of the role of true “efficient cause” played by God regarding Ideas.<sup>28</sup>

Once admitted that the Ideas are produced by God, one must ask himself whether this divinity is superior to the Demiurge, the creator of the sensible world. To answer this question, Brentano recalls the characteristics of the Demiurge: it is good and in him there is no jealousy, he made the world so that it cannot be destroyed and in the best possible manner; so, if he operated in the “best possible way,” it is not possible that there is a God more perfect than him. Consequently, the Demiurge is the supreme God, the same who created the Ideas.

Secondly, Brentano poses a new difficulty which follows the admission of a divine creation of both the Ideas and the sensible world: what does that mean for the Idea of Good? To be sure, he already exposed the Idea of Good as demiurgic regarding the Ideas and now we know that this Idea made the sensible world. If the Demiurge were different from the Idea of Good, he should be created by it, because every perfection originates from it. But if the Demiurge would depend on it to be good, his goodness would be participated and he would no longer be “the best” (κάλλιστον: *Tim.*, 30b).<sup>29</sup> So God, the creator of both the Ideas and the sensible world, is the Idea of Good itself.<sup>30</sup>

Another evidence for his interpretation is the comparison of the Idea of Good with the sun made in the allegory of the cave (*Resp.*, 517c). If the sun causes the generation of sensible things and, while the sun represents the Idea of Good, the visible things represent the other Ideas, so too the Idea of Good must be the efficient cause of the other Ideas.

The fact that Plato does not expressly identify the Idea of Good and the Demiurge with God is not a sufficient refutation against this interpretation, because the Athenian

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<sup>28</sup> “Darüber also ist kein Zweifel. Platon erkannte die Nothwendigkeit eines wirkenden Princips für die Ideen” (H45c, 25548; Brentano 1988, 195; the text written with a pen is underlined with a pencil).

<sup>29</sup> Brentano’s interpretation takes advantage from the fact that, according to Plato, the Demiurge wants to do everything in the image of himself but also in the image of the Idea of Good: ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ (*Tim.*, 29e). τῷ γὰρ τῶν νοουμένων καλλίστῳ καὶ κατὰ πάντα τελέῳ μάλιστα αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς ὁμοιωῖσαι βουληθεὶς (ibid., 30d). He quotes this passage by saying: “Umgekehrt wird dem Gotte beigelegt, was der Idealursache eigen ist, wenn Platon im Timäus (6.) sagt, Gott wolle, dass alles ihm selbst möglichst ähnlich werde” (H45c, 25548–9; Brentano, 1988, 196; the text, written with pen, is underlined with pencil). Some contemporary scholars interpret the *Timaeus* following the line coined by Philo and the Middle-Platonists, namely, that the Ideas would be thoughts of the Demiurge, i.e. the mind of an almost monotheistic God: see Dombrowski 2005, 51–64; Bordt 2006, 238–50. In Brentano’s time, such a thesis was sustained by Zeller 1875, 594.

<sup>30</sup> This interpretation is still supported in a later text, which must have been written at least after 1885: “[...] Platon, für den die Idee des Guten die unendliche Vollkommenheit selbst mit dem göttlichen Urprinzip zusammenfiel” (“Von der göttlichen Allwissenheit,” in Brentano 1986, 255). I take 1885 as *terminus ante quem* because of the work by Freudenthal quoted in Brentano 1986, 258.

philosopher declared this doctrine in a poetic way. According to Brentano, everyone who has well understood the theory of the Ideas must know that

they are not abstract concepts, but spirits, eternal entities, which possess life, reason and soul. The Idea of Good, however, transcends all other Ideas; it alone is without matter, it alone is absolutely good and all other goods, even the other Ideas, are only imitations of it. It cannot lack absolutely anything, not even efficient power. As Plato in *Resp.* says<sup>31</sup>, it must be the greatest, not only in its worthiness but also in its power.<sup>32</sup>

We can see that the account of Platonic Ideas developed by Brentano follows a model that harmonizes Platonism with Aristotelianism by making the Idea of Good a both efficient and exemplary cause of all sensible things. Even the other ideas become personal divinities in agreement with the interpretation of Proclus also followed by Thomas Aquinas.

Finally, Brentano explains the “demonstrations of the existence of God” provided by Plato. The first one bases on goodness: since there is good, God must have the Idea of Good; therefore, that Idea exists. The second demonstration is taken from *Laws*, 896c–897b, where it is said that imperfect things are posterior to most perfect things, as the soul is prior to the bodies and the mover to the moved: therefore, there must be a first mover that is the cause of all further movers. The third demonstration is “teleological,” insofar the existence of God would explain the teleological and harmonious order of the cosmos. After these demonstrations, Brentano concludes his account of Platonic theology by recalling the divine attributes.

These Brentanian teachings of Würzburg are consistent with the contemporary correspondence with his disciple Carl Stumpf, who precisely wrote his dissertation on the “Relationship of the Platonic God with the Idea of Good” (Stumpf 1869).<sup>33</sup> In December 1867 both scholars discussed the interpretation of Trendelenburg on the Platonic Idea of Good. Brentano recalls his lessons in Berlin by quoting his own notes.<sup>34</sup> His teacher

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<sup>31</sup> See *Resp.*, 509b.

<sup>32</sup> “Sie sind ja keine abstracten Begriffe sondern Geister, ewige Wesen, denen Leben Vernunft und Beseeltheit eignet. Die Idee des Guten aber überschreitet noch alle übrigen Ideen. ⊥ Sie allein ist absolut gut, und alles andre Gute auch die Ideen sind nur eine Nachahmung von ihr. Ihr kann gar nichts und also auch die wirkende Kraft nicht mangeln. Sie muss wie Platon Rep VI (19. fin.) sagt nicht bloss der Würde sondern auch der Kraft nach die Grösste sein” (H45c, 25549; see Brentano 1988, 197). The text, written with a pen, is underlined with a pencil; the words “Die Idee des Guten” are also underlined with red pencil.

<sup>33</sup> About this correspondence, see Baumgartner 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Brentano writes: “Trendelenburgs Ansicht über das Verhältnis des Platonischen Gottes zu den Ideen ist falsch. Sie [sc. Stumpf] haben dieselbe aber, glaube ich, aus seinem Philebus ganz richtig erfasst [see Trendelenburg 1837]. In seiner Geschichte der Philosophie trug er uns darüber Folgendes vor: ‚Die Idee, die alle übrigen bestimmt und beherrscht, ist die Idee des Guten. Doch ist diese nicht Gott. Die Ideen sind unbewegt und fest. Gott nur bewegt sie in die Dinge hinein. Die Ideen sind nirgends im Raume, wo also

interpreted the Ideas as eternal thoughts in the mind of God, which was however distinct from the Idea of Good. Both Stumpf and Brentano considered this reading as wrong because the Idea of Good must be identified with God himself. Stumpf's dissertation confirms Brentano's point of view on God and the Ideas: even for him the Idea of Good is at the same time an efficient and exemplary cause, God is the cause of Ideas and He himself must be identified with the Idea of Good.<sup>35</sup>

In a word, Plato's God is a creator one. He is even more efficient than the Platonic God of the standard interpretation in Brentano's time, since He is not only creator of the world but also of the spiritual beings. Consequently, He is like Brentano's Aristotelian God, who creates the whole world and even the spiritual souls. We began theorizing that the presentation of Plato proposed by Brentano could make it easier to show the continuity between Plato and Aristotle. His interpretation of Plato could confirm his opinion regarding central topics of Aristotelian metaphysics, such as God and the soul. Brentano was conscious of this continuity and recalled it to defend his position. It is noticeable in the following lines written several years later, at the beginning of the last decade of his life, when he still continued to discuss the same topics of his youth:

It is unquestionable that Plato believes in a divine maker of the world. Following Aristotle, one might think that he would know, beyond the matter, only the so-called formal causes of the world. This is a consequence of Plato's identification of God with the general Good. In fact, according to him, He was the Idea of Good. After this, for Aristotle, the question about the existence of a divine principle, such as the one admitted by Plato, is transformed into the question about the existence of such an Idea and about its influence as an Idea. But, a subsisting Idea, as the Idea of the general Good would be, cannot exist according to Aristotle [...]. We would draw false conclusions for Plato's doctrine, if we deny that he sustained the existence of a being who knows the whole world and orders it; we would draw false conclusions for the doctrine of Aristotle if, since he does not integrate from Plato's doctrine on the principles anything of the teachings of Plato on the divine being ruler of the world, then we conclude that Aristotle considered that this part contained no

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anders als im Verstande Gottes? Die Idee des Guten ist das Abbild Gottes nicht Gott. Im Philebus findet Platon Schönheit, Ebenmaß, und Wahrheit, Begriffe mit denen er den Begriff des Guten bezeichnete. Metaphysisch ausgedrückt wird das Gute durch das Eins. Nur aus Aristoteles wissen wir wie Platon die Ideen formal als Zahlen fasste z.B. ‚Metaphysik I.6.‘ [from the quotation mark till this point, the reference to the *Geschichte der Philosophie* is a quote from Brentano's notes of the lessons of Trendelenburg: FrSchr 50, 102004] Ihre Bemerkungen gegen diese Deutung der Platonischen Lehre sind vollkommen zutreffend” (Brentano, *Brief 31. Dezember 1867*, freely accessible in [www.franzbrentano.org](http://www.franzbrentano.org)).

<sup>35</sup> See Stumpf 1869, 81–92. For a discussion of Trendelenburg's interpretation, see page 88.

truth. Master and disciple are here very close in many respects, in general as well as in particular (for example, regarding the origin of the thinking soul from God).<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, at the end of his life Brentano keeps considering the divinity of Plato as identical with the Idea of Good and as creator of the world. Thus, the Platonic doctrine can confirm his difficult defense of the Aristotelian creationist God, maker of human soul, a defense in which he will be engaged again in those last years.<sup>37</sup>

#### **4. Conclusions**

For Brentano, Plato is one of the most notable representatives of Greek philosophy. He recognizes among his greatest merits that he was able to give such a great disciple as Aristotle to the history of thought. Although there are some undeniable differences between both authors, continuity between them is more important. In fact, in these pages we have seen how some points of Plato's philosophy were assimilated by Brentano into his conception of Aristotle. He contemplates the Aristotelian notion of God and soul from the tradition of "Platonic" commentators and particularly approaches Aquinas. These authors think about Plato and Aristotle as two authors of deep affinity between them. Thus, we see how Brentano makes use of this connection to provide a scheme which can be harmonized with his interpretation of the notions of God and soul in Aristotle.

Brentano believes that Plato's Idea of Good is a personal God who must also be identified with the Demiurge. The Demiurge is conceived in continuity with Hebrew and Christian Platonism: it was Philo of Alexandria who made Ideas not only thoughts of God (as the Middle-Platonists later did), but also considered them as created by Him; this approach will be followed by other Christian thinkers like Origen. In a similar way, Brentano identifies God with the Idea of Good and affirms that the other Ideas are created by Him. Instead of thinking the Ideas as thoughts of God, as Trendelenburg in his time did, Brentano conceives Ideas as personal entities, following thinkers like Proclus and Aquinas. In any case, this account of Plato not only will favor his personal interpretation of Aristotle, but will also provide a synthesis of ancient thought capable of being easily integrated in the "Christian philosophy," which inspired his philosophical project in different ways.

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<sup>36</sup> "Gotteslehre: Aristoteles, wo er zu früheren Ansichten Stellung nimmt (21/4/1909)," in Brentano 1986, 371.

<sup>37</sup> However, see the chapter "Die Gottheit des Aristoteles und die platonische Idee des Guten" (Brentano 1911b, 91–4), where he does not favor the continuity between Plato and Aristotle too much.

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