September 27, 1975

Dear José,

I've moved along a fair distance in my thinking since we talked this past summer. One result is that yesterday I decided upon the title for the whole piece of writing. It is to be: "Plato and the Good: An Essay on Sophists, Rulers, Socrates, and Ruin." (Just possibly it might be: "Plato and the Good: An Essay on Sophists, Rulers, Socrates, and Forms of Ruin.") Another result of my movement of thought is that I realize that I am near now to being ready to attempt a preface. I suspect that will be the work of next summer. It will involve my recapitulating some claims in The City of God--some powerful, dissolving-of-rationality ones in my opinion--and my stating or suggesting how finally and intentionally they are opposed to the deepest Socratic-Platonic insights into what is and indeed into what-is and what-must-be, both together in their inseparability.

I'm happy or at least relieved to realize that what I'll be constantly diretting myself towards is an apprehension of the good--of Plato's good, yes, but of the good ultimately. The good is a frightenning conception (it is a frightening reality), and it is beautiful and essential. I'm convinced that Plato knew just about all there is to know of it.

I still intend the primary focus of the whole writing to be the Republic, and, as I indicated to you, it is my intention to ease into it by considering, at its outset, the noble lie.

Well, this isn't going to be a thesis presented to BMC, and you are not now the director

of my work. But I thought you would like to know that my apprehensions of what I'm to do have become denser and more satisfying. I figured this would happen, but I didn't know when it would happen. Of course, I've a very long way to go yet in my thinking. But I do believe I've got my most basic conceptions in mind and that they are substantial. Some of these your and my recent talks have helped to reveal to me, directly; and some of them stand in sharp opposition to things you've shown yourself as thinking. Very many of them, of course, have not come up in talk between us. One of the primary of these, for instance--and perhaps this is even the one that will dominate all the others--I can state summarily in this way: it is inevitable that Plato should be unable to make any real distinction between Sophists and politicians, the reason for this lying in his apprehension of the expedient as the inherently inferior and the to-be-turned-away-from, always. I've long been puzzled and irritated by many of Socrates's stands in the Gorgias, but--as a Platonist, and I am one, I've found out--I've at length moved towards greater sympathy with some of them, in particular with those in which Socrates expressed hid distaste for the great (and surely they were great) politicians of Athens's past. Another primary one--not unrelated to the one just stated--is that I believe Plato did know a vision of the sun-like good to be sometimes directly productive of madness. In the Republic he insists on the mere seeming madness produced, but in the Republic he has deliberately--for the strongest of reasons--excluded any statement of much of what he does in fact know.

Things at Fairfield University are worse and worse.

Sincerely, Jim