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SUMMARY

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PAPERS

The Common Origins of Philosophical and Political Power in Plato's *Gorgias*

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ABSTRACT

Plato's *Gorgias* concerns the tension between political and philosophical power. In it, Socrates and Gorgias discuss rhetoric's power, which Gorgias claims is universal, containing all powers, enabling the rhetorician to rule over others politically. Polus and Callicles then develop Gorgias's understanding of rhetoric's universal power. Scholars addressing power's central focus rightly distinguish Socrates' notion of philosophical power from Gorgias's. However, these authors make this distinction too severe, overlooking the kinship between philosophy and politics. This paper argues that Socrates' notion of power parallels Gorgias's, but philosophy prioritizes self-persuasion, whereas rhetoric primarily aims to persuade others.

Keywords: Plato, Socrates, political philosophy, rhetoric, sophistry, δύναμις.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Plato's *Gorgias* concerns the tension between philosophy and politics, and the power (δύναμις)[1] each wields. Socrates converses successively with three interlocutors — Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles — with the stated intention of discovering what rhetoric's δύναμις is, and what its object is (447c). While much of the dialogue attends to the second question, identifying political persuasion as rhetoric's object, Gorgias's initial answer to the first question concerning rhetoric's δύναμις underlies all three discussions. As each interlocutor develops the previous account of rhetoric's δύναμις, Socrates develops his own through his challenges to their claims. Scholars including George Duke, Rachel Barney, and James Stuart Murray have begun the work of distinguishing Socrates' notion of δύναμις from those of his interlocutors. Doing so has enabled these authors to find the dialogue's central question, which is ultimately whether politics and philosophy can be reconciled. However, these authors distinguish politics from philosophy too absolutely, overlooking their common origins, and thus tend to read Socrates as utterly critical of rhetoric and therefore politics. I contend that Socrates' notion of philosophical δύναμις parallels Gorgias's notion of rhetorical δύναμις and that both even share persuasion as its object. However, while rhetoric's δύναμις aims primarily at persuading others, Socrates' philosophical δύναμις aims first at self-persuasion. Because Polus and Callicles develop Gorgias's notion of rhetorical δύναμις into an account of tyranny, the concluding section of this paper will briefly consider what the commonalities between rhetorical and philosophical δύναμις suggests about the relationship between philosophy and tyranny. Through this, I intend to understand politics and philosophy as unifiable and to illuminate Socrates' claim that he is one of a few Athenians who tries his hand at the political art and the only one to act politically (521d).

In what follows, I will confine my examination to the initial exchange between Gorgias and Socrates, in order to indicate how Socratic δύναμις develops from the dialogue's earliest account of rhetorical δύναμις. For Gorgias, rhetorical δύναμις consists in the ability to persuade others, resulting in the rhetor's freedom and rule over others. I will then indicate how Socrates' account of δύναμις, which develops throughout the battle rounds with the succeeding interlocutors, parallels Gorgias's original formulation. For Socrates, we will find, true δύναμις involves knowledge of the virtues (in a political context, especially justice) and the intellect to hit upon what it wishes.[2] Socrates and Gorgias both consider δύναμις to involve persuasion, rule, and to have a universal scope (λόγος). However, Socrates' notion of δύναμις will turn Gorgias's desire to rule over others inward.

II. GORGIAS & SOCRATES ON RHETORIC'S POWER

Socrates' question regarding rhetoric's δύναμις[3] is its first mention in the dialogue: "For I wish to inquire from [Gorgias] what the δύναμις of the man's art (τέχνη) is, and what it is that he professes and teaches…" (447c).[4] Anticipating Socrates' later claim that rhetoric is a mere knack (ἐμπειρία) (462c), I follow David Roochnik's formulation of the conventional understanding of a τέχνη as involving: "…a determinate body of authoritative knowledge" (Roochnik, 1994, 129). If this understanding of τέχνη holds, Roochnik continues, then objects of technical knowledge would also need to be determinate. As George Duke notes, Socrates' second inquiry into what Gorgias professes and

teaches, indeed, constrains a τέχνη to a defined domain by presupposing it has specific objects (2018, 3). This, in turn, presupposes rhetoric is a τέχνη, expecting it to fulfill the associated criteria.

But rhetoric's status as a τέχνη quickly becomes dubious once Gorgias reaches a definition of rhetoric with a view to its δύναμις. Gorgias identifies rhetoric's object as "That which is in truth, Socrates, the greatest good (μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν) and the cause both of freedom for human beings themselves and at the same time of rule over others in each man's own city" (452d). Gorgias here joins the freedom of the human being herself who wields rhetoric with her ability to rule over others who are subject to that rhetoric, anticipating the connection between rhetorical δύναμις and political rule that Polus and Callicles will establish explicitly. Socrates teases Gorgias for claiming, like all craftsmen, to provide the greatest good, remarking that many take their own profession to do so, and asks Gorgias once again to specify what his rhetoric offers, or indeed, what he understands the greatest good to be. In response, Gorgias paints a picture that would tempt any ambitious listener:

> I, indeed, say it is being of a sort to persuade with speeches judges in a courtroom and councilors in a council and assembly members in an assembly and in every other meeting, whichever comes to be a political meeting. And you know with this δύναμις, you will hold the healer as a slave on the one hand, on the other hand the gymnastic trainer as a slave: and this man, the money-maker will appear [as one] making money for another and not for himself, but for you as the one being able (δυναμένῳ) to speak and to persuade the multitudes.[5]

Gorgias resists restraining rhetorical δύναμις to a specified field and, instead, presents rhetorical δύναμις as closely tied to, if not identical to, political δύναμις. Duke rightly interprets Gorgias to identify δύναμις itself as the greatest good in this passage (2018, 7). For the δύναμις to persuade the multitudes by speeches in a political context, Gorgias proposes, immediately results in the greatest good: human freedom and rule over others. But while Duke wants to characterize Socrates' (and thereby Plato's) critique of Gorgias as "ultimately informed by a confused commitment to power and pleasure as the greatest goods" (Duke, 2018, 17), I propose that Socrates' critique will reform Gorigas's notion of δύναμις as the greatest good rather than merely dismiss it.

The interluding discussion before the dialogue's next explicit mention of δύναμις signal two potential distinctions between rhetorical and philosophical δύναμις. First, Socrates leads Gorgias to claim rhetoric concerns justice, foreshadowing Socrates' developing account of δύναμις. Having ascertained that rhetoric is a τέχνη of persuasion, Socrates now seeks to distinguish it from other τέχναι, which also involve persuasion and thus to limit it once more to a specific domain:

> SOC.: …[W]e might *justly* ask the speaker further, "Of what sort of persuasion, and of persuasion about what, is rhetoric the art?" Or doesn't it seem to you *just* to ask further?
> GOR.: It does to me, at any rate.
> SOC.: Answer then, Gorgias, since it seems so to you.
> GOR.: I say, then, Socrates, persuasion in law courts and in other mobs, as I was saying just a moment ago, and about those things that are *just* and *unjust* (454b, my emphases).

Socrates' questions provide Gorgias his answer: rhetoric, as an art of political persuasion, concerns the just and the unjust. This foreshadows Socrates' revision to Gorgias's notion of δύναμις, as Socrates' critique of Gorgias's account will suggest that δύναμις, properly understood, always entails justice.

Second, Socrates and Gorgias go on to distinguish two kinds of persuasion, arguing that rhetoric deals with persuasion in belief, but not in knowledge:

> SOC.: Do you wish us then to set down two kinds (δύο εἴδη) of persuasion, one that provides belief without knowing, and one that provides knowledge?
> GOR.: Certainly.
> SOC.: Which persuasion, then, does rhetoric produce in law courts and the other mobs, about just and unjust things? The one from which believing comes into being without knowing, or the one from which knowing comes?
> GOR.: It's clear, I suppose, Socrates, that it's the one from which believing comes.
> SOC. Rhetoric, then, as seems likely, is a craftsman of belief-inspiring but not didactic persuasion about the just and the unjust (454e–455a).[6]

Socrates here points out a limitation to rhetoric's δύναμις. The rhetorician can only persuade one to believe her; she would be unable (οὐ δύναιτο) to persuade one to know what she says is true didactically (455a). Presumably, by contrast, Socratic philosophical persuasion would be didactic, involving the kind (εἶδος) of persuasion that leads to true belief, provided enough time to carry out its instruction. As Nichols indicates in the notes to his translation, *Gorgias* 455a echoes the *Apology* 37a–b, where Socrates admits that he fails to persuade the judges given the insufficient time he has to make his defense (1998, 37n28). A question I will raise later in this paper is to what extent this didactic persuasion of another is the primary aim of philosophy, or whether, indeed, even philosophy has this power. Instead, I will propose, philosophy primarily seeks to persuade the philosopher herself and, secondarily, to inspire similar self-persuasion in others.

Gorgias seems to disregard Socrates' limitation to rhetoric's δύναμις in what follows, once again shirking its confinement to a specific object, preferring to suggest its universal scope and, thus, threatening rhetoric's status as a τέχνη. Socrates occasions Gorgias's expansion of rhetoric's δύναμις by observing that rhetoricians often persuade others about affairs of other craftsmen, to which Gorgias replies: "I shall try, Socrates, clearly to uncover for you *all* the power (τὴν δύναμιν ἅπασαν) of rhetoric; for you yourself have beautifully led the way" (455d).[7] If rhetoric's full δύναμις only becomes clear when it is stripped of any specific object, then, as Socrates next question will imply, rhetoric is no τέχνη at all: "I wonder at these things, Gorgias, and I am long asking whatever the δύναμις of rhetoric is. For it appears to me to be a certain divinity (δαιμονία τις) when considering its magnitude in this way" (456a).[8] Rhetoric's newly discovered magnitude leads it to transcend a mere τέχνη and become, instead, something manifestly divine, a δύναμις that is universal in scope. Of course, there may well be irony in Socrates' praise here, recalling his mockery of orators' divine inspiration in the *Ion*. However, the *Gorgias* seems to identify divinity and unrestricted δύναμις, suggesting some seriousness to Socrates' claim that rhetoric would be divine if its claim to such a δύναμις were justified.

Gorgias's illustration of rhetoric's unrestricted δύναμις will lead him into an apparent

conflict between rhetoric's all-powerful ability to persuade and the rhetor's responsibility to act justly. This tension becomes the source of what is typically understood to be Socrates' critique. As if to further rhetoric's claim to divinity, Gorgias claims that rhetoric "…gathers together and holds under itself all powers (ἁπάσας τὰς δυνάμεις)…" (456a). Gorgias here suggests rhetoric is not only unlimited in scope with respect to its particular power, but all-powerful and containing all powers in itself. The suggestion seems to be that rhetoric is not only capable of persuading anyone about anything, but also of accomplishing anything. In support of rhetoric's unlimited scope, Gorgias recalls: "On many occasions now I have gone in with my brother and with other doctors to one of the sick who was unwilling either to drink a drug or to submit himself to the doctor for surgery or cautery; the doctor being unable (οὐ δυναμένου) to persuade him, I persuaded him, by no other art than rhetoric" (456b). The successful rhetor does not only speak well about justice, but about all matters of human affairs. But here, Gorgias wields his δύναμις justly: technical knowledge alone lacks the power to affect change in others, so Gorgias uses his δύναμις on his brother's behalf. Rhetoric here appears as a para-τέχνη that assists the one who knows in persuading others to submit to the knower's rule. Politically, in order to rule according to technical knowledge, experts will require the rhetor's service to persuade others to submit to their rule. But this hardly fits the picture Gorgias painted at 452b, where the rhetor convinces all others to serve her interests rather than their own, or, indeed, his most recent expansion of rhetoric's power. Here, it is the rhetor who submits his service to the one who knows.

Gorgias's attempt to demonstrate rhetoric's divine power, while simultaneously censuring its unjust use, leads him to lure that rhetoric *can* be used for any purpose whatsoever (including unjust purposes), which is in conflict with his insistence that rhetoric *ought* not be used unjustly. Gorgias quickly explains that the rhetor's δύναμις is not limited to persuading others to follow the craftsman's knowledge. She can also persuade others that she herself knows more about the particular craft than the expert who truly knows: "And if he should contest against any other craftsman whatsoever, the rhetorician rather than anyone else would persuade them to choose himself. For there is nothing about which the rhetorician would not speak more persuasively than any other of the craftsmen in a multitude. The δύναμις of the art, then, is so great" (456c). Here then, we get a sense of rhetoric's full δύναμις. The rhetor need not align herself with experts; she can persuade the multitudes to recognize her as master over anything, effectively becoming anyone she wishes in their estimation. The rhetor, like a god, can seem to be anyone at all. But Gorgias immediately afterwards admonishes such an unjust use of rhetoric's δύναμις:

> For the rhetor has power (δυνατὸς) to speak against all men and about everything, so as to be more persuasive in multitudes about, in brief, whatever he wishes (βούληται); but it nonetheless does not follow that one must on this account deprive the doctors of reputation—for he would be able (δύναιτο) to do this—nor the other craftsmen, but one must use rhetoric justly too, just as any other competitive skill (457a–b). [9]

Rhetoric is, in principle, an unrestricted δύναμις to conquer all opponents about all things. But Gorgias's attempt to defend rhetoric confines the rhetor to act justly. He concludes that when it is used unjustly, the

individual and not the practice (nor indeed, the teacher) should be blamed. Rachel Barney provides a helpful analysis of these two conflicting treatments of rhetoric, naming them the "Advertisement" and the "Defense," respectively (2010, 102–106). Using Barney's distinction, what is crucial here is that Gorgias's advertisement that rhetoric is in principle all-powerful conflicts with his defense that limits it to serving experts in persuading others to submit to their rule.

While the tension between Gorgias's advertisement and defense is clear, Gorgias's description of the resulting dangers of rhetoric pose a parallel to Socrates' own biography as described in the *Apology*. Gorgias concludes his account by claiming that if rhetorical δύναμις is wielded unjustly, it is the individual and not the practice, or the individual's teacher, who should be blamed: "And, I think, if someone has become a rhetorician and then does injustice with this power and art, one must not hate the man who taught him and expel him from the cities. For that man imparted it for just use, and the other used it in the opposite way. It is just, then, to hate, expel, and kill the one who uses it not correctly, but not the one who taught it" (457b–c). Given that exile was a potential alternative to the death penalty Socrates faced in the *Apology* for his alleged crime of corrupting the youth, this passage suggests a potential parallel between rhetoric and philosophy. Given their unrestricted δύναμις, the reputation of both activities and their practitioners are vulnerable. The philosopher who questions others unjustly becomes a sophist and the rhetor who persuades others unjustly becomes a tyrant. Because of that, the true philosopher and rhetor risk appearing to others like their counterfeit. Given sophistry's close association to oratory, the lines that Gorgias draws here yoke himself and Socrates even closer together. If 'rhetor' is a synonym for 'sophist,' then the philosopher who acts unjustly becomes a sophist, who risks becoming a tyrant.

Socrates himself seems aware of such a risk when he sets out to critique Gorgias's account: "[N]ow you seem to me to be saying things not quite consequent upon or consistent with what you were saying at first about rhetoric. So I'm afraid to refute you, lest you suppose that I speak from love of victory, not in regard to the subject's becoming manifest, but in regard to you" (457e–458a). Socrates fears that his critique runs the risk of appearing like an unjust (and sophistical) pursuit of victory over Gorgias, rather than an earnest inquiry into the matter at hand. It is to avoid this very threat that leads Socrates to insist that the rhetor (and the philosopher) must act justly.

While commentators often interpret Socrates' following questions utterly to refute Gorgias's notion of rhetoric's δύναμις, in the following section, I will argue that Socrates revitalizes Gorgias's notion of δύναμις as the greatest good, by insisting that the rhetor's δύναμις consists in acting justly and by inverting the rhetor's ambition to persuade others such that the proper aim becomes self-persuasion. In short, Socrates provides a vehicle towards unifying philosophical and political ambitions by reimagining δύναμις as well as the freedom and rulership that δύναμις affords.

II. SOCRATES' REFUTATION

After acknowledging that he risks appearing simply to love victory, Socrates claims that his true motivation is to seek the truth about the matter at hand, giving the first indication that one of his own primary motivations in the discussion is self-persuasion.

> Now, then, if you too are one of the human beings of whom I am also one, I would with pleasure question you further; and if not, I would let it drop. And of what men am I one? Those who are refuted with pleasure if I say something not true, and who refute with pleasure if someone should say something not true—and indeed not less pleasure to be refuted than to refute. For I consider it a greater good, to the extent that it is a greater good to be released oneself from the greatest evil than to release another. For I think that nothing is so great an evil for a human being as false opinions about the things that our argument now happens to be about (458a–b).

Instead of supplying his own notion of the greatest good, Socrates identifies a greatest evil: to hold a false opinion about the things they are now discussing.[10] He does not specify which of the things under discussion are so important, so it may be assumed that the nature of δύναμις be included. But crucially, Socrates judges the good of being released from a false opinion as better than releasing another, claiming that it is just as pleasant to him (if not more so) to be refuted than to refute. This implies that Socrates, given his recognition of the great danger holding a false belief poses, would rather come to be persuaded to change his opinion than to persuade another to change hers. One question that remains unanswered in the dialogue is whether this reveals a selfishness to Socrates' philosophizing or, perhaps, whether there is something about the nature of refutation and persuasion that makes being refuted better than refuting another.[11] Socrates continues to signal that he cares for his soul with the attending effect that the souls of others are attended. One possible answer is that without proper care for one's own soul, one cannot ensure that he or she may properly care for another. Rather than pursuing this thought further, at Gorgias's assent that he too would like to inquire into the truth of the matter, Socrates begins to challenge Gorgias's claim to rhetoric's absolute δύναμις by introducing another limitation to it.

Socrates adds to the first limitation, that rhetoric can only persuade without knowledge, that rhetoric can only persuade non-knowers, subtly indicating another parallel between philosophy and rhetoric. Socrates first revises their earlier distinction between persuading without knowledge and persuading with knowledge (454e–455a) by recasting it as a distinction between persuasion and teaching. He asks Gorgias if he makes someone a rhetor "so as to be persuasive in a mob about all things, not by teaching but by persuading" (458e), to which Gorgias assents. Socrates then pushes Gorgias to define "in a mob" as "among those who do not know" (459a). The rhetor is more able than the doctor to persuade the mob, despite the fact that the rhetor is a non-knower while the doctor is a knower, leading Socrates to the unflattering conclusion:

> The one who does not know, therefore, will be more persuasive than the one who knows among those who don't know, whenever the rhetor is more persuasive than the doctor… [Rhetoric] does not at all need to know how the matters themselves stand, but to have discovered a certain device of persuasion so as to appear to know more than those who know, to those who don't know (459b–c).

If the earlier distinction that rhetoric persuades without knowledge was meant to imply that philosophy will persuade with knowledge, now it seems that the distinction is made more

severe. Rhetoric merely persuades, while philosophy teaches, and the two activities no longer share a common gene. However, the further, unflattering claim that rhetoric is the practice of a non-knower persuading the mob of non--knowers and appearing to know more than the knower shares certain parallels with philosophy. This description is rather similar to the explanation of the hatred his philosophizing incurs, which Socrates outlines in the *Apology*, although with the notable exception that Socrates, unlike the rhetor, does know more than the non-knowers in recognizing that he does not know.[12] But while Socrates seeks to inquire whether he *is* wiser than others with the consequence that he appears wiser, he intimates that the rhetor aims merely to appear wiser. Moreover, the attending implication, that whereas rhetoric persuades non-knowers philosophy teaches knowers does not seem simply true. Philosophy, too, requires the humility to seek knowledge. Those studying philosophy must be in some position of ignorance for their inquiry to be genuine. Socrates here seems to be complicating, rather than altogether shirking, the parallel between philosophy and rhetoric.

Socrates then indicates the tension between Gorgias's advertisement and defense of rhetoric and asks whether those who practice rhetoric must also know justice and injustice, leading Gorgias to claim that his students who do not already know these things will learn them from him (459e–460a). Socrates argues that knowledge of justice leads to just practice, to which Gorgias assents (460b). Socrates concludes: "…[T]he rhetorician is unable (ἀδύνατον) to use rhetoric unjustly and to want (ἐθέλειν) to do injustice" (461a).[13] Both Gorgias's advertisement and defense hinge on the word βούλομαι or 'wish.' If she *wishes*, the rhetor can persuade over any affair whatsoever and rule over any sphere. However, Socrates' claim that knowledge of justice involves just practice tempers such a desire. The one who knows what justice is would not *wish* (ἐθέλειν) to act unjustly. Socrates switches terms here to signal a shift in the kind of desire under discussion. While Socrates does not formally introduce the distinction, ἐθέλω has the connotation of an internal urge or drive and often held a connection to φύσις, suggesting that it is contrary to the nature of one who knows justice to desire to act unjustly. Βούλομαι, on the other hand, has the sense of intention or purpose, something that is chosen or decided on.[14] Socrates, therefore, leaves open the possibility that the rhetor may wish to act unjustly (βούλομαι) but such a wish runs contrary to their internal desire to act justly (ἐθέλω). Presumably, if the rhetor comes to be aware of this tension, the rhetor would give up her inconsistent wish to act unjustly. This criterion for philosophical δύναμις, intellect to hit upon what one truly wishes, comes to be more fully developed in Socrates' exchange with Polus, but it is already at play in Socrates' early exchange with Gorgias. Moreover, in order to act with purpose on this internal desire, the rhetor, presumably, would have to reflect on the inconsistency between her wish (βούλομαι) to do injustice and persuade herself to give up that wish in the service of her inmost desire (ἐθέλω) for justice. The rhetor who does act unjustly, then, would err, transgressing rhetoric's proper aims, and the rhetor's own inmost desire (ἐθέλω). In this account, I part ways with James Stuart Murray, who argues that Gorgias's notion of rhetoric requires that it tyrannize over other arts by bending them to rhetoric's own aims (2001, 355–363). That may be true of Callicles' later position, but insofar as Gorgias proposes that rhetoric ought to be used justly, rhetoric's ability to be wielded unjustly is not inherent to

the practice, as Murray wants to say it is. In fact, Gorgias may recognize implicitly that the rhetor ought not wish to wield rhetoric unjustly. In that case, knowledge of justice empowers the rhetor to avoid erring and going against her true wishes.

The distinction just indicated between ἐθέλω and βούλομαι may also provide a further insight regarding Socrates' stated preference for being refuted over refuting others, and the attending priority of self-persuasion in his own philosophical activity. First, the inmost desire (ἐθέλω) to do justice hinges on knowledge of what justice is. One's turn towards a fundamental desire for justice, then, results from being persuaded (either by the self, or through didactic persuasion at another's hand) about the nature of justice. Once this persuasion is accomplished, desire aligns with knowledge and would seem, therefore, to be guided by reason. But even this might not amount to a simple correspondence between one's desire and one's action, since Socrates leaves open the possibility that our wishes (βούλομαι) may run contrary to our inmost desire (ἐθέλω), whereby self-persuasion would be required to subordinate the wish to do injustice to the inmost desire to do justice. In this case, we have a conflict between two impulses, one which is aligned with knowledge and reason and one which pulls contrary to knowledge and reason. The tacit distinction between ἐθέλω and βούλομαι points to a need for self-persuasion to complete the individual's alignment towards justice. But, with this appeal to self-persuasion only implied, Socrates and Gorgias leave unexplored how such persuasion should be achieved. Moreover, this claim will provide Gorgias an opportunity to unify his advertisement and defense, by calling the rhetor to recognize this distinction and subordinate her wish to do injustice to her desire to do justice, such that she no longer unjustly wishes to appear wiser than the knowers. Therefore, her persuasion over others will be predicated on this first moment of self-persuasion.

Socrates refutes only the claim that rhetoric can be wielded unjustly, not Gorgias's claim to its δύναμις over all technical domains. In other words, returning to the account Gorgias provides when first asked about rhetoric's object, Socrates permits Gorgias's original answer to stand. Rhetoric will be "about speeches (λόγοι)" and performed in λόγοι (449e). Thus, with the advent of confining rhetoric to aim only at what one *truly* wishes (ἐθέλω), the parallel between rhetoric and philosophy becomes perfectly clear, both are about and take place in λόγοι. The rhetor may still persuade others to submit in all areas, but she will no longer do so unjustly. Further, while Socrates formulates his refutation here negatively, claiming that the rhetor will be *unable* (ἀδύνατον) to do injustice, he builds to it through a positive account of rhetoric's knowledge of justice. From within Gorgias's account and given the negative formulation, this looks like a limitation to rhetoric's δύναμις, but in fact, it provides Gorgias a way of holding together his claim that rhetoric is essentially a divine δύναμις, as opposed to a limited τέχνη, and that it ought to be practiced justly.

There are many ways to interpret Gorgias's assent to Socrates' arguments here and his attending sacrifice of rhetoric's δύναμις. Marina McCoy, for instance, points out that there is no real contradiction in Gorgias's initial account of rhetoric's δύναμις, since Gorgias simply separates rhetoric's practice from the rhetor's knowledge of justice (2008, 89). Gorgias's assent, McCoy proposes can be read as his attempting to avoid appearing to the public to contradict himself and to be

unable to teach justice (2008, 90).[15] Indeed, Socrates himself suggests that Gorgias may be concerned with such appearances when he urges Gorgias to uncover whether he makes the rhetor good or simply makes her seem better than she is (459e). McCoy then makes the compelling argument that Socrates employs rhetoric to persuade Gorgias to shift his initial position, at least in order to save face, rather than didactically teaching him a truth to replace his false opinion (2008, 91). In her account, McCoy sheds light on the similarity between philosophical and rhetorical practice. I emphasize here how Socrates' arguments will affirm δύναμις as the greatest good, thus bringing together philosophy, rhetoric, and politics as directed towards this common judgment. I thereby part ways with Rachel Barney, who reads the incoherence of Gorgias's advertisement and defense, along with Socrates' ensuing elenchus as indicating that rhetoric is, for Plato "an incoherent, deceptive, and thus essentially vicious practice—not merely that it can be unjustly abused" (Barney, 2010, 107).[16] Thus, while Barney notes in passing that Socrates himself indicates a true rhetoric that would be utterly divorced from its spurious, wicked counterpart, I have proposed that Socrates' elenchus revives Gorgias's own account (2010, 107n22).

III. SOCRATES' PHILOSOPHICAL POWER

Here, we see the first indication of Socrates' sense of δύναμις, which comes to be more fully developed in his later challenges to Polus and Callicles. For Socrates, to be truly powerful suggests mastery over one's practice that keeps it within its proper boundaries. If the rhetorician ought only to act justly, as Gorgias's defense suggests, then rhetoric's δύναμις will include the δύναμις to do so, which knowledge of justice affords. Socrates' own understanding of power does not simply oppose Gorgias's, as scholars often propose, but rather Socrates makes possible and coherent all that Gorgias claims about rhetoric's δύναμις. This, in turn, presents an opportunity to join philosophical inquiry into the truth (about justice) with rhetoric's political ambition to persuade. However, this union requires the rhetor first to persuade herself to forsake her wish (βούλομαι) to act unjustly by recognizing her deeper desire (ἐθέλω) for justice. Rhetoric's inability (ἀδύνατον) to act unjustly constitutes its true δύναμις for Socrates, following Gorgias's own sentiments. And, in precisely this sense, Socrates implicitly allows δύναμις remain the greatest good.

Moreover, the union of philosophy and rhetoric illuminates Socrates' earlier drive to confine rhetoric to a τέχνη, but not in the sense that Duke had suggested, wherein rhetoric must have a specific sphere of objects that limits its activity. Rather, Gorgias and Socrates come closest to identifying a sphere of knowledge that would enable rhetoric to be considered something like a τέχνη when they determine that it governs matters of justice and injustice. While this is not as determinate a sphere of knowledge as medicine or another such art, and thereby pushes the boundaries of Roochnik's formulation of a conventional τέχνη, this practical knowledge of virtue approximates technical knowledge. And yet, rhetoric can still retain its unrestricted δύναμις to persuade about all matters, retaining its claim to divinity. This indicates the second way in which Socrates develops his own notion of δύναμις in parallel to Gorgias's own. Rhetorical δύναμις must involve the knowledge of justice and injustice that will enable one to act only in accordance with justice.

For Socrates, then, δύναμις involves a self-reflexive turn. While Gorgias claims that rhetoric ought to be able to rule over everyone else and renders the practitioner free, Socrates, by claiming that one who knows justice is unable to act unjustly, suggests that the truly powerful person first governs her own actions and wishes, rather than being condemned to act contrary to how she ought, and ultimately would wish, out of ignorance.[17] Socrates provides a way to resolve the tension in Gorgias's account between rhetoric as all-powerful and the imperative that the rhetor ought only to act justly. To this extent, Socrates' notion of δύναμις parallels Gorgias's.

IV. CONCLUSION

Because Socrates' notion of δύναμις parallels Gorgias's rhetorical δύναμις of political persuasion, we can see already in the dialogue's first exchange a hint towards elucidating Socrates' claim that he alone tries his hand at the political τέχνη (521d). Politics and philosophy are not simply opposed. Both involve freedom and rule, and both regard δύναμις as that which enables those ambitions. But δύναμις, properly understood, must submit to a kind of philosophical tempering. Philosophical δύναμις is distinguished from conventional, rhetorical δύναμις in its self-reflexive turn. Gorgias focuses on rhetoric's δύναμις to enslave and rule over others, which leads to Polus's and Callicles' tyrannizing ambitions, while Socrates introduces self-rule by claiming that knowing justice means confining oneself to act justly. While Gorgias claims that the rhetor could persuade anyone she wishes over any matter she wishes (βούλομαι), Socrates takes up Gorgias's second claim, that the rhetor act justly, to reinterpret the first. If the rhetor knows what justice is, she will not desire (ἐθέλω) to act unjustly and thus her true δύναμις entails avoiding injustice. Philosophical δύναμις consists in the self-persuasion to forsake one's base wishes (βούλομαι) for one's inmost desires (ἐθέλω), which are ordered by the knowledge of justice. Only then, might the philosophical ruler seek to persuade others, or, perhaps, to inspire others to undergo their own self-persuasion about the nature of justice. This indicates both the shared origins of and difference between philosophy and tyranny. Both include a universalizing claim to δύναμις over all domains. But the philosopher, according to Socrates, knows what she wishes and prioritizes self-rule before (and if ever) attempting to rule others.

A further question, then, arises here: to what extent can philosophical δύναμις bring about change in the other's desire, should the other refuse to recognize philosophy's claim to δύναμις? Does this self-reflexive turn render philosophy ineffectual in political life? While Socrates himself unites the political and the philosophical in idea, are readers meant to understand his inability to persuade Callicles and perhaps even Polus to indicate a problem in reconciling the two in practice? Does this failure reveal something about the fragility of λόγος and philosophical δύναμις or simply indicate Socrates' particular failure? Perhaps the Platonic dialogue itself affords a vehicle by which to inspire self-persuasion in others without the dangers attending a direct attempt to persuade others. While these questions are never addressed in the dialogue, and thus can only be indicated and not answered here, I hope to have paved the way to address these questions more directly by revealing how philosophy, rhetoric, and politics share the same object and how they differ.[18]

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Notes

1 I translate δύναμις here and throughout as "power," rather than "potential" or "capacity," to better preserve the word's original ambiguity. Δύναμις concerns both the potential or capacity that rhetoric affords and the power it actively wields.

2 The first two criteria of philosophical δύναμις are hinted in Socrates' initial exchange with Gorgias, but the third, that power must be directed towards living the best life and not simply prolonging life, is developed in his final exchange with Callicles.

3 The noun δύναμις and its relatives occur 16 times throughout the dialogue, while the verb δύναμαι and its relatives occur 33 times, for a combined total of 49 mentions. The dialogues stated object, ῥητορική and its relatives occur 91 times. While rhetoric remains the dialogue's main concern, power plays a crucial part in the discussion.

4 Translations of the *Gorgias* are taken from James H. Nichols, Jr. with minor modifications indicated, unless otherwise noted.

5 My translation.

6 Nichols's translation with minor modification.

7 Nichols's translation with minor modification.

8 My translation.

9 Nichols's translation with modification.

10 In the *Phaedo*, Socrates identifies two other interconnected greatest evils for human beings. First, there is the evil that befalls one who is experiencing violent pleasure or pain and believes that whatever causes her suffering is most manifest and true (*Phaed.* 83c). Second, there is the evil befalling the misologist who, having been deceived by a number λόγοι distrusts all λόγοι (*Phaed.* 89d). The pain misologist suffers through her deceit leads to her conclusion that all λόγοι are untrustworthy. It seems the danger Socrates identifies here may connect to these dangers as well; if trust in the λόγος gives one

intense pleasure, as it seems Gorgias's opinion about rhetoric's divine δύναμις gives him, he may begin to take that opinion as indubitable and thus suffer the danger of one who takes the source of her pleasure as most true. Perhaps Socrates, too, even finds such an opinion pleasant and must remind himself here to ward it off.

11 The simultaneously parallel and contrasting claim that Socrates will make in his later discussions with Polus and Callicles that it is better to suffer than to do injustice hardly answers the question regarding selfishness since it is largely the harm attending one's soul that follows doing injustice or the relative happiness of the just person, rather than the action's effect that leads Socrates to prefer suffering injustice to doing it. Socrates repeatedly emphasizes care for one's own soul with the attending effect that another's soul is attended. One possible explanation for this preference may be that caring for one's own soul is a prerequisite for adequate care of another. As Socrates will soon point out, the rhetor who unreflectingly wishes to act unjustly transgresses her deeper, unrecognized desire to do justice. Socrates may hold that similarly one who seeks to care directly for another's soul without first attending to their own runs the risk of unknowingly harming the other in their pursuit.

12 "From this investigation, Athenian men, much hatred has come, the most grievous and serious kind, so that many slanders have arisen from them, and I received this appellation of being 'wise,' for those present at each occasion think that I am wise in those things about which I refute others, whereas it is likely, men, that the god is wise and the oracle meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing" (*Apol.* 23a–b). Translations from the *Apology* are from the Kremer edition, with modifications noted.

13 Nichols's translation, with modification.

14 For a more thorough discussion on the relationship between βούλομαι and ἐθέλω, see John Madden's "*Boulomai*" and "*Thelo*": The Vocabulary of Purpose from Homer to Aristotle, Yale University, 1975.

15 McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 90.

16 A full account of the way Socrates' critique of rhetoric pertains to the way it was practiced in Athens specifically is beyond the scope of this paper. For a fuller discussion of how Plato might be seen to implicate Athenian practice in his account see Michael Svoboda, "Athens, the Unjust Student of Rhetoric: A Dramatic Historical Interpretation of Plato's *Gorgias*" *Rhetorical Society Quarterly* 37, 3 (2007) and Josiah Ober, "Justice, Knowledge, Power: Plato Apology, Crito, Gorgias, Republic" in *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, (Princeton University Press, 1988).

17 For a helpful discussion of the ways in which Gorgias's rhetorical persuasion and Socrates' philosophical persuasion may be more compatible than it first appears in how they engage with others, see James H. Nichols *Gorgias and Phaedrus: Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Politics*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998): 134–149.

18 Many of the ideas in this paper developed out of a series of conversations with Marina McCoy, who also provided careful and invaluable feedback to an earlier draft of this paper. I am also grateful to the audience of the 2019 Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Meeting, who heard and provided feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. Finally, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose extremely helpful comments on the submission likewise helped to improve this paper.

Plato's Intellectual Development and Visual Thinking

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ABSTRACT

Plato has devised texts which call the readers to collaborate cognitively with them. An important epistemic stimulation is the schematization, the line segment, which summarizes Plato's idea of intellectual development. In this research, visual thinking will help us to make the most of the Platonic invitation to investigate further cognitive growth. It will be analyzed how visual discoveries are rendered possible by mental number lines, realizing the epistemological importance of visualization. Thanks to visualization, structuralism will be grasped. It will reveal a connection with Plato's philosophy which suggests a novel elaboration of the Platonic concept of intellectual growth.

Keywords: Higher-Order Pedagogy; Theoretical Childhood; Theoretical Adulthood; Visual Thinking; Mental Number Lines; Structuralism.

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1. PLATO AND THE RATIONAL ENGAGMENT OF HIS READERS

The present research is rooted into my work on Plato and intellectual development (Saracco 2017). There, I analyzed a crucial passage of the Platonic dialogues: the passage of the sixth book of the *Republic* (*R*. VI 509d-511) in which Plato explains what are, for him, the stages of intellectual development of the human being and what are the objects of knowledge pertinent to each phase of cognition. Plato schematizes his idea of intellectual progress using a line segment divided into four subsections: two of them correspond to phases in which our knowledge is still connected to the sensible realm and the other two sectors indicate a kind of knowledge which is pertinent to the intelligible realm.

My attention was captivated by the moment in which Plato, summarizing his idea of cognitive progress, tells his readers that there is much more to know about the subject than what had been discussed so far with Glaucon (*R*. VII 534a):

> But as for the ratios between the things these are set over and the division of either the opinable or the intelligible section into two, let's pass them by, Glaucon, *lest they involve us in arguments many times longer than the ones we have already gone through*. (My emphasis)

Foley (2008, 23), commenting the previous excerpt from the *Republic,* emphasizes:

> the passage shows that Plato is not willing to set forth his views on the further complexities that have emerged. It is a task that he *intentionally* leaves for his readers, revealing that his final assessment of the role of the divided line is to *force a thoughtful reader to transcend the text*. One significant aspect of the divided line is exactly that Plato refuses to explain its point. (Foley 2008, 23. My emphasis)

Foley's words reveal a crucial insight: Plato's text is a stimulus for a rational investigation which is not meant to *end* in the written words of his dialogues. Plato asks his readers to participate actively with the text. This participation is not meant to be a simple approval or criticism of the words of the philosopher; rather, this call for collaboration is designed to "*force a thoughtful reader to transcend the text*" (Foley 2008, 23. My emphasis). Plato, presenting in the *Republic* his schematization of intellectual development, in connection with the objects of investigation that human reason can grasp, *tells* his readers that there is more to discover on the subject, and this is something that *they* have to do. In saying this, Plato *calls for a collaboration between writer and reader*. Plato has not written a textbook whose content can merely be summarized by the readers. He has created a text to which they are required to respond and the act of responding to the text is as important as the text itself: the two of them together complete Plato's task. Plato does not want to convey a static description of how things are. He has created a text that calls out for completion by the readers' further contributions. This does not mean that Plato's words are incomplete in the sense that they communicate thoughts which have not yet reached a good degree of elaboration. On the contrary, it means that the words written by Plato are so well mastered by their author that they are able to stimulate the reader to overcome them, as Foley was highlighting. Plato's texts are not only composed by words which have the goal of expressing the thinking of their author but they also comprise the thinking of their users.

Through the dialogues, Plato is inviting us to reflect on *our* cognitive resources to develop them autonomously. He says this explicitly in the *Meno*:

> As the whole nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only-a process men call learning-discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. (*Men.* 81c-d)

It is useful to read these lines together with an excerpt from the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates is reporting a dialogue about the art of writing which takes place between Thamus and Theuth:

> O most expert Theuth, one man can give birth to the elements of an art, but only another can judge how they can benefit or harm those who will use them. And now, since you are the father of writing, your affection for it has made you describe its effects as the opposite of what they really are. In fact, it will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so. (*Phdr.* 275a-b)

Let us consider this passage in connection with the passage of the *Meno* cited above: in the *Meno* Plato tells us that learning is a process of "recollection" (*Men.* 81d) and in the *Phaedrus* we read that the written words will not help us to remember but they can only be used as *reminders* because they do not lead to ourselves but they rather depend on signs that "belong to others" (*Phdr.* 275a). In the *Phaedrus* Plato explicitly connects the process of learning with remembering something that is *inside* us: what is inside us makes us remember, recollect, a wisdom that is merely reminded by the written words.

It seems unlikely that the author of these passages would conceive of his own written words as the final destination of knowledge, but rather as a stimulus to reach that destination, which is internal to us. Thus, the Platonic words are only a *reminder* of the necessity of looking for knowledge where the answers to the dialogical questions come from, *inside* us, in the organ capable of remembering which is, for Plato, the soul and its main component, the reason. Consistently, Plato's dialogues do not end with the thoughts of the author and the words, the *reminders*, that he has selected to convey them, but they are enriched by the multitude of rational memories prompted by the autonomous investigations of Plato's readers.

The courage of recognizing the existence of an intellectual dimension in which what we have learned to consider certain becomes criticizable, losing its stability, is the necessary premise to reconstruct creatively a truth, which is far from the shadows of what merely appears as true, as Mattéi makes us unders-

tand in the following quote, distinguishing "*two sorts of spectacle lovers*" (Mattéi 1988, 79. My emphasis):

> The first are the crowd and the sophists who unreservedly dedicate themselves to the sensible beauty of colors, forms and voices. As Socrates puts it to Glaucon: '*those who love to watch*' (φιλοθεάμονες) and 'those who love to listen' (φιλήκοοι; *R*. 475d2) remain the *prisoners of appearances* even if they show an unconscious desire for a higher kind of knowledge. In front of them, '*those who love to know*'--*the philosophers*-are in search of the luminous theater of *truth beyond the shadow play*. Like the pure souls released from their bodies and contemplating the vast plain of Truth, and like the initiate in Eros' mysteries contemplating the boundless ocean of the Beautiful, 'the genuine philosophers are those who are in love with the spectacle of the truth' (*R*. 475e).

Here Mattéi highlights that the spectacle created by Plato must not be seen as something constructed to be passively watched and it is not the final destination of the intellectual growth of the reader. If we confuse a means of rational growth with the final goal of this process, we are condemned to live in an epistemic realm in which the shadows are for us the reality. In this cognitive dimension we will never know the truth. If we recognize that Plato's words compose a succession of epistemic stimulations devised to encourage rational evolution, whose meaning requires to be completed by the critical and creative contributions of his readers, we allow the words of Plato to perform the real show they were invented for, the show in which the absolute protagonist is human reason.

1.1 RATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND HIGHER-ORDER PEDAGOGY

The dialogical character of Plato's work is opposite to the will of indoctrinating or just instructing the readers. Plato *chose* to write *dialogues* and this choice is not only a formal but also a philosophical choice: Plato wants to stimulate an active participation of his readers which goes beyond the accidental criticism of the written words, which can take place whenever a text is read. In fact, as we have just seen, when Plato in the *Republic*, has presented his idea of what intellectual development is, he states explicitly that there is more to discover on the subject, but he does not tell his readers *how* they should do it. The modes of collaboration between writer and reader advocated by Plato are not predetermined by the philosopher. Plato's readers can choose to criticize radically his philosophical system or they can choose to accept its basics. Plato interacts dialogically with his readers, asking them explicitly to transcend the text (Foley 2008, 23. Also cf. *Phaedrus*, 275 a-b) to complete it with their contributions. This Platonic request is at the base of the *higher-order pedagogy* that permeates the dialogues, where the role of the readers is not flattened to that of students who can merely absorb the content proposed by their teacher. Plato's readers are invited to become active creators of the philosophical message. This invitation has not to be considered as a consequence of a lack in Plato's argumentative ability. On the contrary, as we have just seen, the philosopher is able to stimulate his readers with explicit requests.[1]

For Plato, education has crucial importance. In fact, the philosopher is well aware of the fact that the human rational nature can diverge from its positive capabilities, when its direction

is determined by messages that appeal simply to appetite. This intuition is itself extraordinary for its modernity. But what renders the Platonic rational pedagogy extraordinary is its character: Plato explicitly says to his readers that they have to find the truth by themselves, using what they are reading only as reminder of the rational power that they possess (*Phaedrus*, 275 a-b). Plato's is a kind of higher-order pedagogy in which the readers are not the passive receptors of a content but they discover themselves as authors of the content.

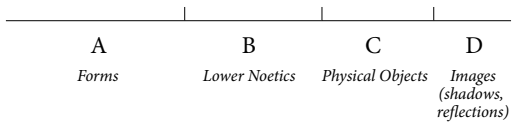
The dialogue between Plato and his readers takes place via the written words of his texts,

that allow the continuation of the cognitive exchange between the philosopher's rational heritage and his reader's intellect. The dialogical interaction with the readers, and the consequent free development of their thinking abilities, does not mean that the Platonic philosophy can be developed in any way. The intellectual stimulation of Plato's words consists in the exhortation to contribute in an original and creative way to the development of what Plato thinks that knowledge is. Plato tells his readers clearly what his idea of knowledge is: the highest point of intellectual development is reached when we are able to abandon the empirical completely to reach the purely intelligible. Only when our rationality is disentangled from the distracting stimuli which come from the tangible realm, we are able to grasp the purely intelligible truth. Nonetheless, the individual contributions of Plato's readers can mould the concept of Platonic knowledge into the shape their intellect suggests. Furthermore, it remains possible at any point for Plato's readers to use their rational capabilities, sharpened through the texts written by the philosopher, to criticize his conception of knowledge, abandoning in this way Plato's philosophical system. My work does not go in this direction. I have chosen to respond to the Platonic intellectual stimulation, proposing a new theoretical framework for engaging with Plato's dialogues.

1.1.1 PLATO'S HIGHER-ORDER PEDAGOGY: MY RESPONSE.

I am going to present the basics of the new theoretical lens that I have elaborated as response to the Platonic request to collaborate with his text. As we will see, my reflections on Plato's schematic representation of intellectual development, will be enriched by new considerations on the role of visual thinking and visual discovery in Plato. We will analyze how the schematization of the line segment aids visual discoveries and how these discoveries relate the line segment with mathematics.

I have chosen to accept the core of Platonic philosophy and I have decided to engage with his words, using them for an investigation in line with his philosophical system. At the centre of my engagement with Plato's words there is the account of human intellectual development presented in the *Republic* (*R.* VI 509d-511), schematized using a line segment divided into four subsections:



This is the rendition, chosen by Foley, of Plato's discussion of the progress of the cognitive capacities of the individual. Each object indicated in the line segment above can be apprehended thanks to a rational faculty correspondent to it. (Foley 2008, 1) The subsection A corresponds to Understanding, *noēsis*. At this

stage of intellectual development the individual is able to apprehend the Forms. The subsection B is Thought, *dianoia*. In this phase of rational evolution the person begins his investigation of the mathematical objects, intellectually inferior to the Forms. The subsection C is Belief, *pistis*, which gives the person the chance to understand the physical objects. The subsection D is Imagination, *eikasia*, which is used to know the images. As Foley explains, he has preferred to "follow one general tendency in the literature of labeling the section representing the Forms with the letter 'A' and treating it as the longest subsegment because Forms are first in order of importance"(Foley 2008, footnote 1, p. 1).

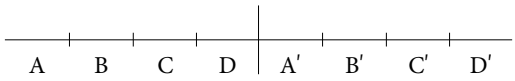
The different length of the subsections of the line segment is traditionally used to represent the different cognitive importance of the objects which correspond to them and of the intellectual faculties necessary to understand these objects. Longer subsections represent objects more difficult to grasp and more advanced cognitive faculties, necessary to investigate these objects. Foley comments the lines of the *Republic* quoted in **1.**, in which Plato exhorts his readers to investigate further the subject of human cognitive progress, stating that even if it seems that the Platonic indications to divide the line segment entail the existence of two middle subsections of *equal* length, when we analyze further this schematization we see that "the two middle subsegments are *unequal* because they represent mental states of unequal clarity, and possibly also objects with unequal degrees of reality"(Foley 2008, 1).

I disagree with Foley because I think that the words of Plato cited above have not to be interpreted only within the cognitive space of the four sectors of the line segment that we have examined. On the contrary, these sectors are the starting point of an intellectual progress which is not described in the dialogues but is originated by them. Plato's words, in my interpretation, are an exhortation to keep in mind that the content of the dialogues is just one chapter of the Platonic book of knowledge.[2] This must guide our interaction with the Platonic text, in case we decide to cooperate with it, as I have done, accepting to stay within the conceptual boundaries given by the Platonic conception of knowledge, which culminates with the apprehension of the purely intelligible. In my reconstruction of what the Platonic account of human intellectual progress could be, I am aware of the role of his written words, in respect to the larger cognitive project that the philosopher indicates. But I am also aware that this broader theoretical framework, even though it has to respond to the Platonic idea of truth, which has to be totally separated from the empirical, leaves us the necessary intellectual space to shape this truth with our contributions.

This positive characteristic of Platonic philosophy leads to the fact that my reconstruction of the stages of human intellectual development,[3] respects and is guided by the Platonic principles about knowledge and truth but it is disputable because it cannot respond to a precise Platonic description. Nevertheless, I need to make an assumption in order to progress with my research on Plato's ideas about human rational growth. I take on board a piece of scientific method to elaborate my theory about what could be the stages of cognitive progress, which should be added to those described in the *Republic*. In science, when there are testable elements which present variations which are not in line with what was theorized about their properties, it is possible, before rejecting the theories about those elements, to hypothesize that the unpredictable variations are generated by other elements, whose existence was not taken into consideration before.

This is the way in which in the nineteenth century the planet Neptune was discovered: the motion of Uranus was considerably different from that predicted through the Newtonian gravitational theory. In order to find a solution to this problem it was hypothesized that there should be a previously undetected planet close to Uranus. The attraction between this hypothetical planet and Uranus had to be considered the cause for the departure of Uranus from its initially predicted orbit. Once this hypothesis was assumed to be true, it was possible to test its content, checking with a telescope for the presence of an undiscovered planet. This led to the first sighting of Neptune, saving Newton's gravitational theory (Chalmers 1976, 78).

In our case, the Platonic excerpt which we have taken into consideration via Foley's comment, is the unpredictable effect which confirms our theory about the existence of stages of cognitive development, which add subsections to the line segment used by Plato to represent human intellectual progress. These subsections are indicated with A', B', C', D' in the schematization below and they are our Neptune, which has not been noticed before.



As we have seen, Foley has chosen to represent with A the Forms, pointing at the significance of this object and of the cognitive capacity correspondent to its understanding, through the use of a subsection of the line segment of intellectual progress larger than the others. In my line segment, the subsection A represents the images and the cognitive capacity necessary to grasp them. When we are able to understand D, the Forms, we reach a superior level of intellectual development. Starting from this epistemic moment, we are able to begin the investigation of the purely intelligible, which is for Plato the highest rational achievement.[4] In the dialogues, there is no indication of how this investigation can take place. I have hypothesized that there can be stages of rational progress also in the cognitive development of the individuals who are already able to investigate the purely intelligible. For this reason, I have also hypothesized that the analysis of the purely intelligible has to begin with an empirical aid, as it happens in the first stages of rational development described by Plato. These stages are represented by the subsections A and B of my line segment, that are, as A' and B', still related to the empirical. With this notation, I suggest the correspondence between the stages of cognitive development, A-D, necessary to reach the epistemic point in which we are able to start the investigation of the purely intelligible and the stages of cognitive advancement, A'-D', of the individuals who are already able to research the purely intelligible.

In order to stress that the description of human intellectual evolution given in the *Republic* is only the first part of the cognitive progress of the individual, I have chosen to call the four sectors of the line segment traced in the *Republic*, theoretical childhood (A-D); the extension of this line segment is theoretical adulthood (A'-D'). I am using the term *theoretical* having in mind the relation between *theōreō* and *oraō*, which implies *a process of cognition which starts with the vision, instantiated through physical or intellectual eyes*. Thus, theoretical childhood will be that stage of cognition in which the speculations are in their childhood because the intellectual eyes are not yet looking in the right direction. With the expressions theoretical childhood and theoretical children, I am *not* referring to *real* children and their cognitive development but I am defining phases of rational evolution, one

intellectually more advanced than the other, coherent with Plato's indications.

Plato states explicitly what are the objects analyzed during the rational progression from A to D. The purely intelligible is the most complex object that the human reason can examine. Thus, it is plausible that its knowledge takes place in stages and that the beginning of the investigation of the purely intelligible is still informed by the tangible, as means to reach the purely intelligible. We do not know whether A', B', C', D' correspond to different objects which reveal different aspects of the purely intelligible or whether different cognitive layers of the purely intelligible are the objects of investigation in A', B', C', D'. But my addition of subsections in the line segment of cognitive progress described by Plato has not the purpose of providing the final answer about the Platonic account of human intellectual development.[5] My representation of this account wants to emphasize that the individual rational growth, as envisaged by Plato, does not end in the description of the *Republic* (*R.* VI 509d-510) but it continues with stages of rational development complementary to those traced by the Platonic words. This extension, grounded in the lines of the *Republic* commented by Foley, (*R.* VII534 a) is my way of responding to the request for collaboration with the text which is, as we have seen, a fundamental aspect of the Platonic dialogues.

In my representation, all the sectors of the line segment have equal length.[6] This does not mean that I think that there is no theoretical difference among the objects and mental stages which correspond to the parts of the line segment. In fact, the text of the *Republic* provides fuel for discussion of equal or unequal length of the subsections of the line segment. Joining this discussion would serve no purpose in my interest on this representation of the Platonic account of intellectual development. This interest is focused on the *equal* epistemic significance that *each* subsection has for the individual rational development. Maintaining the focus on the *function* of each epistemic stage of the line segment is crucial to grasp the significance of this representation for the understanding of the nature and potentiality of human rationality according to Plato.

We have seen so far the phases of development of theoretical childhood and adulthood. Now I want to present the basics[7] of my reconstruction of what could be for Plato the different means, or techniques as I call them, that favour rational progress in each of the phases which are part of theoretical childhood and theoretical adulthood. The technique that Plato has chosen to make theoretical children evolve cognitively is the use of natural language. The beginning of this analysis is given by the quotation from the *Phaedrus* that we have already taken into consideration in **1.** In that excerpt, Socrates reports a dialogue between Thamus and Theuth about the art of writing. For the present purposes, our attention has to be focused on the distinction, made in that excerpt, between knowledge which stems from *external reminders* and *knowledge which emerges exclusively from the reasoning capabilities of the individual*. In **1.**, quoting the *Meno*, we have spoken about the ability of the *reason* to remember, to *recollect*, originating knowledge by itself. But when we have not yet developed this skill we need the words, external reminders of our cognitive potentialities.

We need only to be *reminded* about our intellectual capacities because even during a phase, theoretical childhood, in which we have not yet reached a high degree of intellectual sophistication, we already possess the skills to attain this goal. This is stressed by Plato in the following lines:

> Education isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes….*the power to learn is present in everyone's soul*…education…it isn't the craft of putting *sight into the soul*. *Education* takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way…and *it tries to redirect it appropriately*. (*R*. VII 518c-d. My emphasis.)

These words are part of Book VII of the *Republic*, where the allegory of the cave shows the necessity that the eyes who have always lived in the obscurity of the appearance of knowledge adjust gradually to the sight of its bright reality. This excerpt points to the *graduality* of the process of human intellectual development, as it is confirmed from the context in which these lines appear. The reasoning ability is a skill proper of the human beings and it belongs to everyone of them. Nonetheless, to make sure that the cognitive eyes look at the truth, it is necessary that they are appropriately stimulated. This will avoid the danger emphasized by Mattéi in the lines quoted in **1.**: people stop at the spectacle created by Plato's *words* without investigating its *function*.

We have taken into consideration words to point at their usefulness for the rational growth of theoretical children. Nevertheless, natural language is not the appropriate technique for the rational stimulation of theoretical adults. As we have seen, the object of investigation of theoretical adults is the purely intelligible. To understand what could be an adequate technique to promote the development of this higher-level thinking, I am going to start from Foley's emphasis on the importance attributed by Plato to mathematics. As we have seen in Foley's discussion of his rendition of Plato's line segment which represents objects and the cognitive faculties necessary to understand them, mathematical objects are the first point of entrance in the realm of the intelligible. This is what Foley explains, emphasizing

> the tremendous importance that mathematics has in Plato's account of philosophical development. The study of mathematics serves as a bridge between physical objects and the Forms. Learning to think mathematically is presented as a necessary condition for thinking philosophically because mathematics is what leads us from concern for physical objects to understanding of eternal objects. Once this transition to eternal objects has been made, it is easier to study the Forms. (Foley 2008, 12)

We have stressed the significance of Foley's thought about the Platonic text as stimulation for a research which has not to end with those written words. Now he points at the need of considering the crucial role that mathematics plays in Plato's philosophy, as the bridge between an inferior level of rational development, which can know only via the physical realm, and a superior intellectual refinement, which is able to grasp the non-sensible, the Forms.

I agree with Foley's statements about the significant role that mathematics plays to reach the highest intellectual goal according to Plato, the knowledge of the purely intelligible. Nevertheless, Heath stresses a difference between mathematical and dialectical method in Plato which can make us think that mathematics is imperfect in comparison with dialectic and it cannot be the technique which promotes a higher-order development of human rationality:

> Plato distinguishes two processes: both begin from hypotheses. *The one method*

> *cannot get above these hypotheses* but, treating them as if they were the first principles, builds upon them and, with the aid of diagrams or images, arrives at conclusions*: this is the method of geometry and mathematics in general*. The other method treats the hypotheses as being really hypotheses and nothing more, but uses them as stepping-stones for mounting higher and higher until the principle of all things is reached, a principle about which there is nothing hypothetical; when this is reached, it is possible to *descend again*, by steps each connected with the preceding step, to the conclusion, a process which has no need of any sensible images but deals in ideals only and ends in them; this method, which rises above and puts an end to hypotheses, and reaches the first principle in this way is the *dialectical method* (Heath 1921, 290. My emphasis).

These lines should not be considered as the base for an exclusion of mathematics from the realm of theoretical adulthood. This would be an incorrect inference which can be avoided if we take into consideration the different levels of mathematical complexity.

The first level of mathematical complexity can be associated with an axiomatic approach which can be defined as top-down axiomatic approach. This is "the method of geometry and mathematics in general:"(Heath 1921, 290) it helps us to prove that results are correct (Greenberg 1974, 8) using the axioms, which are never questioned, and the logical consequences we derive from them. With this method results are logically deduced from unquestioned axioms, which are the foundations which ground the mathematical structure.[8] Greenberg explains to us what an axiom is, emphasizing that

> If I wish to persuade you by *pure reasoning* to believe some statement S1, I could show you how this statement follows logically from some other statement S2 that you may already accept. However, if you don't believe S2, I would have to show you how S2 follows logically from some other statement S3. I might have to repeat this procedure several times until I reach some statement that you already accept, one I do not need to justify. That statement plays the role of an *axiom* (or *postulate*). If I cannot reach a statement that you will accept as the basis of my argument, I will be caught in an "infinite regress," giving one demonstration after another without end. (Greenberg 1974, 9)

Greenberg's words point to the fact that the *axioms* are grasped through *pure reasoning*; thus, they lead us directly towards the *purely intelligible*. This reminds us of the role of mathematics in the redirection of our cognitive sight towards the intelligible, which Foley was emphasizing.

I have pointed at the existence of two levels of mathematical complexity. We have seen briefly the utility of the geometrical axioms to move from the tangible to the intelligible. This focus on the intelligible is for Plato fundamental to evolve intellectually *till to the point in which we become theoretical adults. The mathematics utilized by theoretical adults*, already emerges from Heath's words about the dialectical method. When mathematics is applied to the understanding of complex problems, it is not anymore based upon axioms, which do not require any reconsideration. On the contrary, at this level of sophistication, the consequences of the problem have to be utilized to reconsider the truth of the premises. (Russell 1973, 273-274) In this case, we have not a rational movement which merely

goes from an element to its mathematical consideration via a mathematical principle which will not require any reevaluation. This is the way in which the axiomatic approach which we defined as top-down works and its relative simplicity allows its utilization by theoretical children, favouring their cognitive progress towards theoretical adulthood. But, as Foley has highlighted, for Plato the highest point of intellectual evolution is reached when the purely intelligible is the only subject of investigation. At that speculative level, theoretical adults have to try to solve problems whose complexity demands to go back from what has been considered a correct result, a correct consequence of their thinking, to its premise. This axiomatic approach can be called bottom-up since the progress of theoretical adults in the understanding of the consequences of their line of reasoning will illuminate the comprehension of the related premises. We are going to know more about this last kind of axiomatic approach, analyzing it in connection with visual thinking.

I have pointed to the fact that the written words are useful reminders for individuals whose intellectual skills have not yet been totally developed. When Plato's readers reach the cognitive complexity of theoretical adults they have no necessity of the mediation of a written text to progress intellectually. Indeed, this text would be very difficult to compose because it should describe the myriads of intellectual routes which can be chosen by a mind whose capacity of selection is not restrained by cognitive mistakes. This kind of description would be not only very challenging to write but also useless since the only people who could grasp its content would be those who have already reached a level of intellectual maturity which renders the written reminders pointless. This level of development of the human intellectual capacities is not the object of a *direct* Platonic description. Thus, my reconstruction of theoretical adulthood is, in a sense, solidly grounded in Plato's text because it is a reconstruction of a phase of human rational development based, as we have seen, on the effects that this cognitive phase, theoretical adulthood, provokes on another phase, theoretical childhood, directly described by Plato. Nevertheless, the ground of theoretical adulthood is *meant* to be shaken by the contributions of minds which have no fear to leave the place of tradition to develop innovative researches. Consequently, I am ready to admit not only that my idea of theoretical adulthood can be criticizable but also that if it was not criticizable, it would not be that territory of novelty, correspondent to the Platonic choice of leaving this cognitive zone to the rational talent of his readers.

2. THE MENO AND VISUAL THINKING

We have seen that the criticisms of Plato's words are not mere accidents: their occurrence is provoked by the dialogical interaction to make them become part of the philosophical message itself. As we said, this rational stimulation is not meant to make us accept Plato's idea of truth. We, as readers of the Platonic dialogues, are rationally stimulated by Plato to discover a rational sophistication of which we were not aware. We are guided by someone who knows more than we do, but we are guided by him through a dialogical exchange. This method makes us discover the rational resources which give us the chance to critically evaluate the thoughts of the person who is intellectually guiding us, acquiring at the same time the capability of completing his own system and the independence from its content. Through the dialogues, Plato is inviting us to reflect on *our* cognitive resources to develop them autonomously.

An example of the importance of the investigative freedom of the rational creature is found in the dialogue *Meno* where Meno's slave will discover that he possesses the intellectual ability to find an answer to a geometrical problem thanks to the dialogical interaction with Socrates. The slave is not pressured to accept the point of view of an earlier theorist or Socrates' beliefs; indeed, Socrates never expresses his point of view but he questions his interlocutor to develop in him the awareness of his intellectual abilities. The cognitive growth of Meno's slave takes place in the fictional stage of the *Meno*: the slave's answers are decided by Plato as part of his fictional creation but this creation points at the importance of the independent rational activity of the subject of a dialogical interaction. Even when the contribution of Meno's slave is limited to an affirmative or negative answer his replies reveal his own rational activity, stimulated by the words of his interlocutor but developed independently from them (see in particular *Men.* 81c-e). In fact, the solution of a geometrical problem by someone who has never studied geometry requires a reasoning which, even if it is not fully recorded in the dialogue, is present in the correctness of the slave's answer. Thus, the slave's answers are not perfunctory because they are signalling a process of active reflection, required to reply correctly to the questions presented. In the *Meno* the slave is not questioned to learn Socrates' truth, he is questioned to discover that there is truth in himself.

The slave in the *Meno*, through Socrates' questioning, acquires conscience of his rational abilities but what kind of thinking is involved in the reasoning of the slave who gradually realizes to possess the cognitive capacity to know a geometrical truth? An answer to this question comes from Marcus Giaquinto's research. He has worked on the epistemological importance of visual thinking in mathematics.[9] According to Giaquinto "the oldest and best known discussion of visual *discovery* is to be found in Plato's *Meno* (82b-86b)" (Giaquinto 2008, 32. My emphasis). Giaquinto explains that it is usually considered impossible to *discover* a geometrical theorem thanks to visualization. This happens because, when visualizing and seeing are compared, it is usually felt that visualizing is no better than seeing (Giaquinto 2007, 67). This is due to a misleading comparison: in fact, "while the *experience* of visualizing is similar to the experience of seeing, the *epistemic role* of visualizing can be utterly different from the primary, evidence-providing role of seeing...So the fundamental mistake here is to assume that the epistemic role of visual experience, whether of sight or imagination, must be to provide evidence. In view of its non-evidential role we can say that visualizing…is part of an *a priori* means of...discovery" (Giaquinto 2007, 67). Visual discovery, for Giaquinto, is an *a priori* and "it consists in the operation of a synthesis of visually triggered belief-forming dispositions. Hence it may be appropriately regarded as a synthetic *a priori* route to knowledge" (Giaquinto 2007, 67-68).

To understand better the *epistemic* role of visualization according to Giaquinto, it is necessary to come back to the *Meno*. There (*Men.* 81e-86c), Plato famously presented a visual way of discovering a simple fact of geometry: if a diagonal of one square is a side of another square, this other square has twice the area of the first (Giaquinto 2007, 12). Giaquinto emphasizes the necessity that every geometrical discovery has a starting point. Thus, the initial challenge of this Platonic visual discovery is this: "how can we acquire *basic* geometrical knowledge?" (Giaquinto 2007, 12). According to Giaquinto

> In having geometrical concepts for shapes, we have certain general *belief-forming dispositions*. These dispositions can be triggered by experiences of seeing or visual imagining, and when that happens we acquire geometrical beliefs. The beliefs acquired in this way constitute knowledge, in fact synthetic *a priori* knowledge, provided that the belief-forming dispositions are reliable (Giaquinto 2007, 12. My emphasis)

In this excerpt Giaquinto explains that a visual discovery involves the activation of dispositions, that he defines as "belief-forming dispositions" (Giaquinto 2007, 12) that come with possession of certain geometrical concepts (e.g. square, diagonal). What *triggers the activation* of these dispositions is conscious *visual experience*. A belief acquired in this way is *non-empirical*, "because *the role of experience is not to provide evidence*. At the same time, some *visual experience is essential for activating the relevant belief-forming disposition*" (Giaquinto 2007, 47. My emphasis). Giaquinto notices that in some cases, as in the case of the *Meno*, the mode of belief-acquisition is fast, thus the resulting belief seems to the subject immediate and obvious (Giaquinto 2008, 33). In very many cases we are unaware of the cause and occasion of the acquisition of a belief. In fact,

> having a belief is not a manifest state like a pain state-some of our beliefs we are unaware of having-and the transition from lacking a certain belief to having it may also occur without awareness...One may not get a firm belief all at once; to acquire a firm belief by activation of a belief-forming disposition, activations on several occasions may be needed. *But the point is unchanged: there is no anomaly in the fact that we are usually unaware of those occasions.* (Giaquinto 2007, 39. My emphasis)

In the case of the *Meno*, one gets the belief almost immediately, that is, "without any subjectively noticeable period between visualizing and getting the belief. *Immediacy* suggests that to explain why *visualizing* leads to the *belief* we should look to the *visualizer's prior cognitive state*. One hypothesis is that the subject's prior cognitive state included tacitly believing B. *This kind of view was proposed by Plato. On Plato's view the experience of visualizing triggers retrieval of the tacit belief B*" (Giaquinto 2007, 60. My emphasis).

Giaquinto's research has helped us to see in the *Meno* an example of visual *discovery*. Visual thinking is based upon visual activation of belief-forming dispositions. Thanks to these belief-forming dispositions we acquire concepts, such as that of square or diagonal, which allow us to discover, as in the case of the slave in the *Meno*, geometrical truths. In the case of the *Meno* visualization triggers *immediately* the relevant belief-forming dispositions. This entails that the subject's prior cognitive state already included these beliefs. This is in line with what Plato states about recollection in the *Meno*: in **1.** we have seen that, according to Plato, the individuals possess wisdom within themselves. For the philosopher the process of learning is memory, *recollection*, of what is *inside* us.

For Giaquinto visualization has *epistemic* importance since its role is *not* that of providing evidence; rather, visualization, activates the relevant belief-forming dispositions which render possible a visual discovery. This epistemological role of visual thinking has contributed to make us realize *how* the Platonic dialogues can stimulate cognitively the readers; in fact, the words of the *Meno* promote in Plato's readers an *episte-*

mic progress via *visual thinking*. Moreover, we have seen that visual discovery, as the geometric discovery of the slave in the *Meno*, is a synthetic *a priori* discovery, in which visually triggered belief-forming dispositions are synthetized. This character of visual thinking relates the discovery of the slave in the *Meno* with what, according to Plato, is the best use of geometry. In fact, the philosopher, in the seventh book of the *Republic*, states that "if geometry compels the soul to study *being* it's appropriate, but if it compels it to study becoming, it's inappropriate" (*R.* VII 526e. My emphasis).

3. VISUAL DISCOVERY AND MENTAL NUMBER LINES

Giaquinto observes that exists an innate propensity to represent ordered systems of items, such as alphabets or months, as a line. Our disposition to form a mental number line representation once we have acquired a written numeral system may be a special case of this propensity (Giaquinto 2007, chapter 6. See in particular pp. 99; 116). We typically visualize a number line as a graphical line with numbers represented as positions on the line ordered from left to right for individuals in Western cultures (Giaquinto 2007, 107). There are many possible variations. "What seems likely to be constant is that each number is represented by a position on the line (or in the row of numerals) relative to a unique *origin*,….and that the *size of the number is represented by the relative distance between the origin and the number position*"(Giaquinto 2007, 108. My emphasis).

Visual number lines are important in our *mathematical thinking* because the *visual argument* is persuasive and makes the correctness of the proposition obvious in a *direct* way: "whole number addition can be represented easily as a movement to the right from the position marking one addend by the length representing the other addend, the result being represented by the end position (or the length of the segment from the origin to the position). Whole number substraction *n-k* can be represented as a leftward movement from the position representing *n* by the length representing *k,* the result being represented by the end position…. we also have representations of multiplication, division, and rational numbers in terms of the number line…" (Giaquinto 2007, 111). The *epistemic* result is achieved by deploying one's implicit grasp of these facts of representation together with vision or visual imagination and some simple deduction (Giaquinto 2007, 115). The disposition to integrate symbolic and diagrammatic representations is found in innovative mathematicians and its fruitfulness is beyond dispute (Giaquinto 2007, 116).

In the first quotation from Plato cited in this work, the philosopher is summarizing his idea of cognitive progress, and he mentions a ratio pertinent to the sectors of the line segment that has been utilized to render the different stages of rational advancement. In those lines, as we have seen through Foley's comment, Plato exhorts his readers to transcend the text. Plato asks his readers to collaborate with the text. Giaquinto has just given us an idea of one possible way to respond to this request. In fact, we could reflect on the reasons why Plato has chosen to represent phases of mental growth via a schematization which is directly related to an innate propensity of the human beings to represent *ordered* systems of items, as a line. The most immediate thought is that Plato considered the stages of mental growth as the items that he was presenting in an order. Nevertheless, Plato does write that there is much more to know about cognitive growth. Moreover, he does point to the concept of *proportion* among

the phases of epistemic advancement. As Giaquinto has helped us to observe, human beings have an innate propensity to order a numeral system via a mental number line; thus, there are reasons to think that Plato has chosen to represent the phases of cognitive progress via a line segment to move the reader's attention towards the importance of *mathematics*. Assuming that this could be true, new questions arise: *where* should mathematics exercise its power? Within the four subsegments of cognitive progress mentioned by Plato or there could be a more advanced phase of intellectual development where mathematics can express its full potential? It is not difficult to notice that these reflections could be available to Plato's contemporaries and they have not to be necessarily circumscribed to the modern reader.

As we have seen (**1.1.1.**), Foley has answered to the Platonic request of collaboration with his text, working on the length of the subsections of the line segment that represents for Plato cognitive progress. This hermeneutic approach entails a reading of the schematization of the line as a mere *diagrammatic* representation. There is no reflection on the *symbolic* meaning of the diagram itself. Recall the distinction introduced by Giaquinto about visualization: it is essential to recognize the difference between the *experience* of visualization and its *epistemic* role if we want to *discover* via visual thinking. If we limit our reflection on the line segment introduced by Plato to represent his idea of cognitive progress to the measurement of the length of the subsections which compose it, visualization has no epistemic role and no visual discovery can originate from it.

An objection to this line of reasoning could be based on the fact that when Foley analyzes the length of the sectors of the line segment, he specifies that their different lengths represent a possible different equality of the cognitive faculties and of the objects of cognition correspondent to the sectors themselves. Nevertheless, these considerations are applied to specific aspects of a schematization with *no* reflection on *the reasons why* Plato chose *that* schematization to represent intellectual progress. As Giaquinto has helped us to realize, the schematization of the line segment is mathematically tainted. Thus, the lack of reflection on the reasons why this specific diagram has been chosen by Plato to represent cognitive progress, it is equivalent to a use of mathematics that Plato criticizes. In fact, for Plato, mathematics has not to be used as retailers and tradesmen do, just to be able to buy and sell, but it must be used to turn the soul upward, compelling it to discuss the *nature of the numbers* and in this way moving from *becoming* to truth and being (*R.* VII 525b-c. My emphasis). Thus, observing a diagram which is used to *order* systems of items, such as the numeral system, we should not limit ourselves to the *experience* of visualizing but we should be able to leave the *empirical*, the realm of *becoming*, to turn our attention to the *truth* of the *epistemic* role of visualization.

3.1 MENTAL NUMBER LINES AND INFINITE STRUCTURES

Giaquinto takes into consideration a particular case of mental number line: he analyzes the mental number line which allows us by means of visual representation to know an infinite structure, the structure of the natural numbers. Giaquinto, working on *visual cognition of an infinite structure*, refers to the "structure of the finite cardinals under their natural 'less than' ordering. This structure, which I will call 'N', is shared by the set of arabic numerals of the decimal place system in their standard ordering" (Giaquinto 2007, 226; See also Giaquinto 2008, 53).

As Giaquinto notices, "an obvious problem with the idea that a mental number line provides a grasp of the *natural number structure* is that we cannot see or visualize more than a finite part of any such line. When it comes to actual images (or percepts) something like Fig. 2.6 will be the best we can do" (Giaquinto 2008, 53. My emphasis).[10]

Fig. 2.6

The fact that we cannot see or visualize more than a finite fragment of any instance of an infinite structure is not an insurmountable obstacle. For Giaquinto there are two kinds of visual representations, visual category specification and visual image. "A *visual category specification* is a set of related feature descriptions stored more or less permanently; a *visual image* is a fleeting pattern of activity in a specialized visual buffer, produced by activation of a stored category specification. What is impossible is an infinitely extended visual image. But it is possible, and not at all puzzling, that a category specification specifies a line with no right end, one that continues rightward endlessly" (Giaquinto 2007, 227. See also Giaquinto 2008, 54).

In having a visual category specification for the mental number line, "we have a grasp of a *type* of *structured set*, namely a set of number marks on a line endless to the right taken in their left-to-right order of precedence. Secondly, we can have knowledge of the *structure* **N** as the structure of a 'number line' of this type" (Giaquinto 2008, 56. My emphasis. See also Giaquinto 2007, 228). Giaquinto has emphasized the importance of mental number lines for the cognition of some infinite *structures*; in particular, he has taken into consideration the natural number *structure*. We are going to see what *structuralism* is and what could be its relation to Plato's philosophy.

3.1.1 STRUCTURALISM AND PLATO

As we have just seen, Giaquinto shows us how the infinity of the natural number structure can be rendered via a mental number line with no right end. This representation abstracts away from the nature of the objects, the natural numbers, which instantiate the natural number structure. In fact, according to *structuralism*, *numbers*, e.g., in the natural number structure, should be treated as *positions in structures*. For the structuralist, "mathematics is seen as the investigation…of 'abstract structures', systems of objects fulfilling certain structural relations among themselves and in relation to other systems, without regard to the particular nature of the objects themselves….the 'objects' involved serve only to mark 'positions' in a relational system; and the 'axioms' governing these objects are thought of, *not* as *asserting definite truths,* but as *defining* a type of structure of mathematical interest" (Hellman 2005, 536-537). We will come back to Hellman's words shortly. Now, I want to take into consideration a particular instance of structuralism, Shapiro's *ante rem structuralism*. The basics of this kind of structuralism are well explained by Sereni:

> Arithmetic assertions…are not centred on particular objects...Rather, they are based upon the *positions* of the progression structure. For example, the assertion '3<5' does not state that a particular object, 3, is in the relation 'being minor of' with another particular object, 5. Rather, it states that the *position* of the progression

> structure that we call '3' (that will be the third or fourth *position* of the structure, according to the fact that we choose to make the structure begin with 1 or 0) comes before, according to the order relation that exists among these *positions*, the *position* of that same structure that we call '5'. *The fact that exist particular objects, numbers, or other abstract objects, or concrete objects, that occupy those positions and that constitute a system that exemplifies the structure in question, is something that lies outside the object of arithmetic and the significance of its assertions. There could exist natural numbers, occupying the positions that we call with their names;… or there could exist nothing that satisfies the relations of the progression structure. Independently from this, the object of arithmetic-that specific structure- does not change, and its theorems remain true descriptions of that object.* (Sereni 2020, 166-167. My translation. My emphasis)

These words have helped us to understand what *ante rem* structuralism is: it is a kind of structuralism that *ignores* the *individual properties of the objects*, that are *irrelevant*, and it considers only an object as a *position* in a structure.

Shapiro states that *ante rem* structuralism is an instance of the view that he calls 'realism-in--ontology' (Shapiro 2006, 142). He also points to the fact that "*ante rem* structuralism is a variant of traditional Platonism" (Shapiro 2011, 130. See also Shapiro 2006, 142). In Shapiro's structuralism there is an "*existential* commitment to both *structural universals* and their *positions*. The structural universals so described are '*ante rem*' because, *like Plato's Forms*, *they exist independently of the systems that exemplify them*" (MacBride 2008, 156. My emphasis). The "*ante rem* structuralist takes a Platonic view of structures: they exist and are available for mathematical description as complex objects in their own right, *whether or not exemplified by any independent collection of objects*" (Wright 2000, 330. My emphasis).

Shapiro connects *ante rem* structuralism with Plato's philosophy: for Plato reality and truth are disentangled from the *empirical* realm and can be found in the *purely intelligible*, in the same way, for Shapiro, it is irrelevant the *empirical* existence of objects that exemplify the structures that he is taking into consideration; these objects exist *ontologically*, as those *positions* in a structure which can be grasped via an act of *intellection. Both for Shapiro and for Plato, the truth is not in the empirical but in the intelligible dimension*. The existence of the structures is posited by Shapiro via an axiomatic theory of structures. Shapiro's structures are axiomatically characterized (Sereni 2019, 253); nevertheless, Hellman has clarified that the axioms, governing the objects that in structuralism are positions in a structure, do *not* assert *definite* truths but they *define* a kind of structure of mathematical interest (Hellman 2005, 537). The axiomatic approach connected to structuralism can be thus related to the axiomatic approach that in **1.1.1.** has been called as bottom-up: there are not axioms, which are never questioned, used to logically derive mathematical truths from them; on the contrary, there are axioms whose truth can be reconsidered in light of the results of the mathematical problem examined. This is an axiomatic approach proper of a higher--level of mathematical complexity, appropriate to the investigations of theoretical adults who, as we have seen, analyze the purely intelligible. Recall, we have distinguished between two levels of mathematical complexity, the first level, "the method of geometry and mathematics in general" (Heath 1921, 290), was associated with an axiomatic approach that we defined as top-

-down axiomatic approach: with this method, results are logically deduced from unquestioned axioms. This level of mathematical complexity is useful to turn our rational attention from the tangible to the intelligible. This focus on the intelligible is for Plato fundamental to evolve intellectually till to the point in which we become theoretical adults. The mathematics utilized by theoretical adults is based on a bottom-up axiomatic approach. At this level of sophistication, the consequences of the problem have to be utilized to reconsider the truth of the premises.

I have associated the investigation of the purely intelligible proper to theoretical adults with the level of mathematical complexity of structuralism.[11] It can be objected the existence of theoretical adulthood. I have never stated that the phase of superior cognitive development that I label as theoretical adulthood is the only way to respond to the cognitive stimulation of Plato's text. This would be contrary to the non-indoctrinative Platonic higher-order pedagogy which, as we have seen, presents to the reader what Plato's idea of truth is, but it does not impose the acceptance of this truth. According to my hermeneutic approach, the words of Plato's dialogues are meant to stimulate cognitively the readers. In this way, they acquire conscience of their intellectual capacities. The exercise of these cognitive skills can result in a radical criticism of Plato's idea of truth. I have accepted this idea and I have responded to the Platonic request of collaboration with his text, elaborating a new theoretical framework, characterized by two moments of epistemic growth, theoretical childhood, which corresponds to the description of cognitive development provided by Plato in the *Republic*, and theoretical adulthood, which is not the object of a direct Platonic description.

As I have clarified in **1.1.1.**, I have used the term *theoretical* having in mind the relation between *theōreō* and *oraō,* which implies a *process of cognition which starts with the vision, instantiated through physical or intellectual eyes.* As we have seen, Plato in the *Republic* (*R.* VI 509d-513e) chooses to convey his idea of intellectual development utilizing the schematization of the line segment. As Giaquinto has helped us to notice, visualizing has an *epistemic* role and it contributes to visual discovery. In particular, Giaquinto has pointed to the importance of mental number *lines* for visual discovery and he has showed how mental number lines can make us grasp what an infinite structure is. Giaquinto has acknowledged the relation between Plato's philosophy and visual cognition, taking into consideration the geometrical discovery of Meno's slave in the *Meno*. I have reflected *on the reasons why* Plato could have chosen the schematization of the line segment to render his idea of cognitive progress. He proposed a schematization which could immediately engage the reader; nevertheless, in my opinion, Plato's goal was not that his readers stopped at the mere *empirical* visualization. Plato's readers had to question the choice of the philosopher, they had to reflect on the *epistemic role* of visualization.

As I said in **3.**, this reflection can be stimulated by the Platonic invitation to consider the *proportion* among the phases of epistemic advancement that have been presented (*R.* VII 534a). In this way, Plato's readers can start a line of reasoning centred on the fact that the schematization of the line is mathematically tainted. This reasoning can move on considering the possibility that a line segment is used to render an infinite structure; Plato's readers can ponder on the nature of an infinite structure and the appropriate means to know it. A possible outcome of this line of reasoning is the realization that an infinite structure can be the infinite structure of the natural numbers. Thus, mathematics can make us know it. The

mathematics of the infinite cannot be chained to the empirical so Plato's readers can start to think about a kind of mathematics which abstracts away from the properties of the natural numbers. Plato's readers, as finite human beings who investigate the infinite, can also start to reflect upon their cognitive limits. We are going to take into consideration this problem in the next section of this work.

3.1.1.1 EPISTEMOLOGY IN *ANTE REM* STRUCTURALISM: THE ACCESS PROBLEM

As we have just seen, *ante rem* structuralism is a theory about what (mathematical) *universals* there are. Shapiro offers a stratified epistemology,[12] in which each stage corresponds to the acquisition of knowledge of successively more complex mathematical structures. Knowledge of structures begins with our capacity to recognize small, finite, instantiated patterns or structures; for example, short strings of numerals. The subject observes one or more systems of objects arranged in various ways and she *abstracts* away from the irrelevant *tokens*, apprehending the *types* (*universals*) under which they fall. This abstractionist step of Shapiro's epistemology allows the individuals to know small cardinal number structures but since our powers of perceptual discrimination are essentially limited, our ability to abstract types from tokens with which we are acquainted will not provide us with knowledge of large natural numbers structures such as the 1000 pattern. Thus Shapiro postulates the existence of a faculty of *projection*: this faculty enables us to arrange the patterns obtained by simple abstraction and *recognize* that they themselves exhibit an overarching pattern. This yields knowledge of large finite structures, and eventually knowledge of the natural number structure itself. But the faculty of projection is still too limited for mathematical purposes. To deal with still larger structures an alternative epistemological strategy is proposed: Shapiro poses the need of a formal language that provides appropriate definitions of the structures to allow us to know them. It is consequently our ability to grasp *direct descriptions* of large infinite structures that grounds our knowledge of them.

These steps of Shapiro's epistemology, according to MacBride, do not provide any answer to the problem that he defines as "the access problem" (MacBride 2008): how can mathematicians reliably access truths about an *abstract* realm to which they cannot travel and from which they receive no signals? (MacBride 2008, 155. My emphasis). For MacBride the problem consists in a tension between Shapiro's realism in ontology and naturalized epistemology: how can a physical being located in a physical universe know the abstract realm, which includes *ante rem* universals and infinite structures (MacBride 2008)? Shapiro's reply (Shapiro 2011, 149. My emphasis) to MacBride's doubts is that

> My game, again, is to provide a justification for a philosophical interpretation of mathematics, an interpretation which includes a thesis concerning what mathematics is about-*ante rem* structures. This philosophical interpretation is not a deductive enterprise, where I would have to start with non-mathematical, self-evident premises. *This is a different game from showing a sceptic that mathematics itself is true and known.*

According to Shapiro, the goal of his research is to demonstrate that mathematical knowledge *just* is knowledge of *ante rem* structures. This has not to be proved from accepted non-mathematical premises. Shapiro's research

aims at studying *ante rem* structures. As we have seen, these structures possess an *ontological* reality independent from the empirical existence of entities which physically instantiate them. This focus on the universal rather than the empirical realm is common to Shapiro and Plato, as Shapiro himself acknowledges (Shapiro 2006, 142; Shapiro 2011, 130). Both Shapiro and Plato do not tell us where their universal evidence comes from. But Plato has chosen to provide us with cognitive stimulations which give us the chance to criticize his system and every aspect which characterizes it. In this research we have taken into consideration how Plato's text can stimulate us cognitively via visualization, realizing the *epistemological* importance of visualizing: "*Some 'pictures' are not really pictures, but rather are windows to Plato's heaven*…As telescopes help the unaided eye, so some diagrams are *instruments (rather than representations)* which help the unaided mind's eye" (Brown *apud* Maddy 2011, 118. My emphasis).[13]

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Notes

1 Plato's intellectual stimulations are *not* limited to the *explicit* requests of collaboration between writer and reader that the philosopher introduces in his dialogues. Plato is also able to elaborate intellectual stimulations whose meaning is unveiled gradually by the readers who progress rationally. I define both the explicit and the non-explicit cognitive stimuli devised by Plato in the dialogues as *epistemic games*. The nature and the features of the *epistemic games* are analyzed in my book, Saracco, S. 2017. *Plato and Intellectual Development: A New Theoretical Framework Emphasising the Higher-Order Pedagogy of the Platonic Dialogues*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. See in particular the second chapter, *The Structure of Rational Engagement in the Reading of Plato*, pp. 13-53.

2 Stating this I do *not* want to associate my theory with the point of view of those scholars who claim that Platonic *basic* teachings are not part of his written dialogues because they belong to his unwritten doctrines (See the Tübingen school, in particular Krämer, Hans J. 1990. Edited and translated by Catan, John R. *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics: A Work on the Theory of the Principles and Unwritten Doctrines of Plato with a Collection of the Fundamental Documents.* Albany: State University of New York Press and Szlezák, Thomas. 1999. *Reading Plato.* Translated by Zanker, Graham. London: Routledge). On the contrary, I do think that the *fundamental* Platonic teachings *are* in the written dialogues. The existence in this work of indications of the presence of a stage of rational evolution, complementary to the intellectual development rendered possible by the Platonic written texts, does not mean that there are fundamental concepts of Plato's philosophy that are not part of his written words. My idea is that the basics of Plato's thought *are* in the dialogues but the dialogues should not be considered as the final stage of cognitive evolution but as the means to reach a further stage of rational development, whose detailed description is not provided by Plato.

3 On this subject see Saracco, S. 2017. *Plato and Intellectual Development: A New Theoretical Framework Emphasising the Higher-Order Pedagogy of the Platonic Dialogues*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. See in particular the third chapter, *Theoretical Childhood and Theoretical Adulthood,* pp. 53-83 and Saracco, S. 2016. "Theoretical Childhood and Adulthood: Plato's Account of Human Intellectual Development." *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel*, 44 (3).

4 The *epistemic function* of the Forms in relation to the new theoretical framework that I have developed to explain Plato's idea of human intellectual growth is not the subject of this piece. To know more on the topic see Saracco, S. 2017. *Plato and Intellectual Development: A New Theoretical Framework Emphasising the Higher-Order Pedagogy of the Platonic Dialogues*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. See in particular the fourth chapter, *Plato's Forms and Scientific Modelling*, pp. 87-107.

5 This is not problematic: the strength of the message that I want to convey does not depend on the specific details of the reconstruction of the Platonic account of human development. A reader who thinks that the last phase of the cognitive individual growth, that I call theoretical adulthood, has to be represented using three subsections of the line segment which symbolizes intellectual development, instead of the four subsections that I have chosen to represent this phase of cognitive development, is assuming the necessity to contextualize Plato's written words in a broader theoretical framework, represented by an extended line segment. This reader, developing this type of criticisms, is also interacting with the Platonic text, accepting the request of collaboration between writer and reader that I have emphasized as fundamental for the philosopher. This kind of criticisms does not undermine but reinforces the basics of my work.

6 The equal length of the subsections of my line segment does not aim at suggesting that the ancient Greek text should be revised so that the modified words would create the chance to compose unproblematically the Platonic schematization of the stages of intellectual progress using four equal subsegments ("The Revisionist Interpretation" (Foley 2008, 8-9)). I also do not want to commit myself to

the idea that "the two middle segments were not meant to be compared" (Foley 2008, 9-12). This is the way in which the length of the sectors of the line segment of the *Republic* is treated in the so-called demarcation interpretation. Its name derives from the fact that its exponents think that exists a "clear *demarcation* between the intended and unintended points of comparison, and such a demarcation will show that the equality of the middle subsegments can be dismissed because it falls into the latter category"(Foley 2008, 10). I am not interested here in debating whether the equality of the two middle subsegments is unintended ("The Gaffe Interpretation" (Foley 2008, 12-15)), or intended ("The Dissolution Interpretation" (Foley 2008, 15-18)). I want simply to stress the more general point that all the four subsections described in the *Republic* (*R*. VI 509d-511) are important for our cognitive growth but the significance of the process of human intellectual evolution cannot be fully grasped if its reconstruction is limited to these sectors.

7 More on this subject in the third chapter of my book (Saracco 2017), *Theoretical Childhood and Theoretical Adulthood*.

8 An example of how the axiomatic method works, in connection with its application to solve the first problem of Euclid's *Elements*, can be found in the third chapter of my book (Saracco 2017), *Theoretical Childhood and Theoretical Adulthood*, pp. 70-73.

9 Giaquinto, Marcus. 2007. *Visual Thinking in Mathematics: An Epistemological Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For geometrical knowledge see in particular chapters 2-4. See also Giaquinto, Marcus. 2008."Visualizing in Mathematics." In *The Philosophy of Mathematical Practice*, edited by Mancosu, Paolo. New York: Oxford University Press.

10 On this topic see also Giaquinto Marcus. 2007. *Visual Thinking in Mathematics: An Epistemological Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapter 11, see in particular pp. 226-236.

11 On theoretical adulthood see the fifth chapter of my book (Saracco 2017), *Theoretical Adulthood*.

12 Shapiro's epistemology is efficaciously summarized in MacBride, Fraser. 2008. "Can *Ante Rem* Structuralism Solve the Access Problem?" *The Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (230), pp. 157-158.

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The Use and Meaning of the Past in Plato[1]

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ABSTRACT

This essay is based on two premises. The first concerns the vision of writing proposed by Plato in *Phaedrus* and especially the conception of philosophical writing as a maieutic game. The structurally polyvalent way in which Plato approaches philosophical issues also emerges in the dialogues. The second concerns the birth and the development of historical analysis in parallel with the birth of philosophy.
On this basis the text investigates a series of data about the relationship between Plato and "the facts".
1) If we compare the *Apology of Socrates* with other sources, we discover a series of important "games" that Plato performs to achieve the results he proposes.
2) The famous passage of *Phd*. 96A-102A, which concludes with the Ideas and with a reference to the Principles, expresses definite judgments on the Presocratics.
3) In his works Plato attributes to the sophists some merits, even if the outcome of their contribution is overall negative.
4) However, in the fourth complicated diairesis of the *Sophist*, there is a "sophist of noble stock", an educator who can only be Socrates.
5) Plato in the *Sophist* shows the weakness of the Gigantomachy, and proposes an adequate definition of the beings: the power of undergoing or acting. This reveals, before the *Philebus* and the *Timaeus*, the dynamic and dialectical nature of his philosophy
In summary, a multifocal vision emerges, adapted to an intrinsically complex reality.

Keywords: Past, Plato, Presocratic, diairesis, Gigantomachy, multifocal approach.

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1. PREMISE. HOW PLATO WRITES

In this short article I cannot adequately address the central question of "how Plato writes".[2]

1.1. *PHAEDRUS*

It is worth recalling how in the *Phaedrus* Plato, that is a good teacher, clarifies the problem of communication. In the first place, he avoids a simplistic and one-sided view of the issue. The text 1) repeatedly states that Socrates loves both written and oral speeches;[3] 2) highlights the importance of the written word, which enabled the birth of rhetoric, because to develop rules it is necessary to have something stable and analyzable, and this is only possible with a written text.[4] Moreover, Socrates claims to have learned things (235C3) from the ancient poets: he has heard the voice of the ancients by reading their texts.

Plato also explains what characteristics that are necessary for a good speech: 1) to know the truth about the topic; 2) not to despise the "formal" elements elaborated by rhetoricians[5]; c) to know the nature of the soul one is addressing, so as to make a simple speech to a simple soul and a complex one to a complex soul (277B-C). Then Socrates focuses on the problem of "writing":

> It remains only to deal with whether it is opportune to write or not, under what conditions it is beautiful, and under what conditions it is not appropriate (274B 6-7).

The issue is addressed on the basis of a myth (274C ff.). The Egyptian god Theuth has invented writing and praises it as an aid to wisdom and memory for all men, but the Pharaoh takes the contrary view and illustrates the limitations of this medium. Writing does not strengthen but weakens memory, because people, trusting in the written text, will no longer exercise their memory. Besides, writing does not offer true knowledge, which results from a personal discovery, but only a semblance of it (275A; 276C). Therefore, readers, having a lot of information but no "teaching" (ἄνευ διδαχῆς, 275A7), will believe to be learned men, when in fact they know nothing.

Worse still, by its very nature writing has serious limitations: 1) it seems alive but it is not; 2) it is unable to answer any questions and it always repeats the same statement; 3) it does not know how to defend itself, but it always needs its author (275D-E; 276C); 4) it "rolls" into the hands of anyone, whether he be worthy or unworthy. In conclusion, only a naive person can think of transmitting or receiving some stable knowledge through written words (275C; 277D). This seems like a condemnation, but it is not. Indeed, Socrates adds that there is another speech, a "legitimate brother" of the written one, namely oral discourse, which is better and more powerful (276A). It is

> the speech of they who know, a living and animated speech of which the one written can be said, with good reason, to be an image (εἴδωλον) (276A8-9).

There is a peculiar relationship of connection and opposition at work here. We have to accept the weakness of the written word without turning it into a condemnation: it is a more fragile brother that should be taken care of. For this reason, Plato repeatedly makes it clear that one must not put "the most valuable things" down in writing.

To sum up, the philosopher is convinced that communicative weakness is accentuated in the written word. But Plato is also convinced

of the importance of this new tool, and tries to address the problem: his solution is the invention of the "written game". In short, philosophy must not write the "things of greater value", but must rather provoke the reader with allusions, omissions, problems and other inventions, in order to force him to "practice" – and not merely to learn – philosophy. In his written words, Plato tries to preserve the Socrates' educational approach, i.e. maieutics. This choice leads him to define this activity as a "game": The one, who has knowledge of the just, the beautiful and the good, will be wise:

> He does not write seriously (σπουδῇ) [his thoughts] with black water, sowing this knowledge using a straw, with speeches that cannot defend themselves discursively and which cannot properly teach the truth (τἀληθῆ διδάξαι)... But he, it seems, will sow them in the gardens of writing and he will write, when he writes, *as a game* (παιδιᾶς) (276C7-D2).

All texts are only games, yet not futile games, but very useful ones (276E). Plato even says that some fine games can be so important that a person can dedicate his life to them (276D). It is unlikely that here he was not thinking of himself, as he had already written many dialogues.

The writing game becomes the philosopher's defining characteristic, insofar as he is

> one who thinks that in a written discourse on any subject there is necessarily a large part of game (παιδιάν) and that no discourse worth of great seriousness (σπουδῆς) has ever been written in verse or prose (277 E 5-8).

Therefore, the defining characteristics of the "philosopher who writes" consist not only in knowledge of the truth, but also and above all in the capacity to demonstrate its weakness *orally*. So what is the difference between a philosopher who writes about mathematics or politics, and the mathematician or the politician who writes apparently similar things? If any one

> has composed these works knowing the truth and being able to come to their aid when he is challenged about the things he wrote, and if, by *speaking*, he is able to demonstrate the *weakness* of the writing, he must not be called by a name derived from those [the themes that he addresses], but by what he is dedicated to ... To call him wise, Phaedrus, seems excessive and proper only for a deity, but a lover of wisdom [philo-sopher] or something similar, would be more appropriate for him and more moderate (278C4-D6).

1.2. *THE SEVENTH LETTER*

This statement is confirmed in the *Seventh Letter*:

> Therefore, every serious man must not write serious things so as not to expose them to aversion and to the inability of being understood by men. In short, we must logically recognize that, whenever we see someone who has written works, whether laws made by a legislator or writings about some other subject, those works were not for him the most serious things, if he is really serious, because the serious things remain placed in his most beautiful part [the soul]. If he has put something in writing, taking them as serious things, "then certainly"

> not the gods, but men "have taken his wits away" [Homer, *Iliad*, VIII, 360; XII, 234] (344C1-D2).

The Author explains why he has never put his philosophy down in writing:

> In fact, this knowledge is not at all communicable like other sciences, but, after much discussion on these issues, and after a life in communion, instantly, like a light flashing from a crackling fire, it is born in the soul itself and soon it feeds from itself (341C5-D2).

Plato says that the philosophy, unlike other sciences, is not learned by direct lessons, but should be practised together in a Socratic manner, because it lives through discussions. It is a personal work, i.e. a discovery that, even with the guidance of a "teacher", a man makes by reflecting on the aporias that reality and/or discussions put in front of him. Therefore, it may be useful to write about philosophy only for the few who can make good use of the indications to conduct their research:

> But I do not believe that the communication of the arguments on these issues would be of any benefit to men, except to a few, i.e., to those who are capable of finding solutions by themselves on the basis of a few indications. Instead some of the other men would be filled with an improper contempt, absolutely not convenient, and others with exaggerated and vain confidence, as if they had learned wonderful things (341E1-342A1).

For this reason, Plato writes about philosophy, yet does not expose all his thoughts, as he states with a particularly explicit sentence:

> There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one (οὔκουν ἐμόν γε περὶ αὐτῶν ἔστιν σύγγραμμα οὐδὲ μήποτε γένηται, 341C4-5).

1.3. *TWO FINAL REMARKS*

In brief, a philosopher is someone who writes about different issues 1) negatively, by always having more valuable things by which to support the weak statements he lays down in writing; 2) positively, by offering stimuli, problems, indications and allusions – in other words, "games" – that may lead the reader to reflect and to "practise philosophy".

"This Socratic educational setting (the gradual proposal of problems with an increasingly difficulty) involves a peculiar "protreptic" attitude[6]: Plato builds a sequence of texts that are more and more complex and difficult. This is exactly the succession of the dialogues that we find in the reconstruction based on the "stylometric" method.[7]. This analysis makes it possible to classify the texts into different sets[8]. We thus get the following sequence: 1) many simple texts (for "young readers") that introduce a series of often unsolved problems; 2) some very fine dialogues, based on the Ideas, that address many important themes; 3) the difficult and technical dialogues, which allow us to clarify in what sense Platonic philosophy is "dialectic"; 4) the final texts, which allude to some fundamental metaphysical and cosmological themes.

To this we should add an additional element. Plato conceives reality as an orderly disorder, which is to say "one-many complex system", as in system theories. This reality must be grasped from different points of view, of unequal value. Fortunately we can quote Platonic texts

that illustrate this attitude. For example, in the *Laws*, a human being should

> live the life according that nature whereby we are mostly puppets that participate of the truth to a small degree (804B2-4).

But Plato also says that

> truth is the most important good, for both Gods and men; anyone who intends to be blessed and happy can be its partner from the start, so as to live as much of his life as possible in truth (730C1-4).

On the one hand we participate of the truth to a small degree; on the other hand, we can, and/or must, live as much of our life in the truth as possible.

Moreover, the description of humans as puppets unsettles the listeners, leading to an immediate explanation:

> Nay, Megillus, be not amazed, but forgive me. I spoke looking at the divinity and suffering its influence. So, if you like, let's take it that our human race is not worthless, but worthy of some consideration (804B7-C1).

A judgement can be expressed from the divine or the human point of view, and the outcomes are obviously different. This is a clear example of what we call the multifocal approach, which Plato continuously resorts to in all fields.

2. SOME "ENVIRONMENTAL" FACTORS

At this point, it is necessary to define Plato's position in relation to some relevant features of the society in which he was operating.

2.1. *THE BIRTH OF THE SENSE OF "HISTORY"*

In parallel to philosophy, and as the outcome of the same critical attitude, Greece witnessed the emergence of what later came to be described as "historiography"[9]. An intimation of this is to be found in the *Genealogies* by Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 550-476 BC)[10]. However, the real "father of history" is Herodotus of Halicarnassus (c. 484-425 BC): he does not uncritically accept the mythical tales and strives to base his own narrative on what he has personally learned.[11] A further step is provided by Thucydides (c. 460-395 BC, i.e. a contemporary of Socrates'), who apparently wishes to set his own work in contrast to that of his predecessors: he recounts facts not by *gathering information from just anyone*, nor on the basis of *how things seem to him* (I, 22). Especially, he sets his own work in contrast to the poetic tradition, which is more interested in aesthetic effects than in facts.

2.2. *PLATO AND "FACTS"*

The young Plato, who had grown up in this milieu, must have faced the problem of the "objective and verified narration" of facts. However, he was not a historian, but rather a great philosopher and a great writer.

Take the *Apology of Socrates*. The topic is a dangerous one: Plato could not lie about a State trial; moreover, many witnesses were still alive at the time, and any refutation would have discredited his attempt to defend Socrates; finally, he informs us that he was present at the facts he is recounting, and so he suggests that he is not lying[12]. However, the text does not at all state the pure and simple truth. Take the accusation:

> The affidavit in the case – which is still preserved, says Favorinus, in the *Metron* – ran as follows: "This indictment and affidavit is sworn by Meletus, son of Meletus of Pitthos, against Socrates, son of Sophroniscus of Alopece: Socrates is guilty of refusing to recognise the gods recognised by the State, and of introducing other new divinities. He is also guilty of corrupting the youth. The penalty demanded is death" (Diogenes Laertius, II, 40, 1-7).

Xenophon (*Mem.*, I, 1, 2–5; *Ap.*, 10–11) states the same thing: the main charge is a "religious" one, while the charge of corrupting the youth is, in a way, *consequent* upon it. In Plato the charges are the same, but the order is inverted. Socrates himself points out that he is not quoting the exact words of the accusers' statement:

> It states *more or less* (ἔχει δέ πως ὧδε): "Socrates is guilty because he corrupts the youth and does not believe in the gods the city believes in, but in other new gods" (24B8-C1).

However, Plato shows that he is aware of how the charge was formulated:

> But nevertheless, tell us, how do you say, Meletus, that I corrupt the youth? Or is it evident, according to the indictment you brought, that it is by teaching them not to believe in the gods the city believes in, but in other new gods? Do you not say that it is by teaching this that I corrupt them? (26B2–6; cf. 23D1–7)

Plato repeats the same game in *Eutphr.,* 3A-B: *first* Socrates recalls the charge of corrupting the youth (2C); *then* Euthyphro asks him how he does so, according to Meletus; *at this point*, Socrates recalls that he is being accused of inventing new gods and scorning the old ones, and that *this* is the charge brought against him (3A-B).

Plato does not lie but by inverting the factors at play, he makes education (and the contrast between different ways of life, which enables him to present the figure of the "philosopher", as we shall see) the main theme on which to focus, as opposed to the theme of Socrates' relationship with the gods, with regard to which the author wants to propose a much more elaborate reflection (that of the *Euthyphro*). This was made possible through the game of inverting the data of the accusation.

This explanation of mine may be refuted, but the game of inverting the accusation cannot be ignored and must be accounted for.

But let's move on to another element: the payment of the fine.

A person on trial could suggest, after receiving his sentence, an alternative punishment to the one proposed by the accusers. In Diogenes Laertius, II, 42, Socrates first suggested a penalty of 25 drachmas; then, when this caused uproar among the judges, he claimed that he deserved to be maintained at the Prythaneum at public expense; as a consequence, the judges became annoyed and 360 votes against 140 were cast in favour of a death sentence. We should not overestimate the reliability of this source, but the narrative – at least in its general outline – is a logical and consistent one.

The same is not true of Plato's narrative (*Ap.* 35E-36A), which states the same things, but then reverses the sequence, making it less logical and – most importantly – less consistent. The philosopher asks what would be best for him, and most just: as he has devoted his whole life to the good of his fellow citizens, he

deserves to receive free meals from the city more than any Olympic victor. In attempt to clarify his point of view, he repeatedly states:

> I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged anyone; but I cannot convince you of this (37A5–6).
> Since, then, I am convinced that I never wronged anyone, I am certainly not going to wrong myself, and to say of myself that I deserve anything bad, and to propose any penalty of that sort for myself (37B2–5).
> Shall I choose one of those things which I know to be evils? (37B7–8).
> I am not accustomed to think that I deserve any punishment (38A8-B1).

The philosopher's position is clear: he cannot suggest an alternative punishment, because it would mean committing an injustice against himself. However, immediately afterwards he contradicts himself:

> If I had money, I would have proposed a fine, as large as I could pay; for that would have done me no harm. But as it is—I have no money, unless you are willing to impose a fine which I could pay. I might perhaps pay a mina of silver. So I propose that penalty; but, o men of Athens, Plato here and Crito and Critobulus, and Aristobulus tell me to propose a fine of thirty minae, and they will stand as guarantors. So I propose a fine of that amount (38B1–8).

This is the very cause of the uproar among the judges.

There are good reasons to trust Diogenes. But what is most relevant is the fact that, by "inverting" the sequence of events, Plato 1) does not have Socrates speak as a reaction to the judges' outcries, but out of principle; 2) further idealizes the figure of his teacher. However, in doing so Plato runs into a contradiction: Socrates had stated that he did not wish to commit any wrongdoing against himself, which is what he ultimately does.

In conclusion, Plato does not lie, but recounts the facts in such a way as to reorganize them to suit his purposes. The remarkable thing is that he can do so because, being a magician like all artists, he almost invariably succeeds in "getting away with it".

2.3. *PLATO AND THE PREVIOUS PHILOSOPHY*

Let's take a look at the famous passage (*Phd.* 96A-102A), in which Socrates reconstructs the genesis of *his* philosophy. As the culmination of this process is constituted by the Ideas and by a reference to the Principles, it is evident that in outlining the evolution of Socrates, Plato is presenting his own thought as the outcome of Socratic philosophy.

Plato (*first passage*) sets out from the "investigation of nature" (96A), or more precisely from the desire to

> know the causes (τὰς αἰτίας) of each thing, i.e. by what (διὰ τί) each reality [1] is generated, [2] by what (διὰ τί) it is destroyed and [3] by what (διὰ τί) it exists (96A9–10),

in brief, to know the causes of being and becoming[13]. Immediately afterwards, Plato notes that a solution internal to this physical material sphere does not withstand logical analysis and seems inadequate to identify the cause sought for.

The *second passage* is constituted by Anaxagoras' suggestion: a higher entity, the Intelligence, orders and causes the cosmos (97C). The text emphasises the causal value of this ordering Intelligence (97C2; 97C4; 97C6) and, on the basis of this, the possibility of

> finding the cause of each thing, i.e. in what way (ὅπῃ) each reality is generated or is destroyed or exists (97C6–7).

Plato repeats here the same sentence used for physical enquiry, with one significant change: we have one single cause and not many.

The fact that this cause, the divine *Nous*, is an Intelligence allows us to posit the problem of the way in which generation, corruption and existence take place. Plato notes, both before and after the text just quoted, that the *Nous* must arrange each reality as well as possible (ὅπῃ ἂν βέλτιστα ἔχῃ, 97C5–6; ὅπῃ βέλτιστον, 97C8). If the *Nous* is an intelligent cause, it operates in view of an aim and not in a mechanistic way. It must seek to accomplish what is best; this implies knowledge of the Good, without which it is impossible to speak of "the best".

Anaxagoras, however, does not speak of the Good and does not bring the *Nous* into play as the ordering cause of the world, but rather only brings the material co-causes into play. This is like saying that Socrates acts intelligently and then pointing to his skeletal and muscular frame as the cause of his actions.

In brief: natural philosophers denote the cause, but fail to grasp the real cause, distinguishing it from the co-cause without which the cause cannot operate. Their error consists in thinking that one acts 1) because of some things, which at most are co-causes; 2) with intelligence yet not in view of the best, i.e. for the sake of the Good (99A-B).

Third passage: "Socrates" chose to try a different approach and posited some *logoi*, which can be understood as "postulates":

> However, that is the way I began. I assume in each individual case some postulate (ὑποθέμενος ἑκάστοτε λόγον) which I consider strongest, and whatever seems to me to agree with this, whether relating to cause or to anything else, I regard as true, and whatever disagrees with it, as untrue (100A3–7).
>
> This is the kind of cause he has come up with: setting out from the postulate (ὑποθέμενος) that there exists such a thing as the Beautiful in itself, the Good in itself, the Great in itself, and so on (100B5–7).

In brief: Platonic philosophy unfolds according to an analysis of phenomenal reality intended to identify their causes; the discovery that such causes are not to be found in physical reality forces him to posit a second level of ideal causes, which must be subjected to critical analysis. Plato distinguishes 1) the real (and true) cause from other possible causes; 2) a double causality, that of the divine *Nous* (efficient cause) and that of the Good (final cause); 3) other elements associated with these, such as physical ones that act as co-causes[14].

The horizon of Platonic philosophy is not limited to the world of the Ideas, but extends to a Whole that encompasses two dimensions: the physical world of our experience, which must be explained, and another higher reality that provides the foundation for the existence of the physical reality and explains its structure.[15]

In summary, Plato presents his philosophical itinerary as being in close continuity with previous thought, a technique that was to become paradigmatic of his great pupil Aristotle.

2.4. *PLATO AND THE SOPHISTS*

To confirm the angle of the *Phaedo*'s analysis (on both the physical and the metaphysical level), Plato does not bring the sophists into play, even though they represent a crucial step, as is shown their relevant presence in the dialogues. Indeed, between "pre-Socratic" philosophy and Plato there is chasm, and the sophists are the bridge spanning it. Plato acknowledges this: he criticises the final residues of this intellectual movement (Polus, Callicles, Thrasymachus), yet respects the inventive role played by the major sophists, whom he criticises nonetheless.

The sophists' first merit is to have upheld the need for teaching in opposition to the opinion of the multitude, which ignore the problem. In *Men.*, 90E-95A the role as sophists' enemy is played by Anytus, who seems to be brought on stage for the sole purpose of censuring them, even though he claims not to know them. His praise of the citizens of Athens as teachers of virtue is rejected by Socrates, triggering a threatening reaction on the part of his future accuser.

Even more explicitly, in the *Protagoras* the sophist who gives the dialogue its title presents his teaching as *eubulia*, i.e. sensibleness in private and public affairs. Socrates interprets this as the "political art", which is capable of producing good citizens (318E-319A). The end of the dialogue (357D-E) offers a criticism of *hoi polloi*, who ought to recognise that knowledge is stronger than pleasures, which only prevail on account of ignorance. Protagoras, Hyppias, and Prodicus claim to be able to treat this illness, whereas *hoi polloi* do not understand the problem and hence do not send their young to be taught by sophists, a behaviour which has negative consequences for both private and public affairs.

Again, in *R.* 492A-C, Socrates opposes the opinion of *hoi polloi*, who believe that the sophists corrupt the young, whereas they themselves are responsible for the (lack of) education that comes from people's behaviour at assemblies and in law courts. The sophists, then, are right to raise the problem of education: the answers they offer are wrong, but this should not prevent us from grasping the correctness of their position.

Moreover, the sophists have provided contributions that explain why Plato displays, despite his many criticisms, a respectful attitude towards them. Here I cannot adequately discuss the two leading sophists, so I will only provide a few remarks.

Gorgias

Here it is impossible to demonstrate the connection between the *Peri tou me ontos* and some of the *Parmenides*' arguments,[16] but I can recall that in the *Sophist* the Eleatic Stranger is forced to acknowledge that the Eleatics have been vanquished about the refutation of non-being (239B), because they are in contradiction when they say that "non-being is not". It is difficult to find another text, in addition to Gorgias' pamphlet, in which the Eleatic philosophy is forced to acknowledge its defeat.

Plato's esteem for Gorgias emerges from his positive appraisal of rhetoric. The conventional idea that Plato frowns upon rhetoric ignores one basic fact: the existence of *two forms of rhetoric* (*Grg.,* 502D-503A). One is demagogic flattery[17], while the other is a fine thing that makes souls good and states excellent things, whether listeners like to hear them or not. This "true rhetoric" must "persuade" by conveying the truth received from "those who know": indeed, the rhetorician is one of the three collaborators of the true politician (the general, the judge, and the good rhetorician: *Statesman* 304D-E).

This explains Plato's ambivalent attitude towards Gorgias, whom he appreciates as the fa-

ther of rhetoric. The sophist defines this (452D--453A) as the technique of dominion, and the philosopher seems to agree: this is confirmed in *Apology* 73C and in *Philebus* 58A-B, and in the *Gorgias* Socrates states that this definition is very close to reality and that we only need to add that it concerns justice and injustice, both in law courts and at assemblies (454A-B). However, Gorgias is guilty, because he does not provide any real teaching about virtue[18], even though he is not an immoralist. Indeed, in the *Gorgias* it is he who raises the issue of morality. According to the sophist, a teacher of rhetoric cannot be held accountable when this technique is incorrectly used for immoral purposes; rather, it is the person who uses it in such a way who deserves punishment (456A-457C). Gorgias adds that, if one of his pupils knows nothing about justice and injustice, he will learn it from him (460A), through his example.

Plato, however, proves the failure of this hypothesis, by the existence of bad pupils like Polus and Callicles. In brief, if a person has no concept of virtue, but only a method to describe and list the virtues (as in the sophist's case), it is impossible to avoid the negative use of a powerful tool like rhetoric. However, Gorgias is "a good person", and Plato treats him with respect. During the discussion Socrates points out that he is asking questions for the sake of the reasoning (453B-C; 454B-C), and not because Gorgias is unclear. Socrates goes so far as to hypothesise that he has not correctly understood Gorgias' speech (458E); then, when he attacks rhetoric, he adds a further caveat: he does not know whether Gorgias' rhetoric coincides with this kind of empirical practise he is discussing (462A-463A). On his part, the sophist first accepts to be refuted (458B); then he allows his pupil Polus to step in and criticise him; finally, when a problem emerges, he speaks up again and expresses his interest in what Socrates is saying about rhetoric (463D-464A). In an even more evident way, in *Phlb.,* 58 A-D, after Socrates has asserted the primacy of dialectic, Protarchus recalls Gorgias' praise of rhetoric. The philosopher does not dispute this claim, but grants the superiority of the rhetorician's technique on account of its usefulness, while at the same time reaffirming that the dialectic is superior from the point of view of the truth.

Protagoras and the *Sophist*

In order to discuss Protagoras, it would be necessary to show that he is not a relativist at all, but this is impossible here.[19] But it is necessary to understand how Plato can show so much esteem for Protagoras, the most interesting sophist of all. I will only recall the fact that in the *Protagoras* the sophist and Socrates often agree about important issues and that the former even gives a lesson in logic to the philosopher (350C-351B), who does not react to this (because the sophist is right). The underlying question, connected to an epistemological interpretation of the *Homo mensura* doctrine, is discussed in great depth in the *Theaetetus*, with a respect that suggests we should look beyond the letter of the Protagoras' text[20].

Let's consider just one further element: the *Sophist* offers proof of the complex nature of the sophistic movement[21]. Plato repeatedly emphasises that the art in question takes many different forms (223C, 226A; 240C), which explains the difficulties posed by this "hunt" (218C-D; 231C, 236D, 241C, 261A). Ultimately, it is impossible to dismiss the sophistic movement with a one-sided judgement. This is confirmed first by three different *diaireseis*, which start with the distinction between an acquisitive art (which prevails) and a productive art. Then a fourth *diairesis* is put forward (226B-231B) which is very long (it takes up as much space as the other

three combined) and is of a completely different sort: it sets out from the art of separating things, deals with various ethical topics, and presents an utterly unusual figure: *a sophist of noble stock, a purifier of the soul*.

This odd figure of a sophist tackles the decisive kind of ignorance:

> this sort of ignorance is separate, large and bad, and may be weighed up against all other sorts… to suppose knowing something that is not known (229 C 1-5).

These sophists

> seem to think that all ignorance is involuntary, and that he who thinks himself wise will not learn any of those things that he supposes to know (230 A 6-8).

Besides, they employ a method of refutation to handle the matter, in the belief that a fatherly warning does not go far enough:

> They ask questions about subjects, so that a man thinks he is saying something but is really saying nothing; they then easily test the inconsistent opinions of these men who are wandering here and there; these they then collect by reasoning and, comparing them to one another, show that they are in contradiction with themselves in the same things about the same issues and in the same respect. Seeing this, they become angry with themselves and grow gentle towards others (230 B 4-9).

There is only one figure which matches this profile: Socrates. Indeed, the Stranger of Elea is worried about ascribing this purifying art to the sophistry. These are kindred activities, although the likeness between them is reminiscent of that between a wolf and a dog: great care is called for in comparisons of this sort, as likenesses can be misleading (231 A-B). Only with these provisos does the Stranger accept such a character as the sophist of noble stock (231 B): unlike the previous ones, he is a true educator, interested in elevating his pupil's soul, without being paid. In any case, Plato could not avoid acknowledging that, for all his peculiarities, his teacher was part of that intellectual movement we call "sophistic".

However, there is an even more serious problem. The first three *diaireseis* are acquisitive arts, which is to say that they make use of pre-existing things. Ultimately, the fifth *diairesis* (264B-268D) states that what all sophists have in common[22] is the fact that they are conscious deceiver. The problem is that this is a productive, not acquisitive, art. Now, this is not the place to propose a solution. What matters are the two following concepts. First of all, if in its most profound form sophistry is a productive art, it engenders something which did not exist before (265B). The sophists are the "inventors" of something new and "useful" – so much so that, in his final recapitulation, Plato states that sophistry imitates the science which produces contradictions: a convoluted expression which can nonetheless easily be considered a reference to dialectics, which is to say philosophy itself (268C).

Secondly, this final definition is possible because Plato has engaged in a difficult battle with the Eleatics and won, regaining the possibility to say "is not". Philosophy progresses by deeply engaging with previous thought.

2.5. *A "HISTORICAL-THEORETICAL" OPERATION*

This last concept is worth exploring in greater depth, as it reveals the connection between

the historical framework and the theoretical redevelopment undertaken by Plato.

An Eleatic teacher – the representative of a third generation of Eleatic philosophers which, as far as we know, never actually existed – addresses a plea to Theaetetus before embarking on his analysis: "do not think that I am becoming a sort of parricide" (241D3). What we have is both a request and a negation. The Stranger *fears* that he may be taken for a parricide, i.e. for one who opposes the Eleatic school, and is keen to avoid this impression[23]. Rather, he wishes to save philosophy and being, which is to say Parmenides; the only way to do so is to force non-being to somehow be. Without this transition, there is no way to prevent the sophist, who denies the existence of falsehood, from winning. This is not parricide, but a confirmation and overcoming – a move which philosophers will repeat countless times.

Finally, the Stranger makes another plea to Theaetetus, issuing a further warning to the reader: not to consider him mad, if he seems to be turning things upside down. The discussion is complex, because what is at stake is the loftiest product of earlier thought, the concept of being. This necessarily calls for an overall reassessment. It is necessary to set out from Parmenides and the pre-Socratics, and to put their views to the test, since they do not offer any demonstrations:

> it seems to me that each is telling a kind of myth, as though we were children (242C8-9).

This is followed by a polemical exposition of the inconclusive multiplicity of their philosophical positions. While all these thinkers deserve respect, *they themselves have shown little respect towards their readers*: they have developed their arguments without adequately clarifying the concepts they employ. The question is addressed by drawing an initial distinction between monists and pluralists (244B). We here find an attack on absolute monism, according to which only one thing exists, the being (244B). To this, one may easily object: is this "One Being" one thing or two? (244 C-D). For: 1) it is ridiculous to establish two names when the thing is one; 2) the name itself, the very moment the One Being is mentioned, gives rise to two things; 3) the name cannot be identical to the thing, since it is either the name of nothing or it is only the name of a name. Therefore, it seems impossible to admit of an absolute form of monism[24].

Through a kind of leap, Plato does not continue his attack on the monists' conception, but brings some basic concepts of his dialectic into play: one, whole, all, parts. Indeed, the Stranger abruptly poses a question about the *holon*:

> Will they say that the whole is other than being one (τὸ ὅλον ἕτερον τοῦ ὄντος ἑνὸς) or the same with it? (244 D 14-15).

Monists support this identification, which is impossible, because a whole implies parts, whereas the One in itself is absolutely simple and hence cannot have any parts. The contradiction is evident in the case of Parmenides' Sphere (244E-245A), a perfect One which nonetheless clearly has parts. Being, moreover, can be both an all (πᾶν) and a whole (ὅλον), and it is one by participation in the One, and not in itself. From this a consequence follows that forces us to rethink the whole question, because reality emerges as being intrinsically manifold:

> Indeed, if the being that is affected is somehow one, it is not identical to the one and the all (τὰ πάντα) will therefore be more than one (245B8-10).

Being is both one and manifold; hence, it is necessary to address the question of whether it is a whole or not. According to Plato, being must be a whole, because *if being is not a whole but the whole is*, then being is not because it lacks itself, namely the whole which is (245C1-7).

This is followed by an argument which is connected to the previous and addresses the issue of becoming:

> STRANGER – *If the whole absolutely is not*, these same things will belong to being and this, in addition to not being, will never be able to become being.
> THEAETETUS – Why?
> STRANGER – What becomes has always become whole, so he who does not reckon the whole among existent things must not regard either being or generation as an existent thing (245C11-D6).

If the whole is not, the contradiction highlighted in relation to being will also manifest itself in relation to becoming. In short, without the whole-parts game, no ontology is possible.

Through this criticism of monism, Plato is revealing his own theoretical stance, which can further be illustrated by turning to the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*. Indeed, the analysis is brought to an end because, as the Author himself explains, there are countless other problems related to both the pluralist and the monist position: the work is far from complete, but enough has been said (245 E).

Plato operates on the historical level in view of the theoretical proposal he intends to bring out through his "games". He does the same thing with the Gigantomachy[25] (245A--249D). The Stranger states that it is necessary to proceed by dealing with those who reason differently. Actually, though, Plato is changing the point of view: he no longer considers the number of principles at play, but their nature. On the one hand there are the materialists, who identify being with corporeality, reducing it to contact and resistance. On the other hand there are the champions of the *eide*, intelligible and immaterial forms[26]. The text says that those who posit the Ideas are adopting an easier position, whereas the materialists' position is harder – indeed, almost impossible – to grasp. The argument will show that the opposite is the case. As usual, reality is ambiguous.

The materialists' approach is coarse and restricted, so it must be improved by leading them to reason without restricting themselves to the statement that only what is tangible exists. In other words, the position discussed here is not the historically attested one, but an improved version it, enabling a more fruitful engagement. Socrates justifies this choice: "We do not deal with such men, but seek the truth" (246D8-9).

The argument is straightforward: we simply need to get these people to grant the existence of any incorporeal thing whatsoever. Plato confirms that this only holds for those materialists who have improved, because the others will continue to claim that what cannot be grasped with one's hands is nothing at all (246E-247C). At this point, a sudden and in many ways remarkable turn occurs in Plato's argument. The Stranger appears to be concerned about the situation in which he has put these materialists who are no longer capable of defining reality on the basis of a term applicable to both what is material and what is immaterial. Hence, he makes a helpful suggestion, which will ultimately prove metaphysically crucial:

> I suggest that everything which possesses any *power* (δύναμιν) of any kind, or which by nature is predisposed to *produce* any other thing, or to *undergo* even *the slightest action on the part of the most*

> *insignificant reality, even if only on one occasion*, *truly exists*. For I propose the following definition: beings are nothing but *power* (δύναμις) (247D84-E4).

This definition is more strongly confirmed in the discussion with the Friends of the Ideas. The latter uphold the existence of *eide*, which are intelligible and incorporeal Forms that are stable and may be known by thought, whereas the corporeal world is unstable, as it is constantly changing, and may be known by sense-perception. Their position naturally leads to an acknowledgement of the possibility to act and to undergo, or at any rate of knowing and being known. However, these idealists do not accept what the materialists have granted. Whereas it is possible to engage with the (less coarse) materialists, it is more difficult to do so with those people with whom it actually ought to be easier to discuss certain issues, given certain shared premises. However, Plato also runs to these people's rescue:

> If I am not mistaken, we have set up as a *satisfactory definition of beings*, the presence of the power *to undergo or to act*, even with respect to the slightest reality (248C4-5).

The most relevant element is the formulation itself: what seemed like some necessary aid here becomes an adequate definition which Plato wishes to propose even to the dogmatic Friends of the Ideas. In sum, *twice and with no apparent need to do so*, Plato invites materialists and idealists, which is to say all philosophers, to consider *the capacity to act or to undergo as the defining feature of reality.*[27] For Plato, the reality is a dynamic, i.e. dialectic, and not a static ontology.

To sum up, in order to defend ontology against the sophists, Plato here clarifies certain key elements of his philosophy in opposition to all previous thought[28]. Perhaps precisely for this reason, he also makes it clear that a pure ontology is not enough to ensure an adequate vision of reality: what is also required is a dialectic based on the whole-parts game and on the capacity to act and to suffer, as will later be explicitly laid out in the dialogues *Philebus-Timaeus*.

A final paradox: the *Sophist*'s success derives from the fact that later philosophy proved deficient in dialectic yet rich in ontology.

This is not Plato's position, but the relationship with the past, as for him as for us, is always a very complex one.

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Endnotes

1 I will make some references that the reader may find "outlandish" or otherwise at odds with the traditional view of Platonic philosophy. Hence, I shall need to refer to the monograph in which I have suggested a reconstruction of Plato's thought that is, in my opinion, more faithful to the dialogues taken as a whole (Migliori 2013). I have published a more succinct and linear exposition of this new interpretation: Migliori 2017.

2 Migliori 2013 addresses this issue in 165 pages, pp. 25-190; see also Migliori 2017, pp. 23-54. This issue, which has become increasingly important in contemporary hermeneutics, has been firmly established – albeit not in exclusive terms – by the *Tübingen (*Krämer, 1959 and 1982, Gaiser 1988, Szlezák 1988*) - Milan* (Reale 2003, 2008) *-Macerata school, although few scholars are generous enough to acknowledge it.*

3 The philosopher even says that he is "ill" due to his passion for listening to speeches (228B; cf. also 236E).

4 Phaedrus is able to memorize the Lysias' speech only because the author has given him the text; Socrates twice asks Phaedrus to read the text from the beginning again (262D-E); he also interrupts Phaedrus and then asks him to resume reading (263E). This is possible because the written word is always available.

5 As Robin (1930 p. CLXI) observes, Plato quotes a dozen rhetoricians, but using very generic expressions (cf. 258D, 266C, 271A, 272C, 273A, 273C, 277D).

6 The Author invites the reader to address these issues which always leave something unwritten, which must be pondered by the reader. These problems can be dealt with in subsequent texts, which leave new unresolved problems. Consequently the final solution cannot be written (cf. *Seventh Letter* 341C4-5, which I have quoted above).

7 The frequency of particular expressions and words was statistically calculated starting from the *Laws*, which are certainly the last work. This method became a hermeneutic paradigm in the work of W. Lutoslawski 1897 (a masterful analysis of the debate in Stefanini 1949 pp. LXXII-LXXXI); for a more recent version of this kind of research, see Ledger 1989; Brandwood 1990 (and the interesting assessments in Kahn 1999 pp. 36-100).

8 No doubt, stylometric analyses never yield identical results, as is bound to be the case with any statistically based research. Moreover, one must accept a classification by sets and forgo any claim to establish the place of individual dialogues.

9 For the necessary in-depth analysis, I will refer to the excellent reconstruction by G. Giorgini 2017, esp. pp. 92-98.

10 Given the loss of his works, it is difficult to appreciate the important role which this author undoubtedly played. Still, a Heraclitus fragment stresses his importance: "Knowing many things does not teach understanding. Else it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, as well as Xenophanes and Hecataeus" (B40).

11 "Surprisingly, he does not claim that Greek customs are better" (Giorgini 2017, p. 95).

12 Plato only refers to himself here (34A; 38B) and in the *Phaedo* (to say that he was not present).

13 This investigation regards the cause (αἰτία, 96E7, 97A4, A7, B1) of biological and physical-astronomical processes.

14 Plato ends his narrative with a reference to the Principles, because he formulates a further hypothesis, that the postulate itself be attacked (101D3-E3). Plato employs a single procedure: from the aporias of purely physical explanations we ascend to the theory of the Ideas, from the aporias of the Ideas we ascend to the First Principles.

15 Without this "theoretical" respect for the empirical dimension and our world, Plato's political interest would remain philosophically unexplainable.

16 For a more in-depth discussion of this connection, see Migliori 2019 pp. 52-59.

17 Plato clarifies here that sophistry and rhetoric are either the same thing or very similar (520A). If we instead maintain that there is some difference, sophistry proves to be superior to rhetoric, which is purely instrumental (463A-466A). On the structure of this distinction, which takes the form of a complex *diairesis*, see Migliori 2013 pp. 370-371; 896.

18 This is stated both in the *Gorgias* and in the *Men.*, 95C; cf. 70C-D; 76A.

19 For this perspective, see Eustacchi 2016 and 2017, esp. pp. 37-43

20 I will also refrain from illustrating how many words of appreciation are reserved for Prodicus of Ceos.

21 On this dialogue, see Migliori 2007; on these *diaireseis*, see pp. 29-45.

22 Obviously, in this context no reference is made to the fourth *diairesis* and to Socrates.

23 These words are uttered in vain, confirming the risks of writing: for the statement that Plato committed parricide is among the most frequently reported in textbooks on Platonism.

24 The possibility of an ineffable One is not taken into consideration here because it was not historically attested. Plato will only present it and deny it in the first thesis of the *Prm.*, 137C4-142A8.

25 The very epithet used shows that this is a crucial philosophical distinction for Plato.

26 This confirms that the Ideas are not an invention of Plato's, but a concept introduced before his time. Cf. the earliest formulations of the "Third Man", which do not present an endless regress and are not applicable to Plato's position, for example: "A sophistic argument leading to the Third Man was the following one. When we say 'a man walks' we are not talking either about the Idea (man), that walks (for it is motionless), nor about some particular individual that walks (for how could we identify him? We know that man walks, but not which particular individual); then we are saying that a third man is walking alongside these: so there will be some third man of whom we predicate walking. Now, the starting point for this sophistic argument is offered by those who separate the common term from particular things – which is what champions of the Ideas do" (Alex. Aphr., *In Metaph.*, 84, 9-16; this English translation follows the Italian text by L. Lugarini 1954 p. 9, with various changes).

27 Plato immediately (248C-249B) emphasises this *dialectical and dynamic nature of reality*, which manifests itself: 1) on the psychological level: if the soul knows and something is known, there is an acting and undergoing; 2) on the epistemological level: knowing and being known imply acting and undergoing; 3) on the cosmological level: it cannot be granted that movement, life, the soul and the intelligence are present in individual realities but absent in that reality that *is* in the full sense of the term.

28 Pluralists multiply their positions in a way that is unclear. Monists affirm a self-contradictory position. Absolute monism is impossible. Without the whole there cannot be any ontology.

The Ages of Socrates in Plato's Symposium

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ABSTRACT

Plato's Symposium has no less than three dramatic dates: its narrative frame is placed in 401 BCE; Agathon's dinner party is envisaged as having occurred in 416; finally, Plato makes Socrates meet Diotima in 440 BCE. I will argue that the multi-level chronology of the Symposium should be approached along the lines of Socrates' intellectual history as placed against the background of Greek ideas of age classes (also exploited in the Republic). As a result, the Symposium functions as a retrospective of Socrates' life, which uses the traditional concept of ages of man to create a paradigm of philosophical life.

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Nowhere else in his dialogues does Plato pay as much attention to chronological detail as in the *Symposium*. The dialogue exhibits a string of carefully dated events which stretches far beyond the chronological framework suggested by its mult-level narrative structure. Each of these events leads the reader further into the past: Socrates' associate Apollodorus narraters a story he heard from another Socrates' associate, Aristodemus, about a dinner party in the house of the poet Agathon that took place years ago; Aristodemus' account in turn includes two embedded narratives relating to even more remote past, namely, Alcibiades' reminiscences of Socrates' military exploits and Socrates' account of his meetings with Diotima. As a result, the dialogue has several dramatic dates relating to different periods in Socrates' life. In what follows, I will argue that this assemblage of chronological data is far from being accidental and that in the *Symposium* Plato uses the set of traditional ideas concerning age classes in order to shape Socrates' life story as a paradigm of philosophical life.

1. REACHING MATURITY

Socrates was born in 469 BCE. When he meets Diotima, he is still a young man.

> *Symp.* 201d1-5 And now… I shall repeat the account of Eros which I heard from Diotima of Mantinea, a woman wise in this and in many other kinds of knowledge, who in the days of old, when the Athenians offered sacrifice before the coming of the plague, *delayed the desease by ten years*.[1]

The *Symposium* is our only source for the historical episode evoked in this passage (more below). Plato dates it as having taken place ten years before the great plague, which firmly points to 440 BCE. This means that at the moment of his encounter with Diotima Socrates was approaching the age of thirty.

In everything concerning the traditional perception of age groups, arriving at the age of thirty was considered a milestone of the utmost importance.[2] At thirty, the Athenians became eligible for the Council and other offices, including military ones.[3] When the twenty-nine-year-old Xenophon takes the decision to assume leadership of the contingent of his dead friend Proxenus, he is acutely aware that he has not yet reached the appropriate age. "From what state am I expecting the general to come who is to perform these duties?" he asks himself. "And what age must I myself wait to attain? For surely I shall never be any older, if this day I give myself up to the enemy."[4] Thirty was also the age of marriage sanctioned by tradition at least since the time of Solon. Compare Solon's fifth hebdomad (from twenty-eight to thirty-five):

> The fifth is time a man should think of being wed and look for sons to carry on his line.[5]

Similarly, at the age of thirty the Spartans gained not only full rights to hold office and engage in economic activity but also the right to produce legitimate offspring.[6]

This supplies a broader cultural context to those sections of the *Republic* and the *Laws* that deal with the legislation relating to marriage and procreation. The discussion of the age appropriate for marriage in Books 4 and 6 of the *Laws* is especially pertinent:

> *Laws* 721a9-b2 Then let me first give the law of marriage in a simple form; it may run as follows: - A man shall marry between the ages of *thirty and thirty-five*…

> *Laws* 785b2-6 The limit of marrigeable ages for a woman shall be from sixteen to twenty years at the longest, for a man, *from thirty to thirty-five years*; and let a woman hold office at forty, and a man *at thirty years*.[7]

Significantly, this late dialogue not only resumes the association between procreation and immortality which plays such a prominent role in Diotima's speech of the *Symposium* but also treats it in closely similar terms.[8] In the *Symposium*, however, the biological procreation serves only as a starting point for developing the concept of a spiritual one:[9]

> *Symp*. 208e1–209a4 Those who are pregnant in the body, betake themselves to women and beget children - this is the character of their love; their offspring, as they hope, will preserve their memory and giving them the blessedness and immortality which they desire in the future. But those who are pregnant in their souls rather than in their bodies (for there certainly are such people) conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these? – good sense (*phronēsin*) and the other virtues.

The lower levels of this kind of procreation relate to such spheres of human activity as poetry and legislation (209c4-e4); the higher ones relate to sciences and, eventually, to what Plato sees as the greatest science of all:

> *Symp*. 210c6-7 And after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences (*epistēmai*), that he may see their beauty… (d3-e1) …drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will give birth to many and noble arguments in a boundless love of wisdom (*philosophia*), until … at last the vision is revealed to him of some such single science, which is the science of this kind of beauty.[10]

This is the the way shown to Socrates by Diotima, his instructor in the matters of Love (*ta erōtika*).[11]

As far as I can see, little attention has been paid thus far to the fact that Diotima's training of Socrates as presented in the *Symposium* bears a close resemblance to the program of the training of the Guardians introduced in Book 7 of the *Republic*.[12] In the *Republic*, the unspecified 'sciences' of the *Symposium* materialize as a succession of disciplines that includes arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmonics; the highest level of study is represented by dialectic;[13] it emerges at the point at which the *Symposium* has "some such single science, which is the science of this kind of beauty" (*Resp*. 534e2-535a, *Symp*. 210e2-6 and above, with n. 10).

The *Republic* is quite explicit as to the age at which the Guardians' training is supposed to start. Not surprisingly, this is the age of thirty:

> *Resp*. 537c6-d7 The comprehensive mind is always the dialectical. …and those who have most of this comprehension, and who are most steadfast in their learning, and in their military and other appointed duties, when they have arrived at *the age of thirty* have to be chosen by you out of the select class, and elevated to higher honor; and you have to prove them by the help of dialectic, in order to learn which of them is able to give up the use of sight and the other senses, and in c o m p a n y with truth to attain absolute being.[14]

The study of dialectic should last five years:

> *Resp.* 539d8-e2 Suppose, I said, the study of dialectic (*logoi*) to take the place of gymnastics and to be continued diligently and earnestly and exclusively for twice the number of years which were passed in bodily exercise — will that be enough? –Would you say six or four years? he asked. –Say *five years*, I replied.

This brings us again to the age of thirty-five, marked in the *Laws* as the upper limit of the period during which the male members of the community should conclude marriage (above). We arrive, then, at the following correlation:

REACHING MATURITY (30-35)

SOCIAL	*POLITICAL*	*THE GUARDIANS*	*SOCRATES*
marriage	eligible for offices	training in dialectic	training by Diotima

With this in view, let us turn to the next age group with which Socrates is associated in the *Symposium*.

2. ACTIVE LIFE

In his reminiscences in the concluding part of the *Symposium*, Alcibiades refers to two military campaigns in which Socrates distinguished himself: the expedition of Potidaea and the battle of Delium (*Symp.* 219e5-8, 220e7-8). The campaigns at Potidaea and at Delium are dated to 432 and 424 BCE, respectively. That is to say, when fighting at Potidaea Socrates was thirty-seven years old, and he was forty-five years old at the time of the disaster at Delium; he also fought at Amphipolis two years later (*Ap.* 28e; cf. D. L. 2.22). This fits in well with what is in store for Plato's Guardians when, at the age of thirty-five, they have completed their training in dialectic:

> *Resp.* 539e2-540a4 At the end of the time they must be sent down again into the cave and compelled to hold any military or other office which young men are qualified to hold, lest their experience of life be inferior to that of the others. In addition, on this occasion it should also be examined whether, when they are drawn all manner of ways, they will stand firm or flinch. –And how long is this stage of their lives to last? –*Fifteen years*, I answered.

Note that the phrase "on this occasion it should also be examined whether, when they are drawn all manner of ways, they will stand firm of flinch"[15] applies not only to the extraordinary endurance and self-control displayed by Socrates at the siege of Potidaea and the retreat from Delium but also to his withstanding Alcibiades' attempts at seduction which, according to Alcibiades' speech, took place immediately before Potidaea.[16]

In the case of the Guardians, the stage in their lives dedicated to community service is supposed to last fifteen years. It is noteworthy that Plato makes this period considerably shorter than what seems to have been normally practiced in Athens, where men used to retire from civic duties, including military service, around the age of fifty-nine; the same would be true of Sparta, where men ceased to be liabble to military service and became eligible for the Gerousia at the age of sixty.[17] Plato reasserts this well-established practice in the legislation he proposes in the *Laws*: "Let a man go out to war from twenty *to sixty years*" (785b6-7). At the same time, it should be taken into account that normally those close to either the low or

the upper limit of this age range normally did not participate in military operations abroad, being engaged on garrison duty only (Thuc. 3.13.7). This would explain why there is no mention of the twenty-two-year-old Socrates taking part in the battle of Coronea (447 BCE); the chorus of Athenian elders in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata,* left to defend the city during the war, also comes to mind in this connection. That is to say, the actual difference between the retirement age of Plato's Guardians and the standard Athenian practice was probably much less pronounced.

It follows, then, that the fulfilment of military and civic duties was the focus of the mature period in the life of both the citizens of Athens and the citizens of Plato's ideal state. Socrates' case, however, was different. While his exemplary miltary record is well attested (above), no less well attested is the fact that during his entire life Socrates avoided civic duties, having had to depart from this practice only once, in 406, when it fell to him to serve on the Council (*Ap.* 32b). As the *Apology* makes abundantly clear, being a citizen of a state whose ways he did not approve, Socrates chose to serve his city in another capacity, that of a seeker of wisdom, or philosopher, who saw in taking care of the souls of his fellow citizens the central mission of his civic life (cf. also Xen. *Mem.* 1.6.13).

The years of active life are commensurate to the period of procreation. This can be inferred from *Republic* 5:

> *Resp.* 460e1-7 "Do you agree that the period of the prime (*akmē*) may be fairly estimated as twenty years for a woman and *thirty for a man*?" - How do you reckon it? he said. "The women, I said, beginning at the age of twenty shall bear for the State to the age of forty, and the man shall beget for the State from the time he passes his prime in swiftness in running[18] *to the age of fifty-five*."

Here, again, Socrates' case is special in that, as the Diotima speech makes clear, the philosopher's procreation is first and foremost a spiritual one. It finds its expression in that "he will give birth to many and noble arguments in a boundless love of wisdom (*philosophia*)" (above, with n. 10). Accordingly, the following correlation suggests itself:

ACTIVE LIFE (35-50/55)

SOCIAL	*POLITICAL*	*THE GUARDIANS*	*SOCRATES*
procreation	*military and civic offices*	*military and civic offices*	*military service/search for wisdom*

3. RETIRING FROM ACTIVE LIFE

After the retirement from active life the citizens of Athens were expected to take up varioua advisory roles. Thus, an Attic inscription (424/3) prescribes that the ambassadors sent to Methone should be over fifty years of age; this is also the age of the envoys (*theōroi*) in the legislation Plato lays out in the *Laws* (Kennel, 2013, 14; *Laws* 951c6-7). The age of fifty is also set by Plato as a significant milestone in the lives of the Guardians. Let us return for a moment to *Republic* 7:

> *Resp.* 540a4-c2: …and when they have reached *fifty years of age*, then let those who still survive and have distinguished themselves in every action of their lives and in every branch of knowledge to be led at last to their consummation (*telos*): the time has now arrived at which they must raise the eye of the soul to the

> universal light which lightens all things and behold the absolute good;[19] for this is the pattern according to which for the remainder of their lives they are to order the State, the lives of the individuals and their own lives, making philosophy their chief pursuit, but, when their turn comes, toiling also at politics and ruling for the public good…. Then they will depart to the Islands of the Blest and dwell there; and the city will … honor them, if the Pythian oracle consent, as divinities (*daimones*), but if not, as blessed and divine. (cf. *Resp*. 498b7-c4)

For the Guardians, whose mature period was wholly dedicated to civic life, "making philosophy their chief pursuit" coincides with the age of retirement; this is also the age at which they would not only rule the state in turn but also "raise the eye of the soul to the universal light which lightens all things and behold the absolute good."

In the conversation that frames the main narrative of the *Symposium* Plato goes to great lengths to draw the readers' attention to the dialogue's dramatic date:

> *Symp*. 172b6-c4 And first tell me, he said, were you present at that meeting? --Your informant, Glaucon, must have been very indistinct indeed, if you imagine that the occasion was recent… Are you ignorant that for many years Agathon has not resided at Athens?
> *Symp*.173a 4-6 Well, he said… tell me when the meeting occurred. –In our boyhood, I replied, when Agathon won the prize with his first tragedy.

This firmly points to the Lenaea competition of 416 BCE, which means that at the time of the party at Agathon's house Socrates was fifty-three years old. That is to say, the Socrates of the *Symposium* has just crossed the upper limit of the age singled out in *Republic* 7 as the period of active involvement in the life of the community[20] and has entered the age of intellectual contemplation and of purely advisory roles. Simultaneously, he is also approaching the upper limit of the age of procreation, which is set in *Republic* 5 as fifty-five (above).[21]

Fifty-three is the most advanced age at which Socrates is portrayed in the *Symposium*. It is true of course that the dialogue's frame narrative is set at the date when Socrates is approaching the end of his life at the age of seventy;[22] yet, while being the focus of the frame story, Socrates does not appear there as a character. To see the manner in which Plato might position Socrates after the age of fifty-five, we should turn to the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue whose dramatic date is set just before Socrates' trial and death.[23]

The *Theaetetus* resumes the theme of spiritual procreation that was so prominent in the *Symposium*:[24]

> *Tht*. 149b5-7 No woman, as you are probably aware, would ever attend other women in childbirth so long as she herself can conceive and bear children, but only those who are past bearing.
> *Tht*.150b6-9 Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs, but differs in that I attend men and not women, and look after their souls when they are in labor and not after their bodies. … (c4-8) And like the midwives I am barren of wisdom (*agonos … sophias*)… the reason is that the god compels me to be a midwife, but does not allow me to bring forth.

As far as I can see, when approached in the context of the present discussion, Socrates' barrennes would amount to the following.[25] In the speech of Diotima, philosopher is described as inferior to both gods and the wholly wise men in that, being found midway between ignorance and wisdom, he only seeks after wisdom rather than possesses it himself:

> *Symp.* 204a1-2 The truth of the matter is this. No god is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom (*philosophei*).[26]

Reaching the age of retirement, Socrates ceases to be engaged in search for wisdom: his time is now divided between spiritual contemplation and giving advice to others. Note that, if correlated with the *Symposium*, the fact that the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* does not give birth himself but only helps others to give birth would amount to Plato's placing Socrates (even if Socrates himself characteritically denies that) among those wholly wise men who, to paraphrase *Symposium* 210d3-6 (above), "after having given birth to many and noble arguments and thoughts in a boundless love of wisdom," have attained the state of self--sufficiency, and therefore, like gods, have no need to seek after wisdom, that is, to be engaged in the creative activity of *philosophia*.[27]

The theme of the philosopher becoming godlike, either before or after death, emerges in Plato's dialogues more than once.[28] We saw it in the *Republic* description of the Guardians' afterlife (above, with n. 19); Parmenides of the eponymous dialogue and the Eleatic Stranger of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, both of them old men, are apparently also seen as such godlike figures.[29] As the famous Digression of the *Theaetetus* demonstrates, this theme plays an important role here as well:

> *Tht.* 176 a8-b2 Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible (*homoiōsis theōi kata to dunaton*).[30]

The nascent status of Socrates as a godlike mortal also transpires from the speech of Alcibiades that concludes the *Symposium*. Alcibiades tells the company of how once he, the most beautiful youth in Athens, tried to seduce Socrates and failed. This amounts to complete reversal of the usual distribution of roles in a homoerotic relationship; nevertheless, the reversal is correct on a higher scale. This is emphasized in Alcibiades' closing words, which also conclude the entire conversation:

> *Symp.* 222a8-b4 And he has ill-treated not only me; he did the same to Charmides the son of Glaucon, and Euthydemus the son of Diocles, and a great many others. Creating a false impression as if he were the lover (*erastēs*), he himself is in the position of the beloved (*paidika*) rather than in that of the lover.[31]

It is Socrates, then, who possesses true beauty and thus is the true object of love (*erōmenos*). While helping his younger companions to deliver their spiritual offspring, he himself is no longer engaged in the search after wisdom, Thus,

RETIRING FROM ACTIVE LIFE (50/55-)

SOCIAL	*POLITICAL*	*THE GUARDIANS*	*SOCRATES*
end of procreation	*advisory roles*	*ruling the state/ search for wisdom/ spiritual contemplation*	*advisory roles/ spiritual contemplation*

4. SHAPING AN EXEMPLARY LIFE

We have arrived, then, at the following series of correlations. The traditional concept of the ages of man as coming to the fore in *Republic* 5 and the *Laws* is correlated in *Republic* 7 with the stages in the life of the Guardians, and both are correlated in the *Symposium* with the stages in Socrates' life:

reaching maturity		**active life**	**retiring from active life**
30-35		35-50/55	50/55 -
SOCIAL	*marriage*	*procreation*	*end of procreation*
POLITICAL	*eligible for offices*	*military and civic offices*	*advisory roles*
THE GUARDIANS	*training in dialectic*	*military and civic offices*	*ruling the state/ search for wisdom/ spiritual contemplation*
SOCRATES	*training by Diotima*	*military service/ search for wisdom*	*advisory roles/ spiritual contemplation*

The *Symposium* thus twice positions Socrates at the point of transition: first, in his encounters with Diotima, where he is placed at the threshold of the age of procreation, both social and spiritual, and second, in the main narrative, which places him at the upper limit of this age, at the point of transition to the new status of an intellectually self-sufficient god-like wise man. This is unlikely to be accidental. Note indeed that neither of the two milestones on which the *Symposium*'s inner chronology is based, namely, Socrates' encounters with Diotima (440 BCE) and his attending Agathon's dinner party (416 BCE), can be supported by external evidence. Agathon's victory at the Lenaea competition in the early spring of 416 is, of course, authentic, but it was entirely the matter of Plato's own choice to pick up a particular historical event that happened to coincide with Socrates' transition to the age of retirement and to make Socrates be associated with it. The uncharacteristic emphasis that Plato lays on the dialogue's dramatic date (above) further emphasizes the special significance of the latter.[32]

The Diotima episode is even more telling. In dating her meetings with Socrates by an impending plague that has never materialized, Plato introduces a typical non-event whose only reliable reference point is the remark that it took place ten years before the great plague of 430 BCE. As a result, the only piece of historical evidence that this episode supplies is that Socrates' philosophical conversion occurred when he was in his thirtieth year. Again, arriving at the age of thirty was a landmark event in the life of the Athenian male. Even more to the point, in the *Republic* Plato obviously has this landmark in mind when, in his program of the upbringing of the Guardians, he adopts thirty as the age at which their training in dialectic should begin. As we saw, the final objective of the Guardians' training is identical to that of Diotima's training of Socrates, namely, arriving at "some such single science, which is the science of this kind of beauty" (above, with n. 10).

Diotima herself belongs with those of Plato's characters (Callicles of the *Gorgias*, the Eleatic Stranger of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, Philebus of the eponymous dialogue) who are generally assumed to be fictitious. This is not to deny that, when creating this character, Plato may well have had in mind the personality of Aspasia of Miletus and her role in Socrates' life.[33] But Diotima is not Aspasia in disguise. To begin with, in the period described Aspasia, who was Socrates' contemporary, must have been in her late twenties. Yet, Diotima's priestly status strongly suggests that Plato saw her as a middle-aged woman.[34] Furthermore, the entire Diotima episode falls neatly into the well-established pattern of a life-changing

revelation carried out by an authoritative female figure. Parmenides' Goddess initiating the phiolosopher into the Way of Truth readily comes to mind in this connection: chartacteritically, she adresses her disciple as "youth" (*kouros*) (DK 28 B1.24). Another such example is Prodicus' parable of Heracles at the Crossroads, where Heracles, placed at the age of transition from boyhood to youth, encounters Virtue and Vice personified as 'two women of great stature' (Xen. *Mem*.2.21-22). Plato adopts the same pattern in the *Crito*, where Socrates, imprisoned in the Athenian jail, has a dream predicting his approaching death (44a10-b2):

> There appeared to me a woman, fair and comely, clothed in white garment, who called to me and said: "O Socrates, The third day hence to fertile Phthia shalt thou go."

These parallels strongly suggest that, rather than a reminiscence of a real event, the entire Diotoma episode was conceived as a philosophical parable. This conclusion finds further corroboration in the *Phaedo*, where Plato offers an alternative version of Socrates' intellectual biography. Disappointed by the philosophy of nature, young Socrates adopts the doctrine of Anaxagoras, only to become disillusioned again and to take refuge in dialectic (*logoi*) as his own method of seeking the truth of being (99e5-6); as in the *Symposium* and the *Republic*, the search after truth culminates in Plato's own concept of the existence of absolute beauty and absolute good (*Phd*. 100b5-7).

The *Phaedo* account of Socrates' intellectual biography starts with the words "when I was young (*neos*; 96a7)." In principle, the term *neos* can designate any young man between eighteen and thirty years (cf. Golden, 2015, 92-93). Thus, accordung to a story told by Xenophon, when Charicles, one of the Thirty Tyrants, was asked by Socrates to define the age limit below which a man is to be considered young, he answered: "So long as he is not permitted to sit in the Council, because as yet he lacks sound judgment. You shall not converse with anyone who is under thirty" (*Mem*.1.2.35; tr. E. C. Marchant, slightly adapted). On the other hand, when referring to the nineteen-year-old Socrates encountering Parmenides, Plato twice styles him as "exceedingly young" rather than just "young."[35] It can be suggested in view of this that in the *Phaedo* too, Socrates' search after truth is envisaged as covering the period that immediately preceded his arrival at philosophical maturity at the age of thirty. However that may be, no further attempts are made in the *Phaedo* at analyzing Socrates' intellectual developmemt along the lines of age groups.[36] Neither Diotima nor any other external agent are envisaged here as responsible for his philosophical conversion.

All things considered, it would be hard to avoid the conclusion that the *Symposium* stages events in Socrates' life rather than follows them. Alongside representing the young Socrates at the moment of his becoming engaged in the activities of philosopher, the *Symposium* celebrates the elevation of the mature Socrates to the status of the wholly wise men, the very ones who are privileged "to become the friends of gods and to be immortal, if mortal men ever may" (*Symp*. 212a6-7). All this is perceived from the vantage point of the frame story, whose dramatic date is set shortly before Socrates' death.[37] By correlating the milestones in Socrates' life with the traditional Greek ideas of age classes, which are also exploited in the *Republic*, the *Symposium* offers a symbolic retrospective of the life of its protagonist,[38] set as a paradigm of philosophical life.[39]

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Endnotes

1 Here and elsewhere, I use B. Jowett's translation of the dialogues, adapted when necessary. The emphasis is mine.

2 Cf. Garland, 1990, 242: "In Athens at least then, and probably elsewhere, the thirtieth year marked an important turning point in a man's life." See also Golden, 2015, 92-93.

3 Arist. *Ath.Pol*. 4.3, 30.2, 31.1, 63.3; cf. Golden, 2015, 92. On the "pivotal cultural significance" of the age of thirty see also Blondell, 2002, 213, n. 163.

4 Xen. *An*. 3.1.14; tr. C. L. Brownson. Cf. also 3.1.25.

5 Solon 27W 9-10; tr. M. L. West. Cf. Garland, 1990, 2-4.

6 Garland, 1990, 242. For a useful recent discussion see Kennel, 2013, 10, 12; 26, 29, 30-31. In his criticism of Lupi, 2000, Kennel points out that the Spartan law of marriage is only attested as late as Plutarch; yet, as we shall see immediately, both the *Republic* and the *Laws* testify to the fact that, centuries before Plutarch, Plato operated with the same or a closely similar model.

7 Cf. also *Laws* 772d, 773e-774a.

8 Cf. *Laws* 721b8 μετείληφεν ἀθανασίας, c6 τῆς ἀθανασίας μετειληφῆναι as against *Symp*. 208b3 ἀθανασίας μετέχει. Cf. also *Symp*. 206c1-8, 206e-207a, 207d.

9 For a thorough analysis of the relevant *Symposium* passages see Sheffield, 2001, 2-16.

10 *Symp*. d7-e1 τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην, ἥ ἐστι καλοῦ τοιοῦδε.

11 On Diotima as instructor and Socrates' encounters with her as training see *Symp*. 201d5, 207a5-6, 207c5-6, 210e2-3.

12 See, however, Prior, 2006, 155, on the higher stages of Diotima's program: "the Socrates of *Republic* books 6—7, concerned with the mathematical sciences, belongs here." On the affinity between the *Republic* and the *Symposium* see also Kahn, 1996, 359-63.

13 *Resp*. 521d-541b; cf. also *Euthyd*. 290e.

14 Cf. also *Resp*. 539a. Blondell, 2002, 213, n. 163, explicitly places this passage against the social background of Greek age classes.

15 *Resp*. 539e5-540a2 καὶ ἐν τούτοις βασανιστέοι εἰ ἐμμενοῦσιν ἑλκόμενοι πανταχόσε ἤ τι καὶ παρακινήσουσι.

16 *Symp*. 216c-219d; the words "and after that" (καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα) at *Symp*. 219e5-6, opening Alcibiades' account of Potidaea, refer to this particular episode.

17 Athens:: Arist. *Ath.Pol*. 53.4; Plut. *Phocion* 24.3; cf. Garland, 1990, 263, Golden, 2015, 92. Sparta: Lupi, 2000, 12-21; Kennell, 2013, 29-31.

18 That is, when he reaches the age of thirty. Cf. Solon's characterization of the fourth hebdomad (from twenty-one to twenty-eight): "while in the

fourth one, each achieves his peak of strength" (Solon 27W 7-8).

19 Cf. also *Symp*. 210e (quoted above) and 211d.

20 The peace of Nicias signed in 421 effectively put an end to his military service. The last campaign in which he took part was at Amphipolis (422). When the fighting renewed in 415 Socrates was already nearing the upper limit of the age of conscription: as we saw, the members of this age group were no longer expected to take part in military campaigns.

21 Aristotle concurs, see *Pol*. 7 1335b33-38, where he recommends, for reasons of his own, that men should stop bringing children into the world when they are four or five years above the age of fifty; he adduces traditional measuring of man's life by hebdomads (cf. also 1336b40-1337a2 and above, with n. 5) to support this argument.

22 Insofar as it is set shortly before Agathon's death, which is dated *ca*. 400 BCE; cf. Nails, 2002, 9, 314-315.

23 This is emphasized at both the beginning and the end of the dialogue, see *Tht*. 142c, 210d. The other dialogues relating to this period in Socrates' life (the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*) do not approach it from the perspective of age groups.

24 On similarities and dissimilarities in the treatment of this theme in the two dialogues see Burnyeat, 1977.

25 For a comprehensive discussion of Socrates' midwifery see Sedley, 2004, esp. 30-35.

26 See also *Symp*. 200 b9-c5, 202a; *Ly*. 218ab; cf. Xen. *Mem*. 1.6.10. See further Finkelberg, 1997, 234-241.

27 Proceeding from the midwife analogy, Sedley, 2004, 32, n. 57, tentatively suggests that "Socrates too has *some* past experience of producing intellectual offspring of his own" (Sedley's emphasis). Comparison with the *Symposium* strongly suggests that this would indeed be the case.

28 See, e.g., *Phd*. 82b10-c2; *Symp*. 212a5-7; *Resp*. 500c9–d1, 540b5-c2, 613b1. See also the discussion in Sedley, 2004, 74-81.

29 Parmenides' wisdom and serene old age (he is presented as sixty-five years old) are repeatedly emphasized in the *Parmenides*, see 127a7-b5, 136e5-137b1. On the Eleatic Stranger see esp. *Soph*. 215a5-6, where he is compared to a god in disguise. For a discussion of the Stranger's anonymity and lack of physicality see Blondell, 2002, 318-326, esp. 323-324.

30 See also *Resp*. 613b1. On the Digression and the history of its interpretation see esp. Sedley, 2004, 62-81; Bartels, 2015 (with bibliography).

31 *Symp*. 222b3-4 οὓς οὗτος ἐξαπατῶν ὡς ἐραστὴς παιδικὰ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς καθίσταται ἀντ' ἐραστοῦ.

32 To the exclusion of those dialogues that are directly associated with Socrates' trial and death (the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*), the dramatic dates of Plato's dialogues are based on circumstantial evidence, whereas some of them (e.g., the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*) have no agreed upon dramatic date at all. For an overview see Nails, 2002, 307-330.

33 For a recent argument in favor of this hypothesis see D'Angour, 2019.

34 Cf. *Laws* 785b6 (quoted in full above, with n. 7), prescribing that a woman should hold office at the age of forty.

35 *Prm*. 127c5 σφόδρα νέον; *Tht*. 183e7 πάνυ νέος. On Socrates' age at the time of the encounter see Nails, 2002, 309.

36 The same is true of the *Apology*, where the turning point in Socrates' life is synchronized with the Delphic response, with no reference to the age at which he became exposed to it (20e-21d).

37 A similar arangement is also characteristic of the *Theaetetus*, where juxtaposition of the main story and the narrative frame produces a retrospective of the protagonist's life. Note that at the time of his death in the aftermath of the battle at Corinth (369) Theaetetus was approximately at the same age as Socrates when he fought at Delium and Amphipolis; this undermines the argument (Nails, 2002, 276) that the forty-six-year-old mathematician must have been considered unsuitable for taking part in a military expedition and therefore a much earlier date of his death should be adopted.

38 On 'biographical criticism' in the *Symposium* see Halperin, 1992, 100; cf. Finkelberg, 2019, 96-97.

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A New Interpretation of the Noble Lie

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ABSTRACT

At *Republic* 414b, Socrates asks "Could we… contrive … one noble lie …?" Most plausibly, these words imply that there is one noble lie. Following these words, the Autochthony Claim asserts the Best City's citizens are equally brothers, and the Myth of Metals asserts that brother justifiably rules over brother. The article argues that the Autochthony Claim is the "one" noble lie. This conclusion derives from showing that the two assertions are not only a normative exercise about what the Best City should do but are also descriptive insofar as they describe the behaviour of worldly polities in Plato's day and ours.

Keywords: Noble Lie, Sole, Normative, Descriptive.

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1. INTRODUCTION

At *Republic* 414b8-c2, Socrates asks, "Could we … contrive … 'one' noble lie to persuade above all even the rulers, if not them, then the others in the City (ἐν)?" This question entails that there is one Noble Lie. What follows are two logically independent propositions. The first, which is introduced as a Phoenician import that paints the City's denizens as earth-born, culminates in the Autochthony Claim (henceforth AC). It asserts that all of the City's inhabitants, guardian to blacksmith, must see one another equally as brothers, as if born from the same mother.[1] The second culminates in the Hierarchical Claim (henceforth HC). It asserts that brother justifiably rules over brother because their souls are admixed either with gold, or silver, or a combination of iron and bronze. AC and HC are logically independent; both can be true or both false, or one can be true and the other false. The text entails that one must be false; it does not assert that both are false. Which one is false? Socrates refers to AC and HC jointly as a "myth."[2] It does not follow from this that their logical independence is mortgaged; the Myth of Er contains many logically independent propositions without mortgaging its character as one myth (621b8).

Many commentators discuss the Noble Lie on the assumption that both parts are false. A minority either explicitly or implicitly deals with it as myth, relegating the word "lie" to a metaphorical use. Catherine Rowett privileges HC as the Noble Lie. Julia Annas implicitly privileges AC.[3]

There is a complication that doubles the problem of deciding which part is the lie. It opens a new perspective on the Noble Lie. I argue that the Noble Lie is not only a pair of prescriptions or recommendations for the City; it also describes facts of everyday life in Plato's day and in the 21st century. The Noble Lie is not only a pair of normative assertions limited to Socrates' City; the assertions are also descriptive statements that, as we will see, are about Plato's day, today, and many other times and places. Settling on an answer as to which part is the Noble Lie begins with two assertions. This perspective doubles the problem. It yields four assertions.

I argue that HC is true insofar as it is a normative assertion about the Best City, and that AC is false insofar as it is a normative assertion about the City, and its successor, the Best City, because it enjoins their citizens to believe a false normative claim. I conclude that AC, insofar as it a normative assertion about the City, is the Noble Lie. But I also contend that AC and HC are true insofar as they are descriptive assertions about normative practices of many worldly polities in Plato's day, historically, and in our day.

2. THE NOBLE LIE'S CONTEXT

Immediately preceding the Noble Lie, Socrates sets out for the first time the nomenclature for two of the City's three classes. This formally reifies the three classes.[4] Those who had formerly been called "guardians" are for the first time calved off into guardians and "auxiliaries"; this is its first of 13 uses in the *Republic* (ἐπικούρους, 414b4). This is a significant moment in the argument. It marks the point where the City's three classes become explicit and its fictive rulers' implicit existence becomes explicit through their being separated from the two other classes, one of which is named for the first time. After doing so, without explanation, Socrates immediately turns to the Noble Lie. Why does he do so? To the best of my knowledge, the scholarship has not addressed

this question.[5] Plato does not disappoint the expectation that this passage introduces the Noble Lie. With AC and HC as backdrop, the Noble Lie complements the introduction of the newly minted Auxiliaries and Rulers by focusing on their practical obligations.[6]

3. THE AUTOCHTHONY CLAIM

> Could we … contrive one noble lie to persuade … the city? … Nothing new … but a Phoenician thing, which has already happened in many places … but one that has not happened in our time … I'll try to persuade … the city, that the rearing and education we gave them were like dreams; … while, in truth, at that time they were under the earth within, being fashioned and reared and their arms and other tools being crafted. When the job had been finished, then the earth, which is their mother, sent them up. And now, as though the land they are in were a mother and nurse, they must plan for and defend it, if anyone attacks, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth.
>
> You had good reason, he [Glaucon] said, for being ashamed … to tell this falsehood. (414b7-e6)

In order to show AC's descriptive character, I first turn to discussing Autochthony's role in Plato's day, and, second, a reading of the passage above.

1. *Autochthony in Plato's Day*. Christopher Pelling writes, "Autochthony … mattered in the fourth and fifth century …. It was of course particularly connected with Athenians (but not confined to Athens) …."[7] This empirical claim is present in the passage above. The reference to Phoenicia and the assertion that autochthony occurred in many places and times imply that it was a cross-cultural phenomenon (414c4-5). Pelling provides evidence for this empirical claim.[8] Vincent Rosivach surveys widespread references to autochthony in the Athenian democracy. He explains that the root meaning of autochthony, αὐτόχθων, is "indigenous" and "always having the same land." He describes how it incorporated several strands of the "earthborn" theme, the most important of which was Erechtheus.[9] Euripides' *Phoenician Women* attests to the fact that the sowing of dragons' teeth was Theban and not part of Athens' self-interpretation.[10] Once more, AC is Plato's generalization, cast in a literary form appropriate to its context, that describes the fact of autochthony in his day, which Socrates puts forward as a normative principle of the City.

2. *414b7-e6*. Socrates proposes that he will try to persuade the City's inhabitants that their rearing and education were but dreams, while in truth they were in the earth being moulded for citizenship. In describing the suppositious dream-like character of their formative experience, he uses two names for this oneiric underground. It is initially called the "earth" (γῆς, 414d7); this is the customary word to denote something independent of human existence, much like ocean or sky. When it is named a second time, another word is used that treats a part of the earth as an object of human interest. The word "land" is used (χώρας, 414e3).[11] This usage reflects the purpose of this part of the tale. The Auxiliaries must be prepared to defend this "land" as if it were a mother, and, to do so, must hold that fellow citizens are "brothers" (ἀδελφῶν, 414e5).

AC's purpose has two facets. First, it isolates a sub-class of the earthborn – the Auxiliaries, the City's Myrmidons. This is in keeping with

the implicit undertaking that the Noble Lie will further the understanding of the City's newly minted classes: Rulers and Auxiliaries. Second, it sets an affective desidertatum for well-functioning Auxiliaries. They must psychologically fuse citizenship with brotherhood. This does not imply that AC is not part of the whole City's ethos, only applying to the Auxiliaries; rather the Auxiliaries are, so to speak, the predominant element of the citizenry because of the role they play. This is made clear by Socrates' summary statement of the Noble Lie:

> When these earth-born have been armed, led by the rulers … to a military camp from which they can control anyone not law-abiding and fend off an enemy from without, like a wolf, should attack the flock. (415d4-e3)

Plato does not disappoint. AC's addition to our knowledge of Auxiliaries could not be more practical; they are the City's boots on the ground, which AC animates. Just as AC's focus is on the newly revealed Auxiliaries, I go on to show that HC discloses an important practical aspect of the equally newly revealed Rulers.[12]

I turn to Glaucon's reaction to AC. His response provides an answer as to whether AC or HC is the Noble Lie:

> You had good reason, he said, for being ashamed … to tell this falsehood. (414e6)

This asserts that a falsehood, i.e., a lie, has been uttered. In what immediately follows, Socrates does not correct Glaucon's statement, nor does he do so at any point later. This implies that we are now in possession of a Noble Lie. If there is only one Noble Lie, it follows that it is AC. This is confirmed by the truth of HC, both in its normative and descriptive aspects, for which I make an argument in what follows. Glaucon does not offer a rationale for his assertion that a falsehood has been asserted.[13]

Plato allows for a *mélange* of motives – "mixed motives" would be inaccurate – for Glaucon's judgement. Glaucon's forthright opposition to AC finds an explanation in some facts of his day. The Theban allusion conveyed by the Cadmeian reference could have been jarring to Glaucon, if he shared in anti-Theban Athenian sentiments. This would be compounded with Socrates' picture of autochthony that ignores Ion, Erechtheus, and Athenian myth, which was part of contemporary Athenian conversation.[14] Glaucon could have been put off by this unexpected mix of allusions. The text also allows for another motive that arises out of the substance of AC. It is more theoretical in character, although not divorced from an Athenian context. The requirement of the citizens to think of themselves as literal brothers raises a theoretical issue that hits closer to home.

Glaucon is the first to raise thematically the issue of nature. In Book 1, neither Cephalus nor Polemarchus nor Thrasymachus use the word. It is at the core of his speech about justice in Book 2 (359c4-6). He presents it through the distinction between nature and convention. Nothing intervenes between this passage and the Noble Lie that signals Socrates' disagreement with this distinction. Nicole Loraux points out that the autochthony debate during Glaucon's day was alive to the distinction between nature and convention. AC collapses the distinction between nature and convention by absorbing the conventional (citizenship) into the natural (birth). Hence, Glaucon's assertion that a falsehood has occurred can be viewed as based on a confusion of the distinction between nature and convention at play in AC, which the orators had wielded in discussing autochthony.[15]

According to AC, the City's members will be brought to hold that their relationship to one another is that of brothers, as if they are in a natural relationship with one another rather than one that is conventional, e.g., marriage. This is partly conveyed through the untruth that the earth out of which they were supposedly born is their "land" in the civic sense of the word (χώρας, 414e2).[16] When introducing HC, Socrates uses the word "brothers" to sum up AC, in what is the second of its two occurrences in the context of the Noble Lie. This underlines its significance. It captures AC in a word that establishes it as the natural bond determining the character of AC (415a3).

This bond includes all citizens, rulers, auxiliaries, and farmers. This is at variance with traditional autochthony stories, which had an aristocratic bias. It is a category error to take Plato's use of the Cadmeian tale as mere appropriation of traditional material. The presence of "brothers" in a thematic non-familial sense, which raises the issue of nature, combined with the absence of an aristocratic bias, demonstrates that Plato invests the tale with a novel theoretical consideration.[17]

4. A NOTE ON ΓΕΝΝΑΙΟΝ

The *Republic* contains 13 uses of "γενναῖον," which is customarily translated as "noble." It is predicated of human beings, human behaviour, human qualities, animals, food, judges, disciplines, and forms of rule, e.g., tyranny; it is used once as a vocative. Only once is it predicated of an assertion, i.e., the Noble Lie. Socrates asserts that the lie is an iteration of a Phoenician story, evidently about Cadmus, Thebes' founder. The example of Cadmus' sowing of dragons' teeth is offered as a foundational tale of autochthony. This storied heritage provides a pedigree for the use of "γενναῖον" in the sense of "well-born," which captures the word's etymological sense. Kateri Carmola's interpretation of the Noble Lie takes "well-born" to entail intergenerational conflict. She characterizes this as a form of injustice that reflects the "dichotomy" between "liberalism and conservativism," which "frames political reality." I argue that the salient dichotomy implied by the Noble Lie is more universal in its reach and deeper in its impact on "political reality."[18]

5. HIERARCHICAL CLAIM

AC's introduction of the Auxiliaries is relatively uncomplicated. HC's introduction is complicated, first, by the fact that the Rulers are about to undergo radical change. Would it be extreme to say that with the change from the City's non-philosopher-rulers to philosopher--rulers everything changes?[19] Second, HC tackles the issue of the transition of power and, *a fortiori*, the maintenance of power, which is true universally. It is on rulers' permanent agenda. Current scholarship blinks when it deals with HC on this issue.[20]

Socrates, as noted earlier, uses the word "brothers" to refer to the City's inhabitants. It is the textual link between the Noble Lie's two parts and introduces HC. He mentions brotherliness and immediately mortgages it to necessity. They are brothers "but"; the contrasting conjunction, "but," implies that HC is logically incompatible with AC. The incompatibility derives from the fact that HC solves a problem, inherent in political communities: how to justify the hierarchical relationship of brother ruling over brother? AC flies the flag of fraternal equality. HC asserts the necessity of inequality, the unavoidability of ruler and

ruled. This logical incompatibility puts paid to interpretations that see HC incorporating AC.[21]

> For the most part you'll produce offspring like yourselves, it sometimes happens that a silver child will be born from a gold parent, a gold child from a silver parent …. Hence the god commands the rulers first and foremost to keep over nothing so careful a watch as over the children, seeing which of these metals is mixed in their souls. And, if a child should be born with an admixture of bronze or iron, they should take no pity on it, but shall assign the proper value to its *nature* and thrust it out among the craftsmen or the farmers; and, again, if from these men one should *naturally* grow who has an admixture of gold or silver, they will honor such ones and lead them up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary, believing that there is an oracle that the city will be destroyed when an iron or bronze man is its guardian. (Emphasis added, 415b1-c7)

The City will justify its political hierarchy through claiming that gold, silver, and the mix of bronze and iron embody, as it were, an independent standard that is part of each citizen's soul. The City's hierarchy reflects the rank-ordering of gold down to bronze and iron. The god's authority plays a role in two ways. First, the god warrants the hierarchy. This makes sense. The metals are dumb minerals that, in the absence of human or divine valuing, have no value. Second, the god provides instructions for preserving the hierarchy. Whereas AC is, once established, self--perpetuating, this is not true for HC; speaking for the god, Socrates enjoins the rulers to ensure that children are raised in the classes to which they truly belong. This is a two-part problem: there are those who should be demoted, and there are those who should be promoted. Let's call the first problem P_o and the second P_i. Care must be exercised in examining these two tasks. They are the core of HC's connection to the Noble Lie's context, i.e., the establishment of the City's three classes. The god adds a self-enforcing sanction, which applies only to the first, P_o. If iron and bronze are part of the ruling class, the City is *ipso facto* destroyed.

P_o states that if a child is born from gold or silver parents with an admixture of bronze or iron, it shall be assigned according to its "nature" and thrust out among the craftsmen or the farmers (φύσει, 415c2). P_i states that if a child is born from iron and bronze, with an admixture of gold or silver and "naturally grows," it will be led up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary group (φυῇ, 415c4). There are two differences between P_o and P_i. The latter, which describes dealing with a positively anomalous child, uses a verb in the present with a potential continuous sense. This entails a process that takes place over time. Although positive intervention is counselled, no consequences for the failure to do so successfully are mentioned. P_o is different in two ways. First, Socrates does not repeat, even allowing for variation, a comparable temporal parameter to the one that determines P_i, namely a process. An event characterizes P_o, the negatively anomalous child's birth, whereupon – no temporal parameters are implied – its "nature" is recognized by the rulers (φύσει, 415c2).[22] Gold's intervention, which deals with the negatively anomalous child described through the narration, correlates more or less with the event, i.e., the birth. Second, P_o is more important; it has graver consequences. Whereas P_i has honour, even equity, to valorize a remedy, the ongoing existence of the City is at stake when P_o is involved. For the City, for the Best City as Book 8 illustrates, the character of the rulers is of the utmost importance.

This passage is a crux for the scholarship, which reflects the paucity of textual details about P_o and P_i. The scholarship often folds the two problems into one and falls into the temptation of spelling out how this *faux* problem will be solved.[23] But Plato is consistent. Just as, following their introduction, AC shines a light on the Auxiliaries, so too does HC with respect to the Rulers. The manner in which it does has two textual solutions. I present them in the order of narration. The first turns on the pre-philosophic City.

At Book 5's start, Socrates proposes that they next rank-order four bad polities in order of degeneration from the City up to this point in the text (449a-b). However, Adeimantus interrupts Socrates. Nothing in the preceding conversation prepares first-time readers and – we must suppose – Socrates as participant in the conversation for this interruption. It reboots the discussion in a direction that leads to philosopher-rulers, and all that follows from that in Books 5 through 7. It follows that, absent Adeimantus' interruption, the argument would have unfolded the sequence of five polities in descending order without philosopher-rulers. Plato's stage directions in this transition offer the reader an independent non-philosophic City superior to its four degenerate alternatives, which can be pursued at this point in the argument.

HC asserts that "pity" must be put aside in order to meet the necessity of demoting the unworthy child (κατελεήσουσιν, 415c1). In the case of the City, whose Rulers are not philosopher-rulers, questions arise. Does it practice sexual equality and the abolition of the family? The text is silent. Given family attachments, the possibility of nepotism escalates. Even births consequent on sexual equality and the abolition of the family, because of resemblances between parents and children, may bring about ill-results. But there is a greater problem: HC implies that the rulers distinguish the negatively anomalous child in an almost radically timely fashion, close on to the birth. This seems to rule out this City almost *ab initio*. Speculation about sexual equality, the forming of attachments, and nepotism evoke the proverbial barn doors, whose closing is in vain. So much for the first solution. I turn to the second solution, which lifts the curtain on philosopher-rulers.

I next argue that P_o requires the intervention of philosopher-rulers. This would make HC the point in the text where these, in Carmola's usage, "god-like" characters make their first appearance. As we will see, this has the virtue of being the appropriate way of introducing them.

A likely place to search for more about P_o and P_i is Book 5's marriage regulations, which consider how female and male are to be paired for the purpose of reproduction and the resulting births (459d7-461c7). The regulations, among other things, touch on incest, abortion, and infanticide – speaking of them euphemistically. Despite their relevance in this context, P_o and P_i go unmentioned. H. D. Rankin makes an interesting suggestion concerning Plato's use of euphemisms: he states that Plato aimed to moderate the discussion of these matters by the tragedians.[24] In Book 5, the universal problem raised by P_o – how ruling classes renew themselves while avoiding the risks of, e.g., nepotism – yields to the immediate Athenian issue of tempering public discourse. Demonstrating the implicit presence of philosopher-rulers in HC's critical passage shows that Plato does not sacrifice a solution to the universal issue raised by P_o to the local Athenian problem. It is necessary to begin with a well-defined view of philosopher--rulers. Francisco Gonzalez writes:

> The oft-noted tension between the portrayal of the philosopher who will rule the ideal city and the portrayal of the philosopher who is constructing the ideal city in speech, i.e., Socrates, the most obvious difference between the two being that the former must possess knowledge in the strongest sense of the word (i.e., knowledge of the forms and of the good itself) whereas the latter repeatedly denies, both here and elsewhere, having such knowledge.[25]

For my purposes, I need to spell out in greater detail the consequences of "knowledge in the strongest sense." Philosopher-rulers are characterized as being at the "peak of philosophy" and as "most philosophical" (499c7, 498a2-3). Plato operationalizes these superlatives. Using Socrates as a touchstone, philosopher-rulers are essentially different when it comes to the Ideas. Whereas Socrates only has "beliefs" (opinions) about the Idea of the Good, philosopher-rulers have "knowledge" of it. In order to grasp this hyperbolic claim, it is necessary to include Socrates' assertion that this knowledge allows philosopher-rulers to infer through dialectic the other Ideas (506e2, b1, 534b3-c2, 540a8). This implies, for example, that their knowledge of justice follows from their knowledge of the Good (506a4-7). Of decisive importance is the claim that the Idea of the Good is "sovereign" and that it is the "cause," for example, of the *Kalon* (517b8-c2). This implies that, first, philosopher-rulers' knowledge by means of the Idea of the Good has no clearly defined limit and, second, their grasp of the Idea of the Good as a cause gives them a normative principle of causality that reaches into the world.

We are asked to envisage two possibilities. The first is a philosopher, Socrates, who can articulate a standard for philosophy that is inaccessible to him. The second possibility is this standard: a philosopher who grasps a normative principle from which she can deduce the cause, normative character, and the nature of diverse phenomenon such as justice or astronomical truths. In other words, she can deduce the world from a normative principle, i.e., the Idea of the Good.[26] I suggest that this is best understood as a thought experiment. Carmola asserts that there are:

> two rival interpretations of the *Republic* as a whole: as either a genuine blueprint for a just city or a rhetorical device, a game or thought experiment, with details that undercut the possibility of its realization.[27]

This disjunction does not do justice either to the *Republic* or to thought experiments. When Einstein thought about two elevators in free fall, he did not include one with automatic brakes that acted unpredictably. Thought experiments are either coherent or not; the former may lead to a better understanding of the world. Philosopher-rulers are as much of a thought experiment as is the City they rule. They rule the Best City – one of whose functions is to be a paradigm that serves as a standard for evaluating worldly cities, a function that is not compromised even if it were never to come into worldly existence (472c4-e6, especially d7).[28] It is an ideal city, governed – as a matter of necessity – by ideal rulers, i.e., philosopher-rulers.

The eugenic art portrayed in Book 8, when introduced at start of the Muses' tale, sheds light on P_o. A subtle element in its initial presentation allows for the possibility that philosopher-rulers possess a precise mathematical version, which is free of the Muses' playful presentation. This has implications for thinking

about P_o. Socrates casts turning to the Muses as a matter of choice (βούλει, 545d7, compare 336c4). The choice implies an alternative, which would at the very least have to be non-mythical. One possibility, consistent with the hyperbolic presentation of philosopher-rulers' dialectical capabilities, would be a successful, codified, and mathematically precise eugenic art. Consistency requires that both the philosopher--rulers' outsized dialectal reach and a genuine eugenic art are thought experiments. An imaginary art that successfully produces desirable eugenic outcomes would of necessity include the ability to anticipate and pass judgement with precision on outcomes. HC introduces Rulers weighing these outcomes as early as almost imaginable: a neonate or, e.g., a six-month-old, in a manner that serves the needs of P_o. Conceptually parachuting philosopher-rulers into HC's crux immediately settles matters.

This interpretation brings into focus how HC fits in with the context of the Noble Lie. Rulers and Auxiliaries are introduced analogously. Both are spotlighted in the glare of their practical concerns – one literally guards the City, while the other safeguards that it is being ruled by the best. I do not offer this interpretation as an alternative "just so" story.[29] Sometimes Plato's texts have the effect of disassembled jigsaw puzzles. My interpretation is based on the evidence of some connected pieces. It completes a meta-philosophical theme. Book 7 describes philosopher-rulers' upper bounds through their privileged relationship with the Idea of the Good. The Noble Lie gives us a preview of their lower limit in their interaction with the practical. If they are to maintain and renew themselves, a fool proof eugenic art is a *sine qua non*. I am not sanguine about this. The *Republic* suggests, according to my current understanding, that such an art stands to the animal husbandry of Plato's day as philosopher-rulers stand to Socratic wisdom (458e3-459d7).

6. AUTOCHTHONY CLAIM: ITS CONTINUED RELEVANCE

I first review the evidence for AC as descriptive in Plato's day and then turn to make a *prima facie* case for its relative ubiquity in our day. These two synchronous horizons provide a working hypothesis for exploration of its presence as a diachronous phenomenon prevalent in history.

Pelling has collected the evidence for the prevalence of autochthony in antiquity.[30] In Plato's day, the name for a naturalized Athenian was "poeitos," a word rooted in the term used for adoptees into a family.[31] This usage connotes the absorption of legally assimilated citizens into a natural family. This joining of convention and nature is also a 21st century phenomenon.

In our day, this aspect of AC is evoked by the word naming the process of becoming the citizen of a country to which one is not native. In Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, and the United States, to name some, this process is called, *mutatis mutandis*, "naturalization." Not every polity operates under the flag of the West's uses of "nature." For example, Japanese, without recourse to nature, has a word evocative of AC. The Japanese word for naturalization is "kika." Here the first syllable, "k," derived from a Chinese ideogram, indicates a "return," while the second "k" evokes "change." This combination suggests a goal-directed transformation from one state into another. There is a kinship between this and the root meaning of the Greek *φυσις*. The root of *φυσις* shows this; its stem *φυ,* which implies to "grow" or "become," is connected to the verbs of "being" and

"completion" in Latin and Sanskrit. Just as naturalization transforms a stranger into a fellow, say, Canadian, so too does a process of transformation turn a stranger into a fellow Japanese, a state characterized as complete on reaching a fixed destination, a return, analogous to the *terminus ad quem* of an emergent nature. The Russian example is also thought provoking. The word used is "aklimatizacija," which derives from the Greek "klima," meaning "region," with the sense of a specific region. Citizenship, here also, is painted in the colours of a natural phenomenon. Since modern Hebrew uses an analogue of this word, it too bears this association. The modern Hindi, "sameekaran," I am told, also raises the possibility of this connotation of nature. Consistent with this hypothesis is that there is evidence that both Hebrew and Hindi in their pre-modern versions had no word for "nature." All of this allows for the supposition that there is a latent sense of nature in citizenship as such.[32]

Once again, I believe that the foregoing provides a hypothetical basis – a heuristic in the original sense of the word – for research about the prevalence of AC as a human phenomenon. The following remarks on HC are offered in the same spirit.[33]

7. HIERARCHICAL CLAIM: ITS UBIQUITY

HC, unpacked, spells out a fundamental feature of political hierarchies. Hierarchy conveniently puts a name on the complex mechanism by which a polity structures the relationship between ruler and ruled. It settles how ruler is differentiated from ruled. It dictates the rank-ordering of positions within a political order. It sets decision procedures for placements, replacements, and demotions within this order. It defines the scope of actionable matters. The stability of a polity, other things being equal, stands or falls on its citizens living with, and abiding by, its hierarchical order. The attachment of the polity, ruler and ruled alike, to the hierarchical order is a function of the order being invested with an appeal credible to its audience because it is based on a commonly perceived objective standard that justifies its authority. Through its descriptive function, HC provides a schema for this near-universal feature of political life.

At Book 8's beginning, Socrates names seven types of rule (544c-d), implying that what follows is neutral to the distinction between Greek and barbarian (499c-d). Four of these straightforwardly instantiate HC: the Best City, which, *ex hypothesi*, is governed by nature, Timocracy, which looks to honour, Oligarchy to wealth, and Democracy to freedom (554c). In Plato's day, Persia and Egypt followed these examples. In the case of the former, Achaemenid rule looked to the support of the god, Ahuramazda, while for the latter, Pharaoh's divinity is a dramatic example of HC at work.[34] In each case, running from the Best City to Pharaoh, the polis justifies its relationship between ruler and ruled through an appeal to an overarching, authoritative principle independent of the here and now of the lived world.

Allow me to further illustrate HC at work through the example of some stock figures from our common storehouse of rulers through the ages: Augustus, Emperor Wu of Han, Montezuma, and Louis XI of France. The rule of each explicitly or implicitly appealed to some justification independent of the polis. Charles I of England, from his putative *Eikon Basilike* to his sad end, provides evidence of the downside of the loss of this warrant of an overarching justification for ruling. Theocracies follow this vein. Ancient Athens, Sparta, and Rome provide more evidence, insofar as all three, in

varying ways, indulged in the worship of ancestors and sundry divine connections.

History and historical materialism have served an analogous purpose. Liberal democracies, with their various forms of representative governments, draw on the belief that the people shall rule, a normative principle as dominant as any in our day; the inclusion of human rights completes this picture. Nationalisms, in their many forms (some degenerate), are analogous to ancient ancestor worship. If there are exceptions to the rule of HC in its descriptive mode, they are of the sort that prove the rule rather than serve as counter-examples.[35]

8. REFLECTIONS

The Noble Lie displays the Best City doing explicitly what worldly polities do in an automatic manner.[36] The evidence implies that many, if not all, polities are bound to the schema suggested by the Noble Lie. I imagine two centrifugal tendencies in the polis – one aiming at equality derived from a shared sense of siblinghood, and another impelled by the necessity for governance – that are the matrix of a centripetal unifying tendency, with attendant tensions resulting.

The ubiquity of patriotism and associate phenomena are fallow ground for AC's traducing nature. It successfully handfasts convention and nature through asserting the communal ownership of a human being at its founding natural experience, i.e., one's birth. HC is a harder sell. Socrates acknowledges Glaucon's suggestion that HC must be time-honoured. It will take a generation or more before it is a political norm. It is notable that Socrates follows Glaucon's lead on this issue. Since Glaucon has not been introduced, at this point in the narration, to the distinction between non-philosopher-rulers and philosopher-rulers, Socrates' acquiescence implicitly acknowledges that this solution is about cities not ruled by philosophers, which, logically, must include worldly cities. Socrates' use of the word, "*pheme*," to characterize this solution, which may refer either to the gods or to tradition, points to the issue at stake: how are norms established with respect to political hierarchies (φήμη, 415d6)?

To some degree, AC is a truism. Plato's contribution is not limited to the fact that he was the first to plant his flag on this truism. First, by means of AC, Plato shows that the polis turns to a paradox to justify a politically relevant commonality between its citizens, one grounded equally in nature, or some equivalent, and convention. Second, Plato yokes AC and HC into a unity. They are one "myth" (415a2). AC and HC adumbrate the same theme. The polis finds justification for its commonality and its political hierarchy, which dominates its way of life, through claims that are tacit, not revisited in the here and now of political discourse. The complex of AC and HC is a reminder that a primary experience of collective life, a common bond of deep near-brotherly fellow feeling, is in a balancing act with a contrary principle dictating that sibling rules over sibling. The myth lays out for inspection *a*, if not *the*, primal tension of political life. The Noble Lie reveals a source of tension that runs deeper than liberalism and conservatism.[37] It runs deeper not only because of its ubiquity but also because it allows one to see that justice and injustice are baked into the polis' surface.

The *Republic* displays the emergence of injustice as a consequence of the Noble Lie. Although AC is functionally dormant for the balance of the *Republic*'s argument, HC leads to a significant aspect of the *Republic* – the proposal concerning philosopher-rulers. As a

result, it also plays an important role in Book 8. It is the grounding principle of the thesis that the origin of faction, strife between the rulers, the gold of HC, leads to the degeneration of the Best City (545d1-2, 546d8-547a5, 547b2-c4). The immediacy of HC's, and thereby the Noble Lie's, connection to justice is displayed in the initial stage of the Best City's degeneration, which culminates in an act of primal injustice: the *enslavement* of the iron and bronze at the hands of the gold (547c1-4, 615b3, δουλωσάμενοι, 547c2, εἰς δουλείας ἐμβεβληκότες, 615b3).[38]

Two questions: first, is there something like a philosophical anthropology at the basis of the *Republic*'s descriptive claims? My starting point for thinking about this is the *Republic*'s two accounts of the soul (435e-441e, 588b-e). I suggest that the first account is to the second as the normative is to the descriptive, and that jointly they allow for a psychological foundation that serves the requirements of a philosophical anthropology. Second, the joining together of AC and HC raises a question, which seems peculiar to our day: why is the former a truism and the latter not?[39]

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Endnotes

1 Socrates uses three terms to name the city that arises out of the conversation in Book 2. The first is "city in speech" (369c2, 473e2). He uses "aristocracy" six times to designate it (544e7, 545c9, 547c6, 497b7, 427e7, 445d6). He uses "kallipolis" once; it is a *hapax*, not occurring elsewhere in the dialogues (527c2). "Aristocracy" and "kallipolis" are used to name it after philosopher-rulers have been introduced. Based on statistics alone as guide and rejecting "aristocracy" as misleading, I will use "Best City" for this function. Before "philosopher-rulers," instead of "city in speech," I will use "City." For the Greek of the *Republic*, I use Slings throughout.

2 The two parts are a heterogeneous unity (τό λοιπόν τοῦ μύθου, 415a2).

3 The following assert that AC and HC are jointly the Noble Lie: Andrew, 1989, 577, writes of the central

proposition of the myth; Page, 1991, 23, and footnote 21; Brickhouse and Smith, 1983, 82. Brisson, 2005, 41, treats it as myth, as does Schofield, 2006, 223-224. Cornford, 1941, 103, translates it as a "bold flight of invention." Carter, 1953, 299, treats it as metaphorical. Rowett, 2016, 98, and footnotes 64, 83, opts for HC. For AC, see Annas, 1981, 116, and Calabi, 1998, 446.

4 The third class is instantiated, i.e., "farmers and other craftsmen" (414a6-7). Adam, 2009, 189, commenting on 412b, notes that "Rulers" are introduced.

5 Schofield, 2006, 150-153, is among the few who notes this context.

6 See Vegetti, 1998, Volume III, 151-158, for a fuller picture of "guardians."

7 Pelling, 2009, 479.

8 See Pelling, 2009, 479-483, and footnote 10, on autochthony and complexities of Athenian attitudes to autochthony. See footnote 10 for widespread use of the trope among Greeks and non-Greeks. AC is Plato's generalization, cast in a literary form appropriate to its context, which describes these facts; footnote 10 includes references to some 25 examples of autochthony in varied peoples found in ancient texts.

9 Rosivach, 1987, 295, 297, 301-302. See Sophocles' *Ajax* for earliest reference to an Athenian autochthonic origin, which "is in effect a transferred epithet," whereby "people of earthborn Erechtheus become Erechtheus' earthborn people." Euripides' *Ion* deals with another strand in Athenian self-understanding. Saxonhouse, 1986, 257, 272-273, asserts that Euripides reflects the intellectual ethos of Athenian democracy, which challenges its "self-satisfaction," and writes of Euripides' assertion of the "foolishness of autochthony." Westra, 2006, 279, asserts that Euripides does not "escape" the pull of Athenian "hegemony," which excluded foreigners and asserted "Athenian superiority." For more on the peculiarities of the Athenian situation in Plato's day, see Kapparis, 2005, 111; Meyer, 1993, 119-120.

10 Kovacs, 2002, 657-675, 931-941.

11 Chantraine, 1968, 1281.

12 Some commentators assume promoting unity is the primary goal of AC, though the word "unity" does not occur in this context. See Shorey, 2009, 195; Rowett, 2016, 83; Carmola, 2003, 52; Brisson, 2007, 55.

13 Kasimis, 2016, 340-345, 348, 349, 356, on Glaucon believing AC to be "outrageous," suggests he tasks Socrates for breaching a "taboo." But, there couldn't have been a taboo about autochthony. It was publicly discussed through the 5th century's last half: Davies, 1977, 120-121. A descent-group criterion for citizenship, which entailed autochthony, was contentious. Aristophanes, 1998, 1075-1076; see Kovacs, 2002, fr. 360k as well. See Thucydides, 2.36.1, where "autochthony" is equated with "indigenous." Vegetti, 1998, Volume II, 142, footnote 142, observes the passage's "tragicomico" effect.

14 For the Theban issue, see Carmola, 2003, 54. For more on the background, see Fuks, 1971, 34-40.

15 See Loraux, 1981, 112, and footnote 6. "Nature," in this context, names those things that are not a function of human doing or decision-making and distinguishes them from the things that are. See Bywater, 1984, 1134b26; Waterfield, 1998, Book 1, 31, Book 3, 27-38; Burnet, 1965, 484e. Some complex senses of "nature" are on display in its 18 uses in the argument for sexual equality (451b-455d).

16 Hutchinson, 1985, 271ff.

17 Saxonhouse, 1986, 257, discusses the aristocratic bias in the traditional versions.

18 Carmola, 2003, 40-41. See below footnote 37. Ferrari, 2000, 107, footnote 63, sheds light on the term: "The lie is grand or noble (*gennaios*) by virtue of its civic purpose, but the Greek word can also be used colloquially, giving the meaning 'a true-blue lie,' i.e. a massive, no-doubt-about-it lie (compare the term 'grand larceny')."

19 Kasimis, 2016, 347, observes that the chief quality of the City's "rulers" is the character of their "*conviction*" (δόγματος, 412e5; the word reoccurs as introduction to the philosopher-rulers' education, 503a2). This reflects the difference between the City's non-philosophic rulers and the Best City's philosopher-rulers.

20 See below footnote 23.

21 1. Page, 1991, 22, and footnote 20, uses "single," as a translation of "one" myth to blend the two parts. 2. Rowett, 2016, 98, footnotes 64 and 83, also relegates AC to an adjunct to HC. She asserts that AC "… is not a new ideology. It is the traditional use to which such autochthony myths were put … Plato['s] myth is actually about deliberately dividing … [the citizens into three] … classes." Plainly, she asserts that HC is the Noble Lie. However, none of Rowett's sources refer to brotherhood, as Plato does here and in the *Laws* (Burnet, 1967, 663e). There are no references to brothers in the autochthony stories that antedate Plato not limited to its familial sense. She fails to note the assertion that there is "one" Noble Lie, as well as Glaucon's assertion that AC is false, i.e., a lie. Rowett pays a price for dismissing AC as a rehash of traditional materials. Her answer to the title of her article is that philosopher-rulers will believe the Noble Lie because it is not false, i.e., HC is true, if only within the compass of the *Republic*. This entails that there is no Noble Lie. Did Plato portray Socrates as lying when he asserted that there is a Noble Lie?

22 I translate "φυῇ" with "naturally grows" to preserve the sense of a development uninfluenced by human intervention.

23 Page, 1991, 23, and Rowett, 2016, 89, see one problem, as does Carmola, 2003, 52, who also sees the hyperbolic element, calling the "parents …

god-like"; Schofield, 2006, 290, and footnote 11, fails to note the differences between the two issues; notwithstanding, Schofield unpacks the sense of "admixture"; Shorey, 2009, 255, indulges in a "just so" moment, asserting that the … "child will be watched"; Kasimis, 2016, 342, indulges as well: 415c is about "one's acculturative participation in a specific training and a judge's evaluation of that training's success."

24 See Rankin, 1965, 419, for the relation of HC and Book 5.

25 Gonzalez, 2014, 1; I have edited Gonzalez without distorting his meaning. Irwin and Fine provide analogous accounts of the issue. Irwin, 2011, 273, on the gap between Socrates' grasp of the Idea of the Good and that of philosopher-rulers, adds that understanding the Good entails having a coherent account of the virtues complemented by a comparable psychology. Fine, 2003, 116, argues that knowledge of the Good requires a coherent grasp of the Ideas, which separates Socrates from philosopher-rulers.

26 I leave aside a predicate that Plato assigns to the Idea of the Good, i.e., that it is beyond being (508b).

27 Carmola, 2003, 56.

28 This is re-affirmed in Book 9 (592a-b). The City is also potentially a city in the world whose worldly existence is conceptually described in one passage (540e-41a, 545c4-547c4).

29 For more on "just so" interpretations, see above footnote 23.

30 See above footnotes 7 and 8.

31 ποιητούς πολίτης. See Ross, 1962, 1275a; Deene, 2011, 161-162.

32 1. For Japanese, I profit from consultation with a colleague in Japanese Studies; 2. for etymology of *φυσις*, Klein, 1985, 224; 3. for "klima," Chantraine, 1968, 543; 4. for Hebrew, Fox, 1990, 120; 5. for Hindi, I depend on consultation with a colleague in South Asian Studies.

33 Chantraine, 1968, 387, offers "découvrir" as the first meaning of "heuristic," which literally means "to uncover." AC and HC uncover a fresh way of examining contemporary and historical data, and revisiting existent literature. See below footnote 35.

34 See Kuhrt, 1984, 158; Costa, 2006, 74.

35 Mosko, 1992, challenges Sahlins' case that hierarchy is a cross-cultural, diachronic phenomenon. He references Sahlins, *Islands of History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985; "Hierarchy and Humanity in Polynesia," in *Transformations of Polynesian Culture* (1985), edited by Antony Hooper and Judith Huntsman, Auckland: The Polynesian Society. Mosko fails to address the shadow of hierarchy through gift-giving.

36 A review of HC and AC and truth and falsity: in their descriptive modes, both are true insofar as each describes normative, worldly practices of many, if not all, polities. Those described by AC make claims that are false; those described by HC are dubious at best. In their normative modes, AC and HC are about the Best City, to which scholarship in the main limits itself. In this mode, AC enjoins the Best City to make a claim that is false. This makes it the Noble Lie, fingered by Glaucon at 414e7. HC is true in this mode, finding one instantiation within the text. From the introduction of philosopher-rulers to the end of Book 7, Socrates aims to distinguish philosophers from non-philosophers in order to show that philosophers are fit by "nature" to rule the City (473c11-540b7, 474b2-c3, φύσει, 474c1). Philosopher-rulers will know HC to be true as a normative principle. It is part of their self-knowledge.

37 See above footnote 18.

38 Gonda (2016).

39 The Teaching Company's author sees AC as a truism. S/he treats HC as an apology for a caste system.

Plato on Divinization and the Divinity of the Rational Part of the Soul

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ABSTRACT

The divinity of the soul in Plato is analyzed into three aspects, one metaphysical, one epistemological, and one ethical, namely: (1) its immortality and kinship to the Forms, (2) its ability to know them, and (3) its ability to live by them, respectively. I argue that these aspects in combination naturally suggest a process of Platonic divinization or "becoming like god" according to which the person being divinized would be expected to gain (3) increasing moral virtue, which depends on (2) an increasing knowledge of the Forms, which in turn prepares the soul for reunification with (1) its metaphysical kin, the Forms. This interpretation of divinization is confirmed by successively comparing Plato's discussion of "becoming like god" in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*. Since divinization on this understanding requires moral virtue and attentive engagement with the sensible world, other interpretations that take it to be an exclusively intellectual endeavor or a dismissive flight from the sensible world are mistaken.

Keywords: Plato, *homoiosis theo*, divine, god, divinization, psychology

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What does Plato mean when he claims, in the middle and late dialogues, that the soul, and in particular the rational part of the soul, is divine? Answers to this question have not, to my knowledge, received any systematic treatment. Dodds (1945, 19), recognizes the soul's divinity in passing, and Guthrie (1957, 10-12) points out its probable Orphic and Empedoclean heritage, but without developing the theme in Plato himself. My own analysis, in addition to illuminating a recurrent theme in Plato's philosophy of interest in its own right, will provide a basis upon which to build an adequate interpretation of the intrinsically related Platonic idea(l) of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, "becoming like god."[1] Having done so, I will then be able to correct misplaced emphasis, flaws, and tension created by other interpretations of that idea(l).

I. ANALYSIS OF THE DIVINITY OF THE RATIONAL PART

The divinity of the rational part consists of three features. First, it is divine on account of its metaphysical status: it is, for Plato, both (1a) immortal and, even more importantly, (1b) akin to those supremely divine objects, the Forms (see, e.g., *Smp.* 211e, which refers to "divine Beauty itself"; though, it must be granted, Plato calls many other things divine: see Hackforth, 1936, 4). (1a) The immortality of the soul, argued for at length throughout the *Phaedo,* in *Republic* 10 (608c-612a), and in the *Phaedrus* (245c-e), makes the soul just as "deathless" (ἀθάνατον), and therefore divine, as the Homeric gods (see *Phd.* 73a, 79d, 80b, 81a, 100b, 105e, 106b-e, 107c, 114d; *R.* 610c, 611a-b, 611e, 621c; *Phdr.* 245c, 246a, 247b; see also the entry on 'god' in *Def.,* θεός ζῶον ἀθάνατον). But can we be sure that the rational part of the soul specifically is divine because of its immortality? Indeed, of the three psychic parts distinguished in the *Republic,* the rational is called the "most divine" (θειότατον, 589e). Thus, even if it should turn out that there are no parts in the soul when it is separated from the body—a possibility Plato seems to acknowledge (612a, but see Guthrie, 1957, 12-13, and Hall, 1963, 65ff)—we would expect the rational part above all to survive death intact. We are not surprised, then, to find the *Timaeus* (41c-d, 69c-70b, 90a-c) explicitly separating the *mortal* soul (with its two parts, spirited and appetitive) from the *immortal* and *divine* soul (identified as our rational part: see Hall, 1963, 63).

The soul, and in particular the rational part, is also divine, or at least has some degree of divinity, due to (1b) its metaphysical kinship with the Forms. Making use of a particular expression reserved for the Forms alone ("what always is"), Plato informs us that the soul is "akin (συγγενής) to the divine (θείῳ) and immortal and what always is" (*R.* 611e). But again, can we be sure that this type of divinity, or at least this kinship or likeness to true divinity, applies to the rational part in particular? We can. The rational part, to anticipate one of my later points, is our only means of knowing "what always is," the purely intelligible Forms. The spirited and appetitive parts, on the other hand, have no direct link or intrinsic connection to these divine objects. If any particular part of the soul is responsible for its being "akin to the divine and immortal and what always is," it must be the rational part.

We can gain an even more vivid sense of the rational part's kinship with divine, intelligible objects from a neglected aspect of the image of the Cave. The prisoners, as Plato's Socrates points out, being completely unaware of anything beyond their immediate surroundings, mistake what is less real for what is more real (515c-d). Chained in such a way that they can only see the play of shadows on the wall in front of them, unable even to move their heads (514a), they mistakenly think,

for example, that the shadow of some animal--statue cast by the fire behind them is the real animal, not suspecting the existence of either the animal-statue or the true, above-ground animal itself. They do not realize the greater level of reality such things possess in comparison with mere shadows. In short, they do not recognize shadows *as shadows*. Likewise, because all that they see of themselves are their own shadows (515a), unaware that there is more to their own being than what they see, they do not realize the particularly privileged level of reality that they possess as human souls. For they are not merely statues of men (ἀνδριάντας) like those being carried in front of the fire (514b-c), but real, living, breathing men. As such, they do not belong in the world of shadows and images. Metaphysically, they are the kind of thing properly found in the realm above the Cave, which represents the intelligible as opposed to the visible and sensible world (517b). They belong with the other real men who live above ground. (The existence of men above ground is implied because there are images of them in water: see 516a.) Thus, though human souls are not themselves Forms, it is safer to classify them with such intelligible, immaterial, divine objects than with visible, material, mortal ones. And because the image of the Cave itself represents the ascent of the soul to the intelligible realm (517b), we can be confident that the role of the rational part is being especially emphasized. If anything in our souls is akin to purely intelligible Forms, it would be our intellectual, rational part.

The soul's natural kinship with intelligible objects is the foundation of the second argument for the soul's immortality in the *Phaedo*. After dividing reality into "two kinds of beings, one visible and the other invisible," the former always changing and perceptible to the senses but the latter always the same and accessible only to our rational powers (79a), Plato's Socrates goes on to conclude that "the soul is most like the divine (θείῳ) and deathless and intelligible and uniform and indissoluble and always being the same as itself" (80b), "being akin (συγγενής)" to "what is pure and always existing and immortal and unchanging" (79d). While it cannot itself be a Form, the soul, and in particular its rational powers, should be categorized in the realm of divine, immaterial, intelligible objects. The same point is also conveyed by the imagery of the heavenly chariots in the *Phaedrus*, where we learn that the soul finds its true nourishment and fulfillment in gazing on the reality of the Forms in the intelligible realm amidst the gods, to which realm, if it has since fallen, it is ever striving to re-ascend (246b-248a). In addition to being divine due to one of its properties (immortality), it is also divine to some extent simply due to the kind of thing it is.

So much for the divine metaphysical status of the soul and, in particular, of its rational part. The second and third features of its divinity are based on its operations. The first of these, as I have already mentioned, is (2) its theoretical function as the sole instrument of our knowledge of the divine Forms. It is "that by which we learn," which "is always straining towards knowing the truth" as the "learning-loving and philosophical" part of the soul (*R.* 581a; see 611d-e). True learning and philosophy consist in the intellectual grasping of the essences of authentic realities, the Forms (*R.* 475e-476b, 479d-480a, 484b; *Tht.* 175c-d; *Phd.* 63e-66e). The other parts of the soul, the spirited and appetitive, have no share in learning or philosophy except insofar as they enforce and obey the reasoned dictates of the rational part (*R.* 441e-442d; *Phdr.* 253e-254e; *Ti.* 70a-71e); they cannot learn or philosophize themselves. Only the rational part has the divine privilege of knowing the divine Forms.

The third and final mark of the rational part's divinity is (3) its practical ability to rule, regulate, and organize the other parts of the

soul. It is this function of the rational part that Plato chose to emphasize in selecting its name, "calling that part of the soul with which it rationally calculates, rational" (τὸ μὲν ᾧ λογίζεται λογιστικὸν προσαγορεύοντες τῆς ψυχῆς, *R.* 439d). The ideal person (i.e., the philosopher), having used his or her rational part to gain adequate knowledge of the relevant Forms, especially the Good, then proceeds by means of the same part to 'calculate' or 'reason' what is good for the whole soul, transforming his theoretical knowledge of the Forms into practical directives for his own regulation (441e, 442c). Having seen the Form of the Good, he is able to determine what is good, advantageous, and beneficial for himself (and, if need be, for others), and so live a just and virtuous life (see 500d-501c).

For Plato, the ability to rule is a characteristic mark of divinity. In the *Phaedo,* having pointed out that the soul is the natural master of the body (see also *R.* 590c, *Lg.* 896c), Plato has Socrates ask Cebes, "Which seems to you like the divine (θείῳ) and which the mortal? Or does it not seem to you that the divine (θεῖον) is such as to rule and to lead by nature, but the mortal to be ruled and to be subject?" To which he answers: "Clearly, Socrates, the soul is like the divine, and the body the mortal" (80a). When a soul does successfully rule itself and the body it inhabits, it lives a life of virtue—especially in the case of the philosopher, who is constantly purifying himself of contact with the body by subduing it and who acquires true virtue and self-mastery through philosophical wisdom (64a-69d). Similarly in the *Timaeus*, when the Demiurge addresses the gods, he describes how he himself will fashion man's (immortal) soul, associating its ruling power with its divinity and the life of virtue:

> And to the extent that it is fitting for them to possess something that shares our name of 'immortal', something described as *divine* (θεῖον) *and ruling* within those of them who always consent to *follow after justice* and after you, I shall begin by sowing that seed, and then hand it over to you (41c-d, my emphasis, trans. Donald Zeyl, *Plato: Complete Works*, 1997; see 69c, 90a; *Lg.* 713e-714a, 899a-b).

To rule oneself, and hence to live justly and virtuously, is divine. Likewise in the *Phaedrus,* the rational part of the soul, its ruler and charioteer, must steer the other parts in harmony together (i.e., justly and virtuously) in imitation of the gods (246a-b, 248a, 252d-254e). Plato's message is clear: ruling oneself by one's rational power, and hence living a life of justice and virtue, is divine.

The rational part of the soul, then, is divine for three reasons: not only (1) for what it *is*—namely, both (1a) immortal and (1b) metaphysically akin to the Forms, but also for what it is able to *do*—namely, (2) to know these Forms and, subsequently, (3) to rule the other parts and enable a person to live an ordered, just, and virtuous life. It is evident that these three aspects of rationality are not separate and isolated from one another, but inseparably connected. How, then, would they all work together in a given individual, and how might we expect that dynamism to play out, ideally, in the course of his or her development?

First, we may observe that (3) the practical ability to rule is intrinsically dependent upon, though more than a mere side effect of, (2) the theoretical ability to know the Forms. The task of ruling is a serious responsibility, but its execution would be impossible, or at least gravely inadequate, without the knowledge of how to do it which can only come from a grasp of the relevant Forms (*R.* 505a). But why, on the basis of the evidence considered so far, would we expect human beings, (1) whose level of reality, insofar as they are rational, is akin to the Forms which reside in the intelligible world, (3) to employ their

rational part in the difficult and laborious task of ruling themselves (*Phdr.* 253e-254e) or others (*R.* 519c-520e) in this sensible world? Why would a person choose to engage in the affairs of this world, even if such engagement, as we know from the grand cosmic operations of the Demiurge and the gods of the stars and planets (*R.* 508a; *Ti.* 38c-40d; *Lg.* 821a-d, 898c-899b), is a divine task, worthy of the rational part's divinity? If the intelligible world is our true home, and it is there that our metaphysical kin reside, would we not rather intensely desire and eventually attempt to return to that realm from which we have, in some way or other, descended? Furthermore, wouldn't we expect that (2) the profound intelligible grasp of the Forms necessary for (3) an adequate commitment to a life of virtue in the sensible world would, in the process, awaken our nostalgia for our true habitation (*Phdr.* 250c-d), and a deep philosophical longing for what is most beautiful and good (*Smp.* 201a-c, 203e-204b, 206c-e)? Why, in short, would we tie ourselves to the earth, when heaven beckons us skyward (*Tht.* 174a, *Ti.* 90a-b)?

The solution to this apparent difficulty, if the three divine aspects of the rational part are truly unified, must lie in the fact that a life of virtue engaged with the sensible realm is an essential preparation for one's return to the intelligible realm, however this return may ultimately play out.[2] If ruling ourselves according to the informed dictates of our rational part were a suitable method for facilitating the ascent back to the Forms, then it would be easy to see how all three aspects of the rational part's divinity might work together. In the long-term course of a person's development, then, we would ideally expect (3) a life of increasing self-rule, justice, and virtue, which requires (2) an increasing intellectual grasp of the Forms, thereby drawing one ever closer to (1) one's true metaphysical kin. By cultivating the practical *and* theoretical abilities of one's rational part, a person would become as ordered ethically and intellectually as the Forms are metaphysically, preparing the way for reunification. If this expectation is correct, then, though one's rationality is already divine in three ways, there would still be a great work to be accomplished in the life of each person, or at least, each philosopher. And that work, ending as it does in communion with divine objects (the Forms), proceeding by divine means (the theoretical and practical abilities of the rational part), and originating from a divine source (the rational part itself), we are entitled to call a process of divinization. Though we are already divine, there would still be a sense in which we must be divinized—or, in other words, become like god.

II. BECOMING LIKE GOD

I have argued that an understanding of the threefold divinity of the soul's rational part naturally suggests a certain process of divinization or "becoming like god." I will now proceed to confirm that suggestion by studying the passages in which Plato explicitly discusses divinization. It will be my goal in this section to demonstrate that the Platonic idea(l) of "becoming like god" involves just the sort of process outlined above: living a life of moral virtue, which requires both an adequate intellectual grasp of the relevant Forms and a certain commitment to the sensible world as an essential preparation for, and ultimately for the sake of, a reunion of some kind with our metaphysical kin, the Forms (for Plato's commitment to the sensible world, see Duerlinger, 1985, 319; Armstrong, 2004, 174-6; Mahoney, 2004, 329-33, and Mahoney, 2005, 87-91; contrast their views with Lännström, 2011, 113-24). After this, certain flaws and errors in other interpretations of Plato's account of divinization will be corrected.

The fact that becoming morally virtuous presupposes increasing knowledge of the Forms (i.e., philosophical wisdom) has, I take it, been sufficiently demonstrated in section I. What remains to be shown is that "becoming like god" consists in practicing moral virtue and gaining philosophical wisdom as an essential preparation for the transition from the sensible world (or at least, the earthly sensible world) to the intelligible world (or at least, the heavens, where intelligible principles hold most sway). This 'otherworldly' aspect of the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is clearly stated in the *locus classicus* of its expression, *Theaetetus* 176a-b:

> One must attempt to escape from here [earth] to there [heaven] as quickly as possible. And escape is becoming like god as far as possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν); and becoming like is to become just and pious with sound judgment.

Attaining moral virtue is, evidently, essential to divinization and its goal, the ascent to a higher realm.[3] Nevertheless, it is not the whole story. When we consider that the preceding context of this passage is an exploration of the unusual, otherworldly behavior of the philosopher, who pays more attention to essences or natures (i.e., Forms) than to individual instances of them in the sensible world (174a-175e), it is natural to conclude that in doing so such a person, though perhaps he is a caricature in other respects (see Rue, 1993, 72-92, especially 91) has already begun readying himself for the "escape from earth to heaven" precisely by being a philosopher. Thus a life of justice, combined with philosophical thinking, advances the process of divinization and its ultimate goal, the ascent to a higher realm.

In fact, we can detect just such a notion of "becoming like god" in every single middle and late dialogue mentioned so far (see Armstrong, 2004, 171, 172 n. 3 and Duerlinger, 1985, 313ff; also, on the *Philebus,* which I do not discuss, see Armstrong, 2004, 174-6; Russell, 2004, 246-50; Dombrowski, 2005, 100; and Obdrzalek, 2012, 1-6, 12-5). We find it in the *Phaedo*, where after death the just and pious are said to be freed from this earth, which we think is the true earth, but is in fact below its real surface (107e-114d); and of these, those who "have sufficiently purified themselves by philosophy" (114c) will dwell in even more beautiful regions, able to contemplate "the true heaven and the true light and the true earth" (110a). Having always done philosophy, they have prepared themselves to separate from the body and the visible world by associating with the intelligible Forms while still in this life (64a-68c), thus attaining true virtue (68c--69e). The goal of divinization, the ascent to a higher realm (indeed, the intelligible realm itself), is accomplished through philosophy and moral virtue. We find it in the *Republic*, where the true heavens and earth above the Cave are discovered by the escaped prisoner (514a-517b), whose "upward ascension" represents "the ascent of the soul to the intelligible realm" (517b). But this ascent, while primarily intellectual, must also have ethical consequences, insofar as the philosopher who studies the Forms inevitably "imitates them and becomes as like them as possible," and so, "associating with [what is] divine and ordered, becomes as divine and ordered as a human being can" (κόσμιός τε καὶ θεῖος εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γίγνεται, 500b-d). The philosopher's observation of the order present in the divine Forms induces him to the divine life of justice, advancing the process of divinization and preparing him for the ultimate ascent to the intelligible world. Thus, by both philosophy and "practicing virtue, [he desires] to become like god to the extent possible for a human being" (ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυαντὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ, 613a-b). We find it also in the

Symposium, where the lover ascends through sensible objects all the way up to the supreme object of his philosophical ἔρως, the immaterial, incorporeal, "divine Beauty itself" (211e), the vision of which alone lets him achieve "true virtue" (212a). And, as Diotima says, "the love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he" (212a, trans. Paul Woodruff and Alexander Nehamas, *Plato: Complete Works*, 1997; see 207c-d). Divinization is achieved through cultivation of virtue and intellectual union with the Forms through philosophy. We find it in the *Phaedrus* (246b-253b), where the gods ascend in their chariots to "the place beyond heaven" (247c) and behold the magnificent, purely intelligible Forms. The philosopher, who had followed in Zeus' train (250b, 252e), is especially blessed with this vision (248d, 249c, 250b-c). But if he should fall, he must re-ascend through a life of justice (248e--249b), being "lifted up by justice into a heavenly place" (249a). As an embodied being, inspired by the memory of his association with Zeus, he comes to adopt his customs and habits "to the extent that a human being can participate in god" (καθ' ὅσον δυνατὸν θεοῦ ἀνθρώπῳ μετασχεῖν, 253a). Likewise, his philosophical recollection of the Forms in this life, constantly refreshed, draws him back "towards the divine" and the intelligible (249c-d). Once again, the goal of divinization, the return to a higher (intelligible) realm, comes about through virtue and knowledge (or rather, recollection) of the Forms. We find it in the *Timaeus*, where we learn that human souls were born in heaven and that the rational part was placed in our topmost member, the head, which "raises us up away from the earth and toward our kindred (συγγένειαν) in heaven" (90aff). The divine Demiurge wants us to become like him (29e), and we can do this by cultivating our rational part, both intellectually and ethically; and the one who does so, "to the extent possible for human nature, participates in immortality" (καθ' ὅσον δ' αὖ μετασχεῖν ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει ἀθανασίας ἐνδέχεται, 90c). For by studying the order of the heavens intellectually (47b-c, 90c-d) and by pursuing justice morally (41c-d), ordering our own thoughts and internal constitution (42b-c) as the Demiurge orders the universe and the gods ordered us (69b-70b), we advance the process of divinization. Hence I disagree with Sedley (2000), 807 (=Sedley, 1997, 336; see also Sedley, 2017, 327-8) and Lännström (2011), 112 n.4, who agrees with him, when he argues that "in recommending assimilation to that cosmic god Plato is advising us to emulate him, *not as an administrator*, but as something better, a pure intellect directly contemplating eternal truths" (my emphasis; see Mahoney, 2005, 77-91 *contra* Sedley). And finally, we find it in the *Laws*, where the unjust are sent to Hades, and the just, we may infer, to the heavens (904c-e). Thus, as much as the *Laws* is concerned with human affairs, it still considers the ultimate purpose of a just life to be 'otherworldly': for through it, we are divinized and brought to another, higher realm. As Plato himself writes: "Whenever, having associated with divine virtue, it [the soul] becomes surpassingly such [i.e., divine], it moves to a surpassingly, altogether holy place, being transported to another, better location" (904d-e). If virtue makes us "like" god (ὅμοιος, 716d), then the process of becoming virtuous—which not only presupposes the theoretical exercise of the intellect (713e-714a) but also leads us away from this world—is a process of becoming like god, a ὁμοίωσις θεῷ.

In view of such evidence, we must conclude that Plato's concept of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ maintained a consistent unity throughout his mature thought, always implying the fulfillment of the three aspects of the rational part's divinity: the return to a higher realm (i.e., reunion with the Forms in

some fashion), intellectual development, and moral development, corresponding to its metaphysical kinship with the Forms, its theoretical ability to know them, and its practical ability to live by them, respectively. Though admittedly certain aspects of the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ may seem to be emphasized in certain dialogues more than others (escape from the sensible world in the *Theaetetus*, intellectual development in the *Timaeus,* moral virtue in the *Laws*), it would be a mistake to single out one element at the expense of the others in our overall interpretation. Thus I cannot endorse Sedley's reading of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ as "one which leaves moral virtue behind and focuses instead on pure intellectual development" (Sedley, 2000, 806 [=Sedley, 1997, 335]).[3] Likewise, I cannot agree with Armstrong's assertion that "assimilation to god takes on *new* meaning in the *Laws,* involving concern for the order of human affairs rather than a dismissive flight from them" (Armstrong 2004, 174, my emphasis). Even in the *Theaetetus,* in which such a "flight" or "escape" was recommended, it had been urged by way of a life of justice, which necessarily involves concern for human affairs. Thus, the flight itself need never have been a dismissive one (see Rue, 1993, 90-2; Mahoney, 2004, 323-4, 329-31; and Reydams-Schils, 2017, 152-4). Nor, finally, would I assert that "There is a rift in Plato's thought, as he is torn between conceptions of virtue as, on the one hand, an uncompromising but committed engagement with the world and, on the other, a flight from and rejection of it" (Annas, 1999, 70). While Plato did think that the philosopher must ultimately leave this world behind, he also demanded a life of virtue from him, which by its nature cannot simply reject the world. The philosopher must be invested in this world to a certain extent, though not engrossed by it; for his engagement with it is also his means of overcoming it. The apparent "rift in Plato's thought" is only apparent. Plato did not reject the world outright: in fact, he often encouraged us to use sensible objects and images as reminders of what is more real, sending us to the intelligible world precisely through the sensible (*Smp.* 210a--211d; *Phdr.* 249c-251c; *Men.* 81b-86b; *Phd.* 75a-e; *R.* 521cff; see Dombrowski, 2005, 97-9). He was not so otherworldly as to completely disavow, or even merely to ignore, the value and goodness of the sensible world; but Raphael was right, in the *School of Athens,* to paint him pointing to the sky.

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Endnotes

1 Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Greek are my own.

2 I.e., whether one's reunion with the Forms occurs in the intelligible realm itself or in the sensible heavens, where intelligible principles have most sway. The *Phaedo, Republic, Symposium* and *Phaedrus,* as will become evident, suggest the former; *Theaetetus, Timaeus,* and *Laws,* the latter.

3 The logic of my argument requires no particular stance on the relationship between divinization and human happiness. Nevertheless, because the two have usually been identified since antiquity, the objection could be raised that since in my account divinization has a goal, but happiness can have no goal beyond itself, then divinization cannot constitute human happiness. If happiness is a final end, but divinization is a means to some further end, how could divinization possibly be happiness? One plausible answer relies on the qualification Plato consistently attaches to his comments on becoming like god, i.e., "*to the extent possible for human nature,* participates in immortality" (*Ti.* 90c); "*to the extent that a human being can* participate in god" (*Phdr.* 253a); "*if* any human being could become immortal, it would be he," (*Smp.* 212a, trans. Paul Woodruff and Alexander Nehamas, *Plato: Complete Works*, 1997); "becomes *as like* [the Forms] *as possible*…becomes as divine and ordered *as a human being can*…to become like god *to the extent possible for a human being*" (*R.* 500b-d). I take this qualification to mean that as long as a human being remains fundamentally human, some aspects of divinity, including its ability to achieve divine happiness, must remain beyond human capacity. Being a fulfilled, happy human is not the same as being a fulfilled, happy god, even if both forms of happiness include intellectual contemplation as an essential component. Thus what a human being pursues as its own proper happiness, chosen for its own sake as an end goal, may turn out to be, from the divine perspective, only partially fulfilling, a stepping-stone that naturally leads to the higher form of happiness proper to divine nature. In practice this means that while the process of divinization is still ongoing, i.e. when a particular philosopher is becoming more like god but still remains fundamentally human, his or her happiness would still consist in human happiness: living a life of moral and intellectual development guided by one's rational principle. But if the process of divinization were ever actually completed, then the subject of the process, having been fully divinized, and presumably no longer being human, would then become capable of a higher (but intrinsically related) kind of happiness or fulfillment—in this case, some kind of reunification with, or intellectual 'beatific vision' of, the Forms not possible for mere mortals.

4 The extent of the divergence between Sedley's views and my own depends on what he means by "leaves moral virtue behind." If he means that the definition or concept of divinization does not include continual moral development, that the essence of becoming godlike "leaves moral virtue behind" in that sense (see Sedley, 2017, 328), then we disagree sharply. But if he means that the process of divinization, while perhaps starting with moral development, has as its ultimate goal a contemplative grasping of the Forms—a 'beatific vision' in which perhaps moral virtue no longer plays any role, and to that extent "leaves moral virtue behind"—then I am inclined to agree (see Sedley, 2017, 334), with an important caveat. I would maintain that for Plato there is always a need for moral development before that heavenly reunification with the Forms has been fully and completely achieved. As long as the philosopher still lives as an embodied human being in the world, he or she will still need moral virtue to deal with it effectively. Only when the process of divinization is complete, and therefore no longer exists as such (the philosopher having been completely divin*ized*), could moral virtue be totally left behind, or rather surpassed. Hence on my interpretation of divinization, Plato cannot be recommending a *purely* intellectual life in this world. I suspect that Sedley would disagree with me on that point.

Semblables inférieures: quels lieux pour les femmes dans la cité juste de Platon?

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ABSTRACT

What place can women have in Plato's just city? In opposition to the two main antagonistic positions on this topic - some consider Plato a promoter of gender equality as he allows women to have political office, while others put the stress on the fact that Plato keeps them in a subordinate status - this article makes a new claim: these two positions must be held together because of the nature of the rationality at work in Plato's political philosophy, as a combination of emancipatory theoretical elements, and the taking into account of the constraints of history.

Keywords: Laws, Republic, oikos, politics, Women

RÉSUMÉ

Quelle place pour les femmes dans la cité de juste de Platon ? Aux deux positions classiques et antagonistes sur ce sujet – les uns voient en lui un promoteur de l'égalité des genres en ce qu'il permet aux femmes d'accéder aux fonctions politiques, tandis que d'autres soulignent au contraire qu'il les maintient dans un statut subordonné – cet article oppose une nouvelle hypothèse: ces deux positions doivent être tenues ensemble en raison de la nature de la rationalité à l'œuvre dans la philosophie politique de Platon, qui mêle éléments théoriques émancipateurs, et prise en compte des contraintes de l'histoire.

Mots-clés: Femmes, Lois, politique, oikos, République

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La réflexion politique de Platon quant à ce que devrait être une cité juste ne se limite pas à l'intégration des trois groupes fonctionnels – gardiens, auxiliaires et producteurs – à laquelle on la réduit souvent. Elle consiste aussi et avant tout en la délimitation du territoire physique et symbolique de la cité, soit dans le tracé de ses frontières, externes et internes, qui assignent leur lieu politique à des catégories de population distinctes. Celles-ci se constituent par cette opération même – c'est le cas, par exemple, des incurables (Helmer 2017) – ou lui préexistent sur le plan empirique et historique, Platon examinant alors leur pertinence, c'est-à-dire à quels déplacements il faudrait les soumettre pour les intégrer dans l'espace politique juste. Tel est le cas de la frontière qui passe entre les hommes et les femmes, dont Platon examine le bien fondé politique. S'il s'y intéresse, c'est certes parce qu'il est, comme Aristophane, un enfant d'Athènes, qui puise dans sa cité la matière première d'une large partie de ses dialogues. Or même si, « incontestablement, aux yeux des Grecs, il existe des femmes *politai* » (Sebillotte Cuchet 2016, 22) – ce que confirment aussi bien le lexique que l'exercice d'une forme de délibération politique lors de fêtes citoyennes comme les Thesmophories (Valdés Guía 2017), ou encore la dimension religieuse de la citoyenneté dans laquelle elles étaient très impliquées (Blok 2017, 187-248) – les femmes n'en demeuraient pas moins exclues des fonctions politiques (*timai*) les plus hautes. Cette différence, qui est au cœur de l'*Assemblée des femmes*, éveille aussi l'intérêt du philosophe, qui se demande dans quelle mesure un tel partage est inhérent ou non à une pensée rationnelle de l'espace politique juste, et dans quelle mesure il est requis. Autrement dit, en proposant, comme Aristophane mais avec d'autres moyens, de penser « l'impensable » à propos des femmes, à savoir leur participation aux fonctions politiques les plus hautes, Platon sonde la nécessité et les limites du partage des sexes et des genres dans la cité – sexe renvoyant à la différence biologique, et genre aux « rapports de sexe tels qu'ils sont compris par la culture et par l'histoire » (Perrot 2004, 92-93).[1] Pensé à nouveaux frais, ce partage doit selon lui être atténué mais néanmoins perpétué. Car, on le sait, si Platon fait accéder les femmes à l'exercice du pouvoir, il n'élimine pas pour autant la différence *politique* entre les genres : fonctionnellement semblables aux hommes, en droit, pour ce qui concerne l'exécution des tâches politiques, elles ne leur sont pas moins, en fait, inférieures en général en tout œuvre, et moins présentes qu'eux dans la liste des fonctions politiques majeures énumérées dans les *Lois*.

Face à une telle ambivalence unanimement repérée, la critique se divise en deux camps opposés. Le premier souligne et expose la valeur et la nature spécifique des arguments que Platon met en œuvre pour faire entrer les femmes sur la scène politique (Calvert 1975 ; Santas 2002 ; Brisson 2012 ; Townsend 2017), certains allant jusqu'à voir en lui un précurseur du féminisme – ou de formes spécifiques du féminisme (Vlastos 1995 ; Tuana 1994 ; Buchan 1999, 135-154). Dans le même sens, on a pu mettre au jour les préjugés anti-féminins et les violences herméneutiques que la modernité a exercés sur les passages pourtant les plus clairs de Platon concernant l'intégration politique des femmes (Bluestone 1986, 3-73). L'autre camp, au contraire, considère que la promotion politique des femmes et de « l'égalité » des genres par Platon est bien peu solide face à ses affirmations réitérées de leur infériorité intrinsèque par rapport aux hommes (Bloom 1968, 383 ; Annas 1976 ; Saïd 1986, en part. 147-148).

Tout se passe donc comme si la vérité de la pensée de Platon sur la place politique des femmes devait nécessairement se trouver d'un

côté *ou* de l'autre. Contre une telle approche, notre thèse est double. D'une part, les deux positions doivent être tenues *ensemble*, plutôt que disjointes : les femmes ne sont pour Platon ni les égales des hommes, ni leur inférieures, elles sont leurs « inférieures semblables » ou leurs « semblables inférieures » – on préfère le terme de « semblable » à celui d' « égale », l'égalité comportant une idée de valeur, absente des passages où Platon plaide, en termes purement fonctionnels, en faveur du rôle politique des femmes. Un tel oxymore n'est pas le signe de l'incapacité du philosophe à statuer clairement au sujet des femmes, mais le symptôme de ce que signifie selon lui tracer l'espace politique et l'habiter. Pour elles comme pour les autres catégories de la cité – les étrangers, les esclaves, et même ceux qui sont en apparence les mieux établis, les philosophes-rois[2] – le fait d'occuper une place fonctionnelle et symbolique bien délimitée dans l'espace de la cité juste n'empêche pas que les frontières la séparant de son autre ou de ses autres soient fragiles (Helmer 2016 ; 2019), à la fois parce que ce découpage fait fond sur l'hypothèse d'une définition unitaire de la nature humaine (*Theet*. 149c ; *Tim*. 90c3), et parce que Platon intègre une part, selon lui inexpugnable, de nécessité – métaphysique, anthropologique et historique – au cœur de son projet politique et de la rationalité sur laquelle il repose.

D'autre part, et par suite, les deux camps herméneutiques antagonistes restent muets sur la distribution des espaces physiques et symboliques de la cité selon les genres. En faire l'examen fait pourtant apparaître la nature du partage politique auquel obéit l'espace civique platonicien. Il relève d'une forme complexe de rationalité, associant à la fois les conclusions de la réflexion dialectique, et, on l'a dit, la prise en compte de la nécessité irrationnelle inhérente aux usages, aux habitudes, aux traditions. Pour le montrer, il faut se pencher sur le double mouvement politique dont les femmes font l'objet dans la *République* et les *Lois*. Platon propose, d'une part, de faire sortir les femmes de l'espace domestique pour leur ouvrir les lieux des fonctions politiques de la cité ; et, d'autre part, de faire entrer l'esprit communautaire de la *polis* au sein de l'*oikos* dont les femmes ont la charge, pour en modifier les valeurs au bénéfice de la cité tout entière. L'inégale mise en œuvre de ces deux mesures, à la faveur de la seconde qui politise les femmes sans leur confier pleinement des charges politiques, confirme le statut de « semblables inférieures » assigné aux femmes.

1. SEMBLABLES: SORTIR DE L'*OIKOS*, ENTRER DANS LA *POLIS*

Le geste par lequel Platon fait accéder les femmes à la politique comprend deux opérations complémentaires, qui sont comme les deux facettes d'une seule et unique procédure: d'une part, les arracher à l'espace domestique de l'*oikos*, d'autre part, légitimer leur rôle politique en les rendant semblables aux hommes sur le plan politique et en leur ouvrant les lieux du pouvoir.

Sortir de l'oikos

La *République* et les *Lois* tentent, jusqu'à un certain point, d'arracher les femmes à la sphère domestique dans laquelle la société grecque les confine, au nom d'une distribution des tâches traditionnelle en Attique : aux hommes les travaux extérieurs, aux femmes les tâches intérieures, en particulier le tissage et l'intendance générale de la maison (Xén., *Écon*.,VII 22 ; Ps.-Arist., *Écon*., I, 4, 1343b30--1344a6 ; Plat., *Leg.* VII, 805e).[3] Pour quelles

raisons Platon ne se satisfait-il pas de ce partage traditionnel ? Pourquoi, comme le dit Socrate à Glaucon, la cité juste ne laisse-t-elle pas les femmes « rester à l'intérieur » (οἰκουρεῖν ἔνδον, *Rep.* V, 451d) ?

Il y a deux raisons à cela : premièrement, alors que l'espace politique s'accomplit dans une forme achevée de communauté (*Rep.* V, 463c-d), l'espace domestique tend pour sa part, en tant qu'espace clos, à se soustraire à cette visée communautaire, ou à lui résister en se constituant en espace privé ou particulier ; deuxièmement, les femmes infléchissent les pratiques et les mentalités domestiques dans le sens de ce repli vers le particulier ou le privé, ce qui l'accentue. Cette dernière tendance n'est certes pas l'apanage des femmes, comme le montre la vie domestique des timocrates décrite par Socrate dans la *République* : pour admirer en secret leurs richesses et jouir de plaisirs privés, ils se retranchent derrière les murs de leurs maisons où « ils honorent sous couvert de l'ombre (ὑπὸ σκότου) l'or et l'argent, car ils posséderont des celliers et des dépôts (ταμιεῖα καὶ […] θησαυρούς) qui leur appartiennent en propre, où ils les placeront pour les cacher (κρύψειαν), et par ailleurs des enceintes autour des habitations en feront des sortes de nids privés […] » (*Rep.* VIII, 548a). En adorant ainsi en privé une valeur distincte de celle qui leur vaut d'exercer le pouvoir dans la cité – l'honneur –, ils égratignent la communauté civique. Pour éviter de telles dérives, la demeure des gardiens de la cité juste sera soumise à une exigence radicale de transparence, et obéira pour cela à des contraintes architecturales opposées à celles qui ont cours chez le timocrate : « qu'aucun [gardien] n'ait d'habitation ni de cellier (ταμιεῖον μηδενὶ) ainsi disposé que tout le monde ne puisse y entrer à son gré » (*Rep.* III, 416e). De même, la formulation de la mise en commun des femmes et des enfants depuis le seul point de vue des hommes et non du point de vue des femmes (*Rep.* V, 457c-d ; *Leg.* V, 739c ; VII, 807b) – elles n'ont, semble-t-il, pas droit à une réciproque mise en commun des hommes (Calvert 1975, 242) – signale certes les limites de la similitude que Platon établit entre les sexes, mais elle indique aussi clairement – et c'est le point qui nous intéresse ici – que les hommes sont eux aussi des facteurs de privatisation et de repli, par l'intermédiaire du droit et du sentiment de possession qu'ils éprouvent sur leur épouse et leurs enfants, au détriment du commun politique.

Si toutefois les femmes contribuent davantage que les hommes à cette tendance au repli de la maison sur la sphère privée ou particulière, avec les conséquences antipolitiques que ce geste entraîne, c'est parce qu'elles ont beaucoup moins accès qu'eux à la dimension du commun qui caractérise à des degrés divers les espaces politiques de la cité. À la fois cause et effet d'une telle attitude – s'il est vrai que les individus et les régimes dans lesquels ils vivent se ressemblent (*Rep* VIII, 543d ; 544a ; 544d-e ; IX, 577c) – le *genos* féminin ou « race des femmes » selon l'expression d'Hésiode,[4] serait en effet « beaucoup plus dissimulateur (λαθραιότερον) et artificieux (ἐπικλοπώτερον) » que celui des hommes (*Leg.* VI, 781a).[5] Ces deux adjectifs expriment une propension au secret, et font de la maison un lieu opaque, replié sur lui-même et fermé à l'exigence de communauté et de visibilité appelée par la politique juste. Le premier terme et ceux de la même famille, formés autour du verbe λανθάνω, sont fréquents chez Platon quand sont examinées les conditions de possibilité d'un acte juste. Ainsi dans la *République*, aux yeux de l'opinion et des poètes, l'acte injuste et invisible est le plus profitable pour celui qui le commet. Contre une telle idée, Socrate montre les effets respectifs de la justice et de l'injustice dans l'âme, indépendamment

du regard social ou divin : il s'avère, conclut-il, que l'injuste est le plus malheureux des hommes, qu'il agisse ou non à l'insu des dieux et des hommes. Et celui qui commet l'injustice en se cachant devient plus mauvais encore, car il échappe à un châtiment censé l'amender.[6] Par l'opacité qu'il oppose à la sphère publique, le foyer, l'*oikia*, constitue ainsi un lieu propice à des actes injustes ou du moins œuvrant contre le sens de la communauté, notamment de la part des femmes. Habituées à cette « vie retirée et obscure (δεδυκὸς καὶ σκοτεινὸν) » (*Leg.* VI, 781c), elles font usage de leur intelligence (signalée par le second adjectif, « artificieux », ἐπίκλοπος, *Leg.* VI, 781a), comme d'une force antipolitique centrifuge et centripète. Centrifuge quand elles cherchent à pénétrer indirectement le territoire politique, en incitant par exemple fils et maris à s'enrichir et à étendre l'*oikos* au détriment de la *polis* qui en deviendrait comme l'extension ou la succursale. Ainsi de l'épouse de l'homme « aristocratique », qui se répand en litanies sur son manque de richesses et de reconnaissance sociale (*Rep.* VIII, 549c-e). Force centripète en ce que, avec la complicité d'autres acteurs domestiques, en particulier les esclaves dénigrant en secret l'homme de bien auprès de son fils (*Rep.* VIII, 549e-550a), elles font de l'*oikos* le lieu d'un pouvoir occulte qui affaiblit le pouvoir politique commun. L'Athénien confirme cette tendance lorsqu'il évoque la pratique, répandue « particulièrement chez les femmes [...] » (ἔθος τε γυναιξί τε δὴ, *Leg.* X, 909e-910a), consistant à ériger des sanctuaires et des autels privés ou domestiques, et à substituer ainsi des croyances propres aux croyances communes ; ou bien lorsqu'il évoque l'éducation de Cyrus, confiée à des femmes et cultivant davantage le relâchement et le luxe que l'excellence politique (*Leg.* III, 694d-695a).

Pour arracher les femmes à la sphère domestique et neutraliser la force antipolitique qu'elles y exercent, il faudra donc les politiser. Ce qui suppose d'abord de montrer qu'elles sont semblables aux hommes.

Similitude des genres

Pour ce faire, Platon mobilise des arguments distincts dans la *République* et les *Lois*; et il fait valoir cette similitude sur des plans distincts dans ce second dialogue.

Dans la cité juste ébauchée dans la *République* (V, 453b-456b), Platon substitue à la traditionnelle répartition des tâches selon la distinction sexuelle évoquée plus haut, le critère des aptitudes requises pour l'accomplissement d'une fonction donnée – en l'occurrence l'exercice du pouvoir. En d'autres termes, le sexe n'est plus envisagé comme un trait définissant la totalité d'une nature, mais comme un trait parmi d'autres, dont la pertinence en tant que critère de jugement est suspendue à la fonction envisagée. La nature des sexes est certes une différence affectant l'espèce humaine, mais elle n'a de sens que si la fonction examinée lui en donne un. Aussi faut-il toujours préciser « l'espèce de la nature autre et celle de la nature différente [...] *et ce à quoi elles se rapportent* », c'est-à-dire déterminer les critères pertinents d'exercice d'une fonction examinée, en vue de retenir les meilleurs candidats pour la remplir (*Rep.* V, 454c-d). Sur fond d'une pensée unitaire de « la nature humaine » (ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις, *Theet.* 149c ; ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει, *Tim.* 90c), les différences naturelles entre l'homme et la femme ne sont pertinentes pour Platon que par rapport aux fonctions qui les sollicitent. Une différence de nature précise, pour irréductible qu'elle soit comme celle entre les sexes, ne devient pas pour autant un obstacle à l'affirmation d'une identité ou d'une similitude sur un autre plan, par rapport à des fonctions à l'égard desquelles cette différence n'a aucune pertinence. C'est

le cas avec la compétence politique, dont le critère d'exercice pertinent est le bon naturel, c'est-à-dire la bonne disposition à apprendre et à réfléchir, non le sexe des individus. Le lieu du pouvoir de la Kallipolis ne peut donc plus être pensé comme exclusivement masculin, les occupations relatives à l'administration ou la garde de la cité étant ainsi indifférentes au sexe et au genre des agents, comme le précise Socrate à maintes reprises (*Rep.* V, 454e ; 455a-d ; 456a).

Un geste de légitimation similaire du rôle politique des femmes se produit dans les *Lois*, avec cette différence que l'argument présenté pour le défendre n'est plus logico-ontologique, mais plus directement politique : ne pas intégrer politiquement les femmes, c'est priver la cité de la moitié de ses ressources et même davantage (*Leg.* VI, 781a-b), et c'est ne procurer à la cité « qu'une moitié de vie heureuse » (*Leg.* VII, 806c). Cet argument n'est toutefois propice à l'idée de similitude entre les genres – il pourrait, après tout, ne justifier qu'une complémentarité sans similitude – que parce qu'il est suivi de mesures invitant à dispenser aux femmes une éducation similaire à celle des hommes. Évoquée dans la *République* uniquement à propos des gardiennes concernant la gymnastique, la musique et la guerre (*Rep.* V, 452a-b ; 456b-d ; 457a), cette mesure est étendue à toutes les femmes de la cité des *Lois* : « les filles doivent s'entraîner d'une manière égale [aux garçons] » (*Leg.* VII, 804d-e).[7] La relativité géo-culturelle des pratiques éducatives vient au secours de l'Athénien : les femmes des Sauromates, dans la région du Pont, pratiquent autant que les hommes l'équitation et le maniement des arcs. Cet exemple permet de réfuter les réticences de la plupart des Grecs – voire leurs moqueries (*Rep.* V, 452b-e ; 457a-b) – quant à l'égale éducation des deux genres, et la tendance qu'ils ont, selon les cités ou les régions, ou bien à confondre femmes et esclaves (en Thrace), ou bien à cantonner les premières aux tâches domestiques (à Athènes), ou bien encore à les entraîner à la gymnastique et aux tâches domestiques sans toutefois les faire participer aux exercices guerriers (à Sparte) (*Leg.* VII, 804e-806c). La cité des *Lois* ne fera donc pas l'impasse sur l'entrainement militaire des filles (*Leg.* VII, 813d-814b ; VIII, 829b-e) et, comme dans la *République* (V, 457a-b), elles s'exerceront nues au gymnase dans certaines limites d'âge (*Leg.* VIII, 833c-d). Enfin, toujours dans les *Lois*, les femmes sont aussi présentées comme semblables aux hommes dans le domaine pénal. Par exemple, les peines sont identiques pour l'homme tuant sa femme légitime par colère et pour la femme commettant le même crime sur son mari dans les mêmes conditions, et il en va de même entre frères et sœurs (IX, 868d-e) ; égalité pénale également entre mari et femme ainsi qu'entre frère et sœur, si l'un blesse l'autre dans l'intention de le tuer (IX, 877b-c). Les femmes participent, enfin, à part égale avec les hommes aux décisions destinées à évaluer la sentence en cas de contentieux familiaux ayant entraîné des blessures (IX, 878d). Sur la base de ces diverses similitudes entre les genres, comment se traduit donc l'entrée des femmes en politique ? Quels lieux leur sont ouverts hors de l'*oikos* ?

Quels lieux pour les femmes ?

Dans la *République* comme dans les *Lois*, l'espace politique est ainsi ouvert aux femmes, tant sur le plan symbolique – au sens des fonctions qu'elles peuvent exercer dans l'organigramme de la cité – que matériel ou physique. Reste à voir quels en sont les lieux exacts et les frontières précises. Dans la *République*, Platon fait accéder les femmes aux fonctions de gardiennes de la cité – espace politique symbolique – mais sans expliciter davantage,

pour aucun des deux genres, la nature exacte des fonctions concrètes d'administration du territoire de la cité, car tel n'est pas le propos du dialogue. Aussi aucun lieu concret n'est-il mentionné, hormis la palestre et le gymnase, jusqu'alors réservés aux hommes. Socrate indique que les femmes y auront désormais accès pour s'y exercer nues avec eux (*Rep.* V, 452a-b ; 458d). La palestre et le gymnase deviennent ainsi des lieux entièrement politiques d'être inscrits dans le projet de promotion des femmes aux fonctions de gardiennes de la cité.

Si les *Lois* font elles aussi accéder les femmes à l'espace général du politique, elles apportent toutefois plus de précisions sur les espaces particuliers qui leur sont réservés, tant symboliquement que matériellement, parce que l'administration de la cité juste des *Lois* repose sur le découpage fonctionnel de son territoire :

> Ne faut-il pas, puisque la ville et tout l'ensemble du territoire ont été divisés en douze sections, que les rues de la ville elle-même, les maisons, les bâtiments publics, les ports, le marché, les fontaines et tout naturellement les enceintes consacrées, les sanctuaires et tous les lieux du même genre, soient pris en charge par des officiels désignés ? (*Leg.* VI, 758e)

On serait donc en droit d'espérer que, pour chaque lieu signalé dans ce découpage, le partage des fonctions soit égal entre hommes et femmes ou, pour le dire autrement, qu'il soit indifférent au sexe et au genre des agents. Toutefois, la liste des fonctions qui suit ce passage ne signale expressément d'agent féminin qu'à propos des fonctions sacerdotales : on choisira des « prêtres et des prêtresses » (ἱερέας τε καὶ ἱερείας, *Leg.* VI, 759a-d).

La similitude fonctionnelle s'arrête là. Toutes les autres fonctions semblent exclusivement masculines – à en juger du moins par le genre des termes qui les désignent, ainsi que par le silence de l'Athénien sur d'éventuels agents féminins pour les remplir. Outre les gardiens du trésor du temple (ταμίας, *Leg.* VI, 759e), « il faut pour la ville que ses gardes soient organisées ainsi, sous la responsabilité des stratèges, des chefs de compagnie, des commandants de cavalerie, des commandants d'escadron, des membres du conseil en exercice, et tout naturellement des intendants de la ville et des intendants de la place publique » (στρατηγῶν ἐπιμελουμένων καὶ ταξιαρχῶν καὶ ἱππάρχων καὶ φυλάρχων καὶ πρυτάνεων, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἀστυνόμων καὶ ἀγορανόμων, *Leg.* VI, 760a-b), auxquels s'ajoutent, pour le reste du territoire « des intendants de la campagne et des commandants de garde » (*Leg.* VI, 760b ; voir aussi VI, 763c-e). Il en va de même à propos des juges et des magistrats (*Leg.* VI, 761e), dont ceux qui ont en charge l'éducation (VI, 766a-c), ainsi qu'à propos de l'instance politique la plus haute, le conseil de veille, qui intègre progressivement de nouveaux « jeunes gens » (τοὺς νεωτέρους, *Leg.* XII, 952a). À l'inverse, les fonctions strictement féminines mentionnées dans le dialogue sont celles des inspectrices des familles, qui contrôlent les traitements de l'homme envers sa femme avant et pendant la grossesse (*Leg.* VI, 783e-784c). En outre, malgré l'entraînement commun à la guerre, l'Athénien semble limiter la participation des femmes au combat en proposant, « si elles ne font pas davantage » (εἰ μηδὲν μεῖζον, *Leg.* VII, 806b) – c'est-à-dire peut-être si elles ne participent pas au mode de combat des hommes (García Quintela 1989) – qu'elles « inspirent la crainte aux ennemis » (*Leg.* VII, 806b) (l'Athénien ne dit pas comment). Si Platon fait donc entrer les femmes en politique, elles restent toutefois étrangères aux fonctions politiques de gouvernement ou de direction (Levin 2000, 81). Comment, dès lors, comprendre l'écart entre le principe général de la *République*

accordant aux femmes la fonction de gardienne, et la description plus détaillée des *Lois* ne leur ménageant presque aucune fonction politique élevée ? Et comment comprendre aussi, dans les *Lois* elles-mêmes, l'écart entre l'affirmation réitérée d'une égale éducation entre les genres, et les limites imposées aux femmes dans l'exercice des charges politiques?

2. INFÉRIEURES : ENCORE L'*OIKOS*

Infériorité et faiblesse

Trois niveaux ou plans de réponse peuvent être avancés. Le premier ne résout pas le décalage signalé, mais consiste à présenter les éléments sur lesquels s'appuie Platon pour affirmer l'infériorité des femmes par rapport aux hommes, dans la *République* et les *Lois*. Dans la *République*, si Socrate et Glaucon estiment que hommes et femmes, on l'a vu, peuvent exercer également le pouvoir, ils concluent toutefois que « la nature des femmes est plus faible (ἀσθενέστερον) en toutes choses », commentaire énoncé par Glaucon (*Rep.* V, 451d-e) et repris ensuite par Socrate sans discussion (*Rep.* V, 455e ; 456a). Une telle infériorité est réaffirmée dans les *Lois* à maintes reprises, notamment sous la forme de commentaires dépréciatifs, associant la femme à la faiblesse morale d'autres catégories d'individus : ainsi des nourrices, qui « ont un tempérament de femmes et d'esclaves » (γυναικεῖά τε καὶ δούλεια ἤθη, *Leg.* VII, 790a), ou des femmes que, dans un passage cité plus haut, l'Athénien estime particulièrement portées à la dévotion comme « les faibles de toute sorte, et ceux qui craignent un danger ou qui sont en difficulté » (*Leg.* X, 909e). Dans le même sens, la femme est identifiée à la lâcheté, ce qui fait du général peureux « certainement pas un homme, mais une parfaite femme » (οὐδαμῶς ἀνδρῶν ἄρχοντα ἀλλά τινων σφόδρα γυναικῶν ; *Leg.* I, 639b-c ; idée reprise en XII, 944d-e).

Cette infériorité psychologique et morale va de pair avec une infériorité juridique et politique. Ainsi, dans la mesure évoquée plus haut concernant la participation des femmes à part égale avec les hommes dans l'évaluation de la sentence dans les contentieux familiaux où des blessures ont été portées, ce sont toutefois les parents du côté des hommes qui auront le dernier mot au cas où aucun accord n'est trouvé concernant cette sentence (*Leg.* IX, 878e). Infériorité juridique aussi en ce que la femme de condition libre ne peut intenter d'action en justice que si elle est sans mari (et qu'à partir de 40 ans) : dans le cas où elle est mariée, elle ne peut que témoigner devant un tribunal (*Leg.* XI, 937a), le mari détenant la prérogative de l'action en justice. En outre, une femme ne peut participer à aucune charge avant 40 ans, contre 30 ans pour les hommes (*Leg.* VI, 785b). En termes généraux enfin, l'infériorité des femmes est un principe architectonique de la cité, l'Athénien rappelant la hiérarchie selon laquelle les hommes sont supérieurs aux femmes et aux enfants (διὸ καὶ γονῆς κρείττους ἐκγόνων, καὶ ἄνδρες δὴ γυναικῶν καὶ παίδων, *Leg.* XI, 917a), avec le respect que l'inférieur doit marquer envers le supérieur.

Comment, de nouveau, concilier de tels passages avec l'affirmation réitérée d'une égale éducation entre les genres, et avec l'idée que les femmes peuvent aussi être gardiennes de la cité ?

*Politiser l'*oikos *: garder la cité ?*

L'inégale répartition des charges politiques dans la cité des *Lois*, qui va à l'encontre de la proposition de la *République*, conduit nécessairement à cette conclusion, qui constitue le

second plan de la réponse à notre difficulté : les femmes resteront pour l'essentiel remisées dans l'*oikos* ou, pour le dire dans les termes des *Lois*, dans le *klèros*, soit l'un des 5040 lots devant fournir une part essentielle des ressources agricoles dont la cité a besoin (*Leg.* V, 737e). En ce sens, on pourrait penser que Platon reconduit la distribution traditionnelle des fonctions à laquelle il semblait avoir renoncé, celle qui fait dire à Ménon que « la vertu d'un homme consiste à être capable d'agir dans les affaires de sa cité […] [tandis que] la femme doit bien gérer sa maison, veiller à son intérieur, le maintenir en bon état et obéir à son mari » (*Men.* 71e). Néanmoins, si la nature des tâches qui attendent les femmes dans les *Lois* est sans doute identique à celles qu'elles connaissent à Athènes, le sens qu'elles prennent dans le dialogue de Platon est toutefois différent en raison de l'égale éducation des hommes et des femmes. Cette éducation en effet, si elle ne vise pas à faire accéder ces dernières aux fonctions directrices les plus hautes de la cité, cherche néanmoins à faire pénétrer l'esprit de la cité – son idéal de communauté – au sein même des familles, bref à politiser la maison où les femmes exercent un rôle prépondérant.

Une dynamique de ce type est à l'œuvre dans la *République*, aussi bien en ce qui concerne la vie familiale des gardiens que celle des producteurs, du moins si l'on se fie aux maigres indications fournies dans ce dialogue à leur propos. Chez les gardiens, politiser la famille consiste non pas à l'abolir (*contra* Natali 2005), mais à mettre en commun femmes et enfants, soit à désindividualiser les sentiments d'affection particuliers et les relations de parenté, pour les étendre à tout le groupe (*Rep.* V, 457b-461e ; voir le détail dans Helmer 2011). Chez les producteurs, la politisation de l'*oikos* s'apparente davantage à ce qui, on va le voir, a lieu dans les *Lois*: il ne s'agit pas tant, semble-t-il, de modifier la structure de la famille, que d'y faire pénétrer les valeurs sur lesquelles se fonde la cité droite. C'est ce qu'indique par exemple, au livre II, l'injonction adressée aux femmes de renoncer aux fables risquant de rendre leurs enfants plus peureux, et de ne leur raconter que des histoires répondant aux critères moraux retenus pour l'édification de la cité juste (*Rep.* II, 381e). Les mères évoquées dans ce passage ne sont pas nécessairement les seules gardiennes, il peut s'agir de toutes les mères de la cité.

Dans les *Lois*, le rôle politique prêté aux femmes à travers leur rôle domestique apparaît à l'occasion de la mise en place des repas en commun (*Leg.* VI, 780-783c),[8] dans le cadre d'un dispositif plus général :

> Il vaudrait mieux pour le bonheur de la cité revenir sur ce point [les repas en commun], y mettre de l'ordre et régler toutes les pratiques entre hommes et femmes en les rendant communes (πάντα συντάξασθαι κοινῇ γυναιξί τε καὶ ἀνδράσιν ἐπιτηδεύματα). […] De quelle façon alors entreprendra-t-on, sans se ridiculiser, de contraindre réellement les femmes à consommer ouvertement (φανερὰν) des aliments et des boissons en public ? (*Leg.* VI, 781b-c)

La finalité d'une telle mesure est de construire un espace commun aux hommes et aux femmes. Une telle communauté dans les repas correspondrait à l'idéal politique ayant cours chez les gardiens de la *République* (*Rep.* V, 458c-d), dont les *Lois* montrent qu'il est plus divin qu'humain (Schöpsdau 2002, 339). L'importance de ces repas appelés « syssities » tient à ce qu'ils doivent permettre d'introduire de la discipline et de la limitation dans les appétits. Le désir de boisson, celui de nour-

riture, mais aussi, indirectement, les appétits sexuels, obéissent en effet au même schéma d'un vide à remplir (Schöpsdau 2002, 335), qui veut tout accaparer : leur régulation est donc indispensable pour asseoir la *communauté* civique. Cette mesure en faveur des repas en commun est si importante que sans elle, aux dires de l'Athénien, le travail du législateur reste vain (*Leg.* VI, 780c-d), passage dont la force trop rarement signalée (Schöpsdau 2002, 332) assigne donc aux femmes un rôle politique décisif. Il ne tient pas ici à la nature des fonctions administratives qui pourraient leur être confiées, mais à la façon dont elles habitent et animent l'espace domestique en y colportant ou pas l'esprit communautaire devant régner en Magnésie. En ce sens, les femmes sont les « gardiennes » de la cité : non qu'elles se prononcent sur ses lois et leur mise en œuvre, mais en ce qu'elles en forment le maillon indispensable, dont la conduite peut faire réussir ou échouer la réalisation d'une cité vraiment politique.

Nécessité et contingence du partage

On peut objecter que c'est prendre la fonction de la « garde de la cité » en un sens dérivé, voire métaphorique, qui ne résout pas la question du décalage entre ce que promet la *République*, et ce que proposent les *Lois*. D'où un troisième niveau de réponse qui, à défaut de résoudre la difficulté, espère au moins l'éclairer, en allant plus loin que l'« explication » par le controversé contraste métaphysique et épistémologique entre le paradigme divin de la communauté des gardiens de la *République*, et le plan seulement humain de la seconde cité des *Lois* qui doit s'en approcher le plus possible (*Leg.* V, 739b-e).[9] Plus exactement, ce contraste lui-même s'inscrit dans l'élément de réponse plus global que nous proposons, et qui porte sur la nature double de la rationalité telle que Platon semble l'envisager lorsqu'elle s'applique à la sphère politique.

D'un côté, l'élaboration des cités en paroles dans la *République* et les *Lois* plie en partie la nécessité matérielle – soit un ensemble de causes secondaires ou accidentelles, privées de raison, et produisant leurs effets « au hasard et sans ordre » (*Tim.* 46e) (Morel 2003, 146) – aux conclusions de la raison dans son usage dialectique, c'est-à-dire à un ensemble de causes premières intelligibles qui y insèrent de la rationalité. Par exemple, les trois vagues de la *République* – la commune éducation des hommes et des femmes pouvant devenir gardiennes, la mise en commun des femmes et des enfants chez les gardiens, et les philosophes-rois ou reines – arrachent le bien politique à sa forme historique nécessaire, et le soumettent aux préceptes de la raison. De ce point de vue, la distinction entre les femmes et les hommes pour ce qui est de l'exercice du pouvoir est caduque, de même qu'un passage des *Lois* (VI, 776b-778a) révèle le caractère conventionnel et contingent de la différence entre libres et serviles (Helmer 2019, 35-36) ; c'est aussi le cas à propos de la différence entre les citoyens de Magnésie et ceux des étrangers qui sont aussi vertueux qu'eux (*Leg.* XII, 953c-d) (Helmer 2016, 84-85).

Mais d'un autre côté, les partages sont réaffirmés : la cité de Platon contient des esclaves, tout comme elle ferme la porte à ces étrangers pourtant vertueux qui ne pourront jamais être faits citoyens. Il en va de même avec les femmes, réassignées à une place que la raison leur avait fait quitter, sous l'effet d'un retour de la nécessité avec laquelle Platon estime qu'il faut inévitablement compter – l'Athénien mentionnant explicitement une « division *nécessaire* » entre libres et serviles (τὴν ἀναγκαίαν διόρισιν, *Leg.* VI, 777b), et le *Timée* confirmant à un niveau plus global que la nécessité ne se plie pas complétement à la raison (*Tim.* 48a ;

Goldschmidt 1990, 50). Comment interpréter politiquement cette part du nécessaire à propos des femmes ? On peut certes la lire comme la trace d'un contexte idéologique (Loraux 1981, 75-118) dont Platon ne s'émancipe pas entièrement, et qu'il subirait comme à son insu, ce qui vaudrait aussi lorsqu'il traite des esclaves et des étrangers. Mais on peut la lire aussi comme un cas particulier de cette dimension assumée de la rationalité politique consistant à composer avec « les usages », en tant qu'expression historique de la nécessité. Par exemple, au moment de l'édification de la *Kallipolis*, et pour montrer le caractère improbable de la « cité de cochons » décrite par Socrate, dont les membres n'éprouvent que des besoins limités et réglés, Glaucon lui rappelle que c'est une cité d'hommes qu'il s'agit de bâtir, ce qui implique de prendre en compte la tendance des appétits à se diversifier et à outrepasser les limites du nécessaire. Bref, il faut envisager la cité et ses membres « comme c'est l'usage » (ἅπερ νομίζεται, *Rep.* II, 372d), sur le modèle de ce qui se passe à Athènes. Cette part de l'usage ou de la coutume est lisible aussi dans ce commentaire de Socrate selon lequel en matière de tissage, de pâtisserie et de cuisine, les femmes montrent leur supériorité (*Rep.* V, 455c-d). Cette remarque n'est pas le fruit d'un préjugé mais d'un constat empirique lié à un contexte que Platon sait nécessaire, en ce sens qu'il est une donnée factuelle de l'histoire, ce qui « ne signifie pas que [les activités domestiques énumérées] soient [les] seules aptitudes naturelles [des femmes], et qu'on doive les cantonner à ces occupations » (Dixsaut 2001, 66). Dans les *Lois*, le silence sur les charges politiques confiées aux femmes, et son tacite corollaire qu'est leur assignation aux tâches domestiques, sont aussi une manière de tenir compte de cette manifestation de la nécessité que sont les usages légués par l'histoire. C'est ce que semble confirmer ce manquement à l'égale éducation des deux sexes : les genres musicaux devront être adaptés à chacun d'eux, selon les qualités auxquelles ils tendent respectivement. En effet,

> il faudra sans doute séparer les chants selon qu'ils conviennent aux femmes ou aux hommes, en les distinguant par telle ou telle caractéristique, et leur donner bien sûr une mélodie et un rythme adaptés. […] Ce qui dans les mélodies se conforme chaque fois à la différence même de nature entre l'un et l'autre sexe, il faut l'expliquer clairement par cette différence. Aussi la loi et le préambule stipuleront-ils que les garçons se distinguent par un penchant à la grandeur et au courage, et que les filles se distinguent au contraire par une inclination qui pousse plutôt vers la réserve et la réflexion. (τὸ δὴ μεγαλοπρεπὲς οὖν καὶ τὸ πρὸς τὴν ἀνδρείαν ῥέπον ἀρρενωπὸν φατέον εἶναι, τὸ δὲ πρὸς τὸ κόσμιον καὶ σῶφρον μᾶλλον ἀποκλῖνον θηλυγενέστερον ὡς ὂν παραδοτέον ἔν τε τῷ νόμῳ καὶ λόγῳ, *Leg.* VII, 802d-e)

Pourquoi requérir et *décréter* ce partage des caractères – qui, par le fait même, ne peut pas être une donnée de nature antérieure à la *polis*, mais un artifice requis par sa nature à elle – alors que tout l'édifice éducatif de la cité se fonde sur l'éducation commune et identique des deux sexes ? L'hypothèse que nous avançons est que ce partage des caractères répond à cette part de nécessité historique présente dans la cité sous la forme de la répartition des fonctions, de leurs lieux et de leurs temps d'exercice, entre le domestique féminin et l'administratif civique masculin. C'est sans doute, pour Platon, la meilleure et la seule manière de politiser *l'ensemble* de la cité, en la conduisant au point de rencontre du meilleur et des limites du possible.

CONCLUSION

En annonçant davantage que ce qu'il réalise vraiment, Platon renonce-t-il à l'utopie ou, si l'on préfère, à l'idéal politique situé à l'horizon de la *République* ? Ainsi posée, la question retombe dans le piège de l'alternative évoquée en introduction : ou bien l'idéal d'égalité, ou bien l'infériorité. Cependant, l'ambivalence de sa position concernant les femmes n'est pas une cote mal taillée ni un compromis : c'est une position pleine et entière, aux deux facettes intimement liées. Elle souligne que, dans leur cas, le partage de la cité, soit le tracé de ses frontières symboliques, spatiales et fonctionnelles, obéit simultanément à la contrainte dialectique de la distribution rationnelle et différenciée des attributs politiques (fonctions, prérogatives, droits), et à la contrainte irrationnelle du contexte historique avec lequel il faut composer. Prendre en compte cette seconde contrainte n'est pas faire obstacle à la première : c'est au contraire se donner précisément les moyens d'y plier la cité le plus possible, dans l'idée que la sphère politique correctement conçue est un « in-between » qui n'est ni le règne des purs principes, ni la celui de la contingence et de l'expérience, mais leur trouble intersection. Son lieu n'est pas un au-delà utopique, mais l'utopisation de l'ici-et-maintenant, avec ce qu'il comporte, pour Platon, d'irréductible.[10]

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Notes

1 Sur ces deux termes : Grange 2010.

2 Sur les similitudes entre femmes et philosophes au Livre V de la *République* : Townsend 2017, 4.

3 Longtemps assumée par les femmes, la fonction d'intendant(e) (*oikonomos*) tend à devenir masculine au IVe siècle. Voir Descat 1988, 105-107.

4 Hésiode : *Catalogue des Femmes*, 1. Voir Loraux 1981, 75-118.

5 Hésiode applique cet adjectif à Pandore (*Les Travaux et les jours*, 67). Il peut être péjoratif (*Odyssée* XI, 364 ; *Iliade* XXII, 281 ; Théognis, *Élégies* 1, 965-966, où le terme est associé à κίβδηλος, « trompeur », et à κρύπτειν, « dissimuler » ; Eschyle, *Euménides*, 149-164), ou laudatif : *Odyssée* XIII, 291 ou XXI, 397.

6 Pour les emplois du verbe λανθάνω dans ce contexte, voir entre autres : *Rep.* I, 345a ; 348d, et l'histoire de Gygès : *Rep.* II, 361a, 365c-e. Voir aussi *Rep.* III, 392b ; IX, 580c ; X, 591b. Sur ce thème: *Gorg.* 472e.

7 Sur ce passage: García Quintela 1989.

8 Pour un examen détaillé de ce passage: Schöpsdau 2002.

9 Sur cette controverse, voir Lisi 2018.

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Platone e il vegetarianismo nel *Timeo*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse Plato's description of plants and his tacit justification of vegetarianism in the Timaeus. This practice seems to possess exclusively a physiological relevance: I argue that Plato is opposing the idea of vegetarianism as a superior way to purify one's soul and achieve happiness, how it was being professed by the Orphics, the Pythagoreans, Empedocles, and even by his disciple Xenocrates. In the Timaeus, with the justification of vegetarianism only for physiological purposes, Plato is discrediting other philosophers' conceptions of vegetarianism and perfect life: only the study of the noetic world grants ultimate happiness.

Keywords: Plato, Timaeus, Philosophy of Nature, Vegetarianism

ABSTRACT

L'articolo analizza la descrizione della natura delle piante e la tacita giustificazione del vegetarianismo fornite da Platone nel Timeo. Tale pratica alimentare sembra assumere un'utilità esclusivamente fisiologica: potrebbe darsi che Platone si fosse opposto a quanti pro-fessavano il vegetarianismo in qualità di mezzo necessario per purificare l'anima e per rag-giungere la felicità, come gli orfici, i pitagorici, Empedocle ma anche il suo discepolo Seno-crate. Attraverso il particolare valore attribuito a una dieta vegetariana, Platone priva di validità la pretesa degli altri filosofi: solo lo studio delle idee permette di ottenere la felicità.

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1. *TRA MACROCOSMO E MICROCOSMO: PIANTE E DIETA VEGETARIANA NEL* TIMEO

Come è noto, il *Timeo* ha per oggetto di indagine principale la generazione del cosmo sensibile: quest'ultimo, stando all'approfondita descrizione fornita da Platone, risulterebbe prodotto dalla volontà e dall'azione del Demiurgo, il quale, imitando la perfezione del piano noetico e spinto dalla sua natura buona (*Ti.* 29e1), rese il cosmo il più completo e ottimo possibile. Il dialogo non si concentra, tuttavia, esclusivamente sull'analisi del macrocosmo: tramite il personaggio e le parole di Timeo, Platone considera anche il microcosmo umano in tutti i suoi livelli. È così che, accanto alla descrizione dei processi fisiologici del corpo (respirazione, digestione, sensazione), viene suggerita la condotta umana preferibile, che consiste nel coltivare la sfera dell'"anima" (*psyché*) razionale, ossia la dimensione immortale e divina degli uomini. Il fine ultimo è rendere possibile il ricongiungimento dell'anima con gli astri, i viventi sommi e perfetti all'interno del mondo sensibile, il che ha luogo alla morte dell'individuo, nel momento in cui l'anima stessa si separa dai legami che la vincolano a un "corpo" (*sóma* – 90a2-d7).[1] Tale destino felice potrà compiersi solo nel caso in cui gli uomini, nel corso della loro esistenza terrena, sviluppino una conoscenza appropriata e seguano una precisa morale.

Ponendosi dal punto di vista del microcosmo umano, il disegno del macrocosmo guarda proprio all'affinamento della vita umana, mostrando cosa sia più opportuno scegliere e compiere per ottenere questo stato di beatitudine. Nello specifico, lo studio del cosmo quale ente ordinato, intelligente e copia della stabilità del mondo noetico rivela che il sapere da costruire riguarda – almeno, limitatamente al *Timeo* – l'analisi del modo in cui i fenomeni dipendono dal modello intellegibile. Da ciò consegue una precisa necessità: assimilarsi alle qualità del cosmo mostrate da questa indagine, poiché permettono, se imitate, di coltivare una condotta ottima, dato che derivano dalla superiorità assoluta delle idee (32b8-35a1).[2]

Nel caso in cui gli uomini falliscano in questo 'compito', la condizione della loro anima degraderà nel corso delle successive reincarnazioni: si legherà al corpo di una donna oppure di un animale (90e6-92c3).[3] Nel *Timeo* è infatti ammesso un ciclo di trasmigrazioni, connesso all'acquisizione o al mancato conseguimento di conoscenza e virtù: in caso positivo, la *psyché* ascende verso gli astri raggiungendo la felicità; altrimenti, permane sulla terra assumendo vari tipi di esistenza mortale, incorrendo nell'infelicità.

È a questo punto che risulta interessante focalizzare l'attenzione su un genere di entità in particolare, al fine di verificare se anch'esso, nell'ottica platonica, possa o meno contribuire con la sua presenza al perfezionamento della condizione umana, alla stregua degli altri viventi o, più in generale, delle stesse qualità del cosmo: le piante.

Tale questione non era estranea alla cultura greca; si pensi che nei secc. V-IV a.C. erano diffuse pratiche alimentari che invitavano ad astenersi dalla carne in favore dei vegetali, nella convinzione che ciò potesse svolgere una funzione purificatrice e di perfezionamento dell'anima nel corso delle sue reincarnazioni. In particolare, erano l'orfismo e il pitagorismo che guardavano alla dieta vegetariana in qualità di mezzo indispensabile per purificarsi. Su questa base, se si pensa che nel *Timeo* viene illustrato un ciclo di trasmigrazioni, sembrerebbe legittimo ipotizzare una qualche ripresa del vegetarianismo 'ereditata' da questi due movimenti (ben noti a Platone), dato che, secondo la

prospettiva del dialogo, tutte le qualità e le entità del macrocosmo rivestono un'importanza fondamentale per guidare gli uomini verso ciò che è migliore. In realtà dal *Timeo* sembra emergere una concezione contraria, secondo la quale le piante non costituirebbero un valido supporto per elevare l'anima: nutrirsi di vegetali rivestirebbe infatti solo un'utilità dietetica e fisiologica, stando alla breve descrizione della loro "natura" (*phýsis*).

Innanzitutto, nell'ottica di Platone le piante non sono annoverate nei quattro generi dei viventi, divisi in "stirpi" (*géne*) celesti, alate, acquatiche e pedestri (39e7-40a2): se infatti al primo gruppo appartengono gli astri, al secondo gli uccelli, al terzo i pesci, le piante vanno invece escluse dal quarto, definito "*pezón*". Tale termine suggerisce che i viventi riconducibili a questa categoria siano in grado di spostarsi sulla terra, facoltà che le piante non possiedono in quanto sono incapaci di muoversi da sole. In secondo luogo, occorre considerare il fatto che le piante vengano analizzate da Timeo solo dopo aver mostrato nel dettaglio come il cosmo sia stato prodotto dal Demiurgo per rispondere a un disegno intelligente (76e7-77a1): se ne può allora inferire che esse, al contrario dell'ordinamento del cosmo descritto prima della loro menzione, non rivelano agli uomini il "tipo di vita" (*bíos*) migliore. Infine, non si fa allusione in alcun punto del *Timeo* al fatto che le piante facciano parte del ciclo di trasmigrazioni delle anime; di conseguenza, ad albergare in loro non potrà mai essere un'anima originariamente umana che abbia ignorato l'importanza dell'affinamento conoscitivo e morale.

Pur non essendo annoverate tra gli animali o, più in generale, in uno dei quattro *géne*, le piante sono considerate viventi dal momento che possiedono un'anima.[4] In particolare, la loro *psyché* è affine solamente alla "terza specie di anima" degli uomini (77b3-4), descritta da Timeo come mortale e irrazionale (69d6-71a3), ossia "l'elemento desiderativo" (*tò epithymetikón* – 70d7). Pertanto, l'anima presente nelle piante non consente loro di opinare, di ragionare o di dedicarsi ad altre attività intellettuali, ma solamente di provare le sensazioni di piacere e dolore e di rispondere ad appetiti e bisogni (77b5-6);[5] se dunque le piante possiedono un'individualità, nel senso in cui esistono piante particolari ciascuna con una propria anima, tuttavia la loro facoltà sensitiva non dipende dal coinvolgimento di un elemento razionale, come invece accade nel caso dei meccanismi che regolano le sensazioni umane: si tratta semplicemente della capacità di reagire di fronte a ciò che è buono e utile per la singola pianta, oppure di fronte a ciò che viene percepito come nocivo. La loro 'cognizione' riguarda unicamente la salvaguardia di sé, non l'acquisizione di nozioni teoretiche;[6] di conseguenza, le piante non hanno né mai avranno, ad esempio, la possibilità di cogliere il buono in sé. Per questo motivo, esse si differenziano dagli animali, i quali cercano comunque di comprendere il bene grazie a ciò che di razionale è presente nella loro *psyché*, pur limitandosi alle inferiori capacità conoscitive di cui dispongono: le anime un tempo umane costrette all'unione con un corpo di animale potranno così recuperare la condizione originaria nel corso del ciclo di trasmigrazioni. Le piante non ne sono, invece, protagoniste, perché in loro non vi è un'anima umana chiamata a purificarsi, bensì una *psyché* che persegue esclusivamente l'appagamento di appetiti, la ricerca del piacere e la fuga dai dolori.[7]

Occorre specificare che a questa sommaria descrizione della *phýsis* delle piante Timeo premette la ragione per cui furono generate: nacquero grazie agli dèi inferiori al Demiurgo per fornire un "soccorso" (*boétheia*) agli uomini

(76e7-77a3). Le piante garantiscono infatti un riparo dagli eventi atmosferici – gli alberi più grandi permettono di sottrarsi a venti troppo impetuosi, a piogge forti o a una calura eccessiva – e forniscono un'importante fonte di nutrimento.[8] Ne consegue che le piante furono prodotte a totale vantaggio degli uomini, contribuendo tuttavia unicamente alla salvaguardia della loro dimensione materiale, ad esempio limitando danni e incidenti causati da fenomeni naturali avversi e offrendo un alimento immediato. Si tratta, a mio avviso, di un ulteriore elemento che sottolinea la loro inferiorità: il loro valore concerne esclusivamente la sfera sensibile degli uomini, nel momento in cui un individuo è dedito non alla cura della sua anima (allo sviluppo della conoscenza e delle virtù), ma a quella del suo corpo (l'incolumità e il sostentamento fisici).

Le piante vanno quindi annoverate in una sottocategoria di viventi la cui esistenza non aiuta gli uomini a individuare il genere di vita perfetto: da un lato, esse si contrappongono ad altri enti particolari come ad esempio gli animali, i quali, sebbene rappresentino una degenerazione degli uomini, sono in grado, seppur limitatamente, di recuperare la conoscenza tipica dell'anima razionale e di ritornare, nel corso delle varie trasmigrazioni, alla condizione originaria umana. In questo modo, la presenza degli animali ricorda agli uomini l'obbligo di affinare il proprio *bíos* per non essere destinati a soffrire. Dall'altro lato, le piante si differenziano da quelle realtà sensibili che fanno parte di un più ampio ente, come ad esempio gli occhi di un uomo, i quali permettono la contemplazione delle regolarità degli astri e da qui di 'trarre' l'esercizio della filosofia (46e7-47c4). Ritengo dunque che le piante, se considerate sia in sé, sia in relazione all'insieme di cui costituiscono una parte, non possano in alcun modo mostrare agli uomini la necessità di sviluppare appieno la razionalità: esse sono infatti correlate esclusivamente alla dimensione sensibile e corporea, fornendo a quella umana, semplicemente, una *boétheia*.

Quest'ultimo punto viene ribadito da Timeo sottolineando come le piante, tramite le loro radici, siano sempre saldamente ancorate al suolo, motivo per il quale non sono capaci di muoversi da sole (77c3-5); la piena portata di questa osservazione emerge, a mio parere, se relazionata a una metafora che Timeo impiegherà successivamente per illustrare la condizione degli uomini: essi sono equiparati a piante capovolte, nel senso in cui le loro radici (i capelli e, per esteso, la testa) non sono collocate nella terra, ma si ergono in alto tendendo verso il cielo, la sede degli astri, ritenuti perfetti perché assolutamente razionali (90a2-d7). Si comprende allora come la vita da essere umano rappresenti l'apice nella scala dei differenti tipi di esistenza mortale dal momento che l'anima razionale, risiedendo nella testa (44d3-8; 69c3-7), è la più distante possibile rispetto al suolo e, di converso, la più prossima 'spazialmente' alle regioni celesti, mentre le parti inferiori del corpo, dove è stabilita la parte mortale e irrazionale dell'anima (69d6-71a3), sono più vicine al suolo e dunque più lontane dalla razionalità degli astri.[9]

Occorre tuttavia sottolineare come il *Timeo* non presupponga una visione antropocentrica: sebbene gli uomini dimorino presso la Terra, il loro compito è di far tornare la loro anima alla sua vera dimora, tra le stelle. La vita sulla Terra rappresenta allora un punto di passaggio verso una condizione superiore, cosicché rimanervi a più riprese nel corso delle trasmigrazioni significa non aver sviluppato appieno la conoscenza adeguata:[10] il raggiungimento di un'esistenza divina può avvenire solo allontanandosi dalla Terra, sede dei continui movimenti dei quattro elementi e delle loro incessanti trasformazioni,

ossia della dimensione del divenire per eccellenza, contraria alla stabilità, all'ordine e alla regolarità che contraddistinguono gli astri. Ne consegue che le piante sono gli enti più lontani dalla superiorità dei viventi immortali: esse appartengono a quella parte del mondo dei fenomeni più disordinata e irregolare, a cui sono così saldamente legate da non poter mai entrare in contatto con le sue regioni più alte e ordinate. Sulla base di quanto affermato, propongo di considerare che le piante non possano mostrare agli uomini l'importanza per la cura della razionalità proprio in virtù della loro peculiare natura, essendo nate per vivere nella parte più mutevole e inferiore del cosmo. Non è dunque ammesso che possano separarsene, al contrario delle anime che risiedono negli animali e negli uomini.[11]

Un'ultima caratteristica delle piante consiste nell'essere state prodotte dalle "entità più potenti", gli dèi, perché fornissero un "nutrimento" (*trophé*) a "coloro che sono più deboli", gli uomini (77c6-9). Considerando i meccanismi che regolano la digestione, Timeo ribadisce che frutti e piante sono stati generati dalle divinità per sostentare gli uomini (80d7-e1); è opportuno notare che Timeo fa riferimento solamente ai vegetali per illustrare il modo in cui il cibo viene assimilato: se ne deve inferire che egli ritiene frutti e piante gli alimenti per antonomasia, escludendo allora carne e pesce. In effetti, Timeo non sostiene che gli animali siano stati prodotti dalle divinità perché gli uomini se ne cibassero: gli dèi li hanno generati per terminare le quattro stirpi di viventi, al fine di rendere massimamente completo il cosmo. Gli animali non forniscono dunque una *boétheia* materiale agli uomini, ma contribuiscono sia a mostrare la compiutezza, l'unità, la ricchezza del cosmo – qualità da imitare – sia a ricordare il fine preferibile: coltivare la natura razionale per non incorrere nell'infelicità dovuta alla trasmigrazione dell'anima in un corpo da animale.

Bisogna notare, inoltre, che Timeo ripete lo stesso inciso in entrambi i passi menzionati: sono state le divinità a far nascere le piante affinché fungessero da alimento (77c6; 80e1). A mio avviso, questa ridondanza ha il fine di sottolineare la normatività di tale accorgimento dietetico: mangiare vegetali significa adeguarsi a un disegno intelligente sancito dagli dèi, che prevede, in questo caso specifico, non tanto la necessità di sviluppare un determinato tipo di *bíos*, ma di preferire le piante come fonte principale di sostentamento. La sfera divina *ha voluto* che le piante fossero unicamente una *trophé* per gli uomini, per gli enti più deboli: cibarsi di frutti e di vegetali invece che di carne e di pesce significa allora rispettare la volontà divina. È dunque presente, nel *Timeo*, una sorta di giustificazione del vegetarianismo: la descrizione della natura delle piante, del modo e del perché furono generate suggerisce la necessità di cibarsi solo di esse nel momento in cui si deve sostentare la parte corporea dell'individuo. L'approvazione del vegetarianismo può essere inferita anche a partire da un altro ordine di considerazioni: tutti gli animali possiedono un'anima che era, originariamente, umana; mangiare le loro carni coincide, allora, con un atto di cannibalismo, un tabù per la cultura greca.[12]

Prima di trarre un'ultima osservazione a proposito di quanto affermato sinora, ritengo opportuno considerare, brevemente, delle teorizzazioni più esplicite del vegetarianismo nella Grecia classica, al fine di ricondurre a un contesto più preciso i passi del *Timeo* presi in esame: si potrebbe così comprendere il motivo per il quale Platone conceda così poco spazio nel *Timeo* alla descrizione delle piante e, di conseguenza, il senso della sua – tacita – giustificazione del vegetarianismo.

2. *IL VEGETARIANISMO COME PURIFICAZIONE DELL'ANIMA NEI SECC. V-IV A.C.*

Le piante furono spesso oggetto di indagine tra i pensatori dell'antichità: i Presocratici furono i primi ad avanzare considerazioni circa la loro nascita e le loro caratteristiche, seguite da studi e catalogazioni sempre più approfonditi, condotti in particolar modo nel Peripato. Ricorrente è la concezione per cui le piante sono *ápsycha*, cioè sprovviste di anima o dotate di una forma 'primitiva' di *psyché*. Tale opinione doveva certamente sollevare eventuali scrupoli nel consumo di carne di animali in quanto *émpsycha*, ossia enti forniti di anima e dunque capaci di provare dolore e di pensare, sebbene in misura inferiore rispetto agli uomini.[13] Incoraggiamenti a seguire norme dietetiche vegetariane perché ritenute moralmente giuste si fondavano prima di tutto sulla distinzione tra entità *ápsycha* ed *émpsycha*.

In realtà, la dieta greca tradizionale prevedeva già prevalentemente vegetali: cereali, olive e legumi costituivano la base dell'alimentazione, arricchita da formaggi, pesce e solo sporadicamente dalla carne, sia per il costo, sia per la difficoltà di reperimento, sia perché veniva consumata prevalentemente durante feste e sacrifici in onore degli dèi.[14] Al contrario di queste abitudini alimentari, dettate dalle disponibilità economiche o da occasionali motivi di celebrazione, il vegetarianismo è una pratica deliberatamente scelta: esso non è esclusivamente un accorgimento dietetico, ma soprattutto una scelta morale che, agli occhi del praticante, permette di elevare se stessi e di purificarsi così da raggiungere la *eudaimonía*, il "benessere", la principale aspirazione di ogni uomo greco.[15]

Il vegetarianismo fu largamente incoraggiato dal movimento orfico. È opportuno precisare che all'interno di questa etichetta erano annoverati, nell'antichità, personaggi e correnti multiformi, il cui punto in comune era il legame con Orfeo. I membri di queste cerchie guardavano a Orfeo come il loro fondatore e la loro guida spirituale; ritenevano che avesse formulato le dottrine e i precetti che tutti gli adepti seguivano e rispettavano; gli attribuivano numerosi libri, verosimilmente redatti posteriormente al presunto secolo in cui visse. Non è dunque possibile affermare con assoluta certezza che il vegetarianismo sia stato favorito originariamente da Orfeo in persona, ammesso che sia esistito; si può comunque sostenere, grazie a varie testimonianze dirette e indirette, che tale pratica venne seguita da uomini che si definivano orfici in un periodo di poco precedente e contemporaneo a Platone.[16]

La norma orfica di astenersi dalla carne rientra nel più generico precetto di non macchiarsi di sangue: contaminare in questo modo la propria anima significa impedirne la purificazione, e dunque precludere potenzialmente un'esistenza futura ottima. Non viene necessariamente presupposta una teoria della trasmigrazione: piuttosto, bisogna assicurare la vita ultraterrena più felice possibile all'anima immortale. Uccidere, officiare sacrifici cruenti e cibarsi di carne sono azioni che prevedono lo spargimento di sangue e la morte di un altro vivente: un vero membro del movimento orfico, per potersi ritenere giusto e virtuoso, deve favorire una dieta vegetariana. L'ascesa verso una condizione superiore guarda al vegetarianismo in qualità di uno dei mezzi di purificazione preferibili.[17]

Platone doveva avere ben presente la connessione tra orfismo e vegetarianismo: tale pratica viene ritenuta tipica degli orfici in alcune commedie e tragedie; personaggi che si presentavano in qualità di seguaci dell'orfismo erano inoltre diffusi nel mondo greco del sec. IV a.C. Nelle *Leggi*, Platone menziona il *bíos* orfico: a suo dire, si caratterizza per l'avversione allo

spargimento di sangue, per la scelta di celebrare offerte agli dèi senza immolare vittime e per l'astensione dal consumo di carne.[18]

Anche per coloro che si professavano pitagorici erano previste particolari norme dietetiche. Come nel caso dell'orfismo, all'interno della corrente del pitagorismo confluivano svariati personaggi, molto spesso accostati a Pitagora senza che vi fosse stata una qualche reale affiliazione con il movimento. È necessario, inoltre, distinguere diverse fasi del pitagorismo: un primo periodo sotto il magistero diretto di Pitagora a Crotone in qualità di centro 'capitale'; un secondo dopo una serie di rivolte contro i pitagorici della Magna Grecia, il quale vide sia la nascita, a partire dalla seconda metà del sec. V a.C., di comunità sparse in varie città dell'Italia meridionale, sia la dispersione di alcuni pitagorici in Grecia.[19]

I pitagorici dell'Italia meridionale si concentrarono maggiormente sul versante teoretico e matematico della cosiddetta filosofia pitagorica; quelli della Grecia sono ricordati dalle fonti per aver posto enfasi soprattutto sul genere di vita. In alcuni frammenti degli autori appartenenti alla cosiddetta Commedia di mezzo, i pitagorici vengono canzonati per il loro *bíos*, come è possibile riscontrare in ciò che rimane delle commedie *Pythagoristés* di Aristofonte, *Tarantínoi* di Cratino il giovane, *Pythagorízusa* e *Tarantínoi* di Alessi: motivo di ironia sono l'aspetto e il vestiario, fin troppo frugali; la dieta, incentrata sui vegetali; l'obbligo di bere esclusivamente acqua; varie privazioni che risultano, in ultimo, solo inutili pene; la credenza nell'immortalità dell'anima; l'interesse per la retorica e per i sofismi. È soprattutto il genere di vita professato a costituire il bersaglio primario, verosimilmente perché su questo aspetto tali individui insistevano nel professarsi pitagorici.[20]

Il vegetarianismo veniva giustificato molto probabilmente attraverso la teoria della trasmigrazione: l'anima immortale, nella sua successiva esistenza terrena, si sarebbe incarnata nel corpo di altri viventi, tra cui gli animali. L'invito a non cibarsi di carne risponde non esclusivamente all'esigenza di purificare la propria anima, ma anche a quella di rispettare gli altri enti perché possono, potenzialmente, celare l'anima di un familiare o di un conoscente; tale tipo di *bíos* va dunque inteso come superiore e virtuoso rispetto alle norme di comportamento tradizionali. Il vegetarianismo potrebbe essere stato praticato non solo dai pitagorici del sec. IV a.C. di cui si ha testimonianza nei frammenti della Commedia di mezzo, ma anche dal più antico nucleo del movimento: Pitagora e i pitagorici di Crotone avevano infatti istituito una comunità e un *bíos* esclusivi, volutamente differenti dalla comune mentalità greca; l'astensione dalla carne – o da alcuni tipi di alimenti – contribuiva allora a mostrare la peculiare purezza dei pitagorici, così da esaltare la loro superiorità rispetto ai non iniziati.[21]

Platone ritiene Pitagora il fondatore di un particolare genere di vita:[22] egli aveva presenti, allora, non soltanto i pitagorici dell'Italia meridionale, incontrati durante i suoi viaggi a Siracusa e interessati, come si è detto, primariamente a questioni matematiche e astronomiche, ma anche quelli della Grecia, che declinavano il pitagorismo prevalentemente come un insieme di norme morali, tra cui era annoverata la dieta vegetariana. Del resto, questi individui erano figure che si spostavano per larga parte del mondo greco, ed erano ben noti ad Atene.[23]

Un ulteriore promotore del vegetarianismo fu Empedocle di Agrigento. Come è noto, nel suo poema *Sulla natura* egli ritiene che ogni ente particolare sia in realtà il risultato dell'aggregazione di più particelle dei quattro elementi, definiti "radici" (*rhizómata*). Tali *rhizómata* si combinano tra loro nel corso delle varie fasi del cosmo sotto l'influsso di due forze,

Amicizia e Contesa, le quali, rispettivamente, uniscono e dividono fuoco, aria, acqua e terra: quando l'influenza di entrambe è in equilibrio, è possibile la vita dei vari enti contingenti.[24] Accanto a questo ciclo fisico, è presente il cosiddetto ciclo del *dáimon*, illustrato nei frammenti solitamente ricondotti al poema *Purificazioni*: tale entità è costretta a trasmigrare da un tipo di esistenza a un altro a causa di una colpa commessa precedentemente, ossia lo spargimento di sangue. Si tratta, in ultimo, di omicidio, tra cui rientra il cibarsi di carne, che prevede appunto l'uccisione di un altro ente.[25]

Questo atto è ritenuto particolarmente grave perché rappresenta una violenza mossa contro un altro ente profondamente affine. Come è infatti possibile inferire dalla descrizione del ciclo fisico, tutti i viventi sono imparentati tra loro perché condividono la stessa origine: la nascita a partire dalle diverse combinazioni delle quattro radici. Analogamente, considerando il ciclo delle *Purificazioni*, la maggior parte degli enti presenta dentro di sé un *dáimon*.[26] Astenersi dalla carne, e dunque favorire una dieta vegetariana, contribuisce a garantire una vita futura felice al *dáimon*: nutrirsi di animali prevede infatti la loro soppressione, e tale azione incatena il *dáimon* nel ciclo di trasmigrazioni.

Empedocle incoraggia pertanto il vegetarianismo, come conferma la dossografia. Non è concesso, tuttavia, mangiare indiscriminatamente ogni pianta, dato che sembrano escluse alcune categorie di vegetali, ad esempio perché possono potenzialmente nascondere dentro di sé un *dáimon* che un tempo era parte di un uomo illustre.[27] Nonostante le sue opere siano frammentarie e i giudizi della dossografia siano molto distanti rispetto al periodo in cui egli visse, si può affermare con un certo grado di certezza che per Empedocle il vegetarianismo fosse una pratica da favorire in vista di una purificazione dell'individuo, così da ottenere un destino favorevole dopo la morte. Platone conosceva Empedocle, e quindi anche questo precetto: egli richiama infatti varie dottrine dell'agrigentino nei suoi dialoghi, al fine di precisarle, respingerle o integrarle alla luce della sua filosofia, in particolare nel *Timeo*.[28]

3. *PLATONE E IL VEGETARIANISMO*

Si dispone, a questo punto, di elementi sufficienti per trarre un'osservazione conclusiva riguardo alla natura delle piante descritta nel *Timeo* e al modo in cui il vegetarianismo sembra essere giustificato nel dialogo. Platone era al corrente che tale pratica veniva professata da uomini che, dichiarandosi seguaci dell'orfismo o del pitagorismo, la ritenevano una delle modalità attraverso cui purificare completamente l'anima immortale per farle godere della felicità nel corso della sua prossima esistenza (sia che fosse destinata a dimorare eternamente nell'aldilà, sia che fosse costretta a reincarnarsi). Egli non poteva, allora, non opporsi alla potenziale 'distrazione' che il vegetarianismo così concepito rischiava di provocare. A tal proposito, è opportuno notare che l'intero *Timeo* può essere considerato la riscrittura, alla luce della dottrina delle idee, di un trattato *Sulla natura* presocratico: come si è accennato prima, l'analisi del mondo sensibile contenuta nel dialogo mostra da un lato che esso deve essere inteso in qualità di ente generato a partire dal modello noetico, e dall'altro che il livello ontologico da erigere a oggetto di indagine principale è proprio la sfera intellegibile. Ne consegue che il vero compito degli uomini, secondo Platone, è affinare la conoscenza e la condotta esclusivamente tramite la dedizione allo studio delle idee: sviluppare la parte razionale dell'anima e, quindi, consentire il suo ritorno presso gli astri dopo la morte dell'individuo

è un obbiettivo realizzabile soltanto se si conoscono la natura del bene e le verità più alte, rivelate dalla filosofia platonica.[29] Si comprende dunque quale fosse il rischio di osservare il vegetarianismo sulla base delle motivazioni addotte dagli orfici, dai pitagorici o da Empedocle: di intenderlo come un accorgimento sufficiente per considerarsi perfetti; nell'ottica platonica occorreva invece conoscere le idee e costruire un genere di vita sulla base del sapere così acquisito.

A mio avviso, contro queste posizioni 'rivali' Platone avrebbe condotto nel *Timeo* una polemica solamente silenziosa, basata su una sorta di ragionamento fondato sul nesso descrizione--prescrizione:[30] il fondamento di tale argomentazione consiste nel fatto che ogni cosa venne generata per opera di un disegno razionale e divino affinché fosse teleologicamente orientata, affinché tendesse, cioè, alla disposizione e all'assetto migliori conformemente alla propria natura; affermare, da una parte, che gli dèi – gli artefici di questo disegno – hanno voluto che i vegetali costituissero la fonte primaria di nutrimento e, dall'altra parte, che le piante sono enti correlati esclusivamente alla sfera sensibile serve, allora, a segnalare ai fruitori del *Timeo* che cibarsi di vegetali non ha altro valore se non quello di rivestire una mera utilità dietetica, e che le piante devono essere concepite proprio in vista di questa funzione. In altre parole, un'alimentazione vegetariana rientra nella sfera della *boétheia* materiale che gli dèi hanno istituito a vantaggio degli uomini, e non ha dunque alcuna relazione con una presunta *boétheia* volta all'elevamento morale e conoscitivo: bisogna nutrirsi di piante (prescrizione) perché dal disegno intelligente a cui ogni cosa risponde si apprende che esse sono state generate in qualità di alimento per antonomasia, il più utile per sostentare il corpo (descrizione). Nel *Timeo* non si fa alcun accenno al fatto che una dieta vegetariana aiuti l'anima a migliorare la propria condizione: bisogna quindi escludere questa eventualità sulla base del nesso descrizione-prescrizione.[31]

Per confermare l'ipotesi secondo la quale Platone voleva privare il vegetarianismo dell'attrattiva e dell'importanza che gli orfici, i pitagorici o Empedocle erano soliti attribuirgli si può nuovamente richiamare il nesso descrizione-prescrizione a proposito della natura umana: gli dèi hanno generato le piante come correlate esclusivamente alla sfera corporea ma hanno plasmato, nel contempo, gli uomini affinché fossero nelle condizioni ontologiche di sviluppare la razionalità, e cioè, come già detto in precedenza, di concentrarsi sullo studio del piano noetico così da consentire all'anima di raggiungere gli astri dopo la sua separazione dal corpo. Considerando la questione anche da questo versante, ne consegue nuovamente che il vegetarianismo non è per nulla connesso con il potenziamento del lato razionale degli uomini e con la purificazione dell'anima: solo lo studio delle idee, la "scienza" (*epistéme* – 46e6-47c4), consente di ottenere la felicità ultima, perché significa adeguarsi al 'destino' preferibile che gli dèi hanno stabilito per gli uomini nel momento in cui li hanno generati, e cioè coltivare la propria natura di enti razionali in vista della cura dell'anima. Dal momento che Platone redige, con il *Timeo*, un nuovo trattato *Sulla natura* alla luce degli assunti della sua filosofia, egli entra in dialettica con ogni altro intellettuale che si è dedicato allo studio del mondo sensibile, finendo per sostituire, così, le altre speculazioni: non sarebbe implausibile, pertanto, ipotizzare che tra i tanti bersagli polemici sottesi nel *Timeo* figurassero anche quanti si dedicavano al consumo di vegetali pretendendo che fosse assolutamente necessario per garantire il benessere dell'anima.[32]

Questa esigenza potrebbe essere sorta non solo al fine di mostrare la superiorità del *bíos* platonico contro il tipo di vita incorag-

giato dagli altri filosofi, ma forse anche per suggerire specificatamente ad alcuni membri dell'Accademia che il vegetarianismo non doveva essere inteso in altro modo se non, appunto, come un semplice accorgimento utile per il sostentamento del corpo, irrilevante per la morale, la conoscenza, l'anima. In effetti, l'allievo e futuro scolarca dell'Accademia Senocrate, stando alle poche testimonianze che si possiedono a riguardo, professò tale pratica sia perché nutriva la volontà di rispettare gli animali in quanto viventi capaci di soffrire, sia perché seguiva varie norme del *bíos* pitagorico.[33] La natura totalmente sensibile delle piante e il valore di una dieta vegetariana così come descritti nel *Timeo* consentivano a Platone di ricordare anche al suo discepolo Senocrate che lo studio della filosofia platonica e la costruzione di una morale individuale basata sul possesso della *epistéme*, a differenza del vegetarianismo, costituivano l'unico mezzo necessario per ottenere un destino felice e per considerarsi legittimamente uomini divini.

Con questo non intendo dire che Platone avesse svalutato completamente una dieta vegetariana, relegandola nel novero di una semplice pratica utile per la cura della sfera del corpo: essa viene infatti menzionata positivamente nella *Repubblica*. Nel libro II viene illustrato il modello di una città sobria e contenuta, composta in prevalenza da agricoltori e da artigiani che si accontentano di pasti frugali a base di vegetali. Il consumo di carne prevede sia che la città in esame si sia ingrandita enormemente, annoverando dunque molteplici figure come cacciatori, allevatori e mercanti, sia che venga favorita la ricerca del lusso e del superfluo, nonché la volontà di muovere guerra per appagare queste spinte per nulla virtuose (*R*. 369b7-374e9). È come se Platone stesse illustrando il rischio che si cela dietro al nutrirsi: tale azione può trasformarsi da bisogno necessario in vizio. I vegetali consentono infatti di preparare pasti frugali e morigerati, e necessitano dei soli contadini per essere coltivati; al contrario, la carne richiede la presenza di cacciatori e di mercanti, questi ultimi legati al mare, a una realtà verso cui Platone mostra scetticismo se non ostilità perché corruttrice dei costumi.[34] Un ampio numero di queste figure e il conseguente largo accesso alla carne rischiano allora di infondere in tutti i cittadini l'amore per lo sfarzo e per l'eccesso; al contrario, cibarsi in prevalenza di piante aiuterebbe a impedire il sorgere di tale tipo di vizi. Nella stessa *Repubblica*, tuttavia, Platone consiglia la carne – arrosto – come pietanza utile per l'alimentazione dei guardiani della città perfetta (403e8-404c9); nel *Politico*, non guarda con scetticismo – come invece sembra fare nel libro II della *Repubblica* – all'influenza di pratiche come la caccia e la macellazione (*Plt*. 288d9-289a6); nelle *Leggi*, infine, non si oppone all'allevamento (*Lg*. 847e2-848b1). Sembra dunque non esserci un punto di vista sistematico, ricorrente e uniforme da dialogo a dialogo circa la preferibilità di una dieta a base di vegetali o una che annoveri anche la carne.[35]

Concedendo a ogni dialogo una propria autonomia, senza pretendere che ciascuno faccia parte di un sistema filosofico dogmatico e completo come se fossero vari capitoli di un unico trattato, resterebbe però valida la proposta di lettura dei passi del *Timeo* proposta finora: in relazione allo scopo del dialogo – esaltare gli assunti fondamentali della filosofia di Platone in qualità di unica dottrina che spiega convincentemente la natura di ogni cosa e che illustra la morale individuale preferibile – il valore delle piante e di una dieta vegetariana concerne esclusivamente la sfera sensibile e corporea, non quella razionale e dell'anima.[36] Adottando il punto di vista del solo *Timeo*, si deve allora affermare che se un uomo si limita a mangiare vegetali è, certamente, legittimo considerarlo morigerato e contenuto, ma non

puro e perfetto né vero filosofo, qualità che si possono acquisire soltanto dedicandosi alla *epistéme*, alla filosofia platonica.

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Note

1 Tutte le traduzioni dirette dal greco sono segnalate dalle virgolette "" e sono mie.

2 L'ordine del mondo sensibile consente agli uomini di elevarsi imitando ad esempio la sua completezza, uniformità, autarchia, intelligenza. Per quanto detto si rinvia a Carone, 2005, p. 24-78.

3 L'esistenza mortale preferibile è per Platone quella da uomo: una vita da donna o da animali rappresenta un gradino inferiore in questa scala di perfezione, come osserva Brill, 2015, p. 161-175.

4 Viene echeggiata la primitiva valenza – di ascendenza omerica – del termine *psyché*: soffio vitale. Per questa concezione cfr. Bremmer, 1983, p. 13-69.

5 Per le principali funzioni svolte dalla terza parte dell'anima umana, nonché per i suoi tratti in comune con la *psyché* delle piante, si rinvia a Lorenz, 2012, p. 238-258.

6 Un'analisi del funzionamento della sensazione secondo il *Timeo* è offerta da Brisson, 1999, p. 149-184.

7 Per tutto quanto osservato finora a proposito della natura delle piante si rinvia a Carpenter, 2010, p. 281-303.

8 Così, ad esempio, Fronterotta, 2006, p. 374, n. 364.

9 Naturalmente, i viventi alati (gli uccelli), pur potendosi muovere più in alto rispetto agli uomini, sono tuttavia animali, e dunque possiedono una condizione inferiore: gli uomini vanno, pertanto, considerati i viventi razionali più prossimi alle regioni celesti.

10 Come osserva Osborne, 1988, p. 104-109.

11 Alla luce di quanto detto finora, integro le analisi sulla metafora degli uomini come piante capovolte di Gatti, 2015, p. 111-118.

12 L'abbandono del cannibalismo è uno degli atti che, agli occhi dei Greci, segna la nascita della civilizzazione, mentre l'impiego di tali pratiche è il segno che un popolo vive in uno stato ferino e barbaro, come suggerisce Renehan, 1981, p. 255-256. La giustificazione del vegetarianismo nel *Timeo*, più che una teoria manifestamente difesa e promossa, è un corollario che è possibile trarre a partire dalle considerazioni sulla presenza di un'anima originariamente umana negli animali, come rileva Brisson, 2004, p. 313-319: ho integrato questa osservazione con quanto suggerito nel testo a proposito dei numerosi incisi sulla volontà divina di generare le piante solo in qualità di nutrimento per gli uomini.

13 Un'accurata ricostruzione del modo in cui i Greci intesero e studiarono le piante è fornita da Repici, 2000.

14 La carne veniva fornita primariamente dalla macellazione di animali domestici; la cacciagione era prelibata e ricercata, ma non era sufficiente da sola a soddisfare la richiesta di carni. Per le caratteristiche della dieta greca nel periodo classico cfr. Dalby, 1997, p. 57-92.

15 Per quanto detto finora seguo Bernabé, 2019, p. 31-53, il quale osserva che il vegetarianismo fu concepito, in Grecia, "nunca commo una opción simplemente dietética": fu, piuttosto, inteso in un'ottica morale e purificatoria. Ritengo che tale affermazione debba essere riconsiderata in rapporto a Platone e alla tacita difesa del vegetarianismo del *Timeo*, come mostrerò più nel dettaglio in seguito.

16 Per un'analisi del movimento orfico nei secc. V-IV a.C., cfr. Graf, 2011, p. 53-67, il quale mostra come Platone costituisca un'importante fonte indiretta di informazioni: se anche le pratiche che egli descrive non corrispondono all'insegnamento più arcaico di Orfeo, quantomeno furono professate ai suoi tempi e gli erano, quindi, ben note.

17 Per quanto detto si rimanda alle osservazioni di Edmonds, 2013, p. 195-247, 334-345.

18 Per le commedie si veda Aristofane (*Ra*. 1030-1032), per le tragedie Euripide (*Hipp*. 952-954; *Cret*. fr. 472 Kannicht). Sulle menzioni dell'orfismo in Euripide cfr. Bernabé, 2016, p. 183-204. A proposito del non mangiare carne, Platone afferma (*Lg*. 782c7-d1): "si astenevano <gli uomini dei tempi antichi> dalla carne in qualità di alimento empio da mangiare [...] gli uomini di allora vivevano secondo i cosiddetti tipi di vita orfici, nutrendosi di tutto ciò che era inanimato e rifuggendo da tutto ciò che era vivente".

19 Per una storia del movimento pitagorico nei secc. V-IV a.C. si rinvia a Musti, 1990, p. 35-65.

20 Per Aristofonte cfr. Kassel and Austin, 1983, frr. 9, 10, 12; per Cratino il giovane Kassel and Austin, 1983, fr. 7; per Alessi cfr. Kassel and Austin, 1991, frr. 201, 202, 223. Secondo Alessi i precetti che i pitagorici seguono sono *nómos*, secondo Cratino *éthos*: hanno dunque a che fare con la sfera etica, sono norme di comportamento. Naturalmente, le testimonianze della Commedia di mezzo non devono essere intese come una ricostruzione storica delle figure rappresentate: si tratta spesso di distorsioni ed esasperazioni volte a suscitare il riso del pubblico. Il vegetarianismo e la credenza nell'immortalità dell'anima sono, tuttavia, precetti realmente seguiti dai pitagorici in questione: per quanto detto si rinvia a Sanchis Llopis, 1995, p. 67-82.

21 Per un'analisi delle norme di comportamento pitagoriche cfr. Gemelli Marciano, 2014, p. 131-148. La volontà di sottolineare la superiorità rispetto al resto dei cittadini potrebbe essere stata una delle varie cause che scatenarono la prima grande rivolta contro i pitagorici, quella contro Pitagora in persona e il suo centro di Crotone: per questo cfr. Cornelli, 2010, p. 21-38.

22 Nel libro X della *Repubblica* (*R*. 600b3-5), Platone accosta Pitagora a Omero come iniziatore di un certo *bíos*, professato da numerosi uomini: "[...] alla stregua di Pitagora, che fu straordinariamente amato per questo, e ancora oggi i suoi seguaci, definendo pitagorico il loro genere di vita, sembrano risplendere rispetto a tutti gli altri".

23 Per la diffusione dell'immagine dei pitagorici in Atene cfr. Melero Bellido, p. 49-70. Non entro nel più ampio problema di stabilire quanto Platone conoscesse il pitagorismo e le sue dottrine: limitatamente al caso in esame, è possibile affermare con una certa sicurezza che fosse al corrente delle pratiche vegetariane seguite da molti pitagorici, proprio perché ne facevano apertamente mostra in qualità di uno dei tanti elementi utili per sottolineare la superiorità del loro genere di vita.

24 Una ricostruzione del ciclo fisico del cosmo – e delle fasi che qui non menziono – è offerta da Trepanier, 2003, p. 1-57.

25 Per il ciclo del *dáimon* cfr. DK 31 B115, 117-120, 126. Per la condanna dell'omicidio e, da qui, l'invito ad astenersi da sacrifici cruenti e dal mangiare carne cfr. DK 31 B128, 136-137, 139. Ai fini dell'indagine che si sta conducendo, non entro nel più ampio problema di stabilire cosa Empedocle intendesse connotare con il termine *dáimon*: mi limito, semplicemente, a considerare la questione dal punto di vista della purificazione che tale entità può ottenere nel caso in cui l'uomo di cui fa parte non si cibi di carne.

26 Come rileva Balaudé, 2010, p. 105-128, le questioni fisiche del poema *Sulla natura*, forse più del ciclo del *dáimon*, sono essenziali per fondare e per comprendere "la parenté du vivant" – e, con essa, la prescrizione di non uccidere – illustrata nelle *Purificazioni*: da qui la giustificazione del vegetarianismo.

27 Per la condizione felice che è possibile ottenere seguendo i precetti del poema *Purificazioni* – tra cui, quindi, l'astensione dalla carne – cfr. DK 31 B113, 132, 146-147. Empedocle afferma di essere stato, nelle precedenti esistenze, un fanciullo, una fanciulla, un arbusto, un uccello e un pesce (DK 31 B117): non una pianta qualsiasi, ma un "arbusto" (*thámnos*). In un frammento, egli ritiene che alberi e arbusti, tra tutti l'alloro, siano i vegetali migliori perché gli uomini eccellenti, dopo la loro morte, si trasformano talvolta in tali tipi di piante: ne consegue l'invito a non cibarsi di alloro (DK 31 B127, 140).

28 Per Empedocle come pensatore da cui Platone prende le distanze cfr. O'Brien, 1997, p. 381-398.

29 Per il *Timeo* come riscrittura di un trattato *Sulla natura* presocratico si rinvia alle osservazioni di Naddaf, 1997, p. 27-36.

30 Per quanto riguarda la polemica condotta silenziosamente nel *Timeo*, senza cioè nominare di persona i bersagli o le dottrine a cui opporsi, Platone avrebbe in questo modo evitato di concedere spazio ad altre correnti di pensiero o figure di intellettuali così da suggerire che esiste solamente un'unica filosofia, quella platonica. Per esempio, la fisica del *Timeo*, la quale è teleologicamente orientata e presuppone una netta separazione tra la causa (le idee) e i fenomeni (il causato), si oppone manifestamente a quella atomista, la quale è deterministica e ritiene che la causa sia presente all'interno di ogni ente generato:

eppure, Platone non fa alcun accenno esplicito né a Leucippo né a Democrito. Non serviva, infatti, una disamina in parallelo tra le due filosofie, ma era sufficiente focalizzare l'attenzione sulla superiorità di quella platonica al fine di mostrare, per contrasto, le generiche negatività di altre dottrine dissimili: evitare di menzionare direttamente le concezioni che elevano il vegetarianismo a pratica utile per purificare l'anima farebbe allora parte di questa 'strategia' adottata da Platone nel *Timeo*. Per queste ultime osservazioni circa le ragioni del silenzio dell'atomismo (e, più in generale, dei principali bersagli polemici di Platone) nel *Timeo* cfr. Cordero, 2000, p. 7-16.

31 La descrizione della natura del cosmo e degli enti che ne fanno parte assume in certi casi un valore prescritto-normativo perché viene illustrata la disposizione migliore (imposta dal disegno divino che guarda al modello intellegibile), viene dunque mostrato ciò che sarebbe opportuno seguire, favorire, rispettare, ottenere. Questa impostazione emerge chiaramente, ad esempio, dalla *Repubblica*: la descrizione della città perfetta suggerisce la necessità di adeguarsi a una costituzione come quella delineata da Socrate, Glaucone, Adimanto perché rappresenta la disposizione migliore per la città (ricavata dal "paradigma che è in cielo", ossia dal modello noetico – *R*. 592b2). Analogamente, allora, favorire i vegetali per il sostentamento del corpo e dedicarsi allo studio delle idee per elevare la propria anima rappresentano comportamenti da seguire *necessariamente* in quanto rispondono al disegno intelligente che predispone al meglio ogni cosa (permettono agli uomini di raggiungere il pieno benessere, rispettivamente, per il corpo e per l'anima). Per le caratteristiche del nesso descrizione-prescrizione in Platone cfr. Zuolo, 2009.

32 Per il fatto che gli uomini sono stati plasmati per conoscere, cioè sono nelle condizioni ontologiche di scorgere la presenza dell'intelligenza nel mondo sensibile e di ricavarne gli opportuni corollari (costruire un genere di vita dedito allo studio delle idee e a una condotta virtuosa perché significa sviluppare appieno la natura umana razionale, stabilita dagli dèi), cfr. Ferrari, 2008, p. 84-104. Per una dialettica tra Platone e altri intellettuali cfr., solo a titolo d'esempio, Furley, 1989, p. 14-26; Morel, 2002, p. 129-150; Jouanna, 2007, p. 9-38; Duhot, 2008, p. 237-256. Si veda anche *supra*, nota 28.

33 Per le testimonianze cfr. Isnardi Parente, 1981, frr. 53, 220, 252. Per la professione del vegetarianismo da parte di Senocrate e il suo rispetto di altre norme di vita pitagorica cfr. Dillon, 2003, p. 149-150.

34 Sulla città sorta per appagare solamente i bisogni necessari (in cui è prevalente una dieta vegetariana) in contrapposizione a quella che si sviluppa per rispondere all'amore per il lusso (in cui è diffusa anche una dieta a base di carne) cfr. Painter, 2013, p. 121-132. Per l'ostilità di Platone nei confronti del mare, che emerge soprattutto dalle *Leggi*, cfr. Luccioni, 1959, p. 15-47.

35 Per tutto quanto detto finora rinvio a Dombrowski, 1984, p. 58-64, il quale suggerisce di interpretare alla luce del problema 'teoria-prassi' la mancanza, nei dialoghi di Platone, di un punto di vista uniforme circa la preferenza per una dieta vegetariana rispetto a una a base di carne: la coesistenza tra un piano ideale (e preferibile) e uno storicamente determinato (e da perfezionare) rappresenta infatti motivo di costante tensione in Platone. In tal senso, il vegetarianismo sarebbe, per Platone, una pratica ideale, sebbene non possa essere sempre applicata in ogni caso empirico e contingente, da qui l'apertura verso il cibarsi anche di carne. Per ulteriori discussioni sul valore dell'alimentazione in Platone – in relazione anche al problema della natura degli animali – cfr. anche, solo a titolo d'esempio, Haussleiter, 1935, p. 184-198; Sorabji, 1993, p. 9-12, 154-155.

36 Il pensiero di Platone contiene certamente punti irrinunciabili e fondamentali che rappresentano il cuore della sua dottrina (ad esempio l'esistenza delle idee, la centralità dell'anima, la necessità di un impegno politico dei filosofi): tuttavia, la sua filosofia non tratta tali tematiche come dogmatiche, bensì come passibili, da dialogo a dialogo, di essere sottoposte a dubbi, ripensamenti, riletture, precisazioni. In questo modo, la tesi presente in un dialogo non viene ripresa acriticamente e ulteriormente sviluppata in un altro dialogo, ma ogni volta sottoposta a un nuovo esame anche in relazione all'intento principale della singola e differente discussione. Per tutto questo cfr. Vegetti, 2003, p. 66-85.

Limite, illimitato, prima mescolanza: il ruolo del Filebo *nel* De animae procreatione in Timaeo *di Plutarco*

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ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship has recognized some thematic connections related to onto-cosmological issues between two late Platonic dialogues, such as *Philebus* and *Timaeus*, and has tried to explain them in different ways. The aim of this paper is to contribute to such a debate by analysing an ancient exegesis of *Timaeus* 35a1-b4, that of Plutarch of Chaeronea, which made use of the ontological sections of the *Philebus* (16c-17a and 23c-27c) in his treatise on the cosmogony of the *Timaeus*. More specifically, this analysis will show that the notions of 'limit' and 'unlimitedness' played a decisive role in the shaping of the "essence" of the world-soul according to Plutarch.

Keywords: Plato, Plutarch, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, world-soul, unlimitedness

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Nell'ambito degli studi platonici è piuttosto usuale che tra il *Filebo*, il *Sofista*, il *Politico,* il *Timeo* e le *Leggi*, dialoghi verosimilmente appartenenti a una medesima fase tarda della produzione di Platone, vengano riconosciute numerose connessioni tematiche che, ancorché evidenti, rimangono tuttavia oggetto di un dibattito aperto per quel che attiene al loro preciso significato. Tra i temi che più stimolano la discussione è senz'altro il confronto tra la prospettiva onto-cosmologica da Platone complessivamente delineata nel *Timeo* e quella che sembra emergere da alcune assai problematiche sezioni del *Filebo*. Proprio sul significato dei rapporti tra questi due dialoghi, infatti, emergono importanti differenze di fondo tra gli interpreti: coloro che sostengono un'interpretazione del pensiero platonico complessivamente incentrata sulle cosiddette "dottrine non scritte" tendono a vedere nel *Filebo* una maggiore affinità con le testimonianze di Ermodoro (cf. fr. 7 Isnardi Parente = Simpl. *In Arist. Ph*. p. 247, 30 ss. Diels) e di Aristotele (*Metaph*. 1.6, 987b20-988a15, e cf. anche *Ph*. 4.2, 209b11-16), che non con il resto della produzione scritta di Platone (cf. per esempio Berti, 1996), e dunque a non approfondire un confronto stringente tra il *Filebo* e gli altri dialoghi (esemplare a questo proposito è Migliori, 1993); al contrario, coloro che considerano secondaria l'importanza delle testimonianze in merito alle "dottrine non scritte" cercano invece di collocare e spiegare il *Filebo* all'interno del più ampio quadro delle dottrine che emergono dai dialoghi tardi di Platone, tra i quali un posto d'onore spetta chiaramente al *Timeo* (così Brisson, 1993; Fronterotta, 1993; Isnardi Parente, 1996; Fronterotta, 2016, p. 71-73).

Il presente contributo tenterà di collocare all'interno di questo dibattito il punto di vista di un interprete antico di Platone, Plutarco di Cheronea. Questi infatti, all'interno del proprio commento al passo del *Timeo* relativo alla generazione dell'anima cosmica (35a1-b4), già propose un'esplicita identificazione del genere dell'ἄπειρον (o ἀπειρία), tratteggiato nelle pagine 16c-17a e 23c-27c del *Filebo,* con uno dei componenti che il demiurgo del *Timeo* inserisce all'interno della *compositio animae*, vale a dire la οὐσία μεριστή. Una tale identificazione sembra suggerire non solo che anche Plutarco, in modo simile a una parte degli interpreti moderni, abbia tentato di operare una connessione puntuale tra i due dialoghi; ma anche che tale connessione presupponesse una sua interpretazione complessiva delle sezioni ontologiche del *Filebo* che, pur rimanendo quasi del tutto implicita nel *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, potrebbe aver giocato un fondamentale ruolo preliminare alla stesura di quest'ultimo. Per tentare di ricostruirla, dunque, richiamerò dapprima i contenuti dei passi del *Filebo* e del *Timeo* in questione, mettendone in evidenza le affinità e le possibili connessioni (§ I); passerò poi a delineare i termini principali dell'esegesi plutarchea di *Ti.* 35a1-b4 (§ II); infine mi soffermerò sull'identificazione tra οὐσία μεριστή e ἄπειρον proposta da Plutarco, dalla quale tenterò di trarre alcune logiche conseguenze tanto per quel che riguarda la lettura plutarchea delle sezioni ontologiche del *Filebo*, quanto per quel che concerne il ruolo che tale lettura potè svolgere nell'elaborazione della sua interpretazione della cosmogenesi del *Timeo* (§ III).

I

Fin dalle pagine iniziali del *Filebo*, accanto al tema principale del dialogo (ossia quale sia la vita migliore: se quella dedita al piacere, quella dedita all'intelletto o una variante mista delle due), viene tematizzato da Socrate un problema fondamentale, che risulta da "un'affermazione

stupefacente", ossia che "i molti siano uno e l'uno molti" (14c8-9).[1] Di fronte a questa difficoltà, posta su un piano del tutto generale, e che viene detta essere presente ogni volta in tutti i discorsi, Socrate introduce il celebre passo sul "dono degli dèi" (16c-17a). Gli antichi avrebbero infatti trasmesso la seguente "rivelazione" (φήμη): "ciò di cui si dice sempre che è (πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν ἀεὶ λεγομένων) è costituito di uno e di molti, e ha connaturati in sé stesso limite e illimitatezza" (πέρας δὲ καὶ ἀπειρίαν ἐν αὐτοῖς σύμφυτον, 16c9-10).[2] Poco più avanti, alle pagine 23c-27c, una volta aver confutato la tesi che identifica il piacere con il bene, Socrate invita Protarco, suo interlocutore, a non procedere immediatamente con l'indagine relativa alla natura dell'intelletto, bensì a porre preliminarmente l'attenzione sulla necessità di far uso di un ulteriore "espediente" (δεῖν ἄλλης μηχανῆς, 23b5), in modo da poter disporre, rispetto ai discorsi finora condotti, di "altre frecce" al proprio arco (βέλη ἔχειν ἕτερα τῶν ἔμπροσθεν λόγων, 23b6). Tale μηχανή consiste nella celebre divisione di "tutto ciò che ora è nel tutto" (πάντα τὰ νῦν ὄντα ἐν τῷ παντί, 23c4) in due, tre, e infine quattro "specie" o "generi" (23c4-d5):[3]

> 1) l'illimitato (ἄπειρον), nel quale "risiedono il più e il meno" (τὸ μᾶλλόν τε καὶ ἧττον… οἰκοῦν<τε>, 24a9);
> 2) il limite (πέρας), nel quale al contrario viene annoverata la "quantità determinata" (ποσὸν ἕκαστον, 24c3), intesa come "numero in rapporto a numero o misura in rapporto a misura" (πρὸς ἀριθμὸν ἀριθμὸς ἢ μέτρον ᾗ πρὸς μέτρον, 25a8-b1);[4]
> 3) la mescolanza reciproca di limite e illimitato (ἐξ ἀμφοῖν τούτοιν ἕν τι συμμισγόμενον, 23d1; τὸ μεικτὸν ἐκ τούτοιν ἀμφοῖν, 25b5);
> 4) la causa di questa mescolanza (τῆς συμμείξεως τούτων πρὸς ἄλληλα τὴν αἰτίαν, 23d6).

Uno schema ontologico siffatto, per come è presentato da Socrate, sembra in grado di rendere conto della totalità degli enti presenti nel cosmo (ἐν τῷ παντί), e più in generale della struttura ontologica dell'intera realtà:[5] al genere dell'ἄπειρον, la cui caratteristica principale è la "molteplicità" (τὸ ἄπειρον πόλλ' ἐστί, 24a3) pertengono tutti quegli enti o quei processi suscettibili di un incessante passaggio dal più al meno e viceversa, rispetto ai quali è impossibile che si generi alcun limite finché in essi risiedano appunto il "più" e il "meno" (24a7-9: è il caso del "più caldo" e del "più freddo", i quali in sé non ammettono alcun termine, cioè alcuna quantità numericamente determinabile, dal momento che ciò che è "più caldo" o "ciò che è più freddo" è suscettibile di diventare illimitatamente sempre più caldo o sempre più freddo; su questo, Fronterotta, 2016, p. 58); il πέρας costituisce al contrario il genere comprensivo di tutto ciò che possiede un determinato ποσόν, come ad esempio "l'uguale" e "il doppio", che sono in grado di eliminare il "più" e il "meno" dagli enti ricompresi all'interno del genere ἄπειρον, così limitandoli e definendoli. Allo stesso tempo, tanto il genere dell'illimitato quanto il genere del limite (e così anche il genere della mescolanza e quello della causa) costituiscono, ciascuno, una unità, sono forniti cioè, ciascuno, di una "natura unica" (25a4: μία φύσις), che nel caso dell'illimitato consiste nell'assenza di una qualsiasi determinazione quantitativa, mentre nel caso del limite dovrebbe consistere nell'essere esattamente tale determinazione, tale quantità numerica, ancorché Socrate ammetta di non aver "ricondotto ad unità" (25d7) la τοῦ πέρατος γέννα, non avendo dimostrato

in che senso gli enti che rientrano all'interno del genere del πέρας possano essere qualcosa di distinto dal πέρας stesso (laddove invece è possibile distinguere facilmente un'unità del genere illimitato dai diversi enti illimitati che lo costituiscono). Naturalmente, il fatto che i quattro generi costituiscano altrettante unità e che Socrate esplicitamente parli di ἰδέα (25b6) ha condotto alcuni interpreti a considerarli vere e proprie idee, sovrapponibili quindi ai cinque "generi sommi" del *Sofista* (Striker, 1970, p. 77-81; Migliori, 1993, p. 440-469), mentre altri hanno ritenuto, al contrario, che "non si tratta qui delle idee, ma dell'ordine derivato da quelle e da esse comunicato al reale" (Isnardi Parente, 1996, p. 207); si vedrà più avanti come questo problema si ponga anche per Plutarco, e sia importante per comprendere anche la sua posizione esegetica.

Quanto al terzo genere, il μεικτόν, esso comprende al proprio interno tutti quegli enti "misti" che, nella misura in cui sono il prodotto della mescolanza tra πέρας e ἄπειρον, risultano dall'imposizione di una quantità numericamente determinata a tutto ciò che, finché ne è privo, si trova immerso nell'assoluta illimitatezza del più e del meno; tramite l'introduzione del numero, il πέρας rende tali enti "proporzionati e armoniosi" (σύμμετρα καὶ σύμφωνα ἐνθεῖσα ἀριθμὸν ἀπεργάζεται, 25e1); essi sono detti esplicitamente "generazioni" (γενέσεις, 25e4), nel senso che ogni singola mescolanza che risulta dall'ordinamento dell'illimitato da parte del limite è intesa come il risultato di un processo *produttivo*, il cui esito è qualcosa di "generato" (γιγνόμενον), ossia di "prodotto" (ποιούμενον), non essendoci tra questi due termini alcuna differenza, se non nel nome (καὶ μὴν τό γε ποιούμενον αὖ καὶ τὸ γιγνόμενον οὐδὲν πλὴν ὀνόματι… διαφέρον, 27a1-2). Lo stesso genere del misto, e non solo le "generazioni" in esso contenute, è peraltro definito "generazione all'essere risultante dalle misure prodotte con il limite" (γένεσιν εἰς οὐσίαν ἐκ τῶν μετὰ τοῦ πέρατος ἀπειργασμένων μέτρων, 26d8), e "sostanza generata" (γεγενημένη οὐσία, 27b8-9). Tale genere, aggiunge Socrate, sarà quindi forse "un dio" (25b8), quando a mescolarsi sono il limite e l'illimitato nella loro unità generica; ma sarà anche, "in ciascun caso, determinate generazioni"(25e4)[6].

Se dunque ogni ente che rientra nel genere del misto e il misto stesso risultano essere l'esito di atti generativi o produttivi, è necessario postulare, come quarto genere, anche quello della "causa", poiché "tutte le cose generate si generano in virtù di una causa" (πάντα τὰ γιγνόμενα διά τινα αἰτίαν γίγνεσθαι, 26e3-4; per questo principio, cf. anche *Ti.* 28a5-6); tale causa (τὸ αἴτιον) sarà quindi equivalente a un ποιοῦν, cioè a un agente che esprime la propria causalità in virtù della propria "natura" produttiva (οὐκοῦν ἡ τοῦ ποιοῦντος φύσις οὐδὲν πλὴν ὀνόματι τῆς αἰτίας διαφέρει, 26e6-7), che viene esplicitamente detta "demiurgica" (τὸ δὲ δὴ πάντα ταῦτα δημιουργοῦν λέγομεν τέταρτον, τὴν αἰτίαν, 27b1-2); più avanti, Socrate aggiungerà che una causa di questo tipo può essere assai giustamente detta, in endiadi, "sapienza e intelletto" (σοφία καὶ νοῦς, 30c6), e chioserà che l'intelletto "non può esistere senza un'anima" (νοῦς ἄνευ ψυχῆς οὐκ ἄν ποτε γενοίσθην, 30c9-10, cf. *Ti.* 30b2).

Se questi sono dunque i generi attraverso i quali è possibile ricostruire, attribuendo a ciascuno di essi una funzione diversa, l'intera struttura del reale, non appare certo peregrino il tentativo di applicarli allo schema ontologico sotteso alla cosmologia del *Timeo,* quale per esempio viene proposto alla pagina 50c,[7] dove vengono riconosciuti "tre generi" (χρὴ γένη διανοηθῆναι τριττά, 50c7):

1) "ciò che diviene" (τὸ μὲν γιγνόμενον), ovvero l'intero ambito degli enti generati e sensibili;
2) "ciò in cui diviene" (τὸ δ' ἐν ᾧ γίγνεται), ossia il sostrato spazio-materiale, a cui sono anche attribuiti gli appellativi metaforici di "ricettacolo e nutrice di ogni generazione" (πάσης… γενέσεως ὑποδοχὴν αὐτὴν οἷον τιθήνην, 49a5-6) e, più avanti, di χώρα (52a8), insieme "luogo" e "materia" degli enti che vengono generati;
3) "ciò a somiglianza di cui viene all'essere ciò che diviene" (τὸ δ' ὅθεν ἀφομοιούμενον φύεται τὸ γιγνόμενον), ossia le forme, caratterizzate da un essere sempre identico, ingenerato e incorruttibile, e aventi la funzione di paradigma a somiglianza del quale si costituisce ogni divenire.

Oltre a questi tre attori, poi, è presente nel *Timeo* anche una quarta entità, stranamente non revocata in causa nelle sezioni che ricapitolano ed elencano i "generi di realtà", ma a cui la critica ha tradizionalmente attribuito il ruolo metafisico di agente causale intermedio tra le idee e gli enti generati (Cherniss, 1937, p. 34-39; Cherniss, 1944, App. XI; Brisson, 1994, p. 29-106; e, pur se con qualche distinguo, anche Fronterotta, 2006; 2008; 2014; di diversa opinione Baltes, 1999, p. 318, per il quale costituirebbe invece "der schaffende und ordnende Aspekt" del mondo eidetico, posizione ripresa in Italia soprattutto da Ferrari, 2003). Questo attore sarebbe in grado cioè di "realizzare" (ἀπεργάζηται, 28a8) in modo efficiente il cosmo sensibile avendo come modello le forme ideali, così svolgendo propriamente il ruolo di "artefice e padre" (ποιητὴς καὶ πατήρ, 28c3) del cosmo, essendone "la migliore delle cause" (ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων, 29a6): si tratta ovviamente del demiurgo, introdotto da Timeo proprio dopo aver affermato che "tutto ciò che si genera, si genera di necessità a partire da una causa" (ὑπ' αἰτίου τινός, 28a4); esso esprime questa causalità conducendo "dal disordine all'ordine" (εἰς τάξιν… ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας, 30a5) tutto ciò che, senza il suo intervento, sarebbe "non in quiete ma mosso senza ordine né regola" (πᾶν ὅσον… οὐχ ἡσυχίαν ἄγον ἀλλὰ κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως, 30a3-4), e lo fa introducendo l'intelletto nell'anima del cosmo, e l'anima nel corpo del cosmo, sicché quest'ultimo risulta infine essere un vivente dotato di anima e di intelletto (ζῷον ἔμψυχον ἔννουν, 30b8).

Anche soltanto da queste sintesi dei passi di *Filebo* 23c-27c e di *Timeo* 28a-30b e 50c, su cui ho brevemente richiamato l'attenzione, si intuisce perché molti interpreti, come sopra anticipato, abbiano creduto di poter legittimamente proporre un confronto tra i due dialoghi. In particolare, Margherita Isnardi Parente si è spinta ad affermare che "la partizione del *Filebo* riprende e razionalizza quella del *Timeo*" (Isnardi Parente, 1996, p. 208), sicché sarebbe possibile riconoscere una sostanziale identificazione del genere dell'αἴτιον ποιοῦν del *Filebo*, presentato come causa produttiva e intelligente, con il demiurgo del *Timeo*, causa dell'ordinamento del disordinato e dunque della generazione del cosmo; accettata questa prima identificazione, allora, il πέρας esprimerebbe conseguentemente nel *Filebo* la funzione numericamente limitante e ordinatrice che le forme intelligibili assumono nel processo cosmogonico del *Timeo*, laddove l'ἄπειρον esprimerebbe invece la natura della χώρα, mai in quiete e sempre mossa disordinatamente, e infine il genere "generato" del misto coinciderebbe con il cosmo γενητός (e con tutte le singole "generazioni" che avvengono all'interno di esso), in quanto prodotto della comunicazione tra il piano eidetico, le

idee-πέρας, e il sostrato spazio-materiale, la χώρα-ἄπειρον (così anche Fronterotta, 2016). Il confronto può naturalmente condurre anche a conclusioni diverse (cf. Ostenfeld, 2010, p. 312 e Pradeau, 2010).

Comunque, quel che interessa qui è, come detto sopra, tentare di delineare la peculiare posizione plutarchea, almeno per quanto è possibile ricavare partendo dal trattato *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*. Ora, è certamente vero che poche sono le testimonianze relative all'idea che del *Filebo*, o di sue singole sezioni, poteva essersi fatto Plutarco, il cui impegno esegetico fu quasi interamente rivolto al testo del *Timeo,* in questo essendo egli in linea con la tendenza generale degli interpreti platonici della prima età imperiale, di cui sono giunti, interi o in forma frammentaria, numerosi commenti al *Timeo*, ma nessuno dedicato al *Filebo;* le uniche testimonianze del fatto che esso fosse studiato e considerato ai fini della ricostruzione del pensiero di Platone derivano proprio dal *De an. procr.* di Plutarco, oltre che da un'opera perduta di Galeno, intitolata Περὶ τῶν ἐν Φιλήβῳ μεταβάσεων, (*De libr. propr.* 19.14; su tutto questo cf. Petrucci, 2015b, p. 295-300). Inoltre, Plutarco in nessuno scritto espone in modo organico la propria interpretazione del *Filebo*, che dunque rimane in larga parte implicita. Ciò ha fatto sì che il tema sia stato generalmente trascurato dagli studiosi di Plutarco: l'unico lavoro che, a mia conoscenza, abbia tentato una valutazione complessiva della presenza del *Filebo* all'interno del *corpus* plutarcheo è stato condotto da Renato Laurenti, che ne ha indagato le citazioni che compaiono in *De tuenda sanitate*, *Quaestiones Convivales* 8.2, *De E apud Delphos*, e *De animae procreatione in Timaeo* (Laurenti, 1996). Un tentativo di comprendere l'uso del *Filebo* all'interno dell'interpretazione plutarchea del *Timeo* è stato inoltre tangenzialmente affrontato, ma non particolarmente approfondito, da Jan Opsomer, in due lavori che d'altronde avevano scopi diversi (Opsomer, 2004, p. 151; 2007, p. 382-383).

Almeno due sono però le ragioni che rendono lecito, e anzi forse auspicabile, un lavoro di questo tipo: in primo luogo, la vivacità del dibattito contemporaneo sul tema del confronto tra l'onto-cosmologia del *Filebo* e quella del *Timeo* rende interessante chiedersi quale opzione esegetica proponesse un interprete antico che, pur se con strumenti e presupposti ermeneutici diversi da quelli odierni, aveva anch'egli l'obiettivo dichiarato di restituire correttamente l'autentico pensiero platonico; in secondo, è ben noto che Plutarco fu un interprete "coerentista" di Platone (Donini, 1994; Ferrari, 2010; 2017), e dunque fu sensibile al riconoscimento di stringenti connessioni tematiche soprattutto tra i dialoghi tardi, come emerge dall'importante numero di citazioni tratte dal *Fedro*, dal *Sofista*, dal *Politico*, dalle *Leggi* e appunto dallo stesso *Filebo* che egli inserisce all'interno dei propri lavori sul *Timeo* e non solo (Helmbold-O'Neil, 1959; Ziegler, 1965). Il fatto che, in generale, il dialogo propriamente *explanandum* per Plutarco fosse evidentemente il *Timeo* tende a ridurre, ai nostri occhi, la considerazione degli altri a una semplice funzione comprimaria, producendo così un'immagine del platonismo plutarcheo in parte deformata; ma se è fuor di discussione che il testo principale su cui Plutarco impegnava il proprio sforzo esegetico sia il *Timeo*, è allo stesso tempo possibile dimostrare, a mio parere, l'importanza di un lavoro preparatorio che coinvolgeva anche gli altri dialoghi (si pensi, ad esempio, alle *Platonicae Quaestiones,* non tutte dedicate all'esegesi del *Timeo*), sui quali Plutarco doveva presumibilmente sviluppare delle interpretazioni precise,

che poi confluivano nel suo modo di leggere il *Timeo* e di concepire complessivamente il pensiero di Platone.

Ritengo dunque che, all'interno del trattato *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, Plutarco fornisca una traccia che permetta di ricostruire, anche se in misura parzialmente speculativa, il suo pensiero in merito ai quattro "generi" del *Filebo*: come si vedrà, questa consiste nell'esplicita identificazione del genere dell'ἄπειρον con la οὐσία μεριστή del *Timeo*, a sua volta ritenuta essere principio del movimento precosmico, irrazionale e disordinato.

II

Com'è noto, infatti, il *De animae procreatione in Timaeo* è, all'interno del *corpus* plutarcheo, un'opera esegetica direttamente rivolta a fornire l'interpretazione di uno specifico passo testuale, nella fattispecie della pagina 35a1-b4 del *Timeo* di Platone. Questa sezione, all'interno del discorso narrato da Timeo sulla generazione del cosmo, contiene la descrizione dei due processi di mescolanza (il primo: 35a1-6; il secondo: 35a6-b4) che il demiurgo realizza al fine di generare l'anima del mondo, ovvero un'entità che si costituisce come strutturalmente intermedia tra il dominio intelligibile dell'essere e quello sensibile del divenire, permettendo così, secondo modalità che non è possibile approfondire in questa sede, la loro reciproca comunicazione (su questo: Taylor, 1928, p. 106-136; Cornford, 1937, p. 57-66; Brisson, 1994, p. 269-314; Fronterotta, 2008). Si tratta senz'altro di uno dei passi più problematici e discussi nell'antichità, fin dai primi momenti della vita dell'Academia platonica, particolarmente per quanto concerne la divaricazione esegetica tra gli interpreti cosiddetti 'temporalisti' e quelli cosiddetti 'eternalisti' del *Timeo*;[8] basti qui ricordare che Plutarco assunse consapevolmente e polemicamente una posizione temporalista, opposta a quella eternalista, maggioritaria tra i platonici (*De an. procr.* 1012b5: τοῖς πλείστοις τῶν ἀπὸ Πλάτωνος ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι). Se quest'ultima preferiva infatti una lettura διδασκαλίας χάριν (l'espressione risale a Arist., *De cael.* 1 280a ed era probabilmente riferita al primo interprete "eternalista" di Platone, ossia Senocrate, secondo quanto riporta Simpl. *In Arist. De Cael.* 489a, 4-8 Brandis = fr. 75 Isnardi Parente), per la quale quindi il mito di Timeo non sarebbe che una grande allegoria cosmogonica in grado di spiegare, attraverso l'immagine temporalizzata del processo generativo, quel sistema di relazioni causali e di dipendenza logico-ontologica che costituisce, *ab aeterno*, la struttura dell'anima e dunque dell'intero cosmo (su questo cf. Ferrari 2014a; Petrucci 2015; 2018a, p. 26-75; 2019), per Plutarco, al contrario, tale mito darebbe conto, ancorché in forma soltanto verosimile, di un evento realmente avvenuto, quello della generazione dell'universo, e consistito in un atto demiurgico e razionalizzante volto a realizzare una mescolanza ordinata di una serie di elementi che, pur pre-esistendo in quanto tali, non esistevano in quanto κόσμος, giacché ciascuno se ne stava per sé in uno stadio di completa ἀκοσμία (1014b5-c8; al tema Plutarco aveva anche dedicato un'opera, ora perduta, intitolata Περὶ τοῦ γεγονέναι κατὰ Πλάτωνα τὸν κόσμον).

Tale scelta esegetica procurò a Plutarco, come è inevitabile per tutti gli interpreti 'temporalisti', un numero notevole di problemi teorici collaterali. È tuttavia opportuno segnalare che, fin dalle prime pagine del *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, egli si sia preoccupato di chiarire quali fossero i principi (e quindi anche i confini) ermeneutici che egli intendeva rispettare (e che generalmente condivideva

con gli altri interpreti platonici a lui coevi: su questo, Dillon, 1989; Donini, 1992; 1994; 2015; Ferrari, 1999; 2001; 2010; 2012a; Opsomer, 1996; 2004; 2010; Petrucci, 2015b; 2018b; 2018c). Vale la pena citare il passo per esteso: "Esporrò in primo luogo il mio punto di vista su tali questioni, affidandomi al criterio della verosimiglianza (πιστούμενος τῷ εἰκότι) e giustificando per quanto possibile il carattere strano e paradossale della mia trattazione. Quindi applicherò il mio punto di vista al dettato dei testi (ταῖς λέξεσιν), cercando di accordare l'esegesi e la dimostrazione (ἅμα τὴν ἐξήγησιν καὶ τὴν ἀπόδειξιν)" (1014a1-6).[9] Plutarco afferma di voler procedere distinguendo due fasi:

> 1) esporre il proprio pensiero in merito alla generazione del cosmo, basandosi su un criterio di verosimiglianza;
> 2) mettere questo pensiero alla prova dei testi, cercando di far combaciare questi (tramite la loro esegesi) con il suo punto di vista (tramite la dimostrazione). Esegesi e dimostrazione sono dunque apparentemente poste sullo stesso piano, e vanno accordate per poter giustificare - nei limiti del possibile - la posizione 'temporalista' sulla generazione del cosmo.

Se si legge il testo di *Timeo* 35a1-b4, la generazione dell'anima prevede chiaramente *due* processi di mescolanza e il coinvolgimento di *sei* elementi: un essere indivisibile e uno divisibile, un identico indivisibile e uno divisibile, un diverso indivisibile e uno divisibile. In estrema sintesi, si può dire che il primo processo di mescolanza avvenga tra le tre coppie, producendo così, rispettivamente, un essere mediano, un identico mediano e un diverso mediano (35a1-6); il secondo realizza un'ulteriore mescolanza tra questi tre elementi mediani al fine di costituire un'unica realtà (εἰς μίαν ἰδέαν, 35a7), che è appunto l'anima del mondo (35a6-b4). Il senso di queste due mescolanze, in un'interpretazione di stampo non temporalista, è quello di chiarire la natura ontologicamente mediana e cosmologicamente intermediatrice dell'anima del mondo, che dev'essere composta tanto di elementi appartenenti al mondo intelligibile (l'ambito dell'indivisibile) quanto di elementi appartenenti al mondo sensibile (l'ambito del divisibile), perché possa svolgere la funzione di cerniera tra queste due realtà, garantendo la comunicazione tra il piano intelligibile delle idee e il piano sensibile del divenire, e quindi l'attuazione all'interno del piano sensibile della causalità efficiente espressa dalle idee. L'anima del *Timeo*, secondo una lettura di questo tipo, rappresenterebbe quindi una risposta alle critiche contenute nel *Parmenide* in merito al problema spinoso della partecipazione onto-cosmologica (sul quale ovviamente non mi soffermo: su questo, cf. innanzi tutto Fronterotta, 2001, p. 195-222, 381-395).

Plutarco tuttavia non mostra di interpretare in questo senso il passo del *Timeo*. Dal momento che, infatti, la sua posizione teorica di partenza, quella di cui cerca conferma nel testo platonico, prevede che il cosmo sia stato effettivamente generato in un preciso momento da un atto di tipo demiurgico, egli è costretto a concepire la generazione dell'anima come un evento in grado di sancire la cesura tra due *stadi* ontologici diversi: uno precedente (1014b5-9), in cui ciò che esisteva era un "disordine" (ἀκοσμία), ma "non privo di corpo, di movimento e di anima" (οὐκ ἀσώματος οὐδ' ἀκίνητος οὐδ' ἄψυχος), bensì dotato di un σωματικόν "senza forma e coesione" (ἄμορφον καὶ ἀσύστατον) e di un κινητικόν "scomposto e irrazionale" (ἔμπλεκτον καὶ ἄλογον); e uno successivo (1014c9-d1), in cui questi

elementi hanno trovato invece una razionale disposizione per opera del demiurgo, che li ha "ordinati, organizzati e armonizzati insieme" (ἔταξε καὶ διεκόσμησε καὶ συνήρμοσε), facendo di essi (ἐξ αὐτῶν) un cosmo, ossia "il vivente più bello e più compiuto" (τὸ κάλλιστον καὶ τελειότατον ζῷον). Tale atto è quindi chiaramente inteso da Plutarco come un processo di ordinamento razionale di un sostrato disordinato, cioè come un passaggio da uno stadio caratterizzato da un movimento del tutto illimitato a uno stadio caratterizzato da un movimento ordinato e numericamente delimitato. Ciò avviene attraverso il processo di generazione dell'anima cosmica: è per questo che una corretta esegesi del passo di *Timeo* 35a1-b4 è, agli occhi di Plutarco, assolutamente decisiva.

Plutarco è dunque costretto a dar conto, anche per la fase che *precede* il momento della mescolanza, della sussistenza ontologica delle componenti che entrano nella costituzione dell'anima del mondo; deve spiegare, cioè, *che cosa erano*[10] essenzialmente l'essere indivisibile e quello divisibile, l'identico e il diverso del *Timeo,* e deve chiarire a quali precise entità li riconduca, a suo parere, il testo platonico (o anche, naturalmente, altri testi platonici).

È qui che avviene un fondamentale scarto interpretativo, che segna l'intera esegesi plutarchea. Nella citazione del passo del *Timeo* che Plutarco, con apparente correttezza intellettuale, riporta all'inizio del trattato (1012b8-c9), le componenti dell'anima non sono più, infatti, le sei che si leggono nel testo originale, bensì quattro (una lettura del genere è possibile soltanto mediante una *ideological emendation* del testo originario, come hanno mostrato Cherniss, 1976, 160, a; Schoppe, 1994, 91; Ferrari, 1999; 2001; Ferrari, Baldi, 2006, 219): mantenuta la distinzione tra essere indivisibile e essere divisibile, non vengono più distinti, invece, un identico e un diverso indivisibili e divisibili, ma identico e diverso sono posti in sé stessi, come due elementi tra loro del tutto antagonisti, e che come tali entrano, in un modo che dunque Plutarco dovrà chiarire, all'interno della *compositio animae.*

Ne deriva una modificazione piuttosto importante rispetto all'originale platonico; i processi di mescolanza rimangono due, ma sono ben diversi da quelli previsti dal *Timeo*:

> 1) la prima diventa una mescolanza tra essere indivisibile (οὐσία ἀμέριστος) e essere divisibile (οὐσία μεριστή);
> 2) questa prima mescolanza produce un essere intermedio, una οὐσία ἐν μέσῳ, che funge da condizione necessaria per il realizzarsi della seconda, ossia della mescolanza di identico e diverso *in quanto tali*. Senza una οὐσία in funzione sostrativa, che sia come un "ricettacolo per identico e diverso" (ὑποδοχὴν τῷ ταὐτῷ καὶ τῷ θατέρῳ, 1025f2), infatti, identico e diverso non potrebbero, spiegherà Plutarco più avanti, partecipare l'uno dell'altro, o più precisamente, la loro partecipazione non potrebbe in alcun modo essere cosmologicamente "feconda" (1025b2-3; 1025f-1026a1).

Dal momento che il *Filebo* viene chiamato in causa da Plutarco per spiegare in che cosa consista la οὐσία μεριστή, mi soffermerò nelle pagine seguenti soprattutto su tale componente e sulla sua funzione all'interno della prima delle due mescolanze, lasciando dunque da parte le componenti dell'identico e del diverso e il significato del loro ingresso nell'anima cosmica (su questo, rimando principalmente a Schoppe, 1994, p. 100-132).

Qualche parola va però preliminarmente detta sulla οὐσία ἀμέριστος, l'altra componen-

te a essere coinvolta dal demiurgo all'interno della "prima mescolanza". Dal testo del *Timeo* risulterebbe in modo piuttosto chiaro che con essa si tratta dell'essere intelligibile, ossia di quell'essere ontologicamente pieno che caratterizza l'ambito eidetico e che, come si è detto, costituisce l'elemento intelligibile di cui l'anima deve per suo statuto ontologico partecipare, così da poter comunicare con le idee, e dunque poter trasmettere la loro causalità nel sensibile (Taylor 1928; Cornford 1937). Piuttosto problematica è invece la posizione di Plutarco al riguardo (su questo, Schoppe, 1994, p. 139-151): egli sembra in generale interpretare in modo pacifico l'identificazione tra οὐσία ἀμέριστος ed essere intelligibile, ma, tanto in questo trattato quanto nelle *Platonicae Quaestiones*, non sempre chiara è invece la relazione che egli immagina tra l'essere intelligibile e l'intelletto demiurgico. L'impressione è che egli tenda verso una loro sostanziale sovrapposizione all'interno di un unico ambito "eidetico-divino" (l'espressione è di Franco Ferrari in Ferrari, Baldi 2006, p. 47; cf. anche Ferrari 1995, p. 233; 1996a, p. 382-386), diametralmente opposto all'ambito del sensibile, di cui costituisce, nella sua interezza, il modello. Tuttavia, nel *De animae procreatione* - e, a mio avviso, anche grazie all'interpretazione che Plutarco sembra mostrare del *Filebo* - una distinzione, pur se all'interno di uno stesso ambito ontologico "eidetico-divino", può essere riconosciuta. Infatti, Plutarco spiega con chiarezza come vada intesa la natura dell'indivisibilità di questa οὐσία, e conseguentemente in che modo si realizzi, nel momento della cosmogenesi, la sua azione sul sostrato precosmico: essa è ἀμέριστος, "indivisibile", in virtù della sua "semplicità, impassibilità, purezza e uniformità" (1022e5-f1), ed è grazie a queste caratteristiche che, "quando entra in contatto con oggetti composti, divisibili e dotati di differenza, pone termine in essi alla molteplicità, e attraverso la somiglianza li dispone in una condizione unitaria (παύει τὸ πλῆθος καὶ καθίστησιν εἰς μίαν δι' ὁμοιότητος ἕξιν, 1022f2-5)". Questa essenza indivisibile ha insomma il compito di realizzare "attraverso la somiglianza" (δι' ὁμοιότητος) la limitazione della οὐσία μεριστή, la quale altrimenti, per sua natura, si dividerebbe nei corpi *illimitatamente*. Tale limitazione avviene, per Plutarco, "secondo il numero" (cf. 1013d2-3 e 1024e), il che spiega l'attenzione che egli poi rivolgerà alla divisione numerica dell'anima del mondo, cui dedica tutta la seconda parte del *De animae procreatione* (1027b-1030c); ancora, questo processo di ordinamento avviene "tramite l'ingresso di limite e forma all'interno della divisibilità e varietà del movimento" (πέρατος ἐγγενομένου καὶ εἴδους τῷ μεριστῷ καὶ παντοδαπῷ τῆς κινήσεως, 1026a7-8). È chiaro che della οὐσία ἀμέριστος Plutarco evidenzia quindi, ripetutamente, *la funzione ordinatrice* (cf. anche 1016d1: τῷ αἰσθητικῷ τὸ νοερὸν καὶ τῷ κινητικῷ τὸ τεταγμένον) che essa compie sul sostrato disordinato, delimitandolo numericamente e razionalizzandolo in senso formale, cioè "mediante somiglianza", proprio in virtù della propria "indivisibilità", purché appunto intesa nel senso logico-formale della "semplicità", "impassibilità", "purezza" e "uniformità".

Ciò che, in un'ottica platonica, può creare un certo stupore è l'affermazione secondo cui il dio-demiurgo (ὁ θεός, 1016c9) trae quest'ordine "da sé stesso" (ἀφ' αὑτοῦ, 1016d1); se, infatti, come Plutarco sottolinea, tale ordine e tale razionalità sono i tratti "dell'essere stabile e migliore" (τῆς μονίμου τε καὶ ἀρίστης οὐσίας, 1016c9), cioè dell'essere indivisibile, ciò vuol dire che il dio contiene in sé la οὐσία ἀμέριστος, la quale quindi dev'essere considerata, a tutti

gli effetti, una parte del dio. Può essere utile a tal proposito un breve confronto con la seconda *Platonica Quaestio*, nella quale Plutarco definisce "parte di dio" l'anima del mondo proprio in virtù del fatto che in essa è presente un principio noetico (che è ovviamente la οὐσία ἀμέριστος), inteso come quella parte divina di cui il sostrato psichico preesistente si trova, in un certo momento (ossia nel processo di mescolanza), a partecipare (*Plat. Quaest.* 2, 1001c; cf. anche *Plat. Quaest.* 4, 1003a). Una certa coalescenza tra essere intelligibile e intelletto divino in Plutarco appare quindi difficilmente negabile. La questione in parte esula dagli obiettivi di queste pagine, ma essa può forse trovare una parziale spiegazione se si considera che Plutarco fa mostra, tanto in questo trattato quanto in altri suoi scritti, di essere condizionato, in ultimo, da una concezione metafisica di stampo derivazionista, rimontante alla tradizione academica e giuntagli probabilmente per il tramite di Eudoro di Alessandria (sulla cui posizione, in relazione alla "dottrina dei principi" academica e agli influssi "neopitagorici", cf. Bonazzi, 2007 e 2013). Un caso evidente è offerto dallo stesso *De animae procreatione*, quando Plutarco, per spiegare quella che secondo lui costituisce la seconda mescolanza, ossia l'interazione tra l'identico e il diverso, sottolinea la necessità che il demiurgo ponga l'essere indivisibile "davanti all'identico" (πρὸ τοῦ ταὐτοῦ, 1025b5) e l'essere divisibile "davanti al diverso" (πρὸ τοῦ θατέρου), giacché ciascuna di queste due οὐσίαι è προσήκουσα ("adatta") rispettivamente all'uno e all'altro, e dunque può essere intermediaria ai fini di una loro partecipazione cosmologicamente produttiva; a loro volta, identico e diverso sono detti non principi, ma "principiati", in quanto derivati rispettivamente dall'uno e dalla diade indefinita (τὸ μὲν ταὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνὸς τὸ δὲ θάτερον ἀπὸ τῆς δυάδος). Dal momento che, proprio al termine della prima parte del trattato, Plutarco riassume il processo di generazione dell'anima cosmica nei termini di una "delimitazione dell'illimitato per mezzo dell'uno, in modo da farne una realtà che partecipa del limite" (τῷ μὲν ἑνὶ τὴν ἀπειρίαν ὁρίσαντος, ἵν' οὐσία γένηται πέρατος μετασχοῦσα, 1027a3), quel che risulta sembra essere un'impostazione metafisica radicalmente dualistica, declinata (come ha chiarito Opsomer, 2007, 382) secondo due colonne formate dalle coppie di principi e principiati gerarchicamente ordinati, la prima essendo costituita da uno, identico e essere indivisibile, la seconda da diade, diverso e essere divisibile. Se poi nell'uno si vuole intendere (come intende Opsomer) un riferimento a dio in quanto principio primo, sembra allora evidente che il rapporto tra essere intelligibile (idee) e intelletto divino (demiurgo) sia risolto, e lo sia in una direzione gerarchica e derivativa, che pone il demiurgo al di sopra delle idee.

Come che sia, ciò che interessa qui è sottolineare che Plutarco, pur se ambiguo nella distinzione ontologica tra l'essere intelligibile e l'intelletto divino, sembra in ogni caso distinguere tra la *funzione* formale del πέρας, che egli attribuisce alla οὐσία ἀμέριστος, e la *funzione* demiurgico-efficiente del νοῦς, che egli assegna invece al dio; il fatto poi che la οὐσία ἀμέριστος sia a suo parere *contenuta* all'interno del dio (come sembrerebbe implicato dal sintagma ἀφ' αὑτοῦ) gli permetterà altrove (per esempio nella seconda *Platonica Quaestio*) di spiegare che il dio non è solo ποιητής del cosmo, ma anche letteralmente πατήρ, in quanto legato a esso da un vincolo propriamente biologico. Rimane comunque ferma, ed è questo che importa qui, la distinzione *funzionale* che Plutarco riconosce tra divinità ed essere indivisibile all'interno del processo di generazione del cosmo.

D'altronde, si può facilmente notare che, mentre Plutarco non sembra preoccupato di

chiarire con esattezza, da un punto di vista ontologico, la distinzione tra il dio e le idee, è invece assai attento a operare la distinzione (1014b8-9) tra il σωματικόν "senza forma e coesione" (ἄμορφον καὶ ἀσύστατον) e il κινητικόν "scomposto e irrazionale" (ἔμπληκτον καὶ ἄλογον), come si vedrà tra poco nella trattazione della οὐσία μεριστή. Ciò probabilmente perché, per un interprete temporalista, una vera distinzione, all'interno dell'ambito "eidetico--divino", si dà tra una causalità propriamente efficiente e una propriamente formale, e tale distinzione ha senso unicamente in relazione al processo cosmogonico, non *prima*; sicché, nello stadio precosmico non c'è motivo di affaticarsi per distinguere il dio dalle idee, mentre invece è proprio la distinzione ontologica (dunque eterna, pre-cosmica) tra la materia amorfa e la psichicità irrazionale a essere decisiva per spiegare la diversità di funzioni tra queste due nell'ambito del processo cosmogonico, giacché proprio questa distinzione ontologica determina, come si vedrà subito, la netta esclusione del σωματικόν dalla *compositio animae*.

Vengo dunque al vero elemento originale di tutta l'esegesi plutarchea, ossia l'individuazione della οὐσία μεριστή. Mentre nel *Timeo* questa espressione non sembra far riferimento ad altro che all'essere privo di purezza, instabile e continuamente diveniente del mondo generato, in Plutarco invece, in forza della complessiva interpretazione temporalista che egli adotta, esso diventa una componente *preesistente* alla generazione dell'anima e del cosmo, da identificare dunque con un'entità che abbia una sua sussistenza eterna e una sua funzione propriamente metafisica. Se infatti, in una prospettiva eternalista, il divenire è logicamente dipendente dall'essere delle idee, nel senso che il suo stesso statuto ontologico riproduce in modo meno preciso e meno perfetto quello del suo modello, sicché l'anima costituisce quell'entità ontologicamente intermedia tra i due piani senza che questo ponga il problema di dover dire che cosa fosse il divenire "prima" dell'anima, nella prospettiva di Plutarco, invece, il divenire risulta essere il prodotto cosmico di un atto di ordinamento che le forme (o l'intelletto divino) compiono su un sostrato eternamente preesistente (e dunque indipendente dall'essere delle forme). Avendo ipotizzato questo stadio precosmico, Plutarco non può quindi collocare in esso il divenire (che appartiene solo allo stadio cosmico), e non può dunque identificare con il divenire la οὐσία μεριστή del *Timeo*; è perciò costretto a trovare o, per meglio dire, a dedurre dai testi a sua disposizione l'esistenza precosmica di un'altra entità.

Si è visto sopra che Plutarco descrive il disordine precosmico come caratterizzato da due entità, una che egli chiama σωματικόν e un'altra che chiama κινητικόν (1014b5-9). Quest'ultima è da Plutarco intesa come puro movimento, preesistente all'applicazione di una forma razionale che lo delimiti e lo ordini, e dunque del tutto illimitato e disordinato (su questo, una chiara spiegazione è in Ferrari, 2012b). Per individuare questa entità all'interno del testo platonico, Plutarco fa leva su alcuni apparenti appigli offerti dal *Timeo:* alla pagina 30a2-5, per esempio, l'atto ordinatore compiuto dalla divinità ha come proprio oggetto un πᾶν disordinato, "che non si trovava in quiete, ma in un movimento senza ordine né regola" (πᾶν ὅσον… οὐχ ἡσυχίαν ἄγον ἀλλὰ κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως), e che il dio "condusse dal disordine all'ordine" (εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἤγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας).[11] Ancora, alla pagina 52d3-4, Timeo elenca "essere, spazio e divenire" come realtà esistenti già πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι (per una ricostruzione di questa "fase precosmica" che apparentemente il *Timeo* suggerisce, e delle conseguenze implicate da una sua interpretazione letterale o non-letterale, cf. Vlastos, 1939;

Clegg, 1976; Ferrari, 1996c; Mason, 2006; Petterrsson, 2013; Ferrari, 2014b).

Un ulteriore riferimento, nel *Timeo*, a un movimento disordinato che precede l'intervento del dio si trova anche nella sezione relativa alla χώρα (49a-50c). È noto che Plutarco intendeva la χώρα, in linea con tutti i platonici, nel tradizionale senso materiale attribuitogli da Aristotele (*Ph*. 4.2 209b11-13), e usava il termine come sinonimo di ὕλη (sul significato, invece, più correttamente spazio-materiale della χώρα platonica, mi limito a segnalare Algra, 1995 e Fronterotta, 2014; sul senso del rapporto tra χώρα e ὕλη e sulla legittimità della sovrapposizione aristotelica dei due termini, cf. Ferrari, 2007; sulla concezione plutarchea della materia, Ferrari, 1995; 1996c; 2014b). Plutarco è peraltro consapevole che il termine ὕλη, nel senso filosofico di "materia", non è originariamente platonico (cf. *De def. or.* 414f), ma sembra accogliere pacificamente (come peraltro tutti i platonici) questa identificazione con la χώρα, in modo più o meno implicito nel *De an. procr.* e in modo esplicito nel *De Iside et Osiride*, dove la ὕλη viene definita μητέρα καὶ τιθήνην ἕδραν τε καὶ χώραν γενέσεως (373f). Proprio dunque in forza di questa riduzione della χώρα al suo aspetto materiale, accompagnata dalla necessità di individuare un'entità precosmica che ne spieghi il puro movimento, Plutarco ritiene legittima la possibilità di scindere, quantomeno *in signo rationis*, il πᾶν precosmico del *Timeo* nelle due entità diverse del κινητικόν, in cui si può riconoscere la causa originaria e illimitata del movimento,[12] e del σωματικόν, ciò che tale movimento anima *ab aeterno*, ossia l'elemento materiale, la χώρα/ὕλη, in sé passiva e del tutto priva di qualsiasi forma (ἄμορφον καὶ ἀσύστατον, 1014b8).

Una volta operata la scissione logica tra le due entità, Plutarco definisce quella passiva e informe οὐσία σώματος (1014c9), cioè "essenza" della corporeità che andrà a costituire la parte materiale del cosmo, e intende invece l'altra entità, che di questa corporeità indefinita causa l'eterno movimento, come οὐσία ψυχῆς (1014d2), cioè come *una* "essenza" (ma non l'unica!) che, assieme alla οὐσία ἀμέριστος, all'identico e al diverso, andrà a costituire l'anima del cosmo. Plutarco è chiarissimo nell'escludere ogni partecipazione, invece, della οὐσία σώματος al processo di generazione dell'anima: "Coloro che ritengono che la materia corporea si mescoli all'indivisibile, sbagliano" (1022f9); e ancora: "Solo dopo aver portato a termine il discorso intorno all'anima, egli [*scil.* Platone] introduce il tema della materia, perché non ne ha avuto bisogno prima, quando generò l'anima, dal momento che essa esiste indipendentemente dalla materia" (1023b1-4)[13].

La οὐσία ψυχῆς, invece, identificata con la γένεσις illimitata precosmica (sulla base di *Ti*. 52d3), rappresenta per Plutarco l'essenza dell'anima intesa in sé stessa (ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν: su questa definizione, cf. Deuse, 1983, p. 42-45), ossia precosmica, irrazionale e, per questo, sulla base del celebre passo di *Lg.* 10, 896d5, anche "causa del male" (αἰτία κακοῦ, 1015e1). Il fatto che Plutarco identifichi nell'entità 'anima' il κινητικόν precosmico non deve, però, automaticamente condurre a un'interpretazione che rischia, a mio avviso, di essere fuorviante (e di cui forse è responsabile già Proclo, nella celebre testimonianza sull'"anima malvagia" di Plutarco e Attico, cf. *In Ti*. I 381.26-382.12 Diehl = Attico fr. 23 Des Places). Infatti, quel che preme a Plutarco è innanzi tutto negare che nella composizione finale dell'anima cosmica possa entrare *alcun* elemento materiale, ed è per questo interessato a identificare l'elemento della οὐσία μεριστή con una entità diversa dalla χώρα/ὕλη. Siccome nello stadio precosmico, oltre alla materia, è possibile isolare logicamente

il movimento disordinato che muove incessantemente tale materia (e che è "causa del male" proprio e soltanto in quanto è disordinato), e siccome tanto in *Phaedr*. 245c7-e9 quanto in *Lg*. 10, 894b8-896e2 la natura autocinetica è attribuita all'anima proprio come ciò che determina primariamente la sua funzione causale (su questo, Baltes, 2000), Plutarco ha gioco facile ad attribuire il nome di 'anima' a questo movimento originario, tanto più che egli può così ipotizzare, per lo stadio precosmico, una sorta di dualismo anima-corpo che permarrà anche, *mutatis mutandis*, nello stadio cosmico. Questa caratterizzazione del movimento precosmico come "anima malvagia" non deve far dimenticare, tuttavia, che mentre il corpo del cosmo sarà effettivamente la *stessa* χώρα/ὕλη, ancorché partecipata dall'anima cosmica (e quindi da essa tanto vivificata quanto ordinata, come affermato in *Plat. Quaest*. 4, 1003a-b), la ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν sarà soltanto *una* componente - quella della οὐσία μεριστή - di una mescolanza che ne prevede altre tre (essere indivisibile, identico e diverso). Ecco perché rischia di essere fuorviante (anche se in sé non scorretto) affermare che l'anima precosmica *diventa* anima cosmica tramite un processo di ordinamento razionale (è la posizione ad esempio di Thévenaz, 1938, p. 67, che parla semplicemente di due stati successivi dell'anima), come anche che "the world soul is not really a numerically different soul from the precosmic soul, but merely the same soul in a harmonised condition" (Opsomer, 2004, p. 153): ciò sarebbe come dire che tra l'"illimitato" e la "mescolanza" non vi sia alcuna differenza "numerica", laddove invece proprio tale differenza numerica è ciò che li distingue. Dunque, l'anima cosmica, nella sua natura ontologicamente mista, è piuttosto da intendersi come qualcosa di completamente nuovo rispetto alla cosiddetta 'anima' precosmica, giacché, della mescolanza di cui essa si compone, "la causa originaria del movimento" (cioè, appunto, l'anima precosmica) non è che *una sola* componente, che viene numericamente definita dall'interazione con l'essere indivisibile.

III

È appunto nella trattazione di questa componente, e dunque nella individuazione e nella identificazione della οὐσία μεριστή, che entra in gioco il *Filebo*. Plutarco, come si è visto, all'inizio del trattato ha preso l'impegno ermeneutico di accordare la propria personale dimostrazione con l'esegesi dei testi di Platone. Per questo ritiene di poter esplicitamente identificare la οὐσία μεριστή del *Timeo* con il primo dei quattro generi tramite cui nel *Filebo* Platone articola i πάντα τὰ νῦν ὄντα ἐν τῷ παντί: quello dell'illimitatezza/illimitato, ἀπειρία o ἄπειρον.[14] Argomenta Plutarco (1014d2-6): "L'essenza dell'anima (οὐσία ψυχῆς) invece è stata chiamata nel *Filebo* illimitatezza (ἀπειρία) perché è privazione di numero e rapporto, e non possiede in sé né limite né misura (πέρας οὐδὲν οὐδὲ μέτρον) tanto nel difetto e nell'eccesso, quanto nella differenza e nella dissomiglianza. Nel *Timeo*, poi, è l'essenza che viene mescolata alla natura indivisibile e di essa si dice che diventa divisibile nei corpi (περὶ τὰ σώματα γίγνεσθαι… μεριστήν)". Plutarco dunque chiarisce in che senso vada intesa l'espressione οὐσία ψυχῆς, che egli utilizza (senza, onestamente, attribuirla direttamente a Platone) per individuare l'essenza, del tutto priva di πέρας, in grado di dividersi illimitatamente nei corpi (cioè, nella materia precosmica, in quel σωματικόν cui è eternamente connessa; cf. *Plat. Quaest*. 4, 1003a; Thévenaz, 1938, p. 99; Ferrari, 1995, p. 86-90). Subito dopo (1014d7-9) avverte ulteriormente

che la "molteplicità" (πλῆθος) di tale essenza va intesa - analogamente all'indivisibilità della οὐσία ἀμέριστος - non nel senso di "unità aritmetiche e di punti, e di lunghezze e superfici", ma al contrario in quanto "principio disordinato e indeterminato di automovimento e di moto" (τὴν ἄτακτον καὶ ἀόριστον αὐτοκίνητον δὲ καὶ κινητικὴν ἀρχήν, 1014e1-2). È insomma quell'elemento che - comunque Platone lo abbia voluto chiamare: essenza divisibile o necessità nel *Timeo*, illimitatezza nel *Filebo*, anima nelle *Leggi* - secondo Plutarco causa, nello stadio precosmico, il moto disordinato e incessante della materia.

Chi si è occupato di commentare questo passo ha segnalato l'assoluta arbitrarietà dell'identificazione plutarchea tra l'ἀπειρία del *Filebo* e la ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν: Harold Cherniss ha lapidariamente affermato che "this assertion is justified by nothing in the *Philebus*" (Cherniss, 1976, p. 185) e sulla stessa scia si è espresso anche Laurenti (1996, p. 61-66). Non c'è dubbio, come si è visto, che identificare la οὐσία μεριστή del *Timeo* e l'ἀπειρία del *Filebo* costituisca una mossa esegetica sostanzialmente obbligata dal pregiudizio temporalista di Plutarco, costretto a individuare e distinguere ontologicamente, nello stadio precosmico, le singole componenti che in quello cosmico saranno mescolate all'interno dell'anima. Tuttavia, ciò non significa che Plutarco abbia arbitrariamente e superficialmente usato il concetto di ἀπειρία; è più probabile, a mio avviso, che Plutarco, nel chiedersi quale precisa *funzione* Platone assegnasse al κινητικόν tanto nello stadio precosmico quanto all'interno della mescolanza che produce l'anima cosmica, si sia rivolto al testo del *Filebo* e alla sua articolazione ontologica delle "cose che sono".

Bisogna dunque ritornare brevemente alle sezioni ontologiche del *Filebo* sintetizzate nel § I, vale a dire alle pagine 16d-17a e 23c-27c. Da un lato, la sezione di *Phlb*. 16d-17a non suggerisce a prima vista alcuna estensione all'ambito cosmologico del problema uno--molti, accontentandosi, una volta affermata la compresenza in tutte le cose di limite e illimitatezza, di indicare la fondamentale differenza tra un metodo d'indagine che opera διαλεκτικῶς (cioè tramite una vera e propria quantificazione numerica dell'illimitato, così che l'"uno" non si trovi più opposto ai "molti" illimitati, ma a una molteplicità ormai quantificata e dunque numericamente determinata) e un altro metodo d'indagine che invece opera ἐριστικῶς (in quanto passa immediatamente dall'uno all'illimitato senza cogliere τὰ μέσα, gli "intermedi", cioè appunto senza operare alcuna reale limitazione della molteplicità); d'altro lato, tuttavia, non è difficile immaginare che un lettore come Plutarco, immerso nelle problematiche cosmologiche sollevate dal *Timeo*, possa aver colto, nell'affermazione che tutte le cose che sono sono pervase da un principio di determinazione (il πέρας) e da un principio di indeterminatezza (ἀπειρία), un chiaro riferimento all'interazione fondamentale su cui si fonda il cosmo descritto nel *Timeo*, ossia quella tra un paradigma formale costituito dalle idee e un sostrato completamente indeterminato costituito da un χαλεπὸν καὶ ἀμυδρὸν εἶδος (49a), interazione che è resa possibile unicamente da un qualche elemento "intermedio" (l'anima), che ne garantisca la reciproca comunicazione. Già dunque questa sezione, che pone in senso quantitativo e numerico l'operazione dialettica di limitazione dell'illimitato, potrebbe aver rappresentato per Plutarco un testo di riferimento nella costruzione della sua interpretazione del *Timeo*.

È assai probabile, però, che a suggerire più direttamente a Plutarco l'opportunità di un utilizzo in ambito onto-cosmologico (e quindi, nella sua ottica, *psicologico*) della relazione tra

limite e illimitato siano state le pagine di poco successive, ossia la sezione 23c-27c, del cui significato e dei cui possibili accostamenti con il *Timeo* ho dato conto sopra, e di cui ora è possibile finalmente apprezzare l'interpretazione plutarchea.

L'operazione esegetica di Plutarco risulta infatti diversa da tutte quelle proposte dagli studiosi moderni: come si è appena visto, egli fa coincidere l'ἀπειρία non con il sostrato materiale (o spazio-materiale) della χώρα, bensì, in modo apparentemente controintuitivo, con il movimento disordinato che anima quest'ultima, e che per lui consiste in un'entità metafisica logicamente indipendente dalla materia, ossia la ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν, a sua volta identificata con la componente della οὐσία μεριστή che, nel *Timeo*, entra nel processo di mescolanza che produce l'anima del mondo. Che cosa comporta questo?

Si è visto che, delle due mescolanze di *Timeo* 35a1-b4, Plutarco intende la prima come una mescolanza tra "essere indivisibile" ed "essere divisibile", la seconda come una mescolanza tra "identico" e "diverso" possibile unicamente grazie alla prima, che ha fornito un "essere mediano" in funzione intermedia e sostrativa (sicché questa seconda mescolanza è *anche* la mescolanza di identico e diverso con l'essere mediano). Sulla base degli elementi delineati fin qui, è a mio avviso ragionevole pensare che l'articolazione della realtà attraverso i "quattro generi" del *Filebo* sia servita a Plutarco per rendere conto della struttura *essenziale* dell'anima cosmica, quella cioè risultante già alla fine del primo processo di mescolanza tra "essere indivisibile" e "essere divisibile". Sembra infatti in questo modo chiarirsi la *ratio* che sottosta alla spiegazione plutarchea di *Ti.* 35a1-b4:

> 1) innanzi tutto, la οὐσία ἀμέριστος, che nello stadio precosmico sembra indicare, senza ulteriori suddivisioni interne, il piano "eidetico-divino", comprensivo tanto delle forme quanto del demiurgo, nel processo di mescolanza si definisce *funzionalmente* come πέρας, nel senso che essa assume il ruolo di causa paradigmatica, e dunque di limitazione formale (le idee) di un sostrato illimitato. Essa consiste nel limite garantito dall'intelligibile, e non si tratta di una specifica forma trascendente, ma della razionalità formale che pertiene al mondo eidetico nel suo complesso, e che letteralmente entra nella composizione dell'anima del mondo, spiegando così il modo in cui l'ambito "eidetico-divino" interviene sul piano cosmico. La reticenza che Plutarco mostra nella distinzione tra dio e idee all'interno della οὐσία ἀμέριστος precosmica, dunque, lascia il passo a una chiara suddivisione delle due entità all'interno del processo cosmogonico: il dio diventa chiaramente una causa demiurgica, con una funzione produttivo-generativa (si veda sotto, al punto 4), mentre le idee esprimono la loro causalità formale, che agisce in funzione ordinatrice e limitante; 2) il sostrato illimitato (ἄπειρον), sottoposto all'azione formale delle idee, è immateriale, giacché le idee non vanno a ordinare direttamente il corpo del cosmo, bensì agiscono su una οὐσία μεριστή che è movimento puro, essenza che ha di per sé (καθ' ἑαυτήν) la capacità di dividersi illimitatamente nei corpi (corpi di per sé invece del tutto amorfi e passivi); tale essenza, assai peculiare, è γένεσις illimitata (1024c), e tale rimane prima che il demiurgo imponga su di essa il limite. L'imposizione del limite, tuttavia, che per Plutarco avviene nel momento generativo del cosmo, non garantisce la scomparsa totale dell'illimitato: esso non si trasfor-

ma completamente in altro (vale a dire: "l'anima precosmica" non si trasforma, semplicemente, in "anima cosmica"), ma permane, all'interno dell'anima del cosmo e *a fortiori* all'interno delle anime individuali, come sua componente, residuo irrazionale che sottosta all'ordine (1025d);
3) perché la οὐσία ἀμέριστος possa realizzare questo atto di ordinamento formale della οὐσία μεριστή, è necessario che le due essenze vengano mescolate; il prodotto dell'imposizione di un limite all'illimitato è dunque una mescolanza, e segnatamente la *prima* delle due mescolanze previste dal *Timeo* (s'intende nella peculiare lettura plutarchea, con la riduzione da sei a quattro elementi). Tale mescolanza non basta per spiegare la struttura ontologica complessiva dell'anima del mondo (che si completa solo con l'introduzione in essa dell'identico e del diverso), ma ne chiarisce senz'altro la struttura *essenziale*, che deriva da un'interazione tra le due οὐσίαι a disposizione del demiurgo, quella indivisibile e quella divisibile, e soprattutto ne spiega la funzione fondamentale, che è quella di essere κόσμος, "ordine", che poi quest'anima trasferisce al σωματικόν nel momento in cui lo attraversa e lo vivifica. In altri termini, se τὸ πᾶν - cioè l'universo inteso come unione di corpo e di anima - è un κόσμος, ciò è dovuto per Plutarco esclusivamente a questa struttura ordinata dell'anima: di fatto, dunque, in questa prospettiva analizzare la struttura dell'anima non è altro che analizzare la struttura del cosmo, cioè spiegare in che senso e perché τὸ πᾶν è un κόσμος, dal momento che è nella limitazione dell'illimitato, cioè nel passaggio dal movimento irrazionale al movimento razionale, che consiste il fulcro del suo processo generativo;
4) se questa mescolanza è un "prodotto", allora dev'essere stata "generata" (cf. *Phlb.* 27a1-2); e se è stata generata, ha dunque una causa (cf. *Phlb.* 26e3-4 e *Ti.* 28a5-6). Tale causa è il dio-demiurgo, inteso come quella entità, interna all'ambito "eidetico-divino", in grado di esprimere una causalità propriamente produttiva ed efficiente, che trae da sé (ἀφ' αὑτοῦ, 1016d1) l'essere indivisibile e lo usa come πέρας per delimitare e ordinare l'essere illimitatamente divisibile nei corpi.

Se questa ricostruzione è corretta e se dietro alla lettura plutarchea di *Ti.* 35a1-b4, quantomeno per quel che riguarda la mescolanza delle due οὐσίαι, possono essere riconosciute le sezioni ontologiche del *Filebo*, si deve allora conseguentemente ammettere che anche in relazione a questo dialogo Plutarco avesse maturato un'esegesi precisa.

In particolare, due sono le conseguenze interpretative che mi sembrano implicate da Plutarco: in primo luogo, nel πέρας e nell'ἄπειρον così intesi non può leggersi a questo punto alcun riferimento a forme trascendenti, come invece hanno inteso diversi interpreti moderni (per esempio Striker, 1970; Frede, 1993; Migliori, 1993; Berti, 1996), ma, piuttosto, un riferimento a quei "generi" fondamentali tramite i quali è possibile riconoscere la strutturazione essenziale dell'intera realtà; in secondo luogo, la γεγενημένη οὐσία (*Phlb.* 27b8-9), ossia la "mescolanza" di limite e illimitato, consiste, nella lettura suggerita da Plutarco, non nella realtà cosmica tutta, ma nella sola anima, prima essenza effettivamente "generata" dal dio-demiurgo come risultato della limitazione dell'illimitato. Ciò che rende davvero originale e unica la posizione di

Plutarco è esattamente l'applicazione di questa struttura "generica" non all'intera realtà, né alla materia del cosmo, bensì alla sola anima; per quel che si è visto, inoltre, non all'anima compiutamente prodotta, bensì soltanto alla *prima* mescolanza che si verifica all'interno del processo che condurrà alla sua definitiva generazione. Così, la reciproca relazione e partecipazione di limite e illimitato, messa in atto in un momento preciso (quello che sancisce l'origine del cosmo) da una entità causale efficiente, rappresenta per Plutarco non soltanto quel processo di intermediazione tra intelligibile e sensibile di cui l'anima è eterna garante nel cosmo, come suggerisce il *Timeo*, ma anche e soprattutto quel momento propriamente originario e generativo che è avvenuto una volta per tutte, e che è consistito nel passaggio da uno stadio di ἀκοσμία a uno di κόσμος, come suggerisce ancora una volta il *Timeo* interpretato con il supporto delle sezioni ontologiche del *Filebo*.

Prima di concludere, è necessario anticipare una possibile obiezione che può essere mossa a questa ricostruzione: Plutarco è infatti solitamente considerato l'autore medioplatonico che, con una certa superficialità, prefigurerebbe la tendenza, presente anche in parte della critica moderna, ad assimilare i "quattro generi" del *Filebo* ai cinque "generi sommi" del *Sofista* (così per esempio Isnardi Parente, 1996, p. 208, n. 7). Questa convinzione deriva non soltanto dal pregiudizio che vede in Plutarco un autore interessato soltanto a unire, un po' ciecamente, i pezzi di un unico grande puzzle platonico, ma anche, più concretamente, dalla lettura della pagina 391b-c del *De E apud Delphos*, dove effettivamente egli propone un parallelo diretto tra i due passi di *Sofista* e *Filebo*. Tuttavia, proprio questo passo mi pare al contrario confermare, e non smentire, quanto ho provato ad argomentare in queste pagine, e cioè che per Plutarco i "quattro generi" del *Filebo* non possono in alcun modo essere considerati "generi sommi".

Egli infatti riconosce che tanto i cinque generi del *Sofista* quanto i quattro del *Filebo* (in realtà, secondo lui, a loro volta cinque, giacché considera anche il genere della "separazione", solamente accennato da Socrate e Protarco in *Phlb*. 23d9-10) costituiscono dei τρόποι διαιρέσεως (391b5), ossia dei "modi di divisione" o "classificazione" degli enti che costituiscono la realtà; ma non afferma affatto che questi due τρόποι si possano sovrapporre, bensì, al contrario, che nel caso dei generi del *Filebo* si ha a che fare con un ἄλλος τρόπος, tale per cui essi siano da intendere "come immagini" (ὥσπερ εἰκόνας, 391c2) dei generi sommi del *Sofista*. In particolare, l'illimitato come immagine del movimento, il limite della quiete, il divenire dell'essere,[15] mentre la causa della mescolanza come immagine dell'identico;[16] infine, al quinto genere, solo menzionato nel *Filebo*, ossia quello della "separazione", corrisponderebbe come modello il diverso. È evidente che l'uso, da parte di un platonico, del termine εἰκόνες esclude che i quattro generi del *Filebo* possano identificarsi con i cinque del *Sofista* (qualunque fosse l'interpretazione che di questi avesse Plutarco), e anzi suggerisce che l'ambito d'azione entro cui riconoscere limite, illimitato, mescolanza e causa della mescolanza non sia quello eidetico, bensì quello cosmico; che poi all'interno dell'ambito cosmico essi vadano riconosciuti come ciò che esprime la struttura nucleare ed essenziale dell'anima del mondo, è quanto ho cercato di argomentare in queste pagine.

Si possono dunque ribadire le seguenti conclusioni: Plutarco sembra riconoscere nell'articolazione in quattro "generi" del *Filebo* l'articolazione essenziale e strutturale

dell'anima cosmica. Le tre entità - dio, idee e κινητικόν - che pre-esistono nello stadio precosmico assumono, nel primo dei due processi di mescolanza, ciascuna una determinata veste funzionale: l'essenza indivisibile delle idee è limite, quella divisibile del movimento è illimitato, mentre causa è l'intelletto divino; quest'ultimo, applicando all'essere divisibile quello indivisibile, applica un limite all'illimitato e così produce una οὐσία ἐν μέσῳ, ossia un'essenza che può porsi "in mezzo" tra identico e diverso, in sé estremi altrimenti del tutto antagonisti; ciò spiega perché e in che senso l'anima, al termine di entrambi i processi di mescolanza, sia dotata di quel κόσμος che essa ha poi il compito di trasferire al σωματικόν del mondo.[17]

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Note

1 Le traduzioni di questo dialogo, qui e avanti, sono tratte da Cambiano, 1981.

2 Non affronto qui il problema annoso se l'espressione πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν ἀεὶ λεγομένων vada intesa come un riferimento agli enti che "sono sempre" (dunque alle idee), o piuttosto, come la posizione dell'avverbio ἀεὶ chiaramente sembra suggerire, agli enti che "sempre diciamo che sono" (i quali non necessariamente sono gli intelligibili). Su questo, il dibattito è ampio: cf. Benitez, 1989, p. 39-42; Frede, 1993, p. xxix-xxx; Migliori, 1993, 96-100; Berti, 1996; Delcomminette, 2006, p. 97-98.

3 I due termini, εἴδη e γένη, nel loro significato "metafisico" possono essere generalmente considerati ancora sinonimi in Platone, come anche queste righe confermano; a tal proposito ancora utile Des Places, 1964, p. 110-111 (*s.u.* γένος 4°) e p. 159-160 (*s.u.* εἶδος 4°).

4 Tra gli studiosi del dialogo non c'è accordo sulla coincidenza tra le nozioni di ἄπειρον e πέρας che compaiono in questo passo e quelle di ἀπειρία e πέρας che compaiono nel passo precedente, alle pagine 16c-17a: tale coincidenza viene negata per esempio da Frede, 1993, xxxviii, secondo la quale "in the 'divine method', peras and apeiron [scil. apeiria] were used as criteria for the division of the genera as a means to control the numerical completeness of the divisions on every level. In the 'fourfold division', the limit and the unlimited are themselves genera"; mentre viene sostenuta da Delcomminette, 2006, 201, per il quale "aucun élément nouveau n'est introduit dans le passage qui suit". La questione riguarda sempre l'identificazione precisa dell'oggetto d'interesse platonico di queste pagine: sono solo le forme, o tutti gli enti? Su questo problema specifico, oltre ai riferimenti bibliografici citati alla nota 2, rimando anche a Striker, 1970.

5 Anche in questo caso, tuttavia, come in quello dell'espressione πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν ἀεὶ λεγομένων di 16c9 (cf. nota 2), permane un'ambiguità relativa al preciso oggetto di questa mappatura. Gli ὄντα a cui ci si riferisce sono quelli intelligibili, quelli sensibili, o sono "tutti" gli enti, tanto intelligibili quanto sensibili? La frase sembrerebbe a tal proposito piuttosto chiara: l'avverbio temporale νῦν e, ancor di più, la formulazione locale ἐν τῷ παντί farebbero propendere per una limitazione del campo d'indagine al cosmo (nel *Timeo* spesso indicato con l'espressione τὸ πᾶν); d'altro canto, tuttavia, l'operazione di 'mappatura' mediante συναγωγή e διαίρεσις è, nei dialoghi tardi, compito tipico del metodo dialettico, i cui oggetti sembrano poter essere (per esempio nel *Sofista*) le sole idee, in quanto enti stabili e dunque indagabili secondo un'affidabile e precisa procedura di divisione, distinzione e ricostruzione delle loro relazioni. Anche in questo caso, tuttavia, non entro nel vastissimo dibattito critico sul *Filebo*, che non è strettamente necessario ai fini di queste pagine. Per un inquadramento della questione, cf. in particolare Frede, 1993, p. xxxiii-xxxix; Delcomminette, 2006, p 212-216.

6 L'accenno alla divinità del terzo genere rimanda chiaramente al cosmo inteso come θεὸς αἰσθητός in *Ti*. 92c7, al cui interno i singoli enti generati (le "generazioni") sono il risultato dell'imposizione, caso per caso, di un limite formale alla loro naturale illimitatezza.

7 Oltre a questo passo, altre analoghe schematizzazioni si trovano alle pagine 52a1-b5 e a 52d3-4.

8 Sul punto, lo studioso che forse ha posto nei termini più chiari il senso del problema della "generazione del mondo" è Matthias Baltes, nei lavori del 1976 (Baltes, 1976) e soprattutto del 1999 (Baltes, 1999), nel quale egli discute le varie opzioni esegetiche antiche e moderne, non esitando peraltro a prendere posizione in favore degli interpreti 'eternalisti'. Il problema della "ingenerabilità" o "generabilità" del mondo fu posto esplicitamente già da Aristotele (*De cael*. 1.10 279b5: "dobbiamo dire se il mondo è ingenerato o generato e se è incorruttibile o corruttibile"), il quale dimostrò la sua eternità e ingenerabilità polemizzando proprio con la posizione platonica, che evidentemente egli interpretava in senso 'temporalista' (cf. *De cael*. 1.10 279b4-280a34). In età moderna, la legittimità di un'interpretazione temporalista del *Timeo* è stata sostenuta da Vlastos, 1939 e, recentemente, da Sedley, 2007; in ogni caso, così come già accadde in età antica, l'opzione eternalista è maggioritaria: tra i suoi sostenitori il più importante è probabilmente, oltre a Baltes, Francis Macdonald Cornford (cf. Cornford, 1937).

9 La traduzione, per questa e per le altre citazioni dalla stessa opera, è tratta da Ferrari, Baldi, 2006.

10 Uso quest'espressione per intendere che cosa sono da sempre; Plutarco sembra infatti prediligere, nei suoi scritti di esegesi cosmologica, il cosiddetto "imperfetto filosofico" (esempio classico del quale è la definizione aristotelica di sostanza come τὸ τί ἦν

εἶναι, "ciò che era l'essere", in *Metaph*. 7.3 1028b34) quando deve descrivere la condizione precosmica. Cf. *De an procr.* 1024b5: "L'anima (scil. precosmica)… si trovava (ἦν) in mezzo ai due principi, e aveva (εἶχε) una natura simpatetica e congenere a entrambi"; cf. anche, per es., *Plat. Quaest*. 4, 1003a1: "l'anima irrazionale e il corpo informe coesistevano (συνυπῆρχον) l'uno con l'altro da sempre", oppure *Plat. Quaest*. 8.4 1007c3: "tempo non c'era (οὐκ ἦν)".

11 La traduzione italiana è di Fronterotta, 2003, leggermente modificata.

12 Il κινητικόν peraltro è causa non solo del movimento in senso stretto, "locale", ma anche di quello conoscitivo: l'intera sezione di *De an. procr.* 1023d3--1024b7 è dedicata a spiegare che il "movimento di natura opinativa che percepisce il sensibile" (ἀντιληπτικὴν τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ δοξαστικὴν, 1023f6), ossia uno dei movimenti che caratterizzano l'anima cosmica (e naturalmente anche quella individuale), non può derivare dall'essere indivisibile (che invece le garantisce il movimento "noetico, che culmina nella conoscenza"), bensì soltanto da un'entità che, divisibile, "è sempre in contatto con la materia" (1024b1). Tale entità non può essere, appunto, la materia stessa, essendo questa di per sé passiva e priva di qualità.

13 C'è, in questa netta esclusione di ogni elemento materiale dalla composizione dell'anima, una chiara polemica antistoica, che nel *De an. procr.* è in particolare rivolta contro Posidonio, colpevole di "non aver allontanato abbastanza l'anima dalla materia", avendo identificato la οὐσία μεριστή con "superfici e linee", e avendo definito l'anima "forma di ciò che è generalmente esteso" (1023b5-7).

14 Come già notato (cf. nota 4), i due termini compaiono entrambi nel *Filebo* - il primo nella sezione del "metodo divino" di 16d-17a; il secondo nella divisione ontologica di 23c-27c -, ma si discute se essi siano riferiti alla medesima entità. Non è qui necessario entrare nel dibattito relativo al *Filebo*; è sufficiente notare che Plutarco, probabilmente in forza della sua generale lettura cosmologica del pensiero platonico, sembra non pensare ad alcuna distinzione tra ἀπειρία e ἄπειρον.

15 Plutarco usa qui l'espressione τὸ γιγνόμενον, dove ci si aspetterebbe "mescolanza"; ma egli ha di fatto appena affermato che "ciascuna generazione avviene tramite la mescolanza" di limite e illimitato (τούτων δὲ μιγνυμένων πᾶσαν συνίστασθαι γένεσιν, 391b7), e, secondo Plutarco, la prima di tutte le γενέσεις è l'anima del mondo; è questa che garantisce il γιγνόμενον, ossia un divenire ordinato sul modello dell'essere, di cui è immagine.

16 Questa connessione è particolarmente interessante, perché getta una qualche luce sul problema relativo ai rapporti tra l'intelletto demiurgico e le idee all'interno del piano intelligibile: se si adotta anche qui un'impostazione derivazionista (per la quale cf. supra), dietro all'identico non può che vedersi appunto l'uno, cioè dio, principio di unità e dunque di identità (sull'identificazione uno-dio in Plutarco, cf. Opsomer, 2007, p. 382).

17 Naturalmente, perché l'analisi possa dirsi completa sarebbe necessario spiegare anche il modo in cui Plutarco intende la seconda mescolanza, quella che coinvolge l'identico e il diverso, per la quale il dialogo che viene chiamato in causa è il *Sofista*. Su questo mi riprometto tuttavia di tornare in un prossimo contributo.

Plotinus on Care of Self and Soul

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ABSTRACT

Plotinus' philosophical project includes an important Socratic element. Plotinus is namely interested in both self-knowledge and care of soul and self. In this study I examine how through his interpretation of three passages from Plato (*Timaeus* 35a, *Phaedrus* 246b and *Theatetus* 176a-b), Plotinus develops an account of the role of care in his ethics. Care in Plotinus' ethical thought takes three forms. First of all, care is involved in maintaining the unity of the embodied self. Secondly, situated in a providential universe, our souls – as sisters to the world soul - take part in the providential order by caring for 'lower' realities. Finally, Plotinus develops an ethics of going beyond virtue, a process which involves care for the higher, potentially divine, self.

Keywords: Plotinus; Care; Self; Soul; Self Knowledge; Virtue.

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At the very centre of Plotinus' philosophical preoccupations is a concern for understanding who we really are. Indeed, we might say that in addition to qualifying as a Neoplatonic philosopher, Plotinus is also in a crucial sense a Neosocratic philosopher.[1] This is not how Plotinus is usually perceived. In fact, Plotinus' thought has been characterized as "Platonism without Socrates" (Bröcker 1966). But a closer look at Plotinus' work suggests that Socrates' spirit is not absent from the *Enneads*. Not only does Plotinus pay heed to the command of the Delphic inscription *gnôthi seauton*, but his entire *oeuvre* may be understood as contributing to the Socratic project so pointedly elaborated in the *Apology*:

> For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care (*epimeleisthai*) for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul (*Ap.* 30a4-b2).[2]

Of course Plotinus – whose borrowing has sometimes obscured his originality – makes significant contributions to the development of the theme of care for the self, much of which is explicitly Platonic in inspiration. I suggest that we can better understand Plotinus' development of a philosophy of care if we understand it as oriented by three passages from Plato which frame respectively three aspects of Plotinus' thought pertaining to care of self and soul.

The first section of this paper will be devoted to Plotinus' understanding of the self as developed with reference to Plato's *Timaeus* 35a. According to Plotinus the self is multilayered: he often thinks of the layers of self in terms of the Platonic three-part model of the soul. But Plotinus works even more frequently with a model which simply juxtaposes higher and lower soul. He develops his understanding of care for the self primarily against the background of the distinction between higher and lower soul. In this first section of the paper, I make reference to the problem which Plotinus' notion of the impassibility of soul represents for his understanding of care for the soul. The second section of this paper treats Plotinus' explicit remarks concerning care, most of which are made with reference to *Phaedrus* 246b. Care plays a key role in Plotinus' understanding of the metaphysical dynamics of procession and return, explaining both why the soul is in the world and why it must ultimately be detached from the world. Furthermore, in this second section I examine how Plotinus develops a cosmological perspective on self and care. Finally, in the third section of this paper, I examine the connection between Plotinus' understanding of virtue and his thought concerning care. This section returns to a more properly Socratic theme. Here I discuss Plotinus' doctrine of virtue in terms of what I call a "horizon of virtue" and show how the notion of "excellence" is taken up and transformed in Plotinian ethics. In the end, Heracles – who makes a brief appearance in Plotinus' texts – will tie up some loose ends. I conclude that there are three basic types of care in Plotinus.

I THE PLOTINIAN SELF

Plotinus understands the embodied self as characterized by multiple levels.[3] Drawing on Plato's account of the creation of soul in the *Timaeus,* Plotinus formulates a position according to which soul – while remaining fundamentally unified – is the level of reality where multiplicity is most apparent. Plato describes the Demiurge's fashioning of the soul as

follows: "In between the *Being* that is indivisible and always changeless, and the one that is divisible and comes to be in the corporeal realm, he mixed a third, intermediate form of being, derived from the other two" (*Tim.* 35a.)[4] Although he often returns to it in order to readdress its meaning, Plotinus generally takes this passage to mean that the soul is a substance both simple and complex. Accordingly, Plotinus conceives of the self as a microcosm, but a microcosm on the model of the intelligible universe rather than the physical universe. Plotinus writes,

> For the soul is many things, and all things, both the things above and the things below down to the limits of all life, and we are each one of us an intelligible universe (*kosmos no*êtos), making contact with this lower world by the powers of soul below, but with the intelligible world by its power above and the powers of the universe; and we remain with all the rest of our intelligible part above, but by its ultimate fringe we are tied to the world below, giving a kind of outflow from it to what is below, or rather an activity, by which that intelligible part is not itself lessened (III 4 (15), 3, 21-27).[5]

When inquiring into the nature of the true self, Plotinus usually formulates his question in terms of the "we."[6] That is, rather than asking "who am I?" or "what is the self?" Plotinus asks "who are we?" Although for Plotinus the self, fluid as it is, is difficult to pin down, he does suggest that the "we" is the middle of the self which is conceived as a continuum of conscious and even unconscious states.[7] However, we discern behind the multi-leveled self in Plotinus a basic two-part model.[8] In I 1 (53), one of his most sustained investigations into the nature of the self, Plotinus writes,

> So "we" (*to hêmeis*) is used in two senses, either including the beast (*thêrion*) or referring to that which even in our present life transcends it (*to huper touto êdê*). The beast is the body which has been given life (*zôôthen to sôma*). But the true man (*ho d'alêthês anthrôpos*) is different, clear of these affections; he has the virtues which belong to the sphere of intellect and have their seat in the separate soul, separate and separable even while it is still here below (I 1 (53), 10, 6-10).

Plotinus goes so far as to refer to the soul as having something of an "amphibious nature" in the literal sense, that is, having "two lives."[9] Now, much of Plotinus' work on the self represents so many attempts to clarify the nature of the relationship between the two main levels of self. The "beast" (*thêrion*) is to be understood as "another man" attached to the first man or true self (VI 4 (22), 14). It is the composite self which takes part in both soul and body. But the soul that is constitutive of the lower self is according to Plotinus really only an "image" (*eidôlon*) or "reflection" of soul (I 1 (53), 11, 12-13). By this Plotinus means that in no sense is the soul trapped in matter or body (although, he never ceases to revisit the notion – evidently philosophically challenging for him – that the lower soul is an *eidôlon*).

When discussing the nature of the "we" (*hêmeis*) Plotinus recognizes that we can orient and direct our selves in different ways. The self is capable of becoming more than the sum of the levels of soul. Kevin Corrigan has called the "we" in Plotinus "a kind of proportional mean between higher and lower faculties" (Corrigan 2005, 83). And this proportion, it is worth adding, is subject to adjustment. Plotinus writes,

> But then does not the "we" include what comes before the middle? Yes, but there must be a conscious apprehension (*antilêpsis*) of it. We do not always use all that we have, but only when we direct our middle part towards the higher principles (*pros ta anô*) or their opposites, or to whatever we are engaged in bringing from potency or state to act. (I 1 (53), 11, 4-8)

In fact, Plotinus asserts that humans are what they are in virtue of their better part, and in such contexts he can speak of the directionality of the soul in terms of "escape" or "flight" (borrowing from *Theaetetus* 176a8-b1).[10]

In III 4 (15) Plotinus expresses the nature of this directionality of the self in terms of the *daimon* (of unmistakably of Socratic inspiration).[11] According to Plotinus the *daimon* is the level of the self which is immediately above the dominant principle in us. In a certain sense, we choose our *daimon*, Plotinus tells us. Consequently, it belongs to us in one sense, but another does not. For it guides us, while we do not possess it as a layer of the self in a strict sense. Rather, it points beyond the self.

In IV 3 (27) Plotinus explains that the dominance of the better part of the soul must be maintained if only simply to preserve the mere unity of ordinary consciousness. Towards the end of a long investigation into the faculty responsible for memory Plotinus concludes that it is the imagination (*to phantastikon*) which performs this function.[12] This conclusion is not particularly surprising; however, through the course of his argument Plotinus is forced to concede that both the higher and the lower soul have imagination. That is, there are two faculties of imagination in a single human. This is very problematic particularly if, as Plotinus asserts, the imagination also corresponds the level of everyday consciousness. He explains:

> Now when one soul is in tune with the other (*sumphônê hê hetera tê hetera*), and their image-making powers are not separate (*oude khôris tôn phantastikôn*), and that of the better soul is dominant (*kratountos te tou tês kreittonos*), the image becomes one, as if a shadow followed the other and as if a little light slipped in under the greater one; but when there is war and disharmony (*makhê …kai diaphônia*) between them, the other image becomes manifest by itself, but we do not notice what is in the other power, and we do not notice in general the duality of the souls. (IV 3 (27), 31, 9-14)

The fissure which can open up between the higher and lower souls, hence, may become apparent in a disunity of consciousness.

In light of this anthropology, an outline of what care for the self might look like according to Plotinus starts to take shape. Caring for the self is a matter of recognizing the plurality of levels of self and organizing them in such a way that a certain part – the higher part – dominates. But Plotinus sees domination by the higher part of soul in a very specific and qualified way, since the dominating part is itself not the highest kind of thing in the whole of reality. Moreover, this highest part of the soul is not always clearly discernable as a single separate element in the self as a whole. Therefore, rather than the notion of dominance, notions like "directionality" and "aspiration" better capture the significance of the Plotinian picture of hierarchy in the soul. Furthermore, while care for the self at some level involves "separation" of the soul from body, this does not mean the separation of the two levels of soul. Rather, care for the self involves maintaining the unity of the living being in face of the threat of fissure, rupture or disintegration. Moreover, care for

the living being involves the proper maintenance and training of the lower soul.[13] Hence, notions such as harmony and symphony are of key importance in Plotinian psychology. Much of this is, of course, an elaboration of Platonic and Aristotelian thought.

Now there is some tension in Plotinus' account here, since the lower soul is also for its part responsible for another kind of caring. It is the lower soul which cares for the body. Yet care in this sense is according to Plotinus like a shadow of the higher contemplative activity of the soul. This tension raises questions which will concern us in the next section of this paper.

But before proceeding to the second section of this paper we should briefly consider Plotinus' position on the impassibility of the soul. The impassibility of the soul in Plotinus is related to the doctrine that the soul is not entirely descended. Plotinus asserts namely that the soul is always partly attached to the intelligible realm even when it inhabits a body. In IV 3 (27) he paints the following picture borrowing the image from Homer: "For they did not come down with Intellect, but went on ahead of it down to earth, but their heads are firmly set above in heaven." (IV 3 (27), 12, 4-5)[14] In III 6 (26) Plotinus elaborates his doctrine of the impassibility of soul in dialogue with the Stoics. He develops a theory of the soul as fundamentally unaffected even though sensation and thought do involve process and change relating to a world which transcends the individual.[15] Here Plotinus draws on the Aristotelian idea of the soul as a form, and combines it – clearly departing from Aristotle – with the Platonic idea of the soul as self-moved.[16]

Plotinus' account in III 6 (26) concerning how the embodied soul interacts with its environment is complex and this is not the place to go into the details of his discussion. What is important in the present context is that Plotinus' position on the impassibility of the soul seems to represent a challenge to a coherent notion of care of the self. For if the soul cannot be affected in any real way, it is not clear why it should require any care at all. Indeed, the impassibility of the soul might seem to undermine any notion of active ethical engagement and instead promote quietism. Plotinus does not fail to deal with this issue. He writes,

> Why, then, ought we to seek to make the soul free from affections (*apathê*) by means of philosophy when it is not affected to begin with (*mêde ex archên paskhousan*)? Now, since the mental image (so to call it) (*hoion phantasma*) which penetrates it at the part which is said to be subject to affections produces the consequent affection (*pathêma*), disturbance (*tarakhê*), and the likeness of the expected evil is coupled with the disturbance, this kind of situation was called an affection and reason thought it right to do away with it altogether… it is as if someone who wanted to take away the mental pictures seen in dreams were to bring the soul which was picturing them to wakefulness, if he said that the soul had caused the affections, meaning that the visions as if from outside were the affections of the soul. (III 6 (26), 5, 1-13)

Plotinus' discussion of the importance of images in this passage opens a view toward a very complex domain of his thought, that of the "image making power" or "imagination" (*phantasia*). According to Plotinus what appear to be affections are in fact to be attributed to the power of the soul itself. The soul creates images in association with the physical world, but, as Plotinus insists, these images are not affections.

Plotinus addresses the problem of impassibility again at I 1 (53), 12 with an account somewhat less nuanced than that of III 6. He explains, "so the soul becomes compound (*sunthetos*), the product of all its elements, and is affected as a whole (*paskhei dê kata to holon*), and it's the compound which does wrong (*hamartanei*), and it is this which for Plato is punished, not the former." (I 1 (53), 12, 10 Armstrong translation slightly modified). Here it is the compound (*sunthetos*) – the combination of soul and body – which is the subject of affections, not the soul proper. This account of affection is much more readily adapted to the larger context of Plotinus' psychology, for, as we have seen, the body is ultimately animated only by an "image" of the higher soul.

So it turns out that we have in Plotinus two accounts of how to solve the impassibility problem: (1) the image making power of the soul working in a complex parallel relationship with the world (III 6 (26)) and (2) affections are relevant to the soul only insofar as it is part of the compound (I 1 (53)). Both accounts of how in the face of the impassibility of the soul preserve a place for ethics. To be sure, the Plotinian self does benefit from a great deal of security, since no matter how far it "descends" it always remains attached to the intelligible. In V 3 (49) Plotinus asserts that real self-knowledge does not occur at the level of soul but rather only at the level of intellect. But as far as the undescended soul is really with the intellect, it too has self-knowledge, even if this knowledge is mediated. We might say that, insofar as self-knowledge is at least partly constitutive of selfhood, for Plotinus the self is self thanks to its undescended soul. In any case, Plotinian ethics are oriented on the figure of this higher soul which cannot but lead one back to its source. But then what of this impassible self, which in a sense does not need care? In the next section I look at Plotinus's account of the power of soul and how in certain contexts this power manifests itself as power to care.

II PLOTINUS ON SOUL AS CARE

In the first section of this paper I attempted to outline Plotinus' philosophy of self and indicated how the Plotinian multilayered self, partly impassible, can be understood as an object of care. In the present section, I turn to Plotinus's more explicit accounts of care formulated largely through his reading of the *Phaedrus* where Plato writes: "all soul cares for (*epimeleitai*) all that lacks a soul and patrols all of heaven, taking different shapes at different times" (246 b).[17] Plotinus' reading of this passage brings into the discussion of care two new elements. First, it explicitly addresses the world soul, such that we can speak here of a cosmic aspect of care. Secondly, Plotinus addresses a certain ambiguity of care that arises at the human level of the cosmic project of care. I will suggest, somewhat provocatively, that Plotinus understands soul in this context to be equivalent to care itself. That is, the goodness which derives ultimately from the One-Good and which is manifest as timeless substance at the level of Intellect, is manifest as care at the level of soul, a temporal reality. This is namely the level at which intelligible reality interfaces with physical realm and the needs inherent in it.[18] In fact, it is plausible that Plotinus read the *Phaedrus* passage on the soul's care as an elaboration of the "definition" of the soul as self-mover which appears only a few lines earlier in the *Phaedrus* (245c).

Plotinus addresses the key *Phaedrus* passage cited above in various contexts. In general, he reads it as indicating how the world soul governs the world. But Plotinus sees the powers

and activities of individual souls as very close to, even in some sense coinciding with those of the world soul. Plotinus' first reference to the *Phaedrus* passage is in an early work IV 8 (6) (one of his most cited works because it begins with the passage describing a mystical experience). Already in the second chapter, however, he turns to cosmology, writing:

> So that what happens to us when we seek to learn from Plato about our own soul is that we have also to undertake a general enquiry about soul (*peri psuchês holôs zêtêsai*), about how it has ever become naturally adapted to fellowship with body, and about what kind of a universe we ought to suppose that it is in which soul dwells … Plato says that our soul as well, if it comes to be with that perfect soul (the world soul), is perfected itself and "walks on high and directs the whole universe"; when it departs to be no longer within bodies and not to belong to any of them, then it also like the Soul of the All will share with ease in the direction of the All, since it is not evil in every way for soul to give body the ability to flourish and to exist (*tên tou eu dunamin kai tou einai*)[19], because not every kind of provident care (*pronoia*) for the inferior deprives the being exercising it of its ability to remain in the highest. (IV 8 (6) 2, 1-26)

It is worth making a few comments before looking at the remainder of this passage. First of all, it is striking how closely Plotinus links self-knowledge at the level of soul with knowledge of the cosmos: to know the self one must also know the universe. Not only does he link self-knowledge to knowledge of the cosmos, he also presents the cosmic soul as a model for human striving. The world soul is engaged in a kind of "care" (here *pronoia* usually translated as "providence"[20]) precisely for something "inferior" which according to certain principles might seem to be a task unworthy of the soul. Indeed, we have already seen in the previous section how a certain "care of the self" is precisely a matter of organizing the self such that, on the one hand, the higher self dominates whole self and on the other, the higher self is itself is oriented according to what is above it – the *daimon*. Plotinus certainly does qualify his assertion that provident activity is good: "it is not in every way evil" (*mê pasa pronoia tou cheironos*).[21] Nevertheless, the work of providence here is precisely a matter of transmitting "the Good and Being" to further levels in the order of reality. One might be reminded of the return to the cave in the Plato's *Republic* Book VII.[22]

The remainder of the passage is dedicated to drawing a clear distinction between two kinds of caring (with rather obvious reference to Gnostic views). It reads as follows:

> For there are two kinds of care of everything (*dittê gar epemeleia pantos*), the general (*to men katholou*), by the inactive command of one setting in order with royal authority, and the particular (*to de kathekasta*), which involves actually doing something oneself and by contact with what is being done infects (*anapimplasa*[23]) the doer with the nature of what is being done. Now, since the divine soul is always said to direct the whole heaven in the first way, transcendent in its higher part but sending its last and lowest power into the interior of the world, God could not still be blamed for making the soul of the All exist in something worse, and the soul would not be deprived of its natural due, which it has from eternity and will have for ever, which cannot be against its

> nature in that it belongs to it continually and without having beginning. (IV 8 (6) 2, 26- 38)

In this passage Plotinus contrasts an *epimeleia katholou* ("universal care") with an *epimeleia kathekasta* ("particular care"). There are several ways in which we might understand this dichotomy. First, Plotinus might mean that, on the one hand, we tend to care for our own particular selves whereas, on the other, the world soul is preoccupied with the whole of nature. Or, second, he might mean by "particular care" (*katheskasta*) that we are confined to act in a particular time and place in association with those with whom we happen to come into contact. Or, third, it is possible that by "particular" Plotinus refers also to the fact the individual actor has only restricted means at his or her disposal when it comes to caring.

There is an unmistakable echo of Stoic ethical thought in the reminder to look at the world from the standpoint of the universal *logos*.[24] Although Plotinus is certainly influenced by the Stoic view, he working in a fundamentally Platonic paradigm in which the soul is an immaterial reality distinct from reason, possessing a capacity to "care" (to my knowledge Stoics would not really say that the world soul "cares"), and providing goodness and being to that for which it cares. Indeed, what characterizes care in, say, the *Apology* is the fact that it represents a commitment grounding a relation which is free from the conditions that govern other varieties of association. Not only does one provide for the object of care, but one also recognizes the existence and goodness of that for which one cares. The object of care has being and goodness independent of that proffering the care.[25]

In another context where he invokes the *Phaedrus* passage Plotinus writes, "And the text "All soul cares for that which is without soul" applies especially to the world soul, and to the other souls in another way" (III 4 (15), 2, 1). The meaning is not entirely clear. Perhaps Plotinus is reaffirming the distinction between universal and particular care that he had made in the passage cited above. According to this reading, 'in another way' means *epimeleia kathekasta* ('particular care'). Or perhaps, on the contrary, Plotinus is in fact suggesting that the difference between the respective ways that world soul and individual soul care does not correspond strictly to the distinction between *epimeleia katholou* with an *epimeleia kathekasta* (despite the fact that Plotinus does tend to associate *epimeleia katholou* with the world soul). [26]

Indeed, latter on in his *oeuvre* Plotinus weakens the distinction between the caring activities of the world soul and those of the individual souls. In his extended work *On difficulties about the soul* (*Enneads* IV 3-5 (27-29)) Plotinus addresses the *Phaedrus* passage twice (IV 3 (27), 1, 34 and 7, 13). The context is rather complex, since Plotinus' references to the *Phaedrus* occur in the course of objections to a series of arguments made by his opponents with a view to proving that individual souls are parts of the world soul. Plotinus argues that individual souls are not parts of the world soul. Rather, they have exactly the same status and powers as the world soul. Plotinus explains as follows:

> And what about the passage in the *Phaedrus* "All soul cares for all that is soulless"? What could it be, then, which directs the nature of body, and shapes it or sets it in order or makes it, except soul? And it is not the case that one soul is naturally able to do this, but the other not. Plato says, then, that the "perfect" soul, the soul of the All, "Walks on high", and

> does not come down, but, as we may say, rides upon the universe and works in it; and does; and this is the manner of every soul which is perfect. (IV 3 (27), 7, 12-19)

It seems strange enough that there could be more than one soul which governs the universe but Plotinus asserts that "every soul which is perfect" has the fundamental capacity to govern the universe. And this includes, at least in principle, our souls (IV 3 (27), 6). However, although they ultimately do have the power to function like the world soul, our souls have "departed to the depths" (*apestêsan eis bathos*: IV 3 (27), 6, 26), that is, descended deeper into bodies than has the world soul. But even in this later reading of the *Phaedrus* passage the nature of the individual soul's care is not entirely clear. Plotinus adds later in the same Ennead,

> So the great light abides and shines, and its radiance goes out through the world in rational order and proportion; the other lights join in illuminating, some staying in their places, but others are more attracted by the brightness of what is illuminated. Then as the things which are illuminated need more care (*phrontidos*), just as the steersmen of ships in a storm concentrate more and more on the care (*phrontidi*) and are unaware that they are forgetting themselves, that they are in danger of being dragged down with the wreck of the ships, these souls incline downwards more with what is theirs. Then they are held fettered with bonds of magic, held fast by their care (*kêdemonia*) for [bodily] nature. But if every living creature was like the All, a perfect and sufficient body and not in danger of suffering, then the soul which is said to be present would not be present in it, and would give life while remaining altogether in the upper world. (IV 3 (27), 17, 18-31 translation Armstrong, slightly modified)

In this passage the vocabulary of care shifts away from the notion of *epimeleia* of the *Phaedrus* passage (and the *Apology*) towards other terms. *Phrontis* means in its primary sense "thought" and "reflection," but usage evolved such that it came to designate "care," often a fretful care, and hence, in some contexts in can be translated by "anxiety" and even "hypochondria." Perhaps we could translate it here as "anxious care."[27] *Kêdemonia* can mean "care," of course,[28] but the primary sense of *kêdemon* is "protector," "guardian" or "one who has charge of another." And the older sense of the verb *kêdô* and the noun *kêdos* both of which are found in Homer seems to have a lot to do with "trouble." In brief, these lexical items seem to have more pejorative connotations than *epimeleia*. The displacement in vocabulary corresponds to the difference between humanity and the universe.[29] As the last line in the passage cited above suggests, we are – at least in our embodied state – "in danger of suffering," in contrast to the world soul which is *akindunon pathein* "in no danger of being affected."

But the idea that the soul of the universe is for us a "sister soul" (*adelphê psukhê*: IV 3 (27), 6, 14) implies precisely that we are like it. At the very end of his notorious polemic against the Gnostics in II 9 (33), Plotinus returns once again to his favourite *Phaedrus* passage. Having thoroughly scolded members of his school for believing that the world could be the product of a "bad" demiurge and hence deficient, Plotinus concludes:

> As we draw near to the completely untroubled state (*eggus de genomenoi tou*

> *aplêktou*) we can imitate the soul of the universe and of the stars, and, coming to a closeness of resemblance to them hasten on to the same goal and have the same objects of contemplation, being ourselves, too, well prepared for them by nature and cares (*epimeleiais*)[30] (but they have their contemplation from the beginning). Even if the Gnostics say that they alone can contemplate, that does not make them any more contemplative, nor are they so because they claim to be able to go out of the universe when they die while the stars are not, since they adorn the sky for ever. They would say this through complete lack of understanding of what "being outside" really means, and how "universal soul cares for all that is soulless." (II 9 (33), 18, 30-40 translation Armstrong, slightly modified)

This decisive passage shows that it is precisely having been an object of care ("well prepared for them by nature and cares (*epimeleias*)") that makes our souls capable of caring in the way that the world soul does. Care engenders care. And it is only soul that cares. Moreover, this caring activity of soul counts among its highest activities.

III THE HORIZON OF VIRTUE

When Socrates in the *Apology* incites his hearers to care for the best possible state of their souls he seems to see this care of soul as coinciding with care for virtue.[31] If, as I have suggested, Plotinus' work contributes to a Socratic project, how does it stand with virtue? Does care for the self coincide with a care for virtue in Plotinus?[32] The answer will be both "yes" and "no." On the one hand, care of the embodied self does more or less coincide with virtue for Plotinus. On the other hand, when discussing virtue Plotinus always has in mind a goal beyond virtue.[33] Plotinus often recalls how in *Theatetus* 176a-b Plato speaks of the ultimate goal of the philosopher as *homoiôsis theô* "becoming like God."[34] However, while in Plato one might perceive a relative continuity between virtue and likeness to God, Plotinus makes it very clear that virtue is a concept relevant only at the level of embodied human reality, not beyond. We can, then, speak of a "horizon of virtue," that is, a limit shaping our experience beyond which we cannot entirely remove ourselves in our current condition. As a horizon there is implicitly a realm beyond it, to which by way of certain philosophical practices we can have some kind of access. In fact, according to Plotinus, the realm beyond the horizon of virtue is that to which we should ultimately be aiming ourselves.

Just as he adopts the two level model of the soul from Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus makes use of the Aristotelian distinction between "moral" and "intellectual" virtue. However, Plotinus modifies the Aristotelian position in three principle ways. First, he rejects calling what in Aristotle is referred to as "intellectual virtue," virtue at all. Second, he interprets the distinction between moral and intellectual virtue with reference to Platonic structures of mimesis and participation, asserting that what is above virtue (in intellect) is a paradigm for virtue in embodied reality. Third, he situates this account of virtue in his own metaphysical system, which includes an account of the movements of souls from one level to the next in "procession" and "return." According to Plotinus virtue is a necessary goal in life at the level of embodied reality, but loses it significance as the soul moves to higher levels of reality.

Plotinus discusses virtue most extensively in I 2 (19) *On Virtues*. He states his basic position clearly at the end of chapter 3: "And virtue belongs to the soul, not to Intellect or That which is beyond it" (I 2, (19), 3, 31). And Plotinus does not tire of reminding his reader that the ultimate goal for the philosopher lies beyond virtue. Plotinus even suggests that, at least at some level, virtue is simply equivalent to the avoidance of error. He writes, "Our concern, though, is not to be out of error, but to be god" (I 2, (19), 6, 2-3 trans. Armstrong modified). The implication is that narrow concern with right misses the point of virtue altogether. Plotinus thus warns against a legalistic view of virtue. Of course, Aristotle would agree. But Plotinus generally goes further in relativizing the importance of virtue, making what we could take to be a strong "Platonic" claim: Plotinus proscribes the practice of any virtue in isolation from contemplation (*theôria*).

Plotinus also seems to wish to alert his reader to the possibility that certain types of virtue ethics become "egoistic"[35]:

> There are two kinds of wisdom, one in intellect, one in soul. That which is There [in Intellect] is not virtue, that in soul is virtue. What is it, then, There? The act of the self, what it really is; virtue is what comes Thence and exists here in another. For neither absolute justice (*autodikaiosunê*) nor any other moral absolute is virtue, but a kind of exemplar (*hoion paradeigma*); virtue is what is derived from it in the soul. Virtue is someone's virtue (*tinos gar hê aretê*); but the exemplar of each particular virtue in the intellect belongs to itself, not to someone else (*auto de hekaston hautou, oukhi de allou*). (I 2, (19), 6, 13-19)

The true self transcends the particular instances of virtue we cultivate in the physical world. Plotinus understands these this-worldly virtues in good Platonic manner as copies of something better.[36] Furthermore, this passage asserts that the intellect grounds virtue by housing the exemplars of virtue, while not being virtuous itself.

Plotinus often writes of "political virtue" (*politikê aretê* or "civic virtue" as Armstrong tends to translate it) referring all the same, I think, to moral virtue in general. Such virtues both provide limit and as forms in the Intellect are themselves limited. Plotinus explains:

> The political virtues (*politikai aretai*), which we mentioned above, do genuinely set us in order and make us better by giving limit and measure to our desires (*horizousai kai metrousai tas epithumias*), and putting measure into our experience (*holôs ta pathê metrousai*); and they abolish false opinions (*pseudas doxas aphairousai*), by what it altogether better and by the fact of limitation, and by the exclusion of the unmeasured and indefinite in accord with their measuredness; and they are themselves limited and clearly defined. (I 2, (19), 2, 13-18 translation Armstrong modified)

It is interesting that the moral virtues seem also seem to have an intellectual function insofar as they "abolish false opinions." We must admit, then, that the distinction between moral and intellectual virtue which Plotinus borrows from Aristotle is modified such that moral virtue very clearly includes certain intellectual operations.[37] This is at least in part a consequence of Plotinus' engagement with Stoic thought.

In general, one might be tempted to assert that the notion of virtue (*aretê*) in Plotinus had in some sense lost its original, more general,

meaning "excellence" and come to designate something closer to what is often intended by the term virtue in our day, something like "respect for a certain code of behaviour." It would indeed seem a little odd for Plotinus to talk of the *aretê* of a flute player as does Aristotle.[38] Yet what Plotinus does preserve of an earlier Greek notion of virtue is precisely the sense that the measure or criteria of excellence is ultimately internal to the person and is not a matter of adopting an external code.

In several different contexts Plotinus works with what could be called a heroic model of virtue which had been at play in Greek philosophical ethics since almost the beginning.[39] Heroism is a key way by which Plato expresses the nature of excellence in moral achievement. Already in the *Apology* (36d-37a) Socrates compares his achievements to those of the Olympic victors, asserting that he deserves the free meals of the Prytaneum at least as much as those athletes. He justifies his claim thus: "The Olympian victor makes you think yourself happy; I make you happy (*eudaimon*)" (36d9-10). The comparison of the ethically successful person to the victorious athlete has important parallels in Cynic thought.[40] Other decisive parallels can be found in Plato himself. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates concludes his second speech (the last of the three speeches) thus: "After death, when they have grown wings and become weightless, they have won the first of three rounds in these, the true Olympic contests" (256b).[41] Less explicit, but clearly in the same vein, are the remarks at the very end of the *Republic*. Having just concluded his narration of the myth of Er, Socrates says to Glaucon that, if they act in accordance with the philosophy he just developed, "we'll be friends to both ourselves and to the gods while we remain here on earth and afterwards – like victors in the games who go around collecting their prizes – we'll receive our rewards" (621c-d).

Plotinus adopts such a figure of thought at the end of IV 3 (27) (and in I 1 (53)) where he evokes the figure of Heracles. Heracles (never mentioned by Plato) is of course, a key figure in Stoic thought, a paradigm of the sage. He is an interesting figure for Plotinus, not only because he exemplifies the struggle for excellence necessary for moral progress, but also because the myths surrounding Heracles suggest a double destiny: on the one hand, as a shade in Hades and, on the other, as a deified hero. Plotinus thought of these two eschatologies as in some sense representing the nature of our higher and lower souls. It seems that for Plotinus Heracles is like the Olympic victor for Socrates. Plotinus writes somewhat disparagingly of Heracles' accomplishments:

> And Homer's Heracles might talk about his heroic deeds (*ekeinos andragathias heautou*); but the man who thinks these of little account (*tauta smikra hêgoumenos*), has migrated to a holier place (*metatetheis eis hagiôteron topon*), is namely in the intelligible, having been stronger than Heracles in the contests in which the wise compete (*athleuousi sophoi*), - (IV 3 (27) 32, 24-28 trans Armstrong modified)[42]

> What will he say? And what will the soul remember when it has come to be in the intelligible world, and with that higher reality?... (IV 4 (28), 1, 1-2)

The figure of Heracles brings together the three perspectives that I have attempted to distinguish in this investigation of care for self and soul in Plotinus. That is, Heracles clearly represents the divided self discussed in the first section of this paper and allows Plotinus to define and point beyond the horizon of virtue. But what of the notion of caring which is the very centre of this study? I suggest, further, that

the figure of Heracles also serves in Plotinus's discourse as it did in popular Hellenistic thought: Heracles was the benefactor of mankind.[43] He *cared* for mankind. It seems, then, that virtue and care in some sense coincide. The notion of care is only relevant at the level of soul, just as virtue *per se* is relevant only at the level of soul. Perhaps for Plotinus care and virtue are ultimately the same thing: they are a commitment to good actions which propagate goodness in the physical universe. If virtue has its paradigm in the intelligible, so too must care. Although Socrates does not put things quite this way, care and virtue arguably cannot be dissociated from one another in Socrates' thought any more than they can in Plotinus'.

In his penultimate treatise Plotinus returns to the figure of Heracles and in this context we hear a clear reference to the problems examined above in the context of Plotinus' reading of the *Phaedrus* passage. Plotinus writes,

> The soul is said to go down or incline (*katabainein kai neuein*) in the sense that the thing which receives light from it lives with it (*zunezêkenai autê*). It abandons its image (*to eidôlon*) if there is nothing at hand to receive it; and it abandons it not in the sense that it is cut off but in that it no longer exists; and the image no longer exists when the whole soul is looking to the intelligible world. The poet seems to be separating (*khôrizein*) the image with regard to Heracles when he says that his shade is in Hades, but he himself among the gods. He was bound to keep to both stories, that he is in Hades and that he dwells among the gods, so he divided him. But perhaps this is the most plausible explanation of the story (*takha d'an houtô pithanos ho logos eiê*): because Heracles had this active virtue (*praktikên aretên*) and in view of his noble character (*kalokagathian*) was deemed worthy to be called a god – because he was an active (*praktikos*) and not a contemplative person (*theoretikos*) (in which case he would have been altogether in that intelligible world), he is above, but there is also still a part of him below. (I I (53), 12, 27-39))

According to Plotinus' reading of the *Theatetus*, care for the self ultimately requires us to become like God. The lower soul is not cut off or sent to Hades in Plotinus, but as a reflection, simply departs with that which it imitates. As far as virtue is concerned, we are to do a better job than Heracles who – although of noble character – failed to sufficiently cultivate his contemplative self. Heracles, as it were, failed to aim beyond the horizon of virtue.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to illuminate Plotinus' thought on care for self and soul from three vantage points related to three passages in Plato's dialogues. These perspectives taken together provide a relatively comprehensive view of the Plotinian understanding of care for self and soul. I have attempted to show how the multilayered Plotinian self is cared for by the adoption of a certain directionality plotted against the background of the levels of Plotinus' metaphysical system. To care for the self is to identify with the best part of one's self and to aim beyond one's self to higher realities. By doing so, one unifies the self, preventing fissures from opening up in it, such as emerge in the context of Plotinus' doctrine of the double imagination. The soul is nevertheless essentially a caring reality and therefore undertakes to look out for the good of reality even below itself. That the soul should both care for what is lower than it and yet aim for

that which is higher than it means that the soul is active in two directions. One might even speak of a "tension" here. In fact, the multi-layered self is in some sense held together by the activities of the soul which extend outward in two directions. Nevertheless, the human soul's activities of caring for that which is below it can represent a danger for it, since our souls do not have the sovereignty which is exemplified by the world soul. The world soul cares without running any risk of suffering and is hence the model for the activities of our souls. This impassible care represents the paradigm of caring for Plotinus. Or, in other words, according to Plotinus, we should be the world soul of our microcosm. Finally, Plotinus' notion that virtue is meaningful and relevant only at the level of soul suggests that the realms of care and of virtue correspond. I have suggested that we can think of Plotinus doctrine of virtue as elaborating a realm defined by a horizon of virtue beyond which virtue itself points. The figure of Heracles serves to bring together the notion of virtue as both excellence and beneficence with the idea that we should struggle to go beyond virtue itself in striving to be "like God." In the end we can distinguish three kinds of care in Plotinus: 1) a care for self proper, which involves balancing levels of soul and working out techniques to maintain proper consciousness; 2) a cosmic care which involves a care for other as embodied (in self, nature and other people); and finally 3) what we might call a hyper-virtuous care, one which is manifested in the desire to be "like God."

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Endnotes

1 Cf. *Ap.* 28e5-6 and 29e. Compare Song 2009 who argues – correctly, I believe – against interpretations of Plotinus that attribute to him an entirely otherworldly ethics.

2 Translation Grube in Cooper, 1997.

3 For recent discussions of self in Plotinus see Remes 2007, Aubry 2011 and Mortley 2013.

4 Translation Zeyl in Cooper 1997. In fact, the passage and the process it describes are longer and more complex but these are the lines to which Plotinus repeatedly makes reference. Compare Plotinus III 9 (13) 1, 36.

5 This and all subsequent translations from Plotinus's Enneads shall be (unless otherwise indicated) from Armstrong 1966-1988.

6 I 1 (53), 7, 6ff.; III 3 (15), 5, 19-23; VI 4 (22) 14, 16; VI 5 (23), 7, 1 IV 4 (28), 18, 11-15; I 4 (46), 9, 25-10; V 3 (49), 3, 31-39; II 3 (52), 9, 13-15.

7 See e.g. I 1 (53), 11.

8 See in this context Stern-Gillet 2009.

9 IV 8 (6), 4, 32-38: "Souls, then, become, one might say, amphibious, compelled to live by turns the life There, and the life here: those which are able to be more in the company of Intellect live the life There more, but those whose normal condition is, by nature or chance, the opposite, live more the life here below. Plato indicates this unobtrusively when he distinguishes again the products of the second mixing-bowl and makes parts of them; then he says that they must enter into becoming, since they became parts of this kind."

10 See III 4 (15), 2, 4-15: "For the dominant part of it makes the thing appropriate to itself, but the other parts do nothing, for they are outside. In man, however, the interior parts are not dominant but they are always present; and in fact the better part does not always dominate; the other parts exist and have a certain place. Therefore we also live like being characterized by sense-perception, for we, too, have sense-organs; and in many ways we live like plants, for we have a body which grows and produces; so that all things work together, but the whole form is man in virtue of its better part. But when it goes out of body if becomes what there was most of in it. Therefore one must "escape" to the upper world, that we may not sink to the level of sense-perception by pursuing the images of sense, or to the level of the growth-principle by following the urge for generation and the "gluttonous love of good eating," but may rise to the intelligible and intellect and God."

11 For Plotinus' understanding of *daimôn* see Timotin 2012, 286-300.

12 IV 3 (27), 29, 31-32.

13 See IV 3 (27), 32. Although I agree with many of the conclusions in Stern-Gillet 2009, I do not agree that "In Plotinus' ethics, therefore, every single virtue, whether civic or purifactory, is, directly or indirectly, focused on the care of the (higher) self of the virtuous person rather than on the care of the self (higher or lower) of others" (p. 338).

14 Cf. IV 8 (6), 8, 1-11 and Homer, *Iliad* 4, 443. Most latter Neo-Platonists rejected the Plotinian doctrine of the undescended soul. Cf. for example Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 211.

15 For a recent discussion of impassibility in Plotinus see Noble 2013.

16 *Autokinêton* Phaedrus 245c.

17 Translation Nehamas and Woodruff in Cooper 1997, modified.

18 Compare Song 2009 who writes correctly, I believe, "Hence, in Plotinus' view, benevolence is part of the very nature of soul, apart from the question whether she is conscious of it or not" (p. 38).

19 Literally: "the power of the Good and of Being."

20 In this paper I will not discuss the obvious Stoic influence on Plotinus here.

21 Armstrong's translation is misleading here. It should read "not all providence removes from the provident being the ability to remain in what is better." That is, it is the type of providence which is at issue. On my reading some forms of providence may be entirely free from "evil" (a word which does not appear in the passage!)

22 This in fact is the central argument in Song 2009.

23 The word literally means "to fill." See also Plato *Philebus* 42a. Armstrong translates here perhaps too clearly the pejorative sense which may be understood in the context of occurrences in Plato such as *Phaedo* 67 a.

24 See for example Stobaeus (2.75, 11-76,8) on Zeno. (Translation in Long and Sedley 1987, 394.)

25 Socrates tries to show precisely how Meletus does not care about the youth. See *Ap.* 25c-26b.

26 I am inclined to prefer Bréhier's reading to Armstrong's. Brehier translates as follows: « Les paroles de Platon : « l'âme en général prends soin de tout ce qui est inanimé » s'applique surtout à l'âme universelle. Mais chaque âme le fait de sa manière." Armstrong sees the contrast otherwise, translating, "And the text "All soul care for that which is without soul" applies to this [the power of growth] in particular; other kinds of soul [care for the inanimate] in other ways." Armstrong has some good support for his reading on the basis of what follows in the chapter. However, Armstrong's read-

ing makes Plotinus' interpretation of the *Phaedrus* passage in this Ennead inconsistent with essentially all of the other interpretations of it that he offers in his oeuvre. I think it is clear that the overall context should trump the particular in this case.

27 Plotinus discusses the care of individual souls in terms of *phrontis* also in IV 3 (27), 13 and in chapter 18 where he talks of souls coming down "full of care and in a state of greater weakness" (*phrontidos plêroumenês kai mallon ashtenousês*). To be sure, the *Apology* links both *epimeleia* and *phrontis* at 29 e such there are grounds to see these terms as having a similar meaning in Plato. See also *Ap.* 25c.

28 Compare *Republic* 463d.

29 There are two further elements of the vocabulary of care in Plotinus which we will not be able to address here *ôpheleia* which has in an important place in its etymology a notion of service and aid: "There came into being something like a beautiful and richly various house which was not cut off from its builder, but he did not give it a share in himself; he considered it all, everywhere, worth a care (*ôphelimou*) which conduces to its very being and excellence (as far as it can participate in being)" (IV 3 (27), 9, 29-33). And *therapeia* see I 1 (53) 3, 11; VI 8 (39) 5, 19; II 9 (33) 14, 21 and IV (27), 4, 36.

30 Armstrong translates *epimeleias* as "training" here, a rendering which I think undermines the logic of the passage.

31 For care of the best possible state of the soul, see 29e (*tês psyches hopôs hôs beltisê estai*). For care of virtue see 31b and 41e. Cf. *Ap.* 36c: "I went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit, by trying to persuade him not to care for any of his belongings before caring that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible" and 38 a where it is suggested that "the greatest good for man [is] to discuss virtue every day."

32 For a discussion of the relation between care ethics and virtue ethics see Halwani 2003.

33 On the connection between virtue and happiness in Plotinus see McGroarty 2006 and Gerson 2012.

34 The context is quite important. Socrates says, "But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil should be destroyed – for there must always be something opposed to the good; nor is it possible that it should have its seat in heaven. But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth. That is why 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 and pure, with understanding. But it is not at all an easy matter, my good friend, to persuade men that it is not for the reason commonly alleged that one should try to escape from wickedness and pursue virtue. It is not in order to avoid a bad reputation and obtain a good one that virtue should be practiced and obtain a good one that virtue should be practiced and not vice; that, it seems to me, is only what men call 'old wives' talk." (*Tht.* 176a-c). For an insightful discussion of how Plotinus appropriates the Platonic notion of *homoiôsis theô* in terms of the One see Beierwaltes 2002.

35 A robust defense of Plotinus ethics against the charge of egotism can be found in Stern-Gillet 2009.

36 "He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods; for it is to them, not to good men, that we are to be made like. Likeness (*homoiôsis*) to good men is the likeness of two pictures of the same subject to each other (*eikôn eikôni*); but likeness to the gods is likeness to the model (*paradeigma*), a being of a different kind to ourselves" (I 2, (19), 7, 26-30).

37 This is not to say that intellect is not part of the Aristotelian notion of moral virtue; however, Aristotle is in his ethics not interested in opinions *per se*.

38 *Nicomachean Ethics* I 7.

39 This model is related to the less metaphorically loaded model of the sage which plays an important role both in Socratic and in Plotinian thought. For discussions of this element in Plotinus' ethics see Schniewind 2003 and Dillon 1996.

40 Diogenes reports of his Cynic homonym, "To someone boasting 'At the Pythian games I am victorious over men,' Diogenes said, 'I am victorious over men, while you are victorious over slaves'" (Diogenes Laertius VI, 33) Almost exactly the same anecdote is reported of Diogenes at the Olympic games (Diogenes Laertius VI, 43).

41 Compare *Phaedrus* 247 b 5-6. Plotinus makes reference to this at I, 6 (1), 7.

42 Armstrong seems to have missed a few words in his translation here.

43 These conceptions of Heracles as benefactor do, of course, go back to classical Greece. See for example Euripides *Heracles* 177ff., 853, 1194.

BOOK REVIEWS

Samuel Scolnicov, 2018. Plato's method of hypothesis in the Middle dialogues, edited by Harold Tarrant, with a foreword by Hanna Scolnicov. Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag. 253pp.

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"This volume presents the Cambridge doctoral dissertation by Samuel Scolnicov, submitted as a graduate student of King's College. The original title pages gives the submission date of September 1973, and the degree was awarded the following year". (p. 7). The supervisors were Dr. Peck, Prof. Keith Guthrie (unofficial), Prof. Bernard Williams and Prof. Geoffrey Lloyd.

It may seem odd to publish a thesis submitted almost fifty years ago, but the editor Harold Tarrant explains why: "When conversing about Plato, Samuel Scolnicov (1941-2014) not infrequently mentioned doctoral thesis, and I suspect that I asked him more than once what the topic was. From his eartier essays on he had referred to it (a list of Samuel Scolnicov's publications is to be found from p. 238 to 249 of this book), and he published articles devoted to the hypothetical method in *Kant-Studien* (1975) and *Methexis* (1992). He still remained committed to its principal claims in his treatment of *Republic* V-VII (1988); and his book on the *Parmenides* (2003), which was a natural dialogue to tackle as a sequel to the present work, reiterates many of its findings (2003). However, he nowhere returned to the issues with the same thoroughness and scholarly acumen that is demonstrated in the present pages. When I finally read the thesis in Cambridge University Library I felt that here was the key of much else that he had published on Plato, a work that showed his fondamental commitment to Plato – to a Plato who was importantly different from Aristotle, not just Aristotle's more problematic precursor". (p. 10). Harold Tarrant is right. Even if after the submission of this thesis, a lot of papers have been published on ὑπόθεσις, δόξα, ἐπιστήμη, the line, the cave etc., Samuel Scolnicov's work is still relevant.

At the beginning of his work, Samuel Scolnicov gives credit to the Marburg neo-kantians, and in particular to H. Cohen 1878, P. Natorp

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1903 and N. Hartmann 1965, for having stressed the importance of Plato's hypothetical method. "For them, Plato's hypothesis was the idea as objectivized principle of thought, whose function was to make possible scientific reasoning". (p. 39). One can disagree with these scholars on the definition of the idea as "objectivized principle of thought", but one must agree with its function.

In addition, it is usually assumed that the hypothetical method described in Plato is connected to the form of mathematical reasoning later called *analysis* by mathematicans. This is not false, but the method has been understood differently by different commentators. "According to the traditional view of analysis, the method consisted in 'hypothesing the proposition to be proved and deducing the consequences from that proposition, until you have reached a consequence which you knew independently to be true or to be false. You could then, if the consequence was a true one, use it as the premise of a proof of your *demonstrand*; and if it was a false one, you could use its contradictory as a disproof of the proposition you had hoped to establish ". (Robinson 1953, 121). According to this interpretation accepted by Heath 1921 and Wedberg 1955, analysis is a method of deduction in both directions: from the premises to the *demonstrand* as well as from the *demonstrand* to its premises. As a consequence, "*reductio ad absurdum* is a special case of analysis: a supposed premise known as false is reached, and the *demonstrand* is proved false starting from the contradictory of the supposed premise". (p. 46)

But if, in Plato, the idea, as a hypothesis, is not on the same metaphysical level as sensible things participating in it, these sensible things being but the images of a unique model, it does mean that analysis is not a deduction, but an intuition, the divination of the premises supporting a given conclusion. This is what is explained in the next three chapters, one on the *Meno* and the two on the *Phaedo*.

The account of learning offered by Socrates in the *Meno* is mythical, but "[b]y clothing it in a mythical robe Plato seems to be stressing the non-deductive aspect of this account". (p. 83). There are disagreements between scholars on this point. *Meno* is the first dialogue in which the method of division is mentioned, but this method is only sketched, in view of the nature the main character Meno. In the *Phaedo*, however, Plato gives the method of division a broader basis. In this dialogue, Plato indeed seems more interested in the foundation of the doctrine of the ideas than in the existence of the soul. "The *nature* of the soul is argued mainly from its function as knowing agent and is thus, in a restricted sense, dependent on the existence of ideas as objects of knowledge. It would seem then that, at least according to the line of argument taken in the *Phaedo*, the ὑποθέσεις αἱ πρῶται would be the ideas themselves. And the call for re-examination of the first hypotheses could be the linking rope of the ἀνυπόθετος ἀρχή in the *Republic*." (p. 119)

As a matter of fact, the core of the book is the next three chapters on the *Republic*. Samuel Scolnicov first claims that the inquiry into the foundations of knowledge in the soul and the city is hardly distinguishable from an inquiry into justice in the soul and in the city. He then assumes that there is an identity, and not only an analogy, of *genê* between the city and the soul, and that justice consists in maintaining the proper arrangement of both, that is, their natural good order : "Wisdom as the excellence of reason is knowledge (επιστήμη), and knowledge is distinct from opinion. This distinction implies, in its turn, an ontological distinction between ideas and sensibles. The whole chain of hypotheses culminates in the unhypothetical

idea of the Good, which is the absolutely sufficient basis for all hypotheses". (p. 148). The distinction between knowledge and opinion is based on the difference of their objects, ideas on one hand, and on the other hand sensibles which are the appearances of the ideas, these appearances being what they are because they participated in the ideas.

Hence this conclusion: "It seems then that it is not accurate to say that *doxa* in the *Republic* is the apprehension of the sensible world as such. Rather it is the apprehension of the characters in the sensible world which are in fact but a result of participation in the ideas, not as such, but as if they were the absolute and true, because only, characters F. G. … Opinion is thus inadequate apprehension of the sensible world". (p. 159)

Then Samuel Scolnicov wants to establish the difference between mathematical deductive proof and dialectical analysis claimed in chapter 1. This difference depends on the distinction between *doxa* and *epistêmê* consists in being able to provide a *logos*. But for the dialectician the only adequate *logos* is the one which does not need a *logos*, because the unhypothetical principle is at the same time principle of knowledge and of reality. That is the lesson of the Divided Line, which leads to a critique of Robinson's interpretation of Plato's hypothetical method (see p. 196).

In addition, the most interesting conclusion concerns the status of the objects of mathematics. These are not intermediaries, as in Aristotle's view: "But Plato's conception is different: the particular is a reflection, a pure representation of the idea in the spatial medium: 'it has being' from the idea. The particular is thus purely relational, not being in itself anything (rather than 'not existing in itself'), but being completely dependent upon the idea for its being a so-and-so". (p. 203). This helps us to read the very difficult passage of *Letter* vii (342a7-c4), and to exclude Wedberg's interpertation of Plato's theory of ideas: ideas are not attributes or classes, and their relation to particulars is not one of imperfect exemplification.

The last chapter is conclusive: "The method of hypothesis does not intend to *prove* anything. It only purports to offer support for a proposition which is accepted at first (by ὁμολογία) on grounds that may be irrelevant to the process of argumentation. Strictly speaking, no proposition in Plato can be proved: it can be either refuted by *elenchus* or supported by analysis. Strict demonstration would require deduction from premises of which we have absolute knowledge. But, as Protagoras stressed, any premise can be challenged. And in as much as it is open to challenge and persuasion, there is no knowledge of it, but mere opinion. The only premise that cannot be challenged is the unhypothetical principle. But no proof can start from the unhypothetical principle given as an axiom". (p. 209). As a consequence: "It seems, then, that the only possible demonstration that would not be mere *homologia* would be a demonstration from anunhypothetical principle which is consequent upon the analysis which led to this principle. This means, in effect, that no problem can be adequately solved in a purely axiomatic, deductive way; any adequate solution or proof is dependent on the preceding analysis, and loses its value as knowledge if dissociated from it". (p. 210).

The work ends with Appendix I: On being and truth ; and Appendix 2 : The upward path. In the former, Samuel Scolnicov lists different definitions of truth in Plato, to conclude that in the middle dialogues Plato's logical procedures cannot be rigidly connected with propositional calculus. And in the second, he claims, against Robinson, that the upward path in the *Republic* is the hypothetical method used in the *Phaedo*.

At first sight, a book that provides an account of polemics about Plato's hypothetical method before 1970 seems out of date. But even if this is true of many papers and books, the problems remain the same, and Samuel Scolnicov's interpretation of the relevant dialogues and passages remains up to date, namely, that Plato's argumentative procedure cannot be reduced to propositional calculus, because it depends on a metaphysics according to which sensible particulars are but images of ideas leading to an unhypotethical principle. This short book, clear and well-structured, remains of topical interest

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Despite its emphasis on artfully interwoven fabric, the *Statesman* is often said to be made of threads that are no more than loosely tied together. This might explain the reason why this dialogue has been addressed only thread by thread and has not received as much attention as many other Platonic works. In recent years, however, the *Statesman* has enjoyed a renaissance of attention, which can be said to have begun with the volume edited by Rowe in 1995.[1] Beatriz Bossi's and Thomas M. Robinson's edited volume, *Plato's Statesman Revisited*, which is the twin of the previously published *Plato's Sophist Revisited*,[2] aims to reverse the trend and earn even more readers for the still neglected *Statesman*.

The volume encompasses nineteen contributions written in English by a range of internationally renowned scholars. As the editors point out in the Introduction, the volume is a collection of papers, the majority of which was originally presented in April 2016 at the *II International Spring Plato Seminar* on the *Statesman*, which was hosted in Madrid by Beatriz Bossi. The volume is divided into seven broad sections, which are meant to follow the order of the subjects tackled in the dialogue. Also included are an Introduction by the editors, an all-encompassing Bibliography, a List of Contributors, which testifies to the wide range of approaches adopted, and an Index Locorum.

The first part addresses the question of how to approach the dialogue, which scholars have variously considered "weary" (Ryle), "dull" (Grene), and "lumpy" (Blondell). It is indeed true, as Larivée writes in the opening line, that "notwithstanding the *Laws*, the *Statesman* is probably the most unloved Platonic dialogue" (p. 11). For Larivée, the frustration which the reading of the dialogue generates, and which we readers are asked to take seriously, results from four major intertwined obstacles: the elu-

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sive nature of the statesman and his science, the question of his relationship with the philosopher, and the chief purpose and the target-audience of the *Statesman*. It is in these problems themselves that Larivée finds the solution she proposes: she suggests that the *Statesman* should be read first and foremost as a *protreptic* dialogue:[3] specifically, a two-stage protreptic to political science addressed to philosophers. The conception of Platonic dialogues as texts that protreptically unfold by means of allusions links Larivée's contribution to that by Migliori, who takes Plato's written maieutics to be conceived as stimulation for the readers to philosophize by means of increasingly complex "games". By means of a "multifocal approach" to Plato's political philosophy, Migliori focuses on the distinction between the ideal and the empirical levels in three respects: the little trust in human intervention, the danger which the polis already goes through, and the link between politics and ethics. Since the texts protreptically unfold Plato's thought by means of allusions, Migliori begins with the *Laws*, where we find different political models. He then moves to the *Republic*, where Plato presents a model in all its perfection, yet also as a real and possible city. This leads Migliori to suggest that the main contribution of the *Statesman* concerns the nature of the model, not as an abstract operation, but rather as the true form of government to be imitated. Just as the *Republic* presents a first model and the *Laws* a second model, so does the *Statesman*, according to Migliori, explain the significance of the utopian model to be imitated, as well as the role of laws and the statesman – a topic which is further developed in the sixth section.

The second part of the volume addresses the kind of knowledge which statesmanship is supposed to be. El Murr's contribution explains the point that Plato wishes to make with the first two cuts of the division that opens the dialogue. Through a close analysis of the logical structure of *Polit*. 258e–259d, El Murr provides an account of Plato's strategy of placing political science among theoretical (and not among practical) sciences and, in the second move, among the epitactic sciences (and not among the sciences involving the making of judgements). Platonic statesmanship cannot but be a theoretical science – and yet it is a science which necessarily involves action. Like architecture, the political science is prescriptive, and it is precisely the notion of prescription that, according to El Murr, guarantees real, even if indirect, efficiency. "If it were not a theoretical science, then the statesmanship defined here would obviously not be Platonic, but if were not prescriptive it would not be statesmanship at all" (p. 70).[4] In the following contribution, Casertano addresses the puzzling relation between "correct" and "true" and between "belief" and "knowledge" in the *Statesman*. Through a close textual analysis of 277e-279a, Casertano shows why "correct" and "true" overlap. In the *Statesman*, the qualification of "correct" is applied to the method, but also to the good constitution. Besides being correct in order to lead to truth, the method is combined with two other hermeneutic instruments, namely the myth, by means of which the interlocutors discover that their previous result was not wrong, but only partially true, and the model, which is necessary to transform the partially true result into stable knowledge. The criterion for determining the correctness of the only right constitution is the statesman's true possession of expertise, which Casertano reads in relation to the written laws. They are insufficient for determining the correctness of a constitution and cannot be considered the only depository of the truth, since this would stop the search for the truth. After having explained that

the constitution based on written laws are the second best – if written by those who know, laws are an "imitation of the truth" (300c5-6) – Casertano turns to the relationship between political science and written laws, which are further addressed by Peixoto in the sixth section and to the problematic opposition between *doxa* and *epistêmê*. On his reconstruction, the predominance of opinion which Plato declared to have overcome is back, since the science of the true statesman is opinion.

The longest section of the volume is dedicated to the myth.[5] In the extensive paper that opens the section, White, who has dedicated an entire monograph to the *Statesman*,[6] defends the philosophical role of the myth which contributes "to metaphysical matters involving and related to collection and division, particularly with reference to paradigms, the complex status of Forms and the good" (p. 88). Besides providing the necessary information for the Method of Collection and Division to succeed, the myth does serious philosophical labour, especially concerning the roles of paradigm, schema, Forms, and the Good. On his view, the *Statesman* as a whole is a dialogue of comprehensive unity that informs the reader about methodology, the importance of the good in methodology, and the way to approximate the nature of statecraft. In his concise paper, Blyth compares the god we find in the myth of the *Statesman* with Aristotle's prime mover. With respect to (i) ontological independence, (ii) explicit divinity, and (iii) causal effect in the sense of an ongoing cause of movement, the god of the *Statesman* is said to be similar to Aristotle's prime mover. He is closer to Aristotle's prime mover than to the demiurge of the *Timaeus* or to the cosmic soul addressed in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Laws*. According to Blyth, the god of Plato's myth can also be interpreted, like Aristotle's god, as being physically unmoved and contemplating the first principles of being.

The second half of the third part deals with the legacy of the *Statesman*'s myth in the Neoplatonists' tradition. Whereas Motta's contribution deals with Neoplatonist exegesis of the myth, Zamora's paper focuses on Proclus'. Zamora explores Proclus' non-literal interpretation of the myth, according to which the "reign of Kronos", corresponding to the reign of the intelligible, and the "reign of Zeus", corresponding to sensible domain, co-exist. In his examination of Proclus' allegorical interpretation where the "inverse Revolution" is said to describe the resistance of the material element of the universe, Zamora explores an array of cross-references in the commentaries in order to explore the way that Proclus, for whom Platonic writings form a coherent whole, can overcome the divergences between the *Timaeus*, on the one hand, and the myth of the *Statesman*, on the other hand. "In her paper, Motta explains that the Neoplatonists, who read the dialogues in a theological and teleological fashion, took the myth to represent the place where Plato has set the only right target (*skopos*) of the dialogue. For only in a myth can Plato offer an image of the truth that suits a physical dialogue such as the Statesman was considered to be (together with the Sophist ad the Timaeus), as it was considered to be according to the late-antiquity canon. As the visible side of something invisible, the myth presents Plato's cosmos as a harmonic whole, whose twofold nature corresponds to the two deities, Cronos and Zeus. The discussion of passages from the *Prolegomena*, Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* and chapter 6 of book V of the *Platonic Theology* leads Motta to conclude that Neoplatonists used the myth "to explain the interaction between different realms, as well as to describe the way in whi-

ch one is to understand the demiurgic activity pertaining to celestial phenomena" (p. 155).

The fourth part of the volume opens with a contribution by Monserrat-Molas, who has dedicated a number of studies to the *Statesman*,[7] and who focuses here on the passage on Due Measure (*Polit*. 283a-287b). Far from being just a gloss, bridge, or appendix, Due Measure is considered as pivotal to the internal composition of the dialogue, since art, oratory, and method all share the notion of Due Measure, defined as a "new guiding principle for the *logos*" (p. 168). After having shown that the passage 286b-c is an exercise in reminiscence and an illustration of the teaching and learning process, which the dialogical process unfolds, Monserrat-Molas employs the notion of Due Measure to characterize the inquiry as an activity of a community and the need for memory to defend teaching from forgetting. Due Measure shows, for Monserrat-Molas, the shortcomings of an abstract method when applied to the political sphere. In the next paper on *Polit*. 277c-281a, Vale dos Santos argues that weaving, which is analogous to government, is also analogous to the activity of thinking, conceived as the ability to establish relations and to recognize identities and differences. Vale dos Santos shows that thinking, just like weaving, relies on the ability to interweave; the *logos* is a *symplok*ê. Wool-weaving is an image that emphasizes the compositional character of thought, which is said to consist of an analogical relationship between paradigms, a movement that constantly formulates analogies. Sánchez's contribution is also dedicated to the weaving simile in Plato's *Statesman*. From the analysis of weaving as a metaphor for the art of ruling the polis – "a reminder of the required intertwinement of different kinds of human beings and professions" (p. 194), Sánchez draws two main conclusions. Key intellectual operations belong to the art of weaving, which is a reliable paradigm that explains the kind of combing and separating required by the royal art – a sort of practical knowledge conceived as dynamic wisdom that is analogous to the *phronêsis* portrayed by women working at the loom. Just like Aristophanes in the *Lysistrata*, so Plato in the *Statesman* presents the humble and female art of weaving as an expression of *nous* entailed in well-performed art. Beyond intellectual faculties, material and technical skills – the wisdom of the artist –are necessary for running the polis. Thus, statecraft should scrutinize the intelligible features entailed in a humble art mostly performed by women. Plato's position on the status and role of women in society is also the main topic of the contribution that closes the fourth part of the volume. By discussing the *Statesman* as well as the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Laws*, Robinson looks at two levels at which Plato seems to operate when reflecting on how far up the ladder of rule women can rise in a more or less ideal society, what he calls Revolutionary Plato, on the one hand, and Plato the traditionalist, on the other hand. Revolutionary Plato is said to be in full stride in the *Republic*, where a small number of women of appropriate pedigree and education is considered to be as fit as a small number of men of appropriate pedigree and education to serve as philosopher-rulers. By contrast, in the *Statesman* women are no longer thought to be potential rulers. Since the paradigmatic good society depicted in the *Statesman*, rulers will be men only. In the *Laws*, Revolutionary Plato proposes an equal education for both male and female citizens (*Leg.* 805e), but Plato the Traditionalist breaks the surface again by stating that women's nature is inferior to men's (*Leg.* 781b2), so that they cannot be entrusted with political power. Just like the theory of Forms and the tripartition

of the souls, so is a leadership role of women dismissed in the *Statesman*.

The fifth part of the volume connects the statesman to the sophist. In her engaging paper, Palumbo explores Plato's "mimetic art of visual writing" (p. 209) – a topic to which she has dedicated articles as well as monographs – with reference to the *Statesman*. Palumbo unfolds the mimetic operations that ensure the readers' participation, such as the identification with the characters on-stage, their stances and their mistakes, and the mimetic devices such as similes, which create visualization. This is the case for the explanation of Young Socrates' mistake by means of the "visual term" *oion*; the paradigmatic instance of visual representation construed with words is the myth. In dealing with its mimetic elements, Palumbo shows their connection to the *Sophist*, where preserving the proportion of the model is said to be the key feature of faithful representation. Besides the myth, Palumbo calls attention to other paradigms that the dialogue contains and especially to the paradigm of weaving, which is full of explicit references to Plato's dramatic and mimetic writing. The paper closes on a note about the true rivals of Platonic imitation, those who counterfeit and enchant by means of words, and are therefore the greatest of all sophists (303c). It is precisely the difficulty of separating the statesman from the chorus of the sophists that Candiotto addresses in the second and last paper of the volume's fifth part. She focuses on the final definition of the statesman, where the interlocutors aim to set the true rulers apart from a number of rivals and, among them, the chorus of the sophists, who are described with features typically ascribed to Socrates. Just like their separation from the philosopher, the separation between statesmen and sophists is particularly difficult, not least because sophists are at work in politics too. Just like philosophers, then, sophists use rhetoric. For Candiotto, however, the main reasons for this difficult distinction are Socrates' and the sophists' *atopia*. Due to their diametrically opposed *atopia*, both the chorus of the sophists, which comprise a multitude of subjects of chameleon-like nature and mimetic power, and Socrates are difficult to catch and set apart from the statesman. Candiotto argues that Plato's solution to this difficulty lies in the cathartic function of separation – a catharsis "as in the definition of the noble art of sophistry in the *Sophist*" (p. 242). Just like gold needs to be purified from other elements (*Polit*. 303d), so it is necessary to purify rhetoric in order to make it subservient to statesmanship. By purifying rhetoric, Plato also purifies the image of Socrates, thus setting him apart from the sophists.

The single paper included in the sixth and last section of the volume is dedicated to the tension between law and wisdom in the Statesman and defends the primacy of the laws. Starting by the contrast between being and appearance, Peixoto aims to show how the primacy of wisdom over laws defended by the Stranger is established. In particular, she argues that the true rulers actually possess political science and are to be distinguished from those who merely seem to possess it. In a correct form of government, those who rule possess political science and can therefore dispense with the laws. For it is best if the foundation of the good government lies in the wisdom of the wise, rather than in the strength of the laws (*Polit*. 294a), which can hardly deal with the unstable character of human affairs. However, the recourse to laws is justified, since the acquisition of political science, which involves knowledge of *metron* and *kairos*, remains inaccessible or extraneous to the majority of people. For those who possess

political science laws are disposable, whereas for the others laws (and its obedience) are the only possible means of subsisting.

The three papers of the last part of the volume adress the astonishing claim reached by the end of the dialogue, namely that political art needs to weave together two virtues that are explicitly said to be in contrast with each other (307c). Giorgini starts by pointing out that the opposition of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* is incompatible with the Socratic conception of the unity of virtue. For Giorgini, Plato in the *Statesman* has realized that the unity of virtues is not a natural product, but something created by the ruler-educator, who is supposed to be the living example of a well-balanced human being who has knowledge of Due measure and of the art of mastering time. To create political unity and concord, which remains Plato's main concern, the statesman resorts to a divine bond, namely education, which is conceived as a transformation of the soul that leads to correct opinion with assuredness about the most important things, and to a human bond, namely a matrimonial policy aimed at coupling citizens endowed with the opposite virtues. Giorgini shows that the notion of divine and human bonds is, in spite of certain differences, already at work in the *Republic* and will also make an appearance in the *Laws*. In her contribution, Bossi addresses two *prima facie* incompatible theses: on the one hand, the thesis of the involvement of all virtues in wisdom, according to which having wisdom means to have all virtues, and, on the other hand, the thesis of the non-involvement of wisdom, according to which a person who has one virtue may lack the others. Since the latter thesis is defended in the *Statesman*, does the former then need to be abandoned? Bossi holds that the thesis of the involvement defended in the *Protagoras* (where genuine virtues are conceived to be essentially wisdom) and the *Phaedo* (where virtue is united with wisdom) is not abandoned in the *Statesman* and turns out to be compatible with the thesis of non-involvement. She defends this view by arguing that the true statesman has reached the level of philosophical wisdom which implies all genuine virtues, while the others, who display only an inborn disposition toward virtues, instantiate the non-involvement of wisdom. In the closing paper, rowe begins by investigating the sort of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* that the statesman is supposed to interweave. He argues that they refer neither to inborn traits nor to fully developed virtue, but to something in-between. Each allows for mixing with the other, but both are still incomplete and that is why the guidance of the kingly weaver is needed. To the question as to why these two types of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* preoccupy the royal weaver, Rowe provides an answer that goes beyond the influence of the cultural context. For Rowe, the equal status of *andreia* and *sôphrosynê* signals the abandonment of the key role of *andreia*, the identifying feature of the warrior-class in the *Republic*, which now needs to be mingled with its counterpart. Even if the city of the *Statesman* looks very different from Callipolis, Rowe stresses that Plato's main political dialogues offer what is recognizably the same "truest constitution" considered from different perspectives. In this sense, he takes the *Statesman* to frame the problem of the conflict between the moderate and the courageous in terms of (p. 326).

Overall, this is a volume of great interest to anyone who wishes to unravel one or several of the many threads which constitute the fabric of the *Statesman*. Despite (or precisely because of) their different approaches, the contributions mirror the multifaceted nature of the dialogue. By taking into account other Platonic dialogues as well, the contributions build a tight net of internal cross-references, which encourage us

readers to move back and forth – just like we do in reading the dialogue itself, where the problematic relation of laws and political science goes beyond being a merely political issue, and the paradigms are much more than mere illustrations of methodological issues. However, if there is one thing that would have made an already rich volume even richer, it would be a closer consideration of the so-called Method(s) of Collection and Division employed in the search for the statesman. The topic is obviously in the background of White's reflections as well as of El Murr's essay about the first divisions that open the dialogue, and almost all contributions tackle the Method in a more or less indirect way. Its explicit treatment would have added yet another thread to the already strongly intertwined fabric that the volume is made of.

Endnotes

1 C. Rowe (ed.), *Reading the Statesman*, Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 1995.

2 This volume, which was published in 2013, was also edited by B. Bossi and T. M. Robinson.

3 In the volume edited by Rowe in 1995, Ferber speaks of a "propädeutische Lektüre" of the *Statesman*.

4 Whether the non-practical status of the political science, as presented at the beginning of the dialogue, is inconsistent with its production, which is described in terms of interweaving at the end of the dialogue, is a question which El Murr addresses in his excellent monograph, which is dedicated entirely to the kind of knowledge which Plato attributes to the statesman in the eponymous dialogue. D. El Murr, *Savoir et gouverner. Essai sur la science politique platonicienne*, Vrin, Paris, 2014.

5 This was also the case in the volume edited by Rowe in 1995, thus confirming that the myth of the *Statesman* has not only a reception-history, but also, as Lane observed, a vast literature of its own. See M. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's* Statesman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, 9.

6 D. White, *Myth, Metaphysics and Dialectic in Plato's* Statesman, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007.

7 See the vast list in the Bibliography (p. 334).

Review of Knowledge and Ignorance of Self in Platonic Philosophy *(edited by James Ambury and Andy German), Cambridge University Press 2018.*

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It is surprising that self-knowledge remains a somewhat neglected topic of research in the secondary literature on Plato. Given the pedagogical aim of the dialogues, self-knowledge is clearly central to the task of the Platonic project, both for Socrates' interlocutors (especially) and for Plato's readers.

But as German and Ambury point out in their new edited volume, *Knowledge and Ignorance of Self in Platonic Philosophy* (Cambridge 2019), few scholars have devoted works solely to the topic. Notable studies have been undertaken by Ballard (1965), Griswold (1986), Tschemplik (2008), and Moore (2015), all of which inform the current volume. But the current book also expands on insights in these previous works, especially by treating dialogues not previously discussed (nearly every major dialogue is addressed) and extending the discussion beyond self-knowledge in relation only to Socrates.

The book gathers thirteen essays from prominent scholars that share "an openness to what Plato had to say, and what he chose not to say, about… our capacity for becoming, in some problematic way, an object of our own interior reflection and assessment…. without our modern, now questionable, concept of subjectivity." (2) The book is organized thematically around self-knowledge and *theoria* (chapters 1-5) with entries by Lloyd Gerson, Thomas Tuozzo, Drew Hyland, Sara Ahbel-Rappe, and James Ambury; the practical dimensions of self-knowledge (chapters 6 -8) with entries by Brian Marrin, Sara Brill, and Jeremy Bell; self-knowledge and ignorance (chapters 9-12) with entries by Andy German, Marina McCoy, Eric Sanday, and Danielle Layne; the volume concludes with an essay (chapter 13) by Harold Tarrant that focuses on Plato's development in thinking about self--knowledge. The thirteen chapters do particularly well not only in taking up the task of "openness to Plato" and explicating what self-knowledge

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might mean for him, but also in situating self--knowledge amidst other significant themes in the dialogues. Among other themes pursued, there are discussions of the connection between self- knowledge and the Forms (Gerson, Tuozzo), Socratic Questioning (Layne, Hyland, McCoy), Introspection (Ahbel-Rappe), Education (Ambury, Marrin), Mathematics (German), the Soul and Eros (Layne, Marrin, Brill, Bell, Sanday).

Ambury and German point out that the book presents a "plurality of views about the knowledge and ignorance of self in Platonic philosophy, some of which are directly opposed to one another. For students of Plato's Socrates, however, such oppositions are pure profit." (14) On this point, I must agree, and this is to be praised as a virtue of the volume. The work is at its best when it itself creates between its interlocutors a dialogue that inspires wonder about the intricacies and difficulties of the questions about self-knowledge that Plato presents to us. The editors set up such a dialogue in the very structure of the book and its selection of essays. The disagreement between Gerson/ Tuozzo and Hyland in the opening chapters frames well the conversation of the volume. (It is thus appropriate that they stand as the opening chapters of the volume.) At the heart of their disagreement is the nature of the relationship between self-knowledge and theoretical knowledge. In claiming that self-knowledge is identical with theoretical knowledge, Gerson argues that human beings according to Plato are fundamentally *intellect*, and therefore to grasp intelligible reality is to know one's truest self. Hyland disagrees with him (and Tuozzo) by claiming that theoretical wisdom is not at all the right model for self-knowledge and instead we must look to the aporetic, questioning stance Socrates takes in action to understand the ideal of self-knowledge in the dialogues. The disagreement forces readers to consider the multilayered and multivalent answers Plato is pursuing to the questions: *what am I? what can I know about myself?*

Where we end in pursuing these questions depends upon which feature we take to be our starting point in discussions of Platonic self--knowledge. If we begin with the claim that the fundamental feature of Socrates is his knowledge of ignorance and if we assume that he does not have knowledge of the good (Hyland), then such a claim may turn out to be in irreconcilable tension with a claim that knowledge of the good undergirds self-knowledge (Gerson, Tuozzo). How then is self-knowledge related to knowledge of ignorance? How are either related to knowledge of the good? And how does either self-knowledge or knowledge of the good manifest itself in our lives, embedded as they are in time?

The remainder of the essays take their turns, from various perspectives, confronting these puzzles and they succeed in so doing. This does not mean that a univocal answer is ever achieved regarding the nature, possibility, and benefit of self-knowledge. The volume rightly and beautifully takes the questions seriously while at the same time leaving open the possibility for readers to ponder that Plato is not providing us one answer to the puzzles. Some of the volume's essays attempt to spell out a connection between knowledge of Good and knowledge of Ignorance and Self-Knowledge while staying true to the initial demand – to hear what Plato says (and chooses not to say) without importing modern conceptions of selfhood alien to the dialogues. In this vein, McCoy, Layne, and Hyland make especially noteworthy and important contributions. A number of other contributors appropriately turn to the nature of *eros*, education, and psychic transformation in following up on this inquiry. The essays of Marrin, Bell, and Sanday are particularly helpful and provocative in this

regard. It seems that an investigation of *eros* is essential to the nature of self-knowledge, as these contributors to this volume have not only made clear but have also done outstanding work in exploring. Provocative, creative, and original chapters are written by German, Ambury, Rappe, and Brill.

The volume as a whole is illuminating. Ambury and German have provided scholars working on Platonic self-knowledge a comprehensive and stimulating conversation. It is a more than welcome contribution to the secondary literature. It will be a touchstone for further work.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

ANCIENT AUTHORS AND WORKS

When referring to Platonic dialogues by their full title, use the title that is customary in your language (italics), e.g. *Phaedo*, *Phédon*, *Phaidon*. When using abbreviations, please use this standard set:

Apol., Charm., Epist. (e.g. VII), Euthyphr., Gorg., Hipp. mai., Hipp. min., Crat., Crit., Lach., Leg., Lys., Men., Parm., Phaid., Phaidr., Phil., Polit., Prot., Rep., Soph., Symp., Theait., Tim.

For other ancient authors and works, use abbreviations standard in your language, e.g. (in English) those in Liddell-Scott-Jones or the Oxford Classical Dictionary.

Authors are asked to conform to the following examples:

Plat., Tim. 35 a 4-6.
Arist., Metaph. A 1, 980 a 25-28.
Simpl., In Cat., 1.1-3.17 Kalbfleisch (CAG VIII).

MODERN AUTHORS AND WORKS

In the footnotes:
Use the author/ date system:

Gill 2012, 5-6.

In the list of bibliographic references:

Gill 2012: Gill, M. L., *Philosophos: Plato's Missing Dialogue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2012.

CHAPTER IN BOOK:

A.H. Armstrong, *Eternity, Life and Movement in Plotinus's Account of Nous*, in P.-M. Schuhl – P. Hadot (ed.), *Le Néoplatonisme*, CNRS, Paris 1971, 67-74.

ARTICLE IN JOURNAL:

G.E.L. Owen, *The Place of the Timaeus in Plato's Dialogues*, «Classical Quarterly» 3 (1953), 79-95.