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Antisthenes' horse and Plato's horseness: A metaphysical dispute between two Socratics

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Abstract: The paper analyzes some of the main testimonia concerning the relationship between Antisthenes of Athens and Plato. The testimonies on personal issues report hard tempers of both thinkers, a problematic relationship, and a (probably fictitious) moment of rupture between them. The testimonies on their

philosophical controversy mainly report a deep quarrel concerning Platonic metaphysics. According to the sources, Antisthenes would have written an entire dialogue against the founder of the Academia, the *Sathon*, in which he ferociously criticized Plato by saying that the Ideas have no objective but only mental reality. After the explanation of the aspects of this criticism, the paper will assess whether it is possible to find in the Platonic *corpus* an answer to the other Socratic.

Keywords: Plato, Antisthenes, Ideas, Metaphysics, Conceptualism.

Introduction: Antisthenes, Plato, and their controversy

Michel¹ Narcy (1993, p. 53), in a famous paper, stated that Aristotle was the “premier antiplatonicien”. Nowadays, given the reconstruction of Antisthenes' thought accomplished by scholarship, this statement cannot be maintained any longer. If, on the one hand, the Socratic was born about sixty years before the Stagirite, on the other hand, the scant information about his works sufficiently testify to his, say, “antiplatonism.” One can say that so long before Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Perì Ídeon*, as well as before Theopompus of Chios' *Against the Teaching of Plato*, the Athenians saw the so-called “Theory of Ideas” to be ferociously attacked by Antisthenes.

Nobody could deny that the relationship between these two great Socratics seems to have been very problematic. Antisthenes and Plato were both drawn in the Antiquity by several sources with some characteristics such as hard temper, excessive arrogance and vanity,

¹ To Samuel de Figueiredo da Silva (*in memoriam*), beloved father.

wherefore they were very criticized by different authors.² Such characteristics show their colors in some testimonia:

[T1] And he [Antisthenes] chided Plato that he was inflated with arrogance. For when a parade was underway, he saw a hot-tempered horse and said to Plato, "I should think you, too, would be a proud horse."³ He said this because Plato was constantly praising the horse. And once he [Antisthenes] went to him [Plato] when he was ill and, after seeing the basin where Plato had vomited, he said, "I see the bile there, but the arrogance I do not see." (D. L., VI, 7 – transl. Prince = V A 27 SSR = 151, 152 DC)

[T2] It is said that Antisthenes, as he was about to read aloud something from his writings, invited him [Plato] to attend. And when he [Plato] asked what he was going to read, he [Antisthenes] said, "On the Impossibility of Gainsaying." And when he [Plato] said, "So how do you write about that very thing?" and taught him that he had refuted himself, he wrote a dialogue against Plato and entitled it "*Sathon*". From

² See D. L. VI, 1, 8 = Aelius IX, 35; IV A 19 SSR ; Athenaeus XI, 507; etc. I will refer to the testimonia and fragments using the traditional abbreviations in Socratic studies: Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, hereinafter "D. L."; Gabriele Giannantoni's *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* (Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1990), hereinafter "SSR"; Fernanda Decleva Caizzi's *Antisthenis Fragmenta* (Milão, Varese, 1966), hereinafter "DC".

³ It is interesting the suggestion of Susan Prince (2018, *ad loc.*) that Antisthenes' provocation against Plato ("*edókeis moi kai sý hípos àn éinai lamprytés*") can have two possible interpretation. Prince claims that the last term of the statement, being derived from the verb *lamprýno*, "make bright", would be ambiguous in this text. According to how we understand the accentuation of the word, it could mean: i) *lamprytés*, with suffix of the agent of the action corresponding to the verb, and so, Antisthenes would be saying that Plato could be a "very pride horse, a performer of glamour"; or ii) *lampryntes*, with suffix of hypostasis or reification of a quality, so remembering the coining of terms that Plato himself realizes in *Tht.* 182a4-b1. In this last hypothesis, Antisthenes' irony would be even more scathing, because he would be jeering Plato, saying that he could be a "horse, the essence of glamour itself", and he would be doing so by using Plato's own terminology. Antisthenes himself critically repeats this terminology in those testimonia that more directly dwell on the heart of the ontological quarrel between these two philosophers, as we will see below (149A, 149B, 149C Prince = 149 SSR).

this episode began their long-lasting estrangement from each other. (D. L., III.35 – transl. Prince = 36 DC = 148 SSR)

According to Susan Prince (2018), the second anecdote probably was fashioned in the Hellenistic period and is probably unhistorical. Nevertheless it has very important data. The testimony of the proud horse (T1) signalled a disagreement concerning personal temper, which however was not sufficiently serious to prevent some demonstration of friendship between both philosophers: we were told about Antisthenes visiting an ailing Plato. Nonetheless, the public lecture anecdote (T2) expressly signs the beginning of another type of disagreement, which seems to be of a more critical level: the intellectual one. We can imagine Antisthenes, full of proud and “love for reputation” (*philodoxía*) as the sources tell us (D. L. VI, 1, 8 = Aelius IX, 35), going to make a public lecture of some of his writings, and inviting his, say, (ex-)”classmate” Plato to the audience. The latter, by his turn, apparently also full of pride (as other sources testify about his character, e.g. Athenaeus XI, 507), being aware of the main thesis of the writing before the lecture begins, “teaches” (note the patronising tone) Antisthenes that the own thesis of the writing is against the possibility of writing about it. What twinkles in Laertius' words is that Antisthenes had suffered some kind of public humiliation by Plato's hands. Now if we have in mind the importance given to public reputation in Athens at V and IV BC, as well as the remarkable vanity with which these two philosophers were drawn by many ancient sources, we can conclude that this humiliation seems really to mark a point of total schism between them.

It must be noted that what is important in the anecdote is not its historicity but its message. The reported rupture seems to have been strong enough to cause what appears as the summit of the disagreement, the act which would rest in the history of Western philosophy as Antisthenes' “vendetta”. If it is true that “revenge is a dish best served cold”, the cold revenge of Antisthenes was to write a whole dialogue against Plato: “*Sáthōn*”. Its title (an insulting corruption of the name “*Pláton*”) was a variation of “*sathé*”, a low slang term which, nicknaming the male genital organ, was used to

offend someone. Concerning the form of *Sáthōn*'s text, although we do not have any literal quotation thereof, it is really very interesting the suggestion of Brancacci (1993, p. 32, n. 2) that, being part of the genre of Socratic dialogue, it is very probable that it had “Socrates” as the main character presenting the view of the author, Antisthenes, and refuting the ideas of the opposed interlocutor – which, in this case, would be our well known Plato.

The metaphysical dispute

According to Antisthenes himself, “we must pay attention to our enemies, because they first notice our errors” (D. L., VI, 1, 12). So it is very interesting to think, following Cordero's (2001) remark, that the “colors” and “accents” that mark the controversy between Antisthenes and Plato could improve the elucidation of both philosophers' thoughts. The remaining (small) part of the philosophical content of this controversy, mainly of *Sáthōn*, was conveyed to us in the form of maxims and anecdotes (*chreía*) by Aristotle's commentators. As these testimonia concern the same theoretical points, we can suppose that they are concerned with the kernel of the “antiplatonicity” of this Antisthenic work (Brancacci, 1990).

One of its capital points is the ontological status claimed for, let us say, the Platonic “universal”, the Form (εἶδος) or Idea (ιδέα). To the founder of the Academy, this entity would have an eternal, immutable and objective reality, corresponding to the essence of sensible beings, but at the same time it would have an existence independent from their existence. As “quality itself” (ἡ ποιότης, a term which is understood as a neologism coined by Plato: *Tht.* 182a4-b1),⁴ the Idea would have primacy on the sensible being, as the cause of the characterization of it. However, for Antisthenes, this was unacceptable: he claimed against Plato the primacy of the individual concrete thing over the Idea, i.e. the primacy of that *which is*

⁴ See also Chantraine, 1956, p. 21; Brancacci, 1990, p. 181, n. 13.

characterized by the quality (or “the qualified”, τὸ ποιόν). When commenting and elucidating parts of Porphyry’s *Isagogé* (the *Introduction* to Aristotle’s *Categories*), Ammonius, head of the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria, provides a detailed explanation of the Antisthenic position about Plato’s Ideas:

[T3] In order that what is said [by Porphyry] should become clear, let us speak as follows. Of things that are, some really exist [“subsist”], whereas others pertain in our mere thoughts, such as the hippocentaur or the goat-stag [...]. For there is no hippocentaur in reality, but once we have seen a horse and a man, we fashion in our thoughts a certain composite, the hippocentaur. In similar manner nature, for its part, has made both the goat and the stag, and we, for our part, by fashioning unto ourselves in our thought bring to actuality a certain composite, the goat-stag, and it has its being by means of this [thought]. Now Antisthenes said that genuses and forms [sc. species] are in our mere thoughts, when he said, “I see a horse, but I do not see horseness,” and likewise, “I see a human, but I do not see humanity.” [...] And in general among the ancients, some said that these things exist, whereas others said that they do not exist. [...] he [Porphyry] says it was possible with reference to genuses and species [forms] to seek whether they exist or whether they lie in mere thought: for this is what Antisthenes believed. (Ammonius, *Commentary on Porphyry’s “Introduction”*, 39.13-41.5 – transl. Prince = V A 149 SSR)

Finally, among all horses presented in the anecdotes, now it arises the most famous “horse”, the very “horse” of Antisthenes, with which he made contraposition to Plato’s “horse” – or, to keep the terms of the “battle”, Plato’s “horseness”. The context of the allusion: at the work commented by Ammonius, Porphyry said that he would “avoid the deep questions” about the reality of genres (*géné*) and forms/species (*eíde*), informing that there was a noticeable disagreement among the ancients about that, namely about if these things really exist or if they exist only in our thoughts. The position that these things really exist, we know, is Plato’s position (*R.* 476a-479d; 507a-b; *Phdr.* 249a-d; etc.). On the other hand, the opposite

position, which recognizes to them a barely mental existence, Ammonius informs us, it “is what Antisthenes believed”. If, in Plato’s view, the Idea or quality itself, apart from the sensible being, was the owner of the highest level of ontological reality, for Antisthenes the Idea or quality itself would exist as “mere notions of thoughts” (*psilàs monàs ennoías*), as “empty words without any corresponding reality” (*diakénos legoménas kat’oudemiàs hypostáseos*), as also testified by Simplicius (*in Cat.* 8B25, 208, 28-32) and Tzetzes (*H.*, VII, 605-609). Thereby, as we have seen (T3), Ammonius also informed that for Antisthenes the ideas (*eíde*) have no objective reality, but, just like notions as “hypocentaur”, they exist only as mere mental products, results from thinking activity (*tà dè en psilaís epinoiais hypárchei*).

Therefore, in Antisthenes' view, in opposition to Plato's, the Greek term *idéa* has nearly the meaning that the modern term “idea” mainly has, that is, a content of thought. This theoretical controversy is the explanation of the famous anecdote or “provocation”, which resumes in a caricatural way the quarrel between these two Socratics, about to see the “horse” but not the “horseness”, to see the “man” but not the “manness”. The saying, emblematic of the controversy between these thinkers, was repeated by many sources (see testimonies 149A, 149B, 149C Prince). Brancacci (1990, p. 176) postulates that this maxim should probably be part of *Sáthōn*'s text, being “posto in bocca al personaggio principale del dialogo”. For Antisthenes, sensible “men” and “horses” were created by nature and have objective reality, thus they can be “seen”, whereas the Platonic Forms or Ideas, like Horseness and Manness, do not have this kind of reality.

This lack of objective reality means to him that the concept does not have a corresponding sensible, so being *flatus vocis*. In Cordero's (2001, p. 332) and Mársico's (2014, p. 232) eyes, Antisthenes would have a kind of “materialistic” ontological position, whose aim was to give to language a ground in reality. For the Socratic, each “name” should have a “real”, “material” corresponding thing, which is a

“body” (“*sôma*”, as informed by Simpl., in *Cat.* 8B25, 211, 15).⁵ Therefore “horseness” would be a mere “empty” name or concept, because it does not have anything corresponding to it. Its sole reality would be as an object of thought (cf. T3: “*tà dè en psilaîs epinoíais hypárchei*”). So the Socratic exhibited a kind of “conceptualist” interpretation of the Platonic Ideas.

As we can see, Antisthenes can be counted as part of a large tradition at V and IV B.C. of intended demolition of the Eleatic equation *eînai* = *noeîn* (Parmenides, DK 28, B3) – tradition in which we can obviously count too, each one with his own solution, Gorgias as well Plato. In this sense, as noted by Brancacci (1993), it is very interesting that, in Ammonius’ version of the anecdote (T3), the ontological status of the Ideas, in Antisthenes’ view, had been equated to that of the hippocentaur (*hippokéntauros*) and the goat-stag (*tragélaphos*). These two examples, together with the Chimera, were the classic examples of entities understood as just imagined and without objective reality in the discussions at V and IV centuries BC.⁶

⁵ The view that Antisthenes had a “materialistic” position is challenged by Prince (2018, *ad. loc.*), who sees reasons to cast doubt on it in face of evidence from a testimony often referred to as Porphyrian, at the *Scholia at Odyssey and Iliad* (= 51 DC = 187 Prince). According to this notice, Antisthenes acknowledged the existence of non-material beings in reality, like “knowledge”. In my opinion, the acknowledgement of the value and the importance of knowledge is truly a common point in the ethical reflection of most of the Socratics, and Antisthenes was not separate from this tradition spread by Socrates to his disciples. As evidence of that, we even can see Xenophon’s character Antisthenes triumphantly claiming that his major wealth is the wealth in the soul (*Smp.*, 4. 34-45). Nonetheless that does not mean that, in the context of a discussion with a more properly onto-epistemological than ethical interest, as the reported discussion with Plato, we do not have abundant evidence (cf. 149A, 149B, 149C Prince = V A 149 SSR) for attributing to historical Antisthenes a kind of materialistic onto-epistemology. A “materialism” common to the sophistry that was contemporary of him and Plato, according to which what is real is what is shown to the eyes, not the “horse” or “horseness” as hypostatized quality, but the “horse” who is able to be seen, to be touched or even to march in a glamour way in a parade.

⁶ E.g. Gorg. *On the Non Being*, §§ 79-80 (Sextus’ version); Pl. *R.*, 488a2-6; X. *Cyr.*, 4.3.20; see also Alex. *Aphr. in Metaph.*, 81, 26 – 82, 1.

Now let us see one of Simplicius' versions of the same *chreía*:

[T4] [...] Antisthenes agrees that he sees the *horse* (*híppon*) even if he does not admit to seeing *horseness* (*hippóteta*); the former is seen by our eyes, the latter is comprehended by our reason (*tôi logismôi*); the latter is prior by its *rank as a cause* (*en aitiou táxei*), the former is posterior in that it is a *result* (*hos apotélesma*) [...]" (Simplicius, in *Cat.* 8B25, 211; see also David, in *Porph.*, 1, 9).

This testimony explains what type of ontological primacy the *poión* has over the *poiótes*, by introducing the notions of “cause” and “effect”. That means that Antisthenes put upside down the causal relation established in Platonic dialogues. In these works it is established that the possession of qualities by the sensible being is caused by the Idea which is the intelligible corresponding of that quality, in a relation called “participation.” According to Simplicius' testimony (T4), we have in Antisthenic thought exactly the contrary thereof: the “qualified” is the cause of the “quality”, which so comes to be the “result” of that. Moreover, as we saw in Ammonius' testimony above (T3), the specific mode of this causation would be that of the act of thinking, meaning that we see the sensible and, by action of thought, we would create entities with only mental reality: through the abstraction, from sensible horses and men we would create their corresponding Platonic Ideas, namely “horseness” and “manness”, and, through combination of different Ideas, we would create the mental composita, like “hippocentaurs” and “goat-stags”. In Antisthenes' eyes, Plato's metaphysics would be nothing but some kind of “conceptualism”.

Would be there a Platonic answer to Antisthenes in the *Parmenides*?

Regarding that critical interpretation of Antisthenes of the Platonic Ideas, it is curious that somewhere in Plato's *Parmenides* we are told:

[T5] But, Parmenides, said Socrates, perhaps it may be that each of these forms is a thought, and it would not be proper for it to come to be anywhere else but in souls. [...] (Plato, *Parmenides* 132b3-5 – transl. by S. Scolnicov, slightly modified)

In order to fully comprehend this statement, we must first consider the context of the dialogue, and the rationale character Socrates offers for hypothesizing the Forms as thoughts. He presents this hypothesis with hesitation, as if making a sudden and urgent attempt to prevent the Theory of Ideas, which he just presented in the conversation, from being undermined (see Brisson, 1994). Socrates explains that he proposed that hypothesis because, as a thought (*noéma*), perhaps the Idea “would indeed be one and no longer affected by what we have just discussed” (*Prm.* 132b6). The matter “just discussed” refers to Parmenides’ earlier criticisms of Ideas, specifically the “Dilemma of Participation” and the first “Third Man Argument” (see Allen, 1997; Brisson, 1994). These critiques challenge the *internal unity* (or “*simplicity*”) and the *unicity* of the Form (see El Murr, 2005). Notwithstanding some ambiguity surrounding the term “*noéma*” in the text—since, according to Proclus (*in Prm.*, III-IV), it can refer both to the act of thinking and to the product of that act—one can assert that Platonic Socrates is attempting to defend his Theory of Ideas against these objections. Socrates seems to believe that if the Form's relationship to sensible instances mirrored that of thought to the objects of thought, then the Form could relate to multiple things without compromising its unity and unicity. Concerning the ambiguity of “*noéma*,” I agree with Brisson (1994) that Parmenides’ subsequent argument, which differentiates between the act of thinking and its content (*Prm.* 132b7-c8), indicates that the “Ideas as thoughts” hypothesis was interpreted in the dialogue as referring to *products of thought*, that is, *concepts*.

Thus, despite the ambiguity surrounding key terms such as *noéma*, *hén*, and *eînai* (pointed to by Brochard, 1926; Cornford, 1939; Ryle, 1939), the dialogue itself supports a “conceptualist” interpretation of the “Ideas as thoughts” hypothesis briefly exposed

by Socrates (cf. also Cherniss, 1932; Taylor, 1968; Ferrari, 2004; *pace* Bossi, 2005). However, since this hypothesis is ultimately rejected, the *Parmenides* indicates that Plato himself did not adopt this view. Moreover, the *Parmenides* does not provide a thorough and definitive account of this hypothesis, nor does it identify its true proponent. On that basis, scholars such as Dümmler (1889), Zeller (1892), and Grote (1865, vol. III) suggested that that view corresponded to Antisthenes'.

Brancacci (1990), who strongly supports this position, establishes that the *Parmenides* passage offers at least two important informations:

i) This “psychical” or “conceptualist” interpretation of the Ideas was already present in the intellectual milieu of 4th century BCE Athens;

ii) While Plato did not adopt this position, he was fully aware of it.

Additionally, the position of these scholars aligns with the testimonies seen above, according to which Antisthenes supported this view conceptualist and this issue was central to the philosophical quarrel between him and Plato. While it may be difficult to determine whether anyone within the Academy itself defended this view of the Ideas, e.g. Speusippus or Xenocrates,⁷ there is little doubt that Antisthenes maintained this interpretation, or critical stance, on the Platonic Ideas. Briefly, the doctrine alluded to in *Parmenides* 132b, where Socrates hypothesizes that the Form “comes to be” (*eggígnesthai*) in souls (*en psycháîs*) as thought (*noéma*), is indeed compatible with what we know about Antisthenes' criticism of Plato's philosophy (Brancacci, 1990; *contra* Graeser, 2003).

In the dialogue, it is a matter of fact that *Parmenides* refutes this hypothesis. Should we interpret this refutation as a Platonic response to the other Socratic? I would say, “no”. First, because some of the

⁷ See Pseudo-Alexander's *in Metaph.* 782; Krämer, 1973; Halfwassen, 1994; Graeser, 2003; Dillon, 2005; Helmig, 2007.

arguments presented in the *Parmenides* to refute the hypothesis only make sense within the specific context of this part of the dialogue, where Parmenides and Socrates are discussing “participation” in a “reifying” mode. By “reifying mode,” I mean that the verb *metéchein* (*Prm.* 132c10) is understood literally as “to be part of” or “to share in,” implying that all aspects of the participated entity’s nature would be shared by the participating entity. The two would “literally” share in each other, like a pizza and its slices, which possess the same qualities and differ only quantitatively (see Allen, 1997; Dixsaut, 2001; Scolnicov, 2003, etc.). Under this interpretation of participation, sensible beings and Ideas are viewed as completely sharing the same nature. Thus, Parmenides is able to argue that if the Ideas are thoughts, then the participating beings would also be thoughts. However, this conception of participation does not align with the way participation is presented elsewhere in Plato’s works, where the Ideas are considered, for example, intelligible and incorruptible, and it is never suggested that sensible beings could become intelligible or incorruptible through participation in them.

Participation conveys only the specific quality indicated by the term “*autó*” in the expression “*autò tò F*,” used to designate the Forms (see Owen, 1968; Keyt, 1969; 1971; Bossi, 2005). In other dialogues, like the *Phaedo* (99e-100b) and the *Sophist* (251e-259e), the participation is presented as the explanation for the possession of qualities *F* by sensible beings, without suggesting that the whole nature of the Ideas would be shared: participating in the intelligible Form of the Bed makes the wooden thing be a bed but not intelligible (*R.* 596a-599e). Hence, the refutation of the conceptualist hypothesis by character Parmenides, who argues that participating in a supposed thought-made Form would make the participating things be made of thought too (*Prm.* 132b-c9-11), could not be acceptable in Plato’s metaphysics.

Moreover, given that, in the *Parmenides*, the refutation of the “Ideas as thoughts” hypothesis relies on the concept of participation, the argument itself would be also unacceptable to Antisthenes, who,

according to Brancacci (1990), could not accept the reality of a relation like “participation”.

Therefore, I maintain that the *Parmenides* 132b-c does not present a good response to Antisthenes' criticism, nor even a truly “Platonic” response.⁸

Would there be a Platonic answer to Antisthenes elsewhere?

Nevertheless, we do have Plato's answer to his ex-colleague, although not in the *Parmenides*. Indeed we have two versions thereof: one written by Plato's hand itself, the other written by other hands. How surprising it may be, the answer in the two versions is nonetheless basically the same. In the last pages of the book V of the *Republic*, we are told the following conversation between Socrates and Glaucon:

[T6] [SOCRATES] This, then, [...] is my division. I set apart and distinguish those of whom you were just speaking, the lovers of spectacles and the arts, and men of action, and separate from them again those with whom our argument is concerned and who alone deserve the appellation of philosophers or lovers of wisdom.

[GLAUCUS] What do you mean? [...]

[SOC.] The lovers of sounds and sights [...] delight in beautiful tones and colors and shapes and in everything that art fashions out of these, but their thought is incapable of apprehending and taking delight in the nature of the beautiful in itself.

[GLA.] Why, yes, [...] that is so.

⁸ For a full account of the *Parmenides*' passage, see my Braga da Silva, "L'interprétation des « *eide* » comme « *noémata* » : Antisthène dans le *Parménide* de Platon ?". In: Pentassuglio, F., Balla, Ch. (eds.). *Socratica V*. Berlin, De Gruyter / International Society for Socratic Studies (*forthcoming*).

[SOC.] And on the other hand, will not those be few who would be able to approach beauty itself and contemplate it in and by itself?

[GLA.] They would, indeed.

[SOC.] He, then, who believes in beautiful things, but neither believes in beauty itself nor is able to follow when someone tries to guide him to the knowledge of it—do you think that his life is a dream or a waking? Just consider. Is not the dream state, whether the man is asleep or awake, just this: the mistaking of resemblance for identity?

[GLA.] I should certainly call that dreaming [...].

[SOC.] Well, then, take the opposite case: the man whose thought recognizes a beauty in itself, and is able to distinguish that self-beautiful and the things that participate in it, and neither supposes the participants to be it nor it the participants—is his life, in your opinion, a waking or a dream state?

[GLA.] He is very much awake [...].

[SOC.] Could we not rightly, then, call the mental state of the one as knowing, knowledge, and that of the other as opining, opinion?

[GLA.] Assuredly.

(Plato, *Republic*, V, 476a9-d6 – transl. P. Shorey)

The quotation above is part of a major step (R. 474c-480a), which is full of very consistent elements with some known information about Antisthenes and Plato. Firstly some more “personal” aspects can be pointed out. As James Adam (1902, *ad loc.*) notices, if the sight-lover was a mask for Antisthenes, the choice of some words by Plato could be considered perfect. Concerning some expressions thereupon employed in the text, they all betoken a really aggressive opponent, reminding us of all the colors with which the profile of Antisthenes was drawn by the ancient sources. It will be said that the sight-lover could be “angry,” that they must “sooth him” and “gently win him over,” etc. (R. 476d8-e2). On the other side, it could be added

that the statement “saying that if he does know something, it's not begrudged him” (R. 476e5-6) could be understood as Plato's defense to the accusation that he felt envious of his colleagues. He was accused of that in the Antiquity, maybe even in his lifetime (cf. Athenaeus, XI, 507-508).⁹

Besides, concerning a statement of the sight-lover (“*pos gár àn mé ón gé ti gnostheíe?*”, R. 477a1),¹⁰ Adam (*ad loc.*) also observes that, according to Proclus (*in Cra.*, 37), Antisthenes reasoned in the same way with the aim to prove his thesis about the impossibility of contradiction (see Gillespie, 1914). As we saw above, in the “public lecture” anecdote (T2), Plato's criticism of this very thesis was caricaturally presented as the personal reason for Antisthenes have written the *Sáthōn*, a work in which the metaphysical disagreement on the nature of the Ideas, a deeper quarrel between them, had place.

Nonetheless, the main point of the similarity between the sight-lovers and Antisthenes does not concern his personal relation with Plato. Rather it is about his philosophical positions. The sight-lovers are shown as sharing a deeply materialistic and empiricist onto-epistemological position, assuming lively the reality of all beings that they can experiment through the senses, but refusing to accept the reality of the intelligible Ideas. In the opposite perspective, Platonic Socrates of the *Republic* establishes that it is the *eíde* that supports the possession of qualities by the sensible beings, because they are the qualities themselves. On the other hand, the sight-lovers can admit the existence of the beautiful beings of the world, delighting in them, though they cannot admit the existence of the Beauty itself, i.e. the corresponding Idea. Then, the sight-lovers' position is exactly as Antisthenes', who, according to the testimonia, could admit the objective existence of the horse, but not of the horseness nor of whatever X-ness. In the *Republic*, Socrates' explication is that the sight-lover is not able, by turning his thought (*diánoia*), to

⁹ Brisson (1993) notices that the main source of Athenaeus for this issue is not another author but Theopompus of Chios, who, according to Brancacci (1993), was a great admirer... of Antisthenes.

¹⁰ "How could it be known what is not at all?", R. 477a1 - transl. Bloom.

contemplate the qualities or Ideas themselves, not even if he would be guided or instructed by someone to do so; wherefore he would always live “chained” to his senses. Hence Plato states that the sight-lover does not have true “knowledge” of the reality, but only opinion, owing to his lack of access to the kind of eternal and incorruptible reality. As his Socrates says, this man can only “*doxázein allà ou gignóskein*” (R. 476d8-9). For that reason, he concludes that this class of men live as if always “sleeping” and “dreaming,” *because they consider what is like a copy*, viz. the sensible being, which would be the “effect,” *as if it were the original*, i.e. the “cause”. As we can see, the resemblance to what we know about Antisthenic thought is remarkable.

Then, would we be authorized to say that the end of Republic V was written individually “against” Antisthenes? At this point I think we must be cautious. I agree with Adam (1902) and Palmer (1999) that the best is not to make an “individualizing” identification, like “the sight-lover is Antisthenes” *tout-court*. The lovers of sights and auditions are considered in the text as an extremely large type of men, representing an onto-epistemological position rather very generic. One could say that, in view of a Glaucon’ earlier description of the profile of these men (R. 475d1-5), we are facing a class which includes much more than philosophers, sophists and poets. Rather it would very probably include most of the Athenian educated men, who were often lovers of theatre and arts in general, including many of the readers of Plato’s dialogues.¹¹ Therefore, instead of a total equalization of the image of sight-lovers with Antisthenes, I understand that the most important is:

a) on the one hand, to acknowledge that the materialistic-like ontological position which grounds the Antisthenic criticism of Platonic Ideas is the same position shared by that type of men, or a very similar one;

b) on the other hand, to emphasize that, in Plato’s opinion, the ontological position of the sight-lovers is a direct consequence of

¹¹ See also Adam, 1902; Benitez, 1996; Palmer, 1999.

their inability to turn their thought to the more important and everlasting aspect of reality, the Ideas.

Although it is not possible here to really develop one more point, it can maybe be worth at least to note that this argument of Socrates is “circular”. Because, even if he claims that he will convince the sight-lovers that they do not have knowledge, his argumentation works with two premises that are unacceptable to this kind of interlocutor, to wit: i) the Ideas really exist and ii) the true knowledge have them as object. Well, if the sight-lovers do not accept these premises, they cannot be convinced that their position was “wrong”.¹² Now, in my opinion, the exact same conclusion can be said about Antisthenes: considering what we know from the sources, these two premises above could not be accepted by him either. If so, he also could not be convinced of the supposed inappropriateness of his position. Besides, I believe, for the sake of an exegetic justice, that we can be sure that *Plato himself was not unaware of that point*: Socrates' last words in the *Republic* V is that, even after his whole argumentation, the discussion did not convince the sight-lovers, or *philódoxoi*, to admit the intelligible Idea of Beautiful as a real being: “*éphamen toutous [...] autò dé tò kalòn oud' anéchesthai hos ti ón*” (R. 480a3-4).

So the *Republic's* passage (T6) could count as an “answer to Antisthenes” coming from Plato himself, one which seems to me, in view of the explained reasons of circularity, an insufficient answer. Furthermore, we also have a “Platonic” answer to Antisthenes, a fictitious one, in one of the versions of the horse anecdote. As we can see, it is basically the same as the “answer” of the *Republic*:

[T7] [...] Antisthenes, who once in dispute with Plato said, “Plato, I see a horse, but I do not see horseness.” And he [Plato] said, “Because you have the faculty with which a horse is seen, this eye; but the faculty by

¹² It is impossible to develop this issue here, so I will refer to the scholar that reaches the same conclusion, Palmer (1999), as well to those who drew a large discussion about it: Fine (1978 & 1990), Gonzalez (1996), Szaif (2007), Ferrari (2010), Fronterotta (2014), Araújo (2014), etc.

which horseness is contemplated you have not yet acquired.” (Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s “Categories”*, 8 p. 208.23–209.1 = 149A Prince = V A 149 SSR)

Final Considerations

[T8] [Socrates] [...] if any one of you has a wife, let him confidently set about teaching her whatever he would like to have her know.

[Antisthenes] If that is your view, Socrates [...] how does it come that you don't practise what you preach by yourself educating Xanthippe, but live with a wife who is the hardest to get along with of all the women there are—yes, or all that ever were, I suspect, or ever will be?

[Socrates] Because [...] *I observe that men who wish to become expert horsemen do not get the most docile horses but rather those that are high-mettled*, believing that if they can manage this kind, they will easily handle any other. (Xenophon, *Symposium*, 2.9-10 – transl. Todd, my italics)

Now considering the testimonia we have seen, we can reach some conclusions on the relationship between Plato and Antisthenes. The question of the reality of the Ideas, though not the only one, was doubtless one question that seems to have “shaken” the pillars of their relationship. Notwithstanding the attribution by Plato of an objective reality to the intelligible beings, Antisthenes criticised him by saying that these beings had nothing but a merely psychical reality. This was a strong intellectual controversy, say, a very metaphysical dispute between two important Socratics.

Besides, according to what we are told about the hard temper of both philosophers, we can suppose that each of them defended his own point with much energy and animosity. A true “war,” or “race,” of such powerful philosophical minds. However, given the scarcity of reports on this dispute, we cannot reconstruct it in all its colors. We only have a few glimpses thereof. Even so, as we have seen above, when comparing the testimonia with some Platonic dialogues,

one can say that Antisthenes' and Plato's positions arrived at the end of this "race" *without a fully satisfactory answer from each other*. Antisthenic fragments have attributed to the Platonic Ideas a reality which does not match with the way they are described in the *corpus platonicum*. Platonic arguments apparently targeting the position of the other Socratic seem only to 'beg the question', as they are grounded in notions which Antisthenes could never have accepted.

After all, according to the material we have, neither Platonic "horseness" nor Antisthenic "horse" won this metaphysical dispute. Nonetheless, one can be sure at least about one thing: Socrates, who compared himself with a skilled horseman in Xenophon's *Symposium* (T8), trained very well, with his whole art, these two very proud and hot-tempered Athenian "horses".¹³

Data availability

Not applicable.

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