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- 101 GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Justice, Koinonia and Unity: *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Parmenides*

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ABSTRACT

Thus far, scholarly research has paid little attention to the relationship between justice, koinonia and unity in Plato's works. This is despite the fact that this relationship is already mentioned in *Gorgias* 507e6–508a3—even though the passage makes no reference to the theory of forms. In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate how this relationship is established in the realm of forms. First, I examine the so-called intellectual biography of the philosopher in the *Phaedo* (95e–102a). This passage introduces community (κοινωνία) and presence (παρουσία) as alternative ways to understand how things participate in forms. However, by the end of the dialogue the exact nature of this kind of participation remains unclear (100d5–6). Nevertheless, the *Phaedo*'s discussion of previous views on the cause of being, generation, and destruction suggests a single

teleological cause that connects and holds everything together (99c5–6). Secondly, I demonstrate that the relationship between koinonia and justice within the realm of forms is fundamental to Plato's *Republic*, even though this relationship is considered just as a paradigm (500c–501e) and therefore not explicitly discussed. Thirdly, I demonstrate that the *Republic*'s concept of justice is employed in the *Parmenides* to clarify the function and structure of the forms. This model of justice enables us to favour the conception of participation as *koinonia*, thereby rejecting the so-called model of immanence, namely, the view that forms are present in that which participates in them. Finally, I illustrate how the model of justice, present in the third deduction of *Parmenides* II (157b–159b), contributes to the exploration of the koinonia between the One and the principle of plurality.

Keywords: Justice, Koinonia, Unity, Plato

SUBLATING THE HYPOTHESES IN THE *PHAEDO'S* AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Any¹ enquiry into first causes and principles in Plato must begin with the *Phaedo*. This is because the dialogue not only poses the question of the cause of being, generation and destruction for the first time, but also investigates it using a unique method. The theory of forms is presented as a hypothesis in need of a further account, which must be adequate or sufficient (ικανόν). This account is *hikanos* to the extent that it requires no further account, and can therefore be understood as a first principle. In this section, I argue that the hypothesis of the forms—together with its sufficient account—is presented as an alternative to other hypotheses. These hypotheses are examined and refuted in their original meaning, while acknowledging their valuable aspects. Plato would call this an *elenchos* and an *anairesis*² of these hypotheses.³

This refutation begins by examining the hypothesis of the investigation into nature, which can essentially be described as a materialist conception of causes encompassing the efficient and the material cause. Socrates refutes this hypothesis by highlighting its inherent contradictions: (a) when a single fact is considered the cause of opposing phenomena (96d, 99e–101a) or when it is considered the cause of a phenomenon opposing the fact itself (101a8–b2), and (b) when two opposing facts are presented as causes of the same phenomenon (97a–b, 101b–c). Setting aside the controversy surrounding the meaning of ‘συμφωνεῖ ἢ διαφωνεῖ’ in the description of the method of hypothesis, I believe that this refutation provides a good example of how to determine whether conclusions drawn from a single hypothesis (ἐκ τούτων, τὰ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης

ὁμηθέντα) are compatible with one another, and to what degree. Furthermore, I also believe that the principle of non-contradiction plays a crucial role in this endeavour.⁴ The way in which Socrates proceeds shows that he indeed sees the notion of cause operative in the investigation of nature not only as a hypothesis⁵ with contradictory conclusions, but also as incompatible with the Platonic theory of forms. It is indeed impossible to consider both the material preconditions of a phenomenon and the forms as causes in one and the same sense.

Anaxagoras’ notion of *nous* is the second alternative hypothesis.⁶ If one seeks the cause of something, one must establish what is best for it (97c–d). Socrates expected Anaxagoras to demonstrate what is best for each thing and what is good for all things in common (98b). However, rather than proceeding according to this teleological cause, which Socrates considers in accordance with his own mind (κατὰ νοῦν ἑμαυτῷ), Anaxagoras appeals to the same material causes as the physicists. However, neither the former refutation nor this disappointment leads to a complete denial of the respective hypotheses. On the contrary, these procedures culminate in the *anairesis* of the hypotheses in question. Socrates rejects them as real causes, instead assigning them a new meaning within a more comprehensive alternative theory. Socrates’ decision to accept his death sentence is a prime example of this. Indeed, his decision is based on choosing what seems better to him, regardless of the fact that, without his body, he would be unable to do either. The material cause is therefore regarded solely as a condition without which the true cause—i.e. the teleological one—cannot be effective as such (ἐκεῖνο ἄνευ οὗ τὸ αἴτιον οὐκ ἂν ποτ’ εἴη αἴτιον, 99b3–4). Taken together, but not separately, they are able

to provide a sufficient explanation for the phenomena (Horn 2011, p. 137). As we shall see, this is an essential aspect of the Platonic principle theory.

To determine what is best for each thing necessarily requires an enquiry into the common good for all things (98b). That which is good and necessary is conceived as that which binds and holds everything together (99c). This kind of good is considered a power (δύναμις) with the exceptional ability (δαιμονίαν ἰσχύον) to arrange everything in the best way (99c). As Socrates says, his inability to discover the nature of a cause of this kind—a teleological cause—by himself or to learn it from someone else (τῆς τοιαύτης, ὅπη ποτὲ ἔχει) led him to undertake a second journey to find this cause (Dorter 1982, p. 120–127; Horn 2011, p. 138–139; Gerson 2020, p. 53–54). Therefore, it is not the *nous*, but that power, which he is looking for. During this search, he takes refuge in the *logoi* (99e5).

It is precisely at this point that Socrates explicitly refers to the method of hypothesis as an indirect approach to finding a cause that binds and holds everything together. As his own, strongest (ἔρρωμένιστατον, 100a) and presumably most reliable (ἀσφαλέστατον, 100d) hypothesis, he proposes his theory of forms, that is: 1) ‘a beautiful, itself by itself, is something, and so are a good and a large and all the rest’ (100b). The answer to the question about causes follows from this: 2) Everything that is to be regarded as beautiful, apart from beauty itself, is beautiful because it participates in the form of beauty; ‘and the same goes for all of them’ (100c5–6) (Benson 2015, p. 201). Both sentences are consistent with each other. Material causes, on the contrary, are incompatible with the theory of forms, unless they are subordinated to the forms. Nevertheless, three points should be noted: First, this

theory is presented as ‘nothing new’ (οὐδὲν καινόν), and even as most familiar (100a9–10). Second, beauty, goodness, and largeness are listed together (100b6–7).⁷ Third, the precise meaning of participation, as either presence or community (εἴτε παρουσία εἴτε κοινωνία, 100d5), remains unclear.⁸

If we are to make sense of the second part of the method in question, the first two points seem important to me. I will consider the third point in the context of the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*. The method aims to verify the hypothesis itself. In order to do so, one must resort to another superior hypothesis, until one attains something ‘adequate or sufficient’ (*hikanon*, 101d). In fact, Plato is ambiguous on a couple of things. What does he mean by “higher hypothesis”? What is something *hikanon*? If we wish to use this method to further our search for the cause, the first point justifies referring to other passages in the *Phaedo*.

Phaedo 74d–75b describes the close relationship between a general teleology and the theory of forms, including the issue of participation (Chen 1992, p. 198, n. 9). In contrast to the completely determined nature of the forms, sensible beings are considered deficient (ἐνδεῖ, 74d6, e3).⁹ This is why they strive (βούλεται, *Phd.* 74d9, ὀρέγεται 75a2, b1, προθυμεῖται 75b7) to attain the intrinsic perfection of the forms. This striving introduces different degrees of assimilation to the property which the form realises absolutely. In this sense, the form is also the good for the things that participate in it. Therefore, every form is a kind of regional good.¹⁰ In any case, goodness is an essential property of the forms, although they are not identical with it (103e–104a).¹¹ They are essentially good, but they are not the form of the Good, although they ‘bring forward’ goodness in

the same way that the form of three ‘brings forward’ the form of oddness, and hotness ‘brings forward’ fire (104d, 105b–c) – a clear case of κοινωνία τῶν γένων (Mesquita 2018, Zehnpfennig 1991, p. 202, n. 170). They all presuppose the common good. This establishes a hierarchy in the intelligible realm, correcting the original conflation between the good, beauty, and largeness. Specifically, the good that binds and holds everything together is now associated with the forms – the regional goodness – in a teleological manner. Therefore, this new theory, which also incorporates all the aforementioned conceptions of the cause, is more subtle (κομψοτέραν) than the initial theory of forms. Compared to the ignorant (ἄμαθῆ), this new theory attains a supposedly superior kind of certainty (ἄλλη ἀσφάλειαν, 101d).

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JUSTICE AND THE COMMUNITY OF FORMS IN THE *REPUBLIC*

The *dynamis* of the good that binds and holds everything together corresponds to the Form of the Good, which is qualified in the *Republic* as being beyond essence in terms of value and power (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δύναμις, 509b9) (Lisi 2018, p. 240–243). As in the *Phaedo*, Plato introduces here a hierarchy of all beings, with the Form of the Good at the top (518c9, 526e3, 532c6). However, the structure of the *Republic* shows a way towards the good which is fully determined by the conception of justice as doing one’s own (τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν) in a political or in a personal sense. If this conception is to be understood as a real definition of justice, it must be fundamentally and universally

valid, that is, also in the intelligible realm. And so it is, since this realm is conceived as the paradigm of justice. Thus, Socrates says of the philosopher that,

he sees and contemplates things that are set in a regular arrangement and are always in the same condition – things that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it at one another’s hands (οὔτ’ ἀδικοῦντα οὔτ’ ἀδικοῦμενα ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων), but remain all in order according to reason/the ground (κατὰ λόγον) – (transl. Bloom, slightly modified).

Since each of these domains – the political, the personal and the intelligible – represents a just order, they are all composed of a plurality governed by a ruling principle – the philosopher king, the rational soul and the Form of the Good respectively – that binds and holds them together as a unity.¹² A just order also implies that its members are necessarily related to each other and work together. But whereas the philosopher must imitate the eidetical order as accurately as possible for a human being in order to serve as a mediating demiurge of goodness in the private as well as in the public sphere (500c–d), justice is, by virtue of its nature, intrinsic to the realm of forms. This realm must be a cosmos which is organized according to reason and, therefore, according to the ground or first principle, the Form of the Good. As a paradigm of political and personal justice, the intelligible realm necessarily constitutes a community of forms, identical to the one which is introduced already in *Republic* V 476a5–8:

The same logos applies to just and unjust, good and bad and all the forms: each is in itself one, but because they

appear all over the place, through their community with various actions and bodies and with one another, each appears as many (transl. Bloom, modified).¹³

Both passages complement each other.¹⁴ Nevertheless, one might be inclined to enquire whether this community of forms, as briefly described above, effectively constitutes an order κατὰ λόγον. Let's consider this further.

First, as in the *Phaedo*, in the *Republic* the Form of the Good is also equated with other forms. However, the equation in the *Republic* becomes clearly more provocative by the mention of forms of evil and injustice (cf. Gutiérrez 2011, p. 137-152). For how could the Form of the Good be the cause of being and essence of these forms? That Socrates is aware of such a contradiction is clear if we consider *Republic* II 379b15-c7 where he says that the good cannot be the cause of everything, so that we must look for other causes of evil (cf. Szlezák 2003, p. 120). An attempt to avoid this contradiction by considering the form of evil as 'unqualifiedly bad' (White 1979, p. 41; Krämer 1997, p. 202) just displaces the problem, for, in this case, taking this form to be the cause of evil would still imply that the Form of the Good is the indirect cause of evil. To sum up, from the standpoint of reason and the ground, the assumptions that the Form of the Good is one among other forms, and that it is the cause of evil require significant correction. Socrates puts the argument in a nutshell by saying in book IV, ἐν μὲν εἶναι εἶδος τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἄπειρα δὲ τῆς κακίας: there is just one kind of excellence and unlimited kinds of evil (445c5-6).¹⁵ In contrast to *arete*, the unlimited kinds of evil cannot be reduced to one form of evil.¹⁶ *Mutatis mutandis* this is also the case for injustice. Is it possible that Socrates has forgotten all this?

No way. For in book X he argues that evil is corruptive and destructive, whereas the good contributes to the preservation and promotion of everything (608e4-5). Provided this were the case, is the assumption in 476a meant as a didactic provocation of Socrates' interlocutors?

This becomes evident only after having considered the Form of the Good. For, as argued at the beginning of *Republic* V, although what has been said is right (ὀρθῶς), it is deficient (φαυλῶς), since it requires grounding (λόγου δεῖται, 449c7-8) (Gutiérrez 2009, p. 91; Szlezák 1985, p. 286). The dialectical ascent to this logos takes three steps according to the metaphor of the threefold wave (τρικυμία, 472a4). Each wave represents a step higher in this *anabasis* (457b7, c4-5, 472a3-4, 473c6-7). And each step refers to the notion of justice to build up a pertinent hypothesis for the treatment of its respective subject (Gutiérrez 2009, p. 113-120; 2016, p. 12-32). Thus, in order to consider the shared function of man and woman, Socrates takes the coincidence of *physis* and *ergon* as a hypothesis (453b). As to the community of women and children in the second wave, he uses as hypothesis-ἀρχὴ τῆς ὁμολογίας, 462a2—the unifying force of justice as the greatest good and the corrupting power of injustice as the greatest evil for the polis (462a9-b3). As for the feasibility of the ideal polis, he makes use of the coincidence of philosophy and political authority as the hypothesis (473d), which in turn points to the essence of philosophy (472a-480a) as a higher hypothesis (Benson 2015, p. 208-236, Gutiérrez 2009, p. 115-120; 2016, p. 15-32; 2017, p. 109-129). It is precisely here, during this biggest and most difficult wave (472a), that we find both passages mentioned above: the one on the community of forms (476a) and the one on their rational and just order (500c). All this leads us to raise some questions. How can we

make sense of a form of evil and of injustice if the power of injustice weakens each being's power to fulfil their natural function (351e–352a)? Or, further, if the greatest good for the polis is its unity free of contradictions, while sedition represents the greatest evil? Or, how to make sense of a form of evil, if we seek to put an end to evil in our cities and for humanity as a whole (473d)? The threefold wave, however, comes to an end (οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο μὲν τέλος ἔσχεν, 502c9) without providing an explicit answer to these questions, but with an essential hint to the connection of nature and function, to the uniting power of justice, and to the intrinsically rational and just order of the intelligible realm. In what follows, though, I would like to consider another aspect of this passage.

As Franco Ferrari (2000, p. 374–376) has extensively demonstrated, the purpose of *R.* 476a is not, contrary to widespread opinion, to postulate a separation between the intelligible and the visible. Considering the forms' eternal identity, the passage should rather be interpreted as presenting the dialectics between each form's unity of being (αὐτὸ μὲν ἓν ἕκαστον εἶναι) and the plurality of its visible manifestations (τῆ δὲ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἕκαστον). Indeed, we are concerned with the community of forms not only with bodies and actions, but also with each other (ἀλλήλων). In this sense, the forms' φαίνεσθαι is an essential trait of their being. This *phainesthai* is inherent to intelligible being since that what intelligible being *virtually* is and remains in its unity manifests at the same time as a plurality. It manifests itself as the multiple instances participating in it—for example, the form of virtue appears as the forms of justice, wisdom, moderation and courage; and these again as the just, wise, moderate and brave actions—or

as the attributes of any carrier—for instance, beauty in the beautiful things. Nevertheless, intelligible being remains identical to itself. This dialectics can only be grasped within the framework of justice as doing one's own or fulfilling one's own function (τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν). However—as in the *Phaedo*—this implies a hierarchy of forms¹⁷ in which inferior forms are manifestations of superior forms, and, eventually, of the Form of the Good. All of them are similar to the good (ἀγαθοειδῆ). This is why the Form of the Good ought to be regarded as the highest form in terms of power, as the cause of the being and the essence of all forms (509b6–7) and, as the cause of all that is right and beautiful (πάντων ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία, 517c2). However, if unity is an essential feature of the forms, being manifestations of unity, they must presuppose the form of unity (Ferrari 2000, p. 389, Horn 1997, p. 311–312). Thus, this form of unity should be identified with the Form of the Good—in agreement with the Aristotelian reports of the unwritten doctrines.¹⁸ And each of its intelligible manifestations consists—like justice—in a perfect unity that comes to be out of plurality (παντάπασις ἓνα γεγόμενον ἐκ πολλῶν, *R.* 443e1–2). This also explains why the intelligible realm constitutes an intrinsically just order in which every part fulfills its own function. In spite of this, in the *Republic* Socrates does not address these issues. Furthermore, the question remains: What role could the form of evil or the form of injustice play in the realm of forms? Is it at all possible for division and dispersion, destruction and corruption to come out of unity?

As we know, in *Republic* V Socrates defers the examination of political and personal injustice. It is only when the just order of the intelligible realm has been connected to the Form of the Good as its ground and princi-

ple, that we can understand the rectification of *Republic* 476a: ‘Consideration and judgment shall proceed, in this way, according to reason/to the ground’—Κατὰ λόγον γέ τοι ἄν οὔτω γίγνοιτο ἢ τε θεά καὶ ἡ κρίσις (545c6–7) (Gutiérrez 2003a). Measured against this ground, Kallipolis is right (ὀρθή) and good (ἀγαθή) (449a), whereas the unjust souls and constitutions are deficient (ἡμαρτημένα), that is, they fail to reach their goal, which is justice and the good (544d). The emergence of deficient types of constitutions and people is explained by the substitution of the common good by other, particular goods: Timocracy is defined by the desire for privileges and honour (φιλονικία καὶ φιλοτιμία, 548c5–7, 550b5–7, 581a9–10), oligarchy aims at accumulating wealth (555b9–10), democracy seeks to attain absolute freedom (562b9–10), and tyranny strives for unlimited power (573c3–5). Unity decreases and plurality increases step by step.¹⁹ While the just polis and the just person participate at the highest degree in the form of justice (ἐγγύτατα αὐτῆς ἢ καὶ πλεῖστα τῶν ἄλλων ἐκείνης μετέχη, 472c1–2), the multifarious types of injustice result from decreasing degrees of participation in the form of justice. Why should we then posit forms of evil and injustice in the realm of forms? This question leads back to the issue of the first cause of evil. As Socrates announces in book 2, the *Republic* keeps silent on this matter (Szlezák 2003, p. 120).

FROM THE IMMANENCE MODEL TO THE JUSTICE MODEL IN *PARMENIDES*

Bearing this in mind, we can claim that Plato intended to ground a unified cosmos. This cosmos, as we learn from the wise men

in the *Gorgias*, holds heaven and earth, gods and men together as a whole through community and friendship—κοινωνίαν καὶ φιλίαν—, orderliness, temperance and justice: “That is the reason why they call the whole of this world by the name of *kosmos*, not of disorder nor dissoluteness” (*Gorg.* 507e6–508a3, transl. Lamb). This is also the reason why Plato posits that nature as a whole is kindred (ἅτε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὔσης, *Men.* 81a). Even if forms are not explicitly mentioned in the *Gorgias*, there is a similar connection between *koinonia* and justice as the one explicitly attributed to the divine paradigm in the *Republic*. However, in the *Gorgias* the main subject is not eidetical justice, but rather political and personal justice.

Conversely, the platonic *Parmenides* uses the notion of justice to discuss the function of forms, thereby introducing a more fundamental kind of *koinonia*. This, in turn, enables us to relate the causal function of the form of the Good with the notion of unity. In addition to introducing the One as first principle, the *Parmenides* also refers to a kind of material cause. Therefore, even admitting that the *Parmenides* is one of the most obscure Platonic dialogues, it is possible to discover in it some essential hints regarding both the theory of forms and the theory of principles of the unwritten doctrines.²⁰ This is the way I understand *Parmenides* 159b–c: “For all things have been mentioned, once the one and the others are mentioned” (πάντα γὰρ εἴρηται, ὅταν τό τε ἓν καὶ τᾶλλα) (transl. Gill & Ryan).²¹ In other words, everything that is can be reduced to the One and the Others than the One. Of course, one may object that this passage belongs to the Fourth Deduction, where the One and the Others are considered as absolutely separate (159b–c). If they were entirely separate (χωρίς) from each other,

there would not be nothing besides them, since according to Zeno's and Gorgias' tenet, everything that is must always be somewhere (Ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ εἶναι που δεῖ τό γε ὄν ἀεί, *Prm.* 151a4–5; 145e1: μηδαμοῦ μὲν ὄν οὐδὲν ἄν εἴη; vgl. 138a–b, 159c).²² This position guides the discussion in the dialogue to some extent. According to this tenet, the One itself must be in the Others, or the forms in their participants. This is what I call the immanence model.²³ If the principles are separate from each other, it is impossible for the Others to participate in the indivisible One, and for the One to be present in the Others—either as a whole or as parts: “In no way, then, are the others one, nor do they have any oneness in them” (159c–d) (transl. Gill & Ryan). There could not be anything besides them. If this were the case, the principle's being and nature would also have to be separate from its appearance and function. This would contradict the views held in the *Phaedo* (99c9–d1) and the *Republic* (509b8), and render the One and the Others (and forms) powerless, that is, they would not be principles. This separation is unacceptable owing both to the content and the form of the dialogue.

Let us first consider the form, i.e. the dialogue's structure and its dramatic action. As Proclus points out, Athens—in middle between Jonia and Elea—is point where the defenders of multiplicity—the philosophers coming from Clazomenae—and the defenders of unity—Zeno and Parmenides (*In Prm.* 559–661) meet;²⁴ that is, the meeting point between multiplicity and unity. The fact that the first group meets Adeimantus and Glaucon in the agora is noteworthy. From there, they go to the house of Antiphon, who ‘lives close by in Melite.’ And then, again, they go to the house of Pythodorus, ‘outside the city wall in the Kerameikos.’ This is where Zeno and

Parmenides are staying. Socrates and others have come there because they were eager to hear Zeno read his book. The defenders of multiplicity travel from the meeting point of the multitude (the *agora*) to the meeting point of a selected group of philosophers. This movement clearly represents an *anabasis* comparable to that of the Cave Allegory. In the course of this displacement, the defenders of multiplicity find Antiphon, a friend of horses, engaging a smith to work on a bridle. Horses and bridles are examples of the living beings and the artefacts mentioned in the Divided Line at the level of *pistis*. Furthermore, going beyond the city wall to reach the house of Pythodorus may be understood as entering the intelligible realm. In this house Zeno reads his book and Socrates introduces his hypothesis. As Socrates and Parmenides point out, Zeno's difficulties remain within the sensible realm, while the Socratic hypothesis pretend to distinguish and lastly separate the sensible from the intelligible (129a–130b; 135d–e). As usual in the dianoetical procedure, Socrates takes the forms as principles, but Parmenides shows him the self-contradictory consequences that follow from this hypothesis.

During Zeno's lecture, Parmenides remains outside of the house. I take this to be a reference to the separation of the principles and its consequences: whether all is one (εἰ ἓν ἐστι = ἓν εἶναι τὸ πᾶν) or many (εἰ πολλά ἐστιν), if the principles are taken as entirely separate from each other, many absurdities and contradictions ensue (128d). It is with this Parmenides, who remains outside the house during Zeno's lecture, that the young Socrates shares his understanding of forms. The young Socrates conceives each form as a separated absolute unity (εἰ ὁ ἕστιν ἓν, αὐτὸ τοῦτο πολλά ἀποδείξει καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ πολλά δὴ ἓν, τοῦτο ἤδη θαυμάσομαι, 129 b7–8; cf. 137c4–5).

Moreover, his understanding of participation leads to unsolvable difficulties: each form loses its unity and becomes an indefinite plurality. Socrates' account of participation is contradictory; his attempt to mediate between unity and multiplicity is unsuccessful. Both unity and multiplicity remain powerless (133e, 134d–e). He can think of no alternative (131a4–5).²⁵

Parmenides' entrance into the house represents unity acting on multiplicity. Up to this point there has been no mention of the principle of multiplicity, however, only five members of the group are called explicitly by their names: Parmenides, Zeno, Pythodorus, Socrates and Aristoteles; the remaining two are left unnamed. As J. Klein suggests, this could be an allusion to the principle that according to the reports of the unwritten doctrines is called *aoristos dyas* (Klein 1985, p. 286–287). The purpose of the dialectical exercise recommended by Parmenides to the young Socrates is to show the interaction between unity and this principle, not to posit their separation, which would abolish their condition as principles. This is how I understand Zeno's remarks regarding Parmenides' proposed task: μή γάρ οὐ φαῦλον ἢ ὁ λέγει (136b5). Translations into English say: 'For there is a great deal in what he says' (Fowler), '...is no light matter' (Sayre) or 'thing' (Allen), 'it won't be easy' (Gill & Ryan). In any case, as Szlezák (1985) has shown, what is not φαῦλον is τιμιώτερα, that is, it is of higher value and brings us closer to the principles (Gutiérrez 2003).

Under the assumption that the second part of the dialogue should be taken as an instruction (διδάξαι, 135b2), and an example of one of the many paths leading to the truth and to insight, the dialectical exercise should fulfil the so-called dialectical requirement. We have witnessed the same procedure in the *Phaedo*. Thus the exercise can in no way begin

with the First Principle –as in the Neoplatonic interpretation (Halfwassen 1992, p. 302–307). It should begin with the Eleatic hypothesis, which in any case seems to coincide with the hypothesis proposed by Socrates –εἰ ὁ ἔστιν ἓν, αὐτὸ τοῦτο πολλὰ ἀποδείξει καὶ αὐτὰ πολλὰ δὴ ἓν, τοῦτο ἤδη θαυμάσομαι (129b7–8); εἰ ἓν ἐστίν, ἄλλο τι οὐκ ἂν εἴη πολλὰ τὸ ἓν (137c4–5) (O'Brien 2007). The One of the First Deduction excludes all multiplicity and relation. As such, it is limitless (ἄπειρον), has no figure and is nowhere (137c–138a). In this point Parmenides/Plato follows Melissus.²⁶ If the One is nowhere, according to Zeno's/Socrates' position, it is not and it is not one (141e). Consequently, it is neither thinkable—there is no knowledge, opinion or even perception of it—nor communicable—there is no name nor account of it (142a).²⁷ This is exactly the position held by Socrates' fictitious objector in the first part of the dialogue, who denies the being, knowability, and communicability of Socratic forms (135a, 133b). Under consideration of this sophistic position, the Platonic Parmenides uses the First Deduction to draw the contradictory consequences of the Eleatic and Socratic hypotheses (Palmer 1999, p. 116–117, Gutiérrez 2003, p. 132; Brémond 2019). Nevertheless, Parmenides leaves room for an eternal being (141e9–10) (Wahl 1926, p. 57). In other words, he only denies the temporal being of the One.

According to the immanence model, there is nothing different from the One and the Others—neither forms nor participants in them. Moreover, the One is not (since, according to the First Deduction, this would be contradictory).²⁸ Furthermore, the Others are not, since, firstly, if the One is but the Others are entirely deprived of the One, the Others would be completely indeterminate (Fourth Deduction), and secondly, if the One

is not, there would be nothing at all (Eight Deduction).²⁹ The complete separation of the One and the Others in the Fourth Deduction results in them losing their power and therefore their condition as principles. Consequently there is nothing besides them. This should serve to demonstrate the uselessness of the immanence model: it does not work at all! Yet, the Second Deduction still seems to make use of the immanence model:

Isn't this necessary too, that there be nothing outside the one and the others? - No doubt. - But surely what is must always be somewhere. -Yes. - Then won't that which is in something be in something greater as something less? For there is no other way that something could be in something else. - No, there isn't. - Since there is nothing else apart from the others and the one, and since they must be in something, must they not in fact be in each other - the others in the one and the one in the others - or else be nowhere? - Apparently. - So, on the one hand, because the one is in the other, the other would be greater than the one, since they contain it, and the one would be less than the others, since it is contained. On the other hand, because the others are in the one, by the same argument the one would be greater than the others and they less than it. - So it seems (151b) (transl. Gill & Ryan)

If the One and the Others are everything there is—as in the Fourth Deduction—, Parmenides must be referring here to the principles.³⁰ However, in contrast to the Fourth Deduction, the present (Second) Deduction admits the

reciprocal immanence of the One and the Others. This implies the possibility of a resultant third. However, the immanence here is clearly understood in the sense of spatial location: 'For there is no other way that something could be in something else.' As a condition of being, this immanence implies that the One and the Others are both greater and smaller at the same time. Therefore, immanence is contradictory. When Socrates concedes the possibility of participation in the form as a whole or in a part of it, he understands participation precisely in this way, as if the form were spatially present in the participants: τὸ εἶδος ἐν ἑκάστῳ εἶναι (131a8). Consequently, the form loses its unity and becomes as many as participants there are—either as individuals or as parts of them, just like it would happen in the case of sensible things. In any case, Socrates can think of no other way of understanding participation (131a).³¹

It is worth noting that in the passage quoted above an alternative model appears—what I call the model of justice (150a–d) (Gutiérrez 2022). However, I will first discuss the immanence model. Let us consider the One and the Others as possible carriers of properties, for example, let us consider the One and the Others to be bigger or smaller than each other. Neither of them will be carriers of these properties just on account of being what they are, their *ousia*. The One will not be bigger or smaller on account of being one; nor will the Others be bigger or smaller on account of them being others. Besides being what they are, they must have (ἔχειν) these properties, or these properties must be added to them (προσεῖναι), come into them (ἐγγίγνεσθαι) or be in them (ἐνεῖναι). This presupposes the existence of the properties in question, which, as pure determinations or forms (εἶδη), mutually exclude and oppose each other (149e8–9).

Now, this understanding of participation as addition, incoming or being in the carriers leads us back to the mereological alternative and, consequently, to the same difficulties of the first part of the dialogue. If, on the one hand, smallness comes into a single carrier as a whole, it either stretches equally throughout the whole of it, or it contains it, thus becoming equal to it or larger than it. If, on the other hand, smallness comes into a part of the carrier, we will face the same alternative: it either becomes equal or bigger than the carrier. In any case, smallness will do the jobs of largeness and equality, but not its own: *πράττειν τὰ μεγέθους τε καὶ ἰσότητος, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῆς* (150a7–8). We have here a clear case of *polypragmosyne* or injustice, which is not possible in the intelligible realm. In sum: smallness would never be in any being, nor would anything be small except smallness itself (150b). *Mutatis mutandis* this would also have to be the case for largeness, so that smallness and largeness would only be possible in relation to each other. Consequently, they would not have any power (*dynamis*) over appearances; “in relation to the one”—that is, to any carrier whatsoever—they would not have the power to exceed any one, nor to be exceeded by any one, this would only be possible “in relation to each other” (150d). Thus, the model of immanence leads to exactly the same conclusion as the biggest puzzle of the first part of the dialogue (133d). Strangely enough, it is here that the model of justice appears for the first time.

The passage requires that smallness and largeness should each fulfil their own function. Thus, according to the model of justice, every form should act in consonance with their own nature/*ousia*. This intrinsic harmony between nature and function is justice. At the same time, by doing their own-*prattein*

ta heautēs—every form also contributes to the harmony of the whole. From the perspective of the whole, this harmony is *sophrosyne* (cf. *R.* 432a5-b1 and 433a1.b1; *Phaedr.* 247c-e). This is the reason why the form of the Good cannot be identified with the totality of the intelligible, as it does, for example, Ferrari (2023, p. 50). Now, as it often happens in Plato, this is not always stated explicitly. We find an example of this already in the Second Deduction, when thinking (*διάνοια*) distinguishes the One itself from Being. In this case, if Being is something and the One itself is something different, it is not by being one that the One is different from Being, nor by its being being that Being is other than the One. This is rather a result of difference and otherness fulfilling its function (143b). In this way, the model of justice enables every form, as an efficient cause, to produce the same effects (*ταῦτα ποιήσει*) in different carriers without losing its unity. Thus understood, the model of justice—and, by now we should probably add, of *sophrosyne*—corresponds to the above mentioned dialectics between the unity of being of every Form and its multiple appearances or manifestations.³² Consequently, it successfully substitutes the model of immanence. But it is not until the Third Deduction that Parmenides clearly applies the model of justice to the relation between the principles.

The Third Deduction examines the affections of the Others, if the One is: *Τί δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις προσήκοι ἄν πάσχειν, ἔν εἰ ἔστιν* (157b6). The affections of the Others are precisely produced by the *prattein*, or—in the terms of the *Sophist*—by the *dynamis tou poiein* of the One.³³ In contrast to the Fourth Deduction, in the Third one, Parmenides mentions something different (*ἕτερόν τι*) from the One coming to be (*γίγνεσθαι*) in the Others (*ἐν ἑαυτοῖς = τοῖς ἄλλοις*) due to the community

of the One and the Others (ἐκ μὲν τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ ἐξ ἑαυτῶν κοινωνησάντων). First of all, this is a One without parts. It is an absolute One (παντελῶς ἓν, 157c4), the only one which is one without sharing in anything else (νῦν δὲ ἐνὶ μὲν εἶναι πλήν αὐτῷ ἐνὶ ἀδύνατόν ποῦ, 158a5).³⁴ This is precisely the quality this One shares with the form of the Good. They alone are absolutely by themselves. Now, this One produces something else in the Others, but it does not go itself in to them, since it is out of the community of the One and the Others (ἐκ μὲν τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ ἐξ ἑαυτῶν κοινωνησάντων) that something different comes to be. The only possible product of this community is multiplicity, more precisely, the multiplicity of the forms. Since each of them is one, they limit and determine each other. This is how the whole realm of forms comes to be. As such, the One is not just the cause of the unity of the intelligible realm as a whole, but also of the unity of its parts, the forms. The forms as such receive their limit and determination (πέρας) from the One. And again, this function of the One corresponds exactly to the function of the form of the Good as cause of the being and essence of the forms (τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ' ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, *R.* 509b6–7).

Indeed, since the forms are, and they are what they are, each one of them limits itself from the others by its own being, while at the same time contributing to determine others and receiving determinations from others. In a certain sense they are completely what they are due to their reciprocal interaction and mutual affection (*Soph.* 247e–248c). As such, every single form (μῖα τινὸς ἰδέας) is conceived as a certain unity (ἑνὸς τινος) and a whole (ὅλον), that is, as a complete and perfect one composed of all its parts (ἐξ ἀπάντων ἓν τέλειον γεγονός) (157e1). Precisely because of its completeness and perfection, it is neither

to be identified with its parts nor reducible to them, but rather presupposed by them (Harte 2002, p. 131–134; Migliori 1990, p. 309). On the contrary, its parts, understood as intelligible or sensible parts, must partake of the eidetic whole and, because of this, also of the One. This One is the one principle which unites and sustains everything. In this way, we arrive at the same position we had already deduced from *Republic* 476a and 500c. The intelligible realm is just not merely because doing one's own is essential to the forms, but because every part of it, every single form, and the whole realm share the same structure as justice: παντάπασιν ἓνα γεγόμενον ἐκ πολλῶν, *R.* 443 e1–2.³⁵ It has become a perfect one out of its many parts. Justice binds all the forms together: πάντα ταῦτα ξυνδήσαντα. This is why the intelligible realm is a cosmos *kata logon*. Since this is the paradigm of justice, if the material conditions are given, it also manifests itself in the soul and the city. As long as the philosopher assimilates to it and imitates it, she will become a demiurge of justice and *sophrosyne*, and of all the civic virtues in public and private life (500d).

While the One is the cause of limit, the nature of the Others produces unlimitedness (ἡ δ' ἑαυτῶν φύσις καθ' ἑαυτὰ ἀπειριάν, 158d6). However, we must take into account that even before the complete separation of the One and the Others in the Fourth Deduction, the Third Deduction speaks of their separation (ἀφελεῖν [...] ἀφαιρεθέν), although only as a separation by thought and thought alone (διανοία, 158c2–3). In reality, they cannot be separated, for, if they were separated, there would be nothing (158b4). That is why Parmenides uses the verb *metalambanein* in order to refer to a logical condition before participation. The result of this thought experiment is not πλήθος, a multitude or multiplicity, but

πλήθη, multitudes or multiplicities, ἐν οἷς τὸ ἐν οὐκ ἔνι (158c1), in which oneness is not present, that nature which itself by itself is different from the form.³⁶ The examination of this nature departs from its effects, since ‘the very least we are able to subtract’ (ἀφελεῖν ὡς οἰοί τε ἔσμεν ὅτι ὀλίγιστον) (158c2–3) or ‘whatever we see of it’ (ὅσον ἂν αὐτῆς αἰ ὀρωμεν), is always ἄπειρον πλήθει, indefinite multitude (158c5–7).³⁷ Itself by itself it seems to be pure indetermination. But the examination of this nature presupposes the agency of the One as cause of oneness, since otherwise we could neither think nor speak of the smallest part. This also means that we should not understand the genesis of forms literally, but rather as an analysis of their structure as unities composed of multiple elements. This corresponds to the community of *peras* and *apeiron*, which can ultimately be reduced to the interaction between two principles. Using the language of the *Phaedo*, the One would be the cause (*aitia*), the Others, that without which the cause could not act as a cause (99b). Since without the Others, the One could not produce oneness, without indetermined multiplicity, there would be no multiplicity. The community or encounter of both principles, not their being in each other, produces effects similar to their respective natures. Therefore, the justice model clearly prevails over the immanence model, overcoming its problematic consequences. Furthermore, the justice model also enables us to observe the connection between the function of the One and the function of the form of the Good as cause of the being and essence of forms. Considering Aristotle’s reports regarding the Platonic unwritten doctrines in *Metaphysics* A 6 988a12–15, we could also raise the question whether there is any connection between the nature of the Others as cause of

apeiria and the cause of evil. The examination of the unjust constitutions of souls and regimes seems to confirm this. There is an additional hint in this direction in *R.* X 609a–b (Gutiérrez 2011). There, Socrates speaks about the evil that destroys and corrupts, and about the good that preserves and benefits. Furthermore, he adds, nearly everything has its special, congenital evil (σύμφυτον ἕκαστω κακόν, 609a3; ἅπαντα ὑπὸ τῆς κακίας, 609c6; τὸ ἔμφυτον κακόν, 609a2). However, in the case of soul, it cannot be destroyed by its own congenital evil, even though this evil can prevent soul from doing its own job and achieving its *aretē*, its excellence. If not as an efficient cause, at least as a condition *sine qua non* of evil, this congenital evil could be related to the indefinite nature of the Others of the *Parmenides*. Having arrived at this standpoint, we are likely better equipped to fully answer Glaukos challenge concerning the power of justice and injustice in the soul.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 This paper was read at a conference dedicated to the memory of Jens Halfwassen in the Internationales Wissenschaftszentrum Heidelberg (1-3. 12.2022). It will also be published in German in a Festschrift edited by Christoph Poetsch. I'd like to thank Alexandra Alván and Rodrigo Ferradas for the translation.
- 2 See *Rep.* 533c: "Then," I said, "only the dialectical way of inquiry proceeds in this direction, destroying the hypotheses (τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀναρῶσα), to the beginning itself in order to make it secure" (transl. Bloom).

- 3 The philosophical autobiography is presented as a search for the cause of being, coming into being, and passing away (95e8–9, 96a8–10, 97b3, 97c7). It names three stages on the path to investigating causes: 1.) examining the proposals of Ionian natural philosophy on the question of causes (96a–97b); 2.) Anaxagoras's doctrine of nous as a proposal (97b–99c); 3.) the doctrine of forms as his own proposal on this question (99c–102a) (cf. B. Zehnpfenning 1991, p. 196, note 134). As it is usual with such autobiographies, it is written from the perspective of the present time of its composition, i.e., even though Socrates introduces the hypothesis method for the first time on his "second sailing," all three proposals are treated and examined as hypotheses for solving the question of causes. Socrates explicitly presents his second sailing as part of this investigation: τὸν δεῦτερον πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν, 99c9–d1. In contrast to the materialistic conception of causality in the investigation of nature, the doctrine of forms is regarded as the strongest and most reliable logos. The fact that ἀναίρεσις is not explicitly mentioned does not mean that it is not present in the matter. Dorter 1982, p. 138 rightly refers to Hegel and Fichte, but does not mention ἀναίρεσις.
- 4 Cf. *Rep.* IV 436b–437a. As Ch. Kahn pointed out: "He has a clear notion of logical contradiction", Kahn 1996, p. 316; cf. p. 316 n. 33, p. 309, n. 26. See also Bloom 2017.
- 5 Cf. Dorter 1982, p. 132–138; Rowe 1993, p. 246. On the controversy about this point see Horn 2011, p. 140–141. See also Kahn 1996, p. 315: "It is clear that if Plato has a reasonable method in view, what he means by 'accord' is stronger than logical consistency and weaker than logical entailment."
- 6 *Phd.* 97b: καὶ ἔδοξέ μοι τρόπον τινὰ εὖ ἔχειν τὸ τὸν νοῦν εἶναι πάντων αἴτιον, καὶ ἡγησάμεν, εἰ τοῦθ' οὕτως ἔχει, τὸν γε νοῦν κοσμοῦντα πάντα κοσμεῖν καὶ ἕκαστον τιθέναι ταύτη ὅπη ἂν βέλτιστα ἔχη.
- 7 Gerson distinguishes a "coordinate Form of the Good from the superordinate Idea of the Good", Gerson 2020, 53 and n. 52.
- 8 *Phd.* 100d5–6: εἴτε ὅπη δὴ καὶ ὅπη †προσγενομένη. Leaving the text unmodified (προσγενομένη referring to παρουσία and κοινωνία) would certainly turn out to be problematic; it could prove more likely to read προσγενομένου (connected to ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ, cf. Rowe 1993, p. 243, ad 100d4). However, the type of relationship would remain unspecified in this case. On the other hand, according to the conjecture of Wittenbach, προσασγορευομένη, only the designation of this relationship would be left open (cf. Burnet 1972, 1911, *ad loc.*). On this assumption, one might be inclined to ask whether or not the designation corresponds to the relationship.
- 9 Cf. Chen 1992, p. 195: "This is the general teleology which forms the metaphysical part of the theory of Ideas in the middle dialogues. It is applied to all perceptible objects. The teleology of inanimates

- (sticks and stones) in the *Phaedo* is only a special form illustrative of the general theory.” For detailed information and discussion of the opposing view, see Chen 1992, p. 195–200.
- 10 This becomes even clearer when one considers not only the properties of a being, but also its coming-to-be, for Socrates asserts that every being becomes what it is “by participating in the proper essence of each thing in which it participates” (101c) (transl. Fowler). Since this *ousia* is the respective Form, it must also be understood as the good for that which participates in it.
- 11 In 103e, the significant difference between the form itself (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος) and something else that is not that form but always has the *morphē* of that form (ἄλλο τι ὃ ἔστι μὲν οὐκ ἐκεῖνο, ἔχει δὲ τὴν ἐκείνου μορφήν ἀεὶ, ὅταν περ ᾗ). This form is the essential characteristic of something, since it presupposes the corresponding form, but is not a form in itself. If one applies this distinction to the relationship between the form of the good and other forms, one may use the term ἀγαθοειδῆ (cf. *R.* 509a3). Proclus distinguishes between the good in us, the form of all good or the good in itself, and another kind of good that is beyond being and essence, in *Rep.* I. 269, 15–270, 10. On the passage in *Phaidon*, on the correction of the phrase “immanent ideas,” and on the use and meaning of the “occupation metaphor,” see Frede 2011, p. 147–151.
- 12 This suggests that the form of the Good should be understood not as something absolutely beyond being, but as something belonging to it.
- 13 Καὶ περὶ δὴ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν εἰδῶν περὶ ὃ αὐτὸς λόγος, αὐτὸ μὲν ἐν ἕκαστον εἶναι, τῇ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἕκαστον.
- 14 The link between these two passages (476a and 500c–d) is ignored by interpreters who, like Cordero 2016 and Marmodoro 2021, p. 7, still believe that Plato’s middle period was unaware of the connections between forms. They do not understand that the *κοινωνία τῶν εἰδῶν* is an essential part of Plato’s project in the *Republic* (cf. Gutiérrez 2022; on the subject in the *Phaidon*, see Mesquita 2018). Cordero mentions the passage 476a once (Cordero 2016, p. 168), but it does not seem to be of importance to him. Ferrari 2000, p. 365–391 is essential in this regard.
- 15 Socrates’ last three arguments in Book I—the argument of *pleonexia* (349d–350d), the argument of cooperation (350d–352d), and the argument of function and arete (352d–354b)—are important in this regard: in the argument about cooperation, it is even said that the very bad and unjust need a measure of justice in order to perform their deeds (352c), and in the argument about the coincidence of function and arete, it is interestingly claimed that the ears would perform their function poorly if they were deprived of their arete: στερόμενα τῆς αὐτῶν ἀρετῆς, 153c.
- 16 For the idea that there is a form of injustice see Hellwig 1980.
- 17 *Rep.* 485b5–7: καὶ ὅτι πάσης αὐτῆς [ἐκείνης τῆς οὐσίας τῆς ἀεὶ οὐσης], καὶ οὔτε μικροῦ οὔτε μείζονος οὔτε τιμιωτέρου οὔτε ἀτιμοτέρου μέρους ἐκόντες [τῶν φιλοσόφων φύσεων] ἀφίενται.
- 18 However, even though he does this carefully as a conjecture, Ferrari ultimately understands the Form of the Good as the totality of the intelligible world (“la totalità del mondo intelligibile”), Ferrari 2023, p. 50. Without going into the details of this matter, I would just like to point out 1) that if the good as a form is subject to the same logic as other forms, it must exclude its opposite or any multiplicity and, as a result, be absolutely simple; 2) but since the good, unlike other forms—which are only fully determined through their communion with and negation of other forms—is determined and recognizable solely through itself (*R.* 534b3–6, 505a2–4), it lacks nothing and is virtually everything through its unity.
- 19 *R.* 462a: “Isn’t the first step towards agreement (ἀρχὴ τῆς ὁμολογίας) for us to ask ourselves what we can say is the greatest good in the organization of a city—that good aiming at which the legislator must set down the laws—and what the greatest evil; and then consider whether what we have just described harmonizes with the track of the good for us and not with that of the evil? [...] Have we any greater evil for a city than what splits it and makes it many instead of one? Or a greater good that what binds it together and makes it on?” Of course, this refers to justice and injustice, but ultimately to the cause of all that is right and beautiful, to the form of the Good (517c2). See Gutiérrez 2003a, Krämer 1959, p. 102. Blössner overlooks this connection completely: “Da Platons Beweggründe und die von ihm verwendeten Kriterien für Auswahl und Reihenfolge der schlechten Ordnungen im Text selbst offenbar nicht zur Sprache kommen, obliegt es dem Interpreten, sie vermutungsweise zu rekonstruieren”, Blössner 1997.
- 20 In doing so, I take the One of the first deduction as an absolutely separate and isolated One, which expresses the Eleatic conception of Oneness corresponding to the young Socrates’ conception of the forms; I understand the existing One of the second deduction as a designation of everything that is, whether sensible or intelligible; in the third deduction, this whole is, so to speak, reduced to its principles, so that the consequences for those other than the One are drawn depending on whether they participate in the One or not; the fourth deduction draws the consequences for those other than the One when they are absolutely separate from the One.
- 21 Considering that unity is an essential property of forms, one could identify this One with the form,

- and the others with sensory things. See, for example, K. Sayre, who also refers to the connection with the aporiai of participation in *Parmenides* I. And yet, as Sayre himself notes, *Parmenides* I speaks of participation in a part of the forms, whereas here we are talking about the true One (τὸ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἓν), which has no parts (159c5, K. Sayre 1996, p. 294–296). Despite everything, the reference to the connection with the critique of participation is undoubtedly correct. See also *Prm.* 151^a1-3: Οὐκοῦν καὶ τόδε ἀνάγκη, μήδεν εἶναι ἐκτὸς τοῦ ἐνός τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων; -Πῶς γὰρ οὐ. I intend to return to these passages in a coming paper On the interaction of the One and the Many in the *Parmenides*.
- 22 Cf. MXG 979b25: μηδαμοῦ δὲ ὄν οὐδὲν ἄν εἴη; vgl. Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* VII. 70. MXG mentions Zeno as the source of this idea (vgl. Diog. Laert. IX 72 = DK29B4). Wahl already thought that “le Parménide est une imitation de l’œuvre de Gorgias, au moins dans la première hypothèse. Mais de ce non-être de Gorgias, Platon fera sortir l’être”, (Wahl 1926, p. 57). And Calogero: “der ‘Parmenides’ [sei] im Grunde nichts anderes als eine Erneuerung der Schrift ‘Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος’”, Calogero 1970, p. 241. More recently, Palmer asserts: “Thus Plato in the First Deduction presents a certain sophistic appropriation of Parmenides and gives Parmenides himself the opportunity to repudiate it”, Palmer 1999, p. 117, cf. 114–115. And Brémond defends the thesis that: “Platon y présente un pastiche d’une partie du traité de Gorgias Sur le Non-être, et reprend à travers lui la critique de l’éléatisme post-parménéidien principalement représenté par Mélissos”, Brémond 2019, p. 63, cf. 79.
- 23 This model is very clearly rejected by Plato: *Smp.* 211a8: οὐδὲ που ὄν ἐν ἑτέρῳ τινι, *Tim.* 52b3–5: πρὸς δὲ δὴ καὶ οὐνειροπολοῦμεν βλέποντες καὶ φαμεν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι που τὸ ὄν ἅπαν ἔν τινι τόπῳ καὶ κατέχον χώραν τινά, τὸ δὲ μήτ’ ἔν γῆ μήτε που κατ’ οὐρανὸν οὐδὲν εἶναι.
- 24 On the idea of using a “topographia metaphysica as a vivid reflection of his [Plato’s] own ontology,” see Poetsch 2019, 161–167; on the structural analogy between the *Parmenides* and the Divided Line, see Gutiérrez 2003; 2017; 2019. In the last contribution, I show that the *Republic* also follows the structure of the Cave Allegory. The objection according to which this allegorical interpretation is anachronistic or Neoplatonic because Plato himself rejected such interpretations fails to recognize that he reject the use of allegory just in relation to children: ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐχ οἷος τε κρίνειν ὅτι τε ὑπόνοια καὶ ὁ μὴ, *Rep.* 378d6–7. Männlein-Robert is right to complain about the widespread underestimation of what is, after all, a “relevant [...] räumliche und festive Setting des (berichteten) Hauptgesprächs mit Parmenides und Zenon”, Männlein-Robert 2022, p. 275. Against Allen’s rejection of the philosophical relevance of geographical locations see Forcignanò 2022, p. 92. After all, as this author thinks, “the *Parmenides* is a literary composition and what it evokes is more relevant than mere historical facts”, Forcignanò 2022, p. 93.
- 25 *Prm.* 131a4–5: Οὐκοῦν ἦτοι ὄλου τοῦ εἶδους ἢ μέρους ἕκαστον τὸ μεταλαμβάνον μεταλαμβάνει; ἢ ἄλλη τις ἂν μετάληψις χωρὶς τούτων γένοιτο; Καὶ πῶς ἂν;
- 26 Melissus DK30B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7. Cf. Brémond 2019, p. 64–72.
- 27 Brémond asserts rightly: “Il faut noter que lorsque Platon en est arrivé à la conclusion que l’un n’est pas ni n’est un, il a atteint son objectif: l’hypothèse de départ de l’unité s’est montrée auto-contradictoire et justifie un nouvel examen. L’ajout du fait qu’il ne puisse y avoir ni nom, ni science, ni opinion de l’un est donc du point de vue de l’argumentation superflu. Cela se justifie en revanche pour renvoyer aux trois conclusions de Gorgias”, Brémond 2019, p. 77. Cf. Palmer 1999, p. 111–117.
- 28 According to Halfwassen, this judgment presupposes that the law of contradiction also applies without restriction to the theory of the One (Halfwassen 1992, p. 277). In contrast, I believe that this objection suffers from a *petitio principii*: it presupposes the interpretation of the One in the first deduction as “transcending the alternative of being and non-being” (Halfwassen 1992, p. 277). At the same time, the conclusion of the deduction must be noted: “– Is it possible that these things are so for the one? – I certainly don’t think so” (142a6–8), for then one might say: ὁ λόγος αὐτὸς αὐτῷ οὐχ ὁμολογεῖται. The emphasis here is not so much on Aristotle’s opinion, but rather on the fact that Parmenides himself persuaded him to agree with him. Aristotle is the youngest member of the group and, as such, the one who is least likely to interfere or cause difficulties (πολυπραγμονοῖ) (137b6–7). The logos that ultimately matters is the sophistical or Socratic appropriation of the Eleatic arguments.
- 29 Cf. Halfwassen 2001, p. 73: “Positiv gewendet besagt das, dass auch die Vielheit selber noch Einheitscharakter haben muss, um überhaupt als Prinzip konzipiert werden zu können.” He mentions rightly Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1087b9–12, 1088a15. Cf. Slezák 2019 (1987), p. 223–224.
- 30 In 149c, the Others than the One (τὰ ἄλλα τοῦ ἐνός) are neither One nor share in it; the One, for its part, is only One. Cf. 146d3–5 and 147a3–6. On the contrary, Sayre 1996, p. 214–215 thinks that “Parmenides’ concern in the present argument is with a pair of factors – the one and things other than the one – that not only have spatial location, but also relate to each other as larger and smaller [...] this final stage seems to be concerned with things one and other in a common sense.”
- 31 Even though some of the subsequent Socratic proposals are, in a sense, heading in the right direction—I am thinking in particular of the day as

- an image (131b) and the conception of the form a paradigm existing in nature (φύσει) (132d)–, they fail in the face of Parmenides’ objections.
- 32 Recently, Spinelli has attempted to rescue the immanence model. He argues that 1) Plato does not call on the reader to deny the divisibility and immanence of forms, but rather to reflect on “the fact that ideas have a dual nature, on account of which they are, depending on the perspective, both divisible and indivisible, both separate from things and immanent in them” (Spinelli 2022, p. 223). Furthermore, he distinguishes 2.) three types of divisibility: a) a “dialectical” one, which concerns the relationship of forms to thinking; b) an ‘ontological’ one, for the relationship of forms to other forms; c) a “phenomenal” one, for the relationship of forms to sensory things, p. 226. However, on the first point, I can say that I do not consider the talk of a dual nature of forms to be fortunate; it is too reminiscent of the talk of a doubling of the world. Instead, I would refer to the passage from Republic 476a that I mentioned and to the connection between being and the appearance of forms there. He mentions the relevant passages on the types of divisibility. As an example of “ontological” divisibility, he cites *Prm.* 144b1–2, which speaks of the distribution of being among all beings. In doing so, he does not seem to pay attention to the fact that this distribution is a result of a separation from the One in itself and from being through thinking (διανοία) in the existing One (143a7). This would call into question his distinction between “dialectical” and “ontological” divisibility. According to his interpretation, “the noetic forms have two modes of manifestation: on the one hand, as ἀμέριστα, in their purity, uniqueness, and separation from things; on the other hand, as μέριστα, divisible and ‘distributed’ among the sensible things to which they are inherent,” p. 226–227. The talk of two modes of manifestation seems to correct that of a dual nature. But then one would have to ask whether the forms themselves or their mode of manifestation “inhabit” the sensible things. These would then be better understood as properties, as Spinelli mentions shortly before: “The passages mentioned describe the forms as they manifest themselves in a specific, extraordinary way, i.e., in the philosophical contemplation of their pure essence (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, *Smp.* 211b1, *Phd.* 66a2, 78d6, 83b1, 100b6). However, this does not exclude the possibility that the same entities manifest themselves in everyday experience in a different way, i.e., as properties of a thing,” p. 226. One would certainly agree with this, but how then could one speak of a “dual nature of forms”? According to my interpretation, it would be better to say that φαίνεσθαι is anchored in the being of forms, which in turn is very reminiscent of the traditional φύσις. On the whole problem, cf. Devereux 1994, p. 63–90; see there the interpretation of expressions such as τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν μέγεθος (*Phd.* 102d7) and τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν (103b5), which Spinelli considers to be the main witnesses of immanence. Regarding the interpretation of *Prm.* 144b1–2, I tend to agree with Migliori 1990, p. 138.
- 33 In Gutiérrez (2024), I discussed the model of justice in connection with the conception of being as δύναμις τοῦ πάσχειν ἢ ποιεῖν/δρᾶν from *Sophistes* 247e–248c, 254c5. After all, this δύναμις is the basis of the community of forms and of all koinonia in general. To attribute a δύναμις τοῦ πράττειν to the One means that it still belongs to the realm of being, even if, unlike other forms, it is simple: only the form of the Good/One is determined by itself (for more on this, see Gutiérrez 2017, p. 192–196). F. Ferrari rightly refers to the “necessità di focalizzare l’indagine intorno al bene sulla nozione di causa, spostando così l’attenzione dalla questione della sua essenza (ousia) a quella della sua azione, cioè della dynamis che esso esercita,” Ferrari 2023, p. 324. However, I believe that the connection between εἶναι/φαίνεσθαι and φύσις/ἔργον should not be ignored.
- 34 Zekl rightly points out: “Sein (Identität der reinen Bestimmung mit sich selbst) und Teilhabe (Prädikation im Urteil unter Verwendung von ‘ist’ als Kopula) sind zu unterscheiden”, Zekl 1972, p. 164, n. 221. If it is completely identical with itself, this One differs from the One of the first deduction. Cf. Migliori 1990, p. 310, n. 16.
- 35 Proclus already noticed it: “Of Justice, finally, let us say that it is the cause of the Forms performing their proper functions; for by justice each remains in its own station and does what is incumbent upon it. Greatness does not make small, nor smallness confer preeminence, nor does likeness separate derivatives from primary beings, nor unlikeness bring together and unite; but each of the Forms discharges its own function, carries on its own activity, reflects upon itself, and belong to itself”, Proclus, In *Parm.* 855 (transl. Morrow & Dillon). See the only, but extremely important comment I found in the literature on this subject: “Die Idee der Gerechtigkeit gibt es bei Platon also gewissermaßen in zweierlei Fassung: als einzelne Idee und als ideelle Struktur des ganzen Ideenbereiches. Da das ›Material, an dem die Idee der Gerechtigkeit hier ›erscheint‹, die ewigen Ideen sind, ist auch diese ihre erste Manifestation vollkommen; ja, im gewissen Sinne vollkommener als die Einzelidee, weil das, was in dieser nur allgemeines Programm ist – das Tun des Seinigen –, in der Gerechtigkeit des ganzen Ideenreiches auch bereits ›konkret‹ erfüllt ist. Da jenes Reich nicht räumlich ist, hängen sie beide unmittelbar zusammen, ›spiegeln‹ sich und wirken ineinander, ohne jedoch ineinander zu verfließen”, Schwabe 2001, p. 230.
- 36 Cf. Aristoteles, *Metaph.* I 6, 987b33, XIV 5, 1092a25–25. See Szlezák’s cautionary statement: “As long as we only look to the Parmenides, we cannot

arrive at the concept of the aoristos dyas. But if we already know from other texts how we are to think of the initially puzzling idea of an indefinite dyad, then we find quite a bit that corresponds to it in the *Parmenides*”, Szlezák 2019, p. 613.

- 37 This reference to Anaxagoras DK59 B1, B2, B3 brings to mind the manner in which the material cause of natural science is assimilated in the *Phaedo*.

Immortality of the Soul in the First Half of *Phaedo*

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ABSTRACT

In the *Phaedo*, Plato presents what appears to be a dual conception of the soul's fate: purified souls ascend toward what is unchanging, while souls burdened by bodily attachment remain within cycles of reincarnation (80e-81a; 82c-84b; 114c-115a). Rather than treating these as metaphysically distinct destinies assigned to fixed types of individuals, this paper argues that the dialogue stages its arguments in a pedagogical progression that reframes how the soul's persistence ought to be understood and evaluated. The Cyclical, Recollection, and Affinity Arguments foreground different dimensions of the soul and are ordered methodically. The Cyclical Argument secures continuity at the level of life, responding to anxiety about extinction. The Recollection and

Affinity Arguments redirect attention toward the soul's rational orientation and its affinity with what is unchanging. Considered individually, the arguments may seem incomplete. Considered structurally, they trace a philosophical education – from concern about survival to reflection on the character and worth of that survival. The dialogue thus shifts the central question from whether the soul persists to what gives that persistence its value.

Keywords: Plato, *Phaedo*, Immortality of the soul, Pedagogical progression, Cyclical Argument, Recollection, Affinity Argument

1. INTRODUCTION

The immortality of the soul in Plato's *Phaedo* has long been regarded as the dialogue's central philosophical claim. Yet despite extensive commentary, disagreement persists concerning how the dialogue's arguments relate to one another and what conception of immortality they ultimately defend. The Cyclical Argument, the Recollection Argument, and the Affinity Argument each appear to establish the soul's persistence after death, but they do so by emphasizing different features of the soul. The interpretive challenge is therefore not only whether the soul survives death, but in what sense its survival is to be understood.

The prominent approach reads the arguments as components of a cumulative proof, culminating in the Final Argument. On this interpretation, the arguments form a progressive disclosure of the soul's nature. Each stage refines the conception established by the previous one, culminating in a metaphysical account from which immortality emerges as a logically necessary consequence. On this view, the earlier arguments function as preparatory steps toward the final clarification that the soul, as essentially life or as akin to the Forms, cannot admit death (e.g. Hackforth, 1972, p.16-19; Bluck, 2014; Gallop, 2002, p.103; Archer-Hind, 1883, p.14-15).¹ Though plausible, this reading overlooks a crucial dimension of the dialogue: Plato's strategic engagement with interlocutors whose prior conceptions of the soul differ in emphasis. The sequence of arguments does not simply deepen a single metaphysical thesis; it responds to distinct concerns and reorients existing assumptions about what immortality would mean under those differing conceptions. The progression is therefore not merely ontological but pedagogical.²

My reading interprets the progression in a different light. The Cyclical Argument presents the soul as a principle of life participating in cosmic alternation; the Recollection Argument foregrounds the soul's pre-existence and its relation to intelligible reality; the Affinity Argument emphasizes its kinship with what is invisible and stable. Yet these arguments are not ordered merely to establish indestructibility through increasingly refined ontological identification. Rather, they are pedagogically structured to engage different concerns and to reframe what immortality would mean under different conceptions of the soul. Taken together, they play a crucial role in illuminating what makes immortality truly valuable. The dialogue's progression thus shifts attention from the fact of survival to the question of its worth.

The dialogue does not address a philosophically neutral audience; it unfolds within a circle already shaped by differing emphases – some inclined to conceive the soul chiefly as a life-principle continuous through cycles of rebirth, others drawn to Socrates' insistence on rational purification and likeness to the intelligible. By beginning with the cyclical argument, the dialogue engages those whose primary concern is the continuity of life. By advancing to recollection and affinity, it gradually redirects attention toward the soul's rational nature and its highest activity. The sequence of arguments thus reorients the readers' understanding of what gives that persistence its ultimate significance.³

To avoid ambiguity, a brief terminology clarification is in order. By "life-principle" I refer to the soul insofar as it animates and sustains embodied existence. By "rational principle" I refer to the soul insofar as it engages in intellectual activity and seeks likeness to the Forms.⁴ "Immortality" may therefore signify

either continued existence as life-giver or a mode of being characterized by stability and intelligibility. The central claim of this paper is that the *Phaedo* deliberately brings these senses into relation through the ordered presentation of its arguments, thereby revealing both the structure of the soul and the philosophical education required to understand its destiny.

2. TWO FORMS OF DEATH

At the beginning of *Phaedo*, Plato presents a vivid death scene of Socrates' final moments, where his friends and family gather in his prison cell to bid him farewell. In this setting, Socrates challenges the conventional fear of death, claiming that "it is better for a man to be dead than alive" (62a4). His interlocutors react strongly to this idea, as they understand death merely as the cessation of life and the decay of the body – a terrifying and irreversible end. In response, Socrates redefines death through two crucial claims: (1) A philosopher practices nothing other than death and being dead (64a5), and (2) Being dead is just the separation of the soul from the body (64c5). By emphasizing the soul's independence from the body, Socrates suggests that death is not necessarily destructive but can be understood as a process that leads to an afterlife.

DEATH AS A TELEOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT

Socrates' first claim implies that death can be interpreted not simply a biological event, but also figuratively as a symbol for purification, accompanied by intellectual and spiritual achievement and freedom. If death were purely natural, it would not require

practice. Instead, Socrates suggests that death is something one can perform well or poorly, with success measured by the extent to which the soul has detached from bodily influences. True philosophers, he argues, have the correct conception of death and are eager to separate from their bodies in pursuit of pure knowledge (64a-b). This purification allows them to attain direct contact with the Forms, as Socrates asserts, "never will it be permissible for the impure to touch the pure" (67b2).⁵ Thus, for philosophers, death is teleological – it has a purpose: achieving knowledge and dwelling among the forms. Since bodily pleasures obstruct reasoning, true wisdom requires a gradual process of detachment (65b5). In this view, death is a final step in a lifelong purification, not a tragic loss but a fulfillment of the soul's ultimate goal.

DEATH AS THE END OF LIFE

At the same time, the dialogue presupposes another orientation already present within Socrates' circle. On this view, the soul is understood primarily as a principle of life that animates bodies and persists across cycles of incarnation. Socrates observes that "most men who are lovers of riches" (82c5) remain entangled in bodily desires, which makes it difficult for them to detach their souls from the physical world. Because they are unable to conceptualize death as teleological process, their souls remain impure and burdened by bodily attachments. Socrates calls them "lovers of the body" (69a), meaning they value sensory pleasures and bodily dispositions over the pursuit of knowledge. Consequently, their immortality is of an inferior kind – instead of escaping the cycle of rebirth, their souls are continuously drawn back in the physical world,

unable to dwell with the forms. From this perspective, death is not so much a culmination of rational purification as a transition within a larger cosmic process. What matters most is the continued animation and reanimation of embodied life. The fear associated with death, then, concerns not the annihilation of the soul in the strict sense, but the interruption or instability of this life-giving continuity.

These two orientations, I believe, reflect different emphases within a shared philosophical framework. The soul is both life-giving and capable of rational activity. What differs is which feature is treated as primary in determining its destiny. If its defining attribute is its role as the source of life, immortality appears as continued existence across successive embodiments. If its defining attribute is its kinship with what is intelligible and unchanging, immortality appears as purification and likeness to the Forms. Corresponding to these two emphases, there follow two different senses of immortality – one marked by the soul’s continued participation in cycles of embodied existence, and the other marked by the soul’s increasing separation from bodily influences and assimilation to what is unchanging.⁶ While both allow for the soul’s continued existence after death, they differ in what gives that existence value and structure. In the first case, immortality secures continuity; in the second, it secures transformation.

Some scholars argue that Socrates’ definition of death as the separation of the body and the soul is intended to downplay the seemingly dreadful nature of death. By presenting death as a departure rather than destruction, this definition presupposes the soul’s continued existence and function as a kind of euphemism that could ease common fears of death (e.g., Tarrant, 1952; Dilman, 1981). However, I believe this interpretation is misguided.

When Socrates introduces this definition, he presents it as a commonly accepted notion of death (64d). Yet fear persists even under this conception. The difficulty does not lie in misunderstanding death as annihilation, but in how one conceives the soul’s relation to the body and what one takes the soul’s proper function to be. On one hand, the separation itself can be terrifying if one understands the soul primarily in relation to embodied life. On the other hand, the same notion can be liberating if one understands it primarily in relation to rational purification.

3. THE CYCLICAL ARGUMENT: IMMORTALITY AS LIFE- CONTINUITY

In *Phaedo* (69e6-72e), Socrates presents the Cyclical Argument in response to concerns about the soul’s persistence after death, particularly those raised by Cebes. The argument is introduced to address Cebes’ fear that “it (the soul) may be dispersed like breath or smoke, or fly off and exist no longer anywhere at all” (70a1-5). Cebes’ weaver analogy – that even if the soul continues “weaving bodies” for itself, it might nevertheless eventually “blow apart and disperse” (77b5) – further reveals his conception of the primary function of the soul. His worry focuses primarily on whether the life-giving function of the soul can endure indefinitely. The anxiety concerns the eventual discontinuation of the soul’s ability to animate the body.

The weaver analogy makes this orientation clear. We do not fear the disappearance of the weaver out of concern for the craftsman as such, but because his disappearance would mean the end of the craft – the loss of the production and maintenance of the product.

Cebes represents an audience who conceives the soul primarily as necessary for sustaining bodily life – the product of the soul as the animator of body. In this sense, the persistence of the soul matters only insofar as it secures continuity of animation. The cyclical argument directly responds to this concern. Socrates argues that life and death are natural opposites that generate one another within a broader metaphysical balance (70e1-70e3). If living things were not regenerated from the dead, the world would eventually become static and lifeless (72b5). Just as waking arises from sleeping and sleeping from waking, so the living must arise from the dead and the dead from the living.⁷

A major difficulty with the cyclical argument is its reliance on the principle that opposites generate one another. Not all opposites reverse into each other: old does not become young, nor ripe unripe. As Greco (1996) notes, even if “living” and “being dead” are properties of the soul, it does not follow that the soul must return to life. The soul might persist in a state of non-living without cyclical regeneration. If life and death are linear rather than reciprocal, reincarnation becomes unnecessary. We can make better sense of the cyclical argument by appealing to Socrates’ earlier definition of death as “nothing more than the separation of the soul from the body” (64c5). This definition of death prescribes that death is not a linear process, as the process of separation and combination requires both ends of the spectrum – combination requires the reassembly of the dissembled components (Dorter, 1977). However, this less final and more benign understanding of death also implicitly presupposes the existence of a life-giving force independent of the body, meaning that souls must have existed before birth. As Gerson (2006) observes, defining death as

separation presupposes precisely what the argument aims to establish – that the soul is an independently existing principle. If the soul pre-exists and is essentially life-giving, then its postmortem survival is embedded in the premise. Given these difficulties, commentators such as Barnes (1978) argued that the cyclical argument is not meant to fully prove immortality (cf. Gallop 1982).

I contend that the Cyclical Argument is incomplete in proving the immortality of the soul. Nevertheless, the argument cannot be fully appreciated without considering its distinctive role within the dialogue. It directly addresses a specific fear expressed by Cebes: that the annihilation of the soul would entail the irreversible termination of lived experience. Given Cebes’ concern about the continuity of life, the argument clarifies what immortality must amount to if the soul is conceived primarily as a life-sustaining principle.⁸

If the soul is conceived as the life-principle, immortality, accordingly, would consist in the continued capacity to generate and regenerate embodied life. This, accompanied with the notion of death as the separation of the soul and body, warrants the necessity of the soul’s constant return to the earthly realm. In this sense, the Cyclical Argument specifies the necessary condition for a particular conception of immortality: life and death must be reciprocal processes, so that the chain of animation does not terminate. If this reciprocity fails, the very conception of the soul as life-giving force collapses. Seen in this way, the cyclical argument aims at establishing the metaphysical structure required for its possibility. It shows that if the soul’s identity lies in its power to animate, then return to embodied life is not accidental but necessary. In this sense, the Cyclical Argument does not presuppose what it aims to demonstrate; rather, it functions as

a hypothetical argument that discerns what must follow from the assumption that the soul's primary defining feature is its role as a life-principle – an assumption drawn from Cebes' concern. By contrast, if the soul is defined primarily through its rational activity and its aspiration toward what is unchanging, reincarnation ceases to be an attractive outcome. For such an orientation, immortality would not consist in continued animation, but in release: the separation of the soul from bodily entanglement to such an extent that it does not return. The dialogue's later development makes clear that these two conceptions of immortality diverge. The cyclical argument clarifies the first. The subsequent arguments will reorient the reader toward the second.

This contrast explains why Plato does not leave the cyclical argument standing on its own. Having clarified what immortality must entail under the life-principle conception, the dialogue immediately deepens the picture through the myth of reincarnation. The move from argumentative structure to mythic narrative is pedagogical. The cyclical reasoning establishes the conditions under which perpetual return is possible; the myth explores what such return amounts to in lived and ethical terms. By first securing the metaphysical necessity of recurrence and then depicting its consequences, Plato guides the reader to reflect on whether survival through return is, in fact, the soul's highest good.

FROM CYCLICAL PROOF TO PYTHAGOREAN RETURN

The pedagogical development draws upon a broader religious and philosophical background familiar to Plato's audience, namely the doctrine of palingenesis commonly as-

sociated with Pythagorean teaching. Ancient testimony, including Herodotus (*Histories* 2.123) and later reports preserved in Diogenes Laertius (*Lives* 8.14, 8.36), describes a belief in the transmigration of souls, that the soul survives bodily death and re-enters successive bodies within a larger cosmic order.⁹ In its traditional form, palingenesis secures continuity: survival consists in return.

Plato inherits this framework but does not simply reproduce it. In the *Phaedo*, reincarnation is no longer presented merely as a religious doctrine but is philosophically integrated into a broader metaphysical structure.¹⁰ The Cyclical Argument rationalizes rebirth by embedding it within a general principle of oppositional generation: if life and death are reciprocal states, the living must arise from the dead. Plato's reformulated myth of reincarnation, on the other hand, follows naturally from the Cyclical Argument and addresses the religious commitments of his interlocutors. It presents a philosophically shaped version of continued return that makes explicit what the persistence of life would amount to within a doctrinal framework they are familiar with. Given their knowledge of transmigration, life's continuity would take the form of successive re-embodiment.¹¹ At the same time, Plato subtly transforms the meaning of this continuity. Whereas traditional palingenesis emphasizes survival across embodiments, the *Phaedo* introduces an evaluative dimension. Rebirth is no longer neutral. It is connected to the condition and orientation of the soul. Even if the soul returns, a life as a donkey, wolf, hawk, or kite is not worth living (82a1-5).

At this point, it is important to clarify which aspects of life are primarily at stake for those who value the soul as the life-principle. Is the concern the preservation of individual personhood, or rather the continuation of

bodily dispositions and orientations? This distinction is crucial for understanding why someone like Cebes fears the soul's disappearance. Some interpreters, such as Robinson (1970, p.32-33), have questioned whether Platonic immortality preserves personal identity in a strong psychological sense, or whether what persists is a more impersonal rational principle.¹² Yet within the framework of the Cyclical Argument and the subsequent myth, the central concern need not be framed in terms of preserving personal identity in a robust psychological sense. The orientation toward bodily life that the dialogue depicts does not primarily seek the retention of reflective selfhood or explicit memory. Rather it seeks the continuation of the conditions under which bodily pleasures and dispositions may persist. Continuity appears tied less to explicit memory and more to the persistence of cultivated attachments. The soul carries forward its orientation, i.e., its desires, habits, and bodily inclinations, which determine the form of its next embodiment.¹³ What is preserved is not necessarily the narrative self, but the pattern of attachment that binds the soul to embodied life.

Socrates later describes how pleasure and pain "fasten" the soul to the body, "riveting" it and rendering it "corporeal" (83d-84a). Even after separation, the soul may remain marked by bodily influence (81b1-81b5). Although the precise sense in which the body renders the soul "corporeal" is unclear, the text makes evident that bodily attachments shape the soul's postmortem condition.¹⁴ Immortality, in this case, consists in prolonged persistence within the cycle of embodiment. The soul survives in a mode shaped by its attachments. Reincarnation is not merely continuation; it is the consequence of remaining orientation toward bodily life.

Under the conception of soul as the life-principle, what is valued is the preservation of life understood as the ongoing possibility of sensation and enjoyment. The soul's significance lies in its function as animator of the body – the carrier of bodily dispositions and desires. So long as the chain of animation continues, the fundamental concern is satisfied.¹⁵ On my reading, the Pythagorean doctrine of reincarnation functions as a necessary complement to the Cyclical Argument, given that death is understood as the separation of the composite and the non-composite. The soul does not return to its former body; rather, it may re-enter embodied existence in another form. In this way, the possibility of continued bodily experience, and the forms of enjoyment associated with it, is preserved. Souls attached to bodily desires return to forms corresponding to those cultivated desires (82a1- 82a5).¹⁶ Immortality understood as perpetual animation is therefore possible yet not necessarily desirable. To "remain for a very long time" without higher orientation resembles the preservation of an embalmed body: duration without fulfillment.¹⁷

The cyclical argument articulates what immortality must look like if the soul is primarily defined as life-sustaining principle. But the subsequent myth reveals the limitation of this conception. Survival bound to bodily attachment results in endless and purposeless returns rather than genuine liberation. The dialogue's movement is therefore pedagogical. It first clarifies the persistence required by a life-oriented conception of the soul. It then reframes that persistence as insufficient when measured against the soul's rational aspiration. Only after this groundwork is laid can the dialogue redirect attention toward purification and likeness to what is unchanging.

4. THE RECOLLECTION ARGUMENT

Socrates presents the recollection argument to demonstrate that the soul must have existed before birth. He argues that all learning is a form of recollection (76e5) and that in order for someone to be reminded of something, they must have had prior contact with it (73c1-3). Since we are reminded of the Forms when encounter their imperfect physical instances, it follows that we must have encountered the Forms before birth (74e1-75c2). Unlike the cyclical argument, which articulates the possibility of the continued animation, the recollection argument shifts our attention to the soul's epistemic nature. What it establishes is not merely that the soul survives, but that it has stood in relation to what is unchanging and intelligible prior to embodiment.

This shift acquires significance especially when viewed through the two conceptions of the soul already identified. If the soul is understood primarily as life-sustaining principle, the recollection theory may initially seem unsatisfying. It does not explain how life continues nor does it describe the mechanics of return – the primary concern of those obsessed with the preservation of bodily dispositions. Yet it does transform what that return could involve. If the soul has encountered the Forms before birth, then each reanimation carries forward a prior orientation. Survival is not the mere repetition of animation, but the continuation of a trajectory shaped by previous intellectual contact.

The type of intellectual engagement required for recollection appears to depend on the soul's condition. In the Affinity Argument, Socrates emphasizes that only what is pure can come into contact with what is pure (67b2), meaning that an impure soul – one

still attached to bodily elements or dispositions – cannot directly access the Forms. If this is true, then it seems that recollection is reserved exclusively to those who are philosophically enlightened.

Scott (2002) supports this interpretation, arguing that recollection is an intellectual activity aimed exclusively at forming philosophical concepts, and that it presupposes commitment to transcendent Forms. On this reading, recollection in its fullest sense belongs to the soul insofar as it is actively oriented toward the intelligible. In this respect, only those committed to the idea of Forms can recollect in the fullest sense.¹⁸ As Socrates remarks, when we observe that one stone is equal to another, we are led to grasp something beyond the stones themselves: the Form of Equality (74a10). This ability to discern the transcendent principle underlying particular instances is what characterizes successful recollection.

Yet the dialogue does not posit two different kinds of souls. As Socrates insists in response to the attunement argument, “no one soul is more or less a soul than another” (93d1). What differs is not the essence of the soul but its orientation and cultivated disposition. Other dialogues confirm this gradation. In the *Meno*, Socrates is shown to guide a slave to recollect geometrical knowledge.¹⁹ In the *Phaedrus*, recollection is described as occurring in varying degrees: “not every soul is easily reminded of the reality there by what it finds here – [especially] soul that got only a brief glance at the reality there, ..., they fell down here and they were twisted by bad company into lives of injustice that they forgot the sacred objects they had seen before” (Phaedrus 250a1-5).²⁰ If the only obstacle to learning through recollection is the wrong attitude toward the Forms, then the failure to recollect is not due to an essential difference

in soul but rather the impurity of recollection caused by bodily distractions.

Under this analysis, recollection reveals something crucial even for those not committed to a philosophical life. The soul that returns to embodiment does not return as empty animating force. It carries forward dispositions formed through prior contact with what is real. Attachment to bodily life obscures recollection while disciplined detachment clarifies it. The recurrence secured by the Cyclical Argument is therefore not ethically neutral. What persists across embodiments is not merely vitality, but orientation. When the soul is dragged down by bodily elements, it cannot “think most fully and minutely of each object of his inquiry, in itself” (65d5-66a5), and the body leaves it “no leisure of philosophy” (66d). In such a condition, one recognizes particular instances without pursuing their intelligible ground. Thus, one may display bravery “through fear and cowardice” (68d), grasping appearances without grasping the Form. The failure lies not in capacity but in direction.²¹

The Recollection Argument therefore does more than supplement the Cyclical Argument; it grounds the possibility of transformation within the cycle. If all souls share the same nature, and if recollection of the Forms is possible through ordinary cognitive activity, then no soul is fixed in its condition across successive lives. The capacity for recollection means that even within embodied existence the soul can redirect itself toward what is intelligible. Immortality is thus no longer mere continuation of animation, but the persistence of a being capable of reorientation. The same cycle of return may continue, yet the soul’s condition within that cycle can change according to how it engages its cognitive capacities. In this way, recollection introduces the

possibility of qualitative development within life-continuity and prepares the transition to the Affinity Argument’s explicit alignment of the soul with what is stable and divine.

5. THE AFFINITY ARGUMENT: IMMORTALITY AS ASSIMILATION

Simmias, in contrast to Cebes, articulates a different orientation toward the soul. Unlike Cebes, he does not fear death primarily as the discontinuation of embodied life. Simmias’ attunement theory (85e-86d), which compares the soul to the harmony of lyre, acknowledges that the soul could transcend particular bodily configurations and resemble the Forms, just as harmony can transcend the existence of any individual instrument. Simmias explicitly asks Socrates to address the concerns of those who consider “the soul to be a mixture of bodily elements and to be the first to perish in the process we call death” (86d), deliberately distancing himself from this viewpoint.

However, although Simmias clearly possesses this vision of the soul’s transcendent existence, the discussion is soon redirected by Cebes’ weaver analogy, which reflects precisely the view of the soul as tied to bodily elements through its emphasis on sustaining embodiment. The two analogies, i.e., Simmias’ harmony analogy and Cebes’ weaver analogy, though similar at first glance, are fundamentally different in terms of their conception of the soul’s role. While the goal and function of harmony are not defined or characterized by individual instruments, the goal and function of the weaver are closely tied to their product. It is clear that Simmias is more concerned with the inherent attributes of the soul as the rational principle – order and

measure – whereas Cebes is more concerned with the soul as the animator of bodies.²² On this note, Simmias represents a more distinct audience aligned with the Socratic-Platonic rationalist conception of the soul, one that treats its rational function as primary.

According to the Affinity Argument, the soul and body belong to two distinct categories of being. The body is visible, composite, and always changing, making it mortal and prone to decay (78c). The soul, by contrast, is invisible, non-composite, and divine, which makes it more naturally inclined toward permanence (79a). Socrates suggests that a philosopher recognizes this distinction and actively cultivates the soul's tendency to align with the Forms. The more a person pursues wisdom and detaches from bodily influences, their soul becomes "itself by itself", resembling the unchanging and pure nature of the Forms. As Socrates states, "whenever it has come to be alone by itself...when it is about those objects, it is always constant and unvarying" (79d7). However, this similarity to the Forms is not automatic. Unlike the Forms, which are eternally pure, the soul's condition depends on the tendencies it cultivates. If a soul is excessively attached to bodily pleasures and fails to pursue wisdom, it remains impure and fails to achieve true immortality.

However, the Affinity Argument seems to have a notable limitation. Socrates does not claim that the soul is identical to the divine and immutable. Instead, he cautiously states that the soul is similar to the Forms. This subtle distinction raises an important question: If the soul is only similar to the divine, does it necessarily share all its properties, including absolute immortality?²³ Apolloni (1996) highlights this problem, arguing that similarity does not entail identity. Just as biological twins may look alike but have different talents, the

soul may resemble the Forms in certain ways without being truly indestructible. This raises an additional question: Could a soul fail to achieve true immortality, despite its natural inclination toward it? Apolloni suggests that one way to strengthen the argument is to treat the visible and the invisible as exhaustive categories, such that sharing the central attributes of the invisible would be necessary for genuine likeness. Though this interpretation resolves the similarity vs. identity problem, it also faces serious challenges.²⁴

Given the difficulty, it is often argued that the Affinity Argument, together with the stronger Form-of-Life argument (Final Argument) later in the dialogue (105c-107a), may indicate that the Affinity Argument is provisional rather than a complete metaphysical proof (e.g., Sedley 2008; Frede 2008). I agree with those commentators who resist identifying the soul with the Forms and who judge the Affinity Argument insufficient as a proof of immortality. Yet the argument can be reinterpreted in a way that reveals its distinctive philosophical force: its distinctive pedagogical function within the dialogue. As the Cyclical Argument clarifies what immortality amounts to when the soul is understood as a life-principle, the Affinity Argument clarifies what immortality would require if the soul is conceived as essentially rational.²⁵

Socrates talks about visible souls as "some shadowy phantoms of souls have actually been seen" (81d1). These souls are impure because they are plagued by the body to participate in the "visible" (81d2-5). Whether the soul could be like the invisible depends on how successful a person could separate his soul from his body. Meanwhile, sometimes bodily elements could be similar to the invisible in some important respects. For instance,

Socrates suggests “those who’ve been embalmed in Egypt, remains almost entire for an immensely long time; and even should the body decay, some parts of it, bones and sinews and all such things, all still practically immortal (80c9-d1)”. The relationship of similarity emphasized here in the affinity argument shows us some interesting facts about the soul-body dichotomy. There is a sense in which the bodily elements could be immortal. The sense in which the lingering body persists, I believe, could be interpreted as similar to how a soul infused with bodily elements could persist.

The sense in which the soul is immortal in accordance with its nature must therefore differ radically from the endurance of a mummified body. For the soul to be immortal in the stronger sense envisioned here – that is, a soul that does not disperse after death regardless of the passage of time – it must share the central attributes of the Forms, since only the Forms are truly unchanging and immortal. The visible and the invisible are not fixed categories into which the soul is simply placed. The soul’s kinship with the invisible marks a potential rather than a completed status. To participate in the higher form of immortality, it must actively come to share the defining features of what is unchanging.

The Affinity Argument is directed toward those who share the Socratic-Platonic vision about the kind of immortality that is truly desirable – transcending the earthly realm in pursuit of knowledge of the Forms. This is why Socrates refrains from asserting that soul is identical to the Forms and instead emphasizes only similarity: the argument shows the direction in which the soul must orient itself if it is to attain genuine stability.

Towards the end of the Affinity Argument, Socrates hints at its deeper role:

“The soul of the philosopher would not think that while philosophy must free it, it should, while being freed, surrender itself to pleasures and pains and imprison itself again... The soul of the philosopher achieves a calm from such emotions; it follows reason and stays with it, contemplating the true and the divine... After such nurture there is no danger... that, on parting from the body, the soul would be scattered and dissipated and no longer be anything anywhere” (84a–c).

In this passage, Socrates makes clear that the philosopher’s true fear is not the soul’s dissolution as such, but its failure to free itself from bodily contamination. The issue is not mere survival, but whether the soul becomes akin to what is divine and unvarying. Within the Socratic–Platonic rationalist conception, death is not dreadful because it does not interrupt the soul’s commitment to reason and contemplation of the Forms. What would be dreadful, rather, is continued subjection to bodily desires. The value of immortality, on this view, lies not in persistence alone, but in the soul’s assimilation to the Forms through knowledge.

In contrast to the fear of separation rooted in the Pythagorean conception of the soul as the life-principle, those who share the Socratic-Platonic view fear the soul’s inseparability from the body – which is the source of ignorance. Since their fear does not arise from the dissipation of the soul *per se*, an argument that merely justifies the soul’s continued existence would not effectively soothe their fear. For them, the value of immortality lies in the acquisition of genuine knowledge, which requires establishing the possibility that the

soul is not a mixture of bodily elements – a view that Simmias explicitly requests Socrates to address (86e). On this interpretation, we need not assume that the soul is identical with the Forms or that it necessarily shares all of their central attributes. Rather, the Affinity Argument shows that, in order to attain the kind of stability that true philosophers desire, the soul must orient itself toward what is genuinely stable and unvarying. The soul can free itself from bodily contamination and engage in its highest activity precisely because of its inherent similarity to the Forms. Although the argument may not conclusively establish immortality as such, it is sufficient to soothe the fear of those who value the soul’s rational function.

6. COMPLEMENTARITY OF LIFE AND RATIONALITY

The preceding analysis has traced two distinct but interrelated theses concerning the soul: its character as a life-principle and its character as a rational principle oriented toward what is unchanging.²⁶ The dialogue does not simply juxtapose these theses; it orders them pedagogically. The sequence of arguments in the *Phaedo* guides the reader from one conception of immortality to another, not by rejecting the former, but by deepening and reorienting it.

Seen together, these arguments articulate complementary dimensions of the soul. The soul as life-principle explains why living beings exist and persist. The soul as rational principle explains how the same nature can transcend mere persistence and orient itself toward what is unchanging. Taken together, they articulate not a simple guarantee of survival, but the possibility of transformation. That possibil-

ity grounds the significance of philosophical practice: once one recognizes what the soul’s highest good consists in, philosophy appears not as an optional pursuit but as the appropriate discipline of the soul.

The pedagogical progression of the dialogue reflects this structure. Plato begins by addressing the most immediate fear – the anxiety that life might simply end. The Cyclical Argument articulates what immortality would mean if its value lay solely in the preservation of animation. The myth that follows then quietly tests that assumption: continuity alone does not ensure desirability. By first securing the prospect of return and then exposing its limitations, the dialogue gradually reshapes the reader’s concern. The subsequent arguments do not merely add further “proofs.” They redirect attention. The Recollection Argument grounds the possibility of knowledge by showing that the soul’s engagement with the Forms is not accidental but rooted in its own cognitive capacities, exercised even through ordinary intellectual activity. The Affinity Argument then provides the ontological basis for this possibility: if the soul is akin to what is invisible and unchanging, its capacity for knowledge becomes intelligible, and its highest fulfillment lies in stabilizing itself in likeness to what it knows. In this way, the dialogue reframes the original anxiety. The question is no longer simply whether the soul survives, but what kind of survival is worth longing for. The argumentative sequence thus educates desire itself, guiding the reader from the fear of extinction toward an understanding of immortality that finds its meaning in philosophical transformation.

The dialogue’s ultimate teaching is thus not that one conception replaces the other, but that the value of the soul must be understood in light of both.²⁷ If the soul is defined only as life-giver,

immortality collapses into perpetual return. If it is defined only as rational, the possibility of redirecting embodied life toward what is intelligible would lack experiential grounding. The *Phaedo* instead presents the transition from life-continuity to rational purification as achievable, and in doing so offers an ethical lesson: survival alone is not the highest good. What ultimately matters is how the soul understands and shapes its own persistence: whether it remains attached to repetition or turns toward what is unchanging. The pedagogical progression of the dialogue mirrors the philosophical education it seeks to enact. It begins with concern for survival and culminates in reflection on the soul's highest activity. By ordering the arguments in this way, Plato clarifies what gives immortality its true value and, in turn, why the philosophical life is worth pursuing.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. Sedley, 2008. Even though Sedley didn't explicitly discuss how the cyclical argument, recollection argument, and the affinity argument establish the immortality of the soul, his interpretation of immortality in *Phaedo* as "essential immortality" suggests that its immortality lies in its essence as the Form of life.
- 2 I am more sympathetic to the view that the ultimate achievement of the *Phaedo* is not to demonstrate the soul's immortality, but to convey an ethical lesson concerning the highest good (e.g., Anton, 1968; cf. Hackforth, 1950; O'Brien, 1968; Baima & Paytas 2020, esp. p.104-106). However, the question of whether Plato attempts to and ultimately succeeds in proving immortality is highly complex and extends beyond the scope of this paper. I therefore do not attempt to adjudicate between competing interpretations on that issue. Instead, the primary aim of this paper is to illuminate a distinctive feature of the progression of the Cyclical, Recollection, and Affinity Arguments.
- 3 O'Brien (1984) insightfully argues that Plato's dialogues function as sophisticated literary vehicles, addressing different philosophical aims at different stages within a single dialogue and across different dialogues. On this view, the apparent silence regarding the immortality of the soul in Diotima's speech does not amount to a denial of immortality. Rather, the dialogue is deliberately structured to serve distinct purposes at different moments, engaging the reader and directing attention toward what is philosophically most relevant in each context. O'Brien further notes that the dramatic structure of Diotima's speech shifts the reader's attention from immortality as such to the value of immortality. I suggest that a comparable thematic reorientation also occurs in the first half of the *Phaedo*.
- 4 See also Gallop (2002, pp. 88-90), for the influential distinction in contemporary scholarship between the soul conceived as life-principle and the soul conceived as rational principle in Plato.
- 5 All translations of the *Phaedo* are adapted from Gallop (2002).
- 6 Fierro (2001) also clearly distinguishes two different kinds of immortality, suggesting that they differ in value.
- 7 Wolfe (1966) argues that Plato fails to distinguish between "being alive" (not yet dead) and "coming to life" (no longer dead), assuming that the former is equivalent to the latter. However, if "being alive" and "being dead" are taken as polar opposites, then "coming back to life" (72a) seems unable to capture the process of generation, since it appears to imply at least three states (life₁-death-life₂). Robinson (1969) attributes this apparent error to an ambiguity in the Greek. This criticism is compelling if one assumes that the Cyclical Argument is intended to demonstrate the immortality of the individual soul. However, it is possible that Plato commits no such confusion. On my interpretation, the Cyclical Argument specifically addresses the concern about the discontinuity of life itself. Accordingly, "being alive" and "being dead" do not designate two individual states of particular organisms, but rather categorical stages within the larger life-death cycle of the cosmos. They function as polar conditions to which all living beings are subject. In this sense, "coming back to life again" refers precisely to the process of generation between these two cosmic poles: a living cosmos is sustained insofar as individual lives emerge again from death. Once the dialectical context is properly considered, the alleged ambiguity dissolves.
- 8 Ebrey (2023) holds a somewhat similar view, suggesting that the cyclical argument is based on an agreement that does not require Socrates to articulate anything about the nature of the soul.
- 9 On Pythagorean transmigration, see Burkert 1972, esp. p.120-165; Kahn 2001, p.19-32.
- 10 Dixsaut (1991) situates the *Phaedo* against the background of a marginal "Orphic-Pythagorean" current, understood as a syncretic religious-philosophical doctrine emphasizing purification, the soul's imprisonment in the body, and transmigration (cf. pp. 44 ff.). Although she acknowledges the methodological cautions raised by scholars such as Burkert regarding the delimitation of sources, she maintains that Plato draws upon this inherited framework in order to transform it philosophically. In her view, the *Phaedo* invokes tradition not to reproduce it, but to reconfigure its religious motifs within a reflective and dialectical structure (cf. p. 61).
- 11 Simmias and Cebes are often described in the Platonic tradition as associates or students of the Pythagorean philosopher Philolaus of Thebes, reflecting their engagement with doctrines of soul and transmigration characteristic of Pythagorean circles (e.g., Gallop 2002, p. 148). While some scholars question the strength of this association (e.g., Rowe 1991, p. 119), it remains clear that both interlocutors are familiar with doctrines of reincarnation commonly linked to Pythagorean teaching. It is therefore unsurprising that Socrates invokes this framework in addressing Cebes' concern about the extinction of life.
- 12 See also Rowe 1993, p.9-10.
- 13 See Broadie (2001) and Thein (2025, esp. p.75-76), who both resist a rigid substance dualist interpretation of the body-soul relationship in *Phaedo* and suggest that the soul's persistence includes the structured dispositions it has cultivated rather than a purely abstract rational essence. Cf. Bostock, 1986, 119; Ostenfeld, 1987, p.28-29; Eggers, 1995. See also Pakaluk (2003) for an opposing view.
- 14 For a fuller discussion, see Obdrzalek, 2024.

- 15 This is particularly evident in Socrates' discussion of how most people conceive the nature of good and evil. They refrain from vices such as intemperance because they are "afraid of being deprived of further pleasures (Phd. 68d5)." This line of thought can be extended to their conception of death: death is regarded as evil insofar as it deprives one of future pleasures.
- 16 As Broadie (2001) has argued, Plato's dualism is not Cartesian but ethical and teleological: the soul's state reflects its orientation toward or away from bodily life. Cornelli (2015) further emphasizes the plasticity of the Platonic soul, capable of approximating either the corporeal or the intelligible depending on its attachments. See also Fierro, 2013.
- 17 As Long (2019, p.36) suggests, "the continuation of existence is not, in itself, a proper source of comfort; it is essential to show that the soul will somehow be benefited after death".
- 18 Franklin (2005) interprets recollection as a continuing ordinary learning process that underlies common cognition, with philosophical reflection representing its explicit theoretical articulation rather than a separate cognitive faculty.
- 19 For more discussion on how Socrates guides the slave to recollect through ordinary cognitive activities, see Huang, 2025.
- 20 Translation adapted from Nehamas and Woodruff, 1997.
- 21 Svavarsson (2009) identified a crucial feature of the recollection in terms of how it bridges the gap between sensory experiences and philosophical contemplations. In their view, it is the experience of difference between sensibles and the Forms themselves that initiate recollection and contemplation of the Forms.
- 22 Palmer (2021, ch.6) keenly observed Simmias' readiness to accept Socrates' proposition about the existence of Forms such as a Beautiful, a Good, and all other things such as these. Rowe (1993, p.116) also pointed out Simmias enthusiastically shares Socrates' belief about the existence of Forms. There is good reason to believe that Simmias is presented as a representative of a Socratic-Platonic audience.
- 23 See Elton 1997, p.313
- 24 It is a concern whether the text supports reading the visible and invisible as exhaustive ontological categories. At 79a–80b Socrates speaks in explicitly comparative terms, describing the soul as "more like" the invisible rather than categorically identical with it. (e.g., Rowe 1993, p.185; Trabattoni 2023, p.127; Gallop 2002, esp. p.141-142). See also footnote 12 and Cornelli (2019, p. 26-30) on a careful analysis.
- 25 Cf. Palmer, 2021.
- 26 See Robinson (1970, pp. 38-39) on Plato's attempt to combine arguments based on two different conceptions of the soul. However, I disagree that this reflects a mistake arising from an equivocation between the two notions. Rather, I suggest that it is a deliberate and ingenious attempt to reconcile them in order to convey an important ethical lesson.
- 27 This recalls the Philebus (20b-d; 21e-22c; 27b-31b; 59d-67b), where Plato argues that neither pleasure nor intellect alone suffices for the good life; the good life requires both.

Callicles' Critique & the Argumentative Structure of Plato's *Gorgias*

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ABSTRACT

In his great speech in Plato's *Gorgias*, Callicles mounts a critique of Socrates' earlier argument that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. The nature of this critique has not much preoccupied commentators, a neglect that this paper aims to remedy. A second aim of this paper is to address the issue of why Plato returns us, armed with Callicles' critique, to an earlier argument. I argue that Plato sends us back because he intends subsequent discussion to address the critique. In this sense, Callicles' critique is agenda-setting for subsequent discussion. However, this creates a puzzle, for Socrates only directly responds to the critique once and that response fails. Subsequent discussion appears to forget all about the critique as well as the claim that doing injustice is

worse than suffering it. I argue that this appearance is misleading: subsequent discussion does address the critique but does so indirectly. It proceeds by attacking the underlying basis of Callicles' critique, namely, his views on temperance and the good life. I argue that Callicles' views about temperance and the good life shape and inform his critique. By attacking that basis, Socrates responds to the critique and disarms it.

Keywords: *Gorgias*, Callicles, Justice, Temperance

INTRODUCTION

In his great speech or ῥῆσις (482c4-486d1), the third and most able of Socrates' interlocutors in the *Gorgias*, Callicles, expresses in fulsome terms his philosophical outlook. Befitting his protean views, the speech is many things, among them: a critical account of the moral order, a characterization of the distinction between convention (νόμος) and nature (φύσις) as well as a history of the former's ascendance over the latter, and a critique of the life of the φιλόσοφος together with a corresponding commendation of the life of the ῥήτωρ. But the speech is something else as well: a strident critique of Socrates' dialectical behaviour in his engagements with the two previous interlocutors, Gorgias and Polus.

Callicles accuses Socrates of arguing in bad faith against both interlocutors by employing dubious rhetorical techniques – techniques distinctive of the very δημηγόροι of whom Socrates is so critical in the dialogue. Among these techniques is Socrates' conspicuous use of shame to compel his interlocutors to agree to things contrary to their considered beliefs. Callicles' critique of the *Gorgias* exchange is brief and comparatively minor, repeating as it does a critique already expressed by Polus earlier in the dialogue. By contrast, his critical account of the Polus exchange is original to him as well as being more involved and well-developed. This account targets one of the several arguments Socrates deploys against Polus: the argument that doing injustice is worse than suffering it.

Callicles makes a few different points in his critique of that argument, but one line of criticism is particularly powerful and important. It is that Socrates willfully and intentionally misinterprets one of Polus' claims, which enables him to derive a conclusion that he would

not be able to derive otherwise. Indeed, Callicles suggests that Socrates' argument against Polus ceases to be valid once the misinterpretation is corrected and laid bare. This would be a remarkable result, for not only does the conclusion that doing injustice is worse than suffering it have a claim to be one of the most important and central of the entire dialogue, but the argument against Polus is the only argument that seems to be understood by Socrates and Plato as establishing that result.

It is, therefore, surprising that interpreters of the *Gorgias* have not carefully scrutinized Callicles' critique of Socrates' exchange with Polus. One of my aims in this paper is to remedy this neglect. My intention in doing so is not, however, merely to acquire a more precise understanding of Callicles' critique. In Callicles' ῥῆσις, Plato intentionally and conspicuously returns us to a particular earlier argument, but he does so with a twist: we are now armed with Callicles' critique of that argument and primed to see its inadequacies. Why should Plato elect to do this? That is, what is he trying to communicate to his readers by proceeding thus? My second aim in this paper is to address these questions. I shall urge that Plato sends us back to the argument with Callicles' critique in tow because he wishes for us to see subsequent discussion as responding to Callicles' critique. In other words, Callicles' critique sets the agenda for subsequent discussion: it will be geared towards responding to the critique.

The view of Callicles' critique as agenda-setting generates a puzzle, however. For only once in subsequent discussion does Socrates directly respond to Callicles' critique and that response fails. After that failure, Socrates appears to forget all about Callicles' critique and move on to other things, most obviously, the issues of temperance vs. intemperance

and hedonism. Indeed, it looks as though Socrates has forgotten about Callicles' critique altogether. I shall argue that this appearance is misleading. In fact, Socrates *is* responding to Callicles' critique in subsequent discussion, but he is doing so indirectly. Rather than putting forth positive arguments for the conclusion that doing injustice is worse than suffering it, Socrates instead responds to Callicles' critique by attacking its *basis*, that is, the underlying commitments of Callicles that inform and shape his critique. By showing that those underlying commitments are mistaken or false, Socrates in effect disarms Callicles' objection to his argument with Polus and thereby vindicates that argument.

1. SOCRATES VS. POLUS (475A8-C9)

To understand Callicles' critique of Socrates' argument against Polus, it is necessary of course to understand, at least in outline, that argument.

Polus is the second of Socrates' interlocutors in the *Gorgias*. Arrogant, brash, and impulsive – as suggested by his name (463e2) – he repeatedly balks at Socrates' various arguments against him, despite being serially refuted and having little recourse beyond insult and outrage. Among Socrates' several arguments, one in particular deserves emphasis, for it concerns one of the central and most important claims of the entire dialogue; this is Socrates' argument that doing injustice is worse than suffering it – a claim that astonishes and irritates Polus. In reply to Socrates' remark that not only Polus but all men believe the claim, Polus retorts:

And I do believe that I don't, and that no other person does, either. So you'd

take suffering injustice over doing it, would you?

SOCRATES: Yes, and so would you and everyone else.

POLUS: Far from it! I wouldn't, you wouldn't, and nobody else would, either.¹ (474b6-10)

In response, Socrates asks Polus a slightly different question: whether he thinks it's more *shameful* to do injustice than to suffer it, to which Polus replies affirmatively. Socrates then asks: "if doing it is in fact more shameful, isn't it also worse?" (474c8-9); and it is here that Polus demurs, for he is convinced that it is not the case "that the same thing is fine and good or bad and shameful" (474c9-d2). In subsequent argument, Socrates aims to show that Polus is being inconsistent: he cannot coherently maintain that doing injustice is more shameful but not worse than suffering it.

The argument Socrates employs can be fairly briefly and easily stated as follows:

- (A) 1. For all x, y , x is more shameful than y iff x is more painful or worse than y . (475a8-b2)
2. *Doing injustice* is more shameful than *suffering injustice* iff *doing injustice* is more painful or worse than *suffering injustice*. (475b5-8) [from 1]
3. *Doing injustice* is more shameful than *suffering injustice*. (475b3-5)
4. *Doing injustice* is more painful or worse than *suffering injustice*. [from 2-3]
5. *Doing injustice* is not more painful than *suffering injustice*. (475b8-c5)
6. *Doing injustice* is worse than *suffering injustice*. (475c6-9) [from 4-5]

The crucial premises are 1, 3 and 5, for from these premises the conclusion is meant

to follow. Since Polus accepts all three premises, he is forced to the conclusion and thereby revealed to be inconsistent in maintaining that doing injustice is more shameful but not worse than suffering it.

On the face of it, (A) certainly *appears* valid: 2 follows from 1 by universal instantiation; 4 from 2 and 3 by *modus ponens*; and 6 from 4 and 5 by disjunction elimination. But to many interpreters this appearance is misleading. Beginning with Gregory Vlastos' influential article, "Was Polus Refuted?"², there has been much discussion of the validity of the argument with Vlastos, in particular, arguing that it is not valid and that, furthermore, Plato may have been ignorant of this fact. Commentators have rushed to Plato's (and Socrates') defense, urging that once certain ambiguities and misleading modes of expression are corrected, the argument is actually valid, even if it might be problematic in other ways.³

Despite the interest and importance of this debate in the literature, I think that my particular aims in this paper make it possible for me to avoid entering it. The reason is that my interest is not in whether the argument *in itself* is valid or invalid, but rather in how the *characters* themselves receive and understand the argument. For Plato certainly depicts the characters in the *Gorgias* as showing no awareness of the precise issues upon which the Vlastos-inspired debate rests. This is particularly true of Callicles, for while he criticizes and rejects the argument, what forms the basis of his critique is quite removed from what forms the basis of the controversy in the literature.

As I've presented it, (A) is a positive argument for the conclusion that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. But for reasons I have already intimated, this is slightly misleading, for in the text the argument is

deployed somewhat differently. Rather than being a constructive, positive argument for the conclusion, the argument is employed as a negative, destructive argument showing Polus' inconsistency. Socrates succeeds in getting Polus to agree to 1 and 3, which is what enables him to deduce 6; however, Polus is on record as denying 6. Hence, the argument shows an inconsistency in Polus' set of beliefs rather than establishing the truth of the conclusion. The argument shows that Polus must abandon his belief in one of 1, 3, 5 or the negation of 6 to retain consistency; indeed, this appears to be *all* the argument shows. After all, this argument is an instance of Socrates' infamous *elenctic* method: 'refuting' a person's belief by showing that it is inconsistent with their other beliefs. It is interesting, however, that this is not how Socrates understands the argument, as he clearly expresses in summing it up:

I was speaking the truth, then [Ἀληθῆ ἄρα ἐγὼ ἔλεγον], when I said that neither you nor I nor any other person would take doing injustice over suffering it, for it really is worse [κάκιον γὰρ τυγχάνει ὄν]. (475e3-6)

Clearly, Socrates thinks that (A) does not merely show an inconsistency in Polus' set of beliefs, for here he insists that it demonstrates the *truth* of the conclusion; it is on the basis of this argument that we can conclude that doing injustice "really is" worse than suffering it. Now, it is a genuine issue why Socrates (and, behind him, Plato) thinks that this *elenctic* mode of argument establishes the relevant conclusion,⁴ but, in the words of Charles Kahn, "that he does so is plain."⁵

The issue of why Socrates thinks (A) establishes the truth of its conclusion, rather than merely showing the inconsistency of Polus' set

of beliefs, is an important one, but beyond the scope of this paper. What is important for my purposes is, first, that Socrates and Plato behind him seem convinced that the argument does not merely refute Polus, but also establishes that doing injustice is worse than suffering it, and, second, that Socrates and Plato behind him view the argument as of fundamental importance to the entire dialogue. This second point has been persuasively argued by Kahn, who has noted the tremendous “logical and dramatic weight” put upon the argument in the *Gorgias*.⁶ In what follows, I accept Kahn’s point and employ it as a crucial piece of my argument. For if Kahn is right, then Callicles’ critique of (A) attacks one of the most important arguments in the entire dialogue. Clearly, Socrates and Plato have strong motivations therefore to reply to that critique; they cannot let it go unanswered on pain of abandoning this crucial argument altogether.

2. CALLICLES’ CRITIQUE (482E2-483A8)

“Socrates, I think you swagger in your speeches, like a true mob-orator [ὡς ἀληθῶς δημηγόρος ὦν].” (482c4-5) So begins Callicles’ critique of Socrates’ dialectical behaviour in his previous arguments with Polus and Gorgias. The critique has the effect of turning the tables on Socrates, for the latter has just finished describing (481c5-482c3) *Callicles* as evincing pandering behaviour towards the δῆμος, behaviour most distinctive of the δημηγόρος, and now Callicles returns the favor.⁷ But Callicles does not rest easy with vague and general insults of the sort we might expect from the aggressive but crass Polus. Unlike Polus (and, indeed, Gorgias), Callicles is philosophically sophisticated and subtle: he attacks a precise point in Socrates’ previous dialectical interac-

tions, specifically, Socrates’ argument against Polus that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. He levels a quite precise objection to that argument: that Socrates willfully and intentionally misinterprets one of the key claims of the argument. Once the misinterpretation is made manifest, the argument ceases to be valid.

And these, nature and convention [ἢ τε φύσις καὶ ὁ νόμος], are for the most part opposed to each other, so if a person is ashamed and doesn’t dare to say what he thinks, he’s forced to contradict himself. This is in fact the clever trick you’ve thought of, with which you work mischief in your discussions: if a person makes a statement in terms of convention, you slyly question him in terms of nature; if he makes it in terms of nature, you question him in terms of convention. That’s just what happened here, on the question of doing what’s unjust versus suffering it. While Polus meant that doing it is more shameful by convention, you pursued the argument as though he meant by nature. (482e6-483a7)

According to Callicles’ account, Socrates, fully aware of the fact that Polus in (A) 3 meant doing injustice is more shameful by *convention* than suffering it, nevertheless, interpreted Polus as claiming that doing injustice is more shameful by *nature* than suffering it. By itself, this might not seem a problem; after all, it could be that doing injustice is more shameful by nature than suffering it if and only if doing injustice is more shameful by convention than suffering it. However, the latter seems to be precisely what Callicles wishes to deny. For at the outset of this above passage, Callicles says,

“nature and convention...are for the most part opposed.” Indeed, Callicles seems to take this opposition to imply, more precisely, that while doing injustice is more shameful *by convention* than suffering it, it is not more shameful *by nature* than suffering it (483a7-8).

What permitted Socrates to misinterpret Polus' claim in the way he did is the fact that, as stated in (A) 3, Polus' claim was ambiguous, for Polus assents to the claim that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, but that claim does not explicitly state that it is more shameful by convention but not by nature. As Callicles describes Socrates' dialectical malfeasance, in addition to ignoring the fact that Polus meant more shameful by convention but not by nature in (A) 3, Socrates also interpreted (A) 1 (and, consequently, 2) as if it meant more shameful by nature. Now, Callicles does not seem to think that this misinterprets Polus; however, it does cause serious problems for the argument's validity. For it means there is a clear equivocation in the meaning of “more shameful” between premises 1-2 and 3. To see this, we can disambiguate (A) in conformity with Callicles' interpretation of its claims as follows:

- (A') 1. For all x, y , x is more shameful by nature than y iff x is more painful or worse than y .
2. *Doing injustice* is more shameful by nature than *suffering injustice* iff *doing injustice* is more painful or worse than *suffering injustice*.
3. *Doing injustice* is more shameful by convention, but not by nature than *suffering injustice*.
4. *Doing injustice* is more painful or worse than *suffering injustice*.
5. *Doing injustice* is not more painful than *suffering injustice*.

6. *Doing injustice* is worse than *suffering injustice*.

(A') captures how Callicles understands the argument, once ambiguities have been corrected and Socrates' dialectical malfeasance has been exposed. Clearly, (A') is invalid, for 4 no longer follows from 2 and 3, which means the conclusion cannot any longer be derived. With (A) disambiguated as (A'), Polus can cheerfully and, more importantly, consistently assent to claims 1-3 and even 5, but reject the conclusion. In this way, he can maintain that doing injustice is more shameful but not worse than suffering it.

Callicles' critique is quite powerful, as it stands. To be sure, it is dependent on some controversial assumptions, most importantly that doing injustice is more shameful by convention but not by nature than suffering it. Nevertheless, given its assumptions, it does show that Socrates' argument is invalid and so fails to establish its conclusion. This is a striking result, for it shifts the burden of proof in the dialectic from Polus back on to Socrates: he must either respond to the critique or accept it and abandon the argument. In light of the apparent importance of the argument for establishing such a vital result, Socrates is surely compelled to reply.

Is Callicles' account of Polus' misstep accurate? That is, do premises 1-2 and 3 in (A') really more accurately and precisely reflect Polus' understanding than 1-2 and 3 in (A)? Certainly, some scholars⁸ have argued that Callicles' critique accurately diagnoses where Polus went wrong, without necessarily subscribing to my account of Callicles' critique. However, in light of my analysis, I am forced to agree with James Doyle: Callicles almost certainly “overinterprets” (Doyle's word) Polus' agreement.⁹ There is little evidence that Polus

subscribes to the view that nature and convention are opposed or that Polus was tripped up by ambiguities in the argument. After all, as Doyle notes: Callicles' distinction between nature and convention is introduced "as an explanatory *innovation*."¹⁰ At the same time, this aspect of Callicles' critique – whether it correctly captures *Polus*' thinking – seems far less important than the fact that the critique accurately reflects *Callicles*' thinking on the matter. Whether or not Polus was fairly and genuinely persuaded by Socrates' argument, it is clear that Callicles was not and for the precise reasons he adduces.

3. WHY SEND US BACK?

In Callicles' ῥῆσις, Plato references an earlier argument in the dialogue. In so doing, he sends his readers back to that earlier argument. But he does so with a twist: his readers are now armed with Callicles' critique of that argument and primed to see it as inadequate in light of that critique. The effect of this reference to the earlier argument is to place Socrates (and Plato) dialectically on the back-foot: they must respond to the objection or relinquish the argument. Why does Plato elect to do all of this? What is he trying to communicate to his readers in proceeding thus? The obvious, natural, and, I think, correct answer is that Plato wishes to announce to us that subsequent discussion in the *Gorgias* will be devoted, at least in part, to responding to Callicles' critique. In this way, Plato sets the dialectical agenda of subsequent argument in the dialogue. If this, however, is to be more than mere speculation, we need some evidence that Plato is indeed proceeding in conformity with this agenda.

Thankfully, I think we get precisely such evidence in the text. Shortly after Callicles'

ῥῆσις, Socrates embarks on his own ῥῆσις (486e5-488b6), which amounts to a sort of encomium on the virtues of Callicles, his promise as interlocutor, and the likelihood that, working together, they will discover the truth. After this – frankly, overcooked – hymn to Callicles, Socrates gets down to dialectical business and starts by a familiar Socratic tack, inquiring into Callicles' conception of justice. Socrates then deploys the elenchus to refute Callicles' claims; the details of Socrates' argument need not concern us so much as what he concludes:

It's not only by convention, then, that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, or just to have an equal share, but it's so by nature, too. So it looks as though you weren't saying what's true earlier and weren't right to accuse me when you said that convention and nature were opposed to each other and that I, well aware of this, am making mischief in my statements, taking any statement someone makes meant in terms of nature, in terms of convention, and any statement meant in terms of convention, in terms of nature. (489ab)

This makes plain that Socrates' first order of business is to respond to Callicles' critique. He attempts to show here that doing injustice is more shameful by convention *and* nature. If this argument were successful, then Socrates would have effectively replaced premise 3 so as to make (A') valid, thereby shifting the burden of proof back onto Callicles to show that the argument fails. Unfortunately, Callicles is not persuaded and the defense seems to fail, for Callicles insists that Socrates has misunderstood his position. This prompts

further discussion aimed at determining Callicles' actual position, which is apparently adequately achieved at 491c6-d3.

In light of the failure of Socrates' defense against Callicles' critique, we might expect him to take up the task again of defending (A) from that critique. He might proceed in any of a variety of ways but whatever he does, it is natural to suppose that he must secure the conclusion that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. He may do this by repairing or replacing some of the premises of (A) – as he does in the above argument; alternatively, he might cobble together some new premises to show the conclusion nevertheless follows. What is striking is that if one carefully investigates the rest of the *Gorgias*, one finds no obvious instance of any such sort of argument. In fact, any *mention*, let alone argument, regarding doing/suffering injustice disappears for the next 16 or so Stephanus pages (until 508b8-c1). When it is finally mentioned again, one is left scratching one's head:

We must either refute this argument and show that it's not the possession of justice and self-control that makes happy people happy and the possession of evil that makes miserable people miserable, or else, if this is true, we must consider what the consequences are. These consequences are all those previous things, Callicles, the ones about which you asked me whether I was speaking in earnest when I said that a man should be his own accuser, or his son's or his friend's, if he's done anything unjust, and should use oratory for that purpose. Also what you thought Polus was ashamed to concede is true after all, that doing what's unjust is as

much more evil than suffering it as it is more shameful, and that a person who is to be an orator the right way should be just and have expert knowledge of what's just, the point Polus in his turn claimed Gorgias to have agreed to out of shame. (508a8-c3)

This is a puzzling passage, for Socrates here claims that a consequence – presumably a logical consequence – of the claim that justice and self-control make people happy and that the possession of evil makes people miserable is that “doing what's unjust is as much more evil than suffering it as it is more shameful.” Now, it is, to say the least, *far* from clear how the latter follows from the former and Socrates does not bother to explain this. Moreover, there is no obvious evidence in the previous pages of an argument designed to show how the latter follows from the former. Nevertheless, Socrates goes on to insist that the thesis that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it has been established “by iron and adamant arguments” (509a1-2).

Instead of a direct response to Callicles' critique, we get something quite different in the discussion between 491d3 to 508b8. A rough and general itinerary of the discussion might proceed as follows. First, from 491d-494e, we get a discussion of and comparison between the life of temperance, recommended by Socrates, and the life of intemperance, recommended by Callicles. In that discussion, Socrates tries to show the superiority of the life of temperance over intemperance. The discussion then proceeds – from 495a-499b – to the subject of hedonism or the identification of the pleasant and the good, with Callicles defending and Socrates attacking the hedonistic life. Finally, from 499b-508b, the issue of temperance vs. intemperance is raised again

and Socrates argues that temperate life is the best or happiest life while the intemperate life is the worst and the most miserable.

Clearly, then, in the course of the discussion that follows Callicles' critique, there is no explicit reference to the claim that doing injustice is worse than suffering it or that doing injustice is more shameful (whether by convention or nature) than suffering it. Despite the absence of any explicit reference, Socrates appears to think he has *shown* that doing injustice is both more shameful and worse than suffering injustice. We seem to be trapped in a puzzle. On the one hand, we cannot claim that Socrates or Plato merely forgot or decided against providing a response to Callicles' critique in the intervening pages, for Socrates declares more or less explicitly that he *has* provided such a response. On the other hand, we cannot simply accept that Socrates has shown that doing injustice is more shameful or worse than suffering it, for we can find no such arguments in the intervening pages! What, then, are we to do?

There is, I think, a solution to this puzzle, one that depends upon expanding our sense of what an adequate response to Callicles' critique would be. In discussing the absence of arguments related to suffering/doing injustice, I have assumed that any response to Callicles' critique would have to show, somehow, that doing injustice is worse than suffering injustice or, perhaps, that doing injustice is more shameful by nature than suffering it. But this is not the only way Socrates might respond. There is an alternative response that would work as well: Socrates could show that Callicles' critique fails because of the failure of commitments that underly and inform that critique. This might be so in particular if the critique depends upon commitments that Socrates can show are false. If the basis of Callicles'

critique fails, then his critique itself lapses. On this approach, (A) would be defended by showing that the commitments underlying the interpretation of it as (A') are false.

This gives us a new lens through which to examine the puzzling passage we encountered earlier. In that passage, Socrates claimed that a logical consequence of the claim that possession of justice and self-control makes people happy and possession of evil makes them wretched is that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. I pointed out that it is far from clear how the one claim follows from the other. But we now have another way of understanding how this might 'follow.' On this understanding, it is *not* the case that we can derive the one claim from the other. Instead, what Socrates is indicating is that if the first claim is true, then the basis of Callicles' critique of the Polus argument is removed; the critique therefore fails. But if the critique fails, this means that the argument against Polus is vindicated and can remain in effect; the efficacy and cogency of it are not compromised.

More importantly, the approach I am suggesting *also* gives us a new lens through which to examine the intervening pages between 491d3 to 508b8. For now, we should see those pages *not* as offering positive arguments for the claim that doing injustice is worse or more shameful than suffering it. Instead, their function is to attack the basis underlying and informing Callicles' critique of (A). According to this approach, the discussion from 491d3 to 508b8, despite appearances to the contrary, *does* constitute a response to Callicles' critique, but it responds indirectly by attempting to remove the basis of that critique, that is, by arguing that the commitments underlying and informing that critique are false.

In order, therefore, to show that and how 491d8-508b3 attack what I am calling the basis

of Callicles' critique, we need to determine what that basis is and how it underlies and informs the critique. It is to this issue that I turn in the next section.

4. RESPONDING TO CALLICLES' CRITIQUE

The central claim of Callicles' critique is that doing injustice is more shameful by convention, but not by nature, than suffering injustice. This is a twofold claim: first, that doing injustice is more shameful by convention than suffering it and, second, that doing injustice is not more shameful by nature than suffering it. The first claim seems uncontroversial, for all the parties to the debate appear to agree with it; it is, rather, the second claim that occasions dispute and doubt. In light of this dispute, it is natural to ask *why* Callicles is so convinced that doing injustice is not more shameful by nature than suffering it. Partly this rests on how Callicles appears to understand what it is for something to be "more shameful by nature" than something else. For immediately after his critique, Callicles remarks:

For everything more shameful by nature is also worse, like suffering injustice, whereas by convention doing it is more shameful. (483a7-8)

Clearly, therefore, Callicles thinks that doing injustice is not more shameful by nature than suffering it *because* he thinks that suffering it is actually worse than doing it. Callicles' commitment to the latter claim is emphasized by how he goes on in the passage:

No, no man would put up with suffering what's unjust; only a slave would do so, one who is better dead than alive,

who when he's treated unjustly and abused can't protect himself or anyone else he cares about. I believe that the people who institute our conventions are the weak and the many. They do this, and they assign praise and blame with themselves and their own advantage in mind. They're afraid of the more powerful among men, the ones who are capable of having a greater share [πλέον ἔχειν], and so they say that getting more than one's share [τὸ πλεονεκτεῖν] is "shameful" and "unjust," and that doing injustice is trying to get more than one's share [τὸ πλέον τῶν ἄλλων ζητεῖν ἔχειν]. They do this so that those people won't get a greater share [πλέον ἔχωσιν] than they. I think they like getting an equal share, since they are inferior.

These are the reasons why trying to get a greater share than most [τὸ πλέον ζητεῖν ἔχειν] is said to be unjust and shameful by convention and why they call it doing injustice. But I believe that nature itself reveals that it's a just thing for the better man and the more capable man to have a greater share [πλέον ἔχειν] than the worse man and the less capable man. (483a8-d2)

Callicles here further expresses his conviction that suffering injustice is worse than doing injustice, going so far as to claim that suffering injustice is the worst thing there is – so much so that death is preferable to a life of suffering injustice. By contrast, the life of doing injustice is portrayed as good and even just according to nature, though not of course according to convention.

This passage is also helpful because in it Callicles articulates more precisely *what* he

means by doing injustice and suffering injustice. It is clear that he equates *doing injustice* with something like “getting more than one’s fair share”: τὸ πλεονεκτεῖν or τὸ πλεόν ἔχειν.¹¹ Hence, to do injustice is to get or have more than is equitable, while presumably suffering injustice is precisely the opposite: to get *less* than is equitable. In Callicles’ world, it is naturally just for the superior few to get and have more than their equitable share at the expense of the inferior many who thereby have less than their equitable share.

We might expect Socrates to defend himself from Callicles’ critique by attacking his view of justice/injustice, but he does not do so. Nowhere in 491d3 to 508b8 does Socrates explicitly and directly attack the view that doing injustice is good, while suffering injustice is bad, indeed, the worst thing. Nor does he attack the view that doing injustice is getting more than one’s share and suffering it is getting less – indeed, it is natural to suppose that Socrates *agrees* with this characterization of doing/suffering injustice. Instead of addressing Callicles’ view of doing/suffering injustice, Socrates proceeds to depart from a discussion of justice/injustice altogether, preferring to move on to a discussion of temperance. Indeed, the dominant topic of discussion from 491d3 to 508b8 is precisely temperance. Even the two arguments deployed against hedonism at 495a-499b are deployed against a view that Callicles appears to take to *follow* from his elevation of intemperance as a virtue, as Sommerville notes: “Callicles appears to view the limitless pursuit of pleasure as a corollary to his deepest commitment, namely, the view that the superior man ought reject all restraint.”¹² Moreover, while Callicles does eventually abandon his commitment to hedonism, saying that his commitment to it was nothing more than a joke and that he

clearly accepts that some pleasures are better and others worse (499b4-8), it is clear that he never relinquishes his commitment to intemperance, for Socrates still feels obliged to argue against it once Callicles has relinquished his commitment to hedonism.

The turn towards temperance is strikingly abrupt. Socrates begins by trying to further articulate Callicles’ views about the nature of the superior few for whom it is naturally just to do injustice, requesting that Callicles tell him whom he means by the better and the superior and what they are better and superior in (491c4-5). Callicles replies that he means those who are fitting rulers of cities (491c7-8), at which point Socrates raises the question whether these rulers will rule themselves “with a suddenness that causes most commentators to take notice.”¹³ Several questions arise about this abrupt change of course towards temperance: what is its relation to the foregoing discussion of justice/injustice? Why does Socrates shift the discussion in the way he does? Now, it is noteworthy that, while Callicles initially finds it difficult to understand Socrates’ question, when he finally realizes what Socrates is asking – namely, whether the superior few will be temperate – he has no difficulty in seeing the connection to the earlier discussion about justice/injustice:

...this is what’s admirable and just by nature—and I’ll say it to you now with all frankness—that the man who’ll live correctly ought to allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them. And when they are as large as possible, he ought to be competent to devote himself to them by virtue of his bravery and intelligence, and to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite

for at the time. But this isn't possible for the many, I believe; hence, they become detractors of people like this because of the shame they feel, while they conceal their own impotence. And they say that lack of discipline is shameful, as I was saying earlier, and so they enslave men who are better by nature, and while they themselves lack the ability to provide for themselves fulfillment for their pleasures, their own lack of courage leads them to praise self-control and justice [τὴν σωφροσύνην καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην]. As for all those who were either sons of kings to begin with or else naturally competent to secure some position of rule for themselves as tyrants or potentates, what in truth could be more shameful and worse than self-control and justice [σωφροσύνης καὶ δικαιοσύνης] for these people who, although they are free to enjoy good things without any interference, should bring as master upon themselves the convention of the many, their talk, and their criticism? Or how could they exist without becoming miserable under that "admirable" regime of justice and self-control [τῆς δικαιοσύνης καὶ τῆς σωφροσύνης], allotting no greater share to their friends than to their enemies, and in this way "rule" in their cities? Rather, the truth of it, Socrates—the thing you claim to pursue—is like this: wantonness, lack of discipline, and freedom, if available in good supply, are excellence and happiness; as for these other things, these fancy phrases, these contracts of men that go against nature, they're worthless nonsense! (491e6-492c8)

It is natural to focus discussion of this passage on Callicles' elevation of intemperance to a sort of virtue. Certainly, there can be no doubt that he thinks that a good and happy life is one in which an individual encourages her appetites to become as large as possible and employs intelligence and bravery in satisfying them – this is a picture of the happy, good, and virtuous life as precisely the life of unrestrained intemperance, a life of "wantonness, lack of discipline, and freedom."

But there is another aspect of Callicles' discussion worthy of note for our purposes and that is the connection between justice and temperance. Three times in this passage, Callicles yokes together temperance and justice. Indeed, an interpreter could understandably suppose that he identifies the two virtues. But, in fact, there is a weaker reading of his grouping of them together, one that has the benefit of a textual basis. Later in the *Gorgias*, Socrates remarks on an important connection between temperance and justice:

And surely a self-controlled person would do what's appropriate with respect to both gods and human beings. For if he does what's inappropriate, he wouldn't be self-controlled. —That's necessarily how it is. — And of course if he did what's appropriate with respect to human beings, he would be doing what's just, and with respect to gods he would be doing what's pious, and one who does what's just and pious must necessarily be just and pious. —That's so. (507a7-b4)

In this passage, Socrates takes doing what's just to *follow from* temperance: the temperate person will do what is appropriate and that means that in the specific case of relation to other hu-

man beings, she will do what is just. Indeed, on this view, doing what is just is nothing more than behaving temperately in relation to other human beings. Precisely this conception of the relation between justice and temperance seems to inform Callicles' discussion in the passage. Now, it is true that at this stage of the discussion, Callicles is sulking and refuses to participate in Socrates' arguments, but his fundamental objection is to Socrates' view that temperance and justice are virtues, not that temperance and justice are related in the way Socrates suggests. Indeed, nothing in Socrates' characterization of the *relation* between temperance and justice should strike Callicles as inconsistent with his position.

One might wonder, at this point, why I have been emphasizing the connection between justice and temperance. The reason is, I think it explains *why* Socrates (and Plato behind him) shift the discussion to one about temperance. For it is precisely Callicles' views about temperance and intemperance, specifically, his view that temperance is a vice and intemperance a virtue, which underwrite his views about doing and suffering injustice. Recall that doing injustice for Callicles is understood as getting more than one's fair share. I want to suggest that, in the language of the previous passage, getting more than one's fair share is *precisely* what results when one encourages one's appetites to get as large as possible and satisfies them; by contrast, getting less than one's fair share is precisely what results when one's appetites are not satisfied and perhaps even frustrated. In other words, Callicles thinks doing injustice is good and suffering injustice is bad *because* he views the life of intemperance (at least when one's appetites are satisfied) as happy and good and the life of temperance as bad and miserable.

If the previous line of thinking is correct, then the shift to a discussion of the temperate vs. the intemperate life should be seen as an at-

tempt to address the commitments underlying Callicles' critique. To see this, it will help if I briefly draw the various threads of my discussion together. Callicles' critique of (A) partly turns on his contention that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. His conception of doing injustice and suffering injustice is informed by and dependent upon a view he has about what the good life is for a human being. On this view, the best and happiest life for a human being is an intemperate life of maximal appetitive satisfaction, the worst and most miserable life is a temperate one of appetitive frustration. Socrates in 491d3 to 508b8 is concerned to attack specifically Callicles' view of the best and worst lives, precisely by inverting Callicles' conception and showing that, in his words, "it is...by possession of justice and temperance that the happy are happy and that the wretched are...wretched by the possession of vice." In so attacking Callicles' position, however, he attacks the basis of Callicles' critique of (A): it is, after all, this conception of the good, happy life and the bad, miserable one that informs and determines that critique. By attacking the basis of Callicles' critique of (A), Socrates effectively nullifies the critique that it gives rise to. Once that critique has been shown to fail, (A) is thereby vindicated and can remain in force. According to my account, we can now read 491d3 to 508b8 as, in effect, an extended response to Callicles' critique in his ῥῆσις, a response designed to reinstate as legitimate (A) by showing that the critique of it rests on false foundations.

CONCLUSION

One of the central aims of Callicles' rich and varied ῥῆσις is to criticize Socrates' dialectical behaviour in his arguments with previous interlocutors in the dialogue. Callicles'

critique of Socrates' discussion with Polus is particularly pointed and focused, centering as it does on the argument that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. One of my aims in this paper has been to carefully and precisely explain Callicles' critique of this argument. I have also endeavoured to show that the critique should not be treated as an isolated broadside against Socratic methods of argument in the dialogue. For by means of it, Plato returns us to an earlier argument for a claim that is among the most important and central of the entire dialogue. In so doing, Plato primes us to see the discussion following Callicles' ῥῆσις as designed to respond to that critique. However, apart from one isolated argument that conspicuously fails, Socrates does not seem to respond directly to the critique by arguing for the conclusion that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. I argue that the reason we encounter no such argument is that Socrates adopts a different tactic in responding to Callicles' critique. Instead of meeting it head-on and trying to repair or supplement the argument that it criticizes, Socrates proceeds by attacking the basis of the critique in Callicles' deeper commitments. Among these deeper commitments is Callicles' view of the good and happy life as a life of appetite's unrestrained encouragement and fulfillment. In attacking this view, Socrates aims to disarm Callicles' critique by showing that it depends upon a false foundation. In thus proceeding, Socrates is able to vindicate the original argument that doing injustice is worse than suffering it by showing that the Calliclean critique lapses.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 All translations of the text are adapted with occasional alterations from Zeyl 1987 in consultation with Irwin 1979. The Greek text employed is Dodds 1959.
- 2 Vlastos 1967.
- 3 Following Vlastos in the charge of invalidity: Irwin 1979, 157-8 and Santas 1979, 236-9. Arguing instead for validity: Kahn 1983, 87-92, Berman 1991, Johnson 1989, 200-2, and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2017.
- 4 For discussion of the issue specifically in relation to the *Gorgias*, see Kahn 1983, 110-121; for the general issue, see Vlastos 1983.

- 5 Kahn 1983, 110.
- 6 Kahn 1983, 86-7.
- 7 We have here a conspicuous instance of what Doyle 2021, 66 calls “the alter ego theme” in the *Gorgias*. See also Doyle 2021, 63-4.
- 8 See, for instance, Archie 1984 and Johnson 1989, 200-2.
- 9 Doyle 2021, 77.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 For the significance of these phrases and the cognate term *πλεονεξία*, see Balot 2024, 178.
- 12 Sommerville 2014, 240.
- 13 Klosko 1984, 127.

Critón 43b10-11 Πλημμελής: afinación y justicia

Crito 43b10-11 Πλημμελής: attunement and justice

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RESUMEN

Para Platón la música era un elemento indispensable en el desarrollo de la persona. A partir de ello, es común hallar en su obra expresiones como *desafinado*, *desordenado* o *desarmónico* al referirse al alma humana. En *Critón* encuentro que la traducción del vocablo griego *πλημμελής* ha sido imprecisa a lo largo de la historia de la filosofía. Normalmente traducido como absurdo o desconcertante, esta palabra, de corte musical, primeramente significa *fuera de tono* o *desafinado*. La modificación que sugiero, apoyándome en la noción tanto de armonía como de justicia en Platón, permite una lectura más fluida y certera, tanto del diálogo en cuestión, como de la obra entera de Platón.

Palabras clave: Platón, armonía, música, justicia

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ABSTRACT

For Plato, music is a fundamental part of the development of every person. From that idea, it is common to find in his work expressions like *out of tune*, *disordered* or *disharmonic* when speaking about the human soul. In *Crito*, I find that the translations of the Greek word *πλημμελής* have been imprecise throughout the History of Philosophy. Normally, it has been translated as absurd or baffling, this word, which has a musical nuance, primarily means out of tune or off-key. The modification I propose, drawing on the notion of both harmony and justice in Plato, allows for a more fluent and accurate reading, both of the dialogue in question and of Plato's work as a whole.

Keywords: Plato, harmony, music, justice

INTRODUCCIÓN

El uso de la música como herramienta pedagógica en beneficio de la moderación del alma en Platón está bien documentado (Pelosi (2010); Schofield (2023); González Ochoa (1994); Bossi (2008); Grube (1980); Lozano-Vásquez (2012)). No obstante, existe un pasaje en *Critón* al que se le ha prestado poca atención. Me refiero al pasaje aparecido en 43b10-11 donde una palabra considerada como una metáfora musical o como otra cosa puede clarificar la argumentación del propio Sócrates sobre el porqué no debe escaparse de la cárcel. El pasaje es el siguiente:

Καὶ γὰρ ἄν, ὦ Κρίτων, πλημμελὲς εἶη
ἀγανακτεῖν τηλικούτου ὄντα εἰ δεῖ
ἤδη τελευτᾶν.

La traducción que del mismo se ofrece suele ser la siguiente:

Sería absurdo de mi parte, Critón, si a mi edad me irritara porque tengo que morir.

Quisiera apuntar hacia el adjetivo *πλημμελής*, que aquí quedó traducida por *absurdo*. Otras acepciones son: desconcertante, inoportuno, irracional. Ninguno de los traductores que revisé en varios idiomas –inglés, español, alemán y francés–, excepto Gómez Lobo, consideraron la raíz de la palabra como primera opción para traducir. Este vocablo griego, *πλημμελής*, se deriva de este otro, *ἔμμελής*, que significa *en tono, afinado, armonioso*, por lo que el primer sentido de *πλημμελής* es *fuera de tono, desafinado, desarmónico*, y a modo metafórico se sugiere *defectuoso* o *errante*. Como segunda posibilidad el Liddle Scott sugiere *ilícito* o *escandaloso*.

Me sorprende que en ningún caso se advierta al lector sobre la posibilidad de traducir

πλημμελής también como *fuera de tono, desafinado* o *desarmónico*. La razón de mi sorpresa radica en que pienso que *πλημμελής* es más que un recurso literario de Platón en este diálogo. La inclusión de dicha palabra embona mejor con la filosofía de Platón y su apuesta por la música como detonadora de virtudes.

La intención de este trabajo es defender por qué *πλημμελής* debe traducirse como *desafinado* o *fuera de tono* y descartar las otras traducciones, para lo que me propongo demostrar que este uso no sólo es más acertado lingüísticamente, sino filosóficamente atendiendo al contexto moral del que se parte en el mismo diálogo. Para hacerlo, seguiré cuatro líneas de investigación que integraré hacia el final del artículo. La primera es revisar los otros pasajes en la obra de Platón donde utiliza la misma palabra – *πλημμελής* – y verificar el contexto. Segundo, recuperar la noción de música que Platón tiene en sus diálogos tempranos, específicamente lo desarrollado en *Laques* y en *República*, donde música aparece emparejada con la vida virtuosa. En tercer lugar, expondré las razones por las que considero que *desafinado* es una mejor traducción para *πλημμελής* en *Critón*, revisando incluso los distintos modos en que puede interpretarse la expresión *desafinado*. Por último, mostraré que ante los dilemas que el diálogo presenta, *πλημμελής* como *desafinado* es la opción más acertada para comprender la decisión de Sócrates de permanecer en la cárcel aunque su sentencia sea una injusticia.

ESTADO DE LA CUESTIÓN

Además de *Critón*, *πλημμελής* como adjetivo o en su forma verbal (*πλημμελέω*) aparece en otros diálogos. Pondré aquí los pasajes que considero relevantes para apoyar mi propuesta.

En cada uno *πλημμελής* sirve para exponer una situación referida a una falta o exceso de algo. No es un vocablo que Platón haya utilizado mucho, pero cuando lo usa siempre tiene connotaciones musicales, directa o indirectamente.

En *Apología* (22d8), a propósito de documentar las palabras del dios, de que él —Sócrates— es el hombre más sabio de Atenas, refiere que los artesanos caían en desmesura (*πλημμέλεια*) al considerar que sabían lo que no sabían. Es decir, la falta propia de la ignorancia es generar un desorden interno que impide percibir con justicia la realidad. En *Fedón* hay dos casos donde *πλημμελής* es utilizado en conjunto con lo que la voz, las palabras, pueden provocar en las personas. En 115e6 advierte del riesgo de expresarse defectuosamente (*πλημμελής*), mientras que en 117e1 Sócrates habla de la importancia de morir piadosamente (*εὐφημίᾳ*), por lo que es importante que en sus últimos momentos de vida habite el silencio para que los ruidos del llano no desentonen (*πλημμελοῖεν*) este momento.

A propósito del riesgo que conlleva la escritura, en *Fedro* (275e3) habla de cómo reaccionaría ésta si se le tratara destempladamente (*πλημμελούμενος*), es decir, desproporcionadamente. En *República* hay tres ocasiones en donde el vocablo alude a la falta de armonía. En el libro V (451b3) se utiliza *πλημμελής* con ocasión de la preocupación de Sócrates sobre el daño que sus discursos puedan provocar en los oyentes. Si éstos son falsos generarán una distorsión interna, una nota falsa que alterará lo que se diga a continuación. Más adelante, en 480a6 se utiliza como desentonar (*πλημμελήσομεν*) al nombrar como amantes de la opinión en lugar de filósofos a los que no buscan lo Bello en sí. En el libro VI de *República* (491a4) es utilizada como disarmonía en aras del análisis del mal y la perversidad. La corrupción del alma, mediante falsos dis-

cursos, crea una disarmonía (*πλημμελοῦσαι*) en el alma produciendo equivocaciones.

En *Sofista* hay cuatro pasajes (224c7, 242b4, 243a3, 244b4) donde se conserva la misma noción de desorden, desentonación o desafinación, donde, al igual que en el pasaje anterior de *República* Platón establece una asociación entre equivocarse y estar desafinado. En nada desentonaríamos (*οὐδὲν δὴ πλημμελοῖμεν*), queda escrito en *Político* (278e5), al exponer la intención de trasladar lo que se sabe sobre la naturaleza al rey. En *Filebo* (27c1), al hablar de las mezclas entre lo ilimitado y lo limitado Sócrates se pregunta si desentonaría (*πλημμελοίην*) al añadir la generación y causa de la mezcla como cuarto elemento.

En *Timeo* (30a4, 82b5, 92b3) se utiliza como desorden, aunque considerando que ahí se narra la creación del mundo con una clara base de geometría y armonía, bien podrían caer en cada una la noción de desafinado. El padre de este universo quiso que éste pasara de la desafinación a la afinación, de la disarmonía a la armonía, de la desentonación a la entonación, de la discordancia a la concordancia. *Critias* (106b3), en línea con *Timeo*, apela también a lo desafinado, al solicitar que en caso de estar desafinados (*πλημμελοῦντα*) en el relato por venir, sean corregidos por el dios.

Por último, los pasajes hallados en *Leyes* (I 635a5; III 689b7, 691a7; V 731d3; VII 793c1, 795b8, 813c9, 816a7; IX 859e1; X 901b4, 909d5; XII 941b5, 943e3) hacen referencia tanto al error, como a la disonancia, lo desafinado o la ofensa. Al menos en un par de ocasiones (IX 859e1; XII 943e3) se utiliza para hablar sobre la justicia. En VII 816a7, a propósito de la danza, habla de estar fuera de ritmo, de realizar movimientos asíncronos (*πλημμελῶς*). Es la única ocasión en el *corpus* donde tiene este matiz, aunque claro, bien podría también traducirse por desorden.

Tanto el adjetivo *πλημμελής* como el verbo *πλημμελέω* significan, en primer lugar, desafinado y, secundariamente, ofensa, equivocación o desorden. Elegir estos últimos en lugar de la primera opción no es incorrecto. Es totalmente válido. Sin embargo, mi sugerencia es que tras revisar las entradas donde puede rastrearse el vocablo el tema musical está presente. Además, hay un énfasis considerable entre el uso que Platón hace de *πλημμελής* y la asociación que normalmente se establece con la justicia.

ARMONÍA Y VIRTUD

El uso de la música como parte del programa pedagógico de Platón tiene como propósito ayudar al alma a ser moderada (*Rep.* III 404e). Es otra forma de decir que la música trae salud al alma, pues, como Platón cree, la música debe culminar en el amor por la belleza (*Rep.* III 403c). Al atender a los sonidos y melodías correctas, la armonía se implantará en el alma de cualquier persona. Sin embargo, no olvidemos que para los griegos la música tenía que ver con todo lo relacionado con las Musas. Cualquier producción proveniente de las Musas era llamada música, no solo la relacionada con Euterpe. Por eso el inicio del libro III de la *República* comienza analizando los poemas de Homero y Hesíodo, pues la poesía formaba parte de la música. De hecho, las letras se escribían primero y luego venía la melodía; ese era el modo tradicional de componer cualquier cosa relacionada con la música¹.

Si leemos con atención cómo Platón inicia el libro III de la *República*, notamos que al principio no está considerando si los hexámetros de la *Iliada* u *Odisea* son adecuados para fines educativos. Se opone a las palabras, a las frases, a las ideas tomadas de los poemas. Está abordando el contenido moral de algunos

pasajes. Resulta claro que las palabras tienen un impacto más inmediato en una persona que la música. Exceptuando a quienes padecen amusia, todos los demás son capaces de dejarse afectar por la música ya sea con alegría o melancolía. Sí, pero eso no significa que comprendan lo que escuchan. En cambio, pueden leer las letras y compartir las opiniones contenidas en ellas. Platón ve el peligro en esto, pues no es lo mismo escuchar una canción sobre la resiliencia que una sobre la superioridad racial. Una persona que escucha la primera tendría ideas sobre cómo superar la frustración y la adversidad, mientras que quien escucha la segunda empezará a abrazar ideas de odio.

Platón expone un caso para ilustrar su punto. En la *Odisea* (XI, 489), Aquiles afirma que «preferiría, estando en la tierra, trabajar a sueldo para otro, / para un hombre sin suerte, que no tuviera muchos recursos, / más que reinar entre todos los muertos, que han perecido»². Muchos otros pasajes de la *Iliada* y la *Odisea* se usan para exponer el mismo problema. Si la sombra de Aquiles, uno de los héroes griegos más importantes, afirma que prefiere ser siervo en vida antes que rey en el Hades, Platón piensa que esto siembra una idea negativa sobre la muerte. Las consecuencias son temor y rechazo hacia algo inevitable para los humanos. Al hacerlo, también impide el desarrollo de la virtud de la valentía y, como sabemos, esta virtud es esencial para lograr la justicia tanto en el alma como en el Estado. Sin valentía es imposible la justicia.

La edición de los poemas homéricos responde a la preocupación que Platón tiene sobre el impacto de la música en el alma. En el controvertido diálogo³ —*Alcibíades I*— Sócrates anima a Alcibíades a «cuidar de sí mismo». Las palabras de Sócrates son: «sabiendo qué somos, debemos saber cómo cuidarnos (*ἐπιμέλειαν*

ἡμῶν), y si somos ignorantes, no lo sabremos» (129a7-9). Más adelante encontramos que nosotros somos nuestra alma: «Pero puesto que el hombre no es ni su cuerpo ni la unión de ambos [cuerpo y alma], o bien el hombre no existe realmente, o bien el hombre es su alma (τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχὴν)» (130c1-3). Esta es la conclusión a la que Sócrates —y Platón?— llega, y que estará presente en el resto de la obra platónica. Teniendo en mente que somos nuestra alma, podemos continuar con el consejo de cuidarnos, es decir, cuidar de nuestra alma (132c).

Cuidar de algo es cuidar de sus pertenencias. Un hombre se cuida a sí mismo cuando cuida lo que le pertenece (128a), y al hacerlo es capaz de mejorarse (128c). Así como la gimnasia es el arte de cuidar de los pies, debemos encontrar qué arte se relaciona con el cuidado del alma. Para Platón será la filosofía, y como escribe en el *Fedón* (61a3-4): «la filosofía es la más grande música (ὡς φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὐσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς)». Algunos autores, como Burnet (1908, 97-99), ven en esta cita una doctrina pitagórica basada en que la música purifica el alma estableciendo una correlación con la medicina que purifica el cuerpo. Pero esta interpretación ya ha sido rechazada por Shorey (1913, 233) usando un pasaje de *Leyes* y otro de *Laques*.

La otra propuesta para leer la cita del *Fedón* reside precisamente en lo que surge de *Leyes* y *Laques*. Eggers Lan (2006, 131 n.20) es uno de los autores —siguiendo naturalmente a Shorey— que defiende que lo que Platón pretende es establecer la relación entre armonía y virtud. Esto nos lleva a enfatizar el binomio música-virtud, una de las claves principales de la *paideia* platónica.

Como veremos, tanto en *Leyes* como en *Laques* la armonía se asocia con la virtud. En *Leyes* (III 689d6-7) se dice: «la más noble y

la mayor de todas las armonías (συμφωνιῶν) puede decirse verdaderamente que es la mayor sabiduría (σοφία)». Sin armonía no puede alcanzarse la sabiduría. Y Platón añade que quien «vive conforme a la razón» (*Lg.* III 689d7-8) es quien puede armonizar el alma. Líneas antes encontramos una discusión sobre la tensión causada por el conocimiento y la ignorancia, una de las principales preocupaciones de Sócrates. La equivalencia entre ignorancia y vicio es bien conocida en la tradición. Lo que Sócrates entiende por ignorancia no es la ignorancia natural de no saber la velocidad de la luz o la capital de Argentina; es cuando alguien cree saber lo que no sabe. Así, cuando Sócrates —y la mayoría de las veces Platón— habla de la ignorancia como la causa de todos los males, es esto lo que tienen en mente. Ser ignorante significa estar atrapado en un error del que parece imposible escapar por nuestros propios medios, creando un círculo vicioso. Y aquí es donde entra en juego la misión divina de Sócrates. Como se nos dice en la *Apología* (28e ss.), su *daimon* le indicó dedicarse a la filosofía, lo que implicaba examinarse a sí mismo y a los demás. Este examen venía a través de la mayéutica, es decir, cuestionar las propias creencias para iluminar la ignorancia interna.

Volviendo al inicio de esta sección, cuidarse a uno mismo significa examinar las creencias que poseemos. Algunas nunca han sido cuestionadas y pueden estar dañando nuestra alma. Ese sería el caso de pensar que la muerte es lo peor que puede sucederle a alguien, porque de esa creencia surge un cúmulo de ideas que se alimentan del concepto de la muerte como algo terrible. Las palabras de Aquiles en el canto XI de la *Odisea* podrían causar un severo daño en el alma de un joven. Un adulto sano psicológicamente puede leer esas palabras de Aquiles y permanecer sano,

porque ya tiene lo necesario para ver la realidad en su conjunto. Pero alguien que apenas está empezando a comprender cómo funciona la realidad necesita formarse la estructura que le permitirá verla tal como es y no ser dañado por ella. Los poemas, la música con letra, pueden herir el alma, pero también pueden curarla y llevarla al amor por la belleza.

Esto es, exactamente, lo que se dice en *Laques*. En este diálogo, al hablar sobre si Laques ama o no los discursos (λόγων), le dice a Nicías que cuando escucha

un hombre que discurre sobre la virtud o sobre cualquier tipo de sabiduría, que es un verdadero hombre y digno de tal tema, me deleito sobremanera; y comparo al hombre y sus palabras y noto la armonía y correspondencia entre ellos. Y a uno así lo considero el verdadero músico, afinado con una armonía más bella que la de la lira o la de cualquier instrumento agradable (*Laq.* 188c6–d4)⁴.

Creo que esta es la verdadera posición que Platón tiene sobre la tesis del *Fedón*. La filosofía es la música superior porque mediante ella una persona puede alcanzar las virtudes y convertirse en el más noble de los hombres. Las palabras de Laques señalan este punto con precisión. El verdadero músico es quien es capaz de vivir una vida virtuosa. La clave es mostrar la correspondencia y armonía entre el hombre y sus palabras. Pero esto puede malinterpretarse, pues un ladrón también podría vivir bajo este mantra. Un ladrón cree que robar es bueno y sus palabras corresponden a sus actos. ¿Es eso lo que querían decir Laques y Platón con la correspondencia y armonía entre un hombre y sus palabras? La respuesta está en la misma cita. La sabiduría

es la condición para que cualquier virtud sea llamada virtud. En el *Fedón* (68d–69c) esta tesis se refuerza cuando Sócrates explica la moderación y la valentía.

Sócrates le dice a Simmias, al discutir la sabiduría, que «todos excepto los filósofos son valientes por temor y miedo; y sin embargo es claramente ilógico que alguien sea valiente por temor y cobardía» (*Fed.* 68d11-13). Y esto es algo común, según Sócrates, pues cree que el resto de los bien ordenados (κόσμοι), es decir, los virtuosos, no son realmente personas bien ordenadas, sino más bien personas que intercambian deseos por deseos y temores por temores. Este intercambio no tiene nada que ver con ser virtuoso. Lo que la mayoría hace es solo un intercambio de placeres, miedos o deseos, creyendo que lo que hacen es virtuoso. En cambio, Sócrates aclara que no es así.

La condición para que alguien sea virtuoso es actuar usando la sabiduría como guía, pues ésta es la única forma de evitar actuar «por miedo a ser privados de placeres futuros» (*Fed.* 68e5-6). Esta forma de actuar convierte la virtud en un tipo de placer o deseo o miedo. Pero la virtud no puede ser ninguno de ellos, porque es aquello que debe ordenar los placeres, y solo se logra intercambiando los placeres por sabiduría. Sócrates nos dice que así podremos alcanzar «la verdadera valentía, moderación y justicia» (*Fed.* 69b) y la verdadera virtud (ἀληθῆς ἀρετή). Al final, toda persona virtuosa es una persona bien ordenada. Esto puede ser imposible si lo que aprendimos mediante la música en nuestra infancia fue que Aquiles preferiría vivir como esclavo antes que reinar en el Hades. Ese niño, de adulto, intercambiará placeres por placeres y miedos por miedos.

Alguien virtuoso es capaz de vivir según sus palabras y tener en su interior la unidad de la que se habla en *Laques*. Como señala Eggers

Lan (2006, 132 n.2): «para Sócrates pocas cosas son más fundamentales que la adecuación entre nuestras palabras y nuestras acciones». La filosofía es un modo de vida que enseña a todos cómo hacer que esta adecuación suceda. Como sigue Eggers Lan líneas más adelante: «esta armonización entre palabras y actos fue, para él, la esencia de la filosofía». La filosofía como la música superior simplemente significa vivir una vida usando la filosofía como guía principal, de modo que todo lo exterior quede correctamente afinado con el interior de la persona. Aparecerá la armonía.

SÓCRATES SOBRE LA MUERTE

En el *Fedón* nos enfrentamos a una de las ideas más impactantes cuando se lee por primera vez. Me refiero al mensaje que Sócrates quiere que Cebes dé a Eveno: «dile que, si es moderado (σωφρονῆ), me siga lo antes posible» (61b8-c1). En pocas palabras, Sócrates quiere que Eveno lo siga cuanto antes a la muerte, algo macabro, podríamos pensar. ¿Por qué qué alguien desearía seguir a otro en la muerte? Bueno, si eres filósofo, piensa Sócrates, deberías saber por qué. «Un hombre que ha pasado verdaderamente su vida en filosofía se siente confiado al momento de morir» (*Fed.* 63e9-a1). La visión platónica sobre la muerte no es desconocida; de hecho, es bastante familiar. El *Fedón* trata justamente de enlazar una serie de argumentos sobre las pruebas que permitirán a Platón avanzar en su antropología. Pero ¿qué pensaba Sócrates realmente sobre la muerte? La cita tomada al inicio del *Fedón* parece seguir formando parte de la filosofía socrática, pues aparece antes de que la Teoría de las Ideas entre en escena⁵.

Además del *Fedón*, hay al menos otros dos diálogos de los que pueden extraerse ideas

de Sócrates sobre la muerte: la *Apología* y el *Critón*. En la *Apología* usa la muerte para explicar cómo la ignorancia puede ser un mal y conducirnos al vicio:

Temer a la muerte, señores, no es otra cosa que creerse sabio sin serlo; es creer saber lo que no se sabe. Pues nadie sabe si la muerte no es acaso el mayor de los bienes para el hombre, pero la temen como si supieran que es el mayor de los males (*Ap.* 29a4-b1).

Temer a la muerte es ser ignorante, porque implica pensar que sabemos algo que en realidad no sabemos. Esto es crucial. La ignorancia, como se dijo, impedirá que la virtud y la armonía emerjan en el alma de una persona. Esta ignorancia es la que debemos combatir. La mayéutica será la herramienta para abrir el ciclo vicioso causado por la ignorancia. Quien ignora, ignora que ignora. El mecanismo para romper el ciclo es la mayéutica. Nos enfrentamos a una creencia común: el miedo a la muerte. Además de ser consecuencia de la ignorancia, implica una forma de vivir que puede expulsar la virtud de una persona.

Tal como Sócrates la entiende, la muerte es parte de la vida, lo cual significa que una no puede existir sin la otra. Si esto es cierto, entonces lo que pensemos de una afectará a la otra. Si tememos la muerte, en consecuencia, temeremos la vida. Viviremos evitando la muerte en lugar de vivir realmente. Cada decisión tendrá esta creencia como trasfondo. El miedo se convertirá en una parte esencial de la persona. Por lo tanto, la valentía será inalcanzable. Pero sin valentía es imposible ser justo o sabio. Así, la creencia acerca de la muerte definirá inevitablemente nuestra forma de vivir. Aquí es donde debe analizarse el otro momento en que Sócrates habla de la muerte.

Es la cita del *Critón*, ya mencionada en la Introducción de este escrito. La traigo nuevamente:

Καὶ γὰρ ἄν, ὦ Κρίτων, πλημμελὲς εἶη
ἀγανακτεῖν τηλικούτον ὄντα εἰ δεῖ
ἤδη τελευτᾶν.

Sería absurdo de mi parte, Critón, que a mi edad me irritara por tener que morir (*Cr.* 43b10-11).

El contexto es el siguiente. Critón, amigo de Sócrates, lo visita en prisión muy temprano por la mañana. Los guardias lo dejan entrar y encuentra a Sócrates aún dormido. Cuando Sócrates le pregunta por qué no lo despertó, Critón responde que lo dejó dormir porque lo hacía dulcemente, aun con la desgracia que estaba por enfrentar: su muerte inminente. La respuesta de Sócrates es la citada. Parece que Critón no estaba prestando atención a lo que su amigo y maestro dijo en la *Apología*. No hay razón para temer la muerte, pues es algo por lo que todos debemos pasar, y no debemos mantener una idea ignorante al respecto.

Como anuncié al inicio, esta cita es clave para entender el comportamiento de Sócrates y la representación que Platón hace de él, además del de la justicia. Me interesa la palabra *πλημμελής*, pues tiene un significado musical que debe tomarse en cuenta. La traducción tradicional es «absurdo» o «desconcertante», y puede leerse toda la línea como «sería absurdo...». La traducción es correcta; no hay nada malo en traducir *πλημμελής* como absurdo, pues es una acepción válida. Pero quiero centrarme en el hecho de que *πλημμελής* admite otra traducción que ha sido ignorada, pero que creo Platón utilizó deliberadamente. Mi propuesta es traducirla como «desafinado». La idea completa queda: «Sería desafinado... irritarme por tener que morir».

Absurdidad y desafinación no son equivalentes. *Absurdo* implica algo ilógico, inconsistente, irracional. De estas, «inconsistente» podría acercarse a la metáfora musical, pero no abarca la totalidad del concepto, ya que se trata de una inconsistencia racional. En cambio, «desafinado» remite claramente a lo musical. Pero esta traducción no es sencilla. *Desafinado* puede entenderse en dos sentidos. Ser desafinado puede significar estar «alto» o «bajo» en la nota, o bien estar fuera del rango tonal, lo cual solo admite «desafinado» como definición.

Ser desafinado como estar alto significa que una nota, ya sea cantada o ejecutada, está ligeramente por encima del tono correcto; en cambio, estar bajo significa que está por debajo del tono. El tono depende de su frecuencia, es decir, del número de vibraciones por segundo. El otro sentido es romper la melodía, que significa que aunque la nota esté dentro del rango, la ejecución no corresponde al diseño melódico. ¿Qué quiere decir Platón acerca de Sócrates al usar *πλημμελής*? ¿Que no está ni alto ni bajo? ¿O que es melódico? Averigüémoslo. Para ello, incorporo esta nueva gama de sentidos a la traducción para encontrar qué resulta. Las posibilidades son:

- A) Sería absurdo... irritarme si tuviera que morir.
- B) Sería desafinado... irritarme si tuviera que morir.
 - a. Sería estar alto o bajo... irritarme si tuviera que morir.
 - b. Sería no ser melódico... irritarme si tuviera que morir.

Ya descartamos «absurdo», no porque sea incorrecto, sino porque no recoge el aspecto musical del pasaje. Aunque «absurdo» es válido, pierde el sentido pedagógico-musical que

considero Platón busca enfatizar. La opción B requiere analizar B.a y B.b.

B.a traduce *πλημελής* como «alto» o «bajo». Para un instrumento, esto significa estar medio tono por encima o por debajo del resto. ¿Puede decirse que Sócrates está alto o bajo respecto a los atenienses? De cierto modo, sí: si consideramos a los atenienses como instrumentos en una sinfonía, ellos tienen otra afinación. Sócrates evidentemente está en otra tonalidad, sea más alta o más baja que, por ejemplo, Anito, Meleto o los jueces que lo condenaron. Hay falta de correspondencia. Pero si aceptamos esto, significaría que Sócrates está «equivocado» por estar fuera de la afinación general de la ciudad. Y ese no es un mensaje que Platón quiera transmitir acerca del juicio y muerte de Sócrates. De hecho, ese episodio histórico dispara la crítica platónica a la democracia. Como Sócrates dice a Critón: «No debemos considerar lo que la mayoría dice, sino lo que dice el que entiende de lo justo y lo injusto» (*Cr.* 48a5-7). Entonces, B.a no puede ser la interpretación.

¿Y B.b? Allí la desafinación es interna. Ser desafinado implica falta de correspondencia entre lo que uno piensa y lo que uno ejecuta. Es un problema interno del alma. Si Sócrates temiera la muerte, significaría que su creencia sobre ella es incorrecta y está provocando una emoción que rompe la melodía interior. El mecanismo aquí se vincula a los tres principios del alma: razón, fogosidad y apetito. Estar desafinado es perder la correspondencia interior. ¿Por qué el miedo a la muerte rompe la melodía? Porque, como dice la *República*, la valentía es conservar correctamente el criterio sobre qué debe temerse y qué no (*IV*, 429c). Como escribe Adam (1902, 227 n. 429a-430c):

La virtud de la valentía residirá en la clase guerrera. Es debido a su bravura que

llamamos valiente a la ciudad, pues el carácter general de la ciudad en su conjunto no puede determinarse por cualquier valentía o cobardía presente entre los demás. Los soldados, a pesar de toda tentación, se mantendrán fieles a los principios establecidos por la ley respecto a lo que debe y no debe temerse, y lo harán con mayor firmeza porque su formación musical y gimnástica ya los ha preparado para la legislación en cuestión.

La valentía, entonces, es una virtud que reclama conocimiento, uno muy particular, que consiste en saber qué debe temerse y qué no. El miedo, por sí mismo, no es algo que nos ponga fuera de tono. Preguntémoslo: ¿debe temerse la muerte? La respuesta se encuentra en la *Apología*, como se indicó anteriormente. Temer la muerte es ignorancia. Y actuar desde la ignorancia rompe la armonía interior.

Sócrates —y Platón— creen que la muerte es la liberación del alma respecto del cuerpo (*Fed.* 67d). Según la vida vivida, el alma será juzgada y continuará su camino. La muerte no es algo terrible, sino una transición natural. El miedo a la muerte nace de no haber vivido conforme a la virtud. Así, el miedo delata si estamos o no «afinados» en nuestra vida moral.

Al final del *Fedón*, justo al comenzar el mito escatológico, Sócrates recuerda: «Si el alma es inmortal, entonces necesita cuidado (*ἐπιμελείας*), no solo por el tiempo que dura lo que llamamos “vida”, sino por todo el tiempo» (107c1-4). No hacerlo es lo verdaderamente temible. Tanto en Platón como en Jenofonte, Sócrates es retratado como el verdadero músico, aquél que pone en armonía sus palabras con sus actos. Por eso no escapa con Critón, aunque podía hacerlo. Enseñó a seguir la razón, actuar justamente, examinar las creencias.

Quiere morir igual que vivió. Temer la muerte es estar desafinado en el sentido melódico.

La muerte es el catalizador último de la vida moral. Cuando la enfrentamos, surge la verdadera persona. Quien teme la muerte hará lo que sea, al precio que sea, para preservarse, incluso corrompiéndose. Por eso, cuando Critón le propone fugarse, Sócrates le recuerda: «no es vivir, sino vivir bien (εὖ ζῆν) lo que debemos considerar más importante» (Cr. 48b5-6). Esta es la oportunidad que da la muerte: vivir bien. Frente a ella surgen nuestras verdaderas creencias.

Considerando esto, traducir *πλημμελής* como «desafinado», en el sentido B.b, encaja mejor. Creo que Sócrates está diciendo a Critón que no tiene motivo para temer la muerte, pues hacerlo sería propio de alguien «desafinado», es decir, alguien que no ha cuidado de sí mismo ni ha filosofado en su vida. Temer la muerte, como hace Critón, muestra la importancia de la filosofía. Aquella que es la música más alta ayuda a afinar lo que en el alma está desafinado. La traducción sería: «Estaría desafinado, Critón, si a mi edad me perturbara el hecho de tener que morir ahora».

Aunque se menciona la edad de Sócrates, no veo aquí una conexión fuerte. García Novo (1990, 129) cree que es una ironía más de Sócrates poner el peso en su edad, idea con la que discrepo. Ciertamente alguien cercano a los 70 debería aceptar que el tiempo se acaba. Pero el tiempo se acaba desde el nacimiento, y lo único que encuentro es que a una persona mayor le resulta más sencillo aceptar la muerte, no que sólo los ancianos puedan resistir su temor. La consciencia de la vida y la muerte debe llegar temprano, quizá mediante la música. Lo que sí comparto con García Novo es que estamos presenciando la actitud de Sócrates frente a la muerte.

OIKEIOPRAGÍA: SÓCRATES COMO MODELO

Al final del *Fedón*, cuando Sócrates fallece, Platón escribe: «Y ese, Equécrates, fue el final de nuestro compañero, un hombre que, entre los de su tiempo que conocimos, era —así debemos decir— el mejor, también el más sabio y el más justo» (118a15-16). Esta idea también se encuentra en la *Séptima carta* (324e). Las preguntas que deben surgir son: 1) ¿Por qué considera Platón que Sócrates es el más sabio y el más justo de todos los hombres de su tiempo? Y 2) ¿Qué entiende Platón por justicia? Una ayudará a responder la otra. Comencemos examinando la segunda cuestión.

El diálogo para encontrar la respuesta es *República*. El primer libro, también conocido como «Trasímaco»⁶, explora qué es la justicia. Se nos presentan algunas definiciones que deben ser analizadas. Para comprender cómo llega Platón a la conclusión de la justicia como *oikeioprágia*, es importante atender cuatro definiciones encontradas en el libro I. Primero, la definición de Céfalo (DC); segundo, la definición de Polemarco (DP), recogida por Simónides; y las tercera y cuarta definiciones proporcionadas por Trasímaco (DT1 y DT2).

DC: la justicia es decir la verdad y pagar las deudas (331c).

DP: la justicia es hacer el bien a los amigos y el mal a los enemigos (332d).

DT1: la justicia no es otra cosa que el interés del más fuerte (338c).

DT2: la justicia es el interés del gobierno (339a).

Antes de atender estas definiciones, debemos decir algo básico sobre la justicia, para estar en la misma sintonía. La justicia es ἀρετή, es decir, excelencia, pues quien posee

justicia es sabio y bueno (348c; 350c-d; 353e). De momento, la justicia puede ser identificada como una virtud, aunque todavía no como una virtud del alma, puesto que en este punto Platón habla de ἀρετή no solo del alma, sino también de otros objetos como los oídos y los ojos (Adam 1902, 60). Pero afirmar que la justicia es una virtud es suficiente para empezar.

La definición de Céfalo puede dividirse en dos: 1) la justicia es decir la verdad y 2) la justicia es pagar nuestras deudas. Podemos llamarlas DC.1 y DC.2. Decir la verdad encaja como definición de justicia, puesto que mentir es un acto injusto y un vicio. Puede discutirse si decir siempre la verdad es virtuoso, pero lo problemático es *cuándo* decirla, lo cual puede ser imprudente, no porque la verdad no deba ser dicha, sino porque no debería decirse de ese modo, en ese momento, con esas palabras. Esto recuerda el inicio del *Alcibíades I*, cuando Sócrates le dice a Alcibíades que no se había acercado a él antes porque no estaba listo. ¿Listo para qué? Listo para la verdad. Sócrates, como el sabio que dibuja Platón, actúa prudentemente. Esto puede complicarse con la «mentira noble» de la que Platón habla más adelante en *República* (III, 414b-c). Pero como analiza Brisson (2007), la mentira noble es un mito relativo a la constitución de la ciudad platónica que sirve para entenderla y darle unidad según su ideología tripartita⁷. Por su lado, Schofield (2023, 143-144) argumenta que en ese pasaje de *República* Platón no habla explícitamente de mentir como un acto de manipulación, sino de utilizar historias, mitos y otros recursos literarios para inducir a los jóvenes hacia la virtud, incluso si estas narraciones son falsas. La razón de fondo es que la verdad no suele ser aceptada radicalmente cuando se está acostumbrado a la falsedad. El modo de introducir la verdad

en alguien en ese estado epistémico es paulatinamente, con historias y lenguaje para ellos conocido.

DC.2 afirma que la justicia es pagar las deudas. Aunque en principio no parece haber nada incorrecto en esta idea, Platón nos muestra los problemas. Debemos pagar nuestras deudas, sin discusión. Lo que preocupa a Platón es que al pagar una deuda podamos actuar injustamente. El ejemplo es el de devolver un cuchillo a su dueño: es correcto hacerlo, salvo que el dueño lo reclame para cometer un crimen. Si quien tiene el cuchillo lo devuelve sabiendo que será usado para matar, entonces pagar la deuda sería un acto injusto, por dos razones: a) porque proporcionas un arma a alguien furioso para matar, y b) porque te vuelves cómplice del homicidio. Ninguna de las dos puede justificarse como acto virtuoso. Por lo tanto, pagar deudas por sí solo no puede ser considerado justo, ni tampoco decir la verdad. En ambos casos se requiere algo más: sabiduría. Como señala Vallejo (2018, 41), DC nunca podría ser una definición de justicia porque no determina el universal del cual dependen todos los casos.

La segunda definición, DP, sostiene que la justicia consiste en hacer el bien a los amigos y el mal a los enemigos. Lo primero que cabe señalar es que lo que Polemarco expone es simplemente el *ethos* ateniense del siglo V a.C. Esta era la forma en que la gente pensaba y actuaba respecto a la justicia. Esto se encuentra en la poesía griega arcaica como Píndaro (*Odas Píticas* II.8.5), en el teatro como Esquilo (*Coéforas* 123), y en contemporáneos de Platón como Jenofonte (*Recuerdos* II 3.14, 6.35) o Sócrates (*A Demónico* 26), o incluso en diálogos como *Menón* (71e). Estamos presenciando los hábitos de la época de Sócrates⁸. Hábitos que ni Sócrates ni Platón aceptaron. Atender a la justicia como ἀρετή es incompatible con hacer

el mal a los enemigos. Hacer el mal contradice ser bueno, sabio y excelente.

DP puede también entenderse como dar a cada uno lo suyo (Taylor 1937 (rep. 2001), 267), que es la definición de justicia más aceptada en la actualidad. Pero dar a cada quien lo suyo implica que quien hace el bien a sus amigos y el mal a quien le perjudica está otorgando lo que corresponde según esa lógica. Sin embargo, según la idea de justicia como excelencia, esta definición no puede sostenerse, pues se contradice. Hacer el mal a cualquiera, amigo o enemigo, jamás puede ser algo que Sócrates o Platón consideren propio de una buena persona. Hacer el bien a quien nos hace el bien y perjudicar a quien nos hace daño muestra que, en este segundo sentido, la acción no está basada en la ἀρετή, porque ni la persona que devuelve el mal ni la que lo cometió originalmente alcanzarían la excelencia (Vallejo 2018, 43). Sócrates confronta a Polemarco con una pregunta: «¿Es propio de un hombre justo perjudicar (βλάπτειν) a alguien?» (*Rep.* I, 335b2-3).

La justicia como virtud implica dos cosas: virtud interior y virtud que hace virtuosos a otros. DP fracasa por ambas razones: a) la excelencia jamás puede ir acompañada del mal, y b) si tu acción no busca mejorar al otro, no estás actuando con ἀρετή. Platón parece afirmar aquí que es deber de todo ser humano no solo ser excelente en sí mismo, sino hacer excelente a los demás. DP pretende convertir a un injusto en más injusto, y eso es incompatible con ἀρετή⁹.

Pasemos a DT1 y DT2. DT1 afirma que la justicia es el interés del más fuerte; DT2 que es el interés del gobierno. Trasímaco presenta una tesis parecida a la de Calicles en el *Gorgias*¹⁰, vinculando la justicia al poder. Sócrates pregunta si por más fuerte entiende la fuerza física, una idea rechazada por Platón: para él

somos alma, no cuerpo. La fuerza física no puede definir una virtud.

Trasímaco entonces afirma que se refiere a la fuerza de la *polis*, y rápidamente pasa a la idea de que cada gobierno —sea tiránico o democrático— impone las leyes que le convienen (338e). Al final, DT1 y DT2 resultan ser la misma definición, expresada en dos pasos. Pero Sócrates demuestra que ningún gobierno es perfecto, y que, por tanto, también crean leyes que no les convienen. Por lo tanto, obedecer las leyes significa obedecer tanto lo que es como lo que no es del interés del más fuerte. Esto lleva a una contradicción que anula la definición.

Hasta el momento no hemos encontrado una definición de justicia que cumpla la condición mencionada: excelencia (ἀρετή). Tampoco puede ser una τέχνη, pues la técnica por sí misma no es moral: el mejor médico puede curar o matar. Necesitamos otro enfoque.

Sócrates reconoce que la investigación requiere «muy buenos ojos» (ὄξυ βλέπωντος) (*Rep.* II 368c8). Ese análisis más profundo llega en el libro IV. Para Platón el ser humano es una comunidad (κοινωνία) entre cuerpo y alma (*Fed.* 64e-65a). Esta comunidad lucha internamente porque cada componente desea cosas distintas. El alma tiene funciones propias: cuidar, gobernar, deliberar (*Rep.* I 353d). Por eso le corresponde ordenar y equilibrar las necesidades del cuerpo. Para entender la justicia debemos considerar la división tripartita del alma: razón, fogosidad y apetitos. Cada principio tiene una función: la razón guía; la fogosidad apoya a la razón; y los apetitos mantienen la vida. Cuando cada uno cumple su función, hay armonía; cuando no, surge el desorden, la enfermedad y la injusticia.

La propuesta que resuelve los problemas señalados en los primeros libros de *República* es que la justicia es οἰκαιοπραγία (IV 434c8),

es decir, ocuparse de lo propio. «La justicia —afirma Platón— es atender a los propios asuntos (αὐτοῦ πράττειν) y no entrometerse» (IV 433a8-9). ¿Qué significa esto? Implica cumplir la función que corresponde a cada uno. Platón cree que cada persona está naturalmente destinada a una tarea específica, y que la unidad y justicia del Estado dependen de ello. Hacer múltiples labores destruye la *polis*. El *Mito de los metales* lo explica: gobernantes, guardianes y artesanos cumplen funciones naturales necesarias.

Esta concepción orgánica del Estado se aplica al alma: cada principio tiene su tarea. La justicia consiste en que cada parte haga lo que le corresponde. Como sostiene Vallejo (2018, 122): «La justicia significa, por tanto, que cada parte respete sus límites y permita que la racionalidad ejerza su labor de gobierno (ἄρξαντα), estableciendo orden (κοσμήσαντα) y equilibrio (συναρμόσαντα)». Así, el alma alcanza unidad moderada y armonía interna (σώφρονα καὶ ἡρμουςμένον). La justicia se muestra así como trabajo interior, como «la verdadera esencia y preocupación del hombre» (IV 443d1). El que no permite que sus principios internos se entrometan entre sí «ordena su vida interior, es dueño de sí mismo, su propia ley y está en paz consigo» (IV 443d)¹¹.

Arriba señalé que la justicia debe cumplir la condición de excelencia (ἀρετή). Llamándola οἰκαιοπραγία, Sócrates no solo cumple ese requisito, sino que además nos permite entender por qué en el *Critón* πλημμελής debería traducirse como «desafinado». Lo que Sócrates le dice a Critón es que no hay razón para estar desequilibrado, desarmonizado o perturbado por la muerte. Sócrates es, a ojos de Platón, ejemplo de justicia, pero de la justicia que pone al alma en armonía y excelencia. Después de leer el *Critón* con la sugerencia ofrecida al inicio de este trabajo, resulta aún

más claro por qué Sócrates no debe escapar de la cárcel e ir a Tesalia. Hacerlo mostraría que los apetitos dominan sobre su razón, y que su alma está corrompida.

CONCLUSIONES

Sócrates parece estar en sintonía conforme se acerca a sus días finales. Como vimos anteriormente, estar en sintonía significa tener un orden interior y una correspondencia entre todo lo que hay dentro de uno mismo. La virtud es el estado de armonía dentro del alma. Al comienzo de este trabajo anuncié que la importancia de entender πλημμελής como *desafinado* es que remite directamente a tres temas desarrollados en el *Critón*: la vida, la muerte y la justicia.

Comencé revisando algunos pasajes donde Platón se apoya de πλημμελής para explicar algún punto de su filosofía. En ellos pudimos constatar el uso no sólo metafórico, sino literal de este adjetivo o su verbo como algo desafinado, desordenado o desarmonico. Posteriormente, se analizó cómo la virtud y la armonía están ligadas. Allí señalé la importancia de la música —en un sentido amplio— en la formación del alma. Desde cómo las letras pueden hacernos creer en algo virtuoso o en algo vil. El ejemplo utilizado fue el de Aquiles y su afirmación sobre su concepción del reino de los muertos. Al decir que preferiría ser un esclavo vivo antes que rey del Hades, inculca el miedo a la muerte. Quien teme a la muerte es incapaz de desarrollar la valentía. El problema es que sin valentía una persona no podrá desarrollar justicia. La razón es que para cada principio del alma —razón, fogsidad y apetitos— se requiere una virtud para que pueda cumplir adecuadamente su función. Las virtudes son: moderación para los

apetitos, valentía para la fogosidad y sabiduría para la razón (*Rep.* IV 430e-432; 442b-d). La justicia surge como resultado de tener esas tres virtudes, y solo esas tres simultáneamente. Si una falta, o el individuo no posee alguna de ellas, la justicia es imposible.

Temer a la muerte convierte al individuo en alguien que vive una vida no según el criterio socrático de que lo relevante no es vivir, sino vivir bien, es decir, vivir una buena vida, y lo esclaviza al miedo de morir. Ese miedo será la sombra bajo la cual vivirá, temiendo incluso a la propia vida. Pues cualquier concepción que tengamos de la muerte inevitablemente formará nuestra concepción de la vida. Por eso en la *Apología* Sócrates nos invita a pensar la muerte no como algo terrible o malo que nos sucederá, sino a verla tal cual es: un proceso en nuestra existencia, que bien podría ser lo contrario de lo que normalmente se cree. Temer a la muerte puede llevar a cualquiera a cometer cualquier tipo de injusticia.

Por ello, cuando Sócrates dice que «estaría *desafinado* si a su edad se irritara por tener que morir», está proclamando ser verdaderamente un hombre justo. No solo es absurdo irritarse por el hecho de que todos morirán, sino que además desarmoniza a quien se irrita por el hecho de morir. Le quita valentía y, en consecuencia, justicia. Es una persona desordenada por dentro. Entonces, ¿qué se necesita para que una persona esté en sintonía (ἐμμελής)? Vivir filosofando, pues la filosofía es la música más elevada y una preparación para morir. Por eso, en lugar de traicionarse a sí mismo, como piensa Critón que Sócrates hace al no escapar de la cárcel, decide quedarse porque no traicionará los principios por los que vivió, siendo uno de ellos no cometer injusticia en respuesta a una injusticia (*Cr.* 49b). Al actuar de esta forma también hace de Critón una mejor persona.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Sobre este tema recomiendo consultar las obras de Crossley-Holland (2000), Comotti (1986), Gurd (2020), así como la de Von Der Walde (2010), quienes detallan muy bien la relación entre la melodía y la poesía.
- 2 Sigo la traducción de Pedro Tapia.
- 3 Soy consciente de la discusión sobre la autenticidad de este diálogo planteada por Schleiermacher. Dado que el objetivo de este artículo es analizar la traducción de $\pi\lambda\eta\mu\epsilon\lambda\eta\varsigma$ y no determinar si el Alcibíades I es o no un diálogo platónico auténtico, no abordaré esta cuestión. Diré que la relevancia del diálogo radica en que trata temas platónicos con bastante precisión y que el «conócete a ti mismo» es uno de ellos, razón suficiente para que considere este diálogo «espurio» dentro de la argumentación.
- 4 Sigo la traducción de Ute Schmidt.
- 5 Esta es una idea también conocida como «platonismo sin Sócrates» (Vigo 2009, XX). Como señala Eggers Lan (2006, 19-20), existen varias diferencias entre lo que normalmente llamamos el Sócrates histórico y el que está a cargo de la conversación en el Fedón. En esta misma línea encontramos a Guthrie (1990, 329).

- 6 Para una discusión más profunda sobre este tema, véanse (Eggers Lan 1998, 13) y (Vallejo 2018, 35), quienes también reconocen el orden de composición de República del siguiente modo: el libro I escrito alrededor del 390 a. C., justo antes del Gorgias; posteriormente, los libros II-IV y VIII-IX, y finalmente V-VII y el libro X. Si leemos el comienzo del libro VIII justo después de terminar el cuarto, podemos notar la conexión entre ambos, pero más tarde Platón se dio cuenta de que había algunos asuntos sin atender que elaboró en los libros V a VII. Otros autores que consideran esta organización son: (Annas 1981, 7) y (Dorter 2006, ix; 3-8). Por el contrario, Taylor (1937, 264) considera que «no hay nada en el diálogo que apoye alguna de las fantasiosas especulaciones modernas sobre una posible “edición anterior” sin los libros centrales que discuten el carácter y la educación de los “filósofos-reyes”». Guthrie (1990, 422-423) está en sintonía con Taylor.
- 7 Ver Guthrie (1990, 443).
- 8 Como escribe Annas (1981, 34): «Polemárcos representa lo mejor que la justicia tiene que ofrecer al sentido común».
- 9 Como Dorter (2006, 28) señala: «Tanto Céfalo como Polemárcos tratan a la justicia como *technē*, algo que puede lograrse al aprender las normas apropiadas». Sin embargo, Sócrates mostrará que la justicia no puede ser una *technē*, pues entonces podría ser tanto buena como mala. Ver: Taylor (1937 (rep. 2001), 267); Guthrie (1990, 422).
- 10 Ver Annas (1981, 37); Guthrie (1990, 423); Vallejo (2018, 45). Santas (2010, 26) piensa que esto encaja con el retrato que Polo hace de un tirano en Gorgias.
- 11 Para una mayor profundización sobre cómo la virtud representa la salud del alma y la justicia es su medicina, recomiendo el trabajo de Santas (1982, 286-303). En él, analiza los argumentos dados por Sócrates a Calicles en Gorgias, apoyándose también en pasajes de Critón y República. Como recoge Lledó (2015, 89), ya desde un diálogo temprano como Cármenes (162d) aparece la noción de «ocuparse de lo suyo: *ἑαυτοῦ ποιήματα*», aunque ahí lo hace buscando la esencia de la *σωφροσύνη*.

Second Alcibiades 148c-149c: Amun between Spartan *euphemia* and Egyptian silence

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ABSTRACT

This study examines an implicit reference to Egyptian ethics in the *Second Alcibiades*, focusing on the mention of Amun, the Lord of the silent ones. The Egyptian “silent man” parallels the Platonic concept of *euphemia*, extending ritual silence into ethico-political conduct. While the dialogue contrasts *euphemia* and *blasphemia* through Spartan and Athenian behavior, Egyptian texts similarly oppose the “silent” to the “feverish” or “talkative” man. This intercultural parallel suggests a deeper Egyptian influence previously overlooked. Thus, this study explores Egyptian ethics, Greek contact with the Oracle of Amun in Siwa, Plato’s adaptation of *euphemia*, and the implications for the dialogue’s authenticity.

Keywords: *Second Alcibiades*; *euphemia*; silence; Egyptian ethics; Oracle of Amun

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This study aims to highlight an implicit reference to Egyptian ethics found in a passage of the *Second Alcibiades* that mentions the Oracle of Amun. This aspect has not yet been discussed in Platonic studies and therefore represents a gap that requires further attention. The author of the dialogue contrasts Spartan *euphemia* with Athenian pompous sacrifices, indicating that Amun privileges the more reserved attitude typical of the Lacedaemonians (*Alc. II* 149b). The point is that Amun, in Egypt, bears the epithet “Lord of the silent ones,” and the figure of the silent one in Egyptian ethics corresponds well to Plato’s use of the concept of *euphemia*, transposed into a meaning that goes beyond mere religious conduct. While, in the *Second Alcibiades*, εὐφημία and βλασφημία are contrasted and personified, respectively, by Spartan and Athenian attitudes, Egyptian ethics (particularly in the literary genre *sb:yt*, *i.e.*, “instruction”, “teaching”) repeatedly contrasts the silent one with the talkative or feverish one. In both cases, two ethico-political dispositions are set in contrast, presenting an intercultural parallelism that is even more noticeable when we recall several classical accounts indicating that Plato traveled to Egypt.¹ Thus, our aim is to discuss this Egyptian influence that appears in the *Second Alcibiades*, treating it as an autonomous dialogue and leaving aside any references to the *First Alcibiades*, while avoiding any reduction of this discussion to the purely religious aspect. Therefore, this study examines the following points: Egyptian ethics; the contact between classical Greeks and the Oracle of Amun; Plato’s transposition of the concept of *euphemia*; the Egyptian presence in the Libyan oracle; and, finally, a brief consideration of the implications of this parallel for the debate on the authenticity of the *Second Alcibiades*.

WHY AMUN?

Given that this is a dialogue written in Greek which, in depicting the relationship between two Athenians (Alcibiades and Socrates), comments on the military conflict between Athens and Sparta, we must ask ourselves: “*Why Amun?*”. What is the purpose of this Egyptian god in the text? Why did the author of the *Second Alcibiades* choose to point to Egypt when discussing the silent conduct of the Spartans (“τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων εὐφημίαν,” *Alc. II* 149b3), in the midst of war, as a quality valued by this foreign god? In short, the choice of Amun, among so many gods, suggests that there is a reason for it. Some aspect of the cult of Amun is intertwined with the ethico-political conduct (which is not merely religious, given the context of war) advocated as a model of human action by the author of the dialogue. Let us now consider the most relevant passage:

I would like to tell you another story which I once heard from some of my elders. There was a quarrel between the Athenians and the Spartans, and whenever there was a battle, whether by land or sea, our city always came off worse and could never win a victory. The Athenians took this hard, and cast about to discover how they could find relief from their troubles. After discussion they decided to send a delegation to consult Ammon, to ask in particular why the gods granted victory to the Spartans rather than themselves. “We” they said “offer more and finer sacrifices than the rest of the Greeks, and we surpass all others in adorning the temples with emblems, and every year we organize

for the gods' benefit the most solemn and sumptuous processions, spending more money than all the other Greeks put together. But the Spartans have never taken any such pains, and they are so mean to the gods that they regularly sacrifice blemished animals and fall well behind us in the quality of their worship, in spite of being no less wealthy than ourselves." Having said that, they also asked what they should do to be relieved from the evils that beset them. The prophet, no doubt under divine instruction, called them to him and said simply this. "Thus saith Ammon to the Athenians: I prefer the terse Laconic utterance to all the sacrifices of the Greeks." That was all he said; not a word more. (*Alc. II* 148d-149b; transl. by Kenny in Cooper, 1997).

In the above passage, some key points can be identified. The account does not specify when the consultation took place, therefore, it is impossible to date it precisely or to know exactly which conflicts it refers to. However, since Socrates heard this story from his elders, we may infer that it occurred at some point during his childhood or even before his birth, likely between the Greco-Persian Wars and the First Peloponnesian War, in the 5th c. BCE. By that time, the Oracle of Amun at Siwa was already well known to the Greeks, as coins from Cyrene, in Libya, near this oasis, were already being issued (c. 530-480 BCE) depicting Zeus syncretized with Amun (Head, 1887, p. 727; Parke, 1967, p. 203). Furthermore, a statue base (Met Museum, 21.2.65; found in Thebes, Egypt), dating from the 6th c. BCE, attests to the syncretism of Zeus and Amun, that is, "Zeus of Thebes" ("Ζηνὶ Θηβαίω").

Most significantly, in the 5th c. BCE, Euripides refers to the Libyan deserts in *Electra* v. 734, mentioning "the dry lands of Amun [ξηραὶ τ' Ἄμμωνίδες],"² while Herodotus (*Histories* I.46 and II.54) clearly possesses knowledge of the Oracle at Siwa. In other words, when the author of the *Second Alcibiades* refers to an Athenian delegation to the Oracle of Amun ("πέμψαντας πρὸς Ἄμμωνα," *Alc. II* 148e2), this implies a *θεωρία* to a foreign land, namely the Libyan desert, for even though small temples of Amun had been established in classical Greece, the Oracle of Amun remained that of Siwa.³ And what do the Athenians hear from this Oracle? That the god Amun prefers the Spartan *euphemia* to all the offerings of the Athenians ("τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων εὐφημίαν εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ σύμπαντα τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἱερά," *Alc. II* 149b3). Soon after this passage, the dichotomy between these two types of conduct is explained:

It would be a strange and sorry thing if the gods took more account of our gifts and sacrifices than of our souls and whether there is holiness and justice to be found in them. Yes, that is what they care about, I believe, far more than about these extravagant processions and sacrifices offered year by year by states and individuals who may, for all we know, have sinned greatly against gods and men. The gods are not venal, and scorn all these things, as Ammon and his prophet told us. Gods and men of sound mind are more likely to hold justice and wisdom in especial honor; and none are wise and just but those who know how to behave and speak to gods and men. (*Alc. II* 149e-150b; transl. by Kenny in Cooper, 1997).

In sum, the reserved attitude of the Spartans is more valuable in the eyes of the god than the Athenian attempt at bribery⁴ (“ἔδωρούμεθα τοῖς θεοῖς,” *Alc. II* 148e7; “δῶρα,” *Alc. II* 149e2; “ὑπὸ δῶρων,” *Alc. II* 149e4; “πρὸς τὰ δῶρα,” *Alc. II* 149e7) through lavish processions and sacrifices (“πομπάς τε πολυτελεστάτας καὶ σεμνοτάτας,” *Alc. II* 148e8; “τὰς πολυτελεῖς ταύτας πομπάς τε καὶ θυσίας,” *Alc. II* 150a1). Since the gods do not accept bribes (“οὐ δωροδοκοὶ ὄντες,” *Alc. II* 150a4) and despise not only the wealth of these offerings but also the attitude of those who offer them, it is the Spartans who are favored by divine fortune, since they please the god through their ethical conduct, that is, they defeat the Athenians because they are pious, just, prudent, and reasonable people, in addition to being courageous, since they participate in mortal battles. This passage thus points to the ethical virtues⁵ and the qualities that the Greek man must cultivate within himself, which are found in the Spartans and not among the Athenians. The latter are the true losers, for they are defeated not only in battle but also in their own self-improvement, from which they turn away while greedily pursuing a material victory. Thus, by valuing the restrained aspect of Spartan *euphemia*, the Athenians are, in contrast, characterized as βλασφημοί, perpetrators of sumptuous blasphemies, for the god does not hear their prayers and rejects their verbosity, dismissing their sacrifices and even potentially punishing them (“βλασφημοῦντων,” *Alc. II* 149c4; “βλασφημοῦντός,” *Alc. II* 150c4).⁶ However, note that in the last sentence cited above (“τῶν εἰδόντων ἃ δεῖ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν καὶ πρὸς θεοὺς καὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους,” *Alc. II* 150b2), the scope of this ethical achievement is not limited to the individual, nor to the religious sphere. Instead, due to the implications of

the military context, it extends to the realm of political decisions, that is, to human action within society. Consequently, the god in this passage from the *Second Alcibiades*, by refusing bribes and valuing human virtues, determines the victors, namely those who will survive and perpetuate their lineage, thereby establishing an ethical conduct regarding how one ought to act (“πράττειν”) and speak (“λέγειν”) in society.

So why Amun? Why seek a reference in Egypt? Precisely because Amun is an Egyptian god associated with the moral behavior of the “silent man” (*gr*), which resembles the broader discussion of the Spartan *euphemia* that extends beyond the religious sphere into the ethico-political realm, as discussed in the *Second Alcibiades*. Egyptian sources indicate that this god delights in the practice of silence,⁷ which is neither limited to refraining from speaking nor connected to the practice of mysteries,⁸ but is rather characterized by respect for the god through moderate and prudent actions. In other words, this Egyptian “silent one”, in Greek terms, would be akin to the σώφρων or the φρόνιμος, but primarily the εὔφημος, in the broader sense that Plato and the author of this dialogue develop. These actions are carried out in daily life and not merely in relation to the conduct within the temple and toward the god, that is, they possess a meaning that extends beyond the religious and manifests itself in the ethico-political realm of human actions in society.

AMUN AND THE IDEAL OF THE SILENT MAN IN EGYPTIAN ETHICS

Let us examine some examples from Egyptian texts that allow us to perceive the

connection between Amun and the figure of the silent one. First, the most explicit case, which functions as his epithet, appears in a hymn found on the Stela of Nebre: “Amon, the lord of the silent one [*Jmn p3 nb n gr*]” (col. 4).⁹ In another stela from the same period (19th Dynasty), belonging to the scribe Ray, a hymn characterizes Amun-Ra as a god who “lives in truth [*m3ꜥ.t*]” and “loves the silent ones [*gr.w*]”.¹⁰ In general, this is a trait predominantly appreciated by the gods, as appears in the *Chester Beatty Papyrus IV* (verso 5.2): “God loves the silence [*sgr*]”, further referring specifically to Amun: “The god loves the silent one [*gr*] more than him of the loud voice [*q3 hrw*]” (recto 5.8).¹¹ For this reason, a priest of Amun defines himself as the “truly silent [*gr(w) m3ꜥ*] of Thebes, [...] the even-tempered [*qb-srf*]”¹² of the Temple of Amun, the one with a closed mouth [*tmm-r3*].¹³ This autobiographical text reveals that Paenkhemenu bequeathed to eternity his self-portrayal as someone of cool temperament (the opposite of the silent person being the “feverish” or “heated” one), that is, he is one who soothes the heat of conflicts, and ultimately, a peacemaker who calms those who arrive at the temple inflamed with demands, since Amun prefers tranquility and rewards only the silent.

Then, what would be this Egyptian “silent man”? In brief, one could describe him as an idealized ethical figure who serves as a model for human conduct. He is favored by the gods, respected in society, and, through his moderate and prudent behavior, manages to establish himself among the great and important. He is the opposite of the feverish, greedy, and impulsive man who, like every chatterer, talks a lot and does not consider the consequences of his words, since he lacks sound judgment. The action of the silent one does involve literal

silence (avoiding speaking or displaying non-verbal reactions), but it goes far beyond this. It is a posture of restraining negative feelings, of curbing passions, of one who thinks and reflects carefully before acting, ensuring that his word remains in accord with what he feels, since he lives as a truthful person, governed by *m3ꜥ.t*, the most widespread ethico-political concept in Egypt, symbolizing order, righteousness, truth, and justice.¹⁴

Thus, on many occasions, the “silent one” (*gr*) is discussed through a dichotomy with its opposite counterpart, which is represented at times as “hot-tempered” (*t3.w*) and “feverish” (*šmm*), at times as “talkative” (*mdw.tj*), or even as “the hot-mouthed” (*p3 t3-r2*), thereby combining both ideas. For the sake of concision, and aiming merely to illustrate this concept, which has been properly discussed by Cariddi (2023), Gallardo (2025), and Shupak (2009), I will list some short phrases that demonstrate how this dichotomy persisted over millennia and extended into an ethico-political sense: *Maxims of Ptahhotep*: “Be silent [*grzk*] because it is more profitable than chattering” (D365);¹⁵ *Instruction of Amenemope*: “Start no quarrel with the hot-mouthed man [*p3 t3-r2*]” (5.10);¹⁶ “Do not befriend a heated man [*šmm*], Let not a hostile man approach you!” (15.13-14);¹⁷ “Keep your tongue safe from words of detraction” (10.21);¹⁸ *Instruction of a Man for His Son*: “The prosperous man is the one who restrains his mouth [*hnn m r2zf*], since accusations degenerate into words of conflict [*ts.w h3*]” (24.9-10);¹⁹ *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*: “Be patient [*w3h-jbzk*], so that you may know the truth [*m3ꜥ.t*]. Control your desires, so that all may go well in serenity [*gr.w*]” (B1, 241-242);²⁰ *The Teaching for King Merikare*: “One who disseminates talk [*mdw.tj*] is a disrupter of the city. [...] Be proficient in speech [*mdw.t*], so that you may be strong, For the strength

of a king is his tongue” (27-32);²¹ *Instruction of Ankhsheshonq*: “More pleasing is muteness [ἄβῆ] than hastiness of the tongue” (15.16).²²

Thus, the Egyptian “silent man” resembles the ideal represented by the Lacedaemonians in the *Second Alcibiades*, a dialogue that, at 138c, divides men into the μαίνόμενοι (“madmen”, “enraged”, “furious”) and the ὑγιαίνοντες (“healthy”, “sane”, “reasonable”), since in this passage μαίεσθαι (“to rage”) is contrasted with φρονεῖν (“to be prudent”), consequently identifying the Athenians with this enraged and unrestrained figure,²³ similar to the Egyptian “feverish one” (šmm), which likewise carries a medical connotation.²⁴ Between 139c-140b, the author of this dialogue characterizes the majority of Socrates’ fellow citizens as unwise and mad (“ἄφρονας”, “μαίνομένους”), while the reasonable (φρονίμους) are only a few, further discussing certain diseases, including inflammatory conditions that cause fever, thus portraying the Athenians as feverish, arrogant, and irascible (πυρέττειν in 139e, μεγαλοψυχία²⁵ in 140c, ὀργή in 141a). Accordingly, the Athenian is the inflamed person, the sick one, the feverish one.²⁶ By contrast, the Spartan is the one who possesses serenity,²⁷ which is favored by divine fortune; and at 140e, Socrates explains this behavior saying: “the wise [φρονίμους] are those who know what should be done [πράττειν] and said [λέγειν].” So, what is the attitude that Socrates ultimately values in the *Second Alcibiades*? Precisely that of keeping silent (“βέλτιστον εἶναι ἡσυχίαν ἔχειν,” *Alc. II* 150c7), a conduct that resembles the discussion originated in Egypt, since it likewise does not amount merely to keeping the mouth shut. In this way, there is an interplay of oppositions that, even in Greek, reactivates the peculiar Egyptian dichotomy brought by the reference to Amun. In both cases, the conduct that the god prefers is characterized as that of one who lives

justly and with sound judgment, in a healthy manner, in contrast to the maniac, who is sick and unreasonable. Thus, among the various Greek words for silence, the one that most closely resembles the Egyptian ideal of *gr.w* is εὐφημία, precisely because, in Plato, it takes on a meaning beyond religious ritual.

EUPHEMIA BEYOND ETYMOLOGY

The Egyptian concept of the silent man, and its ethical dichotomy, is alluded to in the *Second Alcibiades* through the figure of Amun. It is expressed through a contrast between the behavior of the εὐφημος, represented by the Spartans, and the βλάσφημος, personified by the Athenians. Both terms relate to the concept of εὐφημία and to the verb εὐφημέω, which are ultimately derived from the verb φημί (“to say”) combined with the prefix εὐ (“well”), in the sense of uttering auspicious words. Common in Greek texts, including the Platonic dialogues, the imperative εὐφῆμει is often translated as “Be silent!” or “Hush!”²⁸ However, its actual meaning goes far beyond merely keeping one’s mouth shut, as what must be avoided – and what the imperative magically attempts to prevent in an apotropaic manner – is the utterance of ill-omened words. Such utterances would bring harmful consequences and must therefore be forestalled through an energetic and symbolic ritual that wards off evil. This duality between remaining silent and uttering auspicious words, which pertains to the oral dimension of *euphemia*, is expressed in the tragic poetry of Aeschylus: “I warn you to maintain proper speech, keeping silent where necessary and saying what is appropriate [ὕμῖν δ’ ἐπαινῶ γλώσσαν εὐφημον φέρειν, | σιγᾶν θ’ ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν τὰ καίρια].”²⁹ Nonetheless, εὐφημία is

not restricted to the utterance or non-utterance of words (or the production of noises), but also regulates one's actions and behavior (as in *Alc. II* 150b2, which emphasizes “πράττειν καὶ λέγειν”);³⁰ thus, its meaning extends beyond the more conventional concept of silence (such as that represented by *σιγή* or *σιωπή*):³¹

Because euphemia characterizes an attitude as well as a sense of the potency of language, it entails constraints equivalent to the linguistic reserve in other dimensions of communication: dress, movement, and gesture must be analogously intensified and well omened as well. (Stehle, 2004, p. 130–131).

Although Stehle's (2004) interpretation remains within the realm of religious ritual, especially as expressed in tragic choruses, the categories of “dress, movement, and gesture”, along with knowing what to say and when to remain silent, indicate how moral values interact with the concept of *euphemia*.³² However, as Gödde (2011, p. 315–341) points out,³³ in Plato the meaning of *εὐφημία* extends beyond the religious domain: in ritual, the moral goodness of the worshipers does not matter, whereas in the context of Platonic philosophy *euphemia* becomes associated with the idea of the good and with the criterion of truth. It thus becomes subject to the category of what is or is not correct, thereby permeating the ethico-political sphere. The appropriation of this concept, which originated in religious ritual, is evident in Plato's use of the imperative “*εὐφήμει*,” turning it into a way of challenging the interlocutor's discourse so that it does not stray from the truth (Gödde, 2011, p. 316). This is seen, for instance, in *Gorgias* 469a, where Socrates prevents Polus from holding a false

opinion regarding the discussion of what is just and unjust. But, above all, when, in *Laws* V 735e–736a, Plato employs “*δι' εὐφημίας*” as a kind of euphemism for colonization, a solution regarded as a “milder purge” to eliminate the evil members of a society, who would be akin to “a disease that has developed in the body politic”.³⁴

Moreover, whereas the traditional notion of *euphemia* invokes a special state, distinct from everyday life, where sacredness is performed only on rare occasions (Stehle, 2004, p. 129), in Plato, on the other hand, this attitude of connection with the divine becomes a standard of perfection that the philosopher must pursue on a daily basis. This is because the ideal of *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ* stipulates that “a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just [*δίκαιον*] and pious [*ῥσιον*], with understanding [*φρονήσεως*]” (*Theaetetus* 176a–b).³⁵ In other words, the philosopher must practice the same virtues that Amun values in the Spartan *euphemia*, virtues manifested in daily life and not merely during sacred rites, as in the passage analyzed above (*Alc. II* 149e–150b). Thus, for the author of the *Second Alcibiades*, *euphemia* aligns with the broader projection into the ethico-political sphere that we find in Plato.

With regard to the conceptual intersection discussed in this study, it is clear that the meaning of *gr.w*, implied by the mention of Amun³⁶ in the *Second Alcibiades*, reinforces the shift in the meaning of *εὐφημία* toward the ethico-political domain. This occurs both through the context of the military conflict and through the god's favored conduct (which ensures victory in battle), namely, that of the man of virtuous character. Considering that the conduct of the “silent one” from Egypt is,

above all, a practice of *m3:t* (personified by a goddess, Maat), that is, an expression of conscious and measured deliberation regarding speech and action, its scope likewise extends beyond the religious realm and is inherently ethico-political. It is ethical insofar as it concerns human development in accordance with esteemed moral virtues; and political since these actions impact society and everyday human relations. Therefore, the religious figure of Amun, both in the *Second Alcibiades* and in its Egyptian context, unites social practice and personal development through a key concept, whether *gr.w* in Egypt or εὐφημία in the expanded sense as developed by the author of this dialogue. Furthermore, in both cases, these concepts are not limited to the narrowest sense of silence as the absence of sound (voice or noise), nor to any initiatory silence associated with the mysteries or arising from the ineffable; rather, they constitute a thoughtful and deliberate practice that permeates both speech and action (*Alc. II* 150b).

A BRIEF EXCURSUS ON THE ORACLE OF AMUN BETWEEN EGYPT AND LIBYA

The Oracle of Amun is situated on the hill of Aghurmi in the Siwa Oasis, a region of ancient Libya that is now part of modern-day Egypt and which only became an Egyptian nome during the Roman period.³⁷ This temple was founded in the 6th c. BCE by the Egyptian king Amasis,³⁸ whom Herodotus (*Histories* II.178) describes as a philhellene. Moreover, Amun was the principal Egyptian demiurgic god of the Theban cosmogony, and the archaeological evidence from the temple housing the Siwa Oracle indicates that, during the Archaic and Classical Greek periods, this

Amun is, more specifically, Amun-Ra, in his ram-horned form, an iconography typically associated with his cult in Thebes in Egypt, and who was syncretized with Zeus by the Greeks of Cyrene in Libya.³⁹

In sum, although the Oracle was located in Libya at that time, the cultural milieu of the temple was Egyptian in orientation – a fact reflected even in the mythical origins recounted by Herodotus in his *Histories*.⁴⁰ By stating this, I wish to dismiss any oversimplified objection that this reference to Amun would not reflect Egyptian ethics simply because the Oracle is located in Siwa, a territory that at the time belonged to the Libyans. Fakhry (1944, p. 42), the leading archaeologist to work in that region, is categorical in stating that the “Oracle of Amun at Siwa was a branch of that of Thebes.” The Oracle of Siwa thus reveals an intercultural environment, defined, above all, by the prevalence of Egyptian theology, closely aligned with the ideology stemming from the great temple of Amun (which had housed an oracle since the time of Hatshepsut) at Karnak, in Theban Egypt (Waset).⁴¹

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS ON THE *SECOND ALCIBIADES*' AUTHENTICITY

The *Second Alcibiades* has remained on the margins of Platonic studies, since the prevailing view is that it is inauthentic and, for that reason, it is often not seriously discussed. For example, some editors omit it from their collections of Platonic works, and others refer to the *First Alcibiades* simply as *Alcibiades*, thereby completely silencing this other text.⁴² Even the designation as the “second” already reflects a judgment that has been passed down, as it is

positioned as secondary, both in quality and chronology, to the “first,” which is regarded as more authentic and is therefore more widely debated. Consequently, the mention of Amun and the connection it establishes with Egyptian thought has not been considered a valid hypothesis worthy of debate. There is, therefore, a genuine novelty here that merits more thorough discussion, since, as this article shows, there is a wider context that has not yet been properly explored. This is particularly true when one recognizes that this neglect implies a double devaluation: on the one hand, the dialogue is underestimated due to the consensus that considers it inauthentic; on the other, Eurocentric assumptions contribute to the devaluation of Egyptian texts in philosophy, consequently hindering hypotheses such as this from being taken seriously.

However, the passages discussed throughout this study show that the reference to Amun in the *Second Alcibiades* is neither meaningless nor a frivolous literary embellishment. After all, the Egyptian concept of *gr.w*, praised by Amun, reinforces the serenity of Spartan *euphemia* in daily life.⁴³ This argumentative approach draws on knowledge of Egyptian ethics, which establishes the “silent man” as the ideal to be followed by those who cultivate wisdom. Furthermore, it is connected to Amun, the supreme god and demiurge of the Theban cosmogony, to whom Plato makes an implicit reference when he mentions “the great city of the upper region, which the Greeks call the Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon” (*Phaedrus* 274d).⁴⁴ Thus, beyond merely imitating Platonic stylistic mannerisms and philosophical themes, the author of the *Second Alcibiades* would also be someone well versed in Egyptian philosophical thought, a subject with which Plato shows familiarity, as

evidenced by several ancient accounts claiming he studied there.⁴⁵

Even if the mention of Amun demonstrates knowledge of Egyptian ethics, this fact alone does not, in itself, corroborate the authenticity of the entire *Second Alcibiades*. However, between the opposing poles of the inauthentic and the authentic, we should consider the possibility that it is a reconstituted dialogue, containing core sections of Platonic authorship alongside other parts that were later reworked (perhaps due to the poor condition of the papyrus or wax tablets), resulting in the adoption of a later vocabulary, or even as an attempt, still within the Academy, to unify draft passages set aside by Plato himself, which were only reassembled into a complete text at a later date by one of his own disciples. After all, the alternative would be to accept the existence of a copycat who knew Plato’s philosophy and prose style, as well as his vocabulary and even Egyptian thought, so thoroughly as to be mistaken for the master himself. I believe that not even Eudoxus of Cnidus⁴⁶ would be capable of such an achievement, especially since we have no record of an *Alcibiades* written by him. In sum, the simplest solution would be to move away from the prevailing duality (whether entirely authentic or not), and reconsider the possibility that this dialogue is a draft abandoned by the original author and reworked by a member of the Academy.⁴⁷ Such an approach would satisfy both the critics who dismiss the dialogue as inauthentic and the tradition that has preserved it in the *corpus Platonicum*, by reconciling these positions under the assumption that the text contains original Platonic elements alongside later deviations. Considering that details regarding the transmission of this dialogue from the Academy to the Library of Alexandria are scarce, it is preferable to avoid categorical judgments. In this respect,

the discussion presented here, concerning the Egyptian ethical assumptions related to the role of Amun in the *Second Alcibiades*, serves to raise new questions not yet addressed in Platonic studies.

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- 3 Greek presence in Siwa predates the narrative date of this dialogue (5th c. BCE). In Plato's time, incursions into Libya to consult Amun were relatively commonplace. Consequently, there is no reason to invoke Alexander's famous visit to this oracle as a justification for the inauthenticity of the *Second Alcibiades* (see Tarrant, 2023, p. 127-128; Reale, 2015, p. 43-45). Amun's popularity and the expeditions to his Libyan oracle were in the intellectual horizon of a 4th-century BCE Greek, such as Plato; it is thus unnecessary to impose the Hellenistic period as the background for the events narrated in the dialogue. Furthermore, Plutarch (*Life of Nicias* 14.5-7) states that Alcibiades consulted the Oracle of Siwa. See also the inscription *IG II² 1642* (dated no later than c. 360 BCE), which records in the Parthenon that θεωρίαι were sent to Siwa (possibly as a later dedication); notably, Callias, son of Telocles, the brother-in-law of Andocides and an associate of Alcibiades in the mutilation of the Hermae, appears as a θεωρός sent to Amun in Siwa (Woodward, 1962). There was even a trireme dedicated to religious expeditions named Ἄμμωνίς (Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 61; frag. 443 Rose), and *IG II² 338* attest the existence of a temple of Amun in Piraeus during the 4th c. BCE.
- 4 Both "gifts" and "bribes" are possible translations for δῶρα. On bribery, see Harvey (1985, p. 90-91). Ephorus of Cyme (*FGrH* 70 F 206) reports that the Spartan general Lysander attempted to bribe the Oracle of Amun with gold.
- 5 In this passage, the following terms appear: "ἴσθιος καὶ δίκαιος", "τοῖς νοῦν ἔχουσι", "δικαιοσύνη", "φρόνησις"; note how similar they are to the ἀρεταὶ esteemed by Plato.
- 6 In the *Second Alcibiades*, it is necessary to have knowledge of what is best prior to making a prayer (*Alc. II* 146d-e; see Reale, 2015, p. 57-61), thus avoiding praying for evil thinking it is good (*Alc. II* 148b). Consequently, the worst blasphemy would be praying hastily and without any prudence, since such an unreasonable attitude could lead to divine penalties (*Alc. II* 150c-d). For this reason, Alcibiades accepts Socrates' advice and refrains from offering a sacrifice at the end of the dialogue (*Alc. II* 151a).
- 7 In Egyptian ethics, silence is "gr.w," with variations such as "gr," "sgr," or even "gr(w) ms," that is, "truly silent" or "true silence"; see Gallardo (2025, p. 4); Shupak (2009, p. 249). An important observation to highlight the ethical nature of gr.w was made by Araújo (2000, p. 200-201), who chose to translate this Egyptian concept as "serenity," identifying a parallel with the Greek virtue of temperance (σωφροσύνη), which was also noted by Lichtheim (1997, p. 6-7, 87), who states that the Egyptian silent one is essentially the σῶφρων. The concept of the silent one is also expressed by similar words, such as "calm" (hr.w); see Shupak (2009, p. 246-247). Note that in *Alc. II* 149a-b, the phrase "ἄλλο μὲν οὐθὲν

ENDNOTES

- 1 For these accounts, see Svoboda (1952).
 2 My transl.; cf. Denniston (1964, p. 142).

- ἀποκριθῆναι τὸν προφήτην – τὸν γὰρ θεὸν οὐκ ἔάν
 δηλὸν ὅτι – καλέσαντα δὲ αὐτόν” indicates that the
 Oracle’s prophet, acting under Amun’s guidance,
 pauses before delivering a concise response, thereby
 exemplifying the prudent attitude of the silent man;
 see Reale (2015, p. 167) for a more literal translation.
- 8 On the theme of silence in Plato and other Greeks,
 such as Aeschines of Sphettus (one of the Minor
 Socratics), the Orphics, and the Pythagoreans, see
 Bernabé, 2007; Moriani, 1988; Pentassuglio, 2019;
 Petit, 1997. However, even when these works discuss
 different types of silence (relating to keeping quiet,
 self-control, the ineffable, religious mystery and
 rites, or the concealment from the uninitiated), they
 focus primarily on silence as the result of σιγᾶω and
 σιωπάω. In Plato, this type of silence is ambivalent,
 oscillating between positive and negative values.
 However, none of these studies correlate the theme
 of *euphemia* with the Egyptian ethics of the “silent
 man,” even though both Orpheus and Pythagoras
 are reported in various classical accounts to have
 visited Egypt. On the other hand, Aeschines of
 Sphettus does not figure among the philosophers
 said to have traveled to the Nile, thus, his absence
 reinforces the possibility that a similar valuation of
 silence was already present in the historical Socrates
 himself (independently of the Platonic character),
 suggesting a connection to Pythagorean and Orphic
 thought, and thereby, indirectly, to Egypt. Also, Xe-
 nophon, who served as a mercenary in the Persian
 army during the interval between the two periods
 of Achaemenid rule in Egypt, demonstrates how the
 Spartan education relates to the practice of silence
 (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 3.5; Pentas-
 suglio, 2019, p. 9-10); while Pausanias (*Description
 of Greece* III, 18.3) observes that among the Greeks,
 the Spartans were the ones who most frequently
 consulted the Oracle of Siwa, where Amun, the god
 of the silent ones, reigns.
- 9 Berlin Museum, 20377; transl. Wentz in Simpson
 (2003, p. 285). The translation of this epithet varies,
 as it may derive from *sgr*, a causative verb mean-
 ing “to make silent.” Thus it has a dual meaning:
 “lord of the silent ones” (*nb gr.w*; or “silent,” in the
 singular, *gr*) and “lord of silence,” since the suffix *.w*
 indicates both the plural and the substantivization
 of an abstract concept (and may even be omitted).
 The epithet is also attributed to other deities, such
 as Wepwawet and Osiris, being associated with the
 realm of the dead, since the afterlife necropolis can
 also be called *Jgr.t*, “the land of silence.” However,
 this interpretation is insufficient, as it ignores the
 ethical aspect of the judgment, in which the dead
 justified in *mꜣ.t* (the “true of voice”, *mꜣ.t-ḥrw*) is one
 who lived in righteousness, thus personifying the
 conduct of the “silent one.” A similar concept is
 implicit in the name of the goddess Meretseger (“she
 who loves silence,” *Mr.t-sgr*). As far as our context is
 concerned, Amun is the god of the silent ones (or of
 silence), as well as an oracular god of great prestige
 among the Greeks, to whom Athenian expeditions
 consulted, as attested in the *Second Alcibiades* itself.
- 10 Cairo Museum CG917; my transl., based on Ass-
 mann (1980, p. 2-3); Cariddi (2023, p. 84).
- 11 British Museum EA10684; transl. Shupak (2009, p.
 255); see also Cariddi (2023, p. 72); Gardiner (1935,
 p. 30, 42).
- 12 Literally “cool temperature”, i.e. the one of a calm,
 cool disposition.
- 13 Text #55, col. 15-17, found in Paenkhemenū’s tomb
 (TT 68); 20th Din.; my transl., based on Cariddi
 (2023, p. 82); Seyfried (1991, p. 62-65).
- 14 According to Hornung (1992, p. 131-145), *mꜣ.t* is the
 basis of life from a social perspective, requiring in-
 dividuals to speak and act in accordance with it, as
 only proper behavior in daily life can ensure order
 in the world. One of the most significant texts on
 this concept, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, urges
 us: “Speak Ma’at! Perform Ma’at!” (B1, 319; transl.
 Tobin in Simpson, 2003, p. 42). Stephens (2016)
 argues that the political system of the *Republic* is a
 “reworking” of this Egyptian concept of justice.
- 15 Transl. Shupak (2009, p. 247).
- 16 Transl. Shupak (2009, p. 251).
- 17 Transl. Shupak (2009, p. 253).
- 18 Transl. Simpson (2003, p. 231).
- 19 My transl., based on Cariddi (2023, p. 70); note that
 ḥꜣ has the proper sense of “battle”, “combat”. We
 must also recall the importance of legal proceed-
 ings in Athens and the heated debates within the
 Assembly, which often triggered wars and military
 conflicts.
- 20 My transl., based on the transliteration from the
Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae.
- 21 Transl. Tobin in Simpson (2003, p. 155).
- 22 Transl. Ritner in Simpson (2003, p. 515), with a slight
 modification: “muteness” instead of “dumbness”, to
 avoid ambiguity; see also Gallardo (2025, p. 14).
- 23 Plato is critical of Athens’ military greed, which is
 evident in the Atlantis myth.
- 24 The term *šmm* is attested in Egyptian medical
 papyri (such as the *Edwin Smith Papyrus*, Diagnosis
 XIV), but it becomes a metaphor in the ethi-
 cal teachings. In Greek medicine, there is also a
 connection between the feverish and the one with
 an unbalanced temperament; see Galen, *The soul’s
 traits depend on bodily temperament* 777k, 804k;
 Aristotle, *Problems* XXX.1. Given the delirium and
 mental confusion resulting from high fever, it is
 not difficult to understand the transition from the
 physical illness to the metaphorical meaning. In
 contrast, the silent one is healthy, for he is “cool-
 tempered” and “cold-bellied” (Shupak, 2009, p. 247).
- 25 Note that μεγαλοψυχία (“high-mindedness”, but
 here in negative connotation: “arrogance”) is some-
 what rare within the *corpus platonicum* (attested
 only in *Alc. II* 150c8 and *Def.* 412e9, where it carries
 a positive meaning); however, it resembles the

- Egyptian word *ἡ-jb* (the “conceited-one,” or literally, “great of heart”). In this context, both *jb* (heart) and *ψυχή* show an equivalence as the locus of human interiority.
- 26 Alcibiades is described by Aeschines of Sphettus (SSR, VI.A.42) as an unreasonable sick man: “a violent high fever [πῦρ] seized him, further clouding his judgment” (my transl.). However, within the dramatic time of the *Second Alcibiades*, Alcibiades is still young and receptive to Socrates, i.e., he does not embody the figure of the feverish man. Nevertheless, this textual composition was necessarily written after his youth, foreshadowing his future personification of a madman (*Alc. II* 150c-e) who inflicted damage on Athens with his expedition to Sicily. In *Republic II* 372e-374a, Plato depicts a sick and inflamed city (“φλεγμαινουσάν πόλιν”), using terms related to Hippocratic medicine, a description that could correspond to the Athens of his time, which sought to acquire luxurious goods through war.
- 27 In *Protagoras* 343a-c, Plato praises the wisdom found in the laconic nature of Spartan culture.
- 28 Cf. *Alc. II* 143d2; *Hipparch.* 228b1; *Euthd.* 301a7, 302c3; *Prt.* 330d7; *Grg.* 469a2; *Men.* 91c1; *R. I* 329c2, VI 509a9; *Lg.* III 696c1, X 907a1. The scholium on *Grg.* 469a explains what this imperative would mean: “Silence! Be quiet, do not chatter [εὐφήμει. σιώπα, μὴ ἀκαρολόγει]” (my transl.). Obviously, there is also the plural εὐφημεῖτε. See Stehle (2004, p. 126) regarding this more traditional meaning of auspicious speech that prevents someone from continuing to utter something offensive.
- 29 Aeschylus, *Libation bearers* v. 581-582; transl. Brown (2018, p. 123). Gödde (2011, p. 11) regards these verses as a definition of *euphemia*.
- 30 The correspondence between action and speech also appears in the *Instruction of Amenemope* (13.10-14): “Do not converse falsely with a man, | For it is the abomination of God. | Do not separate your mind from your tongue”; transl. Simpson (2003, p. 233). This suggests that both must be in harmony, as they originate in the reflection within the heart-*jb* (equivalent to the modern concept of the mind and Plato’s λογιστικόν).
- 31 Bernabé (2007) highlights that *σιγή* refers to silence as the absence of noise, while *σωπή* indicates the speaker’s deliberate choice to remain silent, even though their meanings overlap in dictionaries.
- 32 Compare this with *Laws VII* 800b-e, where the Athenian comments on blasphemy in choral performances and emphasizes the necessity of defining good models.
- 33 Cf. Stehle (2014) for a critique of Gödde (2011).
- 34 Transl. Saunders in Cooper, 1997; see Gödde (2011, p. 331).
- 35 Transl. Levett in Cooper, 1997.
- 36 In *Phaedrus*, there is a reference to a certain prophecy of Amun concerning the solemn silence of writing (*Phdr.* 275c8: “Ἀμμωνος μαντεῖαν”; *Phdr.* 275c8: “σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾶ”).
- 37 According to Helck (1974, p. 130-131), oasis administration did not have a fixed status, but varied according to the political and administrative convenience of the moment; in the case of Siwa, it was only during the Roman period that it was recognized as a nome.
- 38 Amasis’ cartouche can be seen on the mural depicting the pharaoh who founded the Oracle standing before Egyptian gods (Fakhry, 1944, p. 91).
- 39 See Parker (1967, p. 194-241); Fakhry (1944, p. 90-95).
- 40 In *Histories II*.54-55, Herodotus reports what he heard from the priests of Amun in Thebes (the Theban Zeus) and from the priestesses of Dodona, suggesting an Egyptian origin for the Libyan Oracle. In *Laws V* 738b-c, Plato mentions the three great oracles: Delphi, Dodona, and Amun.
- 41 The oasis of Siwa lies between Cyrene and the Nile, at a time when the Greeks were seeking to expand into Libyan territory, leading to a conflict that culminated in Amasis’ rise to the throne shortly thereafter. His predecessor, Apries, was reluctant to rely on Greek mercenaries (mostly Ionians) and thus led Egyptian troops against Cyrene in support of the Libyans, who were allied with Egypt and threatened by Greek expansion. However, the defeat in this campaign proved decisive: Amasis, then merely a general under Apries, led a popular revolt fueled by the perception that native troops had been sacrificed while foreign mercenaries were spared. See Herodotus, *Histories II*.161-163, II.169; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History I*.68; and the Elephantine Stela.
- 42 Reale (2015, p. 35-70) argues that there are hermeneutical biases surrounding the *Second Alcibiades*, further pointing out how it has been dismissed without proper justification. Grote (2010, p. 348-350) and Apelt (2004, p. 131-143) emphasize the influence of Schleiermacher’s (1885, p. 259-261) unfavorable judgment on modern tradition, which led to the rejection of this dialogue despite its acceptance in antiquity. It was included in the catalogue of Thrasylus of Mendes (D. L. III.57-59), and only Athenaeus (*Deipnosophists XI* 506c) raised doubts about its authorship, suggesting Xenophon as the author, a hypothesis dismissed by Schleiermacher (1885, p. 259-261).
- 43 Both concepts are sometimes reduced to a Christianized caricature of monastic quietude that does not accurately reflect either the Greek or the Egyptian world.
- 44 Transl. Fowler (1913, p. 563). *Laws V* 738c refers directly to the Oracle of Amun.
- 45 The most recent scholarship regarding Plato’s familiarity with Egypt is found in works exploring potential links between the myth of Thoth in the *Phaedrus* and Egyptian texts, such as Mathieu (2015) and Poetsch (2021). For a more traditional view, which holds that his knowledge would not

differ from his Greek contemporaries, see Brisson (1987) and Froidefond (1971, p. 267-342).

- 46 Eudoxus was a disciple of Plato and spent time with him in Egypt (Str. XVII, 1.29).
- 47 While Thesleff (1989, p. 7-8) discusses the possibility of Platonic drafts, Tarrant (2023, 2025) rejects the authenticity of the *Second Alcibiades*, attributing its authorship to Crantor of Soli, even if he had reworked a preliminary sketch outlined by Plato (Tarrant, 2023, p. 213). A fragment of Crantor (8 Mette) suggests a slight possibility that he may have visited Egypt, since he alludes to the content of Egyptian stelae, thus making it possible that he also heard about the *gr.* Furthermore, Tarrant (2023, p. 205-206; 2025, p. 126-127) notes that both Crantor and the author of the *Second Alcibiades* approve the same type of prayer (trusting in the judgment of the gods). However, I am inclined to think that the mention of Amun is more representative of Plato, given that: a) he also expands the concept of *euphemia* into the ethico-political domain in other works; b) there are many ancient sources attesting his travel to Egypt; c) his work contains explicit mentions demonstrating a well-founded knowledge about Egypt.

Review of Olof
Pettersson, Pauliina
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Autonomy: Self
Determination, Unity,
and Cooperation*.
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Il volume nasce da un progetto di ricerca condotto tra il 2016 e il 2019 presso l'Università di Uppsala e culminato in una conferenza internazionale, i cui esiti sono stati rielaborati e ampliati nei saggi raccolti nel volume. Ne risulta una miscellanea che mantiene una notevole coesione tematica e metodologica, offrendo un quadro ricco e articolato di un tema complesso e centrale nella riflessione moderna, indagato nelle sue possibili radici e formulazioni nel pensiero antico: l'autonomia del soggetto, tanto individuale (l'uomo considerato nelle sue diverse declinazioni: etica, epistemica, sociale, etc.) quanto politico (la città greca). I contributori si interrogano sulla presenza e sulla forma di questa problematica, miratamente, in Platone. Ciascun saggio è corredato da una bibliografia ampia e aggiornata, sebbene interamente in inglese, con il rischio di limitare alcune prospettive. Completa il volume un utile indice dei nomi e dei concetti, che ne facilita la consultazione.

L'introduzione di Remes e Pettersson svolge un ruolo decisivo nel definire il quadro teorico entro cui si collocano i saggi del volume. Poiché nella tradizione moderna il concetto di autonomia è fortemente segnato da presupposti kantiani e da un'impostazione individualistica, gli editori propongono quattro chiavi interpretative che permettono di coglierne meglio le sfumature specifiche in una prospettiva antica e, soprattutto, platonica. La prima è l'*autodeterminazione*, intesa come libertà di orientare le proprie scelte senza essere soggetti a un potere esterno o estraneo al sé autentico. La seconda riguarda l'*unità dell'agente*, ossia la coesione interna che consente a diverse componenti di una data realtà di convergere verso un fine ben determinato e condiviso. Il terzo elemento è il *carattere graduale* dell'autonomia, che non si presenta come un dato immediato ma come un processo suscettibile di variazioni nel tempo o

capace di attuarsi, ogni volta, con una diversa efficacia. Infine, vi è la dimensione dell'*auto-legislazione*, la capacità di dotarsi di norme e di orientamenti che guidino stabilmente l'azione e che traggano origine dal proprio stesso sé. Secondo i curatori, queste quattro direttrici costituiscono, in senso euristico, strumenti utili per avvicinarsi alle molteplici articolazioni del concetto di autonomia nella tradizione platonica: i vari saggi, assegnati a cinque sezioni tematiche, affrontano gli aspetti dell'autonomia platonica così concepita.

La prima sezione, "*Self-Determination: From Legislation to Giving Rational Accounts*", si apre con il saggio di Amber D. Carpenter, "*Accounts and Accountability: The Importance of Being Autologizomenos*" (19–42). Carpenter chiarisce in che senso l'ideale platonico di autodeterminazione si discosti dalle accezioni moderne del termine. L'autrice nota anzitutto che, pur attribuendo grande importanza all'autocontrollo individuale e politico, Platone nella *Repubblica* non ricorre mai al termine *autonomos* e ai suoi derivati. Nell'orizzonte platonico, se l'autodeterminazione coincidesse semplicemente con l'assenza di costrizione esterna—come suggerito dall'uso comune del termine *autonomos*—ne seguirebbe che anche un'azione impulsiva, dettata da passioni o da desideri irrazionali, potrebbe essere definita autonoma. Per Platone, invece, è il pensare ciò che determina l'agente come autenticamente libero. Formulare "discorsi", *logoi*, costituisce dunque la forma più alta e vera di autodeterminazione: deliberazioni e azioni provengono, così, dal vero sé, la ragione, la fonte di precisione, rigore e responsabilità.

La seconda sezione, "*Motivational Challenges to Self-Rule*", prende avvio dal saggio di Nicholas D. Smith, "*Plato's Problems with Aversion*" (45–57). Considerando il modo in cui il personaggio di Socrate, nella *Repubblica*,

riconosce la presenza di vari desideri dell'anima, Smith ritiene che Platone non ammette genericamente le facoltà di desiderare, o di non desiderare, qualcosa: per Platone esistono vere e proprie spinte attive verso, o contro, un oggetto; egli sembra, così, individuare una forma di "pluralismo motivazionale", che rischia di compromettere l'idea di una psicologia morale unitaria. Secondo Smith, la presenza di attrazioni e di repulsioni indebolisce la tesi platonica della tripartizione dell'anima: sarebbe infatti possibile ammettere molti più centri motivazionali dei tre individuati da Platone. Da qui l'invito a trarre una considerazione più generale: ogni teoria dell'autolegislazione e dell'autodeterminazione razionale deve confrontarsi con una "molteplicità psicologica" costituita decisamente da desideri razionali e irrazionali e dalle corrispondenti repulsioni.

Segue il contributo di Oda E. W. Tvedt, "*A Complex Model of Action: What Is Ruling?*" (58–80), che mette in discussione un'interpretazione consolidata della psicologia morale platonica al fine di ampliare la comprensione dei ruoli che i diversi centri motivazionali dell'anima tripartita svolgono nel fissare, accettare e rafforzare gli scopi dell'individuo agente. Il punto di partenza è l'ipotesi secondo la quale l'azione autenticamente autonoma richiede una crescente unità interiore: l'agente ideale è colui che partecipa pienamente alle proprie azioni con l'intera anima, sia nelle componenti razionali sia in quelle irrazionali. Tuttavia, secondo Tvedt il rapporto tra le facoltà psichiche non può essere ridotto a uno schema in cui, da una parte, la ragione stabilisce i fini e, dall'altra parte, i desideri forniscono la spinta motivazionale per raggiungere il fine individuato: nella *Repubblica*, invece, i meccanismi decisionali sono molteplici, e spesso problematici; la ragione può sia fissare obiettivi, sia nutrire proprie inclinazioni. Pla-

tone mostra, così, come l'interiorità psichica sia ricca di istanze motivazionali, molte delle quali non pienamente razionali: in questo modo, è possibile comprendere meglio la natura estremamente complessa della propria anima in vista dell'affinamento di sé.

Nella terza sezione, "*Internal and External Authorities*", Franco V. Trivigno, con il suo articolo "*Dialectic and Rational Agency: Establishing Self-Rule in the Republic and Hippias Major*" (83–105), ritiene che Platone presenti due quadri diversi relativi al governo di sé, a seconda della condizione analizzata, quella utopica-ideale o quella del suo presente, lontano dall'ideale da perseguire. Nel modello perfetto delineato nella *Repubblica*, i bambini dipendono inizialmente dagli altri: ricevono un'educazione che pone le basi per l'acquisizione di deliberazione autonoma e di razionalità. Tuttavia, solo pochissimi, ossia i futuri filosofi-governanti, raggiungeranno la piena e autentica capacità di autodeterminarsi, progredendo nel programma educativo loro destinato. Nel contesto dell'*Ippia Maggiore*, che considera invece le città del presente di Platone, il soggetto sottoposto a un processo educativo e di formazione è sostanzialmente solo: in un ambiente culturale non ideale, numerosissime credenze—molte delle quali addirittura false—rischiano di essere trasmesse e accolte. Nella dimensione delle città ingiuste del presente di Platone, dialettica e confutazione diventano allora gli unici strumenti che consentono all'individuo agente di contenere ignoranza e influenze nocive, al fine di rendersi capace di costruirsi da sé un genere di vita ottimo. Nel quadro ideale della città perfetta, dialettica e confutazione intervengono solo in una fase formativa successiva.

Il contributo di Toomas Lott, "*Socrates and Conflicting Epistemic Requirements: Autonomy and Authority*" (106–127), concentra la sua

analisi sui dialoghi socratici e, in particolare, su una forma precisa di autorità: quella epistemica. Da questi dialoghi, sembra emergere una tensione interna: da un lato, una persona razionale dovrebbe pensare con la propria testa al fine di godere, quindi, di autonomia epistemica; dall'altro lato, dovrebbe affidarsi a fonti autorevoli e utilizzare le migliori risorse conoscitive disponibili. Secondo Lott, per Socrate il "pensare da sé" non ha un valore assoluto: è uno dei vari mezzi primari con cui acquisire *episteme*. Pensare autonomamente e fare affidamento sul parere degli esperti non costituiscono azioni in conflitto tra loro, perché operano in ambiti cognitivi diversi: nel momento di deliberare intorno a un tema molto specifico e settoriale, è spesso opportuno affidarsi a chi possiede competenza in un determinato ambito; nella costruzione di un sapere ampio e universale, il pensiero autonomo diventa decisivo. La scelta tra le due vie dipende quindi dalle esigenze del momento.

James M. Ambury, "*Awakening Autonomy: Olympiodorus' Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*" (128–146), chiude la sezione con un'analisi sul tema dell'autorità, interna ed esterna, nel neoplatonico Olimpiodoro. Nel suo commento al *Gorgia*, Olimpiodoro ritiene che l'autonomia consista nella trasformazione, da parte dell'anima, in pura ragione, e che l'eteronomia coincida invece con la dimenticanza della propria natura autentica. Riprendendo il lessico aristotelico circa la fonte del movimento, interna (*autokineton*) o esterna (*heterokineton*), Olimpiodoro ritiene che l'uomo è mosso e determinato da sé quando agisce secondo ragione in vista del perseguimento della virtù e della sapienza, vale a dire secondo la sua natura razionale intrinseca. Nel momento in cui un individuo comprende di appartenere a un piano totalmente razionale, si avvale di tale dimensione per costruire autonomamente

un genere di vita ottimo; chi ignora la propria natura razionale finisce per essere guidato da elementi esterni.

Nella quarta parte, “*The Limits of Autonomy and Self-Rule*”, Marina Berzins McCoy, “*Vulnerability, Dialogue, and the Limits of Autonomy*” (149–168), osserva che nella prospettiva di Platone non bisogna limitarsi soltanto a concentrarsi sull’esercizio del dominio razionale all’interno dell’anima, indubbiamente la condizione necessaria per godere della massima forma di felicità: la ricerca del sapere e dell’autonomia che deriva dal possesso del sapere è un percorso che interessa l’intera vita di un individuo, e richiede un confronto costante con altri individui, che può esporre a critiche, disagio emotivo, influenza e pressione da parte degli interlocutori. Il perfezionamento di sé è dunque accompagnato dalla consapevolezza di poter essere, ogni volta, confutati. Solo attraverso questo confronto, sottolinea McCoy, è possibile acquisire un grado sempre più autentico di autonomia, una prospettiva che emerge da vari dialoghi di Platone.

Nel saggio successivo, Olof Pettersson, “*Plato, Dialogue, and Epistemic Autonomy*” (169–190), sostiene che per Platone l’autonomia di un individuo non possa essere pensata in isolamento rispetto al contesto “socio-epistemico”. Richiamandosi al *Cratilo*, Pettersson osserva che il linguaggio—per quanto ambiguo e fuorviante—consente di smascherare presunte autorità epistemiche. L’autonomia di giudizio dipende infatti non tanto dal richiamo a una ragione esterna, vale a dire a una serie di procedure e regole argomentative quasi standardizzate (che possono essere sfruttate da un falso sapiente per dare l’impressione di possedere autorità epistemica e dunque per condizionare i suoi interlocutori), ma a una ragione tutta interna allo svolgimento di una determinata conversazione tra vari individui,

che tenga conto anche di tutte le dinamiche (motivazioni, interessi, personalità, linguaggi, etc.) degli interlocutori, al fine di individuare le posizioni più degne di fiducia.

Nell’ultima sezione “*Reconciling Freedom, External Authority, and Nature*”, il saggio di Charlotta Weigelt, “*Self-Government and Law in the Crito and the Statesman*” (193–215), esamina il rapporto di Socrate con l’autorità delle leggi, largamente dibattuto dagli studiosi. Da un lato, Socrate sembra presentare il governo di sé come scaturito dall’esercizio della ragione resistendo a qualsiasi pressione esterna; dall’altro lato, Socrate dimostra di accettare un’imposizione esterna, la condanna a morte, pur riconoscendo di essere stato condannato ingiustamente. Weigelt mette in relazione il *Critone* con alcune riflessioni del *Politico* e dimostra come la contraddizione incarnata da Socrate non sia, in realtà, tale: la libertà, o il governo di sé, corrisponde infatti primariamente alla libertà di scegliere a chi o a cosa sottomettersi. Socrate accetta di obbedire alle leggi, a una realtà esterna, tramite una valutazione razionale, e dunque la sua autonomia non è compromessa: anzi, l’obbedienza alle leggi ateniesi—applicate ingiustamente—mostrata da Socrate è parte integrante del suo essere libero di auto-governarsi.

Susan Sauvé Meyer, “*Freedom, Willing Servitude, and the Limits to Autonomy in Plato’s Laws*” (216–234), esamina l’obbedienza presupposta dall’area semantica della “servitù”, impiegata da Platone per descrivere il rapporto tra cittadini e città. Nelle *Leggi*, la servitù ricorre frequentemente: i cittadini obbediscono alle leggi e ai governanti, i quali, a loro volta, servono le leggi della città. Non si tratta di mera passività o di sfruttamento: sembra infatti esservi spazio per una forma di obbedienza volontaria, disposizione che i governanti devono promuovere e coltivare. I

proemi delle leggi servono proprio a favorire la diffusione di un sentimento di obbedienza consapevole e autentica. Ciò non equivale a dire che esiste la completa libertà: nelle *Leggi*, la “libertà”, *eleutheria*, rimanda piuttosto a un assetto politico-sociale in cui nessun cittadino domina incondizionatamente sugli altri.

Chiude il volume il saggio di Andy German, “*The Natural Preconditions of Political Freedom*” (235–255), che indaga il rapporto tra libertà, natura e teleologia. German mette in discussione la diffusa ipotesi storiografica secondo cui la concezione antica dell’uomo come ente teleologicamente orientato sarebbe stata superata, in età moderna, dall’elaborazione del concetto di autodeterminazione— un’idea innovativa rispetto al pensiero antico, perché afferma l’indipendenza dell’individuo da qualsiasi essenza preesistente o connaturata e, dunque, perché rivendica l’autonomia dell’uomo rispetto a fini considerati come dati dalla nascita. Già in Platone la questione si pone in termini più complessi: per Platone, le inclinazioni umane non sono armoniche per natura, e dunque la città, ad esempio, non nasce in maniera “spontanea” o “naturale”, come se l’uomo fosse inevitabilmente predisposto verso questo orizzonte (la metafora del politico come tessitore serve a veicolare la giustapposizione, anche forzata, di istanze profondamente divergenti); al contrario, la nascita di una realtà socio-politica complessa come una città richiede un grande sforzo di pianificazione e di imposizione di ordine.

Il volume restituisce con grande ricchezza la complessità del problema relativo all’individuazione di una concezione di autonomia nei dialoghi platonici. I contributi mostrano come l’autogoverno costituisca un tema di assoluta centralità per Platone, mettendo in evidenza sia la pluralità motivazionale che caratterizza l’anima, sia la possibilità, ammessa

nei dialoghi, di integrare obbedienza e libertà di scelta. In questo senso, il volume consente di riconoscere, a pieno titolo, l’esistenza di un vero e proprio motivo dell’autonomia del soggetto nella filosofia platonica.

Alcuni saggi tendono a privilegiare la centralità della ragione, rischiando di attenuare il rilievo delle componenti non pienamente razionali messo in luce da altri autori. L’inclusione del contributo su uno degli ultimi Neoplatonici, Olimpiodoro, pur offrendo spunti interessanti, si colloca in una prospettiva leggermente diversa rispetto alla focalizzazione su Platone che domina il volume: per questo, la scelta avrebbe potuto essere bilanciata da altri saggi dedicati alla tradizione platonica più prossima temporalmente al filosofo, arricchendo la rassegna in senso diacronico.

Il grande merito complessivo della raccolta di saggi è di mostrare come il tema dell’autonomia costituisca, in Platone, una prospettiva talvolta distinta da quella moderna e, tuttavia, per quest’ultima ancora feconda, a beneficio non solo degli studiosi di filosofia antica ma anche di chi si occupa di filosofia dell’azione, etica normativa e teoria della razionalità. Il volume si pone certamente come orizzonte di riferimento metodologico e contenutistico per inaugurare un filone di ricerca più ampio, volto a esplorare il tema dell’autonomia anche in altre tradizioni del pensiero antico (ad esempio, quella aristotelica), dove ulteriori prospettive e articolazioni del concetto potrebbero emergere con pari ricchezza.

**Review of Rafael Ferber.
*The Ignorance of the
 Philosopher. Why Did
 Plato Not Write the
 "Unwritten Doctrine"?*
 Baden-Baden: Verlag
 Karl Alber, 2025, 171 pp.,
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In the German-speaking world, Rafael Ferber is well known for his contributions to the study of Plato's Idea of the Good and the *voxata quaestio* of Plato's *agrapha dogmata*. The question this monograph sets out to answer, however, is not what these 'unwritten teachings' consisted of—a topic he covered with a novel approach in (Ferber 1989, 154-211)— but why Plato never wrote them down. To answer this, Ferber turns to what Plato did write: the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Timaeus*, and the controversial *Seventh Letter*. His conclusion is that Plato was not in a sufficiently ideal epistemic state to commit them to writing. Where Plato is usually assumed to have held his own proposals with confidence, Ferber wagers on a Plato who was genuinely uncertain about them.

The first part of the book is devoted to the *Republic*. Ferber begins by ruling out the possibility that the unwritten teachings were secret—Socrates in *Rep.* 506–509 openly professes his wish to discuss them—and then turns to reject the hypotheses of Gadamer and Burnyeat. For Gadamer, they were left unwritten because they were still 'dry schematisms'; Ferber counters that Plato published material of precisely this kind, including the *diairesis* of the *Statesman* and the *Sophist* (*Plt.* 261a–266a; *Sph.* 219a–266a) and the mathematical schematism of the divided line (*Rep.* 510a8, 534a6). Burnyeat's suggestion that the reason was 'sheer technical difficulty' fares no better: Plato wrote the highly technical *Parmenides*; technical difficulty, as Cherniss observed, is if anything an invitation to write (p. 20); and those who advance this hypothesis implicitly assume that the dialogues may contain Plato's most profound teachings, thereby undermining their own position (following Schleiermacher, p. 21). Against both, Ferber proposes that the unsuitable recipient is not Glaucon but Socrates himself: Socrates offers his opinion

about the Good; he does not know it. Since the science that corresponds to the Good is dialectics and not mere opinion (*Rep.* 506b, c, e; p.22), Plato does not venture to fix any thesis about it in writing, resorting instead to sense-based analogies, for which opinion is the appropriate register. This is the interpretive crux: Plato had not attained Knowledge even with respect to his unwritten teachings. The epistemic ideal belongs to God alone, who does not desire wisdom but simply is wise and therefore does not philosophize (*Symp.* 204a1–2); it falls to human souls to pursue the Good without end (*Rep.* 534b8–c6).

The second part seeks confirmation in the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. The *Phaedrus* is famous, among other things, for its so-called ‘critique of writing,’ and Ferber opens by noting that it is precisely here that Plato coins the term ‘philosopher,’ defining him as one who writes with things more valuable (*timiotera*) than anything he puts to paper (*Phdr.* 278d8–e1). Ferber is careful to distinguish: two of the objections raised in the *Phaedrus* target not writing as such but its publication. A published text cannot select its audience or defend itself in the absence of its author (*Phdr.* 275d9–e5). These, however, derive from a more fundamental objection that does bear on writing itself: that it is fixed and immutable (*Phdr.* 275d4–9), and therefore systematically deceptive to a human soul that is, at its core, self-moving (*Phdr.* 245c5–246a2; p. 34). This invariability coheres with what the *Republic* already suggested: Plato was unwilling to freeze his views on the Good in permanent form.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates appears to possess Knowledge (*epistēmē*) rather than mere opinion (*Phdr.* 276c3–5): knowledge not only of sensible things but of Ideas, arrived at through dialectic. Yet Ferber argues that the practitioner of dialectic does not yet know

the Ideas but only has a claim to such knowledge (pp. 36–7). Socrates speaks of the truth that dialectic yields in the conditional (*Phdr.* 278c4–d1), and he insists that the dialectician does not deserve the title ‘wise’—reserved for God alone—but only ‘philosopher’ (*Phdr.* 278d3–6). Even if the dialectician’s knowledge is in some sense true, it is not optimal: it falls short of maximum certainty. More than that, Socrates—and by extension Plato—would not even have completed the dialectical ascent, which is why Plato no more commits his views on the Soul to writing in the *Phaedrus* than he does his views on the Good in the *Republic*. The *Timaeus* reinforces the pattern: Timaeus himself acknowledges that his epistemic grip on first principles amounts to nothing more than opinion (*Tim.* 53d6–8, 48c2–7), while those principles would properly demand immutable and incorrigible theses (*Tim.* 29b4–8), foreclosing their explicit treatment in the text. Perfect Knowledge is God’s alone; the human soul is left to examine itself and its limits.

The *Seventh Letter*, whose authenticity Ferber declines to assume (p. 45, n. 80), provides further evidence. Its Author condemns those who, like Dionysius, have written as though they possessed the very knowledge the Author himself aspires to without having attained it (*Ep.* VII, 341b1–c4). The Author has not written about these matters and never will, not because they are ineffable (he would have no objection to discussing them or even writing about them imperfectly [*Ep.* VII, 341d2–4]), but because he does not consider it appropriate or timely. For most readers it would merely license the complacent satisfaction of having grasped something ‘profound’ (*Ep.* VII, 341e1–6). The most valuable teachings cannot be transmitted by formal means alone; they require oral transmission, lived proximity to the teacher, and the kindling of a ‘light in the

soul.' Ferber is careful to note that this light should not be read as Neoplatonic ecstasy but as the outcome of an inquiry conducted from below. The deeper difficulty is that any cognitive instrument: name (*onoma*), definition (*logos*), image (*eidōlon*), or knowledge (*epistēmē*, *logos alēthēs*, *nous*), by rendering the Idea into something knowable, already turns it into something other than itself (a quality), blocking direct access to what it is (pp. 73–85).

These arguments originally appeared in German as *Die Unwissenheit des Philosophen, oder, Warum hat Plato die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben?* (Ferber 1991), now out of print. In preparing the English edition, Ferber not only updates the arguments but uses the occasion to address debates that emerged in response to the original publication. The 'Retraction' (pp. 91–135) opens with a masterly survey of scholarship on the unwritten teachings that will serve any reader wishing to enter the debate (pp. 91–6), before taking up the central question of whether Plato and his philosopher can ultimately access the Knowledge they pursue. Through sustained engagement with the *Seventh Letter* and a range of methodological issues, Ferber reinforces his central thesis: that Plato's most valuable speculations remain, for Plato himself, hypotheses rather than Knowledge; though ones to which a philosophical life may be dedicated in endless approximation.

Ferber's question is why Plato did not write down the *agrapha dogmata*, but his answer is built almost entirely on Plato's written texts and on the gap between the epistemic condition of Plato's characters and the ideal toward which they strain. As a result—setting aside the critique of writing—his arguments bear on a broader question of interest to readers with no particular stake in the unwritten teachings: what was Plato's own relation to his specula-

tions? The question has largely been forgotten, since it is generally assumed that Plato was a confident, systematic dogmatist. And yet the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*, writing shortly after the Academy's dissolution, felt it necessary to defend the view that Plato did hold doctrines and advanced them with conviction, against the Academic tradition that had read Plato as fundamentally aporetic (Anon. *in Thet.* LIV–LV).

Ferber's work thus reopens a question that is not merely interpretive but substantive: what attitude, according to Plato, should the philosopher hold toward their own activity? The Plato Ferber gives us—ignorant, restlessly inquisitive to the last—may have been, at some remove, the Plato of the so-called Sceptics who led the Academy for much of its history, and whose interpretive legacy remains largely unabsorbed into Platonic scholarship.

The book is dense and presupposes genuine familiarity not only with the texts it directly examines but with the many others it invokes; in this respect it practices what it preaches, seeking out its own reader. Ferber's arguments are backed throughout by precise textual references that make his portrait of Plato as persuasive as the evidence allows. For those who accept the existence of the unwritten teachings, his arguments make it difficult to think it possible to reconstruct these without reckoning with the epistemic relationship Plato held toward them. For readers not specializing in the *agrapha dogmata*, the book raises fundamental questions about philosophical method and about what it means, on Plato's account, to be a philosopher, while also providing a reliable introduction to the debate. Any scholar of Ancient Philosophy would benefit from reading this provocative work, the result of decades of reflection that honors the very interpretation of Plato it defends.

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