Unity and Goodness in the Republic

The paper explores the old but often rather vaguely formulated suggestion that the Good of the Republic is identical to Oneness or Unity Itself. To begin with, a range of passages clearly suggest that the best soul and city are those that are most truly one, those that have no internal conflict (so that, for example, a city suffering civil war is actually more cities than one), or that are in perfect internal harmony.   Conversely, inferior lives and cities are those divided against themselves, those that are dissonant rather than harmonious, many rather than a unified whole. These references to harmony, proportion, and the like are not embellishments. On the contrary, the Republic establishes at least a mutual dependence between oneness and goodness precisely by arguing in specific cases, and in detail, that the goodness of good souls and cities is in effect a matter of their being a unity or harmony of parts. After considering some of the most important of the texts for this explicit connection between oneness and goodness, the paper will develop three further proposals. First, the connection between goodness and unity should be extended to the case of the cosmos as a whole. This is most clear in the Timaeus, but is supported by details of the Myth of Er and by other, more passing, remarks earlier in the Republic itself. Second, the unity relevant to goodness can be apprehended only by a thinker who has studied the major branches of mathematics, and these in a synoptic manner (531c-d). This is explicit in the educational program for the guardians, but can be made more specific by examination of the fundamental principles of Eudoxus' general theory of proportion as recorded in Euclid's Elements—principles that were well-known to Plato and probably developed in large part within the Early Academy.   Third, this in turn allows one to see how the Philosopher-King's final study of "dialectic" following ten years of mathematics (cf. 537d,ff.) builds upon concepts or first principles fundamental not only to mathematics, but to any possible ordering of a realm of becoming (for example, equality, greater, less; part, whole; prior, posterior; motion; contact; time). Here one can see connections to the dialectical training of the Parmenides (especially, but certainly not only, the Second Hypothesis), and to the "critical core" of the Sophist.

I would be happy to give either a shorter (20-minute) version or a longer version of the paper.   The shorter version would merely mention connections with the Timaeus, Parmenides, Sophist , and would restrict itself to discussion of the main Republic texts supporting a link between oneness and goodness.