In this paper I shall discuss some aspects of Plato's concept of the self or person. In particular, I want to show two things. First, I want to show that for Plato the self is ideally or paradigmatically a knower and so the concepts of self and knowledge are closely related for Plato. Indeed, Plato's concept of the self is practically constructed on the basis of his reflections on the nature of the highest form of cognition. Second, and more generally, I want to show that Plato's hierarchical universe embraces selves or persons. That is, incarnate or composite or this-worldly persons belong to the part of the universe that, as Plato says in Republic, neither is unqualifiedly nor unqualifiedly is not. In short, incarnate persons are part of the world of images or reflections of eternal and intelligible models.

The primary subject of this paper is what might be termed 'Platonic intellectualism,' the view, roughly, that epistemology is the focus of philosophical reflection on matters related to persons or selves, including the vexed question of what exactly persons are. The first section, however, explores the roots of Platonic intellectualism in the moral intuitions of Socrates. Socrates (or early Plato, if you will) holds certain extraordinary views about morality. These views, I argue, ultimately rest on a conception of what a person is. This conception is mostly implicit in the early dialogues. It is in the middle dialogues, principally Phaedo and Republic, that a fairly full conception of the nature of the person is developed. The treatment of this is appropriately the subject of a much longer study.¹

1. The Self and the Early Dialogues

I begin with a search for the source of Plato's concept of person or the self in the early Socratic dialogues. In particular, I shall try to excavate the concept of the self presupposed in the so-called "Socratic paradoxes." These are paradoxical because they fly in the face of conventional beliefs regarding human interests. For example, the paradoxical claim that "we must never return evil for evil" or, stated otherwise, "it is better to suffer than to do evil" directly confronts the ordinary and deeply held belief that doing evil does not

¹ See my forthcoming Plato on Knowledge and the Self.
harm one at all whereas suffering evil or having evil done to one harms one almost by definition.\(^2\) The paradox that "no one does wrong willingly" seems to reject the common belief that doing wrong is at least sometimes in one's interest and that people normally act willingly in their own interest.\(^3\) The paradox that "a worse man cannot harm a better man" just sounds silly.\(^4\) Surely, this happens all the time. Similarly for the claim that "the greatest harm for a wrongdoer is to go unpunished." The dispute between a Socrates who makes such wild assertions and a typical Athenian gentleman is not, for example, over whether suffering evil, say, receiving an unjust blow, is more painful than delivering one. Of course it is. Rather, the underlying dispute is over whether one's interests are always better served by doing that which produces on balance less pain. If my only choice is between inflicting pain unjustly and having pain unjustly inflicted on me, could it ever be in my interest to choose the latter? Socrates thinks not just that it is sometimes in my interest to choose the latter but that it is always and necessarily so. Clearly, there is a difference here concerning what constitutes human interest.\(^5\)

If we state the matter of the dispute in this way, one might aptly reply that different people have different interests and Socrates is hardly in a position to privilege his own. Perhaps it is in his interest as he conceives it to suffer rather than to do evil because, say, the shame he would feel in doing the latter would trouble him more than the pain he would experience in suffering the former. Someone else, however, may conceive his own interest differently.\(^6\) The point is superficially a powerful one, but it has an underlying weakness. It presumes that each person is authoritative in determining his or her own interests, that if, for instance, I hold that my interest is served better by doing evil than suffering it, then no one can

\(^2\) Cf. Crito 49b4-c9.
\(^3\) Cf. Gorgias 488a3; Protagoras 345e1.
\(^4\) Cf. Apology 30c8-d4.
\(^5\) Gerasimos Santas, Socrates. Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues. (London: Routledge, 1979), 184ff. distinguishes what he calls a "prudential paradox" from a "moral paradox." "The first is concerned with situations where no question of justice and injustice (or, more generally, right and wrong) arise, and it appears to deny the fact of prudential weakness; the second is concerned with moral situations and appears to deny the fact of moral weakness." I am not convinced that this distinction reflects Plato's intentions, for it seems to me that the root of the paradoxes is that, contrary to popular belief, the prudential and the moral actually coincide. In any case, nothing in my paper turns on whether such a distinction is made.
\(^6\) This is precisely the basis for the objection in Gorgias that Callicles makes to Socrates' refutation of Polus' stubborn assertion that doing evil is better than having evil done to you.