

Plato's *Gorgias*

Labyrinth and Threads



M. J. Carvalho, T. Fidalgo (eds.)

IEF
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“(…) ἐνταῦθα ὥσπερ εἰς λαβύρινθον
ἐμπεσόντες, οἰόμενοι ἤδη ἐπὶ τέλει εἶναι,
περικόμψαντες πάλιν ὥσπερ ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς
ζητήσεως ἀνεφάνημεν ὄντες καὶ τοῦ ἴσου
δεόμενοι ὅσους περ ὅτε τὸ πρῶτον ἐζητοῦμεν.”

Euthydemus, 291b7-c.2

Though at first it may seem to deal with rather specific questions concerning rhetoric, Plato’s *Gorgias* turns out to be about *human life*, and what is at stake in it. This apparent “change of subject” – or rather this ambiguity in the dialogue’s subject-matter – has to do with the fact that the *Gorgias* is very much like a labyrinth: puzzling, intricate, made of multiple meandering paths in which one can easily get lost, and full of deviations which turn this way and that, of entrances that seem to be dead ends, and of dizzying turns that distort all sense of direction.

What is more, the maze we tread through when reading Plato’s *Gorgias* does not have to do only with the complex structure of this dialogue. It turns out that it stands for the labyrinth of *views about life* that is part and parcel of human life itself.

Let us take a closer look at what this means.

First, human life is constituted in such a way that it *understands itself*. It always includes some understanding of *where one stands* and *what one is dealing with*: of *what life is all about*, of *what is at stake in it*, of *what to expect*, of *what really matters*, of *what one is or should be*, etc. But this is not all. This component of human life does not just happen to be there. As a matter of fact, human life *requires* some understanding of itself. It is *guided* by it, and indeed in such a way that *it cannot do without it*. To put it in military terms, it hinges on this “reconnaissance of the terrain” – it takes its cue from it, and is completely *at a loss without it*.

Secondly, life’s understanding of itself is *maze-like*. Human life could require some understanding of itself, but in such a way that meeting this requirement posed no problem. In other words, understanding life could be plain and easy – there could be some obvious and unquestionable truth about it. But, as it turns out, this essential

component of life can be anything but taken for granted; for there is no absolutely unquestionable answer to the above-mentioned questions. Of course one can be positive that one's view about life is true. But on closer inspection it turns out that things are not quite that simple: matters can be considered from other angles, and if one takes this and that into account the picture changes; so that all in a flash one finds oneself in the middle of a very intricate – and closely fought – “chess game” between opposite claims; or rather, one finds oneself in the middle of a very complex and closely fought “*chess tournament*” between an *ever-increasing number* of competing claims. The result being that, in the final analysis, this essential component of life – one's understanding of it – has the structure of a labyrinth: it, too, turns out to be a confusing place where one wanders aimlessly.

And this is what Plato's *Gorgias* is all about. Among other things, it deals with the labyrinth of different ways of understanding life: it explores and tries to map this labyrinth – or, at least to find some threads that may guide us through it. What we are dealing with when dealing with the *Gorgias* is therefore a *labyrinth of labyrinths*: the great maze of life (and with it the maze of different ways of understanding life itself) includes smaller ones, among them the *corpus platonicum* – which in turn includes the *Gorgias*. But the point is that the *Gorgias* a) is itself maze-like and b) focuses on the big labyrinth of life itself viz. of the different ways of understanding it; so that one cannot deal with this smaller maze, the *Gorgias*, without dealing with the *great maze* – or rather with the *global maze* – of life itself and its enigma.

Incidentally, it should be stressed that there are basically two ways of understanding the comparison with a labyrinth. On the one hand, the labyrinth can be conceived of as something seen *from above*. It is complex, intricate and difficult to thread. But at least one has an *overview* of the whole, even if one is unable to untangle the twists and turns of its circuitous route. But, on the other hand, a labyrinth becomes something altogether different if there is *no bird's eye view of it* – i.e., if one finds oneself *trapped inside the labyrinth*, so that it must be explored and mapped “*from within*”. In this case, there is *no overview* at all: the width of the visual field is very limited, there are close, opaque barriers everywhere; the result being that the “territory of vision” is made of narrow “corridors” in the middle of the unseen (viz. in the middle of a massive range of “blind angles”). In other words, the labyrinth *from within* (as opposed to the labyrinth *from above*) is confusing and entrapping in such a manner that one has no idea of *what is where* (not even of the real position of the

fragments one is able to explore) and indeed ignores the very dimension of the labyrinth, etc.

Now, the *Gorgias* may seem to be a labyrinth of the first kind. But both the “great maze of life” and the labyrinth of different ways of understanding it belong to the second kind. What is more, it turns out that even if it is not very difficult to get an overview of the several dozen pages of the *Gorgias*, the *labyrinth of possibilities of interpreting these pages* is much more complicated – and indeed in such a way that it, too, belongs not to the first, but to the second kind.¹

Bearing this in mind can help us get a picture of what the essays presented here are all about. Their purpose is to explore the above mentioned set of labyrinths and to find threads that may be useful in untangling them.

But this brings us to another important point. We speak of *threads*, in the *plural* – not of *one single thread*. In itself, this could mean various things. For instance, it could mean that the mazes we are talking about have *multiple solutions*. To be sure, this may be the case, but that is not what we are trying to say. The point is rather the *fragmentary* character of the essays presented in this volume. On the one hand, they spin, as it were, *loose bits of thread* – joining together only some *parts* of the maze(s), not the whole thing. In other words, these essays do not provide a *continuous thread* – connecting all the dots. They form an “archipelago” of “unconnected islands”: something quite different from – and much less effective than – the string Ariadne provided to Theseus. But this is not all. On the other hand, these essays look at Plato’s *Gorgias* (and at the above mentioned set of labyrinths) *from fairly different angles*. They are characterized by a diversity of approach reflecting the complexity of the above mentioned maze of interpretive possibilities. And it is no exaggeration to speak of differently scaled analyses, of a somewhat “cubist” juxtaposition of perspectives, and of a dynamic collision of different angles. In a way, each of these essays raises the question of how it could or should be extended and transformed into a comprehensive mapping of the *Gorgias*. But at the same time they also raise the question as to how their different approaches could be combined into an integrated framework.

¹ And this completes the picture of the complex set of labyrinths we are talking about: as pointed out above, the *Gorgias* is itself a labyrinth about labyrinths; but there is also the labyrinth of different ways of interpreting the dialogue (and this means: both its “partial steps” and the whole). In the final analysis, there is no direct access to the “text itself” (viz. to “what Plato said”): one is trapped in the maze of interpretive possibilities and doomed to read Plato’s text through the lens or filter of this maze.

In short, the essays presented here amount to a somewhat kaleidoscopic variety of “reconnaissance raids” in the middle of the above mentioned mazes. They include no *global pictures* and no *final answers* – just small *steps in different directions*. They may help clarify a few questions. But at the end of the day the labyrinth(s) prevail(s) over the threads. This collection of essays is therefore open to the kind of objection voiced by Friedrich Hebbel, who once wrote in his *Diary*: “Es ist kaum ein Trost, daß wir immer höher kommen, da wir immer auf der Leiter bleiben” (which loosely translated reads: “It is hardly a consolation that we climb ever higher, since we never go beyond the ladder”).² We could paraphrase this and say: “it is hardly a consolation that we get to know the labyrinth better, since we never find our way out”.

Hebbel certainly has a point; but, still, there can be a world of difference between “less high” and “higher” (viz. between different levels of acquaintance with an unsolved maze). None other than Husserl is said to have recommended to his students: “Nicht immer die großen Scheine, meine Herren, Kleingeld, Kleingeld!” (“Not always the large-denomination banknotes, gentlemen, small change, small change”).³ It has to be admitted that Husserl, too, has a point – not least because it cannot be excluded that the metaphorical “small change” he is talking about is the key to obtaining the metaphorical “large-denomination banknotes”; so that the popular proverb “take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves” also applies here. In other words, it is possible that even if Hebbel is right, what he terms “climbing higher” remains essential if one wants to “go beyond the ladder”. Or, as we might also say, getting to know the labyrinth better – and this means: making the “small steps” (spinning the fragmentary threads) the essays presented here are all about – is essential if one wants to solve the maze.

This is, in a nutshell, what the reader can expect to find in this volume. Here, too, “possibility stands higher than actuality”⁴. More important than the results achieved in these essays is their ability to draw attention to *what remains to be explored* – and they will have fulfilled their role if they manage to act as *starting points* for further

² F. HEBBEL, *Tagebücher* 1, 28.11.1838, Berlin, G. Grote’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1885, 128.

³ Cf. H.-G. GADAMER, *Kleine Schriften*: Platon, Husserl, Heidegger. Idee und Sprache, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1972, 152 (=IDEM, *Gesammelte Werke*, Volume 3, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1987, 107).

⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 1977¹⁴, §7, 38: “Höher als die Wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit.”

research and to awaken the reader's interest in both their specific subject matters and the *Gorgias* and its mazes.

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Mário Jorge de Carvalho, Tomaz Fidalgo

In the Labyrinth of Masks: The Land of Make-Believe in *Gorgias*, 461b-466a

Samuel Carvalhais de Oliveira*

To my son João

1. The background to 461b. Rhetoric as τέχνη and its meaning. The intrinsic link between rhetoric and φρονεῖν in a double sense: the φρονεῖν related to the constitution of rhetoric's point of view and the φρονεῖν related to its “περί τι”. The *all-comprising* character of rhetoric. Rhetoric as δύναμις: its meaning and implications. Rhetoric as “πίστις ἄνευ τοῦ εἰδέναι” and the subsistence of a putative fundamental core of vital, “practical” εἰδέναι.

To better understand the problems posed by 461b-466a it is important to go back a bit. We do not have the possibility here of making a detailed examination of the “background” to 461b-466a: the concepts that are introduced, the phenomena to which they call our attention, the problems that arise from the discussion between Gorgias and Socrates, the complex “picture” that is depicted during these first passages, etc. We will only try to make a “sketch” as far-reaching as possible of some of the points that are at stake in this “background”.

One of the key aspects to this “background” is that the perspective Gorgias professes to have is a “*technical*” one: rhetoric is precisely a τέχνη – and this means: a perspective that belongs to a more appropriate point of view, a perspective that goes far beyond the perspective we commonly have or, to use Aristotle's formula, a

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perspective that is “παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις”¹. In other words, the ῥητορική as a τέχνη stands for something that *has already corrected* the “everyday” point of view: something that is characterized by being incompatible with the perspective of “οἱ πολλοί”² – not only in the sense that it is *different* from that point of view, but especially because the different access it possesses is a *more adequate and perfect* one. Properly considered, it is not only a question of being “more” appropriate, etc.: the perspective ῥητορική has, the “patrimony” it possesses are seen as *the adequate version, the understanding of things exactly as they are*. And it is this *pretension to efficiency* that enables ῥητορική to disqualify, i.e. to correct the “everyday” point of view and its blunt, coarse understanding. When, at 449e, Gorgias says that ῥητορική involves a φρονεῖν³, what is at stake is precisely a lucid and efficient monitoring of λόγοι exactly as they are, a point of view that does not “get things wrong”. This aspect deserves to be stressed.

On the one hand, the point of view of τέχνη is configured by the φρονεῖν and has to do with a φρόνιμος perspective right from the start. In such a way that the “everyday” point of view, the perspective of οἱ πολλοί, etc., is discarded precisely for its being ἄφρων, i.e. not possessing a φρονεῖν way of being. In other words, the τέχνη’s contraposition vis-à-vis the “everyday” perspective has to do with the contrast between a lucid, “awake” way of being and an ignorant, not-lucid way of being. And the difference in question regards precisely the difference between a “field” of ignorance and a “field” that rises above that ignorance and constitutes a “seeing” based on awareness, lucidity, etc., i.e.: what φρονεῖν is all about.

On the other hand, Gorgias understands the φρόνιμος constitution of τέχνη in a *complex* way. For the φρονεῖν at stake here does not regard only a point of view sc. the conformation of a given perspective. It also regards the “περί τι” of that perspective. And the point is that there is a *connection* between these two “moments”: a) the way a point of view is configured, formed and b) that with which this point of

¹ *Metaphysica* A, 981b14.

² Or, as Gorgias puts it in 452e8, “τὰ πλήθη”.

³ More precisely, a “φρονεῖν περὶ ὧν περ λέγειν”. Cf. *Gorgias*, 449e2-6: “{ΣΩ.} Οὐκ ἄρα περὶ πάντας γε τοὺς λόγους ἡ ῥητορική ἐστίν. {ΓΟΡ.} Οὐ δὴ τα. {ΣΩ.} Ἀλλὰ μὴν λέγειν γε ποιεῖ δυνατούς. {ΓΟΡ.} Ναί. {ΣΩ.} Οὐκοῦν περὶ ὧν περ λέγειν, καὶ φρονεῖν; {ΓΟΡ.} Πῶς γὰρ οὐ;” We shall be basing ourselves on the Greek text established by J. BURNET, *Platonis Opera*, vol. III, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968 (1903) and, with a few exceptions, on the English translation by T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias*, Translated with Notes, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979. The underlining is always our own.

view deals, that which is its formal “object”, that in relation to which it moves or by which it is oriented, with which it is “concerned”.

But this still does not touch on the decisive issue. Indeed, the decisive issue is the fact that Gorgias understands rhetoric as having a *universal range*. Or, as one might say using the language of *Metaphysics* Γ (1003a), “rhetoric” is not an “ἐν μέρει” scientific discipline, but rather a “καθόλου” one. That is, “rhetoric” stands for a global, universal φρονεῖν: a φρονεῖν that does not leave anything out, but rather embraces everything.⁴ In such a way that what rhetoric claims for itself is not only being a τέχνη among others, but also being, so to speak, the τέχνη κατ’ ἐξοχήν. Ῥητορική reaches the greatest degree of lucidity and clear-sightedness a perspective can possess – and, indeed, corresponds to a τέχνη “περὶ τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων καὶ ἄριστα”.⁵ All things considered, it is precisely this that qualifies Gorgias to “answer whatever anyone asks him”.⁶

If this is the case, we should also ask Gorgias what he understands the constitution of this φρονεῖν to be. The φρονεῖν that rhetoric claims for itself has not to do *fundamentally* with a *cognitive* adequacy; it has to do with a particular *power* or *capacity*: it has to do with δύναμις, to be precise. “Rhetoric” is something that “(λέγειν) ποιεῖ δυνατός”⁷ – and this in two senses. Rhetoric regards δύναμις, because it confers powers, gives “particular men” the possibility of superiority to (and of ruling over) others in their πόλις.⁸ But, on the other hand, rhetoric also regards δύναμις, not least because it is able to *intervene* in “reality” in a suitable way, because it knows *how to manipulate* it. That is to say, rhetoric involves φρονεῖν, not least because it is able *to define* with due knowledge how one should conduct one’s life, because it is able *to be aware of* the best way human life should be molded, because it is able *to discern* the “direction” that one should take at each moment. In short,

⁴ This idea of the *all-comprisingness* or *all-inclusivity* of rhetoric – that is, the idea that rhetoric leaves nothing out, and indeed has the capacity to, starting out from itself, include (reach) all the possible multiplicity of knowledge or skills – is found to be very clearly expressed by Gorgias in 456a7-8: “Εἰ πάντα γε εἰδείης, ὃ Σώκρατες, ὅτι ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀπάσας τὰς δυνάμεις συλλαβοῦσα ὑφ’ αὐτῇ ἔχει.”

⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 451d5-8: “{ΣΩ.} Λέγε δὴ τῶν περὶ τί; <τί> ἐστὶ τοῦτο τῶν ὄντων, περὶ οὗ οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι εἰσὶν οἷς ἡ ῥητορική χρῆται; {ΓΟΡ.} Τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων, ὃ Σώκρατες, καὶ ἄριστα.”

⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, 447e6-448a3: “{ΧΑΙ.} Εἰπέ μοι, ὃ Γοργία, ἀληθῆ λέγει Καλλικλῆς ὅδε ὅτι ἐπαγγέλλη ἀποκρίνεσθαι ὅτι ἂν τίς σε ἐρωτᾷ; {ΓΟΡ.} Ἀληθῆ, ὃ Χαιρεφῶν· καὶ γὰρ νυνδὴ αὐτὰ ταῦτα ἐπηγγελλόμην, καὶ λέγω ὅτι οὐδεὶς μέ πω ἠρώτηκε καινὸν οὐδὲν πολλῶν ἐτών.”

⁷ As the passage from the *Gorgias* already quoted (449e2ff.) puts it.

⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, 452dff.

ρήτορική stands for *a practical awareness* – and this is the reason why rhetoric can claim to be *the* answer to the fundamental question: “ὄντινα χρῆ τὸν τρόπον ζῆν;”⁹

This is indeed an important aspect. As Gorgias understands it, “rhetoric” is able to provide adequate knowledge about how one should conduct one’s life. And what makes rhetoric the “supreme τέχνη”, the “ἄριστη τέχνη”, is the fact that it is the *vitally* most important τέχνη: the one that ensures that life does not “get things wrong”, does not “go astray”.¹⁰

But here we have to pay attention to a point that significantly distinguishes the discussion between Socrates and Gorgias. 447a-461b highlights Socrates’ recurring question about the “περί τι” characterizing rhetoric. And what springs into view is precisely Gorgias’ difficulty in *determining with precision* the “περί τι” characteristic of rhetoric. The question about the “περί τι” appears in 449d2 and in 449d10: “ἡ ῥητορική περὶ τί τῶν ὄντων τυγχάνει οὕσα;”, “περὶ τί τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη [i.e. ἡ ῥητορική];”. It remains after Gorgias has answered that τέχνη ῥητορική is “περὶ λόγους” (449d11) – and the definition of it is less than satisfactory when Gorgias tries to pin down this “περί τι” by saying that the λόγοι at stake relate to “τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων καὶ ἄριστα.”¹¹ As Socrates puts it, there is something “ἀμφισβητήσιμον καὶ οὐδέν πω σαφές”¹² about this “περί τι” – which makes it far from being “defined”, “guaranteed”: free of ambiguities and unintelligibility. But here we are going to go further and, in particular, try to see more clearly how Gorgias interprets this “ἀμφισβητήσιμον καὶ οὐδέν πω σαφές” in the end.

⁹ In fact, this question (in its different formulations) is found throughout the *Gorgias* and seems to play a decisive role in it. Here we cannot go further than solely making reference to it, without exploring its full meaning, its implications and its twists and turns. The important point is that this question is present, even if in a “silent” way, from the beginning of the *Gorgias* – and the investigation into “rhetoric” is also an investigation into something that claims to be the best way of conducting one’s life. But it is also important how *Gorgias* progressively shows that this question is present in each of us right from the start, whether consciously or not. That is to say, the question about the “ὄντινα χρῆ τὸν τρόπον ζῆν;” corresponds to a *decisive requisite of our point of view* and poses us a *fundamental problem*: precisely the problem of encountering which τέχνη is able to satisfy this requisite and provide a real knowledge of how to guide our lives. Regarding the “ὄντινα χρῆ τὸν τρόπον ζῆν;”, see 500c3-4. See also 500d4: “(…) ὁπότερον βιωτέον αὐτοῖν [i.e. φιλοσοφίας καὶ ῥητορικῆς]”, 507d6-7: “ὁ σκοπὸς εἶναι πρὸς ὃν βλέποντα δεῖ ζῆν”, and 527e3: “ὁ τρόπος ἄριστος τοῦ βίου”.

¹⁰ Cf. Y. LAFRANCE, *La théorie platonicienne de la Doxa*, Collection Noësis, Montréal/Paris, Bellarmin/Les Belles Lettres, 1981, p. 64.

¹¹ Cf. *Gorgias*, 451d5ff.

¹² Cf. *ibidem*, 451d9-e5: “{ΣΩ.} Ἄλλ’, ὦ Γοργία, ἀμφισβητήσιμον καὶ τοῦτο λέγεις καὶ οὐδέν πω σαφές. οἶμαι γάρ σε ἀκηκοέναι ἐν τοῖς συμποσίοις ἁδόντων ἀνθρώπων τοῦτο τὸ σκολιόν, ἐν ᾧ καταριθμοῦνται ἅδοντες ὅτι “ὕγιαίνειν μὲν ἄριστόν” ἐστὶν, τὸ δὲ “δεύτερον καλὸν γενέσθαι, τρίτον δέ”, ὡς φησιν ὁ ποιητὴς τοῦ σκολιοῦ, “τὸ πλουτεῖν ἀδόλως”.”

In 452e1ff. Gorgias presents another definition of the “περί τι”: “rhetoric” has to do with “τὸ πείθειν”, with “πειθῶ” or, as is also said, with “πειθοῦς δημιουργός”. The course the discussion takes from here on concentrates on this new “definition” and draws some important “conclusions”. Among these we should highlight one: *under the pressure* of Socrates’ questions Gorgias concedes that “πειθῶ” is something *dissociated from knowledge*. The whole constitution of πειθῶ – and thus also the δημιουργία it ends up carrying out – has to do not with a real, true knowledge, but with something that *falls short* of εἰδέναι. In other words, as Gorgias himself acknowledges¹³, rhetoric does not have to do with the constituting of a knowledge, in the proper and full sense of the term (i.e. with ἐπιστήμη), but only with πίστις sc. “πίστις ἄνευ τοῦ εἰδέναι” (454e3-4).

But if we look at how the argument proceeds, we see that this declaration does not make any breach in Gorgias’ point of view. And ῥητορικὴ continues to be a *secure, solid* perspective: something completely spotless. In such a way that these two aspects – a “περί τι” below the εἰδέναι and the conviction that rhetoric is the “supreme τέχνη” – run, so to say, “side by side”, without being in contradiction with each other. How is this possible? It is possible because the accusation of a deficient “περί τι” does not invalidate the *efficiency* of rhetoric. Even if rhetoric’s “περί τι” falls short of εἰδέναι, rhetoric continues to know how to *manipulate* reality in one’s favor. Rhetoric continues to *function* – and thus to provide a *vital clear-sightedness*. And the reason why the idea of a deficient “περί τι” has no weight is that it is not sufficient to prevent rhetoric from functioning and so from really being an εἰδέναι – in fact, *the fundamental εἰδέναι, the εἰδέναι that matters*: the one regarding how to conduct one’s life successfully, how to achieve what one wants, etc.¹⁴

This being so, these first passages from the *Gorgias* seem to have the character of an unsolved puzzle and leave several questions, such as the following, unanswered. How is rhetoric really constituted? Is rhetoric really the τέχνη it claims to be? What is the status of something that has the universal capacity to produce πειθῶ without knowledge? Is this possible, i.e.: can a perspective be a “technical” one with such a lack of εἰδέναι? Is this *self-sufficiency* sc. this *vital* self-sufficiency that rhetoric claims for itself, possible? Is there any contradiction in the “*autonomous*

¹³ Cf. *ibidem*, 454e-455a.

¹⁴ Regarding this assumption about the “*pragmatic*” effectiveness of rhetoric, see K. EMING, *Tumult und Erfahrung. Platon über die Natur unserer Emotionen*, Heidelberg, Winter, 2006, pp. 163ff.

manipulation” of a τέχνη, i.e.: is the χρῆσις of the τέχνη something constituted *solely by itself*?

The passage this study deals with has these questions as its “background”. That is, 461bff. is characterized by the formal maintaining of the problem “what is ῥητορική after all?”, “what is its nature and capacity?”, etc. But, if this is so, 461bff. characterizes itself by going in a different way, by analyzing the problem from a “new” point of view. In part, this “new path” has to do with *establishing communications* between the “pieces” that have already been considered. But this “new path” also means a *transfiguration* of these same “pieces”. Because the question regarding the “*structures of life*” – to which, in the end, the “vital” εἶδέναι, that rhetoric claims to be, refers from the start – becomes *more central*. Properly considered, this precisely reflects Socrates’ effort, present from the beginning of *Gorgias*, to call attention to the necessity of *focusing on* (of *seeing closely*) the “τι” and not going astray when considering the “ποιόν τι”.

2. The dialogue between Socrates and Polus. Polus’ reaction to the discussion between Socrates and Gorgias, and the denunciation of “πολλὴ ἀγρουκία”. The characterization of rhetoric as something less than a “technical” point of view: rhetoric as mere “ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή”. The “redefinition” of the “purpose” of rhetoric: “χάριτός τινος καὶ ἡδονῆς ἀπεργασία” – its meaning and implications. Rhetoric and κολακεία. Rhetoric as εἰδωλον

461bff. calls our attention because of the impetuous and abrupt interruption of the argument between Socrates and Gorgias. Polus reacts incredulously and indignantly to the way the discussion has gone and to its “results”.¹⁵ Polus accuses Socrates and

¹⁵ Cf. *Gorgias*, 461b3-c3: “{ΠΩΛ.} Τί δέ, ὦ Σώκρατες; οὕτω καὶ σὺ περὶ τῆς ῥητορικῆς δοξάζεις ὥσπερ νῦν λέγεις; ἢ οἶει—ὅτι Γοργίας ἡσχύνθη σοι μὴ προσομολογῆσαι τὸν ῥητορικὸν ἄνδρα μὴ οὐχὶ καὶ τὰ δίκαια εἶδέναι καὶ τὰ καλὰ καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ, καὶ ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ ταῦτα εἰδὼς παρ’ αὐτόν, αὐτὸς διδάξειν, ἔπειτα ἐκ ταύτης ἴσως τῆς ὁμολογίας ἐναντίον τι συνέβη ἐν τοῖς λόγοις—τοῦτο <δ> δὴ ἀγαπᾷς, αὐτὸς ἀγαγὼν ἐπὶ τοιαῦτα ἐρωτήματα—ἐπεὶ τίνα οἶει ἀπαρνήσεσθαι μὴ οὐχὶ καὶ αὐτὸν ἐπίστασθαι τὰ δίκαια καὶ ἄλλους διδάξειν;”. As some commentators have noted, the confused syntax of the sentence may be intended to show the indignation and agitation with which Polus breaks up the discussion. But it may also hide a “biting” criticism of Polus, if we consider that he was a professor of rhetoric and thus acknowledged as someone who had “the gift of the gab”. Regarding the discussion of this passage, see notably E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato’s Gorgias. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, ad 461b4-c3; T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias, op. cit.*, ad

his “ἄγειν τοὺς λόγους εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα” of “πολλὴ ἄγροικία”.¹⁶ The accusation of ἄγροικία consists in taking advantage of Gorgias’ αἰσχύνῃ¹⁷ – and thus echoes, in a certain way, the fact that the “conclusions” were drawn only because of Socrates’ *pressure*. The arguments Gorgias presents might appear to involve a little bit of inconsistency (“ἐναντίον τι”). But this inconsistency has no *fundamentum in re*; it is something *merely induced* by Socrates, i.e. by the usual way of discussing which he is so fond of – that leads people into ἀπορία and embarrasses them by manipulating λόγοι with “tricks”.¹⁸ And this is why Polus rejects the “results” the discussion between Gorgias and Socrates leads to – for he regards them as something ἄγροικον,

461bc; W. R. M. LAMB (ed.), *Lysis · Symposium · Gorgias*, vol. III, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge/London, Harvard University Press, 1925, *ad loc.*, pp. 306-307.

¹⁶ Cf. *Gorgias*, 461c3-4: “(...) ἄλλ’ εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα ἄγειν πολλὴ ἄγροικία ἐστὶν τοὺς λόγους.” On the etymology of ἄγροικος, ov, see, for example, P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, vol. I, Paris, Éditions Klincksieck, 1968, p. 15 and H. FRISK, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. I, Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1960, p. 16. “Ἀγροίκος, ov” and “ἄγροικία” mean something that is *blunt, crude, arrogant, harsh, bold, exaggerated and coarse, rude, brutally worded*, etc., but also *boorish, vulgar, uncivilized*, the opposite of “ἀστεῖος, ov”, etc. In his commentary on this passage, G. LODGE (ed.), *Plato: Gorgias*, Boston/London, Ginn & Company, 1896 (1991) writes the following: “ἄγροικία: is the reverse of παιδεία. By this very criticism, Polus betrays that he is himself just as lacking in the polish of a gentleman, which he denies to Socrates, as in scientific knowledge”. Regarding the notion of “ἄγροικία” in 461c, the various aspects with which it is associated and the relation it has to other passages in the *Gorgias*, see also A. N. MICHELINI, “ΠΟΛΛΗ ΑΓΡΟΙΚΙΑ: Rudeness and Irony in Plato’s *Gorgias*”, *Classical Philology* 93 (1998), pp. 50-59, in particular p. 50, where she says: “Polus begins (*Grg.* 461c4) by accusing Socrates of πολλὴ ἄγροικία (“complete crudeness”) for having embarrassed Gorgias in the preceding argument. Ἀγροικία, being crude or “countrified” in behavior, as opposed to “citified” (ἀστεῖος), suggests a naïveté that leads one to violate the standards of polite intercourse.” As regards the meaning of “ἄγροικία”, see, for example, J. ADAM (ed.), *The Republic of Plato*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009 (1902), *ad* 361e; J. BURNET (ed.), *Plato’s Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964 (1924), *ad* 32d2; L. CAMPBELL (ed.), *The Theaetetus of Plato*, With a Revised Text and English Notes, New York, Arno Press, 1973 (1861), *ad* 174d; E. M. COPE/J. E. SANDYS (eds.), *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, vol. 2, Hildesheim/N.Y., 1970 (1877), p. 213; J. DALFEN, *Platon: Gorgias*, Translation and Commentary (Platon: Werke; VI, 3), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2004, *ad* 461c; J. DIGGLE (ed.), *Theophrast Characters*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 208f.; E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato’s Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, *ad* 462e6, 508e7-509a1; K. J. DOVER, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974, pp. 112ff.; IDEM (ed.), *Plato Symposium*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, *ad* 194c2; IDEM, *Greek and the Greeks. Collected Papers*, vol. I: Language, Poetry, Drama, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp. 242f.; V. EHRENBERG, *The People of Aristophanes. A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy*, rev. and enl., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1953² (1943), pp. 73 ff.; T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, *ad* 461b-c; O. RIBECK, “Agroikos. Eine ethologische Studie”, *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 23 (1888), pp. 1-68; J. H. H. SCHMIDT, *Synonymik der griechischen Sprache*, vol. III, Leipzig, Teubner, 1879, pp. 72ff.; W. J. M. STARKIE (ed.), *The Wasps of Aristophanes*, London, Macmillan, 1897, *ad* 1320; E. de STRYCKER/R. SLINGS (eds.), *Plato’s Apology of Socrates: A Literary and Philosophical Study with a Running Commentary*, Leiden/New York/Köln, Brill, 1994, *ad* 32d2; J. TAILLARDAT, *Les images d’Aristophane. Études de langue et de style*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1962, §6, pp. 12f.

¹⁷ Cf. *Gorgias*, 461b4-5: “ἢ οἶε—ὅτι Γοργίας ἡσχύνθη σοι μὴ προσομολογῆσαι (...).”

¹⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, 461c1-2: “(...) τοῦτο <δ> δὴ ἀγαπᾷς, αὐτὸς ἀγαθὸν ἐπὶ τοιαῦτα ἐρωτήματα (...).” In this regard, see E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato’s Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, *ad* 462c1.

i.e. something that is not only rude and in bad taste, but also blunt, coarse, without sense and, therefore, having nothing good or praiseworthy about it.

Socrates answers *ironically* by saying that the πρεσβύτεροι possess companions and sons precisely so that the latter can rectify the elders' lives or set them straight again (“ἐπανορθῶν ἡμῶν τὸν βίον”), when their age begins to make them stumble (“σφάλλεσθαι”). Consequently Polus' intervention is merely his duty.¹⁹ Socrates' irony continues after this: he asks Polus to avoid his prolix way of speaking (“μακρολογία”) and Polus retorts by asserting he is free to say as much as he likes. Socrates agrees, for it would be a δεινὸς πάθος if Polus were the only one in Athens who could not enjoy the liberty to speak (“ἐξουσία τοῦ λέγειν”)²⁰; but, on the other hand, Socrates asks if he himself will not also have to go through δεινά given that he does not have the liberty (“ἐξουσία”) to go away and not listen to him anymore.^{21 22}

¹⁹ Cf. *Gorgias*, 461c5-d4: “{ΣΩ.} ὦ κάλλιστε Πῶλε, ἀλλά τοι ἐξεπίτηδες κτώμεθα ἐταίρους καὶ υἱεῖς, ἵνα ἐπειδὴν αὐτοὶ πρεσβύτεροι γενόμενοι σφαλλώμεθα, παρόντες ὑμεῖς οἱ νεώτεροι ἐπανορθῶτε ἡμῶν τὸν βίον καὶ ἐν ἔργοις καὶ ἐν λόγοις. καὶ νῦν εἴ τι ἐγὼ καὶ Γοργίας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σφαλλόμεθα, σὺ παρὼν ἐπανόρθου—δίκαιος δ' εἶ—καὶ ἐγὼ ἐθέλω τῶν ὁμολογημένων εἶ τί σοι δοκεῖ μὴ καλῶς ὁμολογῆσθαι, ἀναθέσθαι ὅτι ἂν σὺ βούλῃ, ἂν μοι ἐν μόνον φυλάττης.” Regarding the meaning of “δίκαιος δ' εἶ”, see E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato's Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, ad 462d2.

²⁰ Socrates mentions the “freedom of speech” (“παρρησία”, etc.) that was in general recognized as a praiseworthy trait of the Athenian democracy. We cannot discuss this reference in detail, its meaning and implications in the *Gorgias*, etc. As regards the notion of “παρρησία”, see e.g. ARISTOPHANES, *Thesmophoriazusae*, 540ff.; EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 421ff., *Ion*, 670ff. (cf. K. H. LEE, *Euripides: Ion*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1997, ad 672). See also J. ADAM (ed.), *The Republic of Plato*, *op. cit.*, ad 587b11; C. COLLARD (ed.), *Euripides: Supplices*, Groningen, Bouma's Boekhuis, 1975, ad 438ff.; E. HALL (ed.), *Aeschylus: Persians*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1996, ad 592f.; A. J. PODELECKI (ed.), *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips Ltd, 2005, ad 180; K. SCHÖPSDAU (ed.), *Platon: Nomoi (Gesetze)*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003, ad 694b1-5; A. H. SOMMERSTEIN (ed.), *The Comedies of Aristophanes: Acharnians*, vol. 1, Warminster, Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1980, ad 45. On the discussion of this passage in the *Gorgias*, see notably J. DALFEN, *Platon: Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, ad 461e and T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, ad 461e.

²¹ Cf. *Gorgias*, 461d6-462a1: “{ΣΩ.} Τὴν μακρολογίαν, ὦ Πῶλε, ἣν καθέρξης, ἥ τὸ πρῶτον ἐπεχείρησας χρῆσθαι. {ΠΩΛ.} Τί δέ; οὐκ ἐξέσται μοι λέγειν ὅποσα ἂν βούλωμαι; {ΣΩ.} Δεινὰ μεντὰν πάθοις, ὦ βέλτιστε, εἰ Ἀθήναζε ἀφικόμενος, οὗ τῆς Ἑλλάδος πλείστη ἐστὶν ἐξουσία τοῦ λέγειν, ἔπειτα σὺ ἐνταῦθα τούτου μόνος ἀτυχήσῃς. ἀλλὰ ἀντίθεος τοι· σοῦ μακρὰ λέγοντος καὶ μὴ ἐθέλοντος τὸ ἐρωτώμενον ἀποκρίνεσθαι, οὐ δεινὰ ἂν αὐτὸ ἐγὼ πάθοιμι, εἰ μὴ ἐξέσται μοι ἀπιέναι καὶ μὴ ἀκούειν σου;”

²² This “introductory part” leads to a moment in which Socrates, so to speak, lays the basis for the “new path” he and Polus will begin to walk. Socrates asks Polus if he claims to have knowledge of the same things Gorgias has. Polus answers affirmatively – and this is the reason why, like Gorgias himself, Polus too is able to answer knowingly all the questions Socrates might like to ask (see 462a5-10). This apparently insignificant exchange of words points already to something important. Polus claims for himself a knowledge that is characterized by a) a nature corresponding to an “awakening” perspective sc. a perspective that has already overcome an ἀμαθής point of view and b) having *the same “patrimony”* as Gorgias, i.e. by coinciding with the kind of knowledge Gorgias possesses: the knowledge Gorgias *continues to possess*, in spite of the ἔλεγχος he was subjected to. It is not important to see if this is really the case; the important point is that – *from Polus' point of view* – things are precisely so.

The continuation “stages” a new “assault” on the meaning of ῥητορική. This “new assault” begins with a role reversal: Socrates appears in the role of the person questioned and Polus in that of the person questioning, examining, testing, etc. Polus starts by asking Socrates what τέχνη he thinks rhetoric to be. Socrates answers with something *surprising, unexpected*²³: rhetoric is *no τέχνη at all*; it is rather a certain ἐμπειρία (“ἐμπειρία τις”)²⁴ or, as Socrates puts it in 463b4, ῥητορική is a mere “ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή”.²⁵ ²⁶ We cannot yet understand the full meaning of Socrates’ words. But what is already evident is that they imply a *disqualification* – indeed a *strong* disqualification – of what ῥητορική claims to be. If Socrates’ words mean something, it is not only that rhetoric is not the “supreme τέχνη” after all, but also that it does not even reach the “τέχνη’s realm”: it has nothing to do with an “awake” perspective. And the problem is precisely: what does Socrates mean by this?

Polus insists by asking what ῥητορική happens to be an ἐμπειρία of (τινος) – to which Socrates answers: “χάριτός τινος καὶ ἡδονῆς ἀπεργασίας.”²⁷ To make clear to Polus what he means by this, Socrates asks him to repeat the itinerary they have taken

²³ If we consider the “background” to 461b.

²⁴ Cf. *Gorgias*, 462c2-5: “{ΠΩΛ.} Τί τοῦτο λέγεις; {ΣΩ.} Ἐμπειρίαν ἔγωγέ τινα. {ΠΩΛ.} Ἐμπειρία ἄρα σοι δοκεῖ ἡ ῥητορική εἶναι; {ΣΩ.} Ἐμοιγε, εἰ μὴ τι σὺ ἄλλο λέγεις.”

²⁵ See *Leges*, 938a and *Phaedrus*, 260e. See also Y. LAFRANCE, “La problématique morale de l’opinion dans le « Gorgias » de Platon”, *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 93 (1969), pp. 5-29, in particular 12ff.

²⁶ The discussion preceding 461bff. is also marked by the close relationship between ῥητορική sc. τέχνη and ἐμπειρία – cf. 448c4-9: “{ΠΩΛ.} Ὡ Χαίρεφῶν, πολλαὶ τέχναι ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἰσὶν ἐκ τῶν ἐμπειρίων ἐμπειρώς ἡρμημένα· ἐμπειρία μὲν γὰρ ποιεῖ τὸν αἰῶνα ἡμῶν πορεύεσθαι κατὰ τέχνην, ἀπειρία δὲ κατὰ τύχην. ἐκάστων δὲ τούτων μεταλαμβάνουσιν ἄλλοι ἄλλων ἄλλως, τῶν δὲ ἀρίστων οἱ ἄριστοι· ὧν καὶ Γοργίας ἐστὶν ὅδε, καὶ μετέχει τῆς καλλίστης τῶν τεχνῶν.” But, if this is so, if before Socrates’ intervention in 462b ῥητορική already appears to be defined by its link with ἐμπειρία, there is, nevertheless, a fundamental difference, which leads to Socrates’ words in 462bff corresponding *de facto* to something new and surprising. In fact the way in which Polus and Gorgias understand the notion of ἐμπειρία and related concepts in 448c does not involve anything *pejorative*: “ἐμπειρία” or “ἐμπειρώς” are *positive* concepts, which are precisely not in contrast with τέχνη, but rather concur with it and share with it the idea of a “good”, “healthy”, “suitable” point of view. While Socrates uses the notion of ἐμπειρία in a *pejorative* sense: as something in contrast with τέχνη and a contradiction of what is a truly cognoscitive point of view. Regarding the ambiguity of the concept of ἐμπειρία and the way in which Socrates and Gorgias/Polus understand it differently, see K. EMING, *Tumult und Erfahrung*, op. cit., p. 163, who writes the following: “Nur aus Sokrates’ Perspektive ist diese Widerlegung gelungen, denn nach dem Rhetorikverständnis des Gorgias reicht es hin, dass der Redner das Gerechte so weiß, wie die Bürger der Stadt es auffassen. Dass dieses Wissen etwas Empirisches ist, ist für ihn keine Minderung des Wissensstatus’ oder Könnens eines Redners, sondern die Bedingung seiner Wirksamkeit.” As well as this, it is important to point out at once that what was said in this passage is still imprecise and can lead to error. As will be seen more clearly, what Socrates says in 462bff. is only possible at first sight to be translated by the notion of “contrast” (as if there was a *clear demarcation* between what is ἐμπειρία and what is not and indeed belongs to the domain of τέχνη). In fact, to tell the truth, one of the fundamental traits of the way in which this ἐμπειρία (like ῥητορική) is constituted is precisely that it is *not* in contrast with τέχνη, and indeed *makes out that it is τέχνη* (lending itself, therefore, to *being confused with τέχνη as such*, and to *taking on the identity that belongs to τέχνη*).

²⁷ Cf. *Gorgias*, 462c6-7: “{ΠΩΛ.} Τίνος ἐμπειρία; {ΣΩ.} Χάριτός τινος καὶ ἡδονῆς ἀπεργασίας.”

– now regarding ὀψοποιία sc. ὀψοποιητική: cookery. And after this one reaches the conclusion that ῥητορική and ὀψοποιητική are μόρια “τῆς αὐτῆς ἐπιτηδεύσεως”. As Dodds noted, there is something provoking and also “humorous” in putting ῥητορική on the same level as ὀψοποιητική: a subject Polus would certainly regard as far below the “status” of ῥητορική.²⁸ But this characterization of ῥητορική goes beyond this – and paves the way for a more serious, destructive and (according to Socrates) suitable identification of it.²⁹

Socrates starts by saying “ὁ δ’ ἐγὼ καλῶ τὴν ῥητορικήν, πράγματός τινός ἐστι μόνιον οὐδενὸς τῶν καλῶν”.³⁰ The “not-belonging to τὰ καλά” nature of rhetoric is followed by another negative characterization: “δοκεῖ τοίνυν μοι (...) εἶναι τι ἐπιτήδευμα τεχνικὸν μὲν οὐ, ψυχῆς δὲ στοχαστικῆς καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ φύσει δεινῆς προσομιλεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.” In this characterization Socrates reinforces his thesis about the “οὐ τεχνικόν” nature of rhetoric. But he also points to another, important determination: rhetoric is a “τι ἐπιτήδευμα ψυχῆς στοχαστικῆς...”.³¹ That is, what constitutes the “realm” of which rhetoric forms part is a “ψυχὴ στοχαστική, etc.”: a *sagacious, cheeky, bold, shameless* ψυχή. With these assertions Socrates does not yet

²⁸ Cf. E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato's Gorgias*, op. cit., ad 462b11.

²⁹ If we have understood it correctly, this is one of the reasons why Socrates introduces his account of ῥητορική in the following terms: “μὴ ἀγροικότερον ἢ τὸ ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν· ὁκνῶ γὰρ Γοργίου ἔνεκα λέγειν, μὴ οἴηταί με διακωμῶδεῖν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιτήδευμα (...).” Regarding all the characterization of rhetoric that follows and of the aspects associated with it, see Y. LAFRANCE, *La théorie platonicienne de la Doxa*, op. cit., pp. 65ff.

³⁰ Cf. *Gorgias*, 463a2-4.

³¹ “Στοχαστικός” conveys the idea of “skilful in aiming at”, “able to hit”, etc., i.e.: “στοχαστικός” has to do with the semantic weight that corresponds to στοχάζεσθαι. But here the fundamental question seems to be the semantic field associated with στόχος and the idea of what one might call a particular kind of στοχάζεσθαι *sensu stricto*: a στοχάζεσθαι that proceeds *without knowledge*, only “by guesswork”. That is to say, “στοχαστικός” also conveys the notion of something “conjectural”, “good at guessing” – and thus “sagacious”, “cheeky”, “shrewd”, “bold”, “impudent”, “shameless”, etc.: meanings that are, in a certain way, reinforced by the juxtaposition of the adjectives “ἀνδρείος” and “δεινός”. On the etymology, see, for example, P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, op. cit., p. 1060 and H. FRISK, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, op. cit., p. 804. On the meaning of the expression “ψυχῆς στοχαστικῆς” in this passage, see v.g. R. E. ALLEN (ed.), *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. I, *Euthyphro · Apology · Crito · Meno · Gorgias · Menexenus*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 248: “Very well, then, Gorgias, I think it is not the result of pursuing an art, but belongs to a soul given to boldness, shrewd at guesswork, naturally clever in intercourse with people”; A. CROISSET (ed.), *Platon: Œuvres Complètes*, vol. III, 2: *Gorgias · Ménon*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1967 (1923), p. 131: “Eh bien, Gorgias, la rhétorique, à ce qu’ il me semble, est une pratique étrangère à l’art, mais qui exige une âme douée d’imagination, de hardiesse, et naturellement apte au commerce des hommes”; G. EIGLER (ed.), *Platon: Werke*, vol. II, German Translation by F. Schleiermacher, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973, p. 317: “Mich dünkt also, Gorgias, es gibt ein gewisses Bestreben, das künstlerisch zwar gar nicht ist, aber einer dreisten Seele, die richtig zu treffen weiß und schon von Natur stark ist in Behandlung der Menschen”; T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias*, op. cit., p. 31: “Well, Gorgias, I think it is a practice, not of a craftsman, but of a guessing, brave soul, naturally clever at approaching people”. See also E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato's Gorgias*, op. cit., ad 463a6b1.

clarify why rhetoric has to do with στοχαστικόν and what makes it something “sagacious”, “shrewd” or “shameless”; but, if this is true, *the question does not stop being “silently” raised* – and leaves the reader the task of finding the “pieces” that provide an answer to it.

Socrates sums up all he has in mind by saying that rhetoric is something belonging to κολακεία.³² And we shall try to look at what this means in greater detail.

The first thing to become clear is that Socrates speaks of rhetoric as a *part* (“μόριον”) of κολακεία – and not as κολακεία itself. In fact, Socrates even suggests that rhetoric is *only a small part* of κολακεία, which has “πολλὰ καὶ ἄλλα μόρια” (463b2). Κολακεία thus stands for something that is far from being local or particular; on the contrary: κολακεία has from the beginning an *embracing* or *pervasive* determination.

Secondly, κολακεία, as Socrates presents it, is *not* an *isolated* determination, a determination constituted *solely by itself* – without a communication with something else. Κολακεία has, one might say, a “*relational*” nature, i.e.: it is intrinsically mixed with something else – and it is precisely through this mixture that its own “field of incidence” is formed. In short, κολακεία is mixed with τέχναι, passes through their constitution and interferes in the perspectives opened by them. The “formal object” of κολακεία is precisely the “realm” of τέχναι (of which Socrates gives as examples ὀψοποιητική, κομμωτική, σοφιστική and ῥητορική).

Here there are two points that should be noted. On the one hand, 463ff. suggests that κολακεία does indeed have a pervasive, wide-ranging field of incidence, but it does not necessarily mean something *universal*, *all-embracing*. Although κολακεία’s constitution exceeds the “horizon” created by each τέχνη – and although, as we have seen regarding rhetoric, these τέχναι might involve a pretension to totality –, the model now adopted (adopted also by our “spontaneous understanding”) seems to be a model precisely of *division* (of “μόρια”). And the fundamental question seems to be the “particular sphere” created by cookery in opposition to rhetoric, the “field” of rhetoric in contraposition to that of sophistry, that which concerns “technical perspectives” in opposition to other possible points of

³² Cf. *Gorgias*, 463a8-b1: “καλῶ δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐγὼ τὸ κεφάλαιον κολακείαν.” It is important to bear in mind the *substantial ambiguity* with which κολακεία is endowed and its *vast semantic field*. As E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato’s Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, ad 463b1 puts it, “κολακεία is conventionally translated by “flattery”, but the Greek term applies to a wider range of actions and also carries a more emphatic implication of moral baseness (...).” And Socrates’ argument will play (and, in fact, has already started to play) with this *wide* character that intrinsically configures the notion of “κολακεία”.

view, etc. On the other hand, if κολακεία has to do with τέχνη, it makes it hard to understand how rhetoric can be opposed to τέχνη: if rhetoric's characteristic field of incidence is precisely τέχνη, what is the meaning of its contraposition vis-à-vis the “technical” perspective?

A better understanding of what is at stake here is provided by another determination that Socrates ascribes to κολακεία, i.e. *a specific way of being* – the “δοκεῖ εἶναι” way of being. The “δοκεῖ εἶναι” is, with due consideration, the way κολακεία is constituted. And that with which τέχνη are mixed from the beginning is not a new “εἶναι”, added to the “εἶναι” that properly characterizes the “technical point of view”, but rather this particular kind of being that, presupposing the “εἶναι”, makes itself appear (“δοκεῖν”) to be it. In fact, the specific determination introduced by κολακεία does not have to do with something *radically new*. Κολακεία transforms the “realm” of τέχνη by introducing a *seeming-to-be* – and a seeming-to-be that is precisely a seeming-to-be-*a-tέχνη*. The interference of κολακεία “lives” on the creation of a “double”, i.e. of a *multiplicity of “doubles”*. In other words, κολακεία introduces a division, a tearing apart, which breaks the “realm” of τέχνη in two by constituting a second, “double realm”.

But this does not yet touch the decisive point. This lies in what Socrates says in 463d1-2: “ἔστιν γὰρ ἡ ῥητορικὴ κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον πολιτικῆς μορίου εἰδωλον.”³³ A satisfactory analysis of this passage would require an exhaustive exploration of the meaning of “εἰδωλον”, an examination of its different “nuances” in the *Corpus Platonicum* and in its preceding uses, etc. Since we are unable to perform such a task, we shall limit ourselves to *one* fundamental point.

The notion of “εἰδωλον” calls attention to the idea of “semblance”, “seemingness”, etc.: to the idea of a “δοκεῖ εἶναι” *strictiore sensu*. But, in fact, the term “εἰδωλον” involves *something far beyond* a “resemblance”, or a “seeming-to-be” in the strictest sense. The fundamental aspect to “εἰδωλον” – and that which seems to be at stake in the extract from *Gorgias* we are discussing – is not so much the “resemblance” to the “original”, but rather a certain “*capacity*” of the “εἰδωλον”: the capacity by virtue of which the “εἰδωλον” *passes itself off as “reality”* and *expropriates it from its condition*. “Εἰδωλον” means that which *pretends to be the*

³³ Here is not the place to discuss the meaning(s) of the reference to “πολιτικῆ”, its undoubtable importance in the *Gorgias* and in the *Corpus Platonicum*, the complex web of phenomena it points to, etc. What matters is only the formal notion of a τέχνη, to which it is contraposed – and contraposed in the form of “εἰδωλον” – the rhetorical way of being.

“*real thing*”. This represents something irreducible to the phenomenon of mere “resemblance”. Because one determination may seem to be another *without the pretension to be it*. In other words, the “resemblance” does not need to tone down the difference between itself and the “original”; the relation it has to the “original” is one of reference to it, one of pointing to it – in such a way that it is precisely the original that, so to speak, takes the lead and becomes prominent. On the contrary, what is at stake here is a relation according to which the “double” tries to *take the place of the “original”*, tries to *replace it*, tries to *take hold of its own determination*. In other words, “εἶδωλον” stands for something that tries to eliminate the duplicity that “image” bears in its meaning by pretending *to be the original itself*. All this means, on the other hand, that the “δοκεῖ εἶναι” Socrates talks about does not have to do with a mere “resemblance”; “δοκεῖ εἶναι” means – as often in the *Corpus Platonicum* – the *pretension to be what one is not* sc. the “true being”, the “thing itself”: the “εἶναι”.

What develops from here rests on this phenomenon – and, in particular, on one fundamental moment in it, which is the following. The way of being of κολακεία sc. of rhetoric as an εἶδωλον is not an absolutely *negative* one. What constitutes κολακεία is not only the property of *not-being-the-εἶναι*, i.e. the pure *not-possessing-the-εἶναι*. Because the way κολακεία does not possess the εἶναι is also intrinsically linked to a *positive, active* conformation: although it does not possess the εἶναι, κολακεία “*asserts the εἶναι’s rights*”, *puts itself* in the εἶναι’s place, *holds* its determination.

3. The opposition between εὐεξία and mere δοκοῦσα εὐεξία. The intrinsic link between “δοκοῦσα εὐεξία” and κολακευτική. The various aspects involved in the constitution of κολακευτική. The masquerade of rhetoric. A fundamental aspect in the effectiveness of rhetoric and in its way of functioning: the ἀνόητος constitution of the point of view to which it appears

The analysis of the constitution of rhetoric does not stop here. In fact, the continuation of 463d2 makes it clear that the argument is far from being concluded. This becomes evident because Polus has not yet grasped Socrates’ meaning and the “zoom” required by it: Polus continues to be preoccupied only with knowing if rhetoric is, at the end of the day, something καλόν or αἰσχρόν – passing over the τι in

favor of the ποιόν τι.³⁴ This *precipitated, hasty* behavior— to which Socrates alludes by punning with the name “Πῶλος”³⁵ – calls our attention to the incompleteness of the investigation into rhetoric: something that is seconded by Socrates himself in 463e1: “(...) οὐδὲν γάρ πω σαφὲς λέγω (...)”. And thus 463dff. ends up assuming the form of a *deeper* “zooming”.

Socrates starts by establishing the difference between σῶμα and ψυχή.³⁶ But this is not all. “In the interior” of σῶμα and ψυχή, Socrates establishes a second difference: that between an “εὐεξία” and something that *only seems to be* an εὐεξία, *but in fact is not* (“δοκοῦσα μὲν εὐεξία, οὐσα δ’ οὐ”). Socrates gives as an example the fact that many (“πολλοί”) appear to have their bodies in good condition (“δοκοῦσιν εὖ ἔχειν τὰ σώματα”) and no one is likely to notice that they are not, except a doctor or a gymnastics trainer.³⁷ And Socrates emphasizes precisely that something of this sort – i.e. something that “ποιεῖ μὲν δοκεῖν εὖ ἔχειν, ἔχει δὲ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον” – takes place *both* in σῶμα *and* in ψυχή.

What is thus depicted makes it clear that this contraposition is *complex*. For it does not only describe a *disjunction*, but also a certain margin of *conjunction* or “community”: that of “εὐεξία/δοκοῦσα εὐεξία”. But there is more. Considered properly, “εὐεξία”, as Socrates understands it, corresponds to a “*first*” *fundamental* “category”: what everything else is all about; “εὐεξία” stands for something that has *a pivotal meaning* – and thus underlies all that is focused on by Socrates from hereon. This is so, because what is in contraposition to εὐεξία is not, as it might be, a determination totally irreducible to it or even one characterized by the pure negation of “εὐεξία”; Socrates says a very different thing, i.e.: the opposite-to-εὐεξία is a “δοκεῖν εἶναι εὐεξία”, constituted in the manner of an εἶδωλον – and thus intrinsically referring to (and borrowing from) the determination εὐεξία inaugurates. But “εὐεξία” here also means a fundamental “category” in a second, more important sense: what begins to be at stake is not merely a question of seeming-to-be-an-other, but this

³⁴ Cf. *Gorgias*, 463d2: “{ΠΩΛ.} Τί οὖν; καλὸν ἢ αἰσχρὸν λέγεις αὐτὴν εἶναι;”

³⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 463e1-3: “{ΣΩ.} (...) Πῶλος δὲ ὅδε νέος ἐστὶ καὶ ὀξύς.” In this regard, see notably J. DALFEN, *Platon: Gorgias, op. cit., ad 463e*; E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato's Gorgias, op. cit., ad 463e2*; W. R. M. LAMB (ed.), *Lysis · Symposium · Gorgias, op. cit., ad 463e2*.

³⁶ Cf. *Gorgias*, 464a1: “{ΣΩ.} σῶμά που καλεῖς τι καὶ ψυχὴν; {ΓΟΡ.} Πῶς γὰρ οὐ;”

³⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, 464a2-b1: “{ΣΩ.} Οὐκοῦν καὶ τούτων οἶμι τινὰ εἶναι ἐκατέρου εὐεξίαν; {ΓΟΡ.} Ἐγώ γε. {ΣΩ.} Τί δέ; δοκοῦσαν μὲν εὐεξίαν, οὐσαν δ’ οὐ; οἷον τοιόνδε λέγω· πολλοὶ δοκοῦσιν εὖ ἔχειν τὰ σώματα, οὓς οὐκ ἂν ῥαδίως αἰσθητοί τις ὅτι οὐκ εὖ ἔχουσιν, ἀλλ’ ἡ ἰατρός τε καὶ τῶν γυμναστικῶν τις. {ΓΟΡ.} Ἀληθῆ λέγεις. {ΣΩ.} Τὸ τοιοῦτον λέγω καὶ ἐν σώματι εἶναι καὶ ἐν ψυχῇ, ὃ ποιεῖ μὲν δοκεῖν εὖ ἔχειν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἔχει δὲ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον. {ΓΟΡ.} Ἔστι ταῦτα.”

“δοκεῖ εἶναι” put in connection with an *overall* ἔξις that has inscribed in itself the *request* or *tension* to be precisely “good”, “well”, “fine” (“εὖ-”). In other words, the question is how “life” as a whole can possess itself in a “good”, “fine” way – and what are the “structures” that destroy this “condition” *by producing a “δοκεῖ εἶναι” regarding it.*

The next part (464bff.) tries to point out this state of things more clearly.³⁸ Socrates describes the complex “net” that the set of determinations he has introduced ends up weaving. In the first place, he ascribes to ψυχή a specific, proper τέχνη, i.e. πολιτική – to which, in the “field” of the σῶμα, there are two corresponding τέχναι: γυμναστική and ἰατρική. Πολιτική is then divided into two: νομοθετική and δικαιοσύνη – which correspond to the two μόρια belonging to the σῶμα. Νομοθετική is said to correspond to γυμναστική and δικαιοσύνη is said to be the ἀντίστροφον to ἰατρική.³⁹ To this set of four τέχναι is ascribed the εὐεξία (i.e. *four possibilities* of there being εὐεξία) – or what Socrates formulates as “ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον θεραπεύειν” (464c4).

But there is more. To this fourfold “realm” of τέχνη Socrates puts in contraposition another “realm”, produced as a result of the intervention of κολακευτική. This other “realm” represents the exact “double” of the first: it is constituted by the same number of τέχναι (sc. of non-τέχναι), bears the same relationships between its elements as those described above, etc. – but has, so to speak, a “κολακευτικός way of being”.

Here one should pay attention to the characterization Socrates makes of the appearing of this new “realm”. It is clear that its whole conformation has to do with κολακευτική – and, this being so, each τέχνη of it has not only the determination of

³⁸ As Socrates puts it in 464b2-3: “{ΣΩ.} Φέρε δὴ σοι, ἐὰν δύνωμαι, σαφέστερον ἐπιδείξω ὃ λέγω.”

³⁹ Here we cannot see this “net” in all its depth. We shall limit ourselves to a swift description. However, it should be borne in mind that the communication between this set of τέχναι is described as a *complex* one. Not only is there what one might call a “vertical” communication (i.e. νομοθετική and δικαιοσύνη as ἀντίστροφα to γυμναστική and ἰατρική), but also what might be called a “horizontal” one: νομοθετική is said to communicate (“ἐπικοινωνεῖν”) with δικαιοσύνη – and the same is said to be the case in the opposition “γυμναστική/ἰατρική”. On the other hand, this kind of communication is, so to speak, “double” and ends up opening another stratum of complexity, i.e.: the relationships between νομοθετική and δικαιοσύνη sc. γυμναστική and ἰατρική are constituted in such a way that the ἐπικοινωνεῖν at stake in them also relates to their “object” of consideration (“ἅτε περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὔσαι”) – in this regard, see E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato's Gorgias, op. cit., ad 464c1*. But, at the same time, this ἐπικοινωνεῖν is *not sufficient* to obliterate a *certain margin of difference*: νομοθετική and δικαιοσύνη sc. γυμναστική and ἰατρική “ὁμῶς δὲ διαφέρουσι τι ἀλλήλων”. On the meaning of the word “ἀντίστροφον”, see W. H. THOMPSON (ed.), *The Gorgias of Plato*, London, Whittaker & Co., 1871, *ad 464b*.

“τέχνη”, but this determination “supported”, “opened”, as it were, by the κολακευτικός way of being. In other words, the constitution of each one of these τέχναι – the σοφιστική, ῥητορική, κομμωτική and ὀψοποιική – internally spells out the κολακευτική and is, properly speaking, an “expression” of the way of being inaugurated by it.

But here it is important to go deeper and ask Socrates what the meaning of all this is. In what way is κολακευτική constituted? What does it bring with it and how does it do this? Or, as one might also say, how does it “*function*”, to what constellation of determinations does this particular kind of εἶδωλον that bears the name of κολακευτική belong?

1) Socrates highlights that κολακευτική is something that notices, perceives or has access (“αἰσθομένη”) ⁴⁰ to τέχνη, from the beginning. That is, κολακευτική does not enter the “realm” of τέχνη as something absolutely external (e.g. as an enemy enters a territory: *from outside*). At least *quoad nos*, κολακευτική is *already present* in the “territory” of τέχνη. It is something with which τέχνη is in contact, something that “touches” the “realm” of τέχνη and is infiltrated into the perspective that is its own.

2) However, here it is not only the case that there is a link between κολακευτική and τέχνη, formed by the notice κολακευτική has of τέχνη from the beginning. This link has the nature of a “διανέμειν” sc. a “διανεμῆσαι” ⁴¹ – in such a way that the kind of link κολακευτική stands for is one that *divides, splits apart, breaks*, etc.

3) But there is more. Κολακευτική does not characterize itself only by splitting apart, as if there were a chaotic breaking up or a mere dispersion. Κολακευτική has a particular way of being, a particular “face” – which counterbalances the splitting away by creating *a particular unity*. In other words, there is a universal “trait” that traverses the multiplicity of elements constituted by κολακευτική and forms an identity among them: κολακευτική *proceeds by* “οὐ γινώσκειν ἀλλὰ στοχάζεσθαι”. ⁴² And thus, if Socrates is right (and here the problem is *also* to understand *if* and *how* Socrates is right), the perspective sc. the perspectives κολακευτική opens up are not backed by awareness and end up by being in fact a *shutting off* – a shutting off to that φρονεῖν that is proper to a point of view configured by τέχνη.

4) But there is not only this. Socrates’ words point out that the formal “οὐ

⁴⁰ Cf. *Gorgias*, 464c5.

⁴¹ Cf. *ibidem*, 464c6-7.

⁴² Cf. *ibidem*, 464c6.

γινώσκειν ἀλλὰ στοχάζεσθαι” rests, so to speak, on a *fundamental “program”* – on something that in a way “orientates” κολακευτική and which the latter “uses” as a fundamental determination for attaining its purpose: on the ἡδύ – κολακευτική “τοῦ μὲν βελτίστου οὐδὲν φροντίζει, τῷ δὲ αἰεὶ ἡδίστῳ θηρεύεται τὴν ἄνοιαν καὶ ἐξαπατᾷ, ὥστε δοκεῖ πλείστου ἀξία εἶναι”.⁴³ This point is of great importance. For by calling attention to this *fundamental determination* underlying the constitution of κολακευτική Socrates reveals that the idea (claimed by Gorgias and so far not refuted) of the *self-sufficiency* of rhetoric has in fact “feet of clay” and hides a contradiction. The pretension to a sustainable perspective independent of the εἰδέναι falls to the ground, because after all rhetoric claims *to know* what makes one’s life worthy. In other words, rhetoric produces, even if by the back door, a *particular identification* of what is καλόν – and it is precisely the surreptitious and “unconscious” (but not for this reason less effective or decisive) equation “καλόν = ἡδεσθαι/χαρίζεσθαι” which guides rhetoric’s steps from the beginning.⁴⁴ And what constitutes rhetoric (but also all τέχνηαι κολακευτικαί) as a presumably aware, lucid undertaking is the pretension to know and have already identified with due cause that which should guide one’s steps: “life” is accordingly a “*business*” of ἡδονή. In short, the τέχνη of manipulation of πειθώ is, in the end, a *τέχνη of manipulation of ἡδονή*.

It is important to underline this aspect very clearly and to fully understand the implications it bears. Socrates’ words call attention to the fact that rhetoric has produced a certain identification of what is at stake in life and should be pursued (of what is εὐεξία, of what is καλόν, etc.). But, things being so, Socrates at the same time underlines that this is *only one interpretation among other equally possible ones*. That is: what characterizes the notion of εὐεξία is its having a *formal* nature, i.e. it is the fact that it is not from the start tied to any one identification of its content. The notion

⁴³ Cf. *ibidem*, 464d1-3.

⁴⁴ Properly considered, this is a point that is “silently” introduced from the beginning of the discussion between Socrates and Polus. For Polus interprets Socrates’ “definition” of rhetoric – “χάριτος τιος καὶ ἡδονῆς ἀπεργασία” – as if it were “praise”. Furthermore: if rhetoric is a “χάριτος τιος καὶ ἡδονῆς ἀπεργασία”, then it is after all something καλόν or rather – as the continuation shows – καλόν *itself*. In this regard, see 462c8-9: “{ΠΩΛ.} Οὐκοῦν καλόν σοι δοκεῖ ἡ ῥητορικὴ εἶναι, χαρίζεσθαι οἷόν τε εἶναι ἀνθρώποις;” Polus’ spontaneous identification of καλόν with χαρίζεσθαι seems indeed to traverse, even if “subterraneously”, all the discussion he has with Socrates, i.e.: the way he understands Socrates’ arguments and objections, the way he resists the arguments added by Socrates, even the harsh, precipitated behaviour of his seem to echo this already given and evident identification of καλόν. And, contrary to Polus, Socrates seems to be quite aware of this (as 462d5 and the idea of a “τιμᾶν χαρίζεσθαι” point to). In such a way that the passage we are now dealing with may not be “innocent” *including as regards Socrates’ “diagnosis” of Polus’ point of view as a point of view completely made up of “precipitation” and indeed of ἀγοικία...*

of εὐεξία creates in itself the conditions of possibility of – indeed it requires – a particular identification of what concerns it, of what in the end is its content. But in itself it is not tied to any concrete identification of its content. To express it using Kantian terminology: there is no *analytical* link between εὐεξία/καλόν, on the one hand, and ἡδονή, on the other. In other words – and this is precisely the decisive point –, the identification produced by rhetoric between εὐεξία/καλόν and ἡδονή does not constitute other than *one* deformatization of the content of εὐεξία sc. of καλόν – and *not the only one possible*.

But, things being so, this means that, on the other hand, rhetoric, in fact, involves a *pretension to knowledge*: the pretension to knowledge that *establishes* ἡδύ as the appropriate determination of the content of εὐεξία. And it is precisely this establishing of meaning – of the identity between terms not marked by any analyticity link – that *exposes rhetoric to the possibility of being radically false*: of roundly missing what is at stake in life and what needs to be pursued in it. And this in such way that, contrary to what is presupposed by Gorgias in his dialogue with Socrates before 461b, the “vital εἰδέναι” that rhetoric claims for itself is not separate from (indeed it is internally fed by) a particular *establishing of meaning* – that 1. is irreducible to the strictly “practical” sphere (to the domain of the mere execution, of the mere manipulation of – or intervention in – reality), 2. is involved in this same practical sphere and intervenes in it, by exercising the “support” or “basic” functions, and 3. is exposed to the possibility that the content it delivers is not appropriate and, thus, only imperfectly “supports” the intervention performed in the practical sphere.

What all this means is the following. We saw in Chapter 1 that the accusation that rhetoric is nothing more than a mere πίστις does not lead to any breach in Gorgias point of view regarding the effectiveness, worth and praiseworthiness of rhetoric. And it does not lead to it because it is presupposed that a territory of “practical εἰδέναι” *completely separate, constituted only of itself* – i.e.: *totally independent* from knowing what determinations (what contents of εἰδέναι, in the proper sense of the term) are involved in the reality that gets manipulated – is possible. In a word: rhetoric – it would seem – *works*, “*brings grist to its mill*”, notwithstanding its not knowing (not possessing εἰδέναι with regard to) the way in which reality is constituted, what is at stake in it, what needs to be pursued in it, etc. It is precisely this pretension that now “falls to the ground”. In fact Socrates’ words reveal that rhetoric is as it were *internally supported by cores of εἰδέναι* – i.e. by *pretensions to an appropriate*

comprehending of what is at stake in reality. In such a way that it is precisely the existence of this “umbilical cord” of connection to something like a “*cognitive question*”, it is this *need to define* what is at stake in the reality in which it intervenes that leads to 1. the working of rhetoric not being independent and merely “automatic” and 2. the definition thus adopted (the εἰδέναι which it claims to have) being able to be exposed to the possibility of being a mere presumption to knowledge: an εἰδέναι without foundations.

This being so, we can see one of the reasons why Socrates says that κολακευτική “θηρεύεται τὴν ἄνοιαν” – and indeed proceeds without γινώσκειν. Κολακευτική chases, goes after or seeks ἄνοια, because it is composed of a *twofold deflection*. On the one hand, rhetoric has adopted one determination (ἡδονή) without even being aware of it: rhetoric does not have the discernment to notice what it has as its own guide, in such a way that this “guide” is a “*tacit*”, “*unconscious*” one. And this very aspect is intimately associated with another: rhetoric has to do with ἄνοια not least because it has adopted ἡδονή “*uncritically*”, i.e. *without examining* if this is really the correct identification of καλόν, *without considering closely* if ἡδονή is truly what should be at stake in one’s life. And it is precisely this *lack of sharpness*, this *blunt constitution*, this “*blind*” being rooted in ἡδονή’s “programme” that turns κολακευτική sc. rhetoric into something, at the end of the day, absurd, foolish, deviant, without sense.

5) The “picture” thus drawn by Socrates introduces another significant modification in what has been considered hitherto. Up to now κολακευτική was included among the τέχναι and its incidence regarded the entire field covered by them. But, up to now, this might be understood in such a way that κολακευτική’s “capacity” was compatible with a “*detached conformation*”: it regards now this τέχνη, now the other, etc. However, if we understand it correctly, Socrates’ analysis ends up revealing something very different – that κολακευτική’s real constitution is in fact *the contrary*. Κολακευτική’s intervention is fundamentally in the definition of what is at stake in *life*, by what it should be molded, on behalf of what it should be lived. That is to say, κολακευτική is able to afford *one overall interpretation* of what everything is all about; it is able to establish an overall “program”, different from other possible ones. This means that the incidence characteristic of κολακευτική and the “program” entailed in ἡδονή do not have a detached nature, but rather a *universal, all-embracing, all-unifying* one. That is to say: it is indeed *possible* that κολακευτική distorts the

“meaning” or pulls it up by the root; κολακευτική is in fact able to give an answer to the question “ὅτινα χρή τρόπον ζῆν;” and turn our “τρόπος τοῦ ζῆν” into a deviant one, from the beginning. Or, as one might also say, there can be a “δοκοῦσα τέχνη sc. a δοκοῦσα εὐεξία τοῦ βίου”: a seeming-to-be-a-τέχνη sc. a seeming-to-be-a-εὐεξία that affects the very core of our lives and leads us astray as regards how we should conduct them.

6) But this is not all. Another “trait” of κολακευτική – one might say, its fundamental one – is described in 464c7ff.: “[ἡ κολακευτική] ὑποδύσα ὑπὸ ἕκαστον τῶν μορίων, προσποιεῖται εἶναι τοῦτο ὅπερ ὑπέδου”. The verb ὑποδύειν, ὑποδύεσθαι, conveys the idea of “go under”, “slip in under”. That is, ὑποδύειν has to do with a δύειν – an entering or a making one’s way into – that goes under, that does not stay on the surface but plunges beneath, dives under or sinks into⁴⁵, that does not go in front of but behind.⁴⁶ This verb is also linked to the idea that what goes under (or stays behind) proceeds in a somewhat “hidden”, “subtle”, “insidious” way. In other words, “ὑποδύειν” might stand for something (or someone) that does not call much attention to itself, that is not “out in the open”, but, as it were, moves slowly, carefully and almost imperceptibly, in order to avoid being heard or noticed. In short, “ὑποδύειν” might also mean to insinuate oneself into something, creep under something (like a snake, for example), etc. But there is more: the way in which ὑποδύειν can, thus, have to do with something that does not let itself be seen, that does not reveal itself to one’s gaze, of which one is not aware and which is, in this sense, “hidden”, “veiled”, unsuspected, results in ὑποδύειν also being able to be associated with the idea of *deceit, beguilement*, etc.⁴⁷

What is thus described, even if in a concise fashion, may serve as a basis for understanding what Socrates’ words point to. Ὑποδύειν, ὑποδύεσθαι also means – and this is the fundamental point – *put on a character, impersonate a character, dress*

⁴⁵ As e.g. in the *Odyssey*, IV, 435 the Dawn is said to “have plunged beneath the broad bosom of the sea (ὑποδύσα θαλάσσης εὐρέα κόλπον)”; see W. WALTER MERRY/J. RIDDELL/D. B. MONRO (eds.), *Commentary on the Odyssey*, rev. and enl., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1886² (1876), *ad loc.*

⁴⁶ See, for example, *Ilias*, VIII, 271, where there is a talk of how Aias got behind Ajax’s shield, as a child hides itself behind its mother (“πάϊς ὥς ὑπὸ μητέρα δύσκειν”); cf. M. M. WILLCOCK (ed.), *Homer: Iliad*, With Introduction and Commentary, 2 vols., London, Bristol Classical Press, 2009 (1978).

⁴⁷ The relation between the two ideas – the idea of something hidden and that of deceit – is found very clearly enunciated in SOPHOCLES, *Philoctetes*, 1112: “κρυπτά τ’ ἔπη δολερᾶς ὑπέδου φρενός.” In this regard see R. C. JEBB (ed.), *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, vol. 4: *The Philoctetes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010 (1890), *ad* 1111f.

oneself up as “x”.⁴⁸ In other words, “ὑποδύειν” regards what Socrates says in 465b, describing the relationship between ὀψοποιική and ἰατρική: “ἡ ὀψοποιική τῇ ἰατρικῇ ὑπόκειται”⁴⁹, i.e. ὀψοποιική *wears the mask of* ἰατρική.⁵⁰

With these words Socrates spells out the very nature of κολακευτική’s interference in the realm of the τέχναι. Κολακευτική enters their realm *as something that pretends to be the τέχναι themselves* – and pretends to be them *by wearing their mask*. As Socrates says, κολακευτική “προσποιεῖται εἶναι τοῦτο ὅπερ ὑπέδν”. And this “προσποιεῖται” reveals precisely the pretension to be something one is not – a pretension that *eo ipso* regards a “qualitative” determination: “προσποιεῖται” means the pretension *to pass* “aiming at pleasure” (“στοχάζεσθαι τοῦ ἡδέος”)⁵¹ off as *τὸ βέλτιστον*, in such a way that the “προσποιεῖται” here at stake is *from the very beginning* a “προσποιεῖται τὰ βέλτιστα”⁵² sc. a “προσποιεῖται” with respect to “πλείστου ἀξία εἶναι”⁵³. And what this means is, considering carefully, the following. Κολακευτική is constituted in such a way that it is not limited to only itself (it does not get reduced to the determination which is its own), but rather “overflows”, so to say, beyond itself and “infiltrates” the identity of τέχνη and the sphere of meaning corresponding to it. That is: what is involved in the notion of κολακευτική is not only a *different* determination of τέχνη, which comes to join it and intervenes in its horizon. The “*difference*” as such is not the fundamental category and makes us lose sight of what is at stake here: it is not a question of a “B” *different* from “A” that, in a supervenient manner, gets close to the determination of “A” and in a certain way gets associated with this. No. The mask metaphor, that of ὑποδύεσθαι, etc., directs our attention towards something irreducible to the idea of a link between an “A” and a “B” *that allows the difference between them subsist*. Because what characterizes the link between τέχνη and κολακευτική is that the latter *superimposes* itself on the

⁴⁸ See notably T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias, op. cit., ad 464cd*, W. H. THOMPSON (ed.), *The Gorgias of Plato, op. cit., ad loc.*, G. STALLBAUM (ed.), *Platonis opera omnia*, vol. II, sect. I: *Platonis Gorgias*, Gothae, Hennings, 1861³ (1828), *ad loc.* and G. LODGE (ed.), *Plato: Gorgias, op. cit.* in his commentary on this passage: “ὑποδύσα: as it were under a cloak or a mask by which its real nature is concealed. The usage is borrowed from the stage; cf. Luc. *Pisc.* 33.”

⁴⁹ Cf. *Gorgias*, 465b1-2: “Τῇ μὲν οὖν ἰατρικῇ, ὥσπερ λέγω, ἡ ὀψοποιική κολακεία ὑπόκειται.”

⁵⁰ Cf. E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato’s Gorgias, op. cit., ad 465b1*: “τῇ ... ἰατρικῇ ... ὑπόκειται, “wears the mask of medicine” (not “is subordinate to medicine”, as L.S.J.): ὑποκεῖσθαι denotes the state resulting from the act of ὑποδύναι (464c7).” See also G. LODGE (ed.), *Plato: Gorgias, op. cit., ad loc.* and G. STALLBAUM (ed.), *Platonis opera omnia*, vol. II, sect. I: *Platonis Gorgias, op. cit., ad loc.*

⁵¹ As Socrates puts it in 465a1-2.

⁵² Cf. *ibidem*, 464d3.

⁵³ Cf. *ibidem*, 464d2.

identity of the former and *gets mixed up* with it: *subverts it*. That is: the “B” that comes to be joined to “A” passes itself off as “A” *itself*: it takes on its identity – it *gets mixed up* with the determination of “A”. And the result of the intervention of κολακευτική is not the constitution of a determination added to “A” – it is not something like an “A” + “B” – but rather *only “A”*: and it is only the τέχνη that is apparent, it is just its “face” that it allows to be seen – and the identity of κολακευτική (what it has of its own and different as compared to τέχνη) *disappears*, gets eclipsed “behind” the “face” of τέχνη itself.

This *confusion in identity* between κολακευτική and τέχνη is what is the core phenomenon: κολακευτική *gets mixed up* with τέχνη (with τὸ βέλτιστον, etc.) in the way that it *usurps the identity* belonging to it, i.e. in the way that it *puts on the mask of τέχνη* and *passes itself off* as it using the determination that is the latter’s. But, things being so, it is important to try and see more closely what aspects are involved here and what the meaning of all this is.

Firstly, this means that κολακευτική is not located side by side with the τέχναι, *coexisting peacefully* with them. The case is rather that κολακευτική introduces a *conflict*, a *tension*. In other words, κολακευτική introduces a pitting of strengths between τέχνη and non-τέχνη (sc. the εἶδωλον), in such a way that the connection τέχνη/εἶδωλον becomes one in which the determination of “power” sc. of “*searching for power*” is decisive. And the connection τέχνη/εἶδωλον is, properly speaking, a *question of power*: a question of “*who takes the lead*” or “gets the best of it”. This is so because κολακευτική turns the εἶδωλα precisely into “*usurpers*” of τέχναι’s place and status, into that which is in a condition (and willing) to *govern over them*. In short, κολακευτική stands for what one might call an “*agonistic determination*” – and thus reflects not only the use of δύνειν in “military” contexts but also the “play” “staged” in 464d5ff., where there is a talk of a διαγωνίζεσθαι between τέχνη (i.e. the doctor) and pseudo-τέχνη (i.e. the cook).⁵⁴

But what is essential here is *how* κολακευτική sc. the τέχναι κολακευτικάι conquer (or try to conquer) the territory belonging to the τέχναι. Socrates highlights that this “conquering” has as its central determination the idea of “*hiddenness*”,

⁵⁴ As regards the use of “δύνειν” in a “military” context, see, for example, *Ilias*, XIV, 63, XVII, 210. The διαγωνίζεσθαι image already appears in 456b-c and also plays a central role in 459aff.

“subtleness”, etc.⁵⁵ Κολακευτική achieves what it wants, not only because it has the same face value as the τέχνη, but also because *it does not call attention to this*. The efficiency of κολακευτική resides in the fact that it is a “silent” or “subterranean” power: a power that does not exist on the surface, but is rather hidden beneath, veiled under the name of something else (a power that proceeds “*clam et fraudulenter*”, as Stallbaum puts it). Properly considered, it is precisely this hidden, “noiseless” power or capacity that is involved in a *mask*. In fact, for a mask to be able to *pass itself off as what is “real”* and thus carry out the “ἐξαπατᾶν”⁵⁶, it has to become “transparent” as regards the “original” – it has *to be seen as the “original” itself and not as a mask*. In other words, the mask disappears – becomes visible and stops being able to deceive – when it calls attention to itself, when its presence is no longer “silent” but “noisy”. In such a way that the *sagacious* nature Socrates ascribes to rhetoric has to do precisely with 1) conquering τέχνη’s face value, i.e. assuming the identity of a real τέχνη and 2) doing it in a surreptitious, secret way.

But, on the other hand, we can also better understand what the διανέμειν produced by the κολακευτική is all about. All things considered, what the διανέμειν κολακευτική carries out is just another *device* or *stratagem* to overwhelm the “real” – and indeed a very sagacious one: by dividing up the τέχνη’s territory, κολακευτική does not only introduce turbulence, and conflict at the core of that territory; it also introduces the possibility of *inverting* the parts τέχνη and εἶδωλον play, i.e. of *reversing* the determinations corresponding to “real” and “image”.⁵⁷ And what subjugates τέχνη is not only having its own territory occupied by a “foreigner force”,

⁵⁵ As will be clearer later, here we touch on the “moral” determination involved in the notion of “κολακεία”, which turns it precisely into something “shameless”, “impudent”, etc. In this regard, see note 32 above.

⁵⁶ As Socrates says in 464d1-3: “(…) καὶ τοῦ μὲν βελτίστου οὐδὲν φροντίζει, τῷ δὲ αἰεὶ ἡδίστῳ θηρεύεται τὴν ἄνοιαν καὶ ἐξαπατᾷ, ὥστε δοκεῖ πλείστου ἀξία εἶναι.”

⁵⁷ As one could also say, using Socrates’ words, κολακευτική sc. κολακεία is precisely a μηχανή: a trick or stratagem, something intended to deceive. In fact, the characterization of κολακεία as μηχανή is something that already belongs to the background to 461 – and, what is more, a μηχανή that has precisely to do with a “δοκεῖ εἶναι”. But, if this is true, the focusing produced in this “background” is not yet sufficient (is not yet “close”) to showing the structural complexity that now begins to be depicted: the constellation of determinations that form this μηχανή, the way it proceeds, how it is constituted, etc. In such a way that, if we are not wrong, what is described in *Gorgias*, at least up to 464, is the transition of a *formal and undifferentiated* notion of μηχανή sc. of “δοκεῖ εἶναι” towards a more and more *precise* notion of it, which tries to analyze how it is composed and how it becomes possible. On the use of “μηχανή”, “μηχανάομαι” before 461, see 459b6ff. Regarding the meaning of μηχανή, see, for example, M. DETIENNE/J.-P. VERNANT, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 2006 (1991), pp. 23, 28, 40, 41, 78, 144 (Translated by J. Lloyd from the French: M. DETIENNE/J.-P. VERNANT, *Les ruses de l’intelligence. La mètis des Grecs*, Paris, Flammarion, 1974); and, in the *Corpus Platonicum*, v.g. R. G. BURY (ed), *The Symposium of Plato*, Cambridge, W. Heffer and Sons LTD, 1973² (1909), ad 203d6.

but the fact that this foreigner force *becomes the “real” one* and acquires its own determination: *assumes its own identity*.

This is not yet sufficient for understanding the complexity of the “traits” with which Socrates depicts κολακευτική. The examination of the constitution of κολακευτική sc. rhetoric must also include an analysis of how *the point of view that is deceived by it* is constituted – and Socrates highlights that the efficiency of κολακευτική relies not least on *the conformation of the “spectator’s” gaze*: the person “watching” and “judging” the whole “stage” on which the masks come and go, the person to whom the masks appear and play their role.

Here the use of ἄνοια, ἀνόητος is again decisive. First of all, Socrates says that the mask is seen as “real” *from the point of view of those men that are “ἀνόητοι ὥσπερ οἱ παῖδες”*.⁵⁸ And the διαγωνίζεσθαι between τέχνη and εἰδωλον is decided in favor of the εἰδωλον *when the point of view of the person “watching” has an ἀνόητος conformation*.⁵⁹ In other words, κολακευτική also chases or hunts after ἄνοια⁶⁰ in the sense that it is preoccupied with (or interested in) having, so to speak, an ἀνόητος “audience” – and the ἀνόητος constitution of the point of view to which it appears is a

⁵⁸ Cf. *Gorgias*, 464d6-7. In fact, the characterization of the perspective of children as ἀνόητος – but also, as Socrates points out in 461c5ff., of the perspective of the old men – is a fundamental trait of the understanding characteristic of the Ancient World. Here it is not possible to analyse in detail this understanding and the different nuances it assumes. However, one should mention that it calls attention precisely to the possibility of one’s gaze having a *defective constitution*: the possibility of a perspective that it is *not lucid, not able to discern how “things really are”, not backed by discernment, not in a “healthy” or “fine” condition*, etc. What is at stake is, therefore, every perspective that lacks the capacities that form part of a mature “free citizen”: a perspective backed precisely by φρονεῖν. It should be noted moreover, *en passant*, that the link between the effectiveness of rhetoric and the fact that it gets constituted in an environment marked by ignorance, non-knowledge (i.e. the fact that it gets constituted *through its relationship to an ignorant point of view* and has in a point of view formed thus the *terminus ad quem* of its accomplishment, so to speak) is an aspect already pointed out by Socrates in the discussion preceding 461b. It is precisely this that is at stake when Socrates and Gorgias determine that rhetoric operates and is effective “before a multitude” (to borrow from W. R. M. Lamb’s translation) sc. “among a mass of people” (to borrow from T. Irwin’s translation): “ἐν πλήθει” (456c6). In this regard see also 459a1-5: “{ΣΩ.} Ἐλεγές τοι νυνδὲ ὅτι καὶ περὶ τοῦ ὑγιεινοῦ τοῦ ἱατροῦ πιθανώτερος ἔσται ὁ ῥήτωρ. {ΓΟΡ.} Καὶ γὰρ ἔλεγον, ἐν γε ὄχλῳ. {ΣΩ.} Οὐκοῦν τὸ ἐν ὄχλῳ τοῦτό ἐστιν, ἐν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν; οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἐν γε τοῖς εἰδόσι τοῦ ἱατροῦ πιθανώτερος ἔσται.” In other words: with all that it allegedly involves regarding the overcoming of a perspective that is common, coarse, not backed by discernment, etc. (i.e. that of the πολλοί, of the ὄχλος, of the πλῆθος, etc.) – an overcoming that makes rhetoric precisely a τέχνη – the *intimate link to* (and *dependence on*) such a perspective constitutes, to tell the truth, one of the supporting walls in the way in which rhetoric is constituted and takes its effect.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, 464d5-e1: “(…) ὥστ’ εἰ δέοι ἐν παισὶ διαγωνίζεσθαι ὁσοποιόν τε καὶ ἱατρόν, ἢ ἐν ἀνδράσιν οὕτως ἀνόητοις ὥσπερ οἱ παῖδες, πότερος ἐπαίει περὶ τῶν χρηστῶν σιτίων καὶ πονηρῶν, ὁ ἱατρὸς ἢ ὁ ὁσοποιός, λιμῶ ἂν ἀποθανεῖν τὸν ἱατρόν.” See C. UNGEFER-KORTUS, “Die Richtenden Kinder: zu Platon Gorgias 464d6f.”, *Hermes* 129 (2001), pp. 562-563.

⁶⁰ As Socrates says in 464d2: “κολακευτική θηρεύεται τὴν ἄνοιαν καὶ ἐξαπατᾷ”.

decisive component of its capacity.⁶¹

The fundamental connection between the constitution of κολακευτική and an “άνόητος like children” perspective calls our attention precisely to the kind of games that belong to a children’s world. Children pretend to be “firemen” or play at being “doctors”. But what children thus “play” is comprehended *by us* (rightly or not) precisely as *playing a part, as pretending to be someone*, in such a way that all this *make-believe* is perceived *as such*, i.e.: as fantasy, as something that belongs to a “fantasy world”, etc. In other words, we have, consciously or not, a thesis about the “reality”, i.e. “non-reality” of the point of view in which children “dwell”: a thesis that establishes that it is a question of *unreality, untruthfulness, mere fantasy*. And regardless of any “ancient conception” about the “place” and nature of παιδες⁶², it is precisely this that Socrates seems to have in view when he says “άνόητοι ὥσπερ οἱ παιδες”. The fundamental point about this statement is not so much the “children”; it is rather the possibility of a perspective being “fantasy”, “merely imagined”, “meaningless” – and being that precisely *to a point of view that is able to discern, to understand what is “real”, “truthful”, “meaningful”*.

This should be emphasized with another “trait” that Socrates ascribes to κολακευτική: *it’s ἄλογος way of being*. We cannot study here the whole spectrum that makes up “ἄλογος”, “ἄλογία”, etc. What is important for us is only the specific kind of *lacking or absence of λόγος* that Socrates seems to have particularly in mind. We can also approach it by comparing a mask and a children’s point of view sc. an άνόητος point of view. In fact, the very “φύσις” of make-believe is constituted by the fact that one *is not able to give an account* of the part one is playing. If we interrupted some make-believe and asked children “what is a doctor?”, “what does he do?”, “is his job a noble or a mean one?”, “how should he treat his patients?”, etc. – we would

⁶¹ That is, the mask “falls off”, stops having its deceiving, illusive effect *when it is seen by a gaze that is shaped by νοῦς*. It is precisely this penetrating gaze, which does not limit itself to the surface of what appears immediately but is in fact capable of discerning what is happening, i.e it is this gaze that “goes beyond the mask” and has the ability to understand where “reality” is situated – in a word, it is this intimate relationship between *having-νοῦς* (seeing based on a perspective shaped by νοῦς) and the *suppression of the effectiveness of any “mask” or “disguise”* that can be found described in a very fine way in Book XVII of the *Odyssey*, at the point where Odysseus (disguised by Athena as a “beggar”, in order to not be recognised by Penelope’s wooers) meets his hound Argos – cf. 291ff., in particular 300ff.: “ἔνθα κύων κεῖτ’ Ἄργος, ἐνίπλειος κυνοραιστέων. // δὴ τότε γ’, ὥς ἐνόησεν Ὀδυσσεύς ἐγγὺς ἔόντα, // οὐρῇ μὲν ῥ’ ὃ γ’ ἔσηνε καὶ οὐατα κάββαλεν ἄμφω, // ἄσπον δ’ οὐκέτ’ ἔπειτα δυνήσατο οἷο ἄνακτος // ἐλθέμεν: αὐτὰρ ὁ νόσφιν ἰδὼν ἀπομόρξατο δάκρυ, // ῥεῖα λαθὼν Εὐμαιον, ἄφαρ δ’ ἐρεεῖντο μύθοι.” Regarding the relation between a perspective marked by the absence of νοῦς and the idea of cheating and deceit see also, for example, *Respublica* X, 598c-d and *Sophista*, 234bff.

⁶² Cf. note 59 above.

probably not get much more than a *puzzled* smile, in a *hurry* to go back to playing again.⁶³ That is, a fundamental property of the “mask” is constituted by *being directed towards the “performing” itself*, being preoccupied only with *the “role”* in question: with *the character*, with *what one pretends*. The fundamental point about the mask is that it pretends to be “x” without being concerned with the sense “x” might have, what it corresponds to, etc. – in such a way that in playing make-believe one is not really able to *give an account of “x”*, one is not able to say what the reason is for (or what is responsible for) the precise things one performs: “ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν” (465a4-5). Make-believe steps over “λόγον διδόναι”⁶⁴, because it does not see it as a fundamental thing – because, in fact, *it is not needed* to play one’s part, to pretend to be “x”. And what turns make-believe into an “ἄλογος πρᾶγμα” is, at least in part, the fact that it lacks any meaning, any account (“οὐκ ἔχει οὐδένα λόγον”) – a lack regarding *those very things* to which it applies and are “carved” into what one’s “face” claims to be.⁶⁵

With all this, Socrates depicts the “traits” that constitute κολακευτική’s nature. This does not mean that the “figure” thus depicted is a complete, thorough one. The “figure” here at stake remains, so to say, “open” to the uncovering of other fundamental determinations – just as the “faces” we encounter in the outside world are always ready to surprise us with new traits and expressions. But, if this is so, the “figure” Socrates has already revealed makes us see that the constitution of what is (or may be) opposed to τέχνη is a very *complex* one – and, indeed, involves a far greater constellation of determinations than we are spontaneously willing to admit. For example, it is surprising for the “spontaneous understanding” of “εἰδωλον” that it may have to do with a fixed “program”: that which strives after ἡδύ; it is also unexpected that the notion of “εἰδωλον” may be linked to the notion of “νοῦς”; the case is the same with the phenomena corresponding to *deceiving* and *lacking*: for what seems to be proper to an “image” is to *reveal the “original”* – and to reveal it

⁶³ And both aspects – the being puzzled and the hurry to carry on playing – are important. In fact, on the one hand, *one does not know how to give a reply to the questions posed*, one does not possess an understanding of what they are aiming at and, on the other, what is fundamental is precisely to *continue “playing”*: the focus is on *the performing itself*, in such a way that one “passes over” (or does not look directly at) the determinations presupposed in the performing itself.

⁶⁴ Socrates does not use this expression, but his words certainly point to the *idea* of it.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Gorgias*, 465a2-5: “τέχνην δὲ αὐτὴν οὐ φημι εἶναι ἄλλ’ ἐμπειρίαν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει λόγον οὐδένα ὃ προσφέρει ἢ προσφέρει ὅποῦ ἅττα τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν.” Regarding the discussion of “ὃ προσφέρει ἢ προσφέρει” and the difficulties in the determining of the Greek, see notably E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato’s Gorgias*, *op. cit.*, ad 465a4.

exactly as it is.

By calling attention to this complex constellation, Socrates ends up stressing one fundamental point and leaving a serious problem in our hands. In fact, Socrates “makes a breach” in that apparently all-embracing territory governed by the εἶδωλον sc. by κολακευτική. And he makes it by opening the possibility of *recognizing the mask as such* and the perspective that is thus deceived by it as an ἀνόητος one. But at the same time his words point to the possibility of “buying the whole story” that the mask “tells”. And here the fundamental point is that the difference between “real” and “disguise” does not depend entirely on the mask’s own capacity to deceive and overwhelm the “original’s territory”; it depends *also* on the *sharpness* or *bluntness* of the perspective that is able (or not) to *discern and distinguish the real from its mask*.

Properly considered, it is precisely the possibility of an alternative between a sharp or a blunt point of view that turns the “realm” of masks into a “realm” that is *not completely all-embracing*: it is precisely this possibility that makes the confusion between the mask and the original/real one *not entirely irreversible*. But, this being so, we ourselves are faced with the problem of knowing how it is possible and what it precisely means, i.e.: how can there be this “interchanging” between “real” sc. τέχνη and εἶδωλον sc. mask? What decides whether it is a question of a mask or one of the “original”? What does this have to do with the oppositon “σῶμα/ψυχή”, proposed by Socrates? And how can all this mean a “labyrinth”? These questions regard, at the end of the day, the constitution of εὐεξία and of what is opposed to it. And they end up revealing that, despite all the steps that have been taken, the problem of rhetoric’s constitution (of its range, its composition, its way of “contaminating” εὐεξία’s way of being, etc.) still stands its ground and needs an even stronger “zoom”.

4. Deeper inside the masquerade: “*confusion*” as a fundamental determination and the labyrinth of masks

The discussion between Socrates and Polus does not end here. In 465b6 Socrates says that in order to avoid going on at length (“μακρολογεῖν”), he will speak as the geometricians do (“ὥσπερ οἱ γεωμέτραι”).⁶⁶ This may suggest that what is going to be

⁶⁶ Cf. *Gorgias*, 465b6ff.: “ἴν’ οὖν μὴ μακρολογῶ, ἐθέλω σοι εἰπεῖν ὥσπερ οἱ γεωμέτραι (...).”

at stake is only a matter of “summarizing” and “sketching” what has been argued. However, understanding this passage *exclusively* as a “summary” or as “another way” of saying what has already been said might lead us to overlook some important points and to “conceal” the phenomena that the next part reveals.⁶⁷ In fact 465b6ff. has to do with all that has been examined, i.e.: the possibility of “A” passing itself off as “B”, the possibility of thus confusing “A” with “B” and misunderstanding “who is really who”, etc. But, at the same time, the passage now in question *renders more complex* this state of things by *analyzing the meaning of this “confusion”*. In short, what is going to be at stake is the inquiring after what Socrates describes as the “φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” (the being mixed up, the being confounded or jumbled together, etc.) between things that are by nature distinct, separated, or set apart (“διέστηκε φύσει”).

Socrates says that, if the ψυχή were not in command (“ἐπεστάτει”) of the σῶμα, but instead the latter were in command of itself, and so cookery and medicine were not surveyed and distinguished from one another (“κατεθεωρεῖτο καὶ δεκρίνετο”) by the ψυχή, but the case was rather that the σῶμα judged (“ἔκρινε”) by guesswork from the gratifications given to it – if this were so, then we would have Anaxagoras’ “ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα”, all things would be jumbled together/mixed up into one (“ἐφύρετο ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”) and matters of medicine and health, and of cookery would be indistinguishable, confused (ἄκριτα) things.⁶⁸

What is thus described calls attention, even if in a “subterranean” way, to several important aspects. In the first place, some of the different εἶδωλα that were said to belong to the “realm” of κολακευτική are again mentioned. Socrates puts these εἶδωλα side by side with some of the τέχναι – and says that the confusion, the mixing up between them is intrinsically related to a certain *power* by which one determination takes the lead and becomes the ἐπιστάτης. Socrates ascribes the constitution of the “confusion”, of the ὁμοῦ not to just any ἐπιστάτης, as if the

⁶⁷ In fact, the ambiguity of 465b6ff. is implied in the very use of “ἤδη” (“ἤδη γὰρ ἂν ἴσως ἀκολουθήσαις”), as it might refer *both* to what has *already* been said (and which is only a matter of “summarizing”) *and* to a another kind of speaking *by virtue of which* Polus will begin to really understand what Socrates means. In this regard, see T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias, op. cit., ad 465b7-c1*.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Gorgias*, 465c7-d6: “καὶ γὰρ ἂν, εἰ μὴ ἡ ψυχή τῷ σώματι ἐπεστάτει, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ αὐτῷ, καὶ μὴ ὑπὸ ταύτης κατεθεωρεῖτο καὶ διεκρίνετο ἢ τε ὀψοποιική καὶ ἡ ἰατρική, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα ἔκρινε σταθμώμενον ταῖς χάρισι ταῖς πρὸς αὐτό, τὸ τοῦ Ἀναξαγόρου ἂν πολὺ ἦν, ὃ φίλε Πῶλε—σὺ γὰρ τούτων ἔμπειρος—ὁμοῦ ἂν πάντα χρήματα ἐφύρετο ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ, ἀκρίτων ὄντων τῶν τε ἰατρικῶν καὶ ὑγιεινῶν καὶ ὀψοποικῶν.” Regarding the reference of this passage to Anaxagoras’ thesis, the notion of φύρειν, etc., see W. SCHWABE, “Mischung” und “Element” im Griechischen bis Platon: Wort- und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen, insbesondere zur Bedeutungsentwicklung von στοιχεῖον, Bonn, Bouvier, 1980, pp. 44ff.

“confusion” were produced simply by the ruling of the determination “A” or “B” over the other. No: what constitutes the possibility of the “confusion” is *the σῶμα* or, more correctly, the σῶμα becoming the ἐπιστάτης: the σῶμα *as ruler*.⁶⁹

As is possible to understand from this first reference, σῶμα does not mean here a “blind” part of a totality or, as it were, the “appendix” of the presentation we have. “Σῶμα” stands for *one particular kind of access* – it stands for a possible *judging* of what the presentation is all about. “Σῶμα” means a particular way of leading one’s life and is intrinsically related to an “awareness”, a point of view or, so to speak, an “author”: an “author” that establishes, interprets and judges (κρινεῖ) *life as a whole* – and establishes, interprets and judges it *as a matter of χαρίζεσθαι*.⁷⁰ In other words, “σῶμα” is but a deformalisation of the concept of εὐεξία sc. of δοκοῦσα εὐεξία: it means precisely that blunt point of view that confuses, mixes up or mistakes the mask for the original and thus ends up “getting things wrong”. In short, using Socrates’

⁶⁹ In this context it is important from the start to point out an important aspect – all the more because, if it was not mentioned, it could lead to misunderstandings and divert us from what, if we look closely, is at stake in these passages from the *Gorgias*. This aspect has to do with a possible *objection* to the description just made and which is presupposed in all that follows – and which is the following. In 465c7-d6 Socrates talks of the fact that there is a “φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” which *would get produced* if the σῶμα became the ἐπιστάτης, began to govern itself and, thus (it is this that is at stake), superimposed itself on the sphere of meaning of the ψυχή, disturbed its working and affected the ability to discern that only the latter is in a condition to offer, etc. But Socrates’ description is made precisely in the *irrealis*: “εἰ μὴ ἡ ψυχή τῷ σώματι ἐπεσάται, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ αὐτῷ, κτλ.” And, looking closely, it therefore appears that what is being said is that the σῶμα *never* governs over the ψυχή, i.e.: that Anaxagoras’ “ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα”, the “φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”, etc., *does not in fact take place*. In other words: Socrates’ description possesses only the character of a *Gedankenexperiment* – and focuses on something that *could* happen *if things were not as they really are*. Now, it is this that could be suggested by Socrates’ definition (by the statement in the *irrealis*) – but, if we look closely, what he is pointing out is precisely the contrary. That is, Socrates stresses precisely that the conversion of the σῶμα into ἐπιστάτης, the constitution of the “φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”, etc., is not only a *real* possibility – something that *can in fact happen* – but, on top of this, it is even something that *tends* to happen. It is this that gets stated expressly in 465b6-c7: “ἴν’ οὖν μὴ μακρολογῶ, ἐθέλω σοι εἰπεῖν ὥσπερ οἱ γεωμέτραι—ἦδη γὰρ ἂν ἴσως ἀκολουθήσῃς—ὅτι ὁ κομνωτικὴ πρὸς γυμναστικὴν, τοῦτο σοφιστικὴ πρὸς νομοθετικὴν, καὶ ὅτι ὁ ὁμοποιητικὴ πρὸς ἰατρικὴν, τοῦτο ῥητορικὴ πρὸς δικαιοσύνην. ὅπερ μέντοι λέγω, διέστηκε μὲν οὕτω φύσει, ἅτε δ’ ἐγγὺς ὄντων φύρονται ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ ταῦτα σοφισταὶ καὶ ῥήτορες, καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὅτι χρήσονται οὔτε αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖς οὔτε οἱ ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι τούτοις.” In other words, there is already a margin of confusion, of non-differentiation, of lack of acuity (or as Socrates says, there is something like a “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”) between the different τέχναι and their “objects” (between what belongs to one or another) – and it is precisely this “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” that causes the possibility of confusion in the second sense, i.e. in the sense of the “ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα”, etc. But, on the other hand, if we bear in mind the analyses preceding 465bff. and, in particular, if we bear in mind the phenomena corresponding to the way in which what is not τέχνη passes itself off as it, just as the “mask” is something already “crossed” with the territory of what is “real”, just as there is in fact a διαγωνίζεσθαι that can be solved in a “wrong” sense (in favor of the “mask” and not of “reality”), etc. – if we bear all this in mind, then it becomes much clearer that what Socrates talks about in 465c7-d6 is not only something belonging exclusively to the level of the *irrealis* (so to speak, “enclosed” in it, without any relation to what is really happening to us), but much more than this: a *real possibility* and a *tendency* from our point of view.

⁷⁰ Or, as Socrates puts it in 465d2-3: “(…), ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα ἔκρινε σταθμώμενον ταῖς χάρισι ταῖς πρὸς αὐτό (…).”

words in 465d5, “σῶμα” is that possible κρινεῖν that produces from itself something ἄκριτον.

But this is only the surface. Socrates’ words call our attention to the fact that there is from the beginning a *quantum of something-beyond-the-mere-σῶμα*, i.e.: what “ψυχή” is all about. The reference Socrates makes to “ψυχή” might indeed seem “vague” and “inaccurate” – but, looked at closely, highlights some fundamental aspects. “Ψυχή” is described in a *negative* way: it regards something that *is not* the σῶμα and the “program” σῶμα stands for. And we can understand why there is this negative characterization. If “σῶμα” involves in itself an ἀνόητος conformation (or is an ἄλογος πρᾶγμα) in the sense we have considered, then the opposite to “σῶμα” means the *formal notion* of something that might *correct* or *restore* the fragility and deficits that are inherent to σῶμα and the kind of “interpretation” it affords.

With this, we can already understand, even if in a sketchy way, a fundamental question: there is indeed the possibility of something *irreducible* to the “σῶμα” and *configured by a different στοχάζεσθαι from the στοχάζεσθαι τοῦ ἡδέος*. In other words, there is the possibility of a *different fundamental κρινεῖν*: a κρινεῖν directed towards another kind of “goal” and able to produce a real “κρίσις” or a true “ἀπόκρισις”; a κρινεῖν that really constitutes εὐεξία and not a mask of it; a κρινεῖν that *correctly* answers the “ὄντινα χρὴ τρόπον ζῆν;” question. These first passages from the *Gorgias* do not yet focus on what may properly be considered to be this “alternative” to “σῶμα” (what the concrete determination of “ψυχή’s program” is, what this “program” corresponds to, of which elements it is composed, etc.). But, even so, they already open the “path” to it and depict the “photofit” of its meaning and requisites, so to speak.

But not only this. Even if Socrates does not mention it explicitly, 465cff. suggests that this “something-beyond-the-σῶμα” is not a determination *added* to the “σῶμα” in a *supervening or accessory* way. On the contrary: there is from the beginning a *communication*, a *mixture* between σῶμα and ψυχή. There is, one might say, an “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” *in the very core of our own presentation* – so that what we call “seeing” is from the beginning the “result” of this “close relationship” between two fundamental overall interpretations. And it is precisely the circumstance of there being this “close coexistence” between two different fundamental interpretations that unleashes the *conflict*, the *tension* – and in fact renders its resolution or conclusion (i.e. the finding of an ἐπιστάτης) a *necessary and pressing*

matter.

As we have said, Socrates does not explicitly and unequivocally mention this aspect. Just as happens as regards the meaning of the terms “σῶμα” and “ψυχή” (of the determinations that they involve, the phenomena to which they correspond, etc.), what we find in 465cff. also has, as regards the *relation* between σῶμα and ψυχή, much more the character of a “left open” or of something still not very precise, with a very undefined outline. But, as happens many times in the *Corpus Platonicum*, the lack of definition and the “silence” regarding certain phenomena does not mean that they are not in some way “present”, constituting even *key pieces* in what is said explicitly and “directly”. In other words: even if it is not entirely clear what the type of link between σῶμα and ψυχή is, 465cff. raises in a way this problem and leaves it in the hands of the reader as something the latter is called on to solve. And this in such a way that, if we raise this problem – if, so to speak, we ask Socrates how the link between σῶμα and ψυχή needs to be constituted for the type of confusion sc. of switch in identity between “reality” and “the mask” to be possible, for the “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” talked about in 465c4-5 to be possible, etc. –, then the “reply” we receive seems much more to point in the sense of an *interlacing* or *mixing* between the σῶμα and the ψυχή rather than in the sense of a *clear demarcation or separation* between both spheres, in which σῶμα and ψυχή constitute “territories” that are *isolated, independent from each other and completely “impermeable” or “water-tight” as regards each other*. That is, the type of interference between the different τέχναι sc. pseudo-τέχναι would not be possible, the cheating, the deception produced by some τέχναι in relation to the others would not be possible⁷¹, the confusion (the “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”) among different τέχναι would not be possible – none of this would be possible, if the territory of “reality” (i.e. that which corresponds to the determination of the ψυχή) and that of “the mask” sc. the confusion with the “original” (i.e. that which is introduced by the σῶμα) were territories *separated* from each other or even “contiguous” to each other. What is at stake is *not*, on the one hand, the σῶμα sc. the confusion or the “one-mixed-up-with-the-other” and, on the other, the ψυχή sc. the ἀπόκρισις – as if it were the case of two “realms” that are

⁷¹ The same interference and deception expressed very clearly in, for example, 465b1-6: “Τῇ μὲν οὖν ἰατρικῇ, ὥσπερ λέγω, ἡ ὀψοποιικὴ κολακεία ὑπόκειται· τῇ δὲ γυμναστικῇ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον τοῦτον ἡ κομμηωτική, κακοῦργός τε καὶ ἀπατηλὴ καὶ ἀγεννὴς καὶ ἀνελεύθερος, σχήμασιν καὶ χρώμασιν καὶ λειότητι καὶ ἐσθῆσιν ἀπατῶσα, ὥστε ποιεῖν ἀλλότριον κάλλος ἐφελκομένους τοῦ οἰκείου τοῦ διὰ τῆς γυμναστικῆς ἀμελεῖν.”

constituted *separately, independently of one another*. No. Socrates' words suggest rather that the relationship between σῶμα and ψυχή, between the ὁμοῦ and the suppression of it, between the mask and "reality", etc., is one constituted by the *intersecting* of the two determinations – in such a way that, in spite of the difference between them (in spite of each having its own identity, completely different from that of the other determination), σῶμα and ψυχή *pass themselves off as each other, are interlaced with each other*, or however we want to express it. It is this fact that there is a mixing or intercrossing between σῶμα and ψυχή – which precisely creates the conditions of possibility for the existence of the confusion, switch in identities, etc. – that we tried to express when we said that there is something like *a second form of "ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ"* between σῶμα and ψυχή in the very core of our own presentation, that is: there are an underlying *mixing* and *possibility of confusion* between determinations that are different from each other.

Now, what all this means is that, on the one hand, our point of view is never only the σῶμα or only the ψυχή, and indeed is *right from the start* stamped with the *co-presence* sc. *co-interference* between the ψυχή ("reality", alterity in relation to στοχάζεσθαι τοῦ ἠδέος, etc.) and the σῶμα (the mask, the confusion corresponding to the ὁμοῦ, the "program" aimed at the χαίρειν, etc.). So that, on the other hand, the ὁμοῦ Socrates talks about as corresponding to the superimposition of the σῶμα on the ψυχή *is not only* something that can or not happen to us, that can or not come about; it is also – and fundamentally so – something that *is already present* in the way in which we see and consider ourselves, in which we understand "life". In other words: right from the start there is a minimum *quantum* of confusion, of lack of discernment, of a presence of masks that pretend to be what they are not, etc., constituted in us. The confusion – the ὁμοῦ – can be *more or less*, can be *more or less pronounced*, but all the various possible alternatives of constitution of confusion refer to *different "degrees" of being affected by the ὁμοῦ* – and not to the alternative between there being or not being ὁμοῦ. This in such a way that the notion of ψυχή – the notion of something-beyond-the-ὁμοῦ (i.e. the ἀπόκρισις of the ὁμοῦ, as one might say) occurs in the framework of a very close link with the ὁμοῦ itself and constitutes a possibility *disclosed from within it*.⁷² And what is important to understand is that this fact does

⁷² Or as one might also say, to describe the state of things at stake here: if the relationship between σῶμα and ψυχή reveals a *conflict*, the kind of conflict it stands for does not have the nature of a "war between two powers alien to one another", but rather of a "*civil war*". And what precisely constitutes

not prevent a) the ὁμοῦ from being *constant*, i.e. from being a determination that accompanies and permanently shapes the way in which we are constituted and b) at the same time from there being something *with a fundamentally different determination*, something really *irreducible* to the ὁμοῦ and truly *beyond* it. For ψυχή does not have an intimate relation to the ὁμοῦ in the sense that it constitutes a “*moment*” of it: one more “*element*” lost in the confusion and absorbed by it. “Ψυχή” stands rather for a radically different *government* and *organization* of the elements that, under the σῶμα regime, are mixed up with one another, i.e.: “ψυχή” means a fundamentally alternative *way of dealing* with the moments that constitute the σῶμα’s point of view – a dealing that, precisely by *implementing a new regime*, *transfigures* these elements and makes them have a totally different “*face*” (a psychic “*face*”, so to say).

All things considered, what Socrates’ words seem to point to is that the ὁμοῦ constituted by the σῶμα is always a particular resolution of a *more fundamental, formal* “one-in-the-other”, “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”, *between σῶμα and ψυχή*. And the decisive point is the fact that the ὁμοῦ constituted by the σῶμα always means, either consciously or not, a “*contraction*” of that inextricable mixture between the σῶμα and ψυχή that from the beginning is carved in stone at the very core of our point of view. In such a way that what we call “*seeing*” *lato sensu* – what we call presentation and having to deal with it – means from the beginning this constitutive “*duplicity*”, this “one-in-the-other”, this “*Wechselwirkung*” between σῶμα and ψυχή, which paves the way for the corresponding conformation of our point of view as a “*masked*” and ἀνόητος one or, on the contrary, as an aware, able-to-discern one.

But this might not yet be sufficient for grasping the complexity of the problem – and could deflect us from the phenomena to which, if we look closely, *Gorgias*, 465cff. points. The state of things described above – the close mixing between σῶμα and ψυχή, etc. – is exacerbated, if we consider that Socrates highlights that both “*realms*” (“σῶμα” and “ψυχή”) are intrinsically affected or “*contaminated*” by εἰδωλα.⁷³ And if we take these words seriously, they end up depicting an “ἐγγὺς

the “ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα” is not the *isolated* operation of one kind of understanding (i.e. the σῶμα’s understanding), but rather an “*internal*” *pitting of strengths*, or a particular “*internal*” *resolution of the conflict* – by which *our own point of view* makes the σῶμα the “*lord*” and thus ends up closing itself up to an interpretation based on νοῦς.

⁷³ That is, “σῶμα’s realm” is constituted by the complex εἰδωλον corresponding to κομωτική and ὁσοποικική and, in turn, “ψυχή’s realm” is itself composed of σοφιστική and ῥητορική.

φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”⁷⁴ much deeper than what has been said so far might suggest. The mixture between ψυχή and σῶμα might up to now have been understood as if *each moment* that constitutes one or the other “realm” did not have the character of a mixture. In other words, σῶμα and ψυχή are in conflict with one another, but the resolution of this conflict in favor of one or the other side brings “peace”: this means the replacement of one “regime” “bag and baggage” by the other. Once σῶμα or ψυχή has assumed power, one’s gaze is determined by this or that “ruler” and all its moments (all its “gazes”, all the perspectives it is able to develop, etc.) have a “somatic” or a “psychic” nature, respectively.

But, considered carefully, if we understand the “mixture”, the “confusion” in this way, we end up introducing *a residuum of non-mixture*, or of “non-confusion”, by the back door: that residuum by virtue of which we even so “safeguard” each moment constituting the complexity of “σῶμα” or “ψυχή” from having the character of a mixture. Socrates, however, seems to point exactly in the opposite direction. The mixture and the possibility of confusion, the “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” is something that, so to speak, has already entered and from the beginning constitutes the way of being of our own gaze, *whether it is presided over and governed by one or the other “ruler”*. “In their own bosom”, σῶμα and ψυχή are, as it were, made of one another (intercross each other). And, if in fact it is so, this comes precisely to intensify and, in a way, “exacerbate” what has previously been only hinted at, that is that from the beginning our point of view is this “non-διάκρισις”, this “not-possessing-the-ἀπόκρισις”.

The way Socrates illustrates this state of things is important. He says that the σῶμα sc. the perspective based on the στόχαζεσθαι τοῦ ἡδέος has the possibility of constituting τέχναι – and τέχναι that *are still*, so to say, “somatic” ones. The “beyond-the-mask”, i.e. the distancing from the mere “immersion” in the εἰδῶλα may still be “immanent” in the “somatic regime” and thus constitute what we might roughly call a “psychic σῶμα”. And, conversely, the constitution of the τέχνη does not have to do with the establishment bag and baggage of the διάκρισις, viz. the dissolution of all confusion in a “field” free from masks. On the contrary, the εἰδῶλον belongs intrinsically to the core of “τέχνη’s realm”: the possibility of “getting things wrong” is present in the very carrying out of what “ψυχή” should be all about. In such a way

⁷⁴ In the metaphorical sense, i.e. in the sense that we use the expression for designating the intrinsic mixing or inextirpable inter-breeding between σῶμα and ψυχή.

that ψυχή – i.e. each particular perspective that it might give rise to – is also not separable from a “somatic” way of being and ends up having, so to speak, a “somatic/psychic” constitution. In short, there is “*another level*” of mixing up, of confusion – another, *deeper kind of* “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”: an “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” underlying and supporting the implementation of these two fundamental “realms” and thus “contaminating” the execution of their own “projects”.⁷⁵

What is thus described turns the “εἶδωλον’s territory”, i.e. the “δοκοῦσα εὐεξία’s territory” into something far from being simple and having a “plain”, “flat” nature. In fact, this “territory” has *deep roots* and it is formed by a *complex and intricate web*. The presence and interference of the δοκεῖν sc. of the mask are constituted, so to speak, *at depth* and traverse different “strata” – in such a way that the unmasking of one of these strata might merely lead to another stratum of δοκεῖν (to another mask) and not yet to the “real face” of something.

But, if this is so, the extract from the *Gorgias* dealt with in this study ends up describing precisely something like a *labyrinth*. The mask is not something that can be easily removed; it is not simply that behind which “the real” or “reality” can be found. The mask of which Socrates talks about is, properly speaking, a “mystery”: an *unknown*. And this is so, not only because the mask is not yet a possession-of-“the-real”⁷⁶, but also because its exact “location”, its “territory” and its “defined limits” are still *unknown* to us. We thus understand why Socrates insists on the κρινεῖν and suggests that the decisive point is the *good or poor condition* of that “judge” in us: of that “judge” who, in the end, we are. But what turns the presence of masks in our point of view into a labyrinth is the fact that the adequate discerning of “who is who”, the “φρόνιμος judgement” *is not (and cannot be) an external one* – *as is the case when “adults” see children playing make-believe*. The “judge” at stake here is not a *knowing spectator* seeing the make-believe game “*from outside*” and judging the “real value” of that “spectacle” *from a neutral perspective*. The “judge” Socrates talks about is *someone who is himself involved in the “spectacle”*: *someone who has a*

⁷⁵ In fact, the question is even more complex if we consider that, as Socrates’ words suggest, the “somatic τέχναι”, in spite of being seen as τέχναι, are in a certain sense “εἶδωλα” of the “psychic τέχναι”, precisely because they still belong to the “somatic regime” – in such a way that the greatest degree of possible awareness pertaining to the realm of σῶμα still has the character of a mask and is still less than what constitutes a truly clearheaded and cognoscitive perspective.

⁷⁶ In the sense that possession by “the real” would enable us to understand retrospectively what the mask is, or which the masks *are*.

particular role, someone *who plays this or that part* – and indeed someone who finds himself *already playing* this or that part. In other words, the “judge” is only another “character” in the make-believe play and must judge *from there*: i.e. judge the make-believe “*from inside*”. And it is precisely this that turns our point of view and the “place” where we find ourselves into a *labyrinth*. A labyrinth not in the sense of a structure that we contemplate *from outside*, viz. *from a synoptical perspective* – but just the contrary. What is at stake is a labyrinth *seen from inside*, without one being able to know if the next step leads to the exit or only to a “mask” of it, if one is going in the “right direction” or, on the contrary, sinking still deeper into the labyrinth, if one has already overcome the major part of the “illusory paths” or is just at the beginning of them. In short, what is at stake is that notion of “labyrinth” which we find already among the Ancients and which describes it precisely as something ποικίλον⁷⁷, i.e.: something *intricate*, *complex* and *difficult*, but also *metamorphic*, *doubtful*, *subtly* or *cunningly* built, a place where one has nowhere to grab onto, etc.⁷⁸ And what confers the *anguishing nature* that intrinsically characterizes the labyrinth is the fact that we are inside it without being able to *discern* where we are; in the strictest sense, we are prisoners of a perspective that falls short of what only νοῦς reveals. Or, as we might also say, we are in the labyrinth like children playing make-believe, and indeed like *orphan children*: we have no “adult” to ask where to go, what to do – which is the “*real exit*”.

This being-imprisoned in the labyrinth means an imprisonment to such an extent that the very idea of τέχνη sc. of εὐεξία, the very notion of “real face” may be nothing but *another mask*. And the very project of replacing the mask by reality, i.e. the idea of something-beyond-the-mask may be nothing but another element, another “character”, another “mask” *invented* by the labyrinthine make-believe in which we find ourselves.

This is certainly a possibility. But, even so, Socrates’ words seem to point to something that stubbornly persists: whether there is something really beyond the mask or this notion does not even make any sense, we are undeniably obliged to deal with that *labyrinthine* “ἐγγὺς φύρεσθαι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ” that Socrates ends up ascribing to the intrinsic constitution of our point of view. In such a way that, as the very idea of the

⁷⁷ See, for example, HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 2, 148.

⁷⁸ In this regard, see P. R. DOOB, *The Idea of the Labyrinth: from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992 (1990), in particular pp. 1f., 18, 20ff., 46ff.

labyrinth conveys, our point of view is, from the beginning, a point of view coerced by the inscription in it of a “way out”, of a real ἀπόκρισις. As regards this point, the “ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα” Socrates describes is quite different from that of Anaxagoras. For the “ὁμοῦ” Socrates appeals to is not a “primitive” one: something that is *already left behind us* and is *definitely surpassed*. The “ὁμοῦ” here at stake is, on the contrary, something that is *still ahead of us*: something that we must deal with and are requested to disentangle in this or that way. The ὁμοῦ Socrates talks of is, in other words, a ὁμοῦ that was not yet “disentangled” by the νοῦς – and the correction of the ὁμοῦ (the elimination of all confusion, the suppression of the illusion created by the “masks”) is something present *only as a task* – with everything that this involves as regards effort, need to mobilize and transform our perspective, etc.

If we look at the continuation, it is clear that the developments brought about by Socrates have but a small impact on Polus’ point of view.⁷⁹ Polus seems to be unaware of the focusing occurring in 461b-466a and of its implications. This is an important point. For it does not only reveal the incompleteness of the path that has been cleared, but also suggests that the *focusing* produced up to now *is still in need of a deeper analysis*. In other words, all the problems and phenomena this excerpt from the *Gorgias* points to have, as so often in the *Corpus Platonicum*, a *fragmentary nature* – and leave us the task of finding the path(s) by which they can be clarified. In particular, 461b-466a does not throw enough light on the problem of knowing if the constitution of the “confusion” (and the “communication” between σῶμα and ψυχή) is a phenomenon that has only to do with the κρινεῖν or if it involves “structures” that go beyond this determination. But, besides this problem, there are also other very important ones. The possibility of all being but a “labyrinth of masks” in the sense we have seen raises the question: is this sufficient to eradicate *the fact* of rhetoric’s successful manipulation, i.e. the power it “stubbornly” claims to possess? The next parts of the *Gorgias* seem to have this problem in mind and suggest that one is still in need of a deeper focusing on the “structures” that constitute rhetoric’s power or capacity. And the problem seems to be precisely: up to what point do these “structures” turn rhetoric’s capacity into something really contrary to εὐεξία? But not only this. One should also ask whether the *Gorgias* proceeds to a more complex identification of “δοκοῦσα εὐεξία”: is it composed of other determinations, which

⁷⁹ As seems to be the case when Polus says (466a4-5): “Τί οὖν φῆς; κολακεία δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ἡ ῥητορική;”

deformalise it still further and significantly transfigure its meaning? What are they? How is the very phenomenon of “δοκοῦσα εὐεξία” constituted? Another fundamental question raised by these first passages from the *Gorgias* is: what is the meaning of this “mixture”, of this “confusion”? And how can the ἀπόκρισις be carried out – and how, in fact, is it constituted? But also: up to what point does this “lack of ἀπόκρισις” contribute to the πονηρία in the ψυχή and obstruct its “release” from that πονηρία? And, in the end, what does all this have to do with the fundamental thesis of the *Gorgias* according to which “doing injustice is the greatest of evils”? Although these and other problems are decisive ones, this study cannot discuss them in detail.

The fragmentary nature of 461b-466a, together with the sole consideration of this extract without seriously putting it in relation with the *Gorgias* as whole, make this study “short-sighted” and with just a *provisional* “result”. Even so, we hope that what was discussed here may serve as a contribution to the understanding of the constellation of phenomena to which the *Gorgias* calls our attention.*

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A pivotal distinction:

ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ / ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται

Tomaz Fidalgo *

1. Introduction

My goal in this text is to distinguish between *ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ* and *ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*.¹ In doing so, I hope to show how our relationship to the formal structure of desire is defined by a lack of acuity. This lack is consequently a key factor, since it enables the confusion between the two. A clear separation will hopefully bring to the surface what is from the beginning acting inside the innards of the text, but also in our lives.

2. Rhetoric and life

It is important to note that one of the first claims made by Polus is that he is, like Gorgias, able to answer all questions. This is not only stated when he tells Chaerephon that he will answer for Gorgias², but it is reaffirmed once the dialogue between Socrates and Gorgias is finished³. So the beginning of the discussion between Polus and Socrates reconsiders the rhetor's pretence to answer all questions. This pretension indicates that the knowledge given by rhetoric enables one to speak

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¹ A distinction that, although silently present throughout the majority of the text, appears for the first time in 466c-d.

² 448a.

³ 462a.

about all matters, even though the rhetor does not need to know (*εἰδέναι*) the things about which he speaks. Therefore, rhetoric presents itself as an art (*τέχνη*) that spreads across all other arts in such a way that by mastering persuasion (*πειθώ*) alone, one is able to speak about everything. From the discussion with Gorgias, we get the characterisation of rhetoric as a universal art, reaching all others through one thing — a particular kind of persuasion that produces belief without knowledge. Even though this is what leads Gorgias to be refuted, since he is forced to acknowledge the dependency of rhetoric on the knowledge of right and wrong,⁴ just and unjust, this is still the definition of rhetoric that brings Polus to the screen. Hence, this is also the starting point to what we must consider. Indeed, Polus rises against both Socrates and Gorgias because he does not accept the dependency of rhetoric to any other kind of knowledge but persuasion itself. In his mind, mastering persuasion is sufficient to conduct life. Assuming the important thing in life is to do what we wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*), all we need is rhetoric; for it gives us the know-*how* that allows us to manipulate the opinion of others — so and thus only by producing persuasion, without knowledge of anything but persuasion itself. According to this view, rhetoric would enable us to do whatever we wish by persuading others⁵, and would lead us to a happy life. It is on this basis that Polus claims his ability to answer all questions: there is not a discussion he cannot win, there is not a question he cannot answer, there is not a desire he cannot fulfil — all he wishes to do he does, and all he needs to do so is rhetoric.

Looking at the question from such an angle, the *τέχνη* he presents appears obviously as the best (*ἡ ἀρίστη*). In fact, this is how rhetoric is described for the first time in the text⁶. Socrates, looking for what it is (*τί ἐστίν*), apparently ignores this description, and proceeds to discuss it with Gorgias, who ends up giving the same

⁴ First, in 454b-e, Socrates distinguishes between "μεμαθηκέναι" and "πεπιστευκέναι", and hence between μάθησις and πίστις. Later, in 456c-457a, Gorgias says that rhetors, like fighters, should not employ their superiority over others unjustly. Later on, after forcing Gorgias to admit that rhetoric does not produce real knowledge, but only conviction, Socrates traps Gorgias into admitting that, in order for someone to learn rhetoric from him, that person either has to *know* what is just and unjust, or Gorgias will have to teach him (459c-460a). Hence, the rhetor needs to know what is just and unjust in order to use rhetoric as Gorgias says he should. And, what is more, if rhetoric itself does not give this knowledge, Gorgias is faced with the fact that, according to his own words, one needs to know something outside of rhetoric, which in turn means that rhetoric is not self-sufficient (as he always claimed it was).

⁵ And, not least, other τεχνῖται.

⁶ 448c.

definition⁷. I will not linger on this subject; the only point I am trying to make clear is that from the beginning of the dialogue there is important tension with the unveiling of what is best in one's life. This is crucial to understand the distinction between *ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ* and *ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*, because Socrates never denies that the best life is that in which one is able to do what he wishes. Instead, he focuses on the cloudy structure of our desire, so that we may understand *what* is it that we wish to do, before even considering *how* to do it. So the question must be raised: is rhetoric the art that grants us the power or ability (*δύνασθαι*) to do *what* we wish? Polus says yes. Socrates, however, says no, because he thinks rhetoric to be blind.

Having arrived here, one cannot help but try to understand why rhetoric is blind. The problem is that, in our natural way of seeing things, we tend to agree that it is a powerful thing, and that it empowers those who master it. But what Socrates means when he says rhetoric is blind is that this so called τέχνη is unable to see what we wish, although believing to see it (*οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι*). So the problem with rhetoric is — according to Socrates — that it misses the *what* (τί ἐστίν)⁸ and only focuses on the *how*. I will explain myself: there is a lack of acuity in our relationship towards what we wish, in such a way that I think I *know* (*εἰδέναι*) what I wish when I wish to buy a new car, but in fact I might not know it, although I think I do (*οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι*). The problem for Polus is simple: I want a new car, and rhetoric is able to give me one. Socrates, on the other hand, is more concerned with finding out *what* is it that I desire when I buy a new car. As usual in Plato's writings, we must figure out in what way we do not know what we think we know. This difficulty begins with Gorgias' inability to define what rhetoric is (τί ἐστίν) and consequently what he is as a rhetor. I will not explore the various details that forge the state of affairs when Polus appears, but rather focus on why we tend to understand why Polus raises against Socrates, even though we can also think Gorgias was refuted.

In fact, we lead our lives on the same basis as Polus: We always know in advance what we want to do, and the problem is usually how to get it. I want to drink coffee when I wake up, then I want to eat, then I want to shower, and so on. Hence, there is no doubt regarding what I wish (*ἃ βούλομαι*), only how to do it. Indeed, the problem for me usually is not why do I want the coffee, but how can I get one. When the waiter comes and asks 'What would you like to have?' I answer 'a coffee, please'. So, I

⁷ 451d.

⁸ And this means the very core of what life is all about.

do know what I wish. Sometimes I just might not know how to get it. However, not knowing *how* to get what I wish also means I do not know *what* to do in order to get it. But this does not mean I do not know what I wish; it just means I do not know what to do in order to get what I wish (*ἄ βούλομαι*). The thing is I also wish to do those things that enable me to get what I already know I wish. In other words: if I wish to have a good grade in my exams I have to figure out what to do in order to get that good grade. If I find out that in order to have a good grade I have to create an amazing power point that uses all the technological tools available, I somehow wish to do that. But I might think that in order to get a good grade I have to study hard, in which case I somehow have to wish to study, as crazy as that may seem. So, if I wish to have a good grade, I have to know how to get it, but knowing how to get it implies knowing what to do in order to get it. Once I realize that, I wish to do what enables me to get what I wish. But here it gets complicated, since one might object that I do not wish to study hard, I just have to do it in order to have a good grade.

3. What do we wish when we wish what we wish — the *ἔνεκά τινος*-equation

For now, the discussion at stake between Polus and Socrates, the one about knowing what we wish, does not seem to be about whether we have or not to know which are the means to get what we wish, because we obviously do, but specially whether we wish those things we do for the sake of others (*ἔνεκά τινος*), like studying. If we wish those things, it means we may not know what we wish, since I might create an amazing power point in order to get a good grade, but in fact the teacher wanted me to study. Indeed, if wishing to have a good grade rubs off on the means to do it, I might think I know what I wish — like creating an amazing power point — but in fact I wish something else — like studying —, that would indeed grant me a good grade. In this case, my *εἰδέναι* would reveal itself a *οἶσθαι εἰδέναι*.

As we will see later on, this is not Socrates' main concern, but it is still important to understand that for us the problem is always how to get there (*πῶς*). Polus is claiming that, if you have rhetoric, this is not a real problem, because the only real instrument is persuasion — if we master it, we will always get what we wish. And we buy it because he tells us that rhetoric is the *τέχνη* that dominates all others: if I have rhetoric I do not need to study or to create a power point, since I can persuade the

teacher into giving me a good grade. In this example, it is not difficult to see that Polus is trying to sell something that may not work, since the teacher might not fall for it and fail me. And yet, we still might think he is right, and that is why sometimes we think that even if we do not study, if we play the cards right and show rhetorical skill, we may get through with it.

The fact that the problem seems to lie on the means — and whether rhetoric has or not a universal power over them — diverts our eyes from the fact that I might not know what I wish when I wish to have a good grade. And that only happens because we think we know what we wish. This gets complicated once I realise I want a good grade in order to get my degree. But even then we are in the reign of the means, although we find it to be deeper than before. And Polus claims effectiveness here too. But at the same time, it hints that, just like I might not know what I wish when I wish to create a power point, I might not know what I wish when I wish a good grade, because if I wish it because it partakes (*μετέχειν*) in my wish to get a degree, I could go on-line and buy one. So here we begin to realize that the problem is about depth. In fact, it is not difficult to see that I also only want a degree *for the sake of* (*ἕνεκά τινος*) something else — and therefore that we have the same problem regarding the degree.

Nevertheless, as deep as the reign of means may go, the fact that I also wish to have friends and a girlfriend has nothing to do with my degree. The problem is still only how to get the things we wish for themselves. And there seem to be many. Indeed, those wishes seem all disconnected. Therefore, if I pictured all things that I desire, the result would be a disconnected dispersion of dots, or perhaps some lines pointing in different directions. In fact, I might even realize that I want a coffee so that I can write this text, or that I want to write this text to be part of a conference, and that I want to be part of the conference to improve my *curriculum*, and so on. But still, at least since I am studying philosophy, this has nothing to do with my wish to buy a Ferrari. The apparent dispersion of the things we wish is very important to understand how rhetoric presents itself as the solution to all problems. If my wishes are scattered across all aspects of life, what I need is a *τέχνη* that gives me universal power, something that, by itself, without the help of anything else, is able to cover all aspects of life — what I want is a *μέγα δύνασθαι*.⁹ Based on something like this, Polus

⁹ This idea is first presented in 466b. At stake is the idea that rhetors can do whatever they please in the city. This is the beginning of a discussion that will re-emerge later on when discussing the tyrants' power and, more specifically, the example of Archelaus (which starts in 471a).

presents rhetoric as a giant octopus, with tentacles as wide and strong as our desires, which can both spread across and in depth. On the other hand, Socrates tries to show that the structure of our "wishing for" (*βούλεσθαι*) is not constituted in this way. Accordingly, if Socrates is right, rhetoric is not able to meet the demands of our "wishing for", and hence rhetoric's power is not a real power.

The text unfolds as a continuous *ἀπόκρισις*,¹⁰ revealing the elements presumed in Polus' claims, which are the same ones that define our natural standpoint on the structure of desire. The question leading this *ἀπόκρισις* is — what do we wish when we wish what we wish? But the answer still seems obvious, and *that* is the problem. We tend to think that, when we wish something, that is what we wish. And this seems obvious because it is obvious: when I want coffee, I want coffee. How complicated can that be? And even if I realise that I want coffee *for the sake of* studying (*ἔνεκά τινος*), I still want coffee. What I mean is that, even if I realize that I wish to drink coffee for the sake of another thing, this desire for study rubs off on coffee. However, if I did not wish to study, I would immediately lose interest in coffee. The same thing holds true for those who drink coffee *for the sake of* pleasure — if suddenly pleasure fell out of the equation, they would stop drinking coffee, since the wish for coffee would disappear. We tend to ignore this because of the equation's¹¹ *efficiency*. Chocolate is a better example than coffee when it comes to pleasure: I want to eat chocolate because it gives me pleasure. But *if* chocolate stops giving me pleasure I stop eating it. This is in fact what happens when I feel I ate too much: it stops giving me pleasure and therefore the wish for chocolate dies.

Hence, as it was said, it seems that the desire for coffee or chocolate is nothing but a collateral effect. We wish some things for the sake of others (*ἔνεκά τινος*), and our interest in these intermediate things (*μεταξύ*) is only an indirect one.¹² Still, it is an interest. But there are many other things that I wish independently from each other, and for the sake of which the others are done. For example, one might do things for the sake of health, or for the sake of beauty, or for the sake of money, or for the sake of pleasure, but the desire regarding money is not *necessarily* connected with the desire regarding health or beauty or pleasure. Here, the problem is not about depth:

¹⁰ So that what at first seems to be simple turns out to be much more complex. See T. FIDALGO, *Plato Playing the Reader: A History of Resistance in Plato's Gorgias*, in this volume, note 34, p. 207.

¹¹ Namely the equation that equals coffee with pleasure.

¹² The οὗ ἔνεκα-structure, as well as Plato's use of *μετέχειν* and *μεταξύ* can be seen in 467c-468c. It is in 468b that Socrates forces Polus to admit that we do everything *ἔνεκα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*. In the next few pages, he will focus on how that can happen.

pleasure and health may be connected, but that connection is not imperative. Thus, there would be many things not desirable for themselves, but for the sake of other *things*, which are still plural.

This being said, we must now consider if we also wish the means. For example, I could wish to eat soup for the sake of health or for the sake of pleasure. In either case, soup is not desired for its own sake (*ἀπλῶς οὕτως*), but for the sake of another thing. But in either case the soup would *partake* (*μετέχειν*) in the desire for another thing. The equation mentioned above means something like this: soup, *if* it makes me healthy, is desirable. However, because my eyes are already fixed on the target, in this case healthiness, I miss the 'if'. That is why I see soup immediately as something that I wish to eat — in my hastiness to get what I wish, which is health, I overlook the 'if'. What I mean is that, if I want to be healthy, I do what I think fit (an instance of *ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ ἀντὶ*) in order to be healthy.

So the amazing thing about this so-called equation is that it hides itself, and delivers only the result. In this case, soup is immediately seen as an *εἶδωλον* of health,¹³ and that is what allows me to eat the soup without having to remind myself constantly that I am eating it *for the sake* of health. But would I still wish soup if I didn't like it? We tend to associate wishing immediately with pleasure, and therefore think that I do not wish the soup but only to be healthy. However, if I wish to be healthy, must that not mean that I wish the soup for the sake of healthiness? And, at the same time, I do not wish the soup, because I also wish pleasure, and cheese would give me that. The problem is defining what to do — do I eat it or not? However, a new problem arises — I do not only have to choose what to do for the sake of something, I also need to *know* (*εἰδέναι*) the thing for the sake of what am I to do something (the οὗ ἕνεκα).

From what was already said, it is clear that we do not have a full dispersion of things we wish to do, but we still have several unconnected equations. There are many things not desirable for themselves, as chocolate or coffee or soup, but these things are always desired for the sake of other *things* that are desirable for themselves. This being the case, we would wish certain things for the sake of pleasure, others for the sake of health, of honour, and so on. However, my desire for pleasure may still have nothing to do with my desire for health or my desire for honour. In fact, eating a

¹³ To better understand what is here at stake, cf. S. OLIVEIRA, In the Labyrinth of the *Gorgias*: The Land of Make-believe in *Gorgias*, 461b-466a, in this volume, pp. 7-44.

chocolate might be something that I wish to do for the sake of pleasure, but something I refuse to do for the sake of health. In the same way, I might wish to keep my arm for the sake of health, and still rather lose it than keep it for the sake of honour. This reveals what seems to be a plurality of unconnected "desirable" things. Our desires appear not only as a multitude, but also as a belligerent one, since my wish for health will probably collide with my wish for pleasure, and so on.

At this point, according to Polus' claim, which is strategically presented as *our* view, rhetoric would still empower me to do the things I wish to do, considering it has the ability or power (*δύνασθαι*) to mingle in *all* aspects of life only by means of persuasion. Even if we take rhetoric to be flattery (*κολακεία*), even if it does not render knowledge about the things one wishes, such as pleasure and health and wealth, yet it allows us to do what we wish. This happens because the rhetor will manipulate those who know those things into getting what he wishes for him. For example, Polus might not know how to generate wealth, but he will persuade the money-getter into getting it for him. In the same way, if he does not know how to get rid of a disease, he will persuade the doctor into doing so. At stake is a practically oriented know-how. What we need is to have a *device* able to solve problems in the daily course of life. That device is rhetoric. Therefore, rhetoric appears as the greatest good, because it is the enabler of life itself. Although we will not explore in a thorough manner how the characterization of rhetoric is rooted in what seems to be the structure of our desire, it is not difficult to understand that rhetoric does seem to be the answer to all problems.

Polus' position can be put thus: if the important thing in life is to do what we wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*), all I need to conduct my life is rhetoric, since this *τέχνη* will give me all the means I need. If I need money to buy a car, it will give me that money; if I want a degree to be a doctor, it will give me that; if I want people to elect me to be president, It will give me that; in sum: what I wish (*ἃ βούλομαι*), it will give me, and all I need to know is *how* to persuade others. That is why rhetoric gives me a *μέγα δυνάσθαι*.

The discussion around the sufficiency of rhetoric to conduct life has many details that cannot be approached here. This has to do with the fact that Socrates describes it as "an alleged art or *τέχνη*" (*ποιῆσαι τέχνην*).¹⁴ Such description is related to the

¹⁴ 462a-466a. Cf. Carvalhais de Oliveira's text above.

empirical status of the know-how used in rhetoric, and its intrinsically *ἄλογος*-character. Socrates attacks this so-called *τέχνη* by saying that it insinuates (*προσποιεῖν*) itself as a *τέχνη*, that it puts on itself (*ὑποδύεσθαι*) a character which is not its own: the character of a *τέχνη*. In short, he claims that rhetoric impersonates (*ὑποδύεσθαι*) a *τέχνη*— that it *pretends to be the character which it puts on* (*προσποιεῖται εἶναι τοῦτο ὅπερ ὑπέδν*),¹⁵ while in reality it is not conducted by knowledge but by guessing (*οὐ γνοῦσα ἀλλὰ στοχασαμένη*).¹⁶

In this passage, the use of *στοχάζομαι* also sheds some light on what we said before. In fact, the above-mentioned equation has the structure of an 'aiming at'. Now this 'aiming at' is precisely what is at stake in the *ἔνεκά τινος*-structure: when we do something 'for the sake of' another, we do it because we are aiming at the latter, hoping to get it. And my claim is that Plato is trying to tell his reader that the territory of rhetoric bears the imprint of the unseen 'if' we mentioned a few lines above. I only wish soup if it makes me healthy, but I only see soup as something desirable if I somehow know it will make me healthy. Soup presents itself as health in the bowl, and that is the only reason why I think I do not have to know *what* I wish. Rhetoric's territory is hence described as the world of *εἶδωλα*.¹⁷ And this is why Polus stresses that rhetoric only needs persuasion without knowledge. The 'if' is the one thing attaching us to any kind of knowledge in the structure of desire. When I disregard it, I disregard the need for knowledge, but I can only do so because I overlook it, and I can only overlook it because it is obvious — being obvious is often the best camouflage. What we are dealing with here might thus be described as *the 'Purloined Letter' of desire*.

In fact, I need to know if chocolate gives me pleasure in order to wish chocolate for the sake of pleasure, but it is so obvious that chocolate gives me pleasure that I do not even bother to think about it. Chocolate presents itself disguised as pleasure, just like soup presents itself as health. This happens because we aim at those things for the sake of which we do them in such a way that they insinuate (*προσποιεῖν*) themselves as the things we really wish for — they are seen *as if* they were those very things. However, the aiming at pleasure cannot be disconnected from knowledge, because I

¹⁵ 464d (we follow the LSJ translation). It should be noted that, though these words (*προσποιεῖται εἶναι τοῦτο ὅπερ ὑπέδν*) are used to describe the "cognitive status" of rhetoric and the fact that it pretends to be more than it really is, in the final analysis this *προσποιεῖσθαι εἶναι τοῦτο ὅπερ ὑπέδν* expresses the essential feature of *everything* in the realm of what Socrates terms *κολακεία*.

¹⁶ 464c-d.

¹⁷ Cf. note 13 above.

need to know what gives me pleasure — *if* I did not know that chocolate gives me pleasure, I would not wish it *for the sake of* pleasure. The same happens with all other things, being it honour or health or anything else. This dependency on knowledge is the heart of Socrates' attack to the self-sufficient pose of rhetoric.

4. *Ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ and ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*

For now my point is yet unclear. However, the main concern in the distinction between *ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ* and *ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται* is whether there is anything we need to know in order to do what we wish, and also whether there is any chance I might be doing what I think I wish, while doing another thing. This is the same as asking — can doing what I think fit (*ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ*) be different from doing what I wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*)?

Such query has to do with the meaning of *δοκεῖν*.

In order to understand what is at stake in the discussion between Polus and Socrates, it is important to realize that we usually do not establish any relationship between knowledge and desire. Nevertheless, Polus does accept the importance of *νοῦς* in 466e. Here, Socrates asks Polus plainly: "*ἀγαθὸν οὖν οἷε εἶναι, ἐάν τις ποιῇ ταῦτα ἃ ἂν δοκῇ αὐτῷ βέλτιστα εἶναι, νοῦν μὴ ἔχων; καὶ τοῦτο καλεῖς σὸ μέγα δύνασθαι,*" Polus then agrees on the necessity of *νοῦς*. What does this mean? How does the introduction of *νοῦς* change our view on the structure of desire?

The analysis of the question itself will explain it. But to get there, let us just take a second to figure out why is it that Polus' answer does not shock us, even though we think that intelligence has nothing to do with wishing (*βούλεσθαι*). Ought we not to offer some resistance to this admission?

No, and the reason was partially brought to surface a few lines above. As it was said, I need to know (*εἰδέναι*), or at least pretend to know (*οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι*), that coffee will help me studying in order to drink it for the sake of academic success. At stake is the empirical status of this kind of knowledge. But the focus of the dialogue is not pointed towards this problem, at least regarding the purpose of this text. The *νοῦς* involved here is strictly pragmatic, and does not force us to leave the reign of rhetoric. Even a dog has *νοῦς* when it comes to what is eatable. This is why we are not shocked by Polus' answer. Yes, we do need some kind of intelligence in order to know what

things to choose for the sake of pleasure and health. But this is all the intelligence we need in order to do what we wish. Therefore, the power delivered by rhetoric has to do with some kind of knowledge, but an *instrumental* one. And that is the power presented by Polus — a kind of technical *νοῦς* that, being empirical or not, serves as an almost magic instrument that enables us to do what we wish. Rhetoric seems like a magic wand that, waved properly, grants all wishes. Socrates tried to show Gorgias that we needed to know (*εἰδέναι*) the things for the sake of *which* this magical wand is to be used, and that the wand itself does not teach us (*διδάσκειν*) that. When Gorgias finally grants this, Polus rises with indignation, and he rises because he thinks that, although some kind of knowledge is required in order to do what we wish, this knowledge is only an instrumental one, which still fits in rhetoric's magic world.

So rhetoric gives us power to do those things we wish, like eating as much as we wish, buying as many cars as we wish. This happens because it has the knowledge needed to understand what things I am required to do *for the sake of* those others I really wish, such as pleasure and health. Like it was said above, I only wish to have a new car for the sake of pleasure, and the only knowledge required here seem to be whether or not a new car gives me pleasure. Polus says that this knowledge is not outside the boundaries of rhetoric, and we easily agree with that. In fact, Socrates also agrees with the fact that this kind of *νοῦς* is within rhetoric's reach. What he tries to show is that it is not the only one implied. We tend to miss out on it because apparently there is not any knowledge involved in our wish for pleasure or health. Even though we easily realize that there is some kind of practical know-how involved in choosing the things we do *for the sake of* the ones we really wish, we assume that there is no knowledge involved in my wish for pleasure or my wish for health. Thus, we can maintain that there is no knowledge involved in our desires because the only knowledge involved has to do with the things I wish indirectly, and not with the things I really wish. This is how we accept so easily the introduction of *νοῦς* and still maintain that desire itself has nothing to do with knowledge. This being true, rhetoric is still self-sufficient and still gives us the kind of *μέγα δύνασθαι* Polus refers to.

This brief analysis enables us to see how Socrates plans to take Polus down: the goal is to show that rhetoric depends on some kind of knowledge that teaches us the οὗ ἕνεκα: for the sake of *what* things we should use its magical powers. Consequently, we cannot but focus on whether those things for the sake of which we use rhetoric depend on some kind of knowledge. Is there anything I need to know

when I wish to have pleasure besides how to get it? Is there anything I need to know when I wish to be healthy besides what do in order to be so?

The answer to these questions is so obvious we do not even bother to phrase it. There is indeed a claim involved, and this is incredibly simple: pleasure is good, and so is health. Once again, the relationship between pleasure and good is so transparent we do not even see two separated things. In fact, the assumption that pleasure is a good thing entails a synthesis and a judgement, and judgments presuppose νοῦς. But when we think of pleasure we assume that it is good, without noticing that. Once again, the pleasant (τὸ ἡδύ) presents itself as good. The question is that this has nothing but empirical status. Nevertheless, it still makes us jump straight to the fact that pleasure is good. So we need to know that pleasure is good in order to do what we do for the sake of pleasure — we do not only need to know what to do for the sake of pleasure, but also to know that pleasure is a good thing. If we did not know whether pleasure is a good thing or not, we would not wish it, and therefore we would not wish to do those things we do for the sake of pleasure. It is because we jump from pleasure straight to good that we think there is no knowledge involved in doing what we wish (ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται) besides the choosing of the means. This same jump allows us to see pleasure as a thing desirable in itself, and, at the same time, to give up pleasure for the sake of health.

The point is very complicated: it implies that I usually cannot think of pleasure without considering it good, but at the same time implies that I in a way sense I can disconnect this immediate relationship. This duality has again to do with the meaning of δοκεῖν. And this is where we begin to unveil such meaning: pleasure appears to me as a good thing in itself, but at the same time I already hint that the fixation of the pleasant (τὸ ἡδύ) as the good (τὸ αγαθόν) has something to do with me. Therefore, I am already open to the possibility of pleasure working as an εἰδωλον of good. But this is not yet clear, and it is not clear because *confusion* reigns in the world of our wishes.

Despite everything that was said, I may still think pleasure is something desirable for its own sake (ἀπλῶς οὕτως)¹⁸. And even if I do something that is not pleasant or that goes against my pleasure, this does not mean pleasure is not something I wish. Apparently it only means it would collide with a more important or urgent desire. On the other hand, if I realize that I wish what is pleasant only *if* it is good (meaning that

¹⁸ Cf. 468c3.

I wish pleasure for the sake of the good: *ἔνεκα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*)¹⁹, this does imply that my wish for pleasure depends on me knowing whether or not pleasure is good. And if Polus is forced to grant this he finds himself in trouble, and so do we.

It is important to notice that Polus does not try to disconnect pleasure from good, but that, on the other hand, he tries to cling, even unconsciously, to the fact that they are not separable. In that case, it means that there is no "*if* pleasure is good", because pleasure *is* good in itself, and hence there is no knowledge required to understand why we long for pleasure. In this way, there is no "*for the sake of*" between pleasure and good, since pleasure is good — even if there is a "*for the sake of*" pleasure is only for the sake of itself. The same thing holds true for health and all others. This however implies that there are various good things, and they are disconnected from each other. This is what forces Socrates into showing Polus that we do all things for the sake of good. And now we must understand how he shows it.

So, do we choose between many good things, or do we choose always the same good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*) disguised in various shapes? Do we wish pleasure and health and honour for the *sake of the good*, or *because* they are good? The answer is very complicated, since we wish those things for the sake of good, while, at the same time, because they are done for the sake of good, they partake (*μετέχειν*) in that good. This is why Polus is able to acknowledge that we do everything *ἔνεκα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ* and still maintain the self-sufficiency of rhetoric. This is possible due to the same phenomenon described above. Let us recapture it now, since it will show how we are able to say that we wish many different good things without noticing they are done for the sake of the same thing. This same thing is always the good, although it appears dressed as many different things. The question at stake is whether or not we have a formal and previously fixed structure of desire.

I will not consider if what we wish when we seek health and honour and all other things is or not a form of pleasure, since that discussion arises later on the dialogue. However, it is easy to realize that, being it pleasure or not, if I take those things to be bad, my desire for them also dies. Let us recall the structure sketched above: when I eat chocolate, I do it for the sake of pleasure, and when I wish pleasure I wish what is good. *If* chocolates stopped giving me pleasure I would no longer eat them, and even *if* chocolates gave me pleasure, *if* pleasure were not a good thing, I would also no

¹⁹ 468b.

longer eat them. So, my desire for chocolates reveals itself as a highly complex thing. And the real problem arises when I understand that the thing I wish when I do something is not the thing itself. What I mean is that when I eat a chocolate what I wish is not the chocolate itself, but the good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*). And this is what is hard to explain, since there is an overwhelming gap between chocolate and *τὸ ἀγαθόν*. This gap, as I intend to show, is the territory where *δόξα* flowers, and therefore the territory where the rhetor rules.

So once again the problem has to do with a *hidden equation* or a *hidden synthesis*. But now we find not one, but at least *two syntheses* going unnoticed. The first has to do with the fact that chocolate gives me pleasure, and the second with the fact that pleasure is good. When someone asks me why is it that I want to eat chocolate I simply answer 'because it is good'. And this chain of syntheses can be much longer: I want a coffee because I want to work, and I want to work because I want to finish my degree, and I want to finish my degree because I want to succeed in the academic world, and I want to succeed in the academic world because success in the academic world would get me a job, and getting a job would help me start a family, and starting a family would make me happy, and being happy is a good thing. Ultimately, the only reason why I wish coffee is because I somehow believe it is leading me to happiness, and because I take happiness to be a good thing. Therefore, if I had no *νοῦς* (or at least something resembling *νοῦς*), I could not wish anything, since I would not establish any connection between coffee and happiness. In that case, my desire would be blind; but I cannot imagine what that would be (unless it is complete and utter boredom). I only think I do, because those syntheses hide themselves.

But all this we have already seen. What is new is that there is another synthesis that also hides itself — for the fact that pleasure is good is also a judgement. And the point is that the previous explanation of our desire still disregards the most important. And this is the fact that the synthesis between pleasure and good or health and good *is indeed* a synthesis. There are two different things involved. The key concept to understand this problem is *confusion*. Pleasure is done *for the sake of* the good, which means it aims (*στοχάζεταιται*) at the good, but in such a fashion that it insinuates (*προσποιεῖται*) itself as the good. So where we ought to see A=B, we see only A. In doing this we forget we are the ones that created the sign '='. I want coffee because it *seems to me* (*δοκεῖ ἐμοί*) that it is something that will make me happy, and I forget

that it *seems* as something that will make me happy because I think I know (*οἶσθαι εἰδέναι*) it will make me happy. The use of *δοκεῖν* has two senses: that which appears to be good and that which I determine as something good, both of them are meant by the expression *ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ*. This same double-faced *δοκεῖν* is what immediately makes me want to be happy, since it presents being happy as a good thing as if I did not had anything to do with the establishment of happiness as a good thing. This is what makes us think we wish pleasure and health and honour for themselves. But in fact we only wish pleasure and health and wealth *indirectly*, just like we only wish coffee and cars and degrees, *indirectly* — what we really wish is good dressed as pleasure or as health. However, because we do not see that we are the ones that dress the pleasant as good, and that the pleasant is done *for the sake of the good*, and also because our doing pleasant things for the sake of the good makes the pleasant things good by partaking (*μετέχειν*) in the good, we think that pleasure is something good in itself. Once again, pleasure presents itself to us (*δοκεῖ αὐτῷ*) as an *εἶδωλον* of *τὸ ἀγαθόν*.

It is only after this exhaustive explanation that we are able to understand that we always wish *the same thing* — the good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*). Not only do we wish (*βούλεσθαι*) always the same thing, but this thing is always fixed in advance. *Τὸ ἀγαθόν* is a *formal* concept, that we have to "deformalize" into other things like pleasure and health so that it can be "deformalized" again into coffee or chocolate or a new car. What Socrates is trying to show Polus it that, even if rhetoric is able to teach us how to get chocolates or cars, it neither teaches us how to de-formalize the good into pleasure or health, nor how to "deformalize" pleasure into a new car or chocolates. This means that rhetoric, by itself, is neither able to teach us the *οὗ ἕνεκα* (for the sake of *what* things it should be used) nor *how* it should be used. The *how* presupposes the *what*, and rhetoric does not teach the *what*. However, due to the confusion and insinuation mentioned above, we neglect this.

As a result of this, it seems that rhetoric is not self-sufficient. There is a knowledge we need in order for rhetoric to be useful, and that knowledge lies somewhere *outside* the realm of rhetoric. This knowledge seems to be concerned with the good, and, instead of teaching it, rhetoric *presupposes* the good without noticing it.

Despite this being in between the lines from the beginning of the discussion between Polus and Socrates (and in reality from the beginning of the dialogue),

assuming that rhetoric depends on this knowledge would finish the matter right away. Admitting a) that we always do things for the sake of good and, at the same time, b) that rhetoric has a δόξα-like relationship with what is good would — and in fact will — destroy Polus' μέγα δύνασθαι. In fact, Socrates is not trying to impose his thoughts on rhetoric to Polus, but rather trying to make Polus realize that his own view of rhetoric — and therefore of himself as a rhetor — is only allowed by confusion and what might be termed *lack of acuity*. Although Polus in a way knows from the beginning that we do everything for the sake of good, he is still trapped in the illusion of power. That is why, after Socrates exposes his view regarding rhetoric, describing it as an εἰδωλον of politics²⁰ (an εἰδωλον that provides no real knowledge but only what seem to be knowledge), Polus still claims that even if rhetoric gives me no knowledge when it comes to discern what is good, the fact is I already know somehow what is good for me and rhetoric enables me to get it.

To destroy the illusion of power, Socrates brings to the surface something that Polus is forced to admit: in order for power to be power, it has to be good for those who have it.²¹ In fact, the very definition of power and our natural views on power force us to accept this fact. What kind of power is a power that does not allow *me* to do what I wish and is detrimental to me? None at all. This makes Polus not only realize that there is some connection between power and τὸ ἀγαθόν, but also that, if power is something that enables me to do what I wish, and if I always wish to do what is good, unless rhetoric allows me to do what is good, it will not be a true power. Polus thinks this is no real objection because he still believes he already knows what is good. As I tried to explain, this is due to *confusion*, since we take what is done *for the sake of good* (an instance of ἔνεκά τινος) as if it were good itself (the οὗ ἔνεκα). But in order for Polus to understand this, Socrates tries to show him that there is a possibility that he might not know what is good for him. The problem is very Socratic: how is it that I might not know what I think I know.

Although the answer may already be anticipated, we must proceed in order to understand how the δόξα-like structure sketched above actually forces Polus to acknowledge that there is no μέγα δύνασθαι.

²⁰ 462b. It should be noted that πολιτική stands for the τέχνη of being a πολίτης —that is, for the τέχνη of being a free man (we could also say, the τέχνη of really being what one is supposed to be).
²¹ 466b.

Up until now, we discovered that *if* the best life is the one led by those who do what they wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*), and that if what everyone wishes is the good, the problem is not only to identify what is good, but also to identify what are the things that allow me to do what I wish. Therefore, I have to know not only that the happy life is good, but also that the happy life is achieved through pleasure, and that pleasure is achieved through success, and success is achieved through studying hard, and studying hard is achieved through coffee. At stake is the question whether persuasion (*πειθώ*) without knowledge (*εἰδέναι*) allows one to do what one wishes. Polus accepts the *νοῦς*, but only regarding *how* to get there, and not regarding τὸ ἀγαθόν itself and the "deformalisation" of good. He is only able to do so because of the double character of *δοκεῖν* mentioned above. He thinks he only needs to know how to persuade, but Socrates tries to show him that he also needs to know (*εἰδέναι*) *for the sake of* what (*οὗ ἕνεκα*) he should persuade others. Socrates tries to show that persuasion is always used *for the sake of* something, and that the latter is established outside the reign of rhetoric. In sum, rhetoric is only an instrument and therefore its usefulness is limited to the identifications of the means. For example, I might use rhetoric to succeed in the academic world, but rhetoric does not teach me that success in the academic world is a good thing. Still, if success were not a pleasant thing and if the pleasant life were not good, I would disregard the academic life. Hence, I must know *what* to use rhetoric for, because, if I do not know the οὗ ἕνεκα (for the sake of *what* I should use it), I will not know *how* to use it. This is why Socrates forces Polus to acknowledge the connection between rhetoric and some kind of *νοῦς* not contained within its limits.²² So it seems rhetoric itself does not allow me to do what I wish, and therefore, it cannot empower me. But Polus still says this is not a problem because I already know what I wish. According to him, rhetoric is still the best τέχνη, since it still gives me what I wish. Socrates, on the other hand, tries to show him that he might not know what he thinks he knows — he tries to tell Polus that while doing what he thinks to be the best (*ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστον εἶναι*) he might still not be doing what he wishes (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*).

The first thing we need to understand is that *ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ* is always the same as *ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστον εἶναι*.²³ The introduction of the superlative "βέλτιστον" tells us one thing — the structure sketched above is not yet complete.

²² 467a and following.

²³ 466e.

This is very important since it relates to the fact that rhetoric presents itself as the best *τέχνη*. Let us complete it then.

As it was explained, we think we wish many different and isolated things. However, the things we wish are not so isolated. They all have something in common: we take them to be good; we do them for the sake of the good. These things are described in the text as *μεταζύ*, and these are neither good nor bad (*οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν*).²⁴ The examples are simple: to walk or to sit or to take a medicine are not things we do "*ἀπλῶς οὕτως*", but for the sake of something else (*ἐνεκά τινος*). This something else is in every case the good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*). So, the thing we wish for when we take a medicine is not the medicine, but *τὸ ἀγαθόν*. This requires a synthesis or an equation that erases itself in such a fashion that I end up believing that what I wish is the medicine. This synthesis or equation depends also on the assumption that this medicine will improve my health; otherwise I would not take it. Moreover I have to consider health to be a good thing. The fact that I take health to be a good thing makes me see health as something good in itself and not a "deformalization" of the concept of good. Therefore health, although established as a good thing by me and *for me*, is seen as immediately good in every case, even if I have to choose pleasure over it. This means I create several *εἰδωλα* of the good, and the only reason I can maintain that there are several good things to do in every case is because I take these *εἰδωλα* to be the good. This confusion only happens because of a lack of acuity allowed by the double meaning of *δοκεῖν*: it is something that I establish as good *for myself*, although thinking it is good regardless of me. Once again, this happens because I forget the 'if' — health is good *if* a healthy life is a good life. But then I have to ask *whether* the healthy life is better than the pleasant life, and that dilemma is present when I want to eat a chocolate. So, when I eat or prefer not to eat a chocolate I am deciding whether the healthy life is or not *better* than the pleasant. But since I am choosing not only between the pleasant and the healthy, but also between the honorable and the academic, what I wish is the best (*τὸ ἄριστον*) between many things that appear to be good. Indeed, since I always wish what is good, desire has the form of intertwined *ἐνεκά-τινος*-links revolving around a formal *οὔ ἐνεκά* (so that they are all for the sake of good). Hence, the problem I face when making a particular decision is identifying what is good in that particular case.

²⁴ 467e, or "μήτε ἀγαθὰ μήτε κακὰ" in 467e and then again in 468a.

But if I stop here, If I stick to the conviction that I could choose any one of the things that *seem to me* to be good, I would still lack criteria to choose between them. So what do I do when forced to choose between things that seem good? I choose *the best*. So what is it that I wish for *in every case*? The best (τὸ ἄριστον).

Hence, I will choose the chocolate *if* it is the best thing to give me pleasure amongst the things in the pantry, and I will have to choose the most pleasant thing in the pantry *if* I choose that pleasure is the best thing amongst health and others, and I will choose pleasure *if* the pleasant life is the best life amongst all others. However, the several '*if*'s' hide themselves, and the '*if* it is the best' is no exception. This happens not only because I immediately *jump* to what is best, since I do what is good for the *sake of the best*, but also because the de-formalization of the concept of good is so complex that it seems that all other good things could be elected as the best.

So what we see here is an incredible expansion of the realm of *μεταξύ*. I tried to show, right in the beginning of this paper, that Polus' problem would always be the understanding of what to do for the sake of something else — the example was whether I should do a magnificent power point or study hard for the sake of a good grade. I then said that, if what I wished was a good grade, I did what I thought to be the best (ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστον εἶναι), but in fact that did not render me the grade. Hence I did not do what I wished, since I wished to have a good grade and the good way to have a good grade is to study hard. In that case, I did what I thought was the best (ποιεῖν ἃ δόκει αὐτῷ βέλτιστον εἶναι), but not what I wished (ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται). So now we see that, with the expansion of the reign of *μεταξύ*, the possibility of confusion becomes endemic.

5. A scary conclusion: the best in life and the difficulty we have in seeing it

But there is still something left to say: I always wish to do what is best, but only if it is the best *for me*. This not being unveiled sooner helps Polus to stay in the fight. The fact that the best is a *formal* concept might induce us to think that the problem at stake here is some kind of *βέλτιστον* hanging in the clouds, but Plato is very specific regarding this — the problem is what is the best for me in every case, and it is only because of the double-meaning of *δοκεῖν* that we forget we are the ones who need to de-formalize it.

Plato stresses this aspect in 468b, when Socrates asks *"τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἄρα διώκοντες καὶ βαδίζομεν ὅταν βαδίζωμεν, οἴομενοι βέλτιον εἶναι, καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον ἔσταμεν ὅταν ἐστῶμεν, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔνεκα, τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ: ἢ οὐ;"* "Indeed, when he uses *"τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔνεκα, τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ"* it becomes clear that the structure of my desire is the structure of my interest for myself. This is one of the reasons I can maintain there are various different good things: because I imagine some other person could choose health over pleasure. However I am not that person and therefore I cannot actually understand his choice. We always like to keep our options open. However, this only proves that we do not know (*εἰδέναι*) what we wish to do in every case, because if we did, there would be no need to keep our options open, since we would always know what is good, and the problem would only be *what* to do for the sake of good. But the depth of the intermediate things (*μεταξύ*) and the fact that they partake (*μετέχειν*) in what is the best shows that we have problems all the way through. We not only have to identify what we should do for the sake of the best: we have to identify *what* is the best. What I have to do for the sake of pleasure implies that I establish it as the best thing to do for the sake of pleasure just as much as pleasure being the best thing depends on me establishing it. And this holds true for the whole realm of "if's" described above. When I establish what is good or what is the best, I am the one establishing it, and, whether I am aware of it or not, I do it because I think it to be the best *for me*. So, I do things for the sake of the best, but not a "best" flying in the sky, as people tend to say Plato means. When I do something, I do it because I assume it is the best (*"οἶμαι βέλτιον εἶναι"*) for me.²⁵

This is very important if we want to understand why rhetoric's *μέγα δύνασθαι* falls apart. As it was said, this drive towards the best is present in the dialogue from the very beginning. By defining rhetoric as the best art, Polus and Gorgias imply that it is the best because it empowers us to do what we wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*). Now we discover that we always wish what is best for us, just like they said. But the problem is how to know (*εἰδέναι*) what is the best for me in every case. At stake is not only the "deformalization" of the concept of good, but more importantly the "deformalization" of what is in every case the best. And this is where we understand why Socrates used the expression *"ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστα εἶναι"*. He used it to show, through the use of *"ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ"* that the knowledge we have of what is best is not a true

²⁵ 468b, *"οἴομενοι βέλτιον εἶναι"*.

εἰδέναι but a οἶσθαι εἰδέναι. And this is what destroys the illusion of the μέγα δύνασθαι or of any kind of δύνασθαι not accompanied by a true knowledge of what we wish.

This is the core in the distinction between ποιεῖν ᾧ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ and ποιεῖν ᾧ βούλεται. Power is only good if it is good for him who has it,²⁶ and it is only good for him who has it, if it allows him to do what he wishes. But now we discover that the power presented by Polus does not allow us to do what we wish, because it lacks the knowledge of what we really wish and therefore does not know how to lead us to what we wish. It is impossible to understand *how* am I to do something if I do not even know *what* to do, and this holds true throughout all the depth of the various layers of μεταξὺ. If I do not know *what* I wish to do, the *how* is irrelevant. Rhetoric is only concerned with the *how*, and hence, by itself, it is useless. This destroys the power (δύνασθαι) rhetoric gives, since it describes it as a blind and useless power — and a blind and useless power is no power at all. Rhetoric is not enough for me to do what I wish because it is blind regarding the good and the best — it has no real power, but only an εἰδωλον of power. In short, the realm of rhetoric is a realm of εἰδωλα; and the power provided by rhetoric is but an εἰδωλον of real power.

Indeed, Polus says that, being rhetoric whatever Socrates says, the fact is it gives him the power to do what he wishes (ποιεῖν ᾧ βούλεται). However, he takes ποιεῖν ᾧ βούλεται and ποιεῖν ᾧ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστον εἶναι as if they were same thing. He confuses them because of the inebriation involved in the feeling of power — that I will not consider here —, but also and especially because he still takes what is a mere οἶσθαι εἰδέναι as a true εἰδέναι. It is once again a problem of confusion, since this οἶσθαι εἰδέναι works as an εἰδωλον of εἰδέναι.

It is also important to notice that Socrates is not trying to prove he has the knowledge that enables him to do what he wishes (ποιεῖν ᾧ βούλεται) and Polus does not. On the contrary, he is trying to show that it is incredibly hard to obtain this knowledge, which is the most important in one's life. He never denies I should live my life doing what I wish (ποιεῖν ᾧ βούλεται); he just says that this might be different from doing what I think fit (ποιεῖν ᾧ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ). Therefore, the first task in life is to discover *what is it that I wish*. And the real problem here is that, although I may even understand that what I wish is the best for me, I do not have a clue of what that might

²⁶ 466b.

be. Hence, when I do what I think fit, I do what *seems* to me to be the best, but this might be different from what I wish because I wish the best, and I might not know what the best is, despite presuming I know (*οἶσθαι εἰδέναι*). Just like it was mentioned before regarding the power-point and studying hard, If I think that life lead according to pleasure is a good life but it turns out it is not, then I am doing what I think fit (*ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ*) but not what I wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*). Also, when I choose a life lead according to pleasure as the best life, if it turns out that the healthy was better, then I am also doing what I think fit but not what I wish.

What I want to explain is that everything I wish to do, from drinking a coffee to buying a car or to writing this essay is determined by a long and formal equation that hides its successive links, and it hides them so efficiently that I think I only wish a coffee, but in fact what I really want is the best life. So, if this text drags me away from the best life instead of towards it, then I am doing what I think fit and not what I wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*). And I believe that what Plato is trying to show is that I am not able to see if writing this text is leading me to the best life, and therefore I might be doing what I think is the best (*ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστον εἶναι*) and not what I wish (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*).

The problem, as usual, is that I might not know what I think I know. However, in this dialogue this same problem reaches scary proportions. As Socrates points out, what he terms *οἶσθαι εἰδέναι* makes it possible that I lead my life thinking I am on my way to what I wish — the best life possible —, but in fact am walking in the opposite direction without even noticing it.

“Les témoins malgré eux”: Socrates' unwitting witnesses in Plato's *Gorgias*

M. Jorge de Carvalho *

1. Polus' and Socrates' ἔλεγχος – two kinds of ἔλεγχος, a different number of witnesses and two kinds of testimony

In one of the methodological interludes that punctuate Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates contrasts two kinds of ἔλεγχος.

The first tries to refute in *rhetorical fashion* (ῥητορικῶς ἐπιχειρεῖν ἐλέγχειν), as people imagine they do in law courts (ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν τοῖς δικαστηρίοις ἡγούμενοι ἐλέγχειν)¹: the one party thinks that they refute the other when they bring forward a number of respectable witnesses in support of any statements they happen to make (καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ οἱ ἕτεροι τοὺς ἑτέρους δοκοῦσιν ἐλέγχειν, ἐπειδὴ τῶν λόγων ὧν ἂν λέγωσι μάρτυρας πολλοὺς παρέχονται καὶ εὐδοκίμους).² What counts in this kind of ἔλεγχος is both the *number* of witnesses and the fact that they are *respectable* or of *good repute* (εὐδόκιμοι).³ The opposite party seems to be refuted and loses the case if it produces only a single witness or none at all (ὁ δὲ τὰναντία λέγων ἓνα τινὰ παρέχεται ἢ μηδένα).⁴

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¹ 471e2-3.

² 471e3-6. Translations borrowed from B. JOWETT (ed.), *The Dialogues of Plato*, Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions, vol. II, N. Y., Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1892³, and T. IRWIN, *Plato - Gorgias*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979, with slight changes.

³ Or, as Socrates puts it in 472a, allegations are supposed to be corroborated and supported ὑπὸ πολλῶν καὶ δοκούντων εἶναι τι.

⁴ 471e 6-7. In 473-474, instead of speaking of witnesses and the like, Socrates compares Polus' ἔλεγχος to putting the motion to the vote in the βουλή viz. in the so-called *Council of Five Hundred*. But we do not need to consider this in any detail – for, in the final analysis, both comparisons point to

Socrates points out that this kind of ἔλεγχος is far from being cogent, and fails to provide any real refutation of the opponent's claims. In fact, it is absolutely *worthless* as far as truth is concerned (οὗτος δὲ ὁ ἔλεγχος οὐδενὸς ἄξιός ἐστιν πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν).⁵ In the final analysis, this kind of ἔλεγχος provides nothing more than an *illusion of refutation* – or, to use Socrates' words, it is δοκεῖν ἐλέγχειν viz. ἡγεῖσθαι ἐλέγχειν, not real ἐλέγχειν in the strong and proper sense of the term.⁶ As a matter of fact, a man may sometimes be convicted owing to false testimony given against him by numerous and apparently respectable witnesses (ἐνίστε γὰρ ἂν καὶ καταψευδομαρτυρηθείη τις ὑπὸ πολλῶν καὶ δοκούντων εἶναί τι).⁷ In other words, this kind of proof or this kind of refutation is worthless because there is always the possibility of what Socrates terms καταψευδομαρτυρεῖν viz. καταψευδομαρτυρεῖσθαι (that the witnesses bear *false testimony*, and that someone is borne down by *false testimony* or *false evidence*).⁸ This is the decisive point: at the end of the day, the fact that there are *many* witnesses and that they seem to be *respectable* provides no guarantee that what they say is the truth. And the fact that one has no witnesses to support one's claims does not necessarily mean that they are false.

Socrates mentions this first kind of ἔλεγχος because, according to him, this is the way Polus tries to undermine his claim a) that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι, and that in fact ἀδικεῖν is the greatest of evils (ὡς μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν τυγχάνει ὄν τὸ ἀδικεῖν)⁹ – so that b) he would rather ἀδικεῖσθαι than ἀδικεῖν (he would rather *suffer* than *do* injustice), c) εὐδαιμονία is utterly incompatible with ἀδικεῖν (and those who do wrong cannot be happy) – and, what is more, d) εὐδαιμονία is *all about* παιδεία and δικαιοσύνη (ἐν τούτῳ ἢ πᾶσα εὐδαιμονία ἐστίν).¹⁰

the same idea. As far as Socrates' comparison is concerned, Polus' *witnesses* and *voters* for Polus – counting *witnesses* and counting *votes* – amount pretty much to the same thing.

⁵ 471e7-472a1.

⁶ For δοκεῖν ἐλέγχειν see 471e3, for ἡγεῖσθαι ἐλέγχειν see 471e4.

⁷ 472a1-2.

⁸ Incidentally, καταψευδομαρτυρέω is a very rare verb. In the extant ancient Greek texts there is no occurrence before the 5th Century B.C. In the 5th Century it appears just once in Plato, once in Isaeus (*De Dicaeogene*, 9.1) and once in Xenophon (*Apologia Socratis*, 24). In the 4th Century B.C. there are four occurrences: in Demosthenes (*In Midiam*, 136, *Contra Aphobum*, 7, *In Stephanum* 1) and in the Ps. Demosthenes (*Contra Apatourium* 37). Ψευδομάρτυς and ψευδομαρτυρέω are considerably more frequent; in the *corpus platonicum* they occur five times: *Theaetetus* 148b4, *Gorgias* 472b, *Respublica* 575b8, *Leges* 937b7 and 937c1.

⁹ 469b8-9.

¹⁰ 470e8-11: {ΠΩΛ.} Τί δέ; ἐν τούτῳ ἢ πᾶσα εὐδαιμονία ἐστίν; {ΣΩ.} Ὡς γε ἐγὼ λέγω, ὃ Πῶλε· τὸν μὲν γὰρ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα εὐδαίμονα εἶναί φημι, τὸν δὲ ἄδικον καὶ πονηρὸν ἄθλιον.

According to Socrates, Polus does not really *argue* against these claims. He just *appeals to everybody else* – to Athenians and foreigners alike – as his witnesses against Socrates’ statements. And Socrates concedes that *almost everybody* disagrees with him and agrees with Polus, so that his antagonist can bring an overwhelming legion of witnesses in disproof of Socrates’ claims (καὶ νῦν περὶ ὧν σὺ λέγεις ὀλίγου σοι πάντες συμφήσουσιν ταῦτ’ Ἀθηναῖοι καὶ οἱ ξένοι, ἐὰν βούλῃ κατ’ ἐμοῦ μάρτυρας παρασχέσθαι ὥς οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγω).¹¹ But on the other hand this does not seem to impress Socrates. Even if he is left alone and with no witnesses to corroborate his claims, he refuses to admit that Polus is right, for Polus did not succeed in convincing him (ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ σοι εἶς ὧν οὐχ ὁμολογῶ).¹² In Socrates’ eyes Polus’ witnesses are but false witnesses (ψευδομάρτυρες), and Polus can call as many such witnesses as he pleases: their testimony is *false*, and the fact that they are overwhelmingly numerous does not change that at all; the result being that Polus proves unable to deprive Socrates of what the latter calls his *real property*, namely the *truth* (οὐ γάρ με σὺ ἀναγκάζεις, ἀλλὰ ψευδομάρτυρας πολλοὺς κατ’ ἐμοῦ παρασχόμενος ἐπιχειρεῖς ἐκβάλλειν με ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς).¹³

In other words, Socrates is absolutely convinced of the truth of his claims. And this means that in his eyes Polus’ witnesses are but ψευδομάρτυρες. The fact that Polus’ witnesses can be dismissed as ψευδομάρτυρες (so that they agree with each other and bear witness only as ψευδομάρτυρες) undermines the significance of their number. The overwhelming number may mean nothing more than an overwhelming multiplication of ψευδομαρτυρία. The problem is, therefore, that Polus’ alleged ἔλεγχος lacks all cogency. In the final analysis, it all comes down to a matter of statement against statement. Polus’ witnesses testify to the fact that they do not agree with Socrates and that they find his claims preposterous. But Socrates remains adamant that he is right, and they produce nothing to *invalidate* his claims. In short, Socrates resists Polus’ attempt to convince him. And Polus’ alleged ἔλεγχος proves unable to *penetrate* Socrates’ stronghold of resistance and *take* it.

¹¹ 472a2-5.

¹² 472b3-4.

¹³ 472b4- 6. I take καί to be epexegetic here and do not agree with Dodds, who thinks there is no play on the philosophical sense of οὐσία as reality, etc. Cf. E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato Gorgias*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, on 472b6. Socrates is no doubt alluding to the previously mentioned notion of rhetorical power as the power that enables one, among other things, to eject other people from their material patrimony (466b-c). But there is something of a pun in what he says here, and his wording strongly suggests that real patrimony, real property (“real οὐσία”) is truth – τὸ ἀληθές.

This is one kind of ἔλεγχος, as Polus and a good many others besides him imagine it to be (ἔστιν μὲν οὖν οὗτός τις τρόπος ἐλέγχου, ὥς σύ τε οἶε καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί).¹⁴

But there is also *another kind of ἔλεγχος* which Socrates on his side deems to be such (ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλος, ὃν ἐγὼ αὖ οἶμαι)¹⁵ – and indeed *the only real ἔλεγχος*. This second kind of ἔλεγχος is presented by Socrates in the following way: “But I consider that nothing worth speaking of will have been effected by me unless I make you the one witness of my words; nor by you, unless you make me the one witness of yours; no matter about the rest of the world” (ἐγὼ δὲ ἂν μὴ σὲ αὐτὸν ἓνα ὄντα μάρτυρα παράσχωμαι ὁμολογοῦντα περὶ ὧν λέγω, οὐδὲν οἶμαι ἄξιον λόγου μοι πεπεράνθαι περὶ ὧν ἂν λέγω, οὐδὲν οἶμαι ἄξιον λόγου μοι πεπεράνθαι περὶ ὧν ἂν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ᾗ· οἶμαι δὲ οὐδὲ σοί, ἐὰν μὴ ἐγὼ σοι μαρτυρῶ εἰς ὧν μόνος, τοὺς δ’ ἄλλους πάντας τούτους χαίρειν ἑᾶς).¹⁶ Now, what kind of ἔλεγχος is this, what kind of “testimony” is Socrates talking about in this case, and how is this second kind of ἔλεγχος supposed to succeed where the other fails?

This second kind of ἔλεγχος¹⁷ is characterized by the fact that it leaves out everybody else besides the two opponents, Socrates and Polus. One of its main traits is, as Socrates puts it, this τοὺς δ’ ἄλλους πάντας τούτους χαίρειν ἑᾶς.¹⁸ In other words, the only witness that matters is one’s opponent. If Socrates – or Polus – fail to produce *their opponent* as a witness in confirmation of what they say, they will have effected nothing. The ἔλεγχος is carried out, as it were, “en tête-à-tête”. Number does not count: what counts is *one single* witness, *one single* testimony – or rather, a *particular* witness, a *particular* testimony: the *testimony of none other but one’s opponent*.

But does this mean a single witness *in the same sense* as the many witnesses summoned by Polus – just a more *authoritative* witness or a *decisive* witness, whose testimony carries more weight than the others? On closer inspection it turns out that it does not mean anything of the sort. The point is that, contrary to what happens in

¹⁴ 472c3-4.

¹⁵ 472c4.

¹⁶ 472b6-472c2. Cf. 474a 4-6: (...) καὶ πείρασαι τοῦ ἐλέγχου οἷον ἐγὼ οἶμαι δεῖν εἶναι. ἐγὼ γὰρ ὧν ἂν λέγω ἓνα μὲν παρασχέσθαι μάρτυρα ἐπίσταμαι, αὐτὸν πρὸς ὃν ἂν μοι ὁ λόγος ᾗ (...)

¹⁷ Let us call it Socrates’ ἔλεγχος; this does not mean an ἔλεγχος directed against Polus’ claims, but rather the kind of ἔλεγχος that, according to Socrates, both he and Polus must try to produce, if they really want to refute the claims advanced by their opponent.

¹⁸ 472c2. Cf. 474a6-b1: (...) τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς ἐῷ χαίρειν, καὶ ἓνα ἐπιψηφίζειν ἐπίσταμαι, τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς οὐδὲ διαλέγομαι.

Polus' alleged ἔλεγχος, in the second kind of ἔλεγχος – in Socrates' ἔλεγχος – testimony does not play a role *as a means of refutation*. In Socrates' ἔλεγχος there is only one witness, and when Socrates speaks of the opponent's testimony what he has in mind is that one of the parties manages to convince the opponent of the very view the opponent rejected, so that it is able to produce none other than *the opponent* as a witness in disproof of the opponent's claims. In other words, in Socrates' ἔλεγχος the opponent's testimony is the *successful result* of the ἔλεγχος, the sign that it has achieved its goal: that the ἔλεγχος proved able to invalidate the opponent's claims (and to invalidate them *in the opponent's own judgment*), i. e. that the ἔλεγχος proved able to *penetrate* the opponent's stronghold of resistance and *take* it. In the guise of two different kinds of testimony (the testimony of *many witnesses* as opposed to the testimony of *only one*) what Socrates presents is a *complete change in the role played by witnesses and testimony*: in the one case (in Polus' ἔλεγχος) it is the centrepiece of ἔλεγχος, in the other (namely in the case of Socrates' ἔλεγχος) it plays no role whatsoever as “*evidence*” viz. as *a means of refutation*.¹⁹

But then the question is: how does the second kind of ἔλεγχος achieve its goal? Surprising as it may seem, Socrates' description does not provide any concrete, let alone elaborate answer to this question. It offers almost no details about the *modus faciendi*. All Socrates does is point out a) that the number of witnesses – and for that matter testimony *überhaupt* – plays no significant role in this kind of ἔλεγχος (so that it must use some other method of refutation) b) that the second kind of ἔλεγχος – Socrates' ἔλεγχος – follows the principle that it will be successful *if and only if it manages to change the opponent's mind* and make him retract his claim and become a witness for the opposite party, and c) that the second kind of ἔλεγχος has to do with what he describes as διδόναι ἔλεγχον ἀποκρινόμενος τὰ ἐρωτώμενα.²⁰ In other words, Socrates' ἔλεγχος consists in what may be called a cross-examination. Its proper medium is the “tête-à-tête” resulting from the exclusion of all testimonial evidence,²¹ and it has to do with some kind of *discussion* of the

¹⁹ The point is not so much that Socrates' ἔλεγχος cannot be false, as that this second kind of ἔλεγχος manages to achieve what Pollus' ἔλεγχος fails to do (at least in the case of Socrates): to convince the opponent and to produce none other than *the opponent himself* as a witness in disproof of his own claims. In the final analysis, Socrates' description of this second ἔλεγχος does nothing more than lay down the criterion that must be met for an ἔλεγχος to be deemed successful.

²⁰ 474a.

²¹ See notably 474a-b: ἐγὼ γὰρ ὦν ἂν λέγω ἓνα μὲν παρασχέσθαι μάρτυρα ἐπίσταμαι, αὐτὸν πρὸς ὃν ἂν μοι ὁ λόγος ᾗ, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς ἐγὼ χαίρειν, καὶ ἓνα ἐπισηφίζειν ἐπίσταμαι, τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς οὐδὲ διαλέγομαι.

claims in question (as opposed to arguments from authority, to counting the number of witnesses who testify on the opposing sides, or to what may be termed the battle of testimony against testimony viz. of statement against statement, etc.).

Now, all this seems to be consistent with what Socrates has been doing since the beginning of the *Gorgias*, and in general with what he tries to do in Plato's dialogues. Socrates' remarks in the methodological interlude we are talking about do not appear to be intended as a thorough description of the two kinds of ἔλεγχος (and in particular of the second, of Socrates' ἔλεγχος), but rather as a very brief *outline* – or as a *memento* – of the methodological watershed separating Socrates from his interlocutors. To be sure, Socrates' methodological outline expresses his reaction to Pollus' attempt to refute his claim concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι (N. B. to refute it by showing that there is something like a *universal consensus* against such a claim). But it should be kept in mind that Socrates' methodological remarks are presented against the background of what has been going on in his discussion with Gorgias and Pollus since the beginning of the dialogue. And, what is more, they are presented as a *general principle* to be followed in all cases.

What this all amounts to is that if Socrates' description of the second kind of ἔλεγχος is anything but thorough and seems to skip the essential question concerning how on earth the ἔλεγχος Socrates has in mind is supposed to achieve its goal, the major features of the second kind of ἔλεγχος – and in particular the answer to the question about the *modus faciendi* – must and can be sought and identified both in the other methodological remarks scattered throughout the *Gorgias* (viz. through the whole *corpus platonicum*) and in Socrates' *practice* of ἔλεγχος both in this dialogue and in the rest of the *corpus platonicum*. But then again, none of this is more than pure conjecture. It has to be admitted that Socrates' description of the *modus operandi* is rather vague and that his characterisation of the second kind of ἔλεγχος does little more than a) exclude Polus' "testimonial proof" and b) set out the criteria that must be met by one interlocutor if he is to refute the other. In this sense, Socrates' description of the second kind of ἔλεγχος is, as it were, a very rough and sketchy "identikit image" that leaves a lot to the imagination.

2. Second Thoughts about Polus' ἔλεγχος

But this is not all, and the analysis must be refined. On closer inspection it turns out that Socrates' description of the methodological watershed that separates him from Polus is more complex – and that the above does not do justice to the scope and importance of the remarks we are trying to interpret. Our account of Socrates' words in 472 misses some important nuances. In fact, to a large extent, it misses the point, and it can prove misleading with regard both to the first and to the second kind of ἔλεγχος Socrates speaks of.

Let us start with the first kind of ἔλεγχος – with Polus' attempt to refute Socrates' claims about ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc.

Socrates' comparison with witnesses in a court of law is somewhat misleading, because it can evoke the idea of an intricate lawsuit and of a judicial process, where witnesses are supposed to play a significant role in ascertaining the truth. But what Polus has in mind is the very *opposite* of an *intricate* judicial matter and indeed the very *opposite* of a judicial *process* (of witness-hearing, cross-questioning and the like). *Omne simile claudicat* – and this is where Socrates' comparison limps. Some awareness of this fact and of what causes his comparison to limp may help us understand what is at stake here – for seeing where the comparison fails is perhaps as instructive as knowing the common features that provide the basis for it.

First, when Polus appeals to the testimony of Athenians and foreigners alike, he does not bring the testimony of *many* witnesses, as it is possible to do in a real court of law. In fact, he is summoning nothing less than *all* witnesses: *all* human beings but Socrates (and whoever is willing to testify in support of Socrates' preposterous claims, and thereby proves to be, together with Socrates, a very rare and rather intriguing exception among human beings). In other words, as pointed out above, Polus brandishes the weapon of *universal consensus* – and what this means is an *impossible* witness- *hearing* (a hearing which simply cannot take place at all, because the number of witnesses exceeds all human capability, etc.).²²

²² Or – which amounts pretty much to the same thing – Polus brandishes the weapon of an *impossible* ballot: the ballot in the *impossible* βουλὴ (in the impossible council) of *all mankind*. It is important to bear in mind that Polus' testimonial proof refers not only to all *contemporary* mankind but to *all past* and *future* generations. This is not expressly mentioned in the *Gorgias*; but it is easy to see that it is what Polus and Socrates have in mind. And that is why, even supposing it were possible to hear many, many witnesses, their testimony would represent only a *very small* – and indeed *negligible*

Secondly, what Polus has in mind is the very opposite of the *proceedings* in a court of law, where each witness is called and cross-examined, and everything depends on *how the hearing unfolds*. *Anticipation* – *knowing beforehand* what all the witnesses are bound to say – is what Polus’ attempt to refute Socrates’ claims is all about. In other words, Polus *bypasses*, as it were, any actual *witness-hearing* and any actual *judicial process* as such. He excludes the possibility of surprise or any significant *development*. He flatly claims that it is possible to know once and for all – long before having the opportunity to hear them, and even if it is absolutely impossible to hear them *all* – that by and large *all* possible witnesses (i. e. *all* human beings) share his own view, are bound to find Socrates’ claims simply preposterous and would no doubt confirm Polus’ statements on the witness stand and testify against Socrates. In a word, if Socrates is right in claiming that Polus’ ἔλεγχος bears some similarity to the hearing of witnesses in a court of law, the least one can say is that the way Polus deals with testimonial evidence is such that it makes a *summary procedure* (or an *accelerated procedure*) in the usual sense of the word seem almost lengthy and full of legal formalities. To be sure, Polus does not rule out the possibility of summoning and hearing the witnesses he refers to – i.e. the possibility of a “real process”. It is quite the reverse: invoking this possibility plays an important part in his argument against Socrates. But the point is that, according to him, one *knows beforehand* what these witnesses are bound to say. Their hearing (and, what is more, their cross-examination) would just confirm what is already known – so there is absolutely no point in actually hearing or cross-examining them.

Thirdly, this means that, in the final analysis, the “universal assent” Polus refers to is the result of a *colossal anticipation*. It is, as it were, a “scene” played on the stage of a single mind – in this case, Polus’ or Socrates’ (or the reader’s) mind. That is, paradoxically enough, a single mind is what it takes to assume universal assent or

– part of the *overwhelming testimonial evidence* Polus and Socrates refer to. It is therefore no exaggeration to speak of an *impossible witness hearing* and an *impossible ballot*.

This is not the place to discuss the history of the idea of *consensus omnium* that provides the background for this particular part of the *Gorgias*. For a survey of this history, see notably K. OEHLER, *Der Consensus omnium als Kriterium der Wahrheit in der antiken Philosophie und der Patristik. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Begriffs der allgemeinen Meinung*, *Antike und Abendland* 10 (1961), 103-130, R. SCHIAN, *Untersuchungen über das argumentum e consensu omnium*, Hildesheim, Olms, 1973, H.-D. VOIGTLÄNDER, *Der Philosoph und die Vielen. Die Bedeutung des Gegensatzes der unphilosophischen Menge zu den Philosophen (und das Problem des Argumentum e consensu omnium) im philosophischen Denken der Griechen bis auf Aristoteles*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1980, and D. OBBINK, “What All Men Believe – Must Be True”: Common Conceptions and *consensio omnium* in Aristotle and Hellenistic philosophy, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1992), 193-231.

to claim that a given view enjoys universal assent. To be sure, nothing prevents a number of individuals from agreeing on such a claim – and this is precisely the case with Polus and many of his fellow citizens. And, what is more, this “consensus about universal consensus” can be *broadened*, in the sense that more and more people can be brought to “testify” and confirm that they, too, share the view in question (and indeed the claim it must be shared by everybody else). But the point is that the number of people who really “take the stand” and testify is extremely small in comparison with what universal consensus is all about. In short, real – verifiable – consensus on universal consensus always falls immensely short of the universal consensus it is all about.

Fourthly, Polus’ claim to universal assent has to do with the fact that, according to him, his view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is absolutely *self-evident*. This is the centrepiece of it all. Polus’ witnesses have nothing to do with intricate and contentious questions of fact or law, the solution of which depends upon testimonial evidence. It is quite the reverse. According to Polus it is a matter of *self-evidence*: of *universally shared* self-evidence. In other words, as Polus sees it, he is just stating an *elementary truth* viz. nothing less than the *blindingly obvious*. In his view, even a child can see that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν – and thus any child could refute Socrates’ claim.²³ So, it may well be that in the courts of law one must consider the number of witnesses and weigh their respectability and authority in order to ascertain the truth in matters of dispute (in which there are no elementary and self-evident truths of the kind Polus claims to be referring to). But this is not quite what Polus has in mind. In his view the truth of his claim does not need to be ascertained by means of testimonial evidence. It is rather the other way around: there are so many witnesses in support of his claims (and, what is more, he can appeal to nothing less than some sort of *universal testimony* or *universal consensus* – to the testimony of *all mankind*) because his claims are absolutely self-evident and do not need any kind of testimonial evidence in order to be established. According to Polus, Socrates’ claims are refuted because – as it is *blindingly obvious*, and as *everybody else* (even a child) is supposed to know – ἀδικεῖσθαι (insofar as it involves one’s own defeat, a significant amount of suffering, etc.) is worse than ἀδικεῖν (which involves nothing of the sort). To sum up,

²³ See notably 470c4-5 (Χαλεπόν γέ σε ἐλέγξει, ὃ Σώκρατες· ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ καὶ πᾶς σε ἐλέγξειεν ὅτι οὐκ ἀληθὴ λέγεις;) and 471d5-8 (καὶ νῦν ἄλλο τι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ λόγος, ὃ με καὶ πᾶς ἐξελέγξειε, καὶ ἐγὼ ὑπὸ σοῦ νῦν, ὥς σὺ οἶε, ἐξελέλεγμαι τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ, φάσκων τὸν ἀδικοῦντα οὐκ εὐδαίμονα εἶναι;).

in Polus' view Socrates is refuted, as it were, *by the blindingly obvious itself* (by the very "truth" he seems unable to realise – by the *fact* that it is not as he claims, and that his claims are totally unfounded and indeed nothing short of preposterous).

But then one may ask: does this mean that witnesses, testimonial evidence, and the like play no significant role in Polus' ἔλεγχος after all? The answer is: no, they *do* play a significant role in this kind of ἔλεγχος – the point is that they do not play the role usually attributed to testimonial evidence (and in particular the role attributed to testimonial evidence in a court of law). But what kind of role do they actually play?

The answer to this question has to do with the fact that, in the final analysis, Polus' ἔλεγχος includes no real judicial proceedings, no real hearing of witnesses, no real attempt to discover the truth, etc. When all is said and done, Polus' ἔλεγχος amounts to the following: one believes in what seems to be an *absolutely self-evident* view on what life is all about (on what is to be feared and avoided, on what is to be sought, etc.); this allegedly self-evident view is at the same time a view on what is and must be self-evident *for everybody else* (i. e. an allegedly self-evident view on the view held by everybody else). The allegedly self-evident view on what life is all about etc. is not deemed to be self-evident because everybody else believes in it and lives by it, etc. As pointed out above it is rather the other way around. To be sure, it cannot be excluded that in the final analysis other people's "lifestyle", the beliefs they have in common or what one has perceived as the common ground of their beliefs is the very origin of one's own belief on what life is all about (of what is to be feared and avoided, of what is to be sought, etc.). In other words, it cannot be excluded that some kind of "intersubjective mimesis" based on the fact that everybody seems to hold the same view on what life is all about (on what is to be feared and avoided, on what is to be sought, etc.) is what really lies behind the seemingly *self-evident* character of this belief.²⁴ But, be that as it may, the truth of the matter is that even so one's own belief is deemed to be by its own right *absolutely self-evident* – so that it is *not perceived as resulting from our perception of other people's beliefs*.²⁵

Having said that, it must be kept in mind that, on the other hand, this does not prevent our view on everybody else's belief in the allegedly self-evident view in

²⁴ So that, say, Pascal's claim about the "talon de soulier" viz. the "talon bien tourné" – the "well-turned heel" (*Pensées*, 35 and 129 Lafuma) – is basically right.

²⁵ In other words, even supposing that the allegedly self-evident "truths" in question result from some kind of "social construction", they are characterized by the fact that they "lose track" of their origin and are regarded as self-evident truths precisely insofar as they are *not perceived* as resulting from any "social construction".

question from playing a significant role with regard to our own belief in it. The “truth” in question is not only deemed to be self-evident: it is also deemed to be *corroborated by everybody else*. In other words, the allegedly self-evident “truth” in question is *doubled*, as it were, by a further source of validation: everybody else’s belief in it or everybody else’s *ὁμολογία*. The allegedly self-evident “truths” we are talking about have something of a “living organism” about them. They are not just there – they have, as it were, a “life” of their own: they take nourishment and strength from the fact that they are constantly supposed to be confirmed by everybody else. This is the “atmosphere” in which they “breathe”. It may be called the “social substantiation” of one’s own beliefs by means of a very complex set of mutually ratifying and reinforcing claims viz. alleged self-evidences: the claim that something is a self-evident “truth”, the claim that all human beings are bound to acknowledge this self-evident “truth”, and that they are also bound to acknowledge the no less self-evident truth that everybody else is bound to acknowledge the alleged self-evidence in question, etc.

All these different claims or all these different beliefs are interlaced with one another and inseparable from each other.²⁶ It is no surprise then that, if the allegedly self-evident truth in question happens to be challenged by someone, the reaction to this challenge takes the form of an “appeal” both to *what one believes to be self-evident* and to *everybody else*, insofar as everybody else is supposed to be, as it were, a witness to the allegedly self-evident “truth” in question. And this is precisely what Polus does in his reaction to Socrates’ claim about ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. In other words, Polus’ ἔλεγχος mirrors the complex structure of our usual belief in allegedly self-evident “truths” viz. the complex structure of our “typical” reaction when the allegedly self-evident truths we believe in happen to be challenged. Regardless of whether what is at stake is Polus’ views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι or some other allegedly self-evident truth of the same kind, we tend to react to any challenge to our views (N. B. of those we regard as self-evident in the above-mentioned sense) just the

²⁶ They form what may be called a *blind knot* of allegedly self-evident “truths” – a set of *communicating vessels*, as it were: of “*communicating*” *claims and beliefs*. And this “blind knot” viz. this “set of communicating claims” is deeply ingrained *in each one of us*. This is a decisive point – even though an important part of these claims has to do with *other people’s* views, the fact is that these claims concerning other people’s (and indeed everybody else’s) views are in each case *somebody’s* claims – i e., they are *made by somebody* and play their role, so to speak, *in someone’s mind* and because they are all *present in the same mind*. In other words, the “everybody” we are talking about is in each case the “everybody” of *somebody’s allegedly self-evident truth about everybody*.

way Polus does. This is precisely what Socrates points out when he says that even a child could resort to this method of refuting his claim.²⁷ In short, as far as its form is concerned, Polus' ἔλεγχος is not just *Polus'* ἔλεγχος (something characteristic of Polus), but rather *everybody's* ἔλεγχος: a typical device of our usual way of seeing things. The reason why Polus can resort to this method – and the method proves to be applicable and to have some effect upon us – lies in the fact that he is not inventing anything: he is just applying an essential component of our usual way of seeing things. But the fact that he resorts to this method – together with the fact that Socrates reflects on Polus' ἔλεγχος and describes its main features – puts us on the track of this essential component of our usual way of seeing things, of which we, more often than not, tend to remain unaware.

3. The anthropological bearing of Polus' ἔλεγχος

So what at first seems to be a “methodological device” or a “rhetorical weapon” (viz. a discussion of methodological questions), on closer inspection turns out to have a twofold “anthropological” bearing. To be sure, Socrates' discussion with Polus is a discussion about what is best for us human beings – and to this extent it has a direct bearing on us all. But that is not what I mean. What I mean is that Polus' ἔλεγχος (N. B. the very form of his ἔλεγχος)²⁸ has a twofold anthropological bearing because it entails an *implicit description of human beings* – of the way we are constituted viz. of some main features of the structure of human life. Let us consider this in some more detail.

First, Polus' claim concerns *each and every one of us*. He speaks of a universally shared view everybody but Socrates is bound to acknowledge.²⁹ In other words, *each and every one* of us is supposed to be *his* witness. Now, if (as pointed out above) the scope of Polus' claim makes it impossible to hear all witnesses, each one of us has the

²⁷ See note 23 above.

²⁸ And this means the form of his ἔλεγχος as it takes shape both in Polus' own words and in Socrates' depiction of Polus' attempt to refute him.

²⁹ In the final analysis, the kind of self-evident truth Polus is referring to is of such a nature that there can be absolutely no exception, so that even Socrates is bound to acknowledge Polus' claim – and either he is somehow cognitively impaired or just paying lip service to something *he cannot possibly believe in*.

possibility of hearing *at least one testimony*, namely *his own*. One can observe one's own reaction to Polus' discussion with Socrates and see whether or not Polus is right in assuming that one would testify for him. And if we find Socrates' claim to be somewhat *strange* and *wrong-headed*, among other things because it seems to mean that it is better to suffer than not to suffer (nay, even if we just find it *puzzling*, and do not understand how Socrates can hold such a view), then we are *de facto taking the stand for Polus*: we are *Polus' witnesses* – the witnesses upon whose testimony he can rely. But if this is the case, then we will also notice the following: when one corroborates Polus' claims, one does not do so *just on behalf of oneself*. One does so because one believes a) that in the final analysis ἀδικεῖν is better than ἀδικεῖσθαι (viz. not to suffer is better than to suffer), b) that this is so absolutely true that it must *hold good in every case*, i. e. *for everybody*, and indeed so much so that c) this very “truth” is and must be absolutely *plain* to everybody.

In order to prevent misunderstandings, it should be noted that Polus' question concerns each and every one of us *in his or her relation to himself or herself*. It has to do with what may be called the “*tua res agitur*” – when it is *about oneself*, i. e. when the *person concerned is oneself*. In other words, Polus asks the following: “*when it comes to you*, what is better – ἀδικεῖν or ἀδικεῖσθαι, to suffer or not to suffer, etc.? In short, Polus' question is to be answered, so to speak, *in the middle voice* (in what the *middle voice* stands for). Now, at first sight this seems to mean that everybody else is irrelevant. But this is not so. The point is that one's “*middle voice*” answer to Polus' question is constituted in such a way that it refers to an allegedly self-evident truth, according to which everybody “in my shoes” (i. e. everybody else “*in the shoes of oneself*” – everybody else when playing the role I play: the role of *being oneself*, *everybody else in his or her non-indifferent relation to him- or herself*) would have to give the very same answer to Polus' question. In other words, one's “middle voice” reaction to Polus' question viz. to his discussion with Socrates relies on a complex set of beliefs like the one we have spoken of above. These beliefs concern both the matter in question (that – *when it comes to oneself* – ἀδικεῖν is preferable to ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc.)³⁰ and the fact that everybody else, *when it comes to him- or herself*, will believe exactly the same thing and acknowledge this as a self-evident truth (and in fact as a

³⁰ So that it seems absolutely *unnatural* – and indeed nothing less than a *strange aberration* – to think or feel otherwise.

self-evident truth that must be acknowledged by everybody else, when it comes to him- or herself).

So, in each case (i. e. for each and every one of us, when he or she realises that he or she must testify in support of Polus' claims) the scope of what he or she testifies to goes far beyond any real perception anyone may have had of other people's beliefs. In other words, the kind of self-evidence that makes us answer Polus' question in the way we do and thereby testify against Socrates has the same form as Polus' ἔλεγχος. It is as if the impossible witness-hearing of everybody else *had actually taken place*. Or rather the "middle-voice" self-evidence we are talking about is constituted in such a way that it seems to be self-evident that *there is no need for any such witness-hearing* – that it would be *pointless*, because one already knows *beforehand* what the outcome is bound to be. To sum up, the impossible witness-hearing is, as it were, *anticipated, without ever taking place* – and this *anticipation* seems to be so self-evident that, for all intents and purposes, it is *as if all witnesses had already been heard* (which in turn excludes the need for actually hearing *any witnesses*).

This is, as it were, the form of our "middle voice" eyes, the way they see, when each one of us realises that he or she must testify in support of Polus' claims. But what this means is that the "middle voice" self-evidence behind our answer to Polus' question is the *very opposite* of a real judicial *process*. To be sure, it bears some similarity to a judicial process – for it has to do with the *anticipation* of a sort of "testimonial evidence", and indeed of the hearing of nothing less than all human beings (i. e. the hearing in which literally *everybody* is called to testify: the hearing *of all possible witnesses*). But on the other hand what characterizes this universal hearing is the fact that *everything is settled beforehand*. It is only an *anticipated* judicial process, an "*as if*" process – i. e. the very *negation* of a process in any true sense of the word. And the verdict is rendered before any real trial, before any evidence has really been produced. It relies solely on *anticipated evidence*. In other words, from the very beginning the process in question is *already closed* – and it is closed *once and for all*. That is, it appears to be *res iudicata*: an issue that is not to be re-litigated. Put another way, the matter is absolutely settled; it is not supposed to be raised again. It is only a question of *living according to the res iudicata viz. with the "verdict"*. The way Polus's ἔλεγχος tries to dismiss Socrates' challenge (i. e. Socrates' attempt to *reopen the process*) mirrors and expresses all this. To be sure, Polus' purpose is to re-enact the original "process" – but, once again, only as an "as-if

process” – as a *summary process* that *summarily* confirms the original “verdict”. And the same holds good for each and every one of us as Polus’ witnesses: we realise that we must take the stand for Polus in this summary process, but we already anticipate the whole hearing and the verdict. Not for a second do we suspend our belief that it is indeed a *res iudicata*, so that our handling of Socrates’ challenge tends to have the form of a so-called ‘hit-and-run’ (the ‘run’ here meaning our forgetting the whole thing and getting on with “business as usual”, i. e. with our lives in accordance with the original “verdict” – that is, in accordance with Polus’ claim).³¹

But this is not all. As pointed out above, the allegedly self-evident “truth” that is at stake in Polus’s ἔλεγχος (the “truth” each one of us is supposed to corroborate) is not just something we know, something we happened to witness or the like. It is rather an allegedly self-evident “truth” *we live by* – an allegedly self-evident “truth” *that shapes our life*. This has to do with the above-mentioned “middle-voice” character of what is at stake in Polus’ discussion with Socrates, viewed solely from a different perspective. Polus’ attempt to refute Socrates’ claim and the latter’s remarks about the former’s ἔλεγχος draw our attention to some fundamental features of the “middle-voice” beliefs that usually play a significant role in our lives. Let us consider in a little more detail how this is so.

First, at least in the case of those who take the stand in support of Polus’ claims – and that means, if Polus is right (if all we that take the stand in support of his claims are right): in *everybody’s* case – at least *some* of the “middle-voice beliefs” human beings live by have the form of allegedly self-evident “truths” of the kind we have been trying to analyse. In other words, at least some of the “middle-voice beliefs” that

³¹ If we ask *from what point of view* the claims expressed in this paragraph are made, the answer is complex:

1) The author of the paper is expressing *what he finds in himself* viz. his own “middle voice view” on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, but on the other hand

2) He is also expressing a claim *concerning everybody else* – namely a claim that he finds in himself and that is part and parcel of his own “middle voice view” on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, which in turn means

3) That he expects the reader (any reader) to check whether the author’s claims *concerning the reader* hold true in his or her own case, and

4) As long as the author believes in his own “middle voice view” on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, he is entirely convinced that the reader will confirm (*is bound to confirm*) the claims in question, and indeed in such a way that

5) He is also entirely convinced that the reader is equally bound to confirm that in his or her “middle voice view” *everybody else* is bound to share both the same “middle voice view” on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι and the same claim *concerning everybody else’s* view on this matter.

This is the complex structure of the author’s use of the first person plural (“we”) and of his mention of, say, “*our* middle voice eyes”, “*each and every one* of us” and the like.

play a significant role in our lives are characterized by the fact that they seem to be absolutely self-evident and entail the complex set of claims (concerning a) the matter in question b) everybody else's view on the matter in question, and c) everybody else's view on everybody else's view on the matter in question) we have spoken of. In short, contrary to what may seem, at least some of the "middle voice" beliefs we live by are anything but *hesitant beliefs* (constituted in such a way that we *admit their frailty* – that they are only *tentative* and *subject to revision*) as well as anything but *humble beliefs* only about ourselves and our own life. If Polus is right (and if all we that take the stand in support of his claims and thereby play Polus' role are right), at least some of the "middle voice" beliefs we live by entail nothing less than the *absolute or unqualified truth claim* and the *universal anticipation* that, as pointed out above, are at the very core of Polus' ἔλεγχος.

Secondly, on closer inspection it turns out that Socrates' discussion with Polus also draws our attention to another important feature of the "middle-voice" beliefs that play a significant role in human life. It is not only a question of the complex set of claims entailed in these beliefs. Socrates' discussion with Polus has also something to say about their *content*. For it evinces that at least some of these beliefs are characterized by what may be called the *formal* nature of their content. But what does this mean?

We may be inclined to think that the "middle-voice" beliefs that play a significant role in our lives concern what is important for us (what is to be avoided and what is to be sought) *in this and that case*, i. e. *in this and that particular context* – *in this and that concrete situation*. But the discussion between Socrates and Polus (469- 473) calls our attention to the fact that it is not necessarily so. At least some "middle-voice" beliefs that play a significant role in human life do not concern *concrete* situations – what is more, they do not concern only the person in question. They have to do with basic assumptions about *life in general* – that is a) about one's *whole* life (and everything in it) and b) about human life, i.e. *everybody's life*. In other words, at least some "middle-voice" beliefs that play a significant role in one's life take the shape of *general principles*, in a loose sense of the word.

But this is not all. Socrates discussion with Polus suggests that there is something like a *basic life orientation*, and that this basic life orientation has a *complex form*: namely the form reflected in their contentions, according to which *the best* (βέλτιον, βέλτιστον, etc.) is X and *the worst* (τὸ κάκιον viz. τὸ κάκιστον, etc.) is Y. This *formal*

core is common to both views – they differ because for Polus our “middle voice eyes” are bound to believe that the worst is ἀδικεῖσθαι, while Socrates contends that the worst is ἀδικεῖν, etc.

Put another way, it is not coincidental that Socrates and Polus resort to the very same basic concept to express their opposing views: this fact reflects the essential structure of all life-orienting “middle voice” view. The point is that there is a *formal core* of basic determinations (“good”, “bad”, “better”, “worse”, “best”, “worst”, etc.) underlying all life orientation – and that all life orientation takes the shape of what may be called an *equation*, establishing, as it were, the *concrete* “identity” of the basic *formal* determinations (the *concrete* features that correspond to them). The apple of discord between Socrates and Polus concerns the latter not the former. Both for Polus and for Socrates it is absolutely self-evident that all human beings are bound to *seek* the “good” and avoid the “bad” – that is, so to speak, the common *alpha and omega* of all life orientation viz. of all our “middle voice” views. And, what is more, both Polus and Socrates would agree that their “middle voice” eyes are bound to follow the principle that the better is preferable to the good or that the “Higher is the doom of the High” (to borrow E. Dickinson’s words³²) viz. that the “Highest” is the doom of the “higher” – and that a similar principle applies to the relationship between the *bad* and the *worse* viz. the *worse* and the *worst*. Although there is no explicit mention of this, nothing could be clearer than the fact that both Polus and Socrates presuppose this innermost core of formal determinations, and that the formal core we are talking about is constituted in such a way a) that it entails the above-mentioned formal determinations (“good”, “bad”, “better”, “worse”, “best”, “worst”, etc.), and b) that these formal determinations are governed by what may be termed a “logic” of their own (the “logic” of *middle-voice seeking and avoiding*, as it were – the “logic” according to which “the Higher is the doom of the High”, the bad is preferable to the worse, etc.).

We can also express this by saying that the *formal common ground* between Polus’ and Socrates’ views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι bears the form of what German philological *Forschung* termed a *Priamel*. This word has taken root, and a *Priamel* is a literary or rhetorical device: a series of parallel statements or listed alternatives that are used to single out one point of interest by contrast and comparison, so that they

³² Cf. To Mrs. J. G. Holland, August 1881 in: T. H. JOHNSON (ed.), *Emily Dickinson Selected Letters*, Cambridge (Mass.), The Belknap Press, 1986, 274.

serve as foils for enhancing a claim, the subject of a literary work (or of a new section within such a work, etc.).³³

Or, to be more precise, the *formal common ground* between Polus' and Socrates' views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι bears the form of a specific kind of *Priamel*, namely of what might be termed a *superlative-Priamel*. A *superlative-Priamel* focuses on a certain range of comparison (on different things that are characterized by a certain quality or common denominator) within which something is said to be *superlative*. In other words, a *superlative-Priamel* focuses on something (a given reality, an activity, some kind of good, some kind of evil, etc., etc.) and singles it out as being the *nec plus ultra*, either *in general* or *within a given range of comparison*. It often takes the shape of a *list of goods* or *evils* that climaxes in a superlative. Sometimes a *superlative-Priamel* does more than just single out a *culmination point*: it takes the form of an *order of rank* and names the *second best* good or the *second worst* evil, the *third best* good or the *third worst* evil, as if it were awarding the first, the second and the third prize in a competition. There are also cases in which a *superlative-Priamel*, while calling our attention to the fact that *different people take different views* on certain issues, tries to *settle the matter* and presents either a “*personal*”, more or less idiosyncratic opinion or what claims to be *the last word* on the matter.

In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether a *superlative-Priamel* is anything more than a rhetorical or stylistic device, meant for emphasis and intensification. But on the other hand, there seems to be more to it than that. There seems to be an essential connection between the *superlative-Priamel* and the very structure of human non-indifference viz. of our concern for ourselves. As a matter of fact, human non-indifference always seeks *the best*: nothing less than the *superlative*; if the superlative turns out to be beyond reach (and compromise seems unavoidable), then it seeks the second best; if this, too, proves to be unattainable, then it seeks the third best, and so on and so forth. And pretty much the same applies to the negative

³³ Or, as Bundy puts it, a *Priamel* is “a focusing or selecting device in which one or more terms serve as foils for the point of particular interest”. See E. L. BUNDY, *Studia Pindarica*, Berkeley/LA, University of California Press, 1962, repr. 1986, 5. H. RACE, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius*, Leiden, Brill, 1982, IX, summarizes his views as follows: “A *Priamel* is a poetic/rhetorical form which consists, basically, in two parts: ‘foil’ and ‘climax’. The function of the foil is to introduce and highlight the climactic term by enumerating or summarizing a number of ‘other’ examples, subjects, times, places, or instances, which then yield (with varying degrees of contrast or analogy) to the particular point of interest or importance”. For further references on this subject, see Appendix I.

superlative: our life is all about *avoiding the worst*; the second-worst scenario is preferable to the worst, and the third-worst scenario is preferable to the second-worst, and so on and so forth. All this means that the “map of life” or the “moral compass” we need in order not to live in “uncharted waters” has pretty much the same structure as a superlative-*Priamel*. It is a very complex superlative-*Priamel* (or, to be more precise, a very complex *set of superlative-Priamel*n). And on closer inspection it turns out that most instances of superlative-*Priamel* we find in Ancient Greek Literature are, as it were, contributions to this “map of life itself” (contributions to the complex set of superlative-*Priamel*n) without which there is no “moral compass” and life remains *terra incognita*.

Needless to say that when we speak here of superlative-*Priamel*, we mean not so much the literary device as the *formal structure of our concern for ourselves* that provides the basis for the literary device.³⁴

This brings us to a further point. As previously mentioned, some well-known instances of superlative-*Priamel* indicate that different people take disparate views on these matters. But even when no emphasis is put on this, the fact that there is a variety of dissenting superlative-*Priamel*n on the same subject-matters looms in the background of any superlative-*Priamel* and reminds us that the “map of life” or the “moral compass” superlative-*Priamel*n are all about is *anything but self-evident* – that this is the realm of ἀμφοιβητήσιμον (...) καὶ οὐδὲν πω σαφές, as Plato puts it in the *Gorgias*³⁵, and indeed the realm of the ἀμφοιβητήσιμον *par excellence*. The problem with the much needed “map of life” (or with the much needed “moral compass”) is that there is no such thing as an indisputable and absolutely reliable superlative-*Priamel* (or an indisputable and absolutely reliable set of superlative-*Priamel*n) – and that, as far as the conduct of life is concerned, even the most obvious “cardinal points” can turn out to be deceptive, so that, in the final analysis, “life is uncharted”.

But one may ask: What has all this to do with the *Gorgias* – and in particular with what we have termed the *formal core* that is common to Polus’ and Socrates’ opposite views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι?

First, it should be borne in mind that, as pointed out above, superlative-*Priamel*n highlight the fundamental connection between an invariable formal structure (our

³⁴ In other words, we are using a “metonymic” designation and naming the structure after its literary expression.

³⁵ *Gorgias*, 451d9-e1.

essential relation to the superlative) and various concrete identifications of the superlative in question (different ways of “filling” this formal structure – that is, disparate views concerning what is deemed to be superlative). Polus’ and Socrates’ claims regarding ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι bear a striking similarity with all this. In other words, Polus’ and Socrates’ claims on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι constitute a case of superlative-Priamel – and viewing them against the background of superlative-Priamelⁿ can help us perceive their complex structure (or rather their *two-layered structure*: the fact that Polus’ and Socrates’ *opposite* views share a *formal common ground*).

Secondly, we should not forget that this is not the first time superlative-Priamelⁿ (their invariable formal structure and variable contents) play a significant role in Plato’s *Gorgias*. As a matter of fact, the connection with superlative-Priamelⁿ plays a significant role in the *Gorgias* almost from the very beginning – to be more precise, it comes into play in 451d9ff.; and, as we shall see, there are still other points of contact in the rest of the dialogue – so that it is no exaggeration to say that the superlative-Priamel (viz. the fundamental anthropological structure it reflects and stands for) is an *overlooked protagonist* of Plato’s *Gorgias*. In 451d9ff. Socrates reacts to Gorgias’ characterisation of the object of ῥητορική as τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων. He points out that τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων is something rather controversial and unclear (ἀμφισβητήσιμον καὶ οὐδὲν πω σαφές).³⁶ He quotes the superlative-Priamel from the well-known skolion: ὑγιαίνειν μὲν ἄριστόν ἐστιν, τὸ δὲ δεύτερον καλὸν γενέσθαι, τρίτον δέ, ὥς φησιν ὁ ποιητὴς τοῦ σκολιοῦ, τὸ πλουτεῖν ἀδόλως³⁷ and then composes a superlative-Priamel of his own, in which various τεχνῖται (the ἰατρός, the παιδοτρίβης, the χρηματιστής) contend that the object of their respective τέχνη is τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν.³⁸ This superlative-Priamel is then completed

³⁶ 451d9 -e1: Ἄλλ’, ὦ Γοργία, ἀμφισβητήσιμον καὶ τοῦτο λέγεις καὶ οὐδὲν πω σαφές.

³⁷ 451e3- 5. Cf.

a) G. KAIBEL (ed.), *Athenaei Naucraticae deipnosophistarum libri xv*, vol. 3, Lipsiae, Teubner, 1890, repr. 1966, XV, 50:

ὑγιαίνειν μὲν ἄριστον ἀνδρὶ θνητῷ,
 δεύτερον δὲ καλὸν φῦαν γενέσθαι,
 τὸ τρίτον δὲ πλουτεῖν ἀδόλως,
 καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ἡβᾶν μετὰ τῶν φίλων

b) *Joannis Stobaei Anthologium*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1884/1912, repr. 1958, IV, 39:

ὑγιαίνειν μὲν ἄριστον ἀνδρὶ θνατῷ,
 δεύτερον δὲ φῦαν καλὸν γενέσθαι,
 τρίτον δὲ πλουτεῖν ἀδόλως,
 εἴτα τέταρτον ἡβᾶν μετὰ τῶν φίλων.

³⁸ 452a1-452d4.

by Gorgias, who claims that the object of his τέχνη, the ῥητορική, is the real μέγιστον ἀγαθόν.³⁹ Now, as it turns out, Gorgias' superlative-Priamel is the starting point of the rest of the dialogue. And, in a way, it is what everything else revolves around; so that the *Gorgias* is a long discussion about what is the real superlative (the real “best thing”) – and *has itself the structure of a superlative-Priamel*. The reader may fail to notice this, but the whole discussion between Socrates and Polus on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is itself part of this superlative-Priamel.⁴⁰

So much for the connection between the complex, two-layered structure of the conflict between Polus' and Socrates' views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι and the complex, two layered structure of our concern for ourselves and what we have termed our *basic life orientation*. It only remains to be added that this conflict of views does not concern one, but two superlative-Priamel, namely a) the superlative-Priamel about *the best* (the “highest”) and b) the superlative-Priamel about *the worst* – the *negative superlative*.

We shall return to this point later, but for now it must suffice to note that our previous description of Polus' claims (i.e. of *our own* claims as Polus' witnesses) was flawed, for it failed to point out the complex character of Polus' (and Polus' witnesses') view viz. the fact that it comprises not one but *two levels of claims* or *two levels of allegedly self-evident truths*: the one concerning the formal core⁴¹ and the one that has to do with the “middle voice” belief that the worst is ἀδικεῖσθαι (that ἀδικεῖν is not so bad as ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc.).

But this is still not all. As a matter of fact, Polus' identification of the worst as ἀδικεῖσθαι is constituted in such a way that it, too, plays the role of something *formal* with regard to other components of life orientation viz. to other “middle voice” beliefs that play a significant role in one's life. For even once it is settled that ἀδικεῖσθαι is

³⁹ 452c8-e8. The two-layered structure we are talking about – a) the formal, invariable common ground viz. our fundamental relation to the superlative as such and b) the variable “contents” – takes on clearer contours in the superlative Priamel, and the *Gorgias* therefore calls our attention to it almost from the beginning.

⁴⁰ That is, on the one hand, 451d9ff. links the *Gorgias* to the long and rich tradition of superlative-Priamel viz. of rank-ordering Priamel which was well-known to every ancient Greek reader. The *Gorgias* appears against this background and alludes to it – and indeed in such a way that this background becomes *part and parcel of it*. On the other hand, the *Gorgias* itself takes the shape of a complex and detailed *superlative Priamel*. This superlative Priamel distinguishes itself by the fact that it includes a lively discussion of the claims in question and resembles a *chess game* (or rather a *chess tournament*) –with *moves and countermoves*, etc. – between diverging superlative-Priamel. This “tournament” between divergent superlative-Priamel – one might also say: this complex *Priamel of Priamel* – highlights both the major opposing views and the underlying formal structure common to them all.

⁴¹ I. e. the one it *shares* with Socrates' view – the one that seems to be *undisputed*.

worse than ἀδικεῖν, this is not enough for one to be oriented: one still has to know how to avoid ἀδικεῖσθαι and to achieve what Polus and his witnesses regard as being the best. In other words, the course of action corresponding to the principle that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν needs to take a *more concrete shape*, without which it remains *ineffective*. But on the other hand all further steps, all further choices, all further beliefs – in a word, everything else that is required for concrete orientation with regard to avoiding τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc. – take their meaning from the principle according to which ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν: they can play an orienting role if and only if one believes and regards it as settled that τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι is the worst and must be avoided at all costs, etc. That is, Polus’ and his witnesses’ allegedly self-evident “middle voice” “truth” that ἀδικεῖσθαι must be avoided (and the whole set of allegedly self-evident “middle voice” “truths” of which it is part and parcel) provides the basis or lays the ground for everything else – and this in such a way that the more concrete choices and beliefs *presuppose* the more basic assumptions and can only be understood *in the light of them*. But what this means is that Polus’ and his witnesses’ basic assumptions concerning the *concrete* identification of the best and of the worst, etc. play the same role with regard to all further choices (viz. to more concrete orienting beliefs) as the “highest” formal determinations (“good”, “bad”, “better”, “worse”, “best”, “worst”, etc.) play with regard to them. In other words, what we are dealing with here is a *three-layered structure*, comprising: a) the *common ground*, i. e. the *formal, invariable core* of all our middle voice views, b) the *concrete identification* of the formal core, giving rise to the conflict of views between Polus (viz. his witnesses) and Socrates, and c) the middle voice views concerning the best way to *achieve* what b) presents as the best and to avoid what it presents as the worst – the point being that b) plays the same role with regard to c) that a) plays in regard to b). To sum up, our “middle-voice” set of assumptions or beliefs is *multi-layered* and has the structure of what may be called a chain of *successive concretisation* of *formal* beliefs or assumptions.

To be sure, Socrates and Polus do not elaborate on this complex structure – in fact, they do not even make any *explicit* mention of it. But what they say points in this direction and puts us on the track of the fact that the orienting beliefs that play a role in human life exhibit this complex structure.

The upshot of all this is the following.

First, there is a *formal common ground* between Polus' (viz. Polus' witnesses') and Socrates' diametrically opposed views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. In the final analysis, these views clash precisely because they share a common ground (because they fill the very same formal structure with opposite determinations); and without this common ground there would be no room for conflict. This common ground provides the basis for the intermediate level of life-orienting “middle-voice” views (the one that corresponds to Polus' and Socrates' disparate views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι). And this intermediate level sets the stage for a third level of life-orienting “middle-voice” views concerning the concrete ways of achieving or avoiding what the second level presents as best or worst, etc. And here, too, there can be disparate views even if the view taken at the second level is the same.

But, secondly, none of this means that the opposition between Polus (viz. Polus' witnesses) and Socrates is any less pronounced. Regardless of whether Polus is or is not right when he claims that it is impossible to believe in Socrates' claims and to live by them, a life lived according to Socrates' principle that the worse is ἀδικεῖν is bound to be *radically different* from a life lived according to Polus' principle that the worse is ἀδικεῖσθαι – and it is no exaggeration to say that these two “ways of life” correspond to nothing less than two different “worlds” (or are in the truest sense of the term *a world apart from each other*), and that this is precisely what Socrates' discussion with Polus is all about.

4. Two emblematic figures: Archelaus' and the “Anti-Archelaus” – showing our true colours

All this takes a more definite shape in the discussion of Archelaus' case.⁴² This is not the place for a thorough analysis of this part of the dialogue. But even a brief outline can help us sharpen our understanding of what Socrates' discussion with Polus says about ourselves. First and foremost, the discussion of Archelaus' case can help us show *our true colours* in the conflict of views between Polus and Socrates. For it is possible that we lack a full and clear-cut understanding of what Polus' and Socrates' views really mean, of their implications, etc. – with the result that either it is not

⁴² 470c-471d, 472d-473b and 479 (but see also 525d).

entirely clear to ourselves that we side with Polus or we fail to realise how self-evident and compelling our middle-voice answer to Polus' appeal (i.e. our siding with Polus) really is. The discussion of Archelaus' case gives a clearer insight into all this.

First it is important to realise what Archelaus' case is all about. We do not need to examine all the details.⁴³ The gist of it is that Archelaus was an arch-criminal – the greatest criminal in Macedonia. His wickedness knew no limits, and he committed all sorts of crimes; but on the other hand he got away with all this; he managed to seize absolute power, destroyed his rivals and enemies; he remained safe from harm and was able to fulfil all his wishes; as he felt no remorse for his crimes,⁴⁴ his life was, so to speak, a continuous “sailing under fair winds”, in which he experienced no defeat, no trouble, no distress, no agony, no sorrow, no grief. In spite of all his crimes, he got everything he longed for and did not have to cope with what he wanted to avoid. In short, *utmost wickedness* together with *superlative luck*, *supreme power* and *freedom from all harm and from all distress* are what Archelaus stands for.

Secondly, it should be kept in mind that the discussion of Archelaus' case is combined with the discussion of a second case – the case of a human being whose fate is the very opposite of Archelaus'. Let us call it the case of the “Anti-Archelaus” viz. of the “inverted Archelaus”.⁴⁵ The “Anti-Archelaus” is characterized by the fact that he *did absolutely no wrong*, but nevertheless fell into the hands of his enemies, who use their power to inflict upon him the most dreadful forms of punishment: he is racked and mutilated, he has his eyes burned out, and after having been himself subjected to every possible variety of the severest torments and been forced to look on whilst his own wife and children endured the like, he is at last impaled or tarred and burned alive. As pointed out above, this “Anti-Archelaus” is innocent, he committed no crime whatsoever.⁴⁶ But he becomes absolutely powerless and is harmed in every

⁴³ Cf. 471a4-d2. And whether Socrates' Archelaus does justice to the historical Archelaus is a question we can leave aside here.

⁴⁴ Cf. 471b7: (...) καὶ οὐ μετεμέλησεν αὐτῷ (...)

⁴⁵ 473b12ff.

⁴⁶ To be sure, Polus' initial description of the second case makes no mention of this second feature: the “Anti-Archelaus”' *innocence*. On the contrary, Polus speaks of someone who has *unjustly* tried to seize power and make himself a tyrant. See 473b 12ff.: Πῶς λέγεις; ἐὰν ἀδίκῳ ἄνθρωπος ληφθῇ τυραννίδι ἐπιβουλεύων, καὶ ληφθεὶς στρεβλῶται καὶ ἐκτέμνηται καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐκκᾶται (...) (emphasis added). It is Socrates who insists on distinguishing between a *just* and an *unjust* “Anti-Archelaus” and thereby draws our attention to the case of he who endures all the sufferings mentioned by Polus, *without having done anything wrong*. Cf. 473d4-5: (...) ὁμῶς δὲ ὑπόμνησόν με μικρόν. ἐὰν ἀδίκῳ ἐπιβουλεύων τυραννίδι, εἶπες; Thus one can speak of an “Anti-Archelaus” in two senses: a) in the sense of Polus' initial description (in which case the “Anti-Archelaus” is characterized only by the fact that, contrary to Archelaus, he does not get his way: he does not get away with it and must endure

possible way. His life is, in the truest sense of the word, a “sea of troubles”. He is spared no pain or indignity. In short, *utter innocence* together with *the severest fate, complete defenselessness and powerlessness* – having to endure the most terrible sufferings and being forced to confront the most horrible evils: that is what the “inverted Archelaus” or the “Anti-Archelaus” stands for.

Now Archelaus and the “inverted Archelaus” correspond to what may be described as an *absolute concentration* of ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι – N. B. of pure ἀδικεῖν and pure ἀδικεῖσθαι. On the one hand, Archelaus is the *paragon*, the *epitome* of ἀδικεῖν – and this means: a) Archelaus stands for the *utmost accumulation* of ἀδικεῖν and b) he also stands for *pure ἀδικεῖν, free from all ἀδικεῖσθαι*. On the other hand, the “inverted Archelaus” is the *paragon*, the *epitome* of ἀδικεῖσθαι – and this in turn means: a) the “inverted Archelaus” stands for the *utmost accumulation* of ἀδικεῖσθαι and b) he also stands for *pure ἀδικεῖσθαι, free from all ἀδικεῖν*. In other words, Socrates’ and Polus’ discussion of these two cases enables us to examine the most pure and complete “sample” of ἀδικεῖν, on the one hand, and the most pure and complete “sample” of ἀδικεῖσθαι, on the other hand – to see them *side by side*, to *compare* them, etc.

And this is the reason why the discussion about Archelaus and the “inverted Archelaus” is illuminating with regard to Socrates’ and Polus’ debate about whether ἀδικεῖσθαι is better than ἀδικεῖν or the other way around – and it is also the reason why this discussion can help us *show our true colours* in this debate.

In the final analysis, Socrates’ claim that ἀδικεῖσθαι is better than ἀδικεῖν (viz. that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι) means that, all things considered, the “Anti-Archelaus” has a better lot in life and is happier than Archelaus – and that the life of the former is preferable to the life of the latter. But this is a claim that we are not prepared to admit – i. e. that our “middle voice eyes” are not prepared to admit.⁴⁷

all sorts of sufferings) and b) in the sense of he who *has done no wrong* but nevertheless must endure the same dreadful fate. Henceforth all mention of the “Anti-Archelaus” in this paper refers exclusively to the latter. Incidentally it is not coincidental that Polus’ initial description does not take into account the second feature and speaks of an *unjust* “Anti-Archelaus”. This expresses one main feature of the kind of understanding of happiness he has in mind, namely the fact that it has nothing to do with whether one person is just or unjust. But in the final analysis Socrates’ “distinguo” is not irrelevant. For what is at stake in his discussion with Polus is the question whether ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι or the other way around. And in order to answer this question it may prove helpful to examine the contrast between two cases of “chemically pure” ἀδικεῖν and “chemically pure” ἀδικεῖσθαι.

⁴⁷ I. e. a claim one is not prepared to admit *when it concerns oneself* or when one is able to put oneself in the place of the person in question and to envisage what it means to *be* the “inverted Archelaus” – so to speak, “*in the first person*”.

What is more, “not prepared to admit” is a bit of an understatement here – for it is not only a question of “not admitting” Socrates’ view, it is rather a question of *flatly rejecting* it. In other words, once it becomes clear what Socrates’ view really means (and that it means no less than the following: that it is better to be like the “Anti-Archelaus” than to be like Archelaus), one realises that Socrates’ claim goes against what our “middle voice eyes” regard as an absolutely self-evident “truth”. This does not mean, of course, that we want to be like Archelaus. But it certainly means that our “middle voice eyes” do not share Socrates’ view that ἀδικεῖσθαι is better than ἀδικεῖν. In other words, it means that our “middle voice eyes” understand what we have termed the *basic formal determinations* (“good”, “better”, “worse”, etc.)⁴⁸ in a way that differs from Socrates’ view – and indeed in such a way that for us it is after all better to be like Archelaus than to be like the “Anti-Archelaus” (i.e. ἀδικεῖν is better than ἀδικεῖσθαι – and the latter is what must be avoided at any cost).

Let us consider this in some more detail.

On the one hand, when all is said and done, Archelaus does not seem to be necessarily unhappy – what is more, he does not seem to be unhappy at all. In spite of all his wickedness, in spite of all his ἀδικεῖν – and since he got away with all his crimes, was able to fulfil all his wishes, suffered absolutely no harm and remained impervious to remorse –, there seems to be no reason for him to be unhappy in any plausible sense of the word. Life seems to have given him all he wanted – or at least to have done so to a greater extent than in the case of other human beings. And if one considers Archelaus’ case with “middle voice eyes” and takes into consideration the way he felt (given the fact that he was impervious to remorse, etc.), one realises that he must have felt *very happy indeed*.

So much for Archelaus. But, on the other hand, if one considers the case of the “Anti-Archelaus”, it turns out that our “middle voice eyes” do not agree with Socrates at all. If Socrates were right, the “Anti-Archelaus” would have no reason whatsoever to be unhappy – after all, his life was completely free of ἀδικεῖν; and, on the other hand, since he managed to remain completely free of ἀδικεῖν, even if what characterizes him is the fact that he was spared no pain or indignity, his life would be very far from being, so to speak, at the *bottom of the ladder* and corresponding to the *worst possible life*. But this is definitely not the way we see it. No matter how one

⁴⁸ I. e., that they perceive the concrete “identity” of the basic *formal* determinations (the *concrete* features that correspond to them).

looks at it, provided one looks at it with one's "middle voice eyes", the "Anti-Archelaus" seems to have *every reason to be unhappy*, and his life seems to embody the very definition of unhappiness, and indeed to be at the bottom of the ladder and correspond to nothing less than *the worst possible life*.

This is how the discussion of both Archelaus' and the "Anti-Archelaus" case sharpens our understanding of what is at stake in Socrates' discussion with Polus about ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, and helps us show our true colours in this discussion. The two cases viz. the comparison between these two cases enable us to realize *what siding with Socrates really means* – and the extent to which Socrates seems to be *wrong*. This is of course all grist to Polus' mill, for it seems to strengthen the basis for refuting Socrates' claim. But no less important is the fact that it also shows that, once we have a full understanding of what Socrates' claim really means, we seem to be completely unable to side with Socrates. That is, once we have a full understanding of what Socrates' claim really means, we realize *how firmly we do in fact side with Polus*. Furthermore, the comparison between these two cases shows how absolutely out of the question siding with Socrates seems to be. In other words, it enables us to realise how *compelling*, how *cogent* Polus' view is – it enables us to realise the *self-evidence* with which Polus' view that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν imposes itself on our "middle-voice eyes" and is in fact our own "middle voice" view. Finally, the comparison between these two cases also helps us realise that Polus is absolutely right when he contends that the self-evidence in question does not concern only one's own view: that it is rather constituted in such a way that it seems no less self-evident that everybody else's "middle voice eyes" must share and endorse this view. For when one compares the two cases in question and realises that Socrates cannot be right, one realises this on behalf of oneself (or in relation to oneself), but also on behalf of everybody else (in relation to everybody else): it seems to be self-evident that everybody else's "middle voice eyes" must feel absolutely the same – that they cannot possibly side with Socrates and must inevitably side with Polus.

But this is not all. One can realise something the way one realises a surprising, undreamt-of "truth". But that is definitely not the case here. When one compares Archelaus' and the "Anti-Archelaus" cases and realises that our "middle voice eyes" side not with Socrates but with Polus, one also realises that this "middle voice" view of things *was somehow always there* – and, what is more, that it is somehow *the view we lived by* all along. Put another way, when confronted with these examples, we

become aware that Polus' words just *spell out* and help us realise *with full and clear consciousness* something that has oriented our life *forever*. To be sure, the orienting belief or the orienting self-evident "truth" which – as one now realises – *has always been there* and guided one's life all along *lacks distinctiveness*. It is by far not as clear-cut and definite as the insight one gains from following the discussion between Socrates and Polus and from comparing the two paradigmatic cases of Archelaus and the "Anti-Archelaus", etc. But the point is that what now appears as Polus' view (as opposed to Socrates' view) is, as it were, the view that has oriented our "middle-voice eyes" from the very beginning. Socrates' view proves to be something altogether alien to the way our "middle voice eyes" are used to seeing things: it is something they are – to say the very least – *not familiar with*. In short, we realise that, whether we were aware of it or not, Polus' view turns out to be *what we have lived by* – and indeed what we have lived by *all the time*.

But this in turn means that, without having any idea of it, *all along* we have been *de facto* "taking sides" in the discussion between Socrates and Polus about which is worse and must be avoided at all costs: ἀδικεῖν or ἀδικεῖσθαι. For, without knowing it, we have been taking *the silent yet eloquent stand of our own lives* to testify in support of Polus. Thus, long before reading the *Gorgias* or being faced with the kind of question that is at stake in Socrates' discussion with Polus, we are and always have been *Polus' unwitting witnesses* – the witnesses upon whose testimony he can rely.

At first sight, of course, this appears to settle the matter. But the thing is that Socrates seems totally unimpressed. He says that this whole Archelaus and "Anti-Archelaus" thing is no real ἔλεγχος – instead of refuting him, Polus is just trying to scare him with hobgoblins or bogymen (in his very words: μορμολύττη αὖ, ὃ γενναῖε Πῶλε, καὶ οὐκ ἐλέγχεις).⁴⁹ And the fact is that Socrates gives no sign of being scared. It is quite the reverse: he does not cease his resistance and remains adamant that Polus and all his witnesses (and this means *each one of us*, who just now had the opportunity to realise to what extent – with what intensity of belief – he or she is Polus' witness) are *simply wrong*. The result being that, instead of breaking up, the discussion of this matter goes on.

But before we move on with our analysis of Socrates' view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, let us take a closer look at how the two cases evoked by him – the case of

⁴⁹ 473d3.

Archelaus and the case of the “Anti-Archelaus” – can help us understand the structure of our life-orienting views on life itself, and in particular the structure of our essential relationship to the superlative.

First, it should be borne in mind that, as pointed out above, both Archelaus and the “Anti-Archelaus” stand for superlatives: the one stands for the superlative (the paragon and epitome) of ἀδικεῖν, the other for the superlative (the paragon and epitome) of ἀδικεῖσθαι. But this is not all. The bone of contention between Polus (together with his witnesses) and Socrates has to do with where these two superlatives are placed in an underlying scale: namely the scale of εὐδαιμονία and the opposite – or, to be more precise, the “force field” defined by two other superlatives: *utmost happiness* and *utmost unhappiness* (the *zenith* and the *nadir* of human existence). On the one hand, Polus and his witnesses (and this means our usual “middle-voice” view) do not place Archelaus (viz. superlative ἀδικεῖν) at the bottom of the scale – i. e. Polus and his witnesses do not equate superlative ἀδικεῖν and superlative unhappiness, as Socrates does. On the other hand, Polus and his witnesses (and this means our usual “middle-voice” view) do place the “Anti-Archelaus” at the bottom of the scale – i. e. they equate superlative ἀδικεῖσθαι and superlative unhappiness;⁵⁰ while Socrates claims that the “Anti-Archelaus” (who stands for superlative ἀδικεῖσθαι) is very far from being the unhappiest of all men.

Secondly, as pointed out above, this means that, for all their differences, the two sides share a *common ground*, namely what might be termed the *formal scale* itself: the framework of basic non indifference related contrasts – a framework that revolves around two poles or “cardinal points”: a positive and a negative superlative. But the point is that this formal framework (this common ground) has the structure of a superlative-Priamel viz. of a rank-ordering Priamel. And when we say that it has the structure of a superlative (viz. a rank-ordering) Priamel, we mean two things. On the one hand, the common ground between Socrates’ and Polus (viz. Polus’ witnesses) is intrinsically superlative-related, so that, as mentioned before, a superlative-Priamel is fit to express what this common ground is all about. On the other hand, it has the formal structure of a superlative viz. a rank-ordering Priamel in that it has to do with a set of formal roles that can be played by different “contents” – so that the *common*

⁵⁰ In their view, the very fact he has done no wrong only makes things worse, for on top of everything else his sufferings are undeserved and unjust

ground itself opens the door to conflict (and in particular to the conflict between Polus viz. Polus' witnesses and Socrates).

But this is not all. The cases of Archelaus and the "Anti-Archelaus" enable us to note two further aspects.

First, the framework we are talking about has the form of a *double superlative-Priamel*: it comprises both the superlative-Priamel *of the best* and the superlative-Priamel *of the worst* (the *Priamel* of εὐδαιμονία and the *Priamel* of the opposite: a positive and a negative superlative, all in one). But this is still not all. On closer inspection it turns out that the complex double-Priamel we are talking about includes more than just the two opposite superlatives – it is of such a nature that it also includes a) the second best, the third best, the fourth-best, etc., and b) the second worst, the third worst, the fourth-worst, etc. In other words, it has the structure of *two rank-ordering superlative-Priamel*n, the one symmetrically opposed to the other in such a way that the interval between the positive and the negative superlative is filled by a graduated scale of intermediate instances.

Secondly, the *double superlative-Priamel* we are talking about is not just the underlying structure of Socrates' discussion with Polus (viz. Polus' witnesses) on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. On closer inspection it turns out that it is the basic formal structure *of our concern for ourselves* viz. the basic formal structure *of human non-indifference*: of *all our seeking and avoiding behaviours*. The point is that the formal core of all our life-orienting "middle voice" views (the very framework of basic contrasts that forms the backbone of our interest in ourselves) is *anything but a tool box of loose determinations*. It is rather a complex set of "cardinal points" – it has the structure of the *double superlative-Priamel* (viz. of the double rank-ordering *Priamel*) we have just described. And all our *seeking and avoiding behaviours* fall within the framework of this *double superlative-Priamel* and bear its imprint.⁵¹ In short, what takes shape in Socrates' discussion with Polus (and in particular in their disagreement

⁵¹ To be sure, it cannot be said that we seek only the positive superlative and try to avoid only the negative superlative. Our essential relation to the superlative is led by a sense of what can be achieved and what cannot – and matches S. Bellow's description of our behaviour: "Recognizing that they can't win, they settle" (S. BELLOW, *Ravelstein*, London, Penguin, 201, 120). On the one hand, if the positive superlative is thought to be out of reach, we seek whatever comes closest to it: if possible, the second-best; if the second-best cannot be achieved, then the third-best, and so on and so forth. The result being that we always seek either *the best* or *the best substitute* for it. On the other hand, we try to avoid both the negative superlative and whatever belongs to the second *Priamel* (but in such a way that we avoid the worst more than the second-worst, the second-worst more than the third-worst – and so on, and so forth). In short, we always try to keep as far *as possible from the negative superlative*.

regarding Archelaus and the “Anti-Archelaus”) is what might be described as a superlative related “compass rose”: the fundamental “compass rose” of human non-indifference. One half of this “compass rose” stands for *positive* non-indifference: it provides the formal map for our *seeking behaviours*. The other half stands for *negative* non-indifference: it provides the formal map for our *avoiding behaviours*. And the distance between the two opposite “cardinal points” is filled with a decreasing scale of intermediate instances.

But there is a further point to be made here. The point is that whatever makes Polus and his witnesses place Archelaus far from the negative superlative is *the very same thing* that makes them equate the “Anti-Archelaus” with the negative superlative. And pretty much the same holds true for Socrates: whatever makes him place the “Anti-Archelaus” far from the negative superlative is *the very same principle* that makes him equate Archelaus and the negative superlative. In other words, there is another structural component besides a) the underlying priamel-like formal structure and b) the concrete contents that put flesh to the bones of this underlying formal structure: there is also c) a determining factor or guiding principle (viz. a set of guiding principles) behind the way we place concrete contents in the underlying double superlative-Priamel. Or, to be more precise, the concrete contents are anything but a formless mass of contents: there is a guiding principle (or set of guiding principles) behind Socrates’ views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι and an opposite guiding principle (or set of guiding principles) behind Polus’ and his witnesses’ views on these matters.

This is not the place to discuss in any detail the two principles (or the two determining factors) in question. The point is that in both cases (both in the case of Socrates and in the case of Polus and his witnesses) the positive superlative-Priamel is intrinsically related to the negative superlative-Priamel, and the latter is intrinsically related to the former. That is, positive non-indifference is intrinsically related to negative non-indifference: seeking behaviours are intrinsically related to avoiding behaviours – and vice versa. In other words, what makes some things be given a certain rank in the framework of the positive Priamel is intrinsically related to what makes other things be given a certain rank in the framework of the negative Priamel – and vice versa. So the structure we are talking about has nothing to do with two separate Priamelns that just happen to be joined together. The point is, rather, that the priamel-like formal structure we are dealing with is *intrinsically twofold*. The two

priamel-like components are, as it were, *cast from the same mould*: life-orientation is *guided by one as it is by the other* and *cannot do without either*.

5. Second Thoughts about Socrates' ἔλεγχος – Socrates' new claim in 474b

As pointed out above, Socrates does not cease his resistance and remains adamant that Polus and all his witnesses are simply wrong – the result being that, instead of breaking up, the discussion of this matter goes on. It is now time to take a closer look at the views put forward by Socrates.

The first thing we have to consider is that our previous account of what Socrates has in mind when he speaks of a second kind of ἔλεγχος (i.e. our previous account of what we have termed *Socrates' ἔλεγχος*) seems to miss important nuances and can prove to be somewhat oversimplified and indeed misleading.

Let us examine Socrates' words in 474b, which play a decisive role in this regard:

(...) ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οἶμαι καὶ ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους τὸ ἀδικεῖν τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι κάκιον ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ μὴ δίδόναι δίκην τοῦ δίδοναι.

{ΠΩΛ.} Ἐγὼ δέ γε οὐτ' ἐμὲ οὐτ' ἄλλον ἀνθρώπων οὐδένα. ἐπεὶ σὺ δέξαι' ἂν μᾶλλον ἀδικεῖσθαι ἢ ἀδικεῖν;

{ΣΩ.} Καὶ σύ γ' ἂν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες.

{ΠΩΛ.} Πολλοῦ γε δεῖ, ἀλλ' οὐτ' ἐγὼ οὔτε σὺ οὐτ' ἄλλος οὐδεὶς.⁵²

At first sight, this piece of dialogue between Socrates and Polus may seem to be a perfectly innocuous summary of their positions in the debate. But on closer inspection it turns out that there is something rather *surprising* about Socrates' words viz. about his short recapitulation of his own claims.

Let us consider this in some more detail.

According to our description, Socrates' methodological principles concerning the second kind of ἔλεγχος – and in particular his “τοὺς ἄλλους πάντας τούτους χαίρειν ἔαν” from 472c2 seem to suggest *that he could not care less about what other people think and has no view of his own regarding this topic*. The only witness that matters to him is his interlocutor viz. his opponent; the only testimony he is interested in is his – but again, as we have seen, not as a testimony (not as a piece of evidence or as a

⁵² 474b2-10.

means of refutation), but because the ἔλεγχος is successful if and only if one is able to produce none other than *the opponent* as a witness in disproof of the opponent's claims. In other words, Socrates is interested in his interlocutor's viz. in the opponent's views only insofar as he proposes to *change the interlocutor's viz. the opponent's mind*.⁵³

To be sure, Socrates' view that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc. claims to be valid *for all human beings, without exception*. But this is a claim about what is better and worse for all human beings, *regardless of what they happen to think* (namely, regardless of *what they happen to think about what is better or worse for them*). It is not a claim about *what they think or are bound to think* (namely what they *think* or are bound to *think* about what is better or worse for them). In this particular regard, Socrates seems to concede that Polus is right (καὶ νῦν περὶ ὧν σὺ λέγεις ὀλίγου σοὶ πάντες συμφήσουσιν ταῦτα Ἀθηναῖοι καὶ οἱ ξένοι, ἐὰν βούλῃ κατ' ἐμοῦ μάρτυρας παρασχέσθαι ὥς οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγω).⁵⁴

This is why Socrates' words in the passage just quoted are surprising, to say the very least. Without as much as a warning, he shifts to what appears to be a very different claim. He says that he, Polus and indeed all human beings do think that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc. (ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οἶμαι καὶ ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους τὸ ἀδικεῖν τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι κάκιον ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ μὴ διδόναι δίκην τοῦ διδόναι). In other words, he makes exactly the same kind of claim as Polus – a claim concerning what *everybody thinks* and *is bound to think*, i. e. a claim concerning the view each one of us, without exception, is bound to hold and cannot help believing in.⁵⁵

This claim is surprising for several reasons, the first being that it seems absolutely implausible that Socrates is right. The claim is made just after the reader has been confronted with the cases of Archelaus and the “Anti-Archelaus”. Each one

⁵³ Of course it must be kept in mind that what we have seen changes our whole understanding of the term “Socrates' opponent”, as far as Socrates' discussion with Polus about ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is concerned. Polus is not the only opponent Socrates has in this regard. In fact, as we have seen, each one of us is Socrates' opponent. For each one of us is *Polus' witness* and each witness for Polus *plays Polus' role* – i.e. the role of *Socrates' opponent*. And this in turn means that each and every one of us, Polus' witnesses, could be the interlocutor whose mind Socrates' ἔλεγχος is supposed to change.

⁵⁴ 472a2-5.

⁵⁵ A claim according to which one's orienting beliefs about ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι (that is: our basic assumptions with regard to the concrete meaning of the formal determinations “good”, “bad”, “better”, “worse”, etc.) are not a matter of opinion: everybody is, so to speak, *constitutively bound* to the ἡγεῖσθαι in question.

of us has just been able to realize with what degree of certainty, with what intensity of belief his or her “middle voice eyes” reject Socrates’ claim about ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι and take the stand for Polus. Thus, it is already very difficult to admit that Socrates’ claim about ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is true, but it is still more difficult to admit that he really means what he says when he contends that everybody – i.e. each and every one of us, without exception – is bound to agree with him.

But this is not all. There is also the fact that the additional claim we are talking about makes everything significantly *more complex* than it seemed to be before. The *plot thickens*, as it were, and becomes more intriguing.

On the one hand, Socrates’ *outline of his own view* becomes more complex. What is more, one cannot help thinking that he has somehow *changed his view*. At first, he seemed to agree with Polus’ claim about what everybody – all human beings without exception – are bound to think. Now he seems to have *his own view* about this – and indeed a view *directly opposed to that of Polus*. To be sure, Socrates does not bother to call our attention to the fact that there is a *new claim*. As pointed out above, he presents his new claim without as much as a warning, without deigning to make any remark about it – as if there was *nothing new* in it. But the fact is that there is something new – and, what is more, this new claim seems to mean that there has been some change in Socrates’ view (and indeed a significant and rather surprising one).

On the other hand, Socrates’ new claim changes the nature of the difference between his view and that of Polus. The difference between their respective views ceases to be a difference concerning both the *content* and the *form* of their claims (in Polus’ case both a claim about an alleged “truth” and a claim about the fact that everybody is bound to acknowledge it; in Socrates’ case a claim concerning just the former, not the latter) and becomes only a difference *of content*. For now, both Polus and Socrates claim a) an alleged “truth” and b) the fact that every human being is bound to acknowledge it. In other words, the *form* of their respective claims is now *exactly the same*, the difference lies solely in the fact that the claim which according to Socrates is both true and acknowledged by everybody else is the claim that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc., while for Polus it is the other way around. The very structure of the passage just quoted mirrors and enhances this *structural parallelism* viz. this *symmetry* between Polus’ and Socrates’ claims.

Finally, the result of all this is that now there is what may be described as a *double conflict* between Socrates’ and Polus’ claims. It is no longer a *simple*

opposition between two alleged “truths” (as it was when Socrates seemed to concede to Polus that he is right in assuming that everybody agrees with him), but rather a *double conflict*: a) a conflict concerning what each party claims to be true and b) a conflict concerning what each party claims to be acknowledged by everybody else – by all human beings without exception.

But this is not all. There is a further aspect to Socrates’ new claim, namely the fact that it changes the way in which we all are called to play a role as witnesses in the debate between Polus and Socrates. At first sight it seemed that only Polus called each and every one of us as a witness in support of his claims. But now it turns out that Polus is not the only one who calls us to be his witnesses. Surprisingly enough, Socrates seems to do precisely the same.

So the upshot is that *we are called as supporting witnesses by both parties*. Both of them ascribe their view to us – contend that we are all bound to acknowledge their claim: to *see* in accordance with it.

To be sure, there is nothing uncommon in this. It seems to be very common practice in courts of law – and indeed wherever human beings live together. But there is something uncommon in Socrates’ claims. Besides the fact that the two parties call as their witnesses no less than *everybody else viz. all human beings without exception*, what is uncommon is the fact that Socrates seems to hold two opposing views: a) that Polus is right in assuming that everybody else agrees with his claim that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν, etc., and b) that all human beings are bound to acknowledge Socrates’ opposite claim that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι, etc. And there is also the fact that Socrates’ claims (both the claim that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι and the claim that we are all bound to acknowledge this) seem so utterly implausible and so contrary to the facts, that one cannot help but get the impression that it is nothing short of absurd to call us in support of such claims.

This rather intricate and labyrinthine set of opposite claims poses several questions: Who is right concerning both levels of claims (both the claim regarding ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι and the claim regarding the universally shared view about them): Socrates or Polus? Is there any way Socrates could be right (and we – that is, Polus and his witnesses – wrong)? Could it turn out that we are Socrates’ witnesses after all?

These are, of course, the most crucial questions. But trying to answer them requires us to consider some *preliminary questions about Socrates’ claims*; for in

order to establish whether Socrates is right or wrong, etc., one must be sure to understand the meaning of his words – what his real claims are – in the first place. Now, the most important questions in this regard are the following: What exactly is the meaning of what we have termed Socrates’ “new claim”? Is it just the opposite view to the one expressed by Polus (in which case it seems safe to assume that a decisive *change of view* has indeed taken place)?⁵⁶ Or does Socrates’ new claim have *some other meaning* – but in that case, *what other meaning* could there be behind his words? And how is this *other meaning* of what we have termed Socrates’ “new claim” consistent with his initial concession that Polus is right in assuming that everybody else agrees with him, when he claims that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν, etc.?⁵⁷

Let this suffice as a first outline of the essential *preliminary* questions concerning Socrates’ “new claim”. These are the questions we will address and try to answer in the rest of this paper. And it is important to give a hint as to *the direction we are heading in*. The main points may be summarised as follows: a) What we have termed Socrates’ “new claim” does not necessarily mean the opposite view to Polus’ (and, for that matter, to Socrates’ initial) claim that everybody agrees with Polus when he asserts that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν, etc.; b) The “new claim” is perfectly consistent with Socrates’ initial concession that Polus is right in assuming that everybody else agrees with him; c) The “new claim” we are talking about does not necessarily mean any change of point of view on Socrates’ part; and d) Socrates’ two assertions (i.e. both the initial concession to Polus and what we have now called Socrates’ “new claim”) are not only perfectly consistent with Socrates’ characterization of the second kind of ἔλεγχος but indeed essential components of what he seems to have in mind when he speaks of the second kind of ἔλεγχος as opposed to the first.

⁵⁶ And then the question is: Why did such a change of view take place? What is the meaning of this change? Is the “new claim” consistent with Socrates’ above-mentioned characterization of the second kind of ἔλεγχος? Or does it mean that Socrates either changed his view on the second kind of ἔλεγχος or dropped his claims in this regard?

⁵⁷ Viz. how is this *other meaning* of Socrates’ “new claim” consistent with Socrates’ characterization of the second kind of ἔλεγχος?

6. A first way of understanding Socrates' new claim (and how we all are Socrates' unwitting witnesses)

In the final analysis, the key to disentangling Socrates' somewhat puzzling set of claims is ἔλεγχος.

Let us take a closer look at this. Socrates is by no means denying that every human being tends to agree with Polus and is willing to testify in support of his claims, because Polus' view seems to be absolutely self-evident, while Socrates' own claims sound preposterous. That is, Socrates does not challenge Polus' claim about "universal consensus" on his claim concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι – neither does he challenge our own testimony in this matter. As pointed out above, this is something he conceded in the beginning of his discussion with Polus on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι – and he *does not retract* or even *modify* this statement. His claim is that even if each one of us is his opponent (a witness upon whose testimony Polus can rely), the fact remains that if one accepts playing the role of Socrates' interlocutor – i.e. if one accepts discussing with Socrates, answering his questions, engaging in a thorough discussion of the matters in question – one will cease to agree with Polus: one will change sides and become a witness in support of Socrates' claims.⁵⁸ In other words, Socrates contends that his ἔλεγχος has the power to produce a radical *change of mind* in his interlocutors. If one accepts undergoing cross-examination, if one ceases to settle matters using the *summary procedure* (the *summary* or *accelerated procedure* proper to Polus' and his witnesses' ἔλεγχος)⁵⁹ and if one engages in what may be called a *real process* (a *real inquiry*, a *real and thorough analysis* of what is at stake), then one is no longer able to agree with Polus and eventually comes to realise that Socrates is right.

But this is not all. Socrates claims that a thorough discussion of the matters in question *inevitably* leads to a change of mind, and that *all* human beings, without exception, provided that they engage in such a discussion and thereby replace the "summary procedure" by what may be called a "proper process", are bound to undergo such a change of mind and to become witnesses in support of his view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι.

⁵⁸ N.B. a witness in the sense proper to the second kind of ἔλεγχος.

⁵⁹ I. e., as pointed out above, using the summary "procedure" usually followed by our "middle-voice eyes".

This is what Socrates' "new claim" in 474b is all about. On the one hand, this claim does not concern what happens *before* one undergoes real ἔλεγχος viz. real cross-examination. That is, it does not concern the realm of "summary procedure", the realm of Polus' and his witnesses' ἔλεγχος: i.e. the realm of "immediate self-evidence". In this realm, Polus – that is, the "Polus" in each and every one of us – reigns uncontested, and (as Socrates admits) everybody, without exception, lives, whether consciously or unconsciously, by Polus' view that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν, etc. In short, Socrates' "new claim" in 474b concerns the realm of what we have called a "proper process" – a realm which for each and every one of us *simply is not there* (i. e. does not exist at all) if one fails to engage in a thorough discussion of the matters in question.

But on the other hand, Socrates' claim about what happens in the second realm – namely in the realm of thorough analysis and discussion of the matters in question – is no less *universal* than Polus' claim. According to Socrates, *all* human beings (and this means *all* human beings, *without exception*), provided that they accept re-examining their assumptions and engaging in a thorough discussion of what is at stake in them, eventually come to realise that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι. Put another way, when Polus and Socrates speak of "everybody", they are really speaking of *everybody, without exception* – and Socrates' "everybody" is no less *all-embracing* than that of Polus.

The point is that the "everybody" Socrates' new claim in 474b refers to has to do with *what happens after we have undergone real ἔλεγχος viz. after we have engaged in a thorough discussion of the matters in question*. It is no longer the "everybody" of immediate "middle-voice" self-evidence. Socrates' point is that, as far as the question regarding ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is concerned, the outcome of the ἔλεγχος (i. e. the outcome of a thorough examination of the matters in question) is absolutely *invariable*: it is *not contingent*; it does not happen only in some cases – it happens and must happen *in all cases*, so that *all* human beings, *without exception*, provided that they engage in a thorough discussion of the matters in question, are *bound to become* Socrates' witnesses. In short, according to Socrates, we *are* Polus' witnesses in the "land" of what we have termed *immediate "middle-voice" self-evidence*, but we *become* Socrates' witnesses – are *bound to become* Socrates' witnesses – in the "land" of thorough discussion of what is at stake in our own assumptions (i.e. when we migrate from one "land" to the other).

This is why there is absolutely no inconsistency between Socrates' initial concession to Polus (namely that everybody agrees with him) and his new claim in 474b, according to which all human beings are bound to agree with him, Socrates: the two claims concern, as it were, *different objects*. In other words, we are dealing with two different claims about what may be called human nature – i. e. about *something allegedly inherent to each and every one of us*. But it must be kept in mind that the two claims in question viz. the two allegedly universal features we are talking about concern two *different possibilities of development* (so to speak, two *stages of development*) of the way we see things. To be sure, the two claims in question are universal: they concern *every human being* and how *each and every one* of us is bound to testify on the matter of ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. I. e., the two claims in question concern *the same persons*. But they do not concern the same persons *in the same situation*, but rather *in a different situation*, namely *before* and *after* having undergone real ἔλεγχος – *before* and *after* having engaged in a thorough examination of the matters in question. In short, the circumstances under which we are bound to *be* (and always have been) Polus' witnesses and those under which we are bound to *become* Socrates' witnesses are not the same. And the watershed is ἔλεγχος.

We can also express this by saying the following. Contrary to what happens in the case of Polus and his overwhelming legion of witnesses, Socrates' description of everybody's (i.e. of *all* human beings') beliefs on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is *complex*. His complex statement on this matter entails two claims: a) Polus' and his witnesses' claim about the fact that everybody is bound to agree with Polus when he contends that ἀδικεῖσθαι is worse than ἀδικεῖν, etc., and b) a second claim concerning the fact that this is true *only as long as human beings do not engage in a thorough examination* of what is at stake in this question – for, *if they do* engage in such an examination, *they are no less bound to change their view and testify for Socrates*. To sum up, in Socrates' view Polus' claim on universal consensus is not wrong; the problem is that what he says is only part of the truth. And, according to Socrates, his complex set of claims is the whole of which Polus' claim is the part.

However, one may object that there is nevertheless a difference between the sense in which everybody is bound to *be* Polus' witness and the sense in which everybody – namely everybody who migrates from the “land” of *immediate “middle-voice” self-evidence* to the “land” of thorough discussion of what is at stake in our own assumptions – is bound to *become* a witness to Socrates' claims. For the latter

does not correspond to *everybody* in the strict sense of the term – it may even be the case that only very *few people* correspond to this category. But the truth of the matter is that Socrates is not referring only to these few – as if his claim did not concern *everybody* (each and every one of us) *in the strictest sense of the word*. No: Socrates' claim *does* concern everybody in the strictest sense of the word (*every* human being, without exception): he contends that *each and every one* of us, if he or she engages in a thorough analysis of what is at stake in the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, is bound to change sides and become a witness in support of Socrates' claim that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι.

In particular, it should be kept in mind that Socrates' second claim includes a *protasis* and an *apodosis*. In other words, his second claim is what may be called a *hypothetical claim*, in the sense that it has the form of a *hypothetical connection* between two judgments. To be sure, a connection of this kind is of such a nature that, if the *protasis* is not fulfilled, the *apodosis* does not follow. Socrates concedes that the *protasis* may not be fulfilled. But the point is that, *if it is fulfilled* (if a human being engages in a thorough analysis of what is at stake in the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι), then he or she is *bound* to change sides and become a witness for Socrates. And, according to Socrates, this holds good for *each and every one of us* – for *everybody* in the strictest sense of the term: for *all* human beings – *without exception*.

Socrates' second claim entails several components, and it is important to take a closer look at them viz. at how they interplay with each other. First it is not possible to be Socrates' witness just like that: as pointed out above, one *is* Polus' witness – one *becomes* a witness for Socrates. Secondly, becoming a witness for Socrates depends upon ἔλεγχος viz. upon engaging in a thorough analysis of what is at stake in the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. And, as a matter of fact, there is absolutely no guarantee that one accepts undergoing real ἔλεγχος or engaging in a thorough analysis of what is at stake in the matters in question. Thus, becoming a witness for Socrates is something *contingent*. But on the other hand, according to Socrates' claim, if a thorough examination of the matters in question does take place, then we are *bound* to become Socrates' witnesses (the witnesses upon whose testimony he can rely) – and this in *all* cases, without exception. Put another way, according to Socrates, the hypothetical connection his second claim is all about holds good for *each and every one* of us: for *everybody* in the strictest sense of the term.

And there is nothing contingent about this. In short, Socrates' claim concerns a hypothetical connection (a connection, as it were, in the *potentialis*), but in such a way that, *if the protasis is fulfilled*, the outcome is *invariable* – and there is something *absolutely* necessary about it.

A further important question concerns the transition from one “land” to the other – namely from the “land” of *immediate “middle-voice” self-evidence* to the “land” of thorough discussion of what is at stake in our own assumptions. This transition is characterized by the fact that there is what may be described as a *strait*, a *bottleneck* or a *chokepoint* that slows down the pace in which human beings can *de facto* become witnesses to Socrates' claim that ἀδικεῖν is worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι. In other words, there is something of a “narrow door” here. Among other things, this “narrow door” has to do

a) with the fact that we tend towards “summary procedures” (we tend to prefer Polus', not Socrates' ἔλεγχος), b) with the fact that the transition must be done *one by one* and its *medium* is the “tête-à-tête” required for the second kind of ἔλεγχος, and c) with the fact that ἔλεγχος viz. a thorough examination of the matters in question is a *difficult* and *time-consuming* process. The result being that, even though all human beings *are able to* become witnesses to Socrates' claims concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι (and, what is more, even though all human beings are *bound* to become witnesses to Socrates' claims, provided that they undergo real ἔλεγχος or engage in a thorough analysis of what is at stake in the question of ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι), the actualisation of this possibility is beset by many obstacles, so that *de facto* only a few – and indeed very few – actually become Socrates' witnesses.

In summary, Socrates' second claim – the claim that every human being can and will become a witness to his view – amounts to saying that, with regard to the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, his ἔλεγχος is bound to achieve something similar to what happens in Reginald Rose's well-known screenplay *Twelve Angry Men*, where only one juror votes “not guilty” in the preliminary tally of a murder trial, causing the other jurors to question their belief that the defendant is guilty – the result being that, one by one, they all change their vote to “not guilty”, so that the defendant is acquitted. The main difference lies in the following: a) Socrates is dealing with nothing less than *all* human jurors or with the *jury of all mankind*, b) what is at stake is not the murder trial of somebody else but rather the “trial” of human life (and this also means of one's own life), where the jurors vote about what

is good and what is bad (what is better and what is worse) for a human being, and c) in Socrates' case there is a *de facto* obstacle – and he is not able to reach all the other jurors and cause them to question their own beliefs on the matter in question. Socrates' new claim in 474b amounts to saying that something of this kind would *inevitably* happen if every human being became Socrates' interlocutor viz. if each and every one of us could be induced to engage in a thorough analysis of what is at stake in the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. Now, such a claim is perfectly consistent with the fact that whether or not one becomes Socrates' witness depends on several *factual conditions*, the fulfilment of which can be beset by *factual* obstacles – with the result that, when all is said and done, very few people come to change their vote and become Socrates' witnesses, and everybody else (that is, almost everybody) remains what we all are before becoming anything else, namely Polus' witnesses: witnesses to Polus' claims.

This brings us to two preliminary conclusions.

On the one hand, if this is what Socrates' new claim means, then there is no real change of point of view on Socrates' part: everything is perfectly consistent with his previous description of the two kinds of ἔλεγχος. He is just completing his outline of the second kind of ἔλεγχος and emphasizing that at least in certain cases – notably in the case of the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι – the second kind of ἔλεγχος *is bound to be effective*: nobody can resist its power, and even the most inveterate opponent of Socrates' view is bound to change sides and become a witness for Socrates.⁶⁰

On the other hand, this enables us to understand that, in a certain sense, Socrates' claim in 474b also amounts to saying that we all are his *unwitting witnesses*. To be sure, this cannot possibly mean that we are *Socrates' unwitting witnesses* in the same sense in which we are and always have been *Polus' unwitting witnesses*. As pointed

⁶⁰ Thus, at least as far as the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is concerned, Socrates claims to be as skilful as – and indeed more skilful than – Gorgias and Polus, for he is able to win over every opponent viz. every human being. He has the *power to make everybody else change their mind* – i.e. a *power of control over πειθώ*. But there are two important differences, and because of them Socrates' power to make his interlocutors change their mind has little to do with what both Gorgias and Polus have in mind when they speak of the ῥητορικὴ:

a) Socrates' power to make his interlocutors change their mind – i. e. his power of control over πειθώ – has nothing to do with a “persuasion from which conviction comes without knowing” or with a persuasion “yielding conviction without knowing” (454d: τὸ πίστιν παρεχόμενον ἄνευ τοῦ εἰδέναι), that is, with an autonomous “realm of πειθώ” that does not depend upon knowledge and ἀλήθεια.

b) Socrates' power to make his interlocutors change their mind has nothing to do with a power that can change his interlocutor's mind *in every possible direction*, as one sees fit. Socrates' power can change his interlocutor's mind *in one direction* – and in all cases with the same result.

out above, the reason why we can be said to be *Polus' unwitting witnesses* is because long before we read the *Gorgias* or were faced with the kind of question that is at stake in Socrates' discussion with Polus, the silent yet eloquent testimony of our own lives *goes against Socrates*. But it seems pretty obvious that we cannot be Socrates' unwitting witnesses *in this sense*. However, this does not prevent us from being Socrates' unwitting witnesses *in a second sense*, namely the following. If our interpretation is right, Socrates' new claim in 474b amounts to saying that, even if we are firmly convinced that Socrates is wrong and could swear to High Heaven that his claim concerning ἄδικεῖν and ἄδικεῖσθαι is absolutely preposterous, even so we are *bound* to become Socrates' witnesses, provided that we accept undergoing cross-examination and engaging in a thorough discussion of the matters in question. To be sure, we have no idea of it. But this does not change the fact that, if Socrates is right, the *hypothetical necessity* his new claim in 474b is all about holds good *for each and every one of us*, so that, according to Socrates, *each and every one of us* is one of Socrates' *unwitting* (we could also say: one of Socrates' *covert*, one of Socrates' *secret*) witnesses – and there is nothing to be done about it! So the bottom-line is that, without knowing it (without having any idea of it), we are already, in some sense, Socrates' witnesses: the witnesses upon whose testimony he can rely.

7. A second way of understanding Socrates' new claim (and how we all are Socrates' unwitting witnesses)

But here we reach a turning point – for this is by no means the only possible way to understand what is at stake in Socrates' new claim in 474b viz. when he asserts that every human being acknowledges his view according to which ἄδικεῖν is worse than ἄδικεῖσθαι, etc. As a matter of fact, there is another way to understand Socrates' words. At first sight, this other way of understanding Socrates' claim in 474b is somewhat baffling, but it should not be discarded beforehand. So let us take a closer look at this question.

Socrates' "new claim" concerning universal consensus can mean more than the *hypothetical necessity* we have spoken of. It can also mean the following: the very same people that take the stand in support of Polus' claims (so that they are and

always have been Polus' witnesses)⁶¹ are constituted in such a way that, deep down, there is something in them that – strange as it may be – agrees not with Polus but with Socrates.

In other words, Socrates' new claim may be understood to the effect that

a) each and every one of us *has a complex* constitution or a *multi-layered* structure;

b) different layers may very well acknowledge different “truths” viz. alleged “truths”;

c) the fact that we have a complex structure does not mean that we must be *aware* of all its elements: it is perfectly possible that some of them remain *undetected* and thereby constitute what may be described as a *submerged, hidden part of the “iceberg” of our own views or beliefs*;

d) it is also possible that these *hidden* views (these *hidden* “truths” or these *hidden* beliefs) which we are not aware of *play a significant role in the way we see things* – and indeed so much so that the views, the “truths” viz. the beliefs we are aware of somehow *rest and depend* upon those we are not aware of;

e) Socrates' words concerning universal consensus refer to this complex structure and claim that under the “surface” in which all human beings, without exception, testify in support of Polus' view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι there is some *deep layer* in which all human beings, without exception, are *bound* to agree with Socrates' view.

Much of what we have said above has to do with what we have termed our “middle voice eyes”. Now, the same holds true for this second way of understanding Socrates' claim concerning universal consensus. What is at stake here is that our “middle voice eyes” have a *complex* structure viz. a *multi-layered* structure of the kind we have mentioned, so that what they see *on the surface* is not necessarily the same as what they see *in the deeper levels* of the complex structure we are talking about. It is therefore possible that *on the surface* (i. e. *as far as we are aware of*) each one of us is and always has been *Polus' witness*, but in such a way that, on the other hand, at least some *hidden layers* of what constitutes our middle voice “power of sight” (viz. our middle voice “view” or our “middle voice beliefs”) see things otherwise and – were we aware of them – would bear testimony in support of Socrates' view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι.

⁶¹ For the silent yet eloquent testimony of their lives *goes against Socrates*.

In other words, the complex structure of our “middle voice eyes” makes it possible that on the surface they are firmly convinced that Socrates is wrong and could swear to High Heaven that his claim concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is absolutely preposterous, while at least some part of what underlies this surface agrees with Socrates and thereby forms, as it were, a “fifth column” of Socratic persuasion inside the very stronghold of anti-Socratic “self-evidence” and belief. And, what is more, the complex structure of our “middle-voice eyes” makes it possible that a) this hidden “fifth column” of Socratic persuasion is an essential component of our “middle voice eyes”, so that it is always there (i.e. so that it is part and parcel of what makes a human being a human being and enables us to see the way we do), and b) this “fifth column” of Socratic persuasion is always there in such a way that, even though we are not aware of its presence and follow the view of the “opposite party”, it is always playing a decisive role in the way our “middle voice eyes” see – and we are always somehow *in contact* with it.

To sum up, this second way of understanding Socrates’ claim concerning universal consensus amounts to the following: without being aware of it, each and every one of us is constituted in such a way that at the very core of one’s being there is a sort of “*eminence grise*” or *grey eminence* – an “*eminence grise*” that agrees with Socrates (an “*eminence grise*” who is and always has been a witness to Socrates’ view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι). And what this means is that, according to this second way of understanding Socrates’ claim in 474b, all human beings are Socrates’ *unwitting witnesses* – each one of us is Socrates’ *unwitting witness* – *in a stronger sense*, namely because deep down nothing less than an *essential part* of us (an essential part of us we are usually not aware of) shares Socrates’ view and has shared Socrates’ view *all along*.

We have tried to draw what may be called an *identikit picture* of the second possible way of understanding Socrates’ new claim concerning *universal consensus*. This identikit picture is, of course, still very vague, but it enables us to see the contrast between the two ways of understanding Socrates’ *consensus claim* we are talking about.

First, it must be borne in mind that, if this second way of understanding it is what Socrates’ claim concerning universal consensus is all about, then his claim is far more than a merely *hypothetical* claim in the above-mentioned sense – it is rather, so to speak, a *categorical* claim. For, if this is what Socrates really has in mind, he is not

contending that every human being is bound to *become* a witness for Socrates if he happens to undergo cross-examination and engage in a thorough discussion of the matters in question; he is rather affirming that, deep down in the core of his being, each and every one of us is, without knowing it, a witness to Socrates' claim concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. In other words, if this really is the meaning of the passage referred to, Socrates' new claim concerning *universal consensus* has nothing to do with the *potentialis*: it concerns an *actual* state-of-affairs – *something already there* – and indeed an *essential component of each and every human being*.

Secondly, corresponding to these two ways of understanding what Socrates *consensus claim* is all about there are two different senses in which all human beings can be said to be *Socrates' unwitting witnesses*. On the one hand, we can be said to be *Socrates' unwitting witnesses*, because, even if we have no idea of it, provided we accept undergoing cross-examination and a *thorough examination* of what is at stake in the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, we are *bound to change sides* and *become* Socrates' witnesses. On the other hand, all human beings can be said to be *Socrates' unwitting witnesses* because, even if we have no idea of it, there is a central and constitutive part of us (there is *something* in the way our “middle-voice eyes” see things) that sides with Socrates' view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι – i. e. because this central and constitutive part of us is and always has been a witness to Socrates' claim. In this case, too, our being witnesses for Socrates has to do with what we have termed the silent yet eloquent testimony of our lives – a testimony which usually remains unnoticed.

Thirdly, this brings us to the question of *duplicitous viz. double-faced testimony*. The first way of understanding Socrates' consensus claim does not raise any question of double-faced testimony. We are said to be Socrates' unwitting witnesses because we are bound to change our mind and change our testimony, if we undergo cross-examination and engage in a *thorough examination* of what is at stake in the question concerning ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι. But if we are Socrates' unwitting witnesses in the second sense, this means that each and every one of us bears what may be called a double-faced testimony and testifies at the same time to Polus' and to Socrates' claims. In other words, contrary to what happens if we are Socrates' unwitting witnesses only in the first sense (in which case our two opposite testimonies pertain to two different realms, namely: before and after ἔλεγχος), if we are Socrates' unwitting witnesses in the second sense, the two opposite testimonies pertain to the same realm:

the realm of our immediate “middle-voice” “self-evidences”. Put another way, in this case we are *at the same time* witnesses to both claims, witnesses for both parties – both for Polus and for Socrates.

The key to all this is, of course, the *complex* viz. the *multi-layered* structure we have spoken of. We are and always have been *both Polus’ and Socrates’ witnesses* – but *not on the same level*. I. e. the two opposite views are not endorsed and believed by the *same* “thing” viz. the *same* “instance”, in the strict sense of the word “same”, but rather by *different components* of our complex and multi-layered structure.

We can express this in terms borrowed from Euripides. In his *Hippolytus*⁶² Theseus dreams of a world where men had two voices – i. e. an *honest* voice in addition to the one we usually have – so that the dishonest-minded among us might be refuted, and we might cease to be deceived. In other words, Theseus “(...) craves two voices, the one to be the voice as we know it, ‘normal’ and hence capable of deceiving, and the other to be capable only of truth, enabled when necessary to contradict and expose the normal voice”.⁶³ Now, the second way of understanding Socrates’ consensus claim has to do with something similar. To be sure, the *double-faced testimony* viz. the *double unwitting witnesses* we are talking about have precious little to do with Theseus’ utopia of truthfulness. But the point is the idea of *two voices*. If the second way of understanding Socrates’ consensus claim is right, then our duplicitous testimony (viz. our being unwitting witnesses *both for Polus and for Socrates*) expresses the fact that our *complex* “middle-voice eyes” see different things and have different voices making different statements on different levels.⁶⁴

⁶² Vv. 928-931

⁶³ B. E. GOFF, *The Noose of Words*. Readings of Desire, Violence & Language in Euripides *Hippolytos*, Cambridge/N.Y., 1990, 46.

⁶⁴ It must be born in mind that this second way of understanding Socrates’ claim concerning *universal consensus* changes the meaning of Socrates’ reference to *false* witnesses and *false* testimony (to ψευδομάρτυρες and καταψευδομαρτυρεῖν viz. καταψευδομαρτυρεῖσθαι). What does Socrates mean when he speaks of καταψευδομαρτυρεῖν and ψευδομάρτυρες and suggests that Polus’ witnesses are *false* witnesses? In what sense is their testimony *false*? Only in the sense that they are not telling the truth (that the claim they support is not true)? Or is it also in the sense that their testimony *does not correspond to what they themselves believe to be true*? According to the first way of understanding Socrates’ claim, Polus’ witnesses say what they believe to be true, and that is all there is to it. But according to the second way of understanding Socrates’ claim, even if Polus’ witnesses say what they believe to be true, deep down there is something in them that takes the opposite view – namely Socrates’ view. In other words, according to the second way of understanding Socrates’ claim, Polus’ witnesses testify on behalf of Polus *against their own better judgment*. But, be that as it may, in either case they are *guileless*; for even if the second way of understanding Socrates’ claim is right, that part of us that bears witness to Polus’ views is *not aware* that deep down there is a key component that, should it be called to take the stand, would bear witness to the exact opposite.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that none of this means that, if the second way of understanding Socrates' claim concerning universal consensus is right, then the first can no longer play a significant role – or that, if we are Socrates' unwitting witnesses in the *second* sense, then it is safe to assume that we are *not* Socrates' unwitting witnesses in the first sense. The truth of the matter is that the two ways of understanding Socrates' new claim concerning universal consensus are by no means mutually exclusive. It is quite the reverse. We are able to *become* Socrates' witnesses because there is something in us that is and always has been Socrates' witness. And Socrates' ἔλεγχος is *bound* to succeed because deep down, in the core of our being, there is a basic level of “middle-voice” self-evidences (and, what is more, a basic level of middle-voice self-evidences *that is inseparably connected with the core of formal determinations* upon which, as pointed out above, depend all other levels of middle-voice “self-evidence” and *life-orientation*) that turns out to be Socrates' “*advance agent*” or a *secret agent*, as it were, on behalf of Socrates' view.

In other words, contrary to what may seem, at least as far as the question of ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is concerned, the *terminus ad quem* of the change of mind prompted by Socrates' ἔλεγχος (i. e. of the change of mind the first way of understanding Socrates' claim concerning universal consensus is all about) is *not* something *completely new*, but *rather something that is and has always been there* – so that the result of Socrates' ἔλεγχος is, so to speak, the *discovery* and *re-appropriation of a hidden centrepiece of our own middle-voice “self-evidences”* – a centrepiece we are usually not aware of.⁶⁵ In short, what characterises the second way of understanding Socrates' claim concerning universal consensus is that it includes the first. In this view, the latter is not wrong; the problem is that it is only *part* of the truth. And the second way of understanding Socrates' claim concerning universal consensus understands itself as the *whole* of which the first way is the part.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ That is 1) on the *surface* level, each and every one of us takes the stand for Polus, 2) on a *deeper* level (namely deep down in the very *core* of our “middle voice” life orienting view) there is a “secret star witness” on behalf of Socrates' views, so that 3) if we leave the surface level and get to the bottom of the matter, we are bound to become Socrates' witnesses (and there is no longer a disparity between the surface and the deeper level).

⁶⁶ This is not the place to discuss this question, but it should be borne in mind that this idea of a *double-faced testimony* (the idea that each and every one of us holds *contradictory* views on nothing less than the *basic principles of life orientation*) is echoed further down in the dialogue, namely in Callicles' doctrine (483eff.). To be sure, Callicles tries to turn Socrates' doctrine on its head. According to him, Socrates' view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι (and what Socrates' presents as deep insight: the view that imposes itself upon us if we examine the matter thoroughly) is in fact but a *surface development* – a mere “epiphenomenon” – in the framework of what Socrates mistakenly takes

But, one may ask, how can this be? And why should we trouble to consider such a far-fetched hypothesis? The answer to these questions is complex, and this is not the place to consider all relevant elements. Let it suffice to say that the *Gorgias* – and in particular some major developments that take place between the beginning and the methodological interlude about the two kinds of ἔλεγχος – presents some hints that may suggest that this hypothesis is not that far-fetched after all. Space forbids more than a brief outline – and our task now is to adumbrate the “jigsaw pieces” that, put together, make this hypothesis less unlikely than it might otherwise seem.

The two parts of the dialogue that foreshadow the complex structure without which the second way of understanding Socrates’ claim concerning universal consensus does not make any sense are a) his description of the masquerade of rhetoric and in particular his analysis of the *opaque medium* in which rhetoric moves⁶⁷ and b) his description of how ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ and ἃ βούλεται differ from each other but are also linked with each other in such a way that the former both *presupposes* and *hides* the latter.⁶⁸ It goes without saying that we must content ourselves with a very sketchy outline of these two important parts of the *Gorgias*. As a matter of fact, this outline must be so concise that it can appear to be something of a caricature.

to be the correlate of a superficial view (the immediate view that, according to Socrates, does not withstand reflection). For Callicles what stands behind Polus’ and his witnesses’ view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is *the original and radical “middle voice” view*. For him, Socrates’ claim on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is but the result of an *internal* development of this very same original “middle voice” view. Socrates’ superlative is, as it were, the “fourth or fifth rate” *substitute for the best* that the weak promote to the highest possible position in order to protect their own interests. And Socrates’ negative superlative viz. his condemnation of ἀδικεῖν, (his claim that the nadir of human existence = ἀδικεῖν) is but an expression of the fear of the weak –namely their fear of ἀδικεῖσθαι and their willingness to give up ἀδικεῖν in order to get rid of ἀδικεῖσθαι. In short, Socrates’ view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι is but the result of an *optical illusion*: the “optical illusion” proper to the weak – their own specific “optical illusion” that they nevertheless manage to transform into a *universal “optical illusion”* (this being the origin of the universal “double-belief” or double-faced testimony Socrates refers to). But the point is that Callicles, too, speaks of a “double belief” and that he seems to interpret Socrates’ doctrine in such a way that a) he concedes one of Socrates’ claims (the claim on universal or at least widespread *double belief*), while b) disputing the second claim – namely the claim concerning the connection viz. the “relation of forces” between the two universal beliefs in question. The result of Callicles’ doctrine is, of course, that the “second belief” (Socrates’ belief) is but an *illusion*, that it must be dispelled, etc. – so that, in the final analysis, Polus and his witnesses are absolutely right: there is no such thing as a “middle voice” view of Socratic persuasion. But then again the fact remains that the second view (Socrates’ view) is a widespread illusion, and that Callicles is forced to develop his own doctrine on double belief in order to refute Socrates’ claims. In this context it is important to note that Callicles tries to deliver “checkmate” to Socrates’ claims on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι, and that in the final analysis everything depends a) on Socrates’ ability to resist this attack and b) on whether Socrates is in turn able to deliver “checkmate” to Callicles claims.

⁶⁷ 463aff.

⁶⁸ 466bff.

Let us start with Socrates' description of rhetoric as a form of *κολακεία* – viz. with what might be described as the complex “anthropology” underlying Socrates' notion of *κολακεία* (in short: his “*anthropology of κολακεία*”). First, it must be borne in mind that Socrates' whole description of *κολακεία* in 463aff., etc., presupposes that *εὐεξία* is, as it were, the fundamental determination viz. the central aim our life is all about. Now, *εὐεξία* has a *formal* character, it is a *formal* determination. On the one hand, it takes different shapes – for, in the final analysis, *εὐεξία* is what both *ψυχή* and *σῶμα* are all about – and *εὐεξία* of the *σῶμα* differs from *εὐεξία* of the *ψυχή*. On the other hand, *εὐεξία* of the *σῶμα* and *εὐεξία* of the *ψυχή* are not constituted in such a way that each of them is wholly independent and autonomous. The truth of the matter is that our relation to *εὐεξία* of the *σῶμα* and *εὐεξία* of the *ψυχή* relies upon and is driven by our primary relation to the formal basic determination, namely *εὐεξία* as such.⁶⁹ This is the decisive point in Socrates' description: *εὐεξία* as such is what human life is all about. But this basic determination has a purely formal character. It must take a concrete shape or assume a concrete identity. In other words, because it is intrinsically related to *εὐεξία*, human life depends upon what may be described as an *equation*, establishing, as it were, the concrete identity of the formal determination – namely *εὐεξία* – it is all about.

But this is not all. According to Socrates, it must be borne in mind that our relation to *εὐεξία* can be troubled by what he describes as *εἰδωλα* – and notably by the *εἰδωλον χάρις* viz. the *εἰδωλον ἡδονή*. But why are *χάρις* and *ἡδονή* said to be *εἰδωλα*? The answer is: because they differ from *εὐεξία*, are only *semblances* of *εὐεξία*, but nevertheless *pretend to be εὐεξία*. I.e.: their being *εἰδωλα* has to do with the fact that, according to Socrates, they are far from corresponding to what *εὐεξία* is all about, but still *assume the identity* of *εὐεξία* and are *mistaken* for *εὐεξία*. Put another way, our relation to *ἡδονή* and *χάρις* is not a relation to *ἡδονή* and *χάρις* as such, but rather a relation to *ἡδονή* and *χάρις* as εὐεξία: as playing the role of εὐεξία⁷⁰ or as being the same as εὐεξία.

This has all to do with the equation we have spoken of above, but this time as a *mistaken equation* like the one that is the centrepiece and mainspring of any image (*εἰδωλον*) as such – in particular when the image is mistaken for the thing itself it represents. In this case, the image plays the role of the thing itself, assumes the

⁶⁹ One might also say: “global” *εὐεξία*.

⁷⁰ And not as playing their own role, so to speak, the “role of themselves”.

identity of the thing itself: *usurps* the identity of the thing itself. It would not be able to play the role of the thing itself and to usurp its identity, if there were no relation to the thing itself in the first place. But, on the other hand, because the εἶδωλον plays the role of the thing itself of which it is an εἶδωλον, i. e., because it takes its place and usurps its identity, the thing itself undergoes what may be described as an *eclipse*: the εἶδωλον seems to be the thing itself and so we lose sight and track of the latter (inasmuch as it is not the same as the εἶδωλον, but rather something else). Now, something similar holds good for ἡδονή and χάρις in their relation to εὐεξία. According to Socrates, the former play the role of the latter, are mistaken for the latter, usurp its identity. They would not be able to play the role of εὐεξία, to usurp its identity, etc., if there were no relation to εὐεξία. And, as a matter of fact, an original relation to εὐεξία underlies our relation to ἡδονή and χάρις. But on the other hand, because ἡδονή and χάρις play the role of εὐεξία, are mistaken for it and usurp its identity, εὐεξία undergoes what may be described as an eclipse: it is, so to speak, eclipsed by ἡδονή and χάρις – N.B. not in the sense that it ceases to play a pivotal role (and we cease to have any relation to it), but in the sense that we lose sight and track of what continues to play a pivotal role in our lives – and is in fact the centrepiece and mainspring of our very relation to ἡδονή and χάρις.

The above enables us to understand what Socrates has in mind when he points out that all this – this basic phenomenon of *mistaken equation* and *confusion* of identity concerning the very thing our life is all about – has to do with the fact that those of us who are misled by this mistaken equation *lack discernment*. He says that this kind of confusion can take place only in the eyes of children or men as silly as children.⁷¹ In other words, it all has to do with *lack of acuity* – with eyes that are not sharp enough to discern what is not identical. Such eyes see everything *blurred*, as it were, and different things *mixed or blended together so as to become indistinguishable*. Such eyes see A and B, which differ by nature but are close to each other, in such a way that they are mixed up, *kneaded* or *muddled* together – the result being what Socrates compares to Anaxagoras' ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα.⁷² But it should be kept in mind what *Socrates'* ὁμοῦ is all about. It does not mean that both A and B (notably ἡδονή viz. χάρις and εὐεξία) vanish without a trace – so that we do not relate

⁷¹ Cf. 464d5: “(...) ὥστ' εἰ δέοι ἐν παισὶ διαγωνίζεσθαι ὀψοποιόν τε καὶ ἱατρόν, ἢ ἐν ἀνδράσιν οὕτως ἀνόητοις ὥσπερ οἱ παῖδες (...)”.

⁷² 465d. Cf. DK 59 [46], B1, 5.

to them. In other words, Socrates does not seem to have in mind that A and B build together a *tertium quid* in such a way that we only relate to this *tertium quid*, not to its components. It is rather that the ὁμοῦ Socrates refers to is constituted in such a way that it *has the form of the above-mentioned equation* (the equation according to which ἡδονή viz. χάρις are εὐεξία and *vice versa*) – all this in such a way that we relate to the *terms* of the equation, and what makes us lose track of εὐεξία as such (*qua* something that is not the same as ἡδονή) is the equation itself viz. the fact that we take it to be valid.⁷³

Owing to the peculiar nature of the kind of ὁμοῦ Socrates alludes to, human life, as he describes it in this part of the *Gorgias*, is constituted in such a way that, on the one hand, εὐεξία is what it is all about (and everything in it has to do with εὐεξία), but on the other hand, it loses the thread of the very εὐεξία it is all about. Put another way, in this part of the *Gorgias* Socrates points out that our “middle-voice” eyes are *complex*, that what we see with them is complex, but that we tend to live, as it were, *on the periphery* or *on the surface* of what our “middle-voice” eyes see. This can be expressed by saying that, according to this part of the *Gorgias*, the “voice” of εὐεξία as such (which is indeed “the mother of all voices”, the centrepiece of everything we “hear”) is *overheard*, so that one seems to hear only *the other voices* that drown it out (i.e. that drown down the central “voice” behind all the others). But the point is that the reason this central voice is overheard is because the others *are mistaken for it* – and indeed so much so that they *impersonate* it and *play its role*.

⁷³ There are three particularly important points:

1) Socrates stresses the idea of ὑποδύναι (464d1, c7) and προσποιεῖσθαι (464c7-d1: προσποιεῖται εἶναι τοῦτο ὅπερ ὑπέδυν, see also 464d4): B *poses as A*, *impersonates A*, so that one *loses sight* of A. We are talking about a very particular way of losing sight of something, for in this case one loses sight of it because *something else plays its role*, so that the thing in question *seems* to be “in sight” and taken into consideration;

2) The ὑποδύναι and προσποιεῖσθαι Socrates is talking about has to do with what might be described as an *equation*. The equation in question is so effective that one loses track of its terms and even of the fact that there is an equation at all: thanks to the equation the two terms “become one” (*they seem to be one*, as if they were completely identical) – and that is what Socrates’ ὁμοῦ (viz. his διέστηκε μὲν οὕτω φύσει· ἅτε δ’ ἐγγὺς ὄντων φύρονται ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ – 465c4-5, cf. 465d5) is all about.

3) All this is closely related to what might be described as *lack of discernment* or *lack of acuity* (and that is why he says we are as silly – ἀνόητοι – as children, cf. 465d6-7). Socrates’ examples refer to various components of his “anthropology of κολακεία”, namely to the confusion between σοφισταὶ and ῥήτορες (465c5) and to the confusion between the ὀψοποιική and the ἰατρική (465d2). We could also add the confusion between ἐμπειρία and τέχνη. But his point is that the *lack of discernment* or *lack of acuity* he is talking about is a general phenomenon: it can affect all kinds of *equations* (and this means: of ὑποδύναι and προσποιεῖσθαι) that shape the way we see things and what we do.

Finally, to put it all in a nutshell, if we look at Socrates' analysis of how ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ and ἃ βούλεται⁷⁴ differ from each other but are also linked with each other in such a way that the former both *presupposes* and *hides* the latter, we find the same pattern:

- a) *Complexity* (in these two cases: “twofoldness”) – *different levels, different “voices”*, making *different “statements”*;
- b) *One of the levels forms the basis for the other*, in such a way that it is what the other is all about, the centrepiece without which the whole thing would simply collapse;
- c) *Lack of transparency viz. lack of acuity*, to such an extent that we lose track of one part of the complex structure – it becomes “submerged”: it continues to play its role, but remains hidden or somehow out of sight, like the hidden part of an “iceberg”;
- d) The part of the complex structure we lose sight of is the very one everything else is all about, so that it is no exaggeration to speak of an *eclipse of the centrepiece*.

8. Conclusion and outlook

The point in all this is the striking correspondence between the pattern we have just described and the multi-layered structure of the life-orienting “middle voice” views that are at stake in Socrates' discussion with Polus. More precisely, the point is the striking correspondence between the said pattern and a particular aspect of this multi-layered structure, namely the connection between what we have termed the *first level* (the *formal core* of all life orienting “middle voice” view)⁷⁵ and the *second level* (what we have termed the *intermediate-level* view).⁷⁶ As it turns out, this connection is such that it, too, possesses two features that *prima facie* seem to be *inconsistent* with one another:

⁷⁴ 466bff.

⁷⁵ Which forms the *common ground* between Socrates and Polus.

⁷⁶ That is, the level on which Socrates and Polus disagree. See p. 22 above. It should be noted that our analysis concentrates on a particular point. On closer inspection, it emerges that the three aspects we are referring to (1: Socrates' “*anthropology of κολακεία*”, 2: the fundamental framework of his analysis of the difference and connection between ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ and ἃ βούλεται, and 3: the multi-layered structure underlying his discussion with Polus on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι) are closely related to each other. And one of the main challenges of Plato's *Gorgias* is the task of piecing together these three puzzle pieces. But what interests us here is their *isomorphism*.

a) On the one hand, it entails what might be described as *the complete dependency of the concrete agenda on the formal agenda*: our whole *concrete agenda* revolves around a centrepiece, namely the *formal core*, the *formal agenda* (the *double superlative-Priamel* we have tried to highlight) – and indeed so much so that without the latter the former would simply fall apart;

b) On the other hand, there is what might be described as a particular kind of “*defocus aberration*”, owing to which we tend to lose sight of the centrepiece and mainspring: of the formal core viz. of the formal agenda; it continues to play its role, but remains hidden or somehow out of sight, like the submerged part of an “iceberg”.

But this is not all. Socrates’ point seems to be that here, too, the “defocus aberration” has to do with the fact that our concrete agenda is *equated* with the *formal agenda* – that they are *supposed to be the same*.⁷⁷ Socrates’ claim is that they are far from being the same, first of all because there are various concrete ways of understanding the formal agenda – and secondly (and more importantly) because Polus’ and his witnesses’ *concrete agenda* does not really *meet* the requirements of the *formal agenda* our concern for ourselves is all about. In other words, Socrates suggests that Polus and his witnesses fall prey to a *fundamental misunderstanding* – to a *mistaken equation* – regarding their own concern for themselves; so that here, too, it is no exaggeration to speak of an *eclipse of the centrepiece*, and indeed of an *eclipse of the centrepiece* that makes one *lose track of what one really looks for*. We can also express this by saying the following: Socrates claims that all our relation to a *concrete agenda* is at the same time a relationship to a *formal agenda*; or, to be more precise, his claim is that all our relation to a *concrete agenda* is put under the pressure of having to meet a *formal agenda* – the result being that everything hinges on the connection between both agendas. Moreover, his point is that there is no real correspondence between the *formal agenda* our concern for ourselves is all about and Polus’ (and his witnesses’) *concrete agenda*. Polus and his witnesses tacitly *equate* their concrete agenda with the formal agenda – but, according to Socrates, on closer inspection it turns out that there is no real correspondence between them. In short, Polus’ and his witnesses’ life orienting view⁷⁸ is based on a *misled equation* or on an *illusory correspondence* between the formal double superlative-Priamel we are all

⁷⁷ As pointed out above, this is what Polus’ and his witnesses’ “middle voice” claim (namely their claim that there can be no real “middle voice” view other than their own) is all about.

⁷⁸ The *guiding principle* (or set of guiding principles) behind their views on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι.

intrinsically related to and the *guiding principle* (or set of guiding principles) behind their “middle voice” claims on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι.

For any of this to make sense, what we have termed the *formal agenda* must, of course, be such that it entails more than just *the common denominator* (i. e. what might be described as a *point of indifference*) between the opposite guiding principles (or set of guiding principles) behind Polus’ and Socrates’ views.

In other words, the second way of understanding Socrates’ claim regarding universal assent presupposes that the *formal agenda* underlying everything else has a *determination and requirements of its own*, which the guiding principles behind Polus’ and his witnesses’ concrete agenda are not able to meet. Only under these circumstances can there be the *lack of correspondence* and the kind of *mistaken equation* we have spoken of. And, what is more, for Socrates’ claim regarding universal assent to make any sense, the *formal agenda* must be of such a nature that it not only differs from Polus’ and his witnesses’ concrete agenda, but in fact leads to something along the lines of Socrates’ claim on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι.

So, then, the decisive questions in this context are:

a) Can Socrates’ view play the role of a “*middle voice*” *concrete agenda* – and what does it look like as a “middle voice” self-evident view?⁷⁹

b) How does the *formal agenda* underlying everything else *differ* from (how *is it more than just*) a *common ground* or *common denominator* between Polus’ and Socrates’ views? What *determinations and requirements of its own* does it entail, that are not met by Polus’ and his witnesses’ views?

c) What is the link between the *formal agenda* and Socrates’ view on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι (that is, how does the *formal agenda* lead to something along the lines of Socrates’ claim on ἀδικεῖν and ἀδικεῖσθαι)?

However, these questions – which are in fact the crux of Plato’s *Gorgias* but which the *Gorgias*, in a typical platonic manner, does not get to discuss (so that in a way it “beats around the bush”) – must be left for another occasion.

⁷⁹ Is there a binding “middle-voice” view of Socratic persuasion? And what does one *see* when one sees things like this? What kind of “middle-voice” self-evidence can make ἀδικεῖσθαι preferable to ἀδικεῖν (being like the “*Anti-Archelaus*” preferable to being like *Archelaus*)?

Appendix I (to note 33)

On the Priamel, see notably F. W. BERGMANN, *La Priamèle dans les différentes littératures anciennes et modernes*, Strasbourg, Decker, 1868, O. CRUSIUS, Elegie, in: A. F. PAULY/G. WISSOWA (ed.), *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 5, Demogenes - Ephoroi, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1905, col. 2260-2303, in particular 2269ff., F. DORNSEIFF, *Pindars Stil*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1921, 97ff., H. FRÄNKEL, Eine Stileigenheit der frühgriechischen Literatur, *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, phil.-hist. Kl. (1924), 63-127, in particular 94 and 120ff. (= H. FRÄNKEL, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*. Literarische und philosophiegeschichtliche Studien, München, Beck, 1955, 1968³, 67ff., 90ff.), R. OEHLER, *Mythologische Exempla in der älteren griechischen Dichtung* (Diss. Basel), Aarau, Sauerländer & Co, 1925, 49f., 78, W. SCHADEWALDT, *Der Aufbau des Pindarischen Epinikion*, Halle (Saale), M. Niemeyer, 1928, H. FRÄNKEL, Review of W. Schadewaldt, *Der Aufbau des Pindarischen Epinikion*, *Gnomon* 6 (1930), 1-20, in particular 18ff., F. DORNSEIFF, *Die archaische Mythen erzählung*. Folgerungen aus dem homerischen Apollonhymnos, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1933, 3ff., 78ff., W. KRÖHLING, *Die Priamel (Beispielreihung) als Stilmittel in der griechisch-römischen Dichtung*, nebst einem Nachwort: Die altorientalische Priamel, Greifswald, Dallmeyer, 1935, C. M. BOWRA, *Greek Poetry from Alcman to Simonides*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936, 1961², 180ff., W. A. A. van OTTERLO, *Beschouwingen over het archaische element in den stijl van Aeschylus* (Diss. Leiden), Utrecht, Broekhoff, 1937, 11ff., 60ff., E. DRERUP, Der homerische Apollonhymnus. Eine methodologische Studie, *Mnemosyne* 5 (1937), 81-134, in particular 117, V. GORDZIEJEV, De Prologo Acharnensium, *Eos* 39 (1938), 321-350, in particular 328ff., W. A. A. van OTTERLO, Beitrag zur Kenntnis der griechischen Priamel, *Mnemosyne* 8 (1940), 145-176, E. FRAENKEL (ed.), *Aeschylus Agamemnon*, vol. II, Commentary on 1-1055, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950, repr. 1974, on 899-902, D. PAGE, *Sappho and Alcaeus*. An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, 55f., F. DORNSEIFF, *Kleine Schriften 1: Antike und alter Orient: Interpretationen*, Leipzig, Koehler & Amelang, 1959, 379ff., H. FRIIS JOHANSEN, *General Reflection in Tragic Rhesis*. A Study of Form, Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1959, 18f., 42ff., E. R. DODDS, *Euripides Bacchae*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1960, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, on 902-911, E. L. BUNDY, *Studia Pindarica*, op. cit., 5ff., H. FRÄNKEL, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*. Eine Geschichte der griechischen Epik, Lyrik und Prosa bis zur Mitte des fünften Jahrhunderts, München, Beck, 1962, 1976³, 211f., 524, 538f., 556, U. SCHMID, *Die Priamel der Werte im Griechischen von Homer bis Paulus*, Wiesbaden, O. Harrassowitz, 1964, C. M. BOWRA, *Pindar*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, 199ff., J. A. LA RUE, *Sophocles' Deianeira*. A Study in Dramatic Ambiguity, Diss. Berkeley, University of California, 1965, 30f, 315, E. B. HOLTSMARK, On "Choephoroi" 585-651, *The Classical World* 59 (1966), 215-216, G. WILLS, The Sapphic "Umwertung aller Werte", *The American Journal of Philology* 88 (1967), 434-442, J. DIGGLE, Notes on the Heraclidae of Euripides, *The Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972), 241-245, in particular 243f., T. KRISCHER, Die logischen Formen der Priamel, *Grazer Beiträge* 2 (1974), 79-91, G.

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Can one be miserable without knowing it?

The problem of ψυχὴ ὕπουλος in Plato's *Gorgias*

Hélder Telo *

“(…) et ego nolo fallere me ipsum,
ne mentiatur iniquitas mea sibi.”
A. Augustinus, *Confessiones*, 1.5.6

People often see themselves as being miserable or unhappy. But is it possible that they are miserable at a given moment and do not realize it? Can we lack insight into our own state? Can we think we are happy or are in the course of becoming happy and yet be in a completely different state? Can there be a latent misery, a misery that determines us and at the same time is in some way hidden from us? How is such a thing possible?

This latent misery is something Polus ironically alludes to in the *Gorgias*. After describing how Archelaus rose to power, Polus says: “And after doing these injustices, it escaped his notice (ἔλαθεν ἑαυτόν) that he had become utterly miserable (ἀθλιώτατος), and he didn’t regret it.”¹ Although Polus’ intention is to mock Socrates’ position, he expresses this position in a very precise manner. According to Socrates, we can find ourselves in a bad state or condition without noticing it. We may be miserable without knowing it. This is very closely connected with the concept Socrates uses in 482b2 of a festering soul (ψυχὴ ὕπουλος). It expresses the existence

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¹ 471b. My translations and paraphrases will be based on Irwin’s translation (T. IRWIN, *Plato - Gorgias*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), with some modifications.

of a latent badness or evil in the soul. This badness or evil can later manifest itself, just as a fit or a periodical attack (a καταβολή, as Socrates says in 519a4) of this illness that hides in our soul, but for the moment it produces no noticeable effects.²

The problem that concerns us here is precisely the possibility and meaning of a latent misery. We will see what Plato's *Gorgias* tells us about the possibility of one being miserable without knowing it and what this possibility corresponds to.

1. The notions of “happiness” and “misery”

The terms “happiness” and “misery” are at first very vague and we have to consider the precise meaning they have for Plato. We find several terms in the *Gorgias* to express the idea of happiness: εὐδαιμονία, μακάριος εἶναι, εὖ πράττειν. However, these terms in early Greek literature and in the colloquial language do not have exactly the same meaning as the term “happiness” has for us. While nowadays the adjective “happy” tends to denote primarily a state of fruition and fulfillment, εὐδαίμων (and even μακάριος) can refer to material prosperity or to anything enviable in human life (being honorable, admirable, having a good family, being talented). As for the expression εὖ πράττειν, it generally means “to fare well” or “to have good fortune”. What predominates in the Greek concept of happiness is therefore this idea of being fortunate and possessing what is required to lead a good life.

As for the notion of misery, it is expressed in the *Gorgias* by notions such as ἀθλιότης, μοχθηρῶς ζῆν and κάκιστα (or κακῶς) ζῆν.³ These expressions qualify someone who is unfortunate and in a bad or pitiful condition. It may refer to one's physical condition or to one's life in general. The situation one is in is undesirable – so much so that it may even be better to die than to live, as Callicles says of someone who suffers injustices and is like a slave.⁴

Thus, what is primarily at stake both in the notion of “happiness” and in the notion of misery is the quality of life. We are always in passionate pursuit of the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) and we are very concerned about what we achieve in any moment and

² Socrates speaks of a καταβολή in the context of the πόλις, but this context is parallel to the one of ψυχή and has a similar structure, as we shall see.

³ Ἀθλιότης and its cognates appear throughout the text. As for the other expressions, see 478e, 505a, 512b.

⁴ 483b.

what our prospects are.⁵ If what we have achieved and what we hope to achieve is bad, then we are not faring well – our life is miserable. On the contrary, if what we have achieved is good, then we are faring well and our life is happy.⁶

Happiness and misery are therefore connected with how our life is going – a life about which we are extremely passionate. Now, these are very formal definitions and they can lead to very different concrete identifications of what it means to be happy or miserable. The text presents two very different perspectives about what it means to fare well and to fare badly. From Callicles' standpoint, it is the quantity of pleasure and pain that determines how our life is going. Socrates, however, distinguishes happiness and misery from the quantity of pleasure and pain we have. From his standpoint, it is rather justice and soundness of mind (excellence in general) that make us live a good life. This diversity of perspectives is very significant. We can have different identifications of what is good and bad in life (what makes a life good or bad), and our identifications may be right or wrong. We may discover in retrospect that our identification was inadequate or others may see that it is so (just as we may see that the others have a very distorted identification of what matters in life). This means that our life or someone else's life may be seen by others as ridiculous, dishonorable or pitiful – or it may be seen as admirable and enviable. Indeed, others may see our life as miserable while we think it is happy and vice versa. Likewise, we may come to realize that a situation we once regarded as miserable or happy was in fact just the opposite.

In truth, the diagnosis of our life and how it is going is very complex. This makes such terms as “happy” and “miserable” very ambiguous, in so far as they can refer to different things. Firstly, they may express how we think our life is going or how we feel our life is going. As beings deeply concerned with what has become and what will become of us, we have always some sort of diagnosis of how things are going and this diagnosis is often expressed in emotions. In this sense, to be happy or to be miserable is not something that has nothing to do with us, something that does not affect us in any way, but it is an expression of how our life affects us.

⁵ See in particular 468b.

⁶ The matter of our prospects is very important – so much so that if we do not have any good prospects, then it may be better for us to die (death may be desirable in comparison with what it means to live and to face how far we are from what we are pursuing). This happens because of our extreme concern about ourselves and our life – a concern that permanently raises the question whether it is worth living or not.

Secondly, the terms “happy” and “miserable” can also qualify how our life is going from an objective point of view or from the point of view of an observer. In other words, we may think our life is going well, we may think we have many good things, but we may either not have them or they may not be as good as we think. In this sense, a different and better standpoint could discern what our condition truly is. Someone else might perceive our state better than us or we might discover later that what we once thought was good or bad was precisely the opposite. Even if there is no such point of view knowing in what condition we are, we can imagine a perfect point of view, which would exactly know how well or badly our life is going. Thus, even if we are glad or sad with what we have, there may be a different (and better) perspective that sees this is not as good or as bad as we think. This perspective would perceive that we are happy or miserable, even if we cannot appreciate our condition.

All things considered, the Greek terms εὐδαιμονία and ἀθλιότης refer primarily to such an objective evaluation of how our life is going. They designate a successful or unsuccessful life, no matter what one’s state of mind may be. This being so, it is easy to conceive the possibility of us being miserable without knowing it. If we identify “happiness” and “misery” with what is a good or a bad condition from an objective standpoint, then our latent misery depends on the possibility of us being in a bad condition without having any notion of it. But how is this possible?

2. Κάλλος κακῶν ὕπουλον: the formal notion of latent badness or evil

The notion of latent misery is grounded on the notion of latent badness and we can better understand the latter if we consider a concept used by Plato in the *Gorgias* – namely, the aforementioned concept of “festering soul” (ψυχὴ ὕπουλος). This concept indicates that there is some badness or evil in such a soul, but a badness or evil that is hidden. In its proper sense, the adjective ὕπουλος refers to a festering or purulent scar, i.e. a sore that seems to be healed and is not, a sore that extends under the surface of the flesh. In the later Hippocratic text *De Medico*, for instance, we find the distinction between four kinds of sores (ἔλκεα), based on their progression (πορεία). The sores progress 1) in the direction of height (εἰς ὕψος), 2) in the direction of width (εἰς πλάτος), 3) towards the “natural junction” of our body, i.e. towards cicatrization (ἐς ξύμφυσιν) – and also 4) in the direction of depth (ἐς βάθος). As an

illustration of the latter, the author mentions “fistulous sores, those that are ὑπουλα (under the surface of a tissue or under a sore) and those hollowed out from inside”.⁷ So the adjective ὑπουλος describes sores that progress in the depths of some being. There is a change and a progression of some evil, but this happens under the surface, under the flesh or the skin. The skin or the flesh may or may not remain unaffected and may hide the evil away from our eyes. It may seem to us that everything is well and the opposite may rather be the case.

This contrast between surface and depth (between appearance and inner being) is essential to the meaning of ὑπουλος and is the basis for its figurative or metaphorical sense – a sense that is relatively common. In Greek texts we find the adjective qualifying not only the body, but also things like the good order of a state (εὐνομία), the horse of Troy (which was full of enemies within), someone’s quiet or peace (ἡσυχία), an oracle (μάντευμα), the mud at the edge of a riverbank (α τέλμα) and even persons.⁸ In these cases, the adjective qualifies something as being unsound, hollow, unreal, treacherous, false or deceitful – something that is not what it seems or what it claims to be, something that deceives us, that presents itself as something good, beautiful or safe, all the while hiding away the evil that it brings. However, it is only a matter of time until this evil is released upon us. The badness or evil present in what is ὑπουλος does not remain out of our sight forever. It is only cumulating before appearing, or waiting to reveal itself as such. And so, besides the contrast between surface and depth, appearance and inner being, we also have the contrast between the immediate impression we have of a given being and what will later result from contact with it (from approaching it or exposing ourselves to it).

All these contrasts can be clearly seen in an expression we find in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*. After discovering that he has murdered his father and married his mother, Oedipus describes his situation before this discovery as a κάλλος κακῶν ὑπουλον (a beauty festering with evils).⁹ His situation was indeed noble and impressive. He had saved Thebes from the Sphinx, he was king, he had a wife and

⁷ See *De Medico* 11.1-6. My translation is loosely based on P. POTTER, *Hippocrates*, vol. 8, Cambridge (MA.) & London, Harvard University Press, 1995, 295ff.

⁸ See, respectively, THUCYDIDES, *Historiae*, 8.64, SOPHOCLES, fr. 1105, DEMOSTHENES, *De corona*, 307, PAUSANIAS, *Graeciae descriptio*, 3.7.3, PLUTARCHUS, *Romulus*, 18.4 and MENANDER, *Sententiae*, 587.

⁹ V. 1396. I follow a common interpretation of the expression, but some defend that κακῶν goes with κάλλος and has the sense of “a superlative evil”. For more on this, see e. g. J. BOLLACK, *L’Oedipe roi de Sophocle. Le texte et ses interprétations*, vol. 4, Lille, Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1990, *ad loc.*

four children. Yet, all this was hiding away many evils: his evil deeds (or, as he describes, “the most shameful deeds among men”) and the consequences that would result from them.¹⁰ When these deeds were discovered, the situation became absolutely unbearable for him: he blinded himself, for he did not want to see his evils, and went into exile. When he justifies taking his own sight, he says that it is “sweet when our mind dwells outside its evils”.¹¹ This sweetness is what characterizes his situation before finding out who he is and what his real condition is. But all the evil was already done, it was already present and, at a certain point, it was even manifesting itself through the plague. The κάλλος (the beauty) was already infected before the evils of Oedipus’ life revealed themselves.

It is something of the kind that according to Socrates seems to happen with the soul. But before considering this, it is important to bear in mind some aspects of the phenomenon Plato calls ψυχή. The “soul” is defined as something that transcends the body (even if it is normally enclosed in it) and also as that which guides the body, as well as our whole life. In order to guide our life, it must have a relation to it, and this relation to life is not something extrinsic to the soul. The essence of the soul as we experience it is this relation we have with our own life. We are aware of different beings, we are aware of ourselves, we are concerned about ourselves and we must intervene decisively in our own “destiny” (in what will become of us). In this sense, the soul is constantly challenged and forced to act. This allows us to understand how Socrates speaks of a ψυχή ὑπουργός.

The soul is affected by its actions, each action determines not only the course of its life, but also the soul itself as the agent.¹² In other words, it is not as if the soul were indifferent as regards its way of acting. There are ways of acting that are better and ways of acting that are worse – and these ways of acting reflect a certain disposition of the soul. This corresponds to the notions of excellence or perversion. We will return to this afterwards. Excellence is connected with justice or righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), soundness of mind or temperance (σωφροσύνη), courage (ἀνδρεία) and wisdom (φρόνησις). These are the perfect modes of acting. Yet we often miss the mark and act in a defective manner. This is very important in the *Gorgias*, where the emphasis is put on the unjust or unrighteous action, but also on

¹⁰ V. 1408: “αἰσχιστ’ ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔργα”.

¹¹ V. 1389f: “τὸ γὰρ / τὴν φροντίδ’ ἔξω τῶν κακῶν οἰκεῖν γλυκύ.”

¹² There is this kind of double effect of each action, which is not exactly a double effect, because one’s soul and one’s life are in a way the same thing.

lack of restraint. These correspond to ways of being with exterior manifestations – especially injustice, which may manifest itself in the most hideous crimes (as Polus proves when he tells Archelaus’ story).¹³ Indeed, our life is made up of interactions, we are members of a πόλις and our actions often affect others. This is placed at the center of the discussion. We may injury others in many different ways and this has consequences not only for them, but also for us. We are the cause of evil, but also suffer from it. Socrates even speaks about injustice as a disease: something that infects us. It is bad for us and if it remains with us, if we are not chastised, it is precisely what makes our soul ὕπουλος – i.e., festering, purulent.¹⁴

As we said, the discussion is mainly focused on justice and injustice, but there are also some very important references to the alternative between σωφροσύνη and ἀκολασία. Socrates compares an unrestrained soul to a perforated vessel. He qualifies it as σαθρά (a word that means unsound or, if said of a vessel, cracked).¹⁵ Before that, when talking about an unjust and impious soul, Socrates says it is σαθρά and also μὴ ὑγιής (which has the meaning of “not healthy”, but also “in bad condition”, “broken” or even “unsound in mind”).¹⁶ All this is included in the idea of ψυχὴ ὕπουλος. It is a soul that seems to be in good condition, seems to be leading a good life and taking care of itself in an appropriate manner – and yet it is crooked (the word is σκολιός, which means both bent or curved and unjust).¹⁷ It is failing its purpose, it is neglecting itself and conducting itself in a bad manner. There is no immediate recognition of this – although it may be only a matter of time.¹⁸

Through all this the parallel with the body is always present. Not only the adjective ὕπουλος comes from the domain of the body (being first applied to sores), but there are constant references to injustice as a disease and there is also the question of this disease becoming chronic. Furthermore, Socrates talks of a καταβολή (519a4), i.e. a fit or an attack of the latent disease, as for instance a periodic attack of fever –

¹³ 471a ff.

¹⁴ Socrates even says that injustice is a disease that, if left untreated, will become chronic (ἐγγρονισθέν), so that the soul may even become incurable (see 480b). In this case, the badness associated with injustice will become inextirpable and the soul will be fully exposed to it. Before reaching that point, however, there is something that can be done – and it is this that renders the question of latent badness particularly poignant for us.

¹⁵ See 493e.

¹⁶ 479b-c.

¹⁷ See 525a.

¹⁸ If it continues in the same manner and does not correct its conduct, the evil in itself may well expand more and more, become manifest and attack the soul (just as is suggested in the passage in which Socrates talks about a καταβολή in the domain of the πόλις). The soul will then find itself under siege – namely, under the siege of its own faults, when it thought everything was going well.

and we can also identify something similar in the domain of the ψυχή, when its badness becomes manifest to itself. However, more than the language connection, there are several passages where there is an explicit comparison, what can be easily understood, for the body is a domain where we can see this formal structure of a κάλλος κακῶν ὑπουλον (of a latent badness or evil) more clearly.

In 464a ff., Socrates compares the good condition (εὐεξία) of the body with the good condition of the soul. He speaks of the possibility of a condition that is apparently good but is not (δοκοῦσα εὐεξία, οὔσα δ' οὐ). The body may appear to be in good shape, healthy, vigorous, and yet be in a decaying state, in bad shape, bad condition. One may not know the condition of one's body or of someone else's body. Only a doctor or a gymnastics trainer would notice (αἰσθάνεσθαι) that it is in bad condition. They have a different and much more keen kind of perception. They have a τέχνη and a τέχνη is an access to things that is παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις, as Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics*.¹⁹ In comparison, our normal αἴσθησις is not so well developed. This lack of acuity is very important and we consider it with more detail below. For now what matters is how this opposition of a good condition of the body and a condition that only appears to be good is also transposed to the soul. Here too there may be a false appearance of being in a good condition, something that hides the real condition we are in.

When Socrates speaks of one of the arts that take care of the body, cosmetics, he also gives pertinent indications regarding this parallel with the soul. He says that cosmetics make “people assume a beauty which is not their own” (ἀλλότριον κάλλος) and neglect “the beauty of their own which would come through gymnastics”.²⁰ This is very relevant. We can not only miss the disease or bad condition of the body, but we can also hide it behind an exterior beauty, completely blocking the manifestation of the real condition of the body. The same happens with the soul (i.e. with our life, the way we lead it, our actions, what becomes of us). We may hide it behind an exterior beauty which is not its own, but something artificial, which we mistake for its real condition.²¹

¹⁹ 981b14.

²⁰ 465b.

²¹ According to Socrates, rhetoric and sophistry do something of the kind – and also the arts in general. But there may be many other ways of doing it, of disguising our condition and deceiving ourselves and others.

Another important aspect of the comparison with the body comes to light when Socrates speaks of the jury composed of children, that has to judge the doctor while the cook prosecutes him.²² The cook fills us with food and pleasure, but this ends up destroying our body.²³ It is a satiety that brings disease (πλησμονή νόσον φέρουσα).²⁴ The doctor, on the contrary, causes us to suffer, although this is beneficial for us. What matters is that for children or for foolish men what seems to be good is actually bad and vice versa. There is a superficial diagnosis of what is good and bad.

The comparison with the body is also used when Socrates speaks of the faults (ἁμαρτήματα) of the body and of paying what is just (i.e. suffering punishment, δίκην δίδοναι) for them. In those situations one must subject the body to treatments like burning or cutting. Socrates says that people may want to avoid this because of the pain, but, if they do, it will make their life more miserable. The same applies to the soul. One has to pay what is just *sc.* suffer punishment for one's faults (one's acts of injustice) and this will make one's soul better and one's situation less miserable.²⁵

These are some of the main aspects of the comparison between body and soul in the *Gorgias*. In both domains we can speak of a latent badness – a badness that can present itself as its precise opposite. Both in the body and in the soul we can talk of a κάλλος κακῶν ὕπουλον.

Yet, the comparisons in *Gorgias* that allow us to better understand what happens with our soul are not limited to the body. There is also a very significant comparison with the πόλις.²⁶ This is regarded as a multiplicity of ψυχαί, in heaps (ψυχαὶ ἄθροαι), somehow interconnected, forming one being or one organism.²⁷ One could say the πόλις is a body of souls. What does this organism then have in common with the ψυχή, according to the *Gorgias*? Socrates says that one can fill the πόλις with everything that is enjoyable and satisfies the πόλις' desires. This will make the πόλις swell (οἰδεῖν) and will also make it ὕπουλος (festering, purulent). It is something of the kind that Socrates says Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades and Themistocles did. They

²² 521e ff.

²³ As Socrates says (see 518c), it destroys the ἀρχαῖαι σάρκες – the original flesh, the flesh we initially had, before we started attending to the body.

²⁴ 518d.

²⁵ See 479a-c.

²⁶ We have thus three levels (the level of the body, of the soul and of the πόλις) and they mirror each other. They have a similar structure and reveal something about each other. Often the images that are essential to refer how the three are constituted are taken from the corporeal level, but the affinity between the body, the soul and the πόλις also works the other way around (for instance when Socrates speaks of ἁμαρτήματα of the body or paying what is just *sc.* suffering punishment for them).

²⁷ Cp. 501d.

filled the πόλις with ships, walls, dockyards, etc., and this made the πόλις richer, better able to satisfy desires. So the πόλις become less σώφρων. And because of this it is inflicted with a latent badness or evil – a badness or evil that Socrates describes as a disease (ἀσθένεια). Socrates then prophesizes that this will later cause a crisis (a fit or attack, a καταβολή). This crisis will come many years after the actions of Pericles and the others, who are responsible for it. In fact, from the standpoint of Plato and the listeners of the *Gorgias*, this political crisis has already come and they know it. Athens lost the Peloponnesian War and is a shadow of its former self. But from the standpoint of the people in the dialogue, it is not certain it will come (it is even rather improbable). Socrates, however, says it will come and also says that people will not see it coming. Everything will appear to be fine, in good condition. Moreover, people will blame those present at the time of the καταβολή. They will have no insight not only into the latent evil, but also into the manifestation of it. They will interpret it all wrong.²⁸

Something of the kind happens with the soul which is ὕψυλος. Its injustice and its badness in general constitute a kind of disease that has no immediate manifestation. However, this description in bodily terms of what happens with the soul is not absolutely clear, and we have to consider what it exactly means. Of what disease of the soul are we precisely talking about? What exactly is a ψυχὴ ὕψυλος?

In order to answer this question, we have to consider two things. First, we have to consider more exactly what the goodness and the badness of the soul are. Then, we will have to see how it is that what happens with our soul can go unnoticed – and what normally determines the diagnosis of our soul and also of how well or badly our life is going.

3. What constitutes goodness and badness in the soul

Before anything else, it is important to bear in mind that the terms ἀγαθόν and κακόν do not have an intrinsic moral connotation in Greek. Their meaning is primarily functional. A good thing is something serviceable and a bad thing is something useless. Likewise, a good person is someone able to fulfill his functions in

²⁸ For all this, see 516e ff.

society (and primarily the political and military functions), whereas a bad person is useless or even detrimental to the others. There were, however, many developments that brought a moral value to these terms – so much so that in the *Gorgias* we see Plato’s endeavor to show how the meaning of these terms is primarily or preeminently moral (especially when applied to the soul).

The terms good and bad have different applications in the context of the *Gorgias*. Firstly, they both qualify objects or things we can achieve through actions. Secondly, they apply to the value of an action in itself (a just action is a good action, an unjust action is a bad action). Thirdly, they can be said of the soul itself. So how is this *πολλαχῶς λέγεσθαι* of the terms good and bad to be understood?

We will be able to bring some order to this multiplicity of meanings if we consider the nature of our soul more closely. There are several important aspects that are emphasized during the discussions in the *Gorgias* and we have to see how they are linked to each other.

First of all, the soul is not regarded as something simple. It is in itself a multiplicity of elements that are interconnected in some manner. These elements are of different kinds. The soul is a multiplicity of different desires, a multiplicity of pleasures and pains, and also a multiplicity of beliefs, judgments or claims of knowledge (of *δόξαι*, *πίστεις* or instances of *οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι*). All this is present in the soul and it is not something incidental, to which it is indifferent; the soul is rather the interaction between these elements and what results from this interaction.

Now, given the fact that the soul is a multiplicity of this kind, it is always articulated in some manner. The different elements that compose the soul must interact and this interaction is subject to two extreme possibilities: they may go well together, work together in an harmonious way, or they may oppose each other and start conflicts. These two extreme possibilities correspond to a good and a bad soul (*χρηστή* or *μοχθηρά*), a soul possessing excellence (*ἀρετή*) or a soul possessing badness or perversion (*κακία*).²⁹

Socrates explains this by comparing the soul with the work of craftsmen like the painter, the builder and the shipwright. He says that craftsmen do not do what they do at random (*εἰκῇ*), but they have something in view (*ἀποβλέπων πρὸς τι*), they want their products to acquire some form (*εἰδός τι*). And so, “each of them arranges in a

²⁹ For these oppositions, see 504a and 504e.

structure (εἰς τάξιν τινά) whatever he arranges, and compels one thing to be fitting (πρέπον εἶναι) and suited (ἀρμόττειν) to another”.³⁰ The objective is to compose a whole that has a structure or order. It is exactly the same thing that doctors and gymnastic-trainers try to do with our bodies. And it is the same thing that we must try to do with our soul. The multiplicity of elements in our soul is not supposed to be at random. These elements should achieve some form, some structure, they should have order – and this requires them to be fitting and suited to each other.

This means that not all articulations or interactions in this multiplicity are equal. Some of them bring order, others bring disorder. In the final myth, Socrates speaks about a soul that is straight and a soul that is crooked. He also speaks about disproportion (ἀσυνμετρία) and ugliness or shamefulness (αἰσχρότης).³¹ This means that some articulations are not adequate, they bring the elements into conflict and disfigure the soul. It becomes limited in its own capabilities, it becomes sick and weak.³²

Socrates gives two main illustrations of such a state of conflict inside a soul. The first one is that of a soul with no restraint, that believes this to be a good condition and so is constantly pulled by desires and is in a constant cycle of suffering and pleasure. In this case there is no stability, no self-control, no retention of one’s feelings. The soul is in a constant flux, always in a precarious position.³³ Secondly, Socrates also speaks of how the δόξαι of a soul (its judicative decisions) can be incoherent or contradict each other. This is particularly so if our δόξαι follow our desires and try to legitimate them.³⁴

We see then how desires and beliefs can distort our soul and introduce disorder in us. We can strive to fill ourselves with pleasure over and over again, we can be dissatisfied over and over again – and thus we will always be in constant and intense movements, very far from a state of ἀντάρκεια, where we would not need anything.³⁵

³⁰ See 503d ff.

³¹ 525a.

³² It is exactly in this way that the stranger in the *Sophist* defines the disease of the soul. It is a civil war (στάσις) between the elements of the soul. Cp. *Sophist* 228a-b.

³³ See 493d ff.

³⁴ This is the situation Callicles is in, according to Socrates. He predicts in 482a-c that Callicles will be discordant with himself and contradict himself, by simultaneously holding contradictory beliefs, and in the following discussion Socrates tries to show how it is precisely so. He elicits from Callicles admissions (i.e. he shows how they are accepted by him, somehow contained in his tacit views) that refute Callicles’ own declared views.

³⁵ For the notion of “not needing anything” (μηδενὸς δεῖσθαι), see 492e ff.

This state of constant pursuit is opposed to the state of justice or straightness and soundness of mind or temperance. In the latter, the soul controls itself, brings order and harmony to itself, restrains the desires that would disturb the structure of the soul and develops the beliefs or even the knowledge that would allow it to conduct itself more properly in life. Such a soul has reached its ἀρετή, i.e. its excellence or its most perfect way of being. It brings itself, through justice and soundness of mind, to the best conformation or the best condition it can have.

This description gives us some very important glimpses into what constitutes the goodness or badness of our soul. But the matter is more complicated and there are still some aspects that are also very important and to which we must pay some attention.

What we have seen up until now does not consider the particular movement of the soul and how each of its moments and their articulation are always a part of this particular movement. This movement is the pursuit of the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) – not any good in particular, not all goods together, but that which is superlatively good, that which absolutely satisfies our soul, so that we achieve a state where we do not lack anything. As is said in the text, every step we take is taken in this direction, and when we stand still, we do it also because of τὸ ἀγαθόν.³⁶ Τὸ ἀγαθόν is the target we always follow. This is what we really want, this is our soul's innermost desire. Everything else we desire is only desired insofar as it contributes in some way to our pursuit of τὸ ἀγαθόν. Indeed, we have (or at least we seem to have) no direct and immediate relation to τὸ ἀγαθόν. Our life is very complex and we must pursue many things in order to improve our condition. If we make our life better, we come closer to τὸ ἀγαθόν, i.e. to the object of our desire. If not, we become further apart from it.

This pursuit of τὸ ἀγαθόν has a formal character. Different things may appear to be τὸ ἀγαθόν and it is always a problem to identify what exactly τὸ ἀγαθόν is (i.e. what it is we really want). It is even a problem if there is something that corresponds to it. However, the soul usually does not face these problems. On the contrary, the soul is aware of many things and in normal circumstances it has somehow identified what is the best. Something seems to it to be the best (δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστον εἶναι) and this is what the soul pursues. Yet, this identification may be wrong. As Socrates

³⁶ 468b: “τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἄρα διώκοντες καὶ βαδίζομεν ὅταν βαδίζωμεν, οἴομενοι βέλτιον εἶναι, καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον ἔσταμεν ὅταν ἐστῶμεν, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα, τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ: ἢ οὐ;”

says, if someone has no intelligence (νοῦν μὴ ἔχων) and does what seems to him to be the best, he will not achieve what we want.³⁷ His soul will miss the target.

Now, if we recall what we just said about the soul being a multiplicity, we have to add that all the moments that constitute the soul are permeated by this tension towards τὸ ἀγαθόν or this desire for τὸ ἀγαθόν. They are all integrated into this fundamental movement of the soul and subordinated to it. All desires and all beliefs are directed towards τὸ ἀγαθόν and their harmony must contribute to it, just as their disharmony must be detrimental to the soul achieving τὸ ἀγαθόν. Otherwise it would be indifferent for us if the soul was good or bad. Yet, it is not. The existence of order or disorder in our soul is decisive in our pursuit of τὸ ἀγαθόν. In other words, τὸ ἀγαθόν is not something completely outside ourselves with which we come into contact no matter who we are and what our condition is. On the contrary, our ἀρετή is absolutely required in order for us to achieve τὸ ἀγαθόν. There is a relation between the goodness of the soul and τὸ ἀγαθόν, although the text is not clear about whether the goodness of the soul is enough to achieve τὸ ἀγαθόν or not (or even if this goodness of the soul is τὸ ἀγαθόν).

What the text is clear about, though, is the fact that our soul is intrinsically dynamic. We are always pursuing τὸ ἀγαθόν and this forces us to act. We have to intervene in reality, we have to determine our own body and we even have to determine our own mind. With this we satisfy our desires and create new ones, we alter, correct or develop our δόξαι and our beliefs. This means that the elements that compose us are constantly changing and constantly assuming different degrees of importance. As a result, the articulation of these elements also changes and it can change in a very radical manner. What was an ordered soul can become disordered and vice versa. A sound mind can become unrestrained, an ignorant mind can become wiser. The modifications can be more or less intense. It all depends on our actions, because what we do determines us. It is not something that only affects the outside. An unjust or unrestrained deed leaves a mark, as does a restrained or just act. This is why Socrates, in the final myth, says: “Everything is clear in the soul when it is stripped of the body, what belongs by nature and what has happened to it, all that the man acquired in his soul from each of his practices.”³⁸ Indeed, everything we do has an effect upon ourselves, everything leaves a mark (just as the body has the marks of

³⁷ See in particular 466e.

³⁸ 524d.

what we did and what we suffered). This mark is not something inside us that completely disappears and never has any effect upon us. It is rather something that shapes the articulation of our soul and therefore affects all further actions and all further moments of our being, in so far as these actions and these moments of our being are expressions of the articulation of our soul. This is decisive for our main problem.

In sum, the soul (or the inner articulation of the multiplicity that constitutes the soul) has an historical character, it is determined by its past actions and it has a future in which it has to determine itself. In this sense, the soul is always responsible for its inner order or disorder. Desires, pleasures, pains, beliefs – everything is in flux. And so the soul can always become more crooked or more straight – at least while it is not entirely crooked or entirely straight.³⁹ We may not be aware of these alterations and their meaning, but we are always the result of them.

All this gives us a good picture of how we are constituted and how we can speak of goodness and badness of the soul – even if normally we do not perceive any of this. The problem now is how can it be possible that we do not perceive this? How can we ignore ourselves to such an extent?

4. Lack of acuity as the condition of possibility of the soul's latent badness (and of its latent misery)

After looking at the nature of badness in the soul, it is now time to consider the limitations of our access that are responsible for our being oblivious to this badness and which thus make the latent misery possible. The latent badness or evil is indeed something we normally do not have any notion of. It is not noticed or perceived.⁴⁰ There is an ἀπειρία (an inexperience, a not being familiarized with the being in question) which prevents us from seeing how it is faring.⁴¹ This is also what is

³⁹ In these extreme cases there is perhaps no chance of the inner articulation of the soul changing. Socrates speaks about the soul becoming incurable (ἀνίατος – see 480b and 525c). One could also think that a soul that has achieved absolute ἀρετή (assuming this is possible) would also be entirely safe from changing its articulation. Socrates, however, does not speak explicitly about it in the *Gorgias*.

⁴⁰ It is the same situation people in Athens find themselves in, according to Socrates (518e4 f.): they do not notice or perceive (οὐκ αἰσθάνονται) the bad state the πόλις is in – or as he says, they do not see it is swelling and festering (οἶδεῖ καὶ ὑπολόγος ἔστιν).

⁴¹ The term ἀπειρία appears in 518d1.

expressed by the prefix ὑπο- in ὑπουλος: there is something underneath the wound, the scar or the skin – something we cannot perceive, something we do not notice. It is so because our access is superficial and intrinsically limited.

It is something of the kind that happens to us, to our very soul. There is a badness or evil that festers underneath the access we normally have to ourselves, underneath the way we normally perceive ourselves. Yet how can a badness be present in us, how can it grow in us without us knowing anything about it? This badness is not something that does not concern us, that does not touch us, something distant, that affects other beings. It is rather something extremely close to us, it afflicts the inner core of our being – and yet we are oblivious to it. How can this be? The reason for this is the radical lack of acuity of our inner eye, especially as regards our own being.

We must then consider this lack of acuity as presented in the *Gorgias*. There are two oppositions that are particularly significant to this question: the opposition between δοκεῖν and εἶναι, and the opposition between πίστις and εἰδέναι. Let us start with the difference between δοκεῖν and εἶναι or, as we might translate it, the difference between semblance and being.

This difference is particularly clear if we consider the kind of access we have to others. It is in this domain that we are normally aware of the difference between semblance and reality – i.e. the difference between pose, pretence and appearance, and what one really is, one's "true colors". In line with this, Socrates distinguishes the hiding of the injustices we have carried out from bringing them to light (εἰς τὸ φανερόν ἄγειν).⁴² Within certain limits, we can hide things from others. They have no immediate access to what happens inside us. But we can also reveal it (even if in a limited fashion).

This possibility of hiding or revealing what we have done and how good or bad we are is also what determines the conditions of the eschatological judgment (the judgment on the whole of our life) in the final part of the text.⁴³ At first, humans were judged while they were still alive and dressed. Because of this they were able to disguise the condition of their soul (whether it was upright or crooked) with their garments (i.e. with other factors, related to appearance, which function as a screen concealing the soul's true nature). As a result, the judgment they got was inadequate and did not correspond to what they really did. Because of this, Zeus changed the

⁴² 480c.

⁴³ 524a ff.

conditions of the judgment and made them be judged after their deaths and when they were naked, so that the judge could look at the soul of the one being judged and see what he had really done and the condition he was in.

Hiding and revealing something are thus possibilities of our relations to others. But this is also a possibility of our relation to ourselves – of the kind of access we have to ourselves. We can hide away from ourselves or bring what we are to light, in order for us to confront it. This is so because our soul is something very difficult to determine. It is not like the other beings we normally see or come into contact with – not even like beings we can easily think about. The ψυχή is something invisible and normally hidden behind appearances. It resembles the interior of the body, which we normally do not see unless we cut through it, through the surface, the skin. But what can cut through the surface of the soul? This is not easy to answer. On the other hand, it is not as if we had no relation to ourselves, our life, and how it is going. Normally we judge ourselves and how our life is going. The problem, as we shall see, is that we judge by the outer garments of the soul (its possessions, its immediate affections, its pleasure and pain), and not by our inner and real being.

Thus, the difference between semblance and being (with the different kinds of access it corresponds to) makes possible the difference between knowing and not knowing the state we are in (if we are good or bad, happy or miserable). This is clearly a possibility in our relation with others. We are like the sailor who does not know if for the people he took safely across the sea it is better to live or to die.⁴⁴ He cannot immediately see the condition of their soul. Likewise, we may not know the value of the course of life we are in, of our actions and our life in general, if it is worth living or not. It may seem to be worth it and yet our true being, our true condition may escape us – at least for some time.

Now, we mentioned that there are two kinds of access to things in general (including ourselves), two ways of seeing things, corresponding to these two possibilities (semblance and being). This is more easily understood if we consider the difference between πίστις and εἰδέναι (i.e. between belief and knowledge) – a difference that is very important right from the start of the text and remains present in the rest of the dialogue.

⁴⁴ 511d ff.

This difference allows to explain how an orator is able to be persuasive about something without having a real understanding of what he is talking about. If his listeners had a perfect knowledge about the topic in question, he would not be able to persuade them without having a real knowledge about these things. But they do not have a perfect access to the topic of discussion. So the orator can persuade them and can instill in them the conviction that something is as he says, even if the listeners are not being really taught about the matter in question.⁴⁵

This is made very clear by the actual Gorgias in *Helen's Encomium*, when he says: “For if everyone, on every subject, possessed memory of the past and <understanding> of the present and foreknowledge of the future, speech would not be equally <powerful>; but as it is, neither remembering a past event nor investigating a present one nor prophesying a future one is easy, so that on most subjects most men make belief (δόξα) their mind’s adviser. But belief (δόξα), being slippery and unreliable, brings slippery and unreliable success to those who employ it.”⁴⁶ The listeners are thus characterized as having a δόξα that is slippery and unreliable (σφαλερὰ καὶ ἀβέβαιος), and this is something that also characterizes our regular access to beings. We do not understand them as what they really are, we have no perfect access to them. We could say that we have no knowledge of the nature of beings, of their true αἰτία (the true cause or true thing responsible for them), and we cannot give an account of them and what happens to them.⁴⁷ We lack insight into what beings are – and in particular into what the body and the soul are. This is why we are normally not qualified to intervene appropriately in these realities. We have no τέχνη, no knowledge by which we know what to do.

Yet, we usually do not regard our access to beings and to our life in general as deficient – as if we had absolutely no idea about what is going on. This is obvious if we consider the fact that we do not normally freeze and avoid any action. We act all the time and this means we have some idea of what we should do and how we should do it. Although we lack acuity in our access to beings, we do not see the lack of acuity as a lack of acuity. We interpret it rather as acuity. We believe we are aware of all this. We have πίστις. We do not know, but this does not mean that we do not decide,

⁴⁵ See 458e ff.

⁴⁶ GORGIAS, *Helenae encomium*, 11. I follow the translation in D. MACDOWELL, *Gorgias – Encomium of Helen*, Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 1982.

⁴⁷ This is what Socrates describes as the requirements for τέχνη – i.e. for a knowledge that is able to intervene appropriately in reality and change it for the better. See 465a.

do not determine things. Our access can be defined as οἶσθαι εἰδέναι. We think we know, no matter whether we know or do not know. We believe in things, they appear as true or false to us, we adhere fully to this or that interpretation, this or that argument, we believe this or that must be done. We have a δόξα – i.e. a version of things, a determination of what things are. This δόξα normally corresponds to a mere semblance – but this does not mean that it is recognized as such, i.e. as an access to what some given being appears to be. The δόξα sees itself as εἰδέναι, as a simple and perfect access to the being in question – and so it loses sight of the true being. It is detained in the apparent being, with full conviction of being in touch with reality. This is what constitutes our access as πίστις.

With this we can better understand why we are oblivious to the state or condition of our soul.⁴⁸ We do not know its nature, we have no notion of what is the true cause of what happens therein. We cannot account for its constitution and what it goes through (its παθήματα).⁴⁹ We are distant from ourselves, we see ourselves from afar. Yet, it is not as if we would admit that we have no notion of how our life is going, of what we are making of it. We normally have a diagnosis of how we are doing. We lose sight of the limitation of access that prevents us from noticing the badness that grows in our soul. We think we know our condition. We think it is good and we just have to continue – or it is not so good, but we know what should be done to improve it. We usually do not see our soul as afflicted by the evil resulting from our bad actions. At the most, we see the circumstances we fall into as bad. If these circumstances were to change, all problems would be solved. This means that we may be leading our life in the wrong way and think that we are doing the right thing.

This is what characterizes our access to ourselves as being an access based on mere conviction or belief and not an access based on knowledge. Yet a different (and difficult) question is what constitutes this πίστις. How is it possible that we think we know, when we do not? There is an answer (or at least a suggestion of an answer) in the *Gorgias* and we have to consider it in its main outlines.

Our natural standpoint is normally not concerned with its own acuity (or lack thereof), and it is also not concerned with understanding the nature of things – in particular the nature of our body and our soul. Yet, this standpoint is usually sure

⁴⁸ This is in fact not restricted to the soul. The same happens with the body and the πόλις. In all these cases we have a very limited access.

⁴⁹ These things are not manifest during life. Cp. 524d.

about what it should do in life. There is something that appears to us as the best thing to do – and this is determined by what is most immediate to us: our pleasure and our pain. In fact, all things are then seen in light of how they make us feel. Our affections determine our life in general and everything in it. The pleasure and pain we feel (as well as the desire to attain one and avoid the other) are precisely what makes us believe we know something and it also decides the content of our knowledge claims. We pay close attention to our feelings and they produce in us a kind of apparent knowledge.

We can understand this better if we consider what Plato says about the false τέχναι. Our apparent knowledge can indeed be developed through the occupations Socrates qualifies as “knacks” or “routines” (ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή).⁵⁰ These words refer to a long contact with something, seeing how it reacts in different situations. This is something Socrates also expresses several times with the verb στοχάζεσθαι (which here means “endeavor to make out”, “guess at”).⁵¹ One has no precise idea of how something is constituted and how it works, so one has to guess how it works and see what the result of this guess is. With time, this develops our perspective of something. But this “developed perspective” still only has eyes for pleasure and pain. It is an enlargement of the same limitation of perspective. We may have a very developed ability and still have no notion of what is going on with us and how this affects us: both in our body and in our soul. We have no real knowledge (εἰδέναι) and we do not search for it. We simply remain in a false perspective (in a domain of δόξα ψευδής).

Socrates develops this in 465d, when he attempts to distinguish τέχναι from ἐμπειρία (i.e. crafts that have real knowledge from knacks designed to increment pleasure). He speaks of a point of view that is not able to distinguish cookery from medicine. This standpoint uses the body as the rule (in the sense of a carpenter’s rule – στάθμη) and for such a standpoint everything is indistinguishable. It corresponds to Anaxagoras’ ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα ἦν – i.e. the state of confusion the universe was in before the intervention of intelligence (νοῦς).⁵² Now, it is something of the sort that happens with our natural standpoint (the non-technical or non-philosophical point of view). Although we see different things and there is no absolute indistinctness, we still cannot see many important (and many of the most important) distinctions of

⁵⁰ See 463a ff.

⁵¹ See 464c, 465a, 502e.

⁵² Cp. *Grg.* 465d5: “ὁμοῦ ἂν πάντα χρήματα ἐφύρετο ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”.

reality. We have a very imprecise standpoint. The most important determinations for us come from pleasure and pain or are related to them. This means that what lies beyond what we immediately feel or what is not important for it is somewhat indistinct for us.

This is particularly true regarding our soul – i.e. regarding our life, our awareness of things, of ourselves and of what we have to do. We have an access based on pleasure and pain and this is how we diagnose how we are doing. We do not know our nature, so we cannot see how things affect us and how our actions determine us. We do not know how we are constituted. We guide ourselves by the enjoyable, we only see if things are pleasurable or not. We have no consideration for the better and the worse, we do not examine this question, because we have no insight into our own constitution. At the same time, what gives us pleasure or pain is (or seems to be) clear to us, and this is assumed to be good or bad. It seems to be the best for us and this is therefore what we pursue – even if it is not what we really want or what we really long for. The distinction between what seems to one to be the best (“ἃ ἂν δοκῇ αὐτοῖς βέλτιστα εἶναι”) and what one truly wants (“ἃ βούλεται”) is essential.⁵³ It is what allows us to follow the wrong path and become bad and miserable.

In sum, our access to beings in general and to ourselves is, in general, limited or finite and it does not recognize its own limitation or finitude.⁵⁴ Because of this, there can be a badness or evil that grows in us without us noticing it – and, consequently, we can be miserable without noticing it.

⁵³ For this distinction, see 466d ff.

⁵⁴ Yet, if we were not able to overcome such limitations, we would have no idea of how we are constituted, and all this discussion about what may or may not happen in the depths of our own being would be absolutely conjectural. Socrates, however, does not want to prevent us from saying something regarding what is happening to us. He claims we can determine that certain ways of acting are good and others bad – and he also claims we can determine that the lives characterized by such ways of acting are good or bad (i.e. worth something or worth nothing, of good or bad quality). This is possible only if we have an insight into our nature and what causes us and our life to be good or bad. We have to give an account of ourselves and what happens to us – we have to examine it and be able to justify it. These are the aforementioned criteria required for a craft (τέχνη), i.e. for an expert knowledge that allows one to intervene and manipulate some being or kind of beings. It is something of the kind (the insight that constitutes a craft) that we must have in order to understand what we are worth, what the state of our soul is, how it can be good or bad.

5. Can we feel miserable without knowing it?

We saw how the notions of happiness and misery in Plato are dissociated from the notions of feeling happy or feeling miserable. They are not subjective facts, but rather something objective, which would be identified by an adequate cognitive access to ourselves. It does not matter how we feel.

However, sometimes our objective misery may become patent and we may feel miserable – i.e. we may suffer accordingly. This notion of patent misery corresponds to the *καταβολή* Socrates speaks about. He says that the *πόλις* is swelling and festering, because the politicians were attending to its every desire. For a while no one notices anything bad, all the bad condition is latent. And then there is this fit, attack or crisis of the disease. The badness that accumulated before becomes patent.⁵⁵ This may happen in our lives. There may be a moment of revelation, when it becomes clear what the value of our actions is, how our soul is disposed and how we are getting along in the pursuit of the good. At this moment we are attacked by all the consequences of our choices, our actions and our way of living.

This is illustrated in the eschatological judgment at the end of the *Gorgias*.⁵⁶ After death the soul is judged for its goodness or badness (its straightness or crookedness). This determines the punishments or the rewards it will receive afterwards. Whereas in life the soul cannot see its exact condition and therefore may be convinced it is better (or worse) than it really is, after death the judge sees the soul as it is and sentences it accordingly. If the soul is unjust, it will then suffer in accordance with its badness. The whole process will thus reveal the soul's condition, which will no longer be latent.

It is something of this kind that happens in the *καταβολή*. It reveals us to ourselves. The lack of acuity that normally prevents us from accompanying our real condition is overcome by a manifestation of our soul itself – of its crookedness. This raises questions such as how much badness must be accumulated in us, “underneath the surface” of our soul, for there to be a *καταβολή*? And what different kinds of *καταβολαί* are there? Do they differ in intensity? And does this difference in intensity correspond to different degrees of badness in one's soul? This is very difficult to establish and it requires very attentive psychological observations. At any rate, it

⁵⁵ See 517a ff.

⁵⁶ See 524a ff.

seems clear that the badness in our soul is not something we never come into contact with, but there is the possibility of this crisis Socrates talks about.

What happens then when all the badness – and, consequently, all the misery – is latent? We considered before the concept of ψυχῇ ὕπουλος (festering soul) and how this concept refers to a latent badness, a badness we do not perceive. Such latent badness is what explains the possibility of latent misery. But this is not all. The concept of ὕπουλος refers originally to a state in the body – a state where there is an accumulation of evil without any symptom or without any manifestation of this evil. So when we speak of a festering soul, does this mean there is no symptom whatsoever in the soul of the badness or evil that is accumulating underneath? We considered Sophocles' use, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, of the expression κάλλος κακῶν ὕπουλον (a beauty festering with evils). Is there actually a κάλλος (a beauty or splendor) in the soul that festers? Are the evils absolutely silent? We saw that they grow in the depth (βάθος) of our being. But what relation do we have with this depth? How is this depth present in us and in what way do we experience ourselves? Is there no contact between the depth and the surface in us? Or, on the contrary, is the depth always present – either by actually manifesting itself as such or in so far as the surface is an expression of the depth (so that we could not feel the surface if we did not feel the depth)? In any of these cases there would be some kind of presence of this depth. But if it were not so, then this latent badness would be completely absent from how we feel ourselves – and we could only speak of a latent misery which is absolutely hidden from us. There would be an appearance of happiness and no feeling of anything different from it.

But how is this appearance of happiness or this thinking one is happy (the δοκεῖν εὐδαίμων εἶναι Socrates speaks of in the *Apology*) to be understood?⁵⁷ What happens from a subjective point of view? How do we experience the situation where we think our life is going well, where we think or we seem to be happy, where there is a δοκεῖν εὐδαίμων εἶναι? What kind of sensation do we have of our own life? How does this situation express itself in our emotions? In what way do we experience our life when we are convinced everything is going fine? Do we experience some kind of fulfillment that makes it indifferent if our life is really good or not? Is this conviction enough for us to feel happy, i.e. to be happy from a subjective point of view? Or is

⁵⁷ See 36d.

there some kind of bitter-sweetness to it, caused by the intrinsic badness of the soul? Can we in some way feel miserable without knowing it?

The question may seem strange. We tend to think about our feelings as being immediate and obvious. But perhaps there may be some confusion regarding our state and how we immediately experience it. Indeed, this state may not be reducible to the most immediate feelings we have (or those that we can more promptly identify). These immediate feelings (the feelings of pleasure and pain) may not be the totality of our emotional life. This means that it may be possible for us to feel miserable without knowing it. We may think we feel happy and fulfilled, even though we are lacking and suffering in some way. We would then not perceive this indigence and the feeling we have of it. We would be unable to interpret not only our own condition, in the depths of our being, but also our emotional state, the immediate contact we have with ourselves (what we might call the surface of our being).

This is in fact a perspective Plato seems to put forward at certain points in the *corpus platonicum*. In the *Philebus*, while discussing the possibility of false pleasures, Socrates argues that in many cases we think that what we feel is pleasure but it is rather a mixture of pleasure and pain.⁵⁸ Likewise, in the *Republic* he describes how we misunderstand what usually happens when we go from suffering to pleasure.⁵⁹ We think we are going from the bottom state to the top state, whereas we are only going to the middle position in the scale of feeling. Normally we have no experience of the real top – which would correspond to real happiness, so we think the middle position (the pleasures that satisfy the part of the soul Plato calls ἐπιθυμητικόν) is already the best we can achieve in life.

Both these passages presuppose a very particular view about our feelings. According to Plato, they are not purely emotional, but they include in themselves – as something essential to what they are – δόξαι (i.e. a way of understanding or interpreting the experience we have, a way of judging it or regarding it). These δόξαι are then responsible for distorting what we really feel and make us have a confused access to our emotional state (namely, to our feeling of misery). We simply end up judging how we feel on the basis of the dominant pleasures and dominant pains – i.e. the stronger movements of the body or the soul, which are more easily perceptible, as

⁵⁸ See 42c ff.

⁵⁹ See 583b ff.

is said in the *Philebus*.⁶⁰ And so we do not see that we can only have great enjoyment if we also lose much and have great needs – as Socrates points out to Callicles in the *Gorgias*.⁶¹ We have a superficial access to our own emotional state. The interpretation we make of it is insufficient and distorts it.

Let us then see in more detail what is said in the *Gorgias* about the state of latent misery. In such a state we are not self-sufficient (αὐτάρκεις). We are not in a condition where we do not need anything (μηδενὸς δεόμενοι). On the contrary, because we lack self-control and restraint, our soul is disordered and, consequently, we are in constant need of pleasure. We are hungry, thirsty, itching and we need to be in such states of discomfort, in order to have pleasure afterwards. We are slaves not only to pleasure, but also to the pain that enables it. Yet, such a condition is not interpreted as miserable. One may even regard it as enviable – as seems to be Polus' case in relation to Archelaus. Such a condition can be desired and appreciated, and it can be judged to be good. Yet it is already accompanied by distress, even if we do not notice it. One has to work day and night to fill one's soul with pleasure – otherwise there will be a significant καταβολή. This is so in the life of the tyrant, but it is also true (even if to a lesser degree) of a more modest life. All life without real soundness of mind and real justice will suffer from some degree of disorder and, consequently, some degree of distress.

This is not all. It is also important to consider another thing that is mentioned in the *Gorgias*, even if it is not very developed in the text: namely, our pursuit of τὸ ἀγαθόν and the way we respond to it at each moment. We often interpret things as good and we believe we are achieving τὸ ἀγαθόν. This is closely connected with what Socrates calls δοκεῖν εὐδαιμόνων εἶναι (thinking one is happy). Yet, to believe we have achieved τὸ ἀγαθόν and that we are happy is different from having achieved τὸ ἀγαθόν and really being happy – and it is the latter condition that we long for. What

⁶⁰ 43b-c.

⁶¹ 493d ff. According to Socrates, Callicles' ideal life is in fact a life with no self-control, where one is constantly pulled by one's desires in the most varied directions. It is a life of a voracious bird (a χαρδιός, 494b), of a catamite (κίναδος, 494e) or a brigand (ληστής, 507e). In such a life there is a constant pursuit of pleasure and the constant suffering involved in needing it once again. Socrates says of someone in this condition that "his vessels are leaky and rotten, and he is forced to be always filling them day and night, or else he suffers the most extreme distresses" (493e-494a). He also poses the following question about such a life: "if the inflow is large, mustn't the outflow be large too, and mustn't there be big holes for the outflow?" Callicles agrees (494b). When the soul is disposed in such a manner, it is full of indigence, distress and frustration – or always very close to it. Every gain it makes is immediately followed by a loss. One has to start all over again, and the rhythm of such a life becomes more and more frantic.

we want is not to have some good things and to believe they satisfy us. We rather want what is superlatively good, something that fully satisfies us. This is the target – and not the feeling of fulfillment that comes from obtaining what we think is the best and yet is not. Such a feeling is different from the feeling of actually obtaining what is the best. The former is a mixture of frustration or fulfillment – something that corresponds to the middle position in the scale of pain and pleasure in the *Republic*. When we think that this middle position is what we long for (i.e. the top), this happens because we are not acquainted with the real top. Not having this real top is not something to which we are indifferent, because the need for it is inscribed in our own being, in so far as we are always this pursuit and this longing for it. Therefore, only by achieving it can we ever be in a position of not needing anything (a position of true αὐτάρκεια). Before that, we are always indigent or needy. We simply do not recognize it. We do not see our state as still being one where we lack something – and something of the utmost importance. We get distracted by the excitement of pleasure and desire, and we fail to notice the complexity of our emotions.⁶²

If this is so, then there is always some indication of our latent badness. It always translates emotionally, even if we are normally not able to identify this and understand its meaning. However, this is not what constitutes misery as such. The problem is not the negative feelings we may have, but the intrinsic badness of the soul – and this badness is determined by something other than feelings. It is not because we feel bad that we are bad and miserable. In many cases feeling bad may actually improve our condition and make us less miserable. This is why Socrates says that being punished (δίκην δίδόναι), which causes suffering, is good, because it helps us get rid of our soul's badness – just as medical treatments help us get rid of the body's badness.⁶³

The main thing is thus our objective state, which only an adequate access to ourselves may ascertain. Socrates in the *Gorgias* seems to believe that he possesses the criteria that determine this diagnosis. However, even if he is wrong about these criteria (about what exactly constitutes the goodness and badness of our soul), this still does not mean that his conception of misery as a certain objective state of which

⁶² This means that it is not all our pleasure and all our pain that create our superficial interpretation of reality, but only the pleasure and pain we tend to notice more easily. This pleasure and this pain are the ones we recognize or are sanctioned by our interpretation of ourselves and our state. This means our normal perspective is based on an interpretation and an understanding – namely the interpretation or understanding that focuses on our most immediate and most obvious emotions.

⁶³ See 476a ff.

we may not aware is invalid. It may well be the case that the only way to truly know ourselves and the state we are in is to go beyond our immediate feelings.

Νόμος τῆς φύσεως in Plato's *Gorgias* 483e3

Paulo Alexandre Lima*

1. Preliminary remarks

A lot has been written about Callicles' so-called immoralism and his apparently paradoxical expression: νόμος τῆς φύσεως. One of the main aims of this paper is to demonstrate that νόμος τῆς φύσεως is *not* necessarily paradoxical and might express a peculiar, not entirely original, *moral* ideal.

There are two main opposing views about the relationship between Callicles' νόμος τῆς φύσεως and the Stoic conception of natural law. According to one of these there is no relationship at all: Callicles and the Stoics mean entirely different things when they speak of natural law¹. According to the other view, however, Callicles and the Stoics are speaking of similar things – so that the Stoic conception is part of a tradition originating in Callicles' formula². The second main aim of the paper is to indicate that, although Callicles' conception and that of the Stoics are different in terms of content, a *formal, structural common identity* between them remains.

Neither of the aims of the paper can be easily achieved. Both require long inquiries into a great variety of themes. I cannot extend my inquiries beyond what is reasonable in a presentation of this sort. This means that the paper will be very incomplete and will endeavour to give only enough evidence to prove its claims. Because this is a conference on Plato's *Gorgias* (not on Stoic thought) most of the

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¹ See, notably, Gisela Stricker, *Origins of the Concept of Natural Law, in Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, repr. 2004, 212: "More famous, but less perspicuous, is probably Plato's version (...) in Callicles' speech in the *Gorgias* (483A7-484C3). This may actually contain the first historical occurrence of the Greek phrase νόμος τῆς φύσεως (law of nature, 483E6), but *decidedly not in the sense that became current afterwards*." (My italics) See also, for example, Gerard Watson, *The Natural Law and Stoicism*, in A. A. Long (ed.), *Problems in Stoicism*, London and Atlantic Highlands (NJ), The Athlone Press, 1971, repr. 1996, 217, 218, Ada Neschke-Hentschke, *Der Dialog Gorgias und die Tradition des europäischen Naturrechts*, in Michael Erler and Luc Brisson (eds.), *Gorgias – Menon*. Selected papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum. Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 2007, 69, 71.

² For references, see Gisela Stricker, *art. cit.*, 209 n. 1.

paper will be dedicated to proving the first claim. As regards the second I will stick to a few sketchy indications.

2. Νόμος and φύσις

As I said above, νόμος τῆς φύσεως is usually seen to be a paradoxical expression. In order to explain why this is so, I will first define the meanings of νόμος and φύσις separately. Then I will show that νόμος and φύσις were used by some authors of the fifth century B.C. to express a fundamental *opposition* between nature, on the one hand, and custom or law, on the other.

I will begin with a brief analysis of the term νόμος. Νόμος means two different things. First of all, it designates *custom*, that is, a particular set of actions or attitudes that are inherited from the past and explicitly or inexplicitly function as *norms of action*. These actions or attitudes reflect what should and should not be done within a particular group or society. On the other hand, νόμος designates *positive* (that is, *written*) *law*. Positive (written) laws are products of the public institutions of the city-state (Athens, for example) and constitute *explicit (written) norms of action* within that city-state.

The term νόμος can be applied not only to men and gods, but also even to animals. However, human affairs is its field of application *par excellence*. As I indicated above, νόμος involves the idea of a *particular* way of life that is sanctioned by a *particular* group or society. But the term νόμος also points to the fact that there is a relationship between the *way of life* of a particular community and the *natural environment* in which that community lives. In other words, νόμος is related to another Greek term: ἥθος – that is, to human character and how it evolves according to the natural environment. Thus, νόμος designates the way of life of a human community in so far as it *distinguishes itself* from the way of life of *other* human communities.

From early on, however, νόμος was also used for referring to *universal* moral principles: the so-called ἄγραφοι νόμοι (as in the case of Sophocles' *Antigone* 454). These were conceived as *divine* laws. This indicates that νόμοι – meaning either custom or (written) law – are not necessarily understood only as something made by men for men, but can be viewed as coming from a divine source. The norms of human

action are therefore based on the gods' judgments about what human beings should and should not do.

Now let us turn to the word φύσις. Etymologically speaking, φύσις is linked to the verb φύεσθαι. Φύσις therefore refers to the *process of growth* but also to *what results from it*. The term φύσις was originally applied to plants and animals. However, its use can be extended to human beings in as much as they possess an organic body.

But φύσις means a bit more than this. In fact, the term is also used for referring to the *nature and constitution* of each particular thing. As I have just pointed out, φύσις designates the process of growth – and this is the active meaning of the word. On the other hand, φύσις can have a passive meaning as well – in which case it designates the result of the process of growth. As a consequence of this, I believe, the term came to signify the *form*, the *appearance*, of a particular thing or being. What is most important to bear in mind, however, is that the word φύσις points to the *spontaneous* character of the process of growth and its results; that is to say, it refers to a principle of being which is *present* in each particular thing and determines its course (birth, growth and constitution) *from within*.

To be sure, there is a lot more associated with φύσις – but, unfortunately, I cannot explore the ramifications of the term in full. It should suffice to say that φύσις is closely related to ἀλήθεια – so that it can be used to express the idea of *reality*: the idea of the *true* or *authentic* nature of a particular entity. Moreover, φύσις can express the idea of *descent* (see Plato's *Menexenus* 245d) and also the idea of physical *strength* (see Plato's *Gorgias* 484a: a very important passage for us).

It is clear, then, that νόμος and φύσις can be conceived separately, that is to say, independently of any contrast with one another. What is more, they sometimes even have implied concurrent or supplementary meanings. For a Greek physician, for example, φύσις means, among other things, the healthy state of the body: the *norm* (as it were) to which the body should conform. Conversely, νόμος sometimes points to divine law – that is, to a law the source of which lies *beyond human convention*.

This, however, does not mean that the opposition between νόμος and φύσις is absurd. My previous explanation has suggested the way in which it can be implied in the meaning of each of these words. It all depends on where one places the emphasis when one uses the terms νόμος and φύσις. If, on the one hand, the core meaning of νόμος is *convention* and if, on the other hand, the core meaning of φύσις is *reality*, then an *opposition* between νόμος and φύσις will quite naturally arise. And indeed it

did – in various domains. I shall mention only a few. The discussion on the natural or conventional character of names is one of these domains. Another one is the distinction between objective and subjective knowledge.

But the most significant domains (for us, at least), in which the opposition between νόμος and φύσις came to play a decisive role, were ethics and politics. In these two domains – which, of course, were closely related to one another – there were at the time (I am talking of Athens in the fifth century B.C.) a few compelling questions. The political scientists of the time asked: how did human society and political constitutions come to be? Ethical theorists, on the other hand, were trying to determine whether human conventions and values are grounded in themselves or in objective reality. Greek intellectuals were conscious of the great variety of human conventions and political constitutions. They were puzzled by this and tried to provide (different) explanations for it. Protagoras, for example, maintained that human society, laws, and customs are entirely conventional (see Plato's *Theaetetus* 167c and also the myth in *Protagoras* 320c-322d). Antiphon the Sophist, for his part, claimed that some laws made by men are contrary to what is just and fair by nature – and so came to draw a line between what is just by convention and what is just by nature. In other terms, he (implicitly) asserted that there is a non-conventional source for human values (see DK 87 B 44).

This analysis of νόμος and φύσις is obviously incomplete³. None the less, it should suffice to explain how Callicles' νόμος τῆς φύσεως *can* be interpreted as a paradoxical expression when read or heard⁴. Furthermore, the analysis carried out above also makes it possible for us to understand the opposite view – that is, the view according to which Callicles' formula has nothing paradoxical in it and may imply a certain *morality*: a norm to which human lives should by nature conform.

³ For a more complete analysis see, for example, Felix Heinemann, *Nomos und Physis: Herkunft und Bedeutung einer Antithese im griechischen Denken des 5. Jahrhunderts*, Basel, Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 1945, Max Pohlenz, *Nomos*, *Philologus* 97 (1948), 135-142, Id., *Nomos und Physis*, *Hermes* 81 (1953), 418-438, Gregory Vlastos, *Isonomia*, *American Journal of Philology* 74 (1953), 347-349, Eckart Schütrumpf, *Kosmopolitismus oder Panhellenismus? Zur Interpretation des Ausspruchs von Hippias in Platons Protagoras (337Cff.)*, *Hermes* 100 (1972), 5-29, Heinz-Gerd Schmitz, *Physis versus Nomos: Platons politiktheoretische Auseinandersetzung mit Kallikles, Thrasymachos und Protagoras*, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 42 (1988), 570-596, Pierre Hadot, *Le voile d'Isis: essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de Nature*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004, 39-52.

⁴ In support of this view, see Gerard Watson, *art. cit.*, 218, Gisela Stricker, *art. cit.*, 212, Ada Neschke-Hentschke, *art. cit.*, 68, 70.

3. *Gorgias* 483e3

3.1. Callicles' "gospel of force" (Froude⁵)

Let us now turn to the main part of the paper. The first question I should like to address is this: who is Callicles? There are at least two different views on this subject. According to one of the views Callicles is a purely Platonic fiction (see Neschke-Hentschke⁶). The other view is a bit more complex (see Menzel⁷). According to Menzel Callicles is, of course, a product of Platonic fiction. Nevertheless, Callicles represents an existing⁸, hostile view of Socrates and the practice of philosophy in general⁹. Menzel's claim is that Callicles represents the view of Critias – who, as we know, was a member of the oligarchic party and one of the Thirty Tyrants¹⁰. As we shall see, this is of some importance for us. If Menzel is right, then Callicles is representing a certain *ideal*: the *oligarchic* ideal – and not simply describing a state of affairs.

Before turning to the meaning of νόμος τῆς φύσεως, we should have a look at the structure and content of Callicles' ῥῆσις (482c-484b). At the beginning of his ῥῆσις Callicles tries to point out what he thinks is Socrates' illegitimate strategy in his refutation of Polus. According to Socrates "doing wrong is fouler than suffering it" (τὸ ἀδικεῖν αἰσχρὸν εἶναι τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι) (482e). (I follow Lamb's text and translation in the Loeb series¹¹.) Callicles, however, thinks that Socrates' thesis is based on "stuff that is 'fair', not by nature, but by convention" (ἃ φύσει μὲν οὐκ ἔστι καλά, νόμῳ δέ) (482e). "Yet", Callicles says, "for the most part these two – nature and convention – are opposed to each other" (ὥς τὰ πολλὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐναντία ἀλλήλοις ἐστίν, ἥ τε φύσις καὶ ὁ νόμος) (482e-483a). According to Calicles, Socrates' refuting strategy is not legitimate because he follows criteria established by convention. "(...) by nature", on the contrary, "everything is fouler that is more evil, such as suffering wrong" (φύσει

⁵ James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life (1795-1835)*, vol. II, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1882, 7. Cf. Adolf Menzel, *Kallikles: Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Lehre vom Rechte des Stärkeren*, Wien und Leipzig, Frank Deuticke, 1922, 79.

⁶ Ada Neschke-Hentschke, *art. cit.*, 70: "Die Rede des Kallikles vom Gesetz der Natur ist (...) eine Erfindung Platons (...)."

⁷ Adolf Menzel, *op. cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38, 86, 91. See, more recently, Ada Neschke-Hentschke, *art. cit.*, 69, 70.

¹¹ *Plato: Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. With an English translation by W. R. M. Lamb. Cambridge (Massachusetts) / London (England), Harvard University Press, 1925, repr. 1996, 380-386.

μὲν γὰρ πᾶν αἰσχρόν ἐστιν ὅπερ καὶ κάκιον, τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, κτλ.) (483a). By saying that “doing wrong is fouler than suffering it” Socrates is proclaiming the morality of a slave: “(...) this endurance of wrong done is not a man’s part at all, but a poor slave’s” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς τοῦτό γ’ ἐστὶ τὸ πάθημα, τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἀνδραπόδου τινός) (483a-b).

The second part of Callicles’ ῥῆσις extends this sort of accusation to democratic laws and the democratic regime as such. As Callicles says, “(...) the makers of the laws are the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous” [(...) οἱ τιθέμενοι τοὺς νόμους οἱ ἀσθενεῖς ἄνθρωποι εἰσι καὶ οἱ πολλοί] (483b). Existing under the disguise of a regime that represents all citizens, democracy is, in fact, the regime of “the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous”. In other words, democracy represents the interests of “the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous”. As Callicles claims, “(...) it is with a view to themselves and their own interest that they make their laws” (πρὸς αὐτοὺς οὖν καὶ τὸ αὐτοῖς συμφέρον τοὺς τε νόμους τίθενται, κτλ.) (483b). In Callicles’ view democracy – that is, the political regime of “the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous” – is at war with “the strongest sort of folk”. As Callicles puts it, the weaker sort of men and the more numerous make their laws “to terrorize the stronger sort of folk who are able to get an advantage” [(...) ἐκφοβοῦντες τοὺς ἐρρωμενεστέρους τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ δυνατοὺς ὄντας πλεον ἔχειν, κτλ.) (483c). Furthermore, Callicles suggests that “the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous” favour the ideal of ἰσονομία – of equal shares in the political institutions of Athens – because this ideal protects them from being defeated by the stronger sort of men. As Callicles asserts, “(...) they are well content to see themselves on an equality, when they are so inferior” (ἀγαπᾶσι γάρ, οἶμαι, αὐτοὶ ἂν τὸ ἴσον ἔχωσι φαυλότεροι ὄντες) (483c). The morality of the slave, to which Callicles refers at the beginning of his ῥῆσις, is the morality of “the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous”. This sort of morality, which “the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous” establish by convention, determines that “to aim at an advantage over the majority” is “foul” and “unjust”. In Callicles’ exact words, “(...) this – that the weaker sort of men and the more numerous are content as equals etc. – is why by convention it is termed unjust and foul to aim at an advantage over the majority, and why they call it wrongdoing” (διὰ ταῦτα δὴ νόμῳ μὲν τοῦτο ἄδικον καὶ αἰσχρὸν λέγεται, τὸ πλεον ζητεῖν ἔχειν τῶν πολλῶν, καὶ ἀδικεῖν αὐτὸ καλοῦσιν) (483c-d).

Having said this Callicles turns to the presentation of his own *morality*. In the last part of the ῥῆσις Callicles announces his “gospel of force”: the content of νόμος τῆς φύσεως. To a morality by convention Callicles opposes a *morality by nature*. According to Callicles, “(...) nature (...) herself proclaims the fact that it is right for the better to have advantage over the worse, and the abler of the feeble” (ἡ δὲ γε, οἶμαι, φύσις αὐτὴ ἀποφαίνει αὐτό, ὅτι δίκαιόν ἐστι τὸν ἀμείνω τοῦ χείρονος πλεόν ἔχειν καὶ τὸν δυνατώτερον τοῦ ἀδυνατωτέρου) (483d). Callicles tries to prove the *natural* character of his *morality of “the better” and “abler”* by pointing to what happens in some other states and the animal world: “It is obvious in many cases that this is so, not only in the animal world, but in the states and races, collectively, of men (...)” (δηλοῖ δὲ ταῦτα πολλαχοῦ ὅτι οὕτως ἔχει, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ζώοις καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν ὅλαις ταῖς πόλεσι καὶ τοῖς γένεσιν, κτλ.) (483d). This *generalization* – or rather, *universalization* – of the right of the “better” and “abler” is decisive for understanding the *objective* character of Callicles’ νόμος τῆς φύσεως. Indeed, it is after this universalization that Callicles introduces the notion of νόμος τῆς φύσεως: “(...) these men (Xerxes and the like) follow nature – the nature of right – in acting thus (in having advantage over the worse and the feeble); yes, on my soul, and follow the law of nature – though not that, I dare say, which is made by us” [(...) οὗτοι κατὰ φύσιν τὴν τοῦ δικαίου ταῦτα πράττουσι, καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία κατὰ νόμον γε τὸν τῆς φύσεως, οὐ μέντοι ἴσως κατὰ τοῦτον, ὃν ἡμεῖς τιθέμεθα] (483e). Before introducing his famous quotation by Pindar, Callicles tells us the fable of the “tamed lions”; and he prophesizes the coming of the saviour who only saves himself – by freeing himself from the chains of all the laws which are against nature (see 483e-484a). The intensity of Callicles’ ῥῆσις is at its highest point when he says, “(...) and there – in the revolt of the slave etc. – dawns the full light of natural justice” [(...) καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἐξέλαμψε τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον] (484a-b).

This is the core of Callicles’ morality. What we have said should provide a glimpse of the content and foundations of νόμος τῆς φύσεως. Now I should like to address a few questions concerning νόμος τῆς φύσεως. The first question is about the paradoxical character that νόμος τῆς φύσεως seems to have. According to what we have seen above, there are – apparently – good reasons for thinking that νόμος τῆς φύσεως is a paradoxical formula. How can one speak of a law of nature, if law and nature are opposites? *If νόμος and φύσις are opposites, then νόμος τῆς φύσεως must have a paradoxical character.* However, we have seen that νόμος and φύσις are not

necessarily opposite concepts and sometimes designate similar things. This means that they are far from being just opposites and are perfectly compatible with one another. In other words, νόμος and φύσις can form a single expression such as νόμος τῆς φύσεως: *no paradox* will necessarily arise from this. But what, then, does νόμος τῆς φύσεως mean? Although νόμος and φύσις can have similar meanings, νόμος τῆς φύσεως does not designate the same as νόμος or φύσις alone (as if both notions were interchangeable and their meanings had become fused). I should like to argue that *νόμος τῆς φύσεως means something which νόμος or φύσις cannot express by itself alone*. To put it very briefly: νόμος τῆς φύσεως conveys the idea of a *law* the *authority* of which derives from the fact that it is *given by nature* and *expresses nature*. If one intends to argue that this might be implied in each of the terms, one should none the less admit that νόμος τῆς φύσεως makes it more explicit.

The second question I should like to address has to do with the apparently immoral speech of Callicles. Among the commentators on Plato's *Gorgias*, there are some who believe that Callicles' position is immoral (see Shorey¹²). I do not think this view is correct, although we could be very easily convinced of its correctness if we looked at Callicles' speech from the point of view of current morality. Callicles' position is immoral in so far as it promotes a way of life that offends against current morality. However, if we looked at Callicles' speech from a different point of view (that is, without adopting any sort of morality) we would be able to see that Callicles is describing a *norm* in accordance with which human beings *should* live their lives – and in this sense his position has a *moral* character. According to Callicles – as we have indicated above – it is a *norm of nature* (νόμος τῆς φύσεως) that determines that the stronger *should* prevail over the weaker (see 483d, 488b).

One might argue against the idea that Callicles proposes a non-paradoxical, moral view – namely, by saying that Callicles is depicted in a comical fashion. I agree with the view that Plato makes Callicles look funny. In the *Gorgias* Callicles is depicted as a very excited, irritating young man. On the other hand, I think this does not speak

¹² *Apud Plato: Gorgias*. A revised text with introduction and commentary by E. R. Dodds. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, repr. 2001, 266, *ad* 483c7-484c3: "This famous passage has been described by Shorey (*What Plato Said* 154) as 'the most eloquent statement of the immoralist's case in European literature'. 'Immoralist' is *perhaps* [my italics] a misleading word; for Callicles believes that to obey the law of nature is not only profitable but *right* [Dodds' italics] (δικαιον, d1: cf. 491d1)." Dodds says "perhaps" – he is not totally sure of it. More recently, Ada Neschke-Hentschke (*art. cit.*) spoke in this connection of "die Perversion des Rechtes" (69) and "die Negation von Recht und Gerechtigkeit" (70).

against the view that νόμος τῆς φύσεως expresses a *consistent, serious moral ideal*. In Plato's dialogues – as we know – a very serious (and even dangerous) thing can very well be hidden behind the mask of a funny character or a comical assertion. In the *Gorgias* the mask of the comical depiction of Callicles conceals the serious (and dangerous) ideal of the right of the stronger.

As I have indicated above, Callicles' ideal of the right of the stronger can be equated with the *aristocratic, oligarchic* ideal, according to which *only* the (*few*) *best* citizens should have the right to participate in political decisions. Callicles' use of καλός κἀγαθός in 484d might indicate that he adheres to this political ideal. It is true that καλός κἀγαθός can be used without oligarchic connotations (see Socrates' use of it in 478e). But in Callicles' mouth it must have oligarchic overtones, given his ideal of the right of the stronger. (For καλός κἀγαθός with oligarchic connotations – as opposed to βάνανσος¹³ – see Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4, 2 and Aristotle, *Politics* 1274a7-13).

I should like to consider one last possible objection to the claim that Callicles' νόμος τῆς φύσεως is not paradoxical and involves a peculiar sort of morality. One might argue against this claim by saying that καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία in 483e announces the arrival of the odd and eccentric νόμος τῆς φύσεως. However, I claim that although it might be viewed as an odd and eccentric formula, νόμος τῆς φύσεως points to a very definite ideal. Καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία reflects an increasing intensity in Callicles' speech (see Menzel¹⁴) and his awareness that he is about to take a big step. Callicles is about to declare the *objective character*¹⁵ and *universal validity* of the right of the stronger (see 483d; Menzel claims that κατὰ φύσιν τὴν τοῦ δικαίου refers to subjective right¹⁶ – I

¹³ On the social implications of this term see, for example, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir: formes de pensée et formes de société dans le monde grec*, Paris, La Découverte, 1981, repr. 1991, 297-298, Gregory Vlastos, *The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy*, *Political Theory* 11 (1983), 505-506, 508.

¹⁴ Adolf Menzel, *op. cit.*, 21: "Kallikles formuliert demnach das Recht des Stärkeren zunächst als Recht im subjektiven Sinne, als Recht auf Herrschaft und Mehrbesitz an Gütern. Dann erfolgt mit einer gewissen Feierlichkeit (καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία) die Steigerung zum objektiven Rechtssatze, der zugleich ein Naturgesetz ist."

¹⁵ Pace Gisela Stricker, *art. cit.*, 212: "There is no indication that this alleged law of nature provides objective standards of *morality*." But see Gerard Watson, *art. cit.*, 218: "(...) the law of nature entitles (or obliges) us on occasion to ignore the narrow prescriptions of particular law-codes."

¹⁶ Adolf Menzel, *op. cit.*, 21: "Kallikles formuliert demnach das Recht des Stärkeren zunächst als Recht im subjektiven Sinne (...)."

agree with him). According to Callicles, νόμος τῆς φύσεως designates a *cosmic principle*¹⁷ and he uses this principle to *justify* a tyrant's morality.

3.2. Pindar, fr. 169 Bergk¹⁸

In 484b Callicles endeavours to strengthen his position by quoting a few lines from a lost poem by Pindar (fr. 169 Bergk). The text of the Pindar fragment quoted by Callicles runs like this: “Law the sovereign of all, / Mortals and immortals, / (...) Carries all with highest hand, / Justifying the utmost force: in proof I take / The deeds of Hercules, for unpurchased –” [νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεὺς / θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων / (...) ἄγει δικαίων τὸ βιαιότατον / ὑπερτάτῃ χειρὶ· τεκμαίρομαι / ἔργοισιν Ἡρακλέους, ἐπεὶ ἀπριάτας –].

In my view Callicles is trying to prove that his cosmic principle derives from god (Zeus) himself. Callicles' point is this: *if he proves the divine origins of his cosmic principle, then his cosmic principle is legitimated through the authority of god (Zeus) himself*¹⁹. Menzel maintains that Pindar intends to convey the idea that supremacy is justice because it manifests the will of god (Zeus)²⁰; I agree with Menzel on this. But then he says that Callicles' interpretation is partial and incomplete, since it ignores the religious element that is present in Pindar's fragment²¹. Here I disagree; I cannot see why one should accept that Callicles ignores the religious element in Pindar. As I indicated above, the *religious* element contributes to *strengthening* Callicles' position. Furthermore, Callicles' political convictions are perfectly compatible with Greek religious tradition, and they are perhaps even supported by the fact that Zeus rules over gods and men alike. I take it that νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεὺς points to the rule of Zeus, which is rule by *force*. As the Pindar fragment suggests, Zeus governs “with

¹⁷ As Menzel says, though not without some hesitation: “(...) gleichsam ein kosmisches Prinzip (...)” (*Ibid.*)

¹⁸ *Poetae lyrici Graeci*. Edited by Th. Bergk. Vol. I: *Pindari carmina*. Leipzig, B. G. Teubner, 1878⁴, 438-440.

¹⁹ The logic of this kind of argumentation is well grasped by Gisela Stricker, *art. cit.*, 218: “(...) what is right or good is so, in a way, because it is prescribed by the gods.” However, she fails to recognize that the same logic is present in Callicles' argumentation.

²⁰ Adolf Menzel, *op. cit.*, 35: “Die Übermacht schafft Recht, insofern sich in ihr der göttliche Wille manifestiert.” See also 96: “Nicht die Übermacht als solche schafft Recht, sondern nur soweit sich in ihr der göttliche Wille manifestiert (...)”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 35: “Die Deutung, welche Kallikles den Versen Pindars gibt, ist keineswegs falsch, aber einseitig und unvollständig: es wird dabei das religiöse Moment vollständig ignoriert.”

highest hand” (ὑπερτάτα χειρί) (484b). In my view this is precisely what Callicles wants to happen at a political and moral level. In other terms, Callicles’ supremacy of the stronger over the weaker *mirrors the hierarchy of the cosmos*, in which Zeus rules.

However, one might argue against the view that Callicles means the same thing as Pindar did. A pertinent objection would be that Callicles misquotes Pindar. Callicles is just using Pindar as an authority to prove his point; but Pindar does not mean what Callicles wants us to think he did. The verse ἄγει δικαίων τὸ βαιότατον (484b) might be used to argue that Callicles and Pindar mean quite different things. The reading of the *Gorgias* manuscripts is ἄγει βαιῶν τὸ δικαίότατον. The editors of the *Gorgias* usually correct the reading of the manuscripts. They consider it a transcription error and restore the text to what ought to be its original form, i.e. identical with what Pindar actually wrote. Other editors, however, think that the reading of the manuscripts is right and that Plato makes Callicles misquote Pindar on purpose. What are the consequences of this? On the one hand, if one accepts the reading δικαίων τὸ βαιότατον, then the sense of Pindar’s fragment is (*apparently*) contrary to Callicles’ interpretation of it. Δικαίων τὸ βαιότατον would mean: “bringing to justice what is most violent”. On the other hand, if one accepts the reading βαιῶν τὸ δικαίότατον and takes βαιῶν as the present participle of the factitive verb βαιόω, then the meaning of the verse would be: “effecting by *force* what is most *just*”. Accepting the reading of the manuscripts, then, seems to have the following consequence: Callicles and Pindar cannot be pointing to the same thing. However, this is not so, for δικαίων can be interpreted as a *factitive verb* as well. If this is right, then δικαίων τὸ βαιότατον would mean: “making *just* what is most *violent*” (and not: “bringing to justice what is most violent”). This means that in both cases Callicles and Pindar might be pointing to the *same* thing. The reading βαιῶν τὸ δικαίότατον – in so far as it is a misquotation of a poem from Pindar – would be very consistent with Callicles’ character. But unfortunately the verb βαιόω is not attested elsewhere. This means that the plausibility of the reading of the manuscripts is merely a hypothesis and rests on pure speculation. Be that as it may, one thing is certain: Pindar and Callicles are both pointing to the *rule of force* and also to the *authority of*

Zeus. (Much of the above is borrowed from Demos²², but I end up going in a slightly different direction.)

4. Concluding remarks: *Gorgias* 483e3 and Stoic thought

Two main conclusions can be taken from what I have been saying up to now. The first is that Callicles tries to prove the validity of a norm of conduct determined by universal nature. The second is that this norm of conduct derives from god (Zeus).

These two characteristics of νόμος τῆς φύσεως (as Callicles understands it) are elements of the Stoic conception of natural law as well. Like Callicles, the Stoics understand *natural law* as a *norm of conduct determined by nature* – that is, *by god (Zeus)*. In *De natura deorum* I, 36 Cicero says: “Lastly, Balbus, I come to your Stoic school. Zeno’s view is that the law of nature is divine, and that its function is to command what is right and to forbid the opposite” (*Zeno autem, ut iam ad vestros, Balbe, veniam, naturalem legem divinam esse censet, eamque vim obtinere recta imperantem prohibentemque contraria*) (Rackham’s text and translation in the Loeb series²³). And in *De legibus* I, 18 we find a similar passage: “(...) Law is the highest reason, implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite” [(...) *lex est ratio summa insita in natura, quae iubet ea, quae facienda sunt, prohibetque contraria*] (Keyes’ text and translation in the Loeb series²⁴). The first Cicero passage shows that, like Callicles, the Stoics derived the *authority* of Nature to command what ought to be done from her *divine* character.

One might object that the Stoics speak of something different from Callicles’ νόμος τῆς φύσεως; I think this is right. The Stoics understand nature as a rational entity, while Callicles understands nature as force. One should not, therefore, consider the two conceptions as identical. On the other hand, however, one should not neglect the existing *similarities* between the two conceptions of natural law. In other words, one should find the right balance in assessing the differences and similarities between

²² Marian Demos, Callicles’ Quotation of Pindar in the *Gorgias*, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 96 (2003), 85-107.

²³ Cicero: *De natura deorum, Academica*. With an English translation by H. Rackham. London, William Heinemann / Cambridge (Massachusetts), Harvard University Press, 1933, repr. 1972, 38.

²⁴ Cicero: *De re publica, De legibus*. With an English translation by Clinton Walker Keyes. Cambridge (Massachusetts) / London (England), Harvard University Press, 1928, repr. 1994, 316.

them. Although they differ much in terms of content, their *structural* similarities are quite striking.

One might also object that there is no evidence of a direct influence of Callicles' νόμος τῆς φύσεως on the Stoic conception of natural law; I agree with this. None the less, I am not concerned with a direct influence of Callicles on the Stoics. I am concerned, rather, with the structural similarities between these two conceptions of natural law. In spite of the differences, there are some striking similarities between them that cannot be overlooked.

Plato's *Gorgias*' Escathological Myth

António de Castro Caeiro*

1. Rhetoric

When Socrates considers the most important use (χρεία) of rhetoric he says that “a man should most of all take care for himself so that he doesn't do injustice, knowing that he will have a great enough evil if he does. Isn't that right?¹ (480a1-4)”:

S.- And if he or whoever else he cares about does do injustice (ἀδικήσῃ), he should go voluntarily wherever he will pay justice as quickly as possible, to the court of justice as to the doctor, eager to prevent the disease of injustice from being chronic and making his soul festering and incurable (σπεύδοντα ὅπως μὴ ἐγχρονισθὲν τὸ νόσημα τῆς ἀδικίας ὑπουλον τὴν ψυχὴν ποιήσῃ καὶ ἀνίατον) or what else are we saying, Polus, if our previous agreements remain firm? Mustn't what we say now agree with what we said then only this way, and otherwise not?

P.- Yes indeed. What else are we to say, Socrates?

S.- Then for someone's defence for his own injustice, or when his parents or his friends or his children or his native state do injustice (τὸ ἀπολογεῖσθαι ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀδικίας), rhetoric is no use at all to us, Polus, unless someone supposes it is useful for the opposite purpose (ἐπὶ τοῦναντίον) that he should denounce most of all himself (κατηγορεῖν δεῖν μάλιστα μὲν ἑαυτοῦ) then his relatives, and whatever other friend does injustice; and should not conceal the unjust action, but bring it into the open, to pay justice and become healthy; and compel himself and others not to shrink in cowardice (μὴ ἀποκρύπτεσθαι ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ φανερόν ἄγειν τὸ ἀδίκημα, ἵνα

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¹ Pl. *Grg.* 480a1-4. All translations of the *Gorgias* are from: *Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 3, translated by W.R.M. Lamb, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1967.

δῶ δίκην καὶ ὑγιῆς γένηται, ἀναγκάζειν τε αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους μὴ ἀποδειλιάν) (b7-c5), but to close their eyes and offer themselves well and bravely, as though to the doctor for cutting and burning; he should pursue the good and fine, not counting the pain (τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ καλὸν διώκοντα, μὴ ὑπολογιζόμενον τὸ ἀλγαινόν), but offering himself for flogging, if his unjust action deserves flogging, for prison, if it deserves prison, paying a fine, if it deserves a fine, accepting death, if it deserves death; he should himself be the first denouncer of himself (κατήγορος) and of the rest of his relatives, and use his rhetoric for this, to have his unjust actions exposed and get rid of the greatest evil, injustice (ἀπαλλάττονται τοῦ μεγίστου κακοῦ). Are we to say yes or no to this, Polus?²

To this extraordinary (ἄτοπον) employment of Rhetoric to accuse oneself of wrongdoing and not of defending, Socrates adds an even more perplexing one:

And then, turning it around the opposite way, if we really should harm anyone an enemy or anyone at all as long as we don't ourselves suffer any injustice from the enemy for we must be careful about that but if our enemy treats someone else unjustly, we should take every precaution, in speaking and in action, to prevent him from paying justice and appearing before the court of justice. And if he appears, we must arrange it so that he escapes and doesn't pay justice, but if he has stolen a lot of money, we must see he doesn't pay it back, but keeps it and spends it on himself and his relatives, unjustly and godlessly; and if he has done injustice deserving death, we must see he does not suffer death best of all never, to be immortal in his baseness, but otherwise to live the longest possible life in this condition (ἀθάνατος ἔσται πονηρὸς ὢν, εἰ δὲ μή, ὅπως ὡς πλεῖστον χρόνον βιώσεται τοιοῦτος ὢν). For these sorts of things I think rhetoric is useful. Polus, since for someone who isn't about to act unjustly, its use doesn't seem to me to be all that great if indeed it has any use at all, for it wasn't evident anywhere in what was said previously.³

C.- Tell me Chaerephon, is Socrates in earnest about all this, or is he joking?

Ch.- Well, to me he seems remarkably in earnest, Callicles. But there's nothing like asking him.

C.- I'm certainly anxious to do that, by the gods. Tell me, Socrates, are we to suppose you're in earnest now, or joking? For if you're in earnest, and all these

² 480a6-d7.

³ 480e-481b

things you say are really true, then wouldn't the life of us men be upside down? And don't we apparently do everything that's the opposite of what we should do?⁴

2. Seduction, Power, Lust

Is this assessment of Rhetoric based upon the conversations that Socrates has during the Dialogues with Gorgias, Polus and finally Callicles? In each conversation, different levels of wrongdoing or injustice are identified. Each one being the outcome of Rhetoric. If things had not been upset by Socrates, then Life would not have been turned upside down, as Callicles says.

1. Thus Gorgias maintains that there is no need for the orator and his rhetoric: to know the truth of the actual matters, but one merely needs to have discovered some device of persuasion which will make one appear to those who do not know to know better than those who know⁵, so that the business of the teacher of rhetoric is to make someone “appear in the eyes of the multitude to know things of this sort when he does not know, and to appear to be good when he is not”⁶

2. For Polus, Rhetoric endows anyone with a great power (τὸ μέγα δύνασθαι), consisting in “doing whatever one thinks to be best. Rhetoricians are what? Are they not like despots, in putting to death anyone they please, and depriving anyone of his property and expelling him from their cities as they may think fit?⁷”. While Socrates holds that “they do nothing that they wish to do (οὐδὲν ὧν βούλονται), they do whatever they think to be best (ὅτι ἂν αὐτοῖς δόξη βέλτιστον εἶναι).⁸” “The great power being a good to him who has it.”⁹

3. Callicles takes Gorgias and Polus's points of view to the limit. He holds that “he who would live rightly should let his desires be as strong as possible and not

⁴ 481c1-3. Εἰ μὲν γὰρ σπουδάζεις τε καὶ τυγχάνει ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγεις, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἀνατετραμμένος ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία πράττομεν, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἢ ἃ δεῖ.)

⁵ 459b7-c2. φαίνεσθαι τοῖς οὐκ εἰδόσι μᾶλλον εἰδέναι τῶν εἰδόντων

⁶ 459e4-5. ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς δοκεῖν εἰδέναι αὐτὸν τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ εἰδότα καὶ δοκεῖν ἀγαθὸν εἶναι οὐκ ὄντα;

⁷ 469b9-c2

⁸ 466d8-e2

⁹ 466d8-e6 τὸ μέγα δύνασθαι ἔφης ἀγαθὸν εἶναι τῷ δυναμένῳ

chasten them (τὰς μὲν ἐπιθυμίας τὰς ἑαυτοῦ ἔαν ὥς μεγίστας εἶναι καὶ μὴ κολάζειν), and should be able to minister to them when they are at their height by reason of his manliness and intelligence, and satisfy each appetite in turn with what it desires.”¹⁰

From Socrates’ point of view, therefore, one should know the truth. Teaching is not persuading. Having great power is not doing whatever one feels like. To unleash the strongest possible desires and satisfy them is to not know what one is doing. It is a defeat. The pursuit of happiness being understood as the pursuit of pleasure. Socrates holds that “good is the end of all our actions, and it is for its sake that all other things should be done, and not it for theirs”¹¹ and that “it is for the sake of what is good that we should do everything, including what is pleasant, not the good for the sake of the pleasant.”¹² Gorgias, Polo and Callicles, each defend a way of pursuing pleasure without caring about anything else”.¹³ The “debate is upon a question which has the highest conceivable claims to the serious interest even of a person who has but little intelligence—namely, what course of life is best”.¹⁴

3. Standing up for oneself

Callicles asks Socrates about the situation that could actually happen of one “being dragged and brought before the court (εἰσαχθεὶς εἰς δικαστήριον), by some utterly wicked and worthless man (ὑπὸ πάντῳ ἴσως μοχθηροῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ φαύλου).”¹⁵ Socrates says that “If he ever is brought before the court and stand in any such danger as mentioned (εἰσὶν εἰς δικαστήριον περὶ τούτων τινὸς κινδυνεύων) (521c8-9), [...] it would be no marvel if he were put to death (521d3).” This could happen, therefore, because “the speeches, says Socrates, that I make from time to time are not aimed at gratification, but at what is best instead of what is most pleasant, and as I do not care to deal in “these pretty toys” that you recommend, I shall have not a

¹⁰ 491e8-492a3. καὶ ἀποπιμπλάναι ὧν ἂν αἰεὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία γίγνηται

¹¹ 499e8. τέλος εἶναι ἀπασῶν τῶν πράξεων τὸ ἀγαθόν, καὶ ἐκείνου ἕνεκα δεῖν πάντα τᾶλλα πράττεσθαι

¹² 500a23. Τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἄρα ἕνεκα δεῖ καὶ τᾶλλα καὶ τὰ ἡδέα πράττειν, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὰγαθὰ τῶν ἡδέων

¹³ 501e3-4. τὴν ἡδονὴν ἡμῶν μόνον διώκειν, ἄλλο δ’ οὐδὲν φροντίζειν;

¹⁴ 500c1-4. ὅντινα χρὴ τρόπον ζῆν

¹⁵ 521c3-6

word to say at the bar (οὐχ ἔξω ὅτι λέγω ἐν τῷ δικαστηρίῳ).”¹⁶ So he could not use rhetoric, either in speech or in favors. He would be facing the same situation a doctor is facing when “tried by a bench of children on a charge brought by a cook.” The charges being: “personal mischief of the children, of destroying by cutting and burning, of starvation, of choking to distraction, of giving nasty bitter draughts, of forcing to fast and thirst.” Not like the cook “who used to gorge you with an abundance of nice things of every sort.” And if the doctor speaks the truth, saying that all he has done was for the health of the children, “great would be the outcry from such a bench as that, a loud one”.¹⁷

Mutatis mutandis, this would be Socrates’ own fate “if he were brought before the court” charged by anyone of “corrupting the younger men by reducing them to perplexity, or reviling the older with bitter expressions whether in private or in public.” Even if he says on his behalf that he did what he did in their own interest.¹⁸ But even such a man “in such a case and apparently with no power of standing up for himself” still has a resource: “standing up for himself (εἰ βεβοηθηκὼς εἴη αὐτῷ) by avoiding any unjust word or deed in regard either to men or to gods.” (...)“the most valuable kind of self-protection (βοήθεια ἑαυτῷ κρατίστη)” (...)“for no man fears the mere act of dying, (...) doing wrong is what one fears: for to arrive in the nether world having one’s soul full fraught with a heap of misdeeds is the uttermost of all evils.”¹⁹

4. Inversion

If real rhetoric involves self-denunciation and self-accusation about what one has done wrong, is not for being put to service in the defence of any injustices carried out, and is, on the other hand, for doing everything possible to stop one’s enemy having to go to court and, if he does have to go, everything possible so that he does not have to undergo his punishment, we can see that the slightest possibility of saving ourselves has only one sense: not carrying out any injustice, that it is better to undergo injustice

¹⁶ 521d8-e2

¹⁷ 521d-522a

¹⁸ 552b

¹⁹ 522d-e. αὐτὸ μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν οὐδεὶς φοβεῖται, ὅστις μὴ παντάπασιν ἀλόγιστος τε καὶ ἄνανδρός ἐστιν, τὸ δὲ ἀδικεῖν φοβεῖται· πολλῶν γὰρ ἀδικημάτων γέμοντα τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς Ἅιδου ἀφικέσθαι πάντων ἔσχατον κακῶν ἐστιν

than carry it out, and that, once an injustice has been carried out, it is better to pay for it than not do it. The turning into the contrary of life as we see it, the logic of everyone for himself to the extent that this is possible, the attempt to hide the mistakes we make, the omissions we commit, all the ways in which we are unjust towards others, has a hypothesis of being understood based on the facticity of experience. The formal character of Socrates' theses constitutes an obstacle to understanding them, because it withdraws them from the concrete experiencing of injustice carried out and undergone, from the freeing of action from the presence of injustice. In our being together in the anonymous or explicit presence or total absence of the Gods, one can see the non-cancellable root to the understanding of the austere and penetrating, but true, meaning of Socrates' thesis. All the injustice that I do to another not only causes the other suffering, whatever I do or do not do. Every action has its consequences, but actions also remain with whoever carries them out. In this way, the harm caused by my injustice has a ricochet effect on my own life. If it is like this in particular circumstances in which we exceed ourselves, there will be others that are anodyne. The difficulty thus consists in perceiving the anonymous presence of our actions, any possibility of our simple existence being able to be onerous for others. In the same way we perceive that, when we are the subject of an injustice, we can exactly see the heavy effect on the life of the agent of the injustice. Even if in the majority of cases and fundamentally one does not know what one is doing - the effect that causes what we say, which for the other means a silence - even so a working of total availability is possible for an exposing to the truth of this way of living life. It would be better if we had never made contact with injustice. If it occurs, perpetrating it is worse than undergoing it. Undergoing punishment is better than remaining unpunished.

5. Conscience

Give ear then, as they say, to a right fine story (καλὸς λόγος), which you will regard as a fable (μῦθος), I fancy, but I as an actual account (λόγος); for what I am about to tell you I mean to offer as the truth (ὥς ἀληθὴ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν).²⁰

²⁰ 523a2-3a

What Socrates is trying to reveal is not an eschatological myth, but the truth about our situation. We shall present it point by point, in order to offer an interpretation cancelling out the obvious mythological character investing recounted stories and gaining factual transparency.

1. In our time of Cronos the law concerning mankind (καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἔστιν ἐν θεοῖς) holds (...) that every man who has passed a just and holy life (τὸν βίον διελθὼν) departs after his decease to the Isles of the Blest, but whoever has lived unjustly and impiously goes to the Tartarus.²¹

2. Living men judged the living upon the day when each was to breathe his last; and thus the cases were being decided amiss (δικασταὶ ζῶντες ἦσαν ζώντων, ἐκεῖνη τῇ ἡμέρᾳ δικάζοντες ἢ μέλλοιεν τελευτᾶν· κακῶς οὖν αἱ δίκαι ἐκρίνοντο).²²

3. Pluto came before Zeus with the report that they found men passing over to either abode undeserving.²³

4. Zeus decided: First, “to put a stop to their foreknowledge of their death; for this they at present foreknow (παυστέον ἐστὶν προειδότας αὐτοὺς τὸν θάνατον· νῦν γὰρ προΐσασι).”²⁴ Next, they must be stripped bare of all those things before they are tried; for they must stand their trial dead. Their judge also must be naked, dead, beholding with very soul the very soul of each immediately upon his death, bereft of all his kin and having left behind on earth all that fine array, to the end that the judgement may be just.”²⁵

The final myth in the Gorgias describes a crisis of conscience. The trial is carried out when only the souls of the tried and of the judge are in contact. The solitude of the person being judged, without friends or relatives, and the obligations of leaving behind, on earth, all that world, are conditions for the judgment (decision) being just. It is important to stress here the condition of nudity for the trial to be carried out. The only intervention in it is the inspection of lucidity. The judge too is divested of all his “qualities”. Only through the abandoning of this cosmos is there the possibility of performing an examination of one’s conscience.

²¹ 523a5-b4

²² 523b4-b7

²³ 523c

²⁴ 523d6-7

²⁵ 523e1-6. ἔπειτα γυμνοὺς κριτέον ἀπάντων τούτων· τεθνεῶτας γὰρ δεῖ κρίνεσθαι. καὶ τὸν κριτὴν δεῖ γυμνὸν εἶναι, τεθνεῶτα, αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν θεωροῦντα ἐξαίφνης ἀποθανόντος ἐκάστου, ἔρημον πάντων τῶν συγγενῶν καὶ καταλιπόντα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς πάντα ἐκεῖνον τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα δικαία ἢ κρίσις ᾗ.

We can see that the notion of nudity involves the divesting of everything that could lead to biased judgment conditions: clothes, which point to a condition, the way of being, in general or at that moment, of one's body – but also that which stands between our soul and others' point of view, which is the body itself: simulating, physiognomic games, anything that can create illusions or opacity, an inexpressive look.

This nudity has in mind how someone is. Only a long time after knowing someone does this someone show himself to be exactly as he is, without a mask. Without being able to save appearances.

Once the conditions for knowing how someone is have been created (his conduct conveys or corroborates the character one ascribes to him – one is not interested in his growing old or fat), one has in mind determinations of the human soul just as it can be detected exclusively through an effort to comprehend what we comprehend in a tacit way: its way of being, its individuality. In the majority of cases we have suspicions about how someone is.

What we see at the start are traits pointing to what someone is, an interpretation of ourselves for ourselves. There is interpretational excess, but there is also an insufficiency relating to the sense of what is detected. Between us and others there is a huge distance.

Even with those who have always been there with us, when we make a reflection on the meaning of their frustrations, of how they live life, how their world is, we see that we are lacking in knowledge about how things are with them. It is a question of trying to unveil the way in which someone is, his character, his strength of will, his lapses. There are people who gain control of themselves and others who lose it. There are people who improve everything in us, others who destroy it. The majority of people do not say anything. Others, nevertheless, change everything: they make it possible to see or they make blind.

People can be right next to each other in a bus and not even notice each other. People mind their own business; it is not because their shoulders are touching that they are close. At that moment they are like things. The manifestation of the other is not provided by the content seen, but by what in human beings is the ψυχή, their breath (ψυχή comes from the Greek verb meaning to breathe). It is for this reason that the other can lay waste or be mild, like a breeze.

Seeing how someone is in their heart is something that is not included in the body's visible content. It is necessary to see how persons deal with extreme situations, what they are capable of. This occurrence is not circumscribed to the interior of a person, although it is strong there. Each of us is not in the interior of our body, alone. We overflow and expand throughout the world. We are the same size as the world.

This nudity is the loss of clothes: the group to which it belongs, the manipulation it uses, ages, sexes, etc. This nudity tries to see which presentation and façade it can manipulate, but in the non-figurative sense we see what nudity means when we talk about the hard truth, presented without any kind of deception.

This judgment of meaning has no attenuating circumstances. It is a question of an appraisal of those circumstances in which we were capable of doing something that was not necessary, in which there was an excess.

The judge too cannot be manipulated; he has to see one in the eye. There can be no attenuating circumstances on either the part of the judge or of the judged.

This is what conscience and the crisis of conscience phenomenon portray. In this there is no going to court nor is an objective crime subject required (the breaking of a code, for example). Although Plato uses the image of the court, of defence and attack, what there is here is the mythological description of when we behaved badly, when there was an excess, when we did not know, when we maltreated. We see what is at stake when there is subject-matter involving bad behaviour. Regrets, feeling sorry and remorse always arrive too late, with regards to what can no longer be undone.

When there is a scission of the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ with respect to the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$, a scission within life itself and the soul, this forces us to review what we have done. We are in the midst of a decision, of a crisis, regarding what is happening.

This is schizophrenia within our life: how was it possible? Is the judge a transcendent entity? Or is he one of my facets? And who perpetrated the injustice? How does he live with me, when I am already another?

There is a rejection. We are unable to integrate this "I" which we were in the I we are. I am sorry for what I was, I feel remorse. It is I who reflect about myself. And it is not a question here of any theoretical reflection. It falls upon me, but I do not know from where.

It is this that leads to the identification of an appraising hearing. When there is a crisis of conscience, there are no attenuating circumstances. What comes to be present is a nudity related to our very life. We cannot appeal to those we know; there are no

corroborating witnesses to say that I am cool. I am taken unawares in what I myself am and this is not what I have. What I have done is absolute, it cannot be undone, I am consigned to the consequences. I cannot corrupt that which I am.

The description of this nudity renders me impermeable to others. I do not want others to discover what I am. There is abandonment to myself. Others are not there with me; they are unable to help me nor do I manage to communicate to them what I have done. I lose all those characteristics that tie me to life and make me identify that I am alive (that which is in my identity card). I do not recognize race, sex or age, but I am consigned to my humanity.

6. Judgment

1.

For death, as it seems to me, is actually nothing but the disconnection of two things, the soul and the body, from each other. (...) each of them keeps its own condition very much as it was when the man was alive, the body having its own nature, with its treatments and experiences all manifest upon it. (...) So when a man's soul is stripped bare of the body, all its natural gifts, and the experiences added to that soul as the result of his various pursuits, are manifest in it.²⁶

2. A passage from *The Republic*.

But tell me further this. “What do you regard as the greatest benefit you have enjoyed from the possession of property?” “Something,” he said, “which I might not easily bring many to believe if I told them. For let me tell you, Socrates,” he said, “that when a man begins to realize that he is going to die, he is filled with apprehensions and concern about matters that before did not occur to him (ἐπειδάν τις ἐγγύς ἢ τοῦ οἴεσθαι τελευτήσειν, εἰσέρχεται αὐτῷ δέος καὶ φροντὶς περὶ ὧν ἔμπροσθεν οὐκ εἰσήει). The tales that are told of the world below and how the men who have done wrong here must pay the penalty there (τὸν ἐνθάδε ἀδικήσαντα δεῖ ἐκεῖ διδόναι δίκην), though he may have laughed them down hitherto, then begin to torture his soul with the doubt that there may be some truth in them (τότε δὲ

²⁶ 524b2-c1. ὁ θάνατος τυγχάνει ὧν, ὥς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ δυοῖν πραγμάτων διάλυσιν, τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος, ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων· ἐπειδὴν δὲ διαλυθῇτον ἄρα ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων, οὐ πολὺ ἤττον ἐκάτερον αὐτοῖν ἔχει τὴν ἕξιν τὴν αὐτοῦ ἥνπερ καὶ ὅτε ἔζη ὁ ἄνθρωπος, τό τε σῶμα τὴν φύσιν τὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ θεραπεύματα καὶ τὰ παθήματα ἐνδηλα πάντα.

στρέφουσιν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν μὴ ἀληθεῖς ᾧσιν). And apart from that the man himself either from the weakness of old age or possibly as being now nearer to the things beyond has a somewhat clearer view of them. Be that as it may, he is filled with doubt, surmises, and alarms and begins to reckon up and consider whether he has ever wronged anyone (ἤδη ἐγγυτέρω ὢν τῶν ἐκεῖ μᾶλλον τι καθορᾷ αὐτά—ὕποψίας δ' οὖν καὶ δείματος μεστὸς γίγνεται καὶ ἀναλογίζεται ἤδη καὶ σκοπεῖ εἴ τινα τι ἠδίκησεν). Now he to whom the ledger of his life shows an account of many evil deeds starts up even from his dreams like children again and again in affright and his days are haunted by anticipations of worse to come.²⁷

This is Plato's description of death. We pass over to living in accordance with this absolute suspension of being with others. There is no content sufficient to rehabilitate us. In this judgment there is a state of not being able to return to the world: one does not manage to read, listen to music, and talk with others. The present time does not get re-established. We remain tied to what we were. This violation of guilt is what cancels out possibilities, installation in the world. We stop being able to be in some particular place. The world closes up. This nudity, this hard truth, is detectable because we stop being channelled towards the world. Everything is attention and concern; everything is fear.

This is the description we have in the dialogue. "We come to have in our mind". Θεωρεῖν – it is not the theoretical model, but seeing, having in mind – θεωρία is the situation in which we see, it is the colloquial circumstance of seeing, it modifies pragmatic behaviour with regard to anything. From the mythical point of view there is a judge and a defendant, but what is at stake here is that this is what occurs when we have a bad conscience, when there is a crisis of meaning: we reject what we were and this rejection comes from a being which does not coincide with us. There is an interruption in the links to the world and this corresponds to the situation of death – it is the impossibility of performing life.

This crisis occurs "suddenly and unexpectedly", i.e. we do not prepare for it, it occurs against our will. It occurs against every expectation and we do not want to go through it. It forces us to reconsider who we are, to reconsider the meaning of our actions. It provides us with the possibility of rejecting ourselves, but summons the possibility of being.

²⁷ *Respublica* 330d1-331a3.

What is at stake is not a juridical or religious failing, or not living up to what the other thinks of me. What is at stake is the loss of myself, the non-recognizing of myself. I enter into the situation of reflecting upon the overall meaning of my life. It is an ontological and not an ontical question. It is not connected to transgression as such. They are not specific contents that compare what I am with what I think I am, but another possibility: it is life that asks us how things are with us, without us having been who we were to be, if this great turning-point for things occurred.

The sensation of indebtedness towards everything, of global dissatisfaction, of indebtedness towards ourselves, the wanting at a certain point to change everything in our life, all these are formal, existential contents.

In the circumstances in which we are in ourselves, abandoned by the world, there is no worldly content, a worldly cause. I am called to justify what I was and I may not succeed in doing it. I can in the last instance be a chance happening. I have ended up by falling into this in which I am; I did not create this. The question is: was I who I was to have been? I can be zealous and diligent and not in truth have been.

Plato's thesis is that if there is a real opening to the possibility of death, a nudity of myself, in comparison with the generalized impossibility, in this situation it can happen that the possibilities in which I play out my life manifest themselves in their meaning and can or not be abandoned.

The hermeneutic situation of philosophy gets revealed in the confrontation with the possibility of impossibility. There is the declaration of my life situation as being finite. It is this that compels me to reconsider the way in which I approach everything.

The dissociation carried out aims at recognizing the autonomous occurrence of lucidity. Lucidity is excessive compared to everything that it is permitted to see, including the body itself.

But the hugest scission occurs in the lucidity between the awareness of myself now being judged and my future left uncertain. The obstruction to the understanding of what may happen confines me to myself in a repressed relationship with others and the world, but also with myself because I do not know what is going to become of myself. The possibility of this dissociation can happen and, in truth, it happens when we are still alive. The extreme situation of confinement in which I isolate myself in a *ψυχή* and come to see everything filtered by the approach of the end.

When lucidity faces temporal finiteness it reflects on its limits. At that moment a crisis and a decision on meaning, on that which has been, get started.

An experience of terror shuts us up in ourselves. It seems that time will never pass. At that moment one does not meditate on what one is going through. These are radical experiences of time. They get modified temporally with relation to nothing.

3.

Rhadamanthus sets before him and surveys the soul of each, not knowing whose it is; nay, often when he has laid hold of the Great King or some other prince or potentate, he perceives the utter un-healthiness of his soul, striped all over with the scourge, and a mass of wounds, the work of perjuries and injustice; where every act has left its smirch upon his soul, where all is awry through falsehood and imposture, and nothing straight because of a nurture that knew not truth: or, as the result of an unbridled course of fastidiousness, insolence, and incontinence, he finds the soul full fraught with disproportion and ugliness.²⁸

With this it is possible to trace out the reduction of the visible, of what constitutes reality, to a structure that, although it constitutes what is presented, is not, nevertheless, visible. What we have available corresponds to a neutral interpretation of things which is as a rule that of objective reality, i.e. what constitutes things, but on the other hand corresponds to a set of operations tending to tacitly organize things. What Plato produces, compelling us to circumscribe our gaze (the live body and the dead body), points to there being a set of characteristics acquired during life, either through getting old or through forms of intervention by the body. What we have in mind are ἵχνη (footprints, clues). What is presented contains, as sensitive data that is apparently mute, a characteristic of transitivity or transcendence. It is not something that implodes into itself. What is presented can be interpreted over and beyond what it is permitted to see. Its diseases do not correspond simply to objective data, but surpass what it is permitted to see. In this sense ἰδεῖν is possible, it is possible to see.

Plato produces a dialectic of presentation. He tries to circumscribe what it is permitted to see: a slash, a cut, a perforation – what, for us, already points to a violent intervention. He also seeks the possibility of seeing that the precariousness of a body

²⁸ 524e1-525a6. ὁ Ῥαδάμανθους ἐκείνους ἐπιστήσας θεᾶται ἐκάστου τὴν ψυχὴν, οὐκ εἰδὼς ὅτου ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ πολλάκις τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως ἐπιλαβόμενος ἢ ἄλλου ὅτου οὖν βασιλέως ἢ δυνάστου κατείδεν οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς ὄν τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλὰ διαμεμαστιγωμένην καὶ οὐλῶν μεστὴν ὑπὸ ἐπιορκιῶν καὶ ἀδικίας, ἃ ἐκάστη ἢ πρᾶξις αὐτοῦ ἐξωμόρξατο εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ πάντα σκολιὰ ὑπὸ ψεύδους καὶ ἀλαζονείας καὶ οὐδὲν εὐθὺ διὰ τὸ ἄνευ ἀληθείας τεθράφθαι. Καὶ ὑπὸ ἐξουσίας καὶ τρυφῆς καὶ ὕβρεως καὶ ἀκρατίας τῶν πράξεων ἀσυμμετρίας τε καὶ αἰσχροτήτος γέμουσαν τὴν ψυχὴν εἶδεν.

points to much of its own nature. The body, via its troubles, diseases, scars, its φύσις and ἔξις, makes it possible to see what life the person, who inhabited it, had. There is the possibility of gathering clues about who he was. A corpse makes it possible to access the structures constituting the body (φύσις, ἔξις). All these indications are ἔνδεια (manifest, visible).

There is not just the possibility of reading the body because there is more than it is permitted to see. There is also the possibility of analysing the ψυχή when it is lain bare in the body. In this way one can also analyse the φύσις (essence) not only of the body, but also of the ψυχή. It is possible to see its diseases and ἐπιτήδευσις (way of being in general or at that moment) in each pragma (situation or circumstance). The term *pragma* is usually translated by “thing”, in German “Sache”, which is different from “ding”, a physical thing. Translating it by “action” also loses its etymological meaning – pragma is a crossing. The verb is used by Homer for crossing the sea (πράττειν). In this literal sense it means crossing, but in the metaphorical sense the Greeks wanted to denote not only a political or moral action but also an action as the result of crossing moments in time. It denotes a condition of possibility of acting: waiting for circumstances or their constitution, the concrete conditions in which the situation gets set up – a lesson, for example, which gives a sense to a lecture hall, taking place an hour and a half from here (and this is a 150 kilometre journey). It denotes that the specific nature of the ψυχή is time. We need time to create situations and live through them.

7. Sentences

1. Beholding this he sends it away in dishonour straight to the place of custody, where on its arrival it is to endure the sufferings that are fitting.²⁹
2. And it is fitting that every one under punishment rightly inflicted on him by another should either be made better and profit thereby, or serve as an example to

²⁹ 525a6-7. ἰδὼν δὲ ἀτίμως ταύτην ἀπέπεμψεν εὐθὺς τῆς φρουρᾶς, οἳ μέλλει ἐλθοῦσα ἀνατλήναι τὰ προσήκοντα πάθῃ.

the rest, that others seeing the sufferings he endures may in fear amend themselves.³⁰

What remains of someone who has departed is a nothing that manifests itself. We see the links that bound us to him. The other, in dying, appears to us more vigorously. He is no longer available, but his meaning, his way of acting, still lives with us. An examination of or decision on the life of someone is possible precisely when that person appears to us in their absence. We look at our friends as if they are for always, but Plato invites an inspection of the other so as to see that the other is always there. What is at stake is a point of view which has all others as its own, seeing them not only when they appear, but seeing others as in the majority of cases they seem to us and also as they are secondarily, as they see things and interpret them. Rhadamanthus sees us as we are when we want to score points, but also in our more intimate secret, what we are for all our life, which manifests itself or always remains in the background. This point of view takes account of a soul over and beyond its diseases. Rhadamanthus, because he knows the way of being of each ψυχή can comprehend the meaning of all its actions; the judge can comprehend each ψυχή in its relation with the mega-situation that is being alive, not only in relation to the various πράγματα (serious conversation with someone, changing one's behaviour,...).? Rhadamanthus has in mind the whole labyrinth because it reflects on the meaning of human life, the relationship of lucidity with the outline draft, the project, that for which each lucidity is launched. It is what can be deduced by considering the form of relationship of each one of us with things, with the ἀλήθεια, the way in which each one has put into practice the knowledge of how it was with him, if existence was an expression of his meaning or if it was aborted. What is at stake is seeing how praxis is a manifestation of the ψυχή. Was someone or was he not as he was to have been? The judgment seeks to formulate an opinion about the nature of the human soul and of what should have been done to arrive at oneself. It is this that is at stake at the end of time, when we are taken to the mortal zone. The examination is performed and the fundamental question is: are we just with ourselves or not? Can we justify ourselves? Were we what we

³⁰ 525b1-4. Προσθήκει δὲ παντὶ τῷ ἐν τιμωρίᾳ ὄντι, ὑπ' ἄλλου ὀρθῶς τιμωρουμένῳ, ἢ βελτίονι γίγνεσθαι καὶ ὀνίνασθαι ἢ παραδείγματι τοῖς ἄλλοις γίγνεσθαι, ἵνα ἄλλοι ὀρῶντες πάσχοντα ἃ ἂν πάσχη φοβούμενοι βελτίους γίγνωνται.

were to have been? Have we accomplished the meaning of the enterprise? Do we accomplish ourselves?

Rhadamanthus knows how to have in his mind the *ψυχή* of each one of us, while not knowing who it is. There is a *θέομαι*, a having in mind, a contemplating. It is not an analysis of the soul in general, as in psychology. There is no soul in general. What there is the possibility of each one coming to have a soul or losing it, the possibility of having a soul that is large or small. What is at stake is how each one relates with lucidity. Do you or do you not have a soul? Did you acquire it or lose it? Nobody can get to live without manifesting his soul, his heart. There can be a nostalgic relationship with that which did not get to be.

He does not see to whom it belongs. Rhadamanthus comes to see with each one of us his capacity to endeavour. This is the mythological wrapping. What is at stake is the judgment of ourselves by ourselves, about whether we have been who we were to have been. For this reason also at stake are the clues about how we have been (for example the traumas that reveal something).

3.

Those who are benefited by the punishment (...) are they who have committed remediable offences; but still it is through bitter throes of pain that they receive their benefit both here and in the nether world; for in no other way can there be riddance of iniquity.³¹

We have been describing the way in which we arrive at the definition of the circumstances in which the *ψυχή* finds itself when it is appraised, when hanging over it there is a judgment that determines the meaning of its actions. After describing these circumstances it happens that each *πρᾶξις*, each situation through which each soul has passed is as it were engraved in its own *ψυχή*. There is a pointing to the meaning of each situation so that what remains after there being an action is the expression of the meaning.

Πρᾶξις binds the *ψυχή* as much to what it has done as to what it has not done. It binds it to its conduct, to its practical behaviour. This makes it possible for

³¹ 525b4-c1. εἰσὶν δὲ οἱ μὲν ὠφελούμενοί τε καὶ δίκην διδόντες ὑπὸ θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων οὗτοι οἱ ἂν ἰάσιμα ἁμαρτήματα ἁμαρτῶσιν· ὅμως δὲ δι' ἀλγηδόνων καὶ ὀδυνῶν γίγνεται αὐτοῖς ἡ ὠφελία καὶ ἐνθάδε καὶ ἐν Ἄϊδου· οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε ἄλλως ἀδικίας ἀπαλλάττεσθαι.

Rhadamanthus to have in mind the *ψυχή* as a kind of invisible force field, without knowing whose it is.

Rhadamanthus has the conditions to see beyond who it is, who are the parents, if he has the power. He manages to examine the *ψυχή*, which is not perceived? but contemplated (*θεωρία*). It is this that occurs when we have ourselves in mind. Rhadamanthus sees the moments at which we go all the way or we realize ourselves. He has in mind not only one's diary, daily program (even if these portray metaphysical dispositions). Rhadamanthus sees the manifestation of excellence in an action. At stake is the impression of a particular action that remains in a soul.

It can occur that the key moments in our life are not easily registered by us in a brief visual inspection. What has produced changes in our point of view, launches us, makes us turn in another direction – this modification is unlikely to be verified by us. If we had not meditated about this we would be unlikely to know how to say what terminated a trend and opened up other possibilities, considered a new hypothesis. Rhadamanthus has in mind the decisive moments that pass unobserved in daily life. He has in mind the impression that remained of that first time. Everything that identifies gets lost in an action of *ἀδικία*, which goes beyond the bounds.

Rhadamanthus has in mind transgressions with others and also with us – *ἀδικία*.

This qualifies that which is involved in *ἀδικία*. Ἄνευ ἀληθείας – there has been a replacement of unconcealment, of what is true, by what is false. The *ψυχή* corresponds to an unfolding of oneself with oneself. Being is to some extent this same relationship. *Ἐξουσία*, power, is the way in which we impose our point of view. *Ἀλαζονεία*, pretension, is the self-esteem of ourselves to which we adapt the rest. *Τρυφή*, *ὕβρις* and *ἀκρατία* are ways of getting out of oneself. What is at stake is the *ψυχή*'s way of behaving. This characterizes the *ψυχή* as being without character. This pathology involving loss of power over oneself (in certain circumstances we are projects of another's will, which has created us) is what Plato is describing: it puts us in a situation where there is an absolute loss of meaning.

But I suppose the makers of the laws ... terrorize the stronger sort of folk who are able to get an advantage, and to prevent them from getting one over them (ἐκφοβοῦντες τοὺς ἑρρωμενεστέρους τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ δυνατοὺς ὄντας πλέον ἔχειν, ἵνα μὴ αὐτῶν πλέον ἔχωσιν), they tell them, that such aggrandizement is foul

and unjust, and that wrongdoing is just this endeavour to get the advantage of one's neighbors (αἰσχροὺν καὶ ἄδικον τὸ πλεονεκτεῖν, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἀδικεῖν, τὸ πλεον τῶν ἄλλων ζητεῖν ἔχειν) (...) So this is why by convention it is termed unjust and foul to aim at an advantage over the majority, and why they call it wrongdoing (τοῦτο ἄδικον καὶ αἰσχροὺν λέγεται, τὸ πλεον ζητεῖν ἔχειν τῶν πολλῶν, καὶ ἀδικεῖν αὐτὸ καλοῦσιν).”³²

Plato's thesis is that “on seeing the ψυχή Rhadamanthus sends it to the place of his prison where he/it will have to suffer appropriate sufferings”. In the judgment there is a causal, formal link between the understanding of the state of the place in which that which goes out of oneself (the unjust) is and the sending to prison (it is not possible for oblivion to occur). There is a relation between a depressed state and having to pass through suffering. It is not a question of paying a fine or being a prisoner. The ψυχή can in this case, even so, never have restituted itself to itself. There is a synthesis between the fine and the possibility of having control again of one's own life (clean, so to say). The question is certainly being compelled to pass through suitable suffering.

The possibility of the ψυχή offering me a new opportunity after it has been traumatized, after reaching its end, gets ascertained. The ψυχή can gather new strength, not by wanting more but by wanting what was to be wanted. Nothing ontical repairs the fault. It appears repaired. What is the nature of the adaptation to the inhabitable day-to-dayness?

4. And the thesis of *The Republic*:

But of those who have done extreme wrong and, as a result of such crimes, have become incurable, of those are the examples made; (...) others are profited who behold them undergoing for their transgressions the greatest, sharpest, and most fearful sufferings evermore.³³

³² 483b5-c8.

³³ 525c1-6. οἱ δ' ἂν τὰ ἔσχατα ἀδικήσωσι καὶ διὰ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀδικήματα ἀνίατοι γένωνται, ἐκ τούτων τὰ παραδείγματα γίγνεται, καὶ οὗτοι αὐτοὶ μὲν οὐκέτι ὀνίνανται οὐδέν, ἅτε ἀνίατοι ὄντες, ἄλλοι δὲ ὀνίνανται οἱ τούτους ὀρώντες διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ὀδυνηρότατα καὶ φοβερότατα πάθη πάσχοντας τὸν αἰὶ χρόνον.

8. Conclusion

1.

But among the many statements we have made, while all the rest are refuted this one alone is unshaken—that doing wrong is to be more carefully shunned than suffering it; that above all things a man should study not to seem but to be good both in private and in public; that if one becomes bad in any respect one must be corrected; that this is good in the second place.³⁴

2.

Next to being just, to become so and to be corrected by paying the penalty; and that every kind of flattery, with regard either to oneself or to others, to few or to many, must be avoided; and that rhetoric is to be used for this one purpose always, of pointing to what is just, and so in every other activity.³⁵

3. According to our analysis, the fundamental claims found throughout the dialogue have to do with the connection between "persuading", "doing what one feels like" and "taking pleasure". The active components – to persuade, to do what one feels like and to get pleasure – are the motives for being unjust. On the other hand, being persuaded, being the object of someone else's desires viz. of someone else's power means suffering injustice. We get a glimpse here of the intrinsic relationship between human beings: agent and recipient, active and passive, intervening and being the subject that undergoes intervention. On the one hand, we can be at the same time active and passive towards ourselves. On the other hand, we change roles and become either active agents of injustice or passive subjects of injustice.

Furthermore, there is a scale of increasing levels of injustice towards one another. It also appears that there is a transition from a more general/broader field of intervention to a more specific one: from persuasion of the masses (the use and

³⁴ 527b2-8. ἀλλ' ἐν τοσούτοις λόγοις τῶν ἄλλων ἐλεγχόμενων μόνος οὗτος ἡρεμεῖ ὁ λόγος, ὥς εὐλαβητέον ἐστὶν τὸ ἀδικεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, καὶ παντὸς μᾶλλον ἀνδρὶ μελετητέον οὐ τὸ δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀγαθὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶναι, καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ· ἐὰν δέ τις κατὰ τι κακὸς γίγνηται, κολαστέος ἐστί, καὶ τοῦτο δεύτερον ἀγαθόν.

³⁵ 527b9-c6. μετὰ τὸ εἶναι δίκαιον, τὸ γίγνεσθαι καὶ κολαζόμενον διδόναι δίκην· καὶ πᾶσαν κολακείαν καὶ τὴν περὶ ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὴν περὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, καὶ περὶ ὀλίγους καὶ περὶ πολλούς, φευκτέον· καὶ τῇ ῥητορικῇ οὕτω χρηστέον ἐπὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἀεὶ, καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ πάσῃ πράξει. ἐμοὶ οὖν πειθόμενος ἀκολούθησον ἐνταῦθα, οἱ ἀφικόμενος εὐδαιμονήσεις καὶ ζῶν καὶ τελευτήσας, ὥς ὁ λόγος σημαίνει.

control of an entire people) to the pleasure one gets from a single person. Persuasion – the abuser of political, personal and sexual power – forms various layers and various circles of self-affirmation. One is always greedy, one wants to have more than one should or can, and one always wants to have more than other people.

Punishment of the culprit has to do with persuasion – it must touch the very core of persuasion, namely of the kind of persuasion that gives rise to injustice. After all, flattering oneself is what injustice is all about. And being greedy lies at the bottom of every flattery: it makes us want more than we should or can. Self-indulgence reduces other people to mere “satellites” of oneself. To perpetrate injustice – to be unfair – harms the principle of structural proportion in our being with others. This harming of the principle of proportion is corrected only when the perpetrator gets punished. If injustice cannot be avoided — and life shows that it cannot — then injustice has to be rectified. But the point is not just some kind of “mechanical” repairing of the harm caused by offences. The point is “restoration of health” (of the ψυχή’s health) for the culprit himself.

Once injustice is committed, the perpetrator should be punished. Indeed, the perpetrator must pay the penalty, must account for his or her acts (διδόναι δίκην). All kinds of flattery, towards others or oneself, must be avoided. The three forms of injustice shape one another. They are forms of self-indulgence. And the point is getting at the root of problem.

Taking any other course would mean the reversal or eradication/denial of human nature. When one is aware that one has to account for one’s acts, one not only seeks to undo the evil one has done to others: one tries to recover oneself from the snares of one’s own wickedness.

In the final analysis, Self-indulgence comes from within ourselves and we are the object of our own indulgence. We live in the solitude of our own agency. Sadness goes hand in hand with realizing that we can only exist as the objects of all our whims. Self-indulgence has taken hold of us from the beginning of time. Are we condemned to being attached to ourselves and to leaving everybody else outside?

Perhaps another way of redemption for our self-indulgence would inaugurate a different kind of relationship with ourselves and with others.

Plato Playing the Reader:

A History of Resistance in Plato's *Gorgias*

Tomaz Fidalgo *

My goal in this text is to consider the history of resistance in Plato's *Gorgias*. To do so, I will begin by explaining what I mean by a history of resistance. I will then try to develop a study of such a resistance in the dialogue between Socrates and Polus. This text will thus be divided into two sections: the first will try to show the importance of the project; the second will try to exemplify the first.

1. What is a history of resistance? Importance and elements

One of the strangest things when reading the *Gorgias* is that it is possible to read it and go on with life as if nothing happened. At first glance, this does not seem strange, considering it happens with the majority of texts. So why is this one different? Why is it strange that we can read the *Gorgias* and go home barely untouched? What makes this text so special that it is really strange for someone to read it *as if* it had nothing to do with the way life is led? It is said several times during the dialogue that the subject debated is the most important of all, since it deals with the problem of how we should lead our lives.¹ Now, ignoring the problems we

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¹ See notably 458a8-b1: “οὐδὲν γὰρ οἶμαι τοσοῦτον κακὸν εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅσον δόξα ψευδῆς περὶ ὧν τυγχάνει νῦν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ὧν.”; 472c6-d1: “καὶ γὰρ καὶ τυγχάνει περὶ ὧν ἀμφισβητοῦμεν οὐ πάνυ μικρὰ ὄντα, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν τι ταῦτα περὶ ὧν εἰδέναι τε κάλλιστον μὴ εἰδέναι τε αἰσχιστον: τὸ γὰρ κεφάλαιον αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἢ γινώσκειν ἢ ἀγνοεῖν ὅστις τε εὐδαίμων ἐστὶν καὶ ὅστις μὴ.”; 487e7-488b1: “πάντων δὲ καλλίστη ἐστὶν ἡ σκέψις, ᾧ Καλλίκλεις, περὶ τούτων ὧν σὺ δὴ μοι ἐπετίμησας, ποῖόν τινα χρὴ εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τί ἐπιτηδεύειν καὶ μέχρι τοῦ, καὶ πρεσβύτερον καὶ νεώτερον ὄντα. ἐγὼ γὰρ εἴ τι μὴ ὀρθῶς πράττω κατὰ τὸν βίον τὸν ἐμαυτοῦ, εὖ ἴσθι τοῦτο ὅτι οὐχ ἐκὼν ἐξαμαρτάνω ἀλλ’ ἀμαθία τῇ ἐμῇ: σὺ οὖν, ὥσπερ ἡρξω νοουθετεῖν με, μὴ ἀποστῇς, ἀλλ’ ἱκανῶς μοι ἐνδειξαι τί ἐστὶν

encounter when leading our lives is the best manner to resist such a text. And this is precisely what happens: while reading it, it is easy to recognize how we fall into the numerous traps prepared by Plato, how we take on the roles of Gorgias, Polus and Callicles and, just like them, resist Socrates; but then these problems go back to the bookcase. This is the very best way to resist the *Gorgias*, and my belief is that such a resistance is anticipated and described by Plato in the course of the dialogue.

I once tried to explain a group of high school students why I decided to study philosophy. Obviously, this meant trouble. I was trying to tell them that I realized I had no idea of what to do with my life, and so I decided to try to comprehend what I was supposed to do, before doing it. Needless to say they were not very thrilled. The reason for this is very simple: they already knew to some degree what to do with their lives, but just did not know how to get there. To shake things up a little, I told them: "Here I am, saying that you could be living a life that you neither chose nor control, saying that this life may lead you to the opposite of what you really want, and you could not care less. But if I told you that the most beautiful girl or the most handsome boy in the world was in the next room and I could introduce you to him or her, then you would not miss a single detail." I had just read the *Gorgias* for the first time. It felt like I was playing Socrates... But after reading the dialogue a couple of times and studying it for a while, it became clear to me that, in most ways, I'm still just like those kids.

Afterwards, I found that the text itself describes how our natural standpoint tends to resist philosophy. Doing so, it describes some of the phenomena included in such a resistance. Indeed, the *Gorgias* anticipates how we keep avoiding real "away from the desk" confrontation with the text. This demonstrates how we repel philosophy, for the core of the dialogue is about the need for philosophy in conducting one's life. So the history of resistance is in fact a history of the *Gorgias*. This dialogue is an attempt to drag the reader into venturing on the philosophical life, and thus it needs to deal with the natural resistance to such venturing. The funny thing about this particular text is

τοῦτο ὁ ἐπιτηδευτέον μοι, καὶ τίνα τρόπον κτησαίμην ἂν αὐτό, καὶ ἂν με λάβῃς νῦν μὲν σοὶ ὁμολογήσαντα, ἐν δὲ τῷ ὑστέρῳ χρόνῳ μὴ ταῦτα πράττοντα ἅπερ ὡμολόγησα, πάνυ με ἡγοῦ βλάκα εἶναι καὶ μηκέτι ποτέ με νοουθετήσης ὕστερον, ὥς μηδενὸς ἄξιον ὄντα.” and 500b5-c8: “καὶ πρὸς Φιλίου, ὃ Καλλίκλεις, μήτε αὐτὸς οἶου δεῖν πρὸς ἐμὲ παίζειν μηδ’ ὅτι ἂν τύχῃς παρὰ τὰ δοκοῦντα ἀποκρίνου, μήτ’ αὖ τὰ παρ’ ἐμοῦ οὕτως ἀποδέχου ὥς παίζοντος: ὁρᾷς γάρ ὅτι περὶ τούτου ἡμῖν εἰσιν οἱ λόγοι, οὗ τί ἂν μᾶλλον σπουδάσειέ τις καὶ σμικρὸν νοῦν ἔχων ἄνθρωπος, ἢ τοῦτο, ὄντινα ἡμῖν τρόπον ζῆν, πότερον ἐπὶ ὃν σὺ παρακαλεῖς ἐμέ, τὰ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς δὴ ταῦτα πράττοντα, λέγοντά τε ἐν τῷ δήμῳ καὶ ῥητορικὴν ἀσκοῦντα καὶ πολιτευόμενον τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον ὃν ὑμεῖς νῦν πολιτεύεσθε, ἢ ἐπὶ τόνδε τὸν βίον τὸν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ, καὶ τί ποτ’ ἐστὶν οὗτος ἐκείνου διαφέρων.”

that, by using the characters of Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, it shows the reader why he resists philosophy, and hence why he resists a text that is trying to drag him into philosophy. By putting the reader in the shoes of the characters who resist philosophy, Plato is trying to give him a mirror-like view of himself and his relation to philosophy. Hence, the *Gorgias* includes a history of the reader's relation with the text. In a way, this history is the history of the text itself, since it is the history of the dialogue between Plato and his reader about the philosophical way of life.

To better understand what is at stake, it is important to say that my original problem regarded the end of the dialogue and the way Callicles seems to sulk, once he realises he has lost the argument. At the time, this seemed to me like the perfect portrayal of the reader (of myself) after reading the text. This meant something like "well, well, you win, now please finish this so I can go on with my life". Curiously enough, this moment consists in the end of the explicit resistance to Socrates. This *dramatic* aspect hints that there are, within the dialogue, elements that describe *why* and *how* we tend to resist it, and accordingly *why* and *how* we tend to resist philosophy.

A history of resistance consists in the inventory of such elements. This inventory must be a dynamic one, if it wishes to be faithful to the text. Nevertheless, it also needs to progress *pari passu* with the unfolding of the dialogue between Socrates and his successive interlocutors. Besides accompanying the progress in questions and answers, such a history of resistance needs at all time to be watchful for the tacit aspects indirectly dealt with by Plato. These aspects, although apparently inexistent, play a key role in the *Gorgias*. Indeed there are various silent, tacit, dramatic aspects that are important for understanding the text. This indicates that there are, besides Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, a lot of important and *tacit "characters"*, which are connected with the three explicit ones. I will try to show that resistance is one of them.

The project of a history of resistance is therefore the project of a history of how and why Gorgias, Polus and Callicles tend to resist what Socrates is saying and, at the same time, the project of how and why this resistance reflects the reader's resistance, for he is portrayed by those three characters. This implies it is also a history of the underlying elements that lead each one of them to fail to understand what Socrates means and what he is pointing to. Hence, it is an account of all that contributes to each one of these characters either assuming what was not said or forgetting what was

already stated. It is thus a narration of all the elements that show *how* and *why* these three characters resist philosophy, and hence includes elements described in the text, but also *how* and *why* these elements appear and *how* and *why* these elements (and the way they appear) interact with the characters. Since Plato's goal is clearly to put his reader in the shoes of each one of Socrates' opponents, it is also clear that he is describing the reader through these characters, and therefore trying to describe *how* and *why* the reader resists philosophy.

To complete this project in its full length it is necessary to accomplish three tasks:

The first one has already been mentioned, and it is to accompany *pari passu* all the developments in the dialogue. This means understanding what Socrates is asking at all times, that is both the explicit and implicit sides to each question; but it also signifies comprehending the answer to Socrates' question, and in what manner it actually answers the question or evades it, and why it answers or not the question, and if it answers the question fully or leaves something out. It also entails trying to understand why Socrates is asking what he is asking, and why in this particular manner; at the same time it means comprehending why the answer is so incomplete, and if it is incomplete because the interlocutor did not grasp the question (and if so, why did not he grasp it), or if he is leaving something out on purpose. In sum, this means analysing everything that is said and left unsaid in basically every question and answer in the dialogue. At the same time, in order to analyse every question and answer it is mandatory to keep in mind what was said previously and is now being re-stated or forgotten. Indeed, it is always more at stake than the actual question or answer. So following these questions and answers entails accompanying where they come from and where they lead. Hence, following the progress of the text implies a difficult form of “strabismus” involving multiple eyes. This process would help to unveil which are the moments of resistance and what they are connected with.

The second thing necessary is to trace the “anatomical” structure that supports everything that is said, both by Socrates and by his opponents. This requires an analysis in depth. In order to understand how the text moves, it is compulsory to grasp how its “skeleton” works, where its joints are, which way they bend, which are the weak links and which the strong points. If one wants to know why Socrates asks this instead of that and why Gorgias answers this now and then that, it is important to trace the basic structure. To be more specific: in order to understand why Gorgias,

Polus and Callicles resist this or that question or resist granting this or that, it is necessary to understand what they are trying to defend and what they are defending themselves from. This would reveal the underlying basis to a resistance to the text and how Plato depicts them. The moments of resistance found in the first point are to be taken as symptoms of these deeper problems.

The third task is to show how the “skeleton”(s) portrayed by Plato fit(s) the reader. This is obviously the most important part, but also the most difficult one, for it demands a full understanding of the previous points. Does the reader resist Socrates in such and such steps in the dialogue? Even better, do *I* resist the text in these passages? When Socrates asks such and such, what would I answer? Do I accept Gorgias' answer? And when he refutes that answer, do I buy it? Yes? No? Why not? Why yes? What does that say about me? What does that say about my relationship with philosophy? The text is always about me, the reader. This third task relates the elements of resistance and their basis to the way they intend to show *why* and *how* I resist philosophy. Plato is so kind (or so cunning) that he tries to help the reader in answering these questions.

These are the three main tasks that would help in studying the history of resistance. However, the fact that they are divided for methodological purposes does not mean they are to be taken one at the time. On the contrary, if such a history is to be written, it is necessary to fight on all three fronts at the same time. The only way to understand the moments of resistance is if there is some kind of relation to their basis, and the contact with their basis only happens after a contact with their surface moments. At the same time there is no connection with the reader's resistance if there is no contact with the moments of resistance in the text, and there is no contact with the moments of resistance in the text if the reader does not sense them. All three elements of a history of resistance are thus intertwined and need to be considered together. The *Gorgias* is the perfect example of a *living* work, one that gains life when in contact with the reader. In order not to kill such a text, it is of the utmost importance to read it and study it as a dynamic organism, and this is why the three parts should be considered together. This paper is hence related to the whole dialogue and to the complexity of reading it.

Before exemplifying this form of analysis in the dialogue between Socrates and Polus, I will try to further explain some of the "characters" described above as being

the *tacit* ones in Plato's *Gorgias*. With this explanation I hope to show how resistance is one of these "characters", and why it is such an important one.

Strictly speaking, an account of all these *tacit* "characters" would lead to an analysis of the whole text. This is obviously not the objective here. Instead, the goal is to briefly depict the scenario in which the silent character "Resistance" appears. All action is connected to this "character" and moves towards it. But in order to understand this, it is important to have some kind of overview that makes it possible for resistance to be found. I will try neither to lengthen this panoramic view in a way that makes it a detailed analysis, nor to be so brief and imprecise that it becomes indistinct.

Although I will not follow a chronological order from now on, the first moment of the text introduces the first so called *tacit* "character". Socrates and Callicles exchange proverbs about being late or on time for a battle (πόλεμος καὶ μάχη) or a feast (έορτή).² This expresses an interested relationship with what has just happened. Callicles is telling Socrates and his friends that they just missed something good. This something is hence described as a feast — *i.e.* as something that people would be interested in being a part of. The fact that what is at stake is some kind of exhibition or display (ἐπίδειξις) by Gorgias³ also suggests that the subject was an important one. Its importance has to do with the advantage or pleasure it gave those who were listening, and this advantage or pleasure is taken to be something good. This is also a way Plato develops to tell his reader that what will happen from now on is somehow connected to an important subject; and by mentioning a feast, Plato hints that the subject has to do with the relationship between pleasure and good, in such a way that it would be bad *for the reader* to miss out on such a discussion.

Now, this is the first hint of something that will become of uttermost relevance, *sc.* the interest in oneself, which is one of the most important "characters" in Plato's *Gorgias*. In fact, when Socrates is talking with Gorgias, but especially with Polus and then with Callicles, it becomes clear that something good (ἀγαθόν) is only good if it is good for him who has it. This can be called the "middle-voice" interest, for it means

² Cf. 447a1-6:

“Καλλίκλης· πολέμου καὶ μάχης φασὶ χρῆναι, ὃ Σώκρατες, οὕτω μεταλαγχάνειν.

Σωκράτης· ἀλλ’ ἦ, τὸ λεγόμενον, κατόπιν έορτῆς ἤκομεν καὶ ὕστεροῦμεν;

Καλλίκλης· καὶ μάλα γε ἀστείας έορτῆς· πολλὰ γὰρ καὶ καλὰ Γοργίας ἡμῖν ὀλίγον πρότερον ἐπεδείξατο.”

³ See notably 447a5-6: “πολλὰ γὰρ καὶ καλὰ Γοργίας ἡμῖν ὀλίγον πρότερον ἐπεδείξατο”. Cf. 447b2, 447b8, 447c3, 449c4, 6, 452b3, 458b7, and 467c1.

that interest in anything is always a form of interest in oneself. So, from the very beginning the text establishes a connection between self-interest and ἀγαθόν. This connection extends to the reader, because he also lost Gorgias' exhibition, which was a good one, at least according to Callicles. Consequently, this means that the reader somehow missed something that might be good for him, something he would be interested in. At the same time, this tells the reader that the following discussion will have to do with something that is considered by Callicles to be good for him. So the exchange of proverbs is a peculiar way of telling the reader that what follows will have some similarity to a feast, and it is quite ironical that such a feast will take the form of a battle between Socrates and his opponents.

The concept of a battle (πόλεμος καὶ μάχη) is rather good for explaining the problem of resistance. This warlike image gains life immediately when Callicles shows surprise at the fact that Socrates is interested in hearing Gorgias.⁴ Although Callicles thought it good, and hence related to the self-interest he has, he seems to be surprised by the fact that Socrates wants to hear Gorgias. So apparently he thinks Socrates would not be interested in Gorgias' ἐπίδειξις, which means he does not think Socrates would consider it a good one. This shows *ab initio* that there is some opposition between these two sides. In other words, it suggests that Callicles expects Socrates to resist what Gorgias has just said, and therefore that Gorgias would also probably resist Socrates' standpoint. But this also implies that there will be a fight over something that one thinks to be good and the other does not. The reader is hence put in the middle of a battle concerning what is and is not good (ἀγαθόν). Given that ἀγαθόν is related to an interest the reader has in himself, this means he is thrown into a battle about what is and is not good for him. Now this is obviously a battle that should interest the reader (and the fact that it might not is also quite important as regards our ἀμαθία). Since there are two sides resisting each other, the adherence and resistance to either of these sides will tell the history of the reader's relationship with the text.

There are now at least two "characters" identified in the dialogue: one is self-interest, and the other is ἀγαθόν. But the third one, which is resistance, can also be sensed. For now, it is said that the dialogue has to do with the interest the reader has in himself, and that the dialogue therefore deals with a discussion about what is and is

⁴ 447b4-5: Καλλίκλῃς· τί δέ, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν; ἐπιθυμεῖ Σωκράτης ἀκοῦσαι Γοργίου;

not good for him. This makes the fact that I can read this text as if it had nothing to do with me incredibly ironical. Simultaneously, it unleashes the problematic connection between a need to *know* something and getting what I am interested in: it raises the problem of *knowing* (*εἰδέναι*) what is or is not good for me. The parent-related examples are always good: every time my parents told me that something was not good for me, although I thought it was, immediately comes to mind. Mostly they were right, and this suggests there is problem regarding *knowing* what is and is not good. Yet, just as I can still dismiss my parents' advice to consider if something is good or not before doing it, it is also possible to consider Plato a patronising figure and just ignore him. Dismissing this need to know if something is good or not *for me* is usually the best way to resist such a discussion. Usually we ignore the question of whether something is or is not good because we already have a previously fixed and automatic answer. But once again this means ignoring the question. There are multiple ways of ignoring, and hence, multiple ways of resistance. There is the "yes mom" while looking at the watch, there is the fake interest, the expressive turning your back, the bored look that says "I'm not listening anyway, but keep on", and so on. All these things can also be done with Plato. But there are two ways of resistance that are the most relevant ones to what we are looking at here:

The first one happens when we are really into a discussion, taking it seriously, listening to what is being said, and yet, when time comes, are capable of doing exactly the opposite of what we thought we had agreed on. Plato suggests this problem in a rather curious manner. Indeed, when Socrates is refuting Gorgias, he uses a purposely fallacious argument intended to establish a direct connection between knowing something and doing it.⁵ Gorgias has to accept it; otherwise all he said before about the rhetor leading others to do what he wants through rhetoric would fall apart. But this is a way Plato has to call the reader's attention to a problem, which will not be discussed in this dialogue, but that nevertheless deserves consideration. Now listening eagerly and understanding something but still dismissing it when time calls for action shows resistance, for it reveals a form of repulsion towards what we agreed previously, and this action-related form of resistance is usually much stronger than the one expressed in words. Despite not dealing with this problem directly, Plato does raise it. In doing so, he is asking us: when you say you

⁵ Cf. 459c-461b.

agree with Socrates, what does that mean? Do you agree with him while reading and then resist him once the book is shut? When you agree that pleasure is not good *per se* in an academic paper, does that mean you do not resist that thesis when you go out for a drink?

The second is also a very important one: it consists in real discussion; hard, frontal confrontation. It consists in a real battle between sides that will not avoid the fight, but rather stand their ground. And this form of resistance is actually encouraged by Plato. For example, the end of the discussion with Polus is an express provocation of the reader. Indeed, when Socrates tries to show that rhetoric should be used to accuse oneself and one's friends,⁶ Plato is teasing the reader, asking him if he really agrees with what was said before, begging the reader to resist him and discuss with him. This is also why Socrates praises Callicles for his frankness and outspokenness.⁷ Indeed, Plato seems to like the character portrayed by Callicles exactly because he offers resistance and does not seem to surrender, at least until the end when he starts to sulk. When he sulks, he returns to the parent-like examples of resistance described above, and literally tells Socrates to finish the discussion as he likes because he no longer cares. But before sulking, Socrates asks Callicles to be frank and outspoken and never hold back when he does not agree. He does it because this form of resistance is associated with philosophy (φιλοσοφία, φιλοσοφεῖν)⁸, with a form of φιλομαθεῖν, and hence may lead to a change in one's standpoint. When someone is really interested in something and does not agree with the other, he will discuss it, and if his primary interest is the truth regarding the matter, he may end up changing the way he thinks. This is what Socrates intends when he says he would thank the man who would be so kind as to refute his mistaken views.⁹ However, what happens more often than not during a discussion is that truth is the least important thing and, even if we acknowledge our opponent is right and we are wrong, this is not usually followed by an actual change. Usually we forget it after a little while, just as happens several times with Polus.

The second form of resistance helps to show that the problem concerning the previous form of resistance may have something to do with our careless relationship

⁶ Cf. 480.

⁷ Παρησία (487a3), παρησιάζεσθαι (487d).

⁸ On φιλοσοφεῖν and the discussion on this topic in the *Gorgias*, see 481d4, 482a4, 482a7, 484c5, 9, 485a4ff., 485b1, 485c3ff., 485d1, 486a7, 487c7, 500c8 and 526c3.

⁹ See 458.

with the truth. This careless relationship with the truth is precisely what Socrates is trying to fight, and this is why he begs Callicles to be frank and outspoken and have no shame, just as he does with his reader. At the same time, he is also describing *why* and *how* we resist his efforts to make us adhere to the truth. This means we can resist Socrates in a good way, by putting up a fight, but still do it for the wrong reason. What I mean is that we can resist Socrates in the second sense —either because we care about the truth (and are therefore willing to listen to him, so that we can criticize our own perspective and even change it if needed) or because we do not agree with him and are willing to argue just for the sake of arguing —, without being open to a possible change in our opinion. This second hypothesis is expressed in Callicles sulking, and it may or may not be suitable for describing the way we act after reading the *Gorgias*. It is important to stress that up to a certain point, it is difficult to discern between discussing for the sake of truth and discussing for the sake of discussing.¹⁰ I believe Plato is also saying that this happens because there is a strong connection between human life and truth, and that even when we are arguing for the sake of arguing we are usually arguing for the sake of truth, but in such a way that we are not willing to question a pre-assumed and unquestioned truth. So it all comes down to whether we question or not what *we think we know* (what Plato terms οἶσθαι εἰδέναι).¹¹ This is literally the moment of truth. And this is also the criterion that allows one to distinguish between the good and the bad way of resisting Socrates. This so-called bad way leads back to the previously described forms of "I do not care". As was said above, they are difficult to distinguish and ultimately they are both present in the text.

Given this, it is important to add here that Callicles' counter-strike is necessarily an important part of a history of resistance. Indeed, Callicles' intervention represents the most explicit form of opposition to Socrates in the whole dialogue. But this is not the only reason and I dare say it is not even the main one. This resistance, instead of appearing like a radically new approach, comes as the full revelation of what both Polus and Gorgias seem to uphold but leave unsaid. It is not completely clear whether

¹⁰ See notably 457d, 505e and 515b.

¹¹ On οἶσθαι εἰδέναι – οἶσθαι εἰδέναι ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν (*Apologia Socratis* 29b1), οἶσθαι τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς (*Apologia Socratis* 21d5, *Meno* 84c5, *Alcibiades Major* 118b1), δοκεῖν εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς (*Gorgias* 459d6) or δοκεῖν σοφὸν εἶναι μὴ ὄντα (*Apologia* 29a5-6) – see *Apologia Socratis* 21b-22a, 23a-e, 29a-b, *Sophista* 229c, 230a-b, 268a, *Leges* 732a, 863, 886c-d, *Alcibiades Major*, 117b-118b, *Symposium* 204a, *Theaetetus* 187c, 210c, *Phaedrus* 275b, *Politicus* 302a-b, *Philebus* 48d-49b, and *Leges* 732a5-6, 863c5-6 and 866b7-8.

they do not say it because they do not want to or because they presuppose in a confused and somehow unconscious fashion what Callicles is now revealing. In either scenario, what is important for a history of resistance is that this unveils the reader's standpoint towards what is said. Callicles is not trying to disavow Polus' perspective, just as Polus is not trying to refute Gorgias'. Instead, he accuses Polus and Gorgias of being ashamed and not saying what they really believe, which is what he is about to say.¹² Hence, Callicles' counter-strike is presented by Plato as a deeper consideration of the same thing that is at stake from the beginning. Just as with Polus' intervention, it is not difficult pinpoint where he fails and where his refutation begins, *i.e.*, it is not difficult to figure out what Callicles will accuse him of agreeing with out of shame. Plato does not try to hide it, and one might even say that he tries to point it out so that the reader remembers it. Nevertheless, this does not mean the reader knows what is wrong or left unsaid about this admission, but just that he senses that there is something wrong. And the proof that the reader does not perceive what is wrong is that he cannot anticipate what Callicles is about to say (or at least I could not). This reveals a lack of acuity regarding what was previously said. Both Socrates and Callicles indeed agree that there is a problem of acuity and confusion, and both play with it.

I will not be able to study Callicles' counter-strike in these pages, but I cannot help stressing its importance in a history of resistance. This importance has to do with the fact that Callicles accepts the description of a confused standpoint and also accepts the existence of εἶδωλα¹³, but, at the same time, claims that it is not yet proven that pleasure is an εἶδωλον of τὸ βέλτιστον and that, in the end, Socrates may still be the one who is confused and takes an εἶδωλον as if it were some kind of αὐτὸ τὸ βέλτιστον. He accepts that there is a problem of acuity, but still thinks Socrates may be the one who needs glasses. I will not explore the numerous details in this counter-strike, but it can now be said that this is clearly a way Plato has to make his reader resist him in a philosophical way. As was said above, Plato seems to like Callicles' character. Indeed, he gives him the very important role of resisting Socrates in an at least partially philosophical way. Plato is begging his reader to be critical, just as Socrates begs Callicles to be outspoken and not to concede anything he does not

¹² Cf. 482c ff.

¹³ In other words, Callicles accepts two major components of Socrates' "anthropology of *κόλακεία*". See notably 463d-464e.

really agree with (like Polus and Gorgias did).¹⁴ So Callicles' angry eruption is probably the closest we get to philosophy in this text, and it is not by mere chance that the dialogue between Socrates and Callicles is equivalent to almost half of the *Gorgias*.

There is yet another important point regarding Callicles' intervention that we should bear in mind. It consists in the fact that the same thing that happened to Gorgias and Polus also happens to Callicles — and this suggests the need for a *hyper-Callicles*. If, on the one hand, Callicles sulking can be traced back to the parental models, on the other hand it shows that there is still something left unsaid. Plato does show in unorthodox fashion that it is still possible and still important to resist what Socrates says to refute Callicles. Indeed, he sets a standard of acuity that he intentionally fails to fulfil. Callicles sulking means he is yet unconvinced. This reflects what happens with the reader — he cannot resist Socrates' arguments, but once he closes the book life goes back to normal. There is something left unsaid, but we just cannot see what. We need a *hyper-Callicles* who is able to reveal what we are still presupposing without noticing. There is a structure consisting of continual ἀπόκρισις, which is formally developed in the sequence that starts with Gorgias and ends in the suggestion of a hyper-Callicles.¹⁵ Such a formal structure forces the reader to review his perspective and to focus on what he thinks he is seeing perfectly but after all is not. At the same time, it portrays the reader's continuous resistance and his surprise regarding what Plato is forcing him to question. This ἀπόκρισις is hence also the philosophical way of looking at things, which is being performatively presented to the reader.

So we can see that resistance can be connected to a lack of acuity. Indeed, there is a form of resistance that is endorsed by an incapability to discern between different things, as for example between pleasure and good. Polus, for example, can resist Socrates in both the ways described above because he is convinced that pleasure and good are one and the same. He does not have enough acuity to distinguish between them and takes them to be one and the same, and hence this lack of acuity leads to confusion. The example of an express resistance due to confusion is when Polus is shocked by Socrates' claim that the rhetor may not do what he wants (ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ

¹⁴ Cf. 487a.

¹⁵ See note 34 below.

αὐτῷ) when he does what he wishes (*ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*);¹⁶ the example of a silent resistance offered by the alleged self-evidence that pleasure is good is to be found at the end of the dialogue — when Callicles acknowledges that Socrates' conclusions derive from what was previously said, but still does not seem very convinced.

Nevertheless, there are within the text moments of resistance that seem to bring both Socrates' opponent and the reader closer to philosophy. This is related to what we have termed "good resistance". Indeed, Plato appears to tease the reader on purpose to make him willing to understand Socrates' point of view. This actually happens when Gorgias or Polus or Callicles tries to understand what Socrates is saying. However, more often than not, they only do it in order to launch a refutation afterwards. But once they and the reader attempt to grasp Socrates' meaning, he is already playing his game, and they are, in a sense, entering the reign of philosophy. However, things are not so simple as this, and all the moments of "good resistance" may still be contaminated by another form of deeper resistance, which is constituted by an unwillingness to question the core of our opposition to Socrates and to philosophy. Just as described in the third sub-section of the line allegory, there are moments of φιλοσοφεῖν still contaminated by the persistence of all unquestioned and hence un-philosophical moments.

So every gain in perspective that still leaves something unquestioned (even or especially without being aware of it) is a form of resistance in the first sense. As I hope to show during the second part of this paper, this is the deepest and most important form of resistance, on which all phenomena of resistance are based.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that philosophy is described in the dialogue as the τέχνη of the ψυχή. It corresponds both to the corrective and the nomothetic sides of the ψυχή.¹⁷ This becomes clear once one realizes that a) philosophy is to the ψυχή what medicine is to the body and b) that rhetoric is its εἰδωλον.¹⁸ But at the same time, philosophy is also the τέχνη that attempts to understand what is best for the ψυχή. Only this τέχνη is able to determine the course of action that must be taken if one wants to avoid illness rather than having to treat it. For, in fact, one can only spot and correct an illness in the ψυχή if one knows what a healthy ψυχή looks like. The main comparison is between philosophy and medicine,

¹⁶ Cf. 466d-eff.

¹⁷ Or, to be more precise, of its *θεραπεία*. Cf. 464b.

¹⁸ Cf. Socrates' description of the various τέχναι, their respective εἰδωλα and the role they play in the structure of life (464-465).

and by following this line of thought Plato is in some way saying that our ψυχή can be (and usually is) ill, so that it needs philosophical treatment. He is thus also describing resistance to philosophy as a way of keeping the ψυχή ill. Nevertheless, resistance can be a way to let philosophy enter our lives and, at the same time, still be something completely un-philosophical if it leaves something unquestioned. In a way, the above-mentioned "good resistance" can even be a way to make the disease more and more powerful. It is possible for illness to be seen as health, at various levels, and this leads one to resist treatment, or embark on treatment up to a certain point. Plato is trying to describe the normal state of the ψυχή as being an auto-immune disease, but we usually think it is health, and even if we are ready to agree that the lungs could do a little bit better, or the liver, overall things are not that bad and do not require much change.

As a result of all this we can distinguish two major meanings for resistance: one is ignoring Plato's teasing, and there are many ways of doing this. The other is resistance in the form of questioning, and this is precisely what Plato wants. Gorgias, Polus and Callicles resist Socrates in both these ways and so do we, (although one might turn out to be a mild form of the other, as pointed out above). A history of resistance must differentiate between a) the kind of resistance there is at each moment and b) the deeper resistance that lies behind it.

Now, these two meanings also help to understand that a history of resistance has to include the moments in which we are supposed to resist but do not. Indeed, as stated above, not resisting — not *questioning*— when we should *is* a form of resistance.

In order to show the connection between resistance and other tacit characters in the text, it is time to return to our argument. This will help to show the importance of a history of resistance. After this I will try to exemplify this importance with an analysis of the dialogue between Socrates and Polus. Hopefully this will assist in further clarifying how resistance is a centerpiece in Plato's *Gorgias*.

Up until now, several apparently-hidden "characters" in the text have been mentioned: ἀγαθόν, self-interest, resistance, οἶσθαι εἰδέναι (and hence οἶσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς), ἀλήθεια, εἰδωλον, τέχνη and also ἐπίδειξις. If we looked at these in detail, they would rapidly multiply. Instead of doing this, I will focus on looking at their links to the idea of resistance. This will obviously result in a panoramic and

superficial picture, which is intended to give resistance its place in the overall question of the *Gorgias*.

The first thing one ought to note is that, from the beginning, there is a connection between ἀγαθόν and a form of superlative (ἄριστον or βέλτιστον). This also means that there is a connection between self-interest and a form of superlative. When Polus first tries to answer instead of Gorgias, he is asked who or what Gorgias is (ὅστις ἐστίν),¹⁹ and he says that he is an expert in the most important τέχνη of all.²⁰ The fact that there is a connection between Gorgias' ἐπίδειξις and ἀγαθόν establishes a link between good (ἀγαθόν) and the best, a connection that will prevail throughout the whole text (even if this superlative assumes different names). This connects Gorgias' resistance to Socrates with the best τέχνη. This τέχνη has to do with a form of knowledge (εἰδέναι), namely with knowledge of how to lead one's life in order for it to be the best possible. The conflict between Socrates and Gorgias means that both of them think they know the best way to lead life, and each of them considers the other to be wrong, even if he thinks he is right (and thus each one of them believes the other to be in a οἶσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς position). There are, however, subtle distinctions that need to be made. On the one hand, Socrates is trying to convince Gorgias that there is a need for a "navigational knowledge", a form of εἰδέναι that grasps what the formal superlative we are all intrinsically related to looks like. In fact, without knowing *what* the superlative is, one cannot know *how* to get there. However, this knowledge is still to be found. On the other hand, Gorgias, Polus and Callicles hold a) that a set of materially determined *desiderata* is what human life is all about²¹ and b) that we naturally know these material *desiderata*, so that c) the only problem is how to get them. Rhetoric is hence thought of as an instrumental τέχνη, one that gives power (δύνασθαι) to attain the materially determined *desiderata* life is all about.²² It is an instrument, but the best one, and the only one we need. Socrates however is trying to show that in order to get the best things in life, one must first know what the best things in life are — for if someone thinks them to be candies and in the end the best is

¹⁹ 447d1: Σωκράτης· ἢ καλῶς λέγεις. ὦ Χαιρεφῶν, ἐροῦ αὐτόν.

Χαιρεφῶν· τί ἔρωμαι;

Σωκράτης· ὅστις ἐστίν.

²⁰ And this τέχνη is καλλίστη because it has to do with τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων καὶ ἄριστα (451d7-8).

²¹ We speak of *materially* determined desiderata as opposed to *formal* desiderata (τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ ἄριστον or τὸ βέλτιστον); the latter are of such a nature that they must be “deformalized”: it still remains to be seen what set of concrete desiderata meets their requirements.

²² Cf. 466b.

instead health, then all the power one has does not help at all. Indeed, it would not even be power, for power is only power if it is effective (as we will see later on). This roughly sketched difference of perspective between Socrates and his opponents helps us realize that the purpose of Gorgias' ἐπίδειξις is not to question peoples' knowledge of what life is all about (for everyone naturally knows what this is), but rather to convince people to attend his school, in which he teaches them how to gain the necessary power to achieve the things in question.

This outline shows a form of resistance to Socrates, which consists in thinking that what life is all about cannot be seriously questioned. Plato is trying to explain how most of the things we think we know are indeed nothing but conviction (πειθώ) disconnected from real knowledge.²³ The way Socrates and Gorgias discuss various kinds of conviction is meant to explain how most of our convictions have the form of a πειθώ πιστευτική.²⁴ This is also at stake in the contrast between ἐπίδειξις and διαλέγεσθαι.²⁵ In the beginning, both Polus and Gorgias resist διαλέγεσθαι, the first by answering the way he does, and the second by trying to turn διαλέγεσθαι into a moment of ἐπίδειξις. And this is exactly what the reader does. The proof of this is that we accept the answers given both by Polus and by Gorgias. We resist this form of interaction with Socrates because he is trying to force us to revise what we think we know. He is attempting to show us that we may not know what we think we now; and we resist this because we really think we know it. This describes a form of attachment to the truth, for it shows that οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς always looks like real εἰδέναι. We only resist Socrates because we think we already know so well what life is all about that there is no room for any serious question about it. This happens with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, and the sequence in their appearance is nothing but a zoom in on this same problem. This is also related to why we accept these characters' drift from the question "τί" to "ποιόν τι"; for we take the first for granted and do not see the point in questioning it.²⁶ Because we think we know what something is, we jump right to questions concerning its predicates (*what kind of thing it is*)— whether

²³ Cf. 454-455.

²⁴ 455a1.

²⁵ Cf. 448d, 449b, 453b, 457c, 458b, 471d, 474a-b.

²⁶ Cf. 448e and 463c. On the distinction between τί (τί ἐστί, ὅπερ ἐστί) and ποιόν τι, see notably *Euthyphro* 5 c-d, *Laches* 189e-190a, *Meno* 71a-b, 86d2-e2, 100b4-6, *Respublica* 354ab, 437-439, *Protagoras* 360e-361c, *Symposium* 194e4-195a5, 201d, *Phaedrus* 237bd, 260b-c, and *Epistula* VII 342e-343.

it is good, bad, neither, beautiful, or the opposite, and so on and so forth. This is related to self-interest, since it is because we are interested in the way our life unfolds that we are interested in whether the things which we deal with are good or bad. This makes us skip the question of what they are because we assume we already know the answer to this. But Plato is trying to show that, if we subject most of the things we think we know to the question "τί ἐστίν;", they will be unveiled as being *πειθώ πιστευτική*. Since we do not know what it is, it is therefore impossible for us to know what kind of thing it is (*ποιόν τι*), and hence whether it is good or bad or neither. *Τί* and *ποιόν τι* are hence also tacit "characters" and, if noticed, they help to force us to reconsider the way we lead our lives — and that is what Socrates depicts as *φιλοσοφεῖν*.

We now stumble upon a "character" that might be described as the *vital insight*. This vital *insight*, as the name clearly suggests, is an apparently self-evident *insight*. It is something we take to be unquestionably true. Moreover, the reason we call it vital is that the insight we are talking about conducts our daily lives. Plato claims that we see things from an inquisitive point of view. Since we are interested in what is good and bad for us, this interest always raises the question — is this good? Now, the fact that we might not notice such a question does not mean it is not there; and the point is that, if we take away the answer, we will immediately notice the question. What I mean is that the question is always there, but usually it is already answered in advance by an assumption or a judgement (*δόξα*) that determines whether X is good or bad. For example, if someone gives me a medicine and I do not know if it is good, my action will be paralysed, and I will not take it until I am sure it is good. But if a physician prescribes me some treatment, even without explaining it to me, I will assume that it is good and be ready to do as I am told. And why? Just because I believe the physician to be competent and to have my best interest at heart. It is plain that the physician is trying to cure me, and what is more, *everyone knows that* he is good (he has a good reputation (*δόξα*), and people say he always helps his patients).

So, we can now stress three aspects concerning this vital insight. First, it is already there before any kind of reflection or questioning. This vital insight therefore works in such a way that we do not even notice we are asking questions and answering them — it is an "automatic" insight, and like most things we do automatically, it is so obvious we do not even notice it. Being obvious and manifestly clear is often the best cover. Secondly, it has vital importance, *i.e.*, this insight is

important for conducting everyday life. Thirdly, it is shared by (almost) everyone else; and this gives its unquestionable validity its final touch. This is what the often used expression "*everybody knows that*" is all about. This expression entails some kind of "circular breathing", one that reinforces the vital insight we are talking about — the more people that share a given assumption and take it to be self-evident, the more difficult it is to question it. At the same time, it makes this insight more automatic and less personal. And by less personal I mean less critical.

Now, this third aspect associates δόξα with οἱ πολλοί. I believe that Plato does this intentionally, and the question he is trying to ask is: what do we know when we know what everybody knows? Or better: what do we know, when we know what the πολλοί know? Or even better: what do we know, when we know *as* πολλοί? In the end, given the pejorative meaning of the word, Plato is insulting us and makes no effort to conceal it. At stake is something that Callicles will accept and use against Socrates in his counter-strike, and also something used by Nietzsche and described by him as *the herd*: a communitarian form of uncritical and passively accepted evidence owing to which our lives are led not by us, but by some anonymous and external insight (which is seen by us as our most important and distinctive characteristic). Indeed, despite prescribing different treatments to this condition, Socrates, Callicles and Nietzsche agree with this diagnosis of our normal condition. Between Socrates and Callicles — (and then the hyper-Callicles, to whom Nietzsche is clearly connected) — the discussion deals with the alleged self-evidence that pleasure is good, or even that pleasure is αὐτὸ τὸ βέλτιστον. And this is also what is already implicit in the discussion with Gorgias and Polus. The whole text is built to question this incredibly strong vital insight, and the history of our resistance to one is also the history of our resistance to the other.

What we have seen regarding vital insight puts us on the track of a number of very important "characters" that will be considered in the second part of this paper. Amongst these characters are Archelaus, the "anti-Archelaus"²⁷, and the various forms of *priamel*, both the positive and the negative. Many others ought to be mentioned, but for now this will have to suffice.

So, in a nutshell, a history of resistance is a history of *how* and *why* we resist Socrates' approach, and accordingly, of how and why we resist *philosophy*. An

²⁷ Cf. 470ff.

example of the *how* is taking shelter under the question "ποιὸν ἐστίν;" when we were asked about "τί ἐστίν;". An example of the *why* is the following: the only reason why we resist questioning what we think we know is because what we think we know or are convinced into knowing is cloaked in the guise of real and unquestionable knowledge. So a history of resistance in the *Gorgias* is a history of *how* and *why* we kill our "inner Socrates". And, what is more, it is the history of how and why we prevent our "inner Socrates" from asking questions concerning the superlative: what is the best in life ²⁸(and everything connected to this – which is literally everything). To be sure, we acknowledge the fact that this superlative is, as Socrates puts it, ἀμφοισθητήσιμον.²⁹ But, more often than not, this only means that we are perfectly aware that different people take it to be different things, but nevertheless assume that those who think differently from us are simply wrong. This indicates that Plato is describing the superlative as a pre-fixed formal structure, whereas we think it to be a set of "material" desiderata, even if it is hard to grasp. We resist Plato because there is some kind of inertia that pulls us back to this set of "material" desiderata (health, money, beauty and the like as the best things in life *per se*, and not as things that may or may not play a role as "deformalizations" of a *formal* superlative). This means that the history of resistance is an account of our natural inertia. This inertia is also a "character" of the *Gorgias* — a kind of gravity that forces our "inner eye" to keep lax and unfocused. Just as described in the *Republic*, our "inner eye" is seated (θάκος)³⁰ and resists movement³¹ (and this is once again closely connected to the 3rd subsection of the divided line).³² And the only reason it resists movement is because it thinks it sees perfectly. The fact is that we are seated and strapped while thinking we are moving freely. Curiously enough, one of the best ways to show this "seated" character of our perspective is by using a road example.³³ It is as if I were heading to a city, to the best city (one where everything would be simply the best), and someone stopped me and asked if I really knew if this was the way to get there, and if I really wanted to go that way and if I had thought of other places to go, perhaps better ones. My

²⁸ There is even a reference to Socrates' fate, which evokes the *Apology* and the problem of how we kill our "inner Socrates".

²⁹ 451d9.

³⁰ *Respublica* 516e4.

³¹ Or, to be more precise, resists κινεῖν τὰ ἀκίνητα – see *Respublica* 533c2.

³² See notably *Respublica* 510bff. and 533c.

³³ This kind of example is tailor-made for the *Gorgias*, since this dialogue is devised to play the role of someone who interrupts the reader in his or her daily life

reaction would be to resist him, to tell him I know perfectly well where I am heading to and how to get there. I would draw him a map to explain where I am at, where I want to go to and which is the best way to get there. This is what Gorgias, Polus and Callicles do. They identify their position in the landscape of life: where they are at and where they want to go to, and also how to get there. Furthermore, they say that everyone else wants to go to the same place and that there is only one road that leads there. But Socrates tells them that their map is wrong, because they do not know where they are, nor where they want to get to, and hence they cannot know how to get there (and in the end, Socrates too hints that neither does he). Socrates is saying that their vital map is completely wrong, and they need a way to know how to navigate life. What they need is a new compass, and this compass is a strange one called philosophy. This is exactly the same thing he is trying to tell his reader, and just like those characters, the reader resists. The various forms of resistance have been described above: we either start fighting him and then give up on it and go our way without attending to what he said (and there are multiple ways to do that), or listen to him and fight him out of interest in getting to the best place. In the second scenario we might even not end up agreeing with him, but we may still be entering a philosophical way of life. This second scenario relates once again to the possibility of a “hyper-Callicles”.

Plato builds a setting in which a history of resistance has major importance. Because we are driven towards the superlative (the best thing in life), we resist questioning what we think that to be, and hence we resist admitting the possibility of something that could lead to a life much better than the current one, while still defending that we are really interested in the best life possible. This is in fact what makes it so curious that I can read the *Gorgias* and go on with my life as if nothing happened. At the same time, this makes a history of resistance a fundamental moment of the *Gorgias*.

Before advancing to the second part of this text, two caveats must be made.

One of them concerns the fact that considerations about the relationship between Plato and his reader raise obvious problems, for I am only one reader and all I can say is limited to my own experience. However, this happens with all the texts one read; there is no remedy for this –and each reader must see for himself or herself whether my “history of resistance” does or does not apply in his or her case.

The second caveat relates to the first in the sense that we are not quite the same reader the second or third or fourth time we lay eyes on the text. What I mean is that there are different layers of resistance depending on one's familiarity with the *Gorgias*. A history of resistance should obviously include all these layers. As said previously, what seems a simple form of resistance to Socrates may turn out to be a very complex one. I think that Plato plays with this as well. The first time we do not realise he is messing with us, but the second one we do, and the third time around we may even begin to understand why. The fact that the development in the dialogue amounts to a continuous ἀπόκρισις³⁴ can also be related to this. In a way, this formal aspect also represents the reader's gradual ἀπόκρισις not only while reading the succession of questions and answers that make up the *Gorgias*, but also as he reads and re-reads the dialogue. This gradual ἀπόκρισις relates to the history of how and why we resist Socrates and accordingly also represents the development of one's relationship with philosophy.

2. A case study for the history of resistance: Polus' resistance to Socrates

The dialogue between Polus and Socrates is a good example of resistance for many reasons, which I will try to make clear in the following pages. As I will try to show, the vital insight described in the first part³⁵ survives the dialogue between Socrates and Gorgias, and it is the core of Polus' resistance. The problem is that, if questioned, this vital insight may turn out to be less evident than assumed, and this is precisely what Socrates tries to show. But, if you come to think of it, the vital insight we are talking about — the insight that equates ἀγαθόν with ἡδονή and the like— survives the whole text. This same *vital insight* is at stake in Socrates' "sophistical" refutation of Polus.³⁶ And it is this same vital insight that makes Callicles so angry

³⁴ To put it in the terms of Anaxagorean cosmology: it moves from relative ὁμοῦ to relative ἀπόκρισις. Both Socrates' and his opponents' arguments become *more and more differentiated*. In a way, from the beginning to the end the *Gorgias* stages the very same conflict of views—the development has to do with the way the views in question and the conflict between them are put under more potent magnifying glasses. It should be borne in mind that Socrates' "anthropology of κολακεία" revolves around the difference between ὁμοῦ and the opposite. And in this sense, it is no exaggeration to say that the *Gorgias* speaks of itself —of what is going on in its own pages — and contains a certain amount of so-called "mise en abyme".

³⁵ I mean the kind of insight that usually directs one's daily life.

³⁶ 460-461.

and so willing to resist Socrates. Furthermore, it is an intimation of this insight that first makes us suspicious about Socrates' attempt to both Gorgias and Polus (and even his attempt to refute Callicles). The history of resistance, as I tried to show, is a history of this same unquestioned and very resilient vital insight and of the various ways it has of surviving our questioning and resisting our brief attempts at φιλοσοφεῖν.

This vital insight stands behind the first sign of Polus' resistance: the indignation with which he interrupts the dialogue between Socrates and Gorgias. He looks in fact a bit stunned by its result. It is indeed very clear that he resists the conclusion from the preceding part of the argument. He resists because he does not think that Socrates or Gorgias *actually believe* what they have just said.³⁷ He asks Socrates whether he is serious or joking, and holds that Gorgias was not outspoken because he was ashamed to speak out what he really thought. In a way (in a *confused* way), the reader is put in a position where he sort of agrees with Polus: something does not add up in Gorgias' refutation. But that's not all, for despite all the inquiry into rhetoric, one can not help feeling, even if in a blurry fashion, that there is something left unsaid. Indeed, even if Gorgias' refutation ends up being effective, since Gorgias cannot break the link between knowing something and doing what one knows (see page 8 above), still something about the previous argument whispers (or shouts...) that there is much more left unsaid about rhetoric and about the superlative. I do believe that the way Socrates tries to refute Gorgias is meant by Plato to trigger resistance. The reader may not know what is wrong, but it is difficult not to sense that something is wrong. This is one of those cases mentioned in the first part that seem to show Plato's intention of making the reader resist Socrates. It works like a tease, as if he were giving us something to fight for, so that we do not close the book convinced that Socrates is right without thinking carefully about it. Socrates may indeed be right, but what has occurred is not enough to *prove* him so.

Polus stands for this confused opposition to Socrates. On the one hand, he realizes that the core of Socrates' attack rests on the fact that rhetoric depends on some fundamental idea of what is good or bad (ἀγαθόν ἢ κακόν), noble or base (καλόν ἢ αἰσχρόν), just or unjust (δίκαιον ἢ ἄδίκον)³⁸. On the other hand, he does not

³⁷ 461b.

³⁸ I will not consider the philological details regarding the meaning of all these very important words.

realize that what is required, namely knowledge (εἰδέναι), is quite different from apparent knowledge (δοκεῖν εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς), and hence lies outside the realm of rhetoric, which is precisely the realm of δοκεῖν εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς. Polus assumes that knowledge about the ἀγαθόν is always at our disposal, and so there is no *lack or need* to know anything beside rhetoric itself. But he is not aware that his own view makes rhetoric dependent on some *real knowledge* (one that lies outside the realm of rhetoric), the result being that if the "automatic" knowledge of ἀγαθόν rhetoric relies upon turns out to be no real knowledge, then it becomes evident that rhetoric does depend on something else and that, without that something else, it is completely useless. Polus does not quite grasp the full meaning of what Socrates said before, and does not seem to have paid much attention to the details of the Socratic way of questioning. He thinks that everyone knows what is and is not good in life, and there is no need to question it. Plato works like a skilled chess player who puts the reader in the position he wants him to be by only giving him a certain amount of information. He then anticipates the reader's reaction to the place he finds himself trapped in. This reaction is expressed in Polus' intervention. From what has already been said, his appearance on stage reveals at least two forms of resistance that are intertwined.

The first one is the following: Polus resists Socrates because he really does not agree with him; he accordingly objects to Socrates' views. The second one consists in the fact that Polus is not trying to understand what Socrates means by his mysterious words. Indeed, Polus is not interested in knowing if rhetoric actually does or does not depend on some other kind of εἰδέναι because he thinks he already knows the answer to this question. He is convinced that there is no useful or *interesting* knowledge beyond rhetoric, at least none that is not granted naturally (so that everyone has it at their finger tips)³⁹. Instead of questioning if there is any such knowledge, he attacks Socrates for trying to raise this question. He resists because he feels threatened, just as our body becomes tense when we are afraid. Once again, this has to do with the structure of self-interest. Polus maintains that he knows what is good for him, and Socrates is questioning that. Consequently, precisely because he is interested in those things that he thinks to be good, he resists Socrates' questioning.

³⁹ To be sure, Polus acknowledges that there are other kinds of knowledge beyond rhetoric, namely those very τέχναι rhetoric is supposed to have under its control. But the other τέχναι play just an instrumental role and they do not belong to the centerpiece of knowledge we are talking about.

Now, although it may be difficult for the reader to grasp all that is implied when reading the text for the first time, what comes after is anticipated here. For what we have seen already shows that the reader's resistance may have something to do with his incapability to question some things, and that this resistance to questioning oneself has to do with thinking one knows what one may actually not know. At the same time, Plato seems to want the reader to resist, and he does this because the reader is supposed to resist if he is really interested in his life (and the things he considers to be good). Indeed, if someone now tried to convince me that my girlfriend is an awful person I would certainly resist, and that shows interest in what I consider to be good. Furthermore, it also shows an interest in the truth, for it shows that all the strength of my vital belief (in this case, the belief that my girlfriend is a good person) rests on it being taken to be an absolute truth. Self-interest is hence connected with truth and with εἰδέναι. Now, even if it turned out to be true that my girlfriend was an awful person (which unsurprisingly I am absolutely convinced she is not, so that in fact I exclude this possibility) I would only reach that conclusion if I first resisted the idea. This resistance might play the role of a trigger that ignites questioning. In the beginning, such questioning may be biased, but it is still questioning, and can gain momentum and become such that it ends up taking much more than it was first intended to. Plato is trying to unleash our "inner monster", as it were, namely, the inner Socrates. But, still not quite knowing why, we resist. This has to do with a form of inertia, which in turn has to do with οἶσθαι εἰδέναι. As pointed out above, this inertia is a form of resistance.

The next textual account of resistance is also connected to the first part of the text and even to its very beginning. It is shown by Polus' question about the reason he is not allowed to speak at length. Now this shows a resistance to dialogue — namely, resistance to replacing ἐπίδειξις with διαλέγεσθαι. At the same time, it also shows resistance to another important character in the text's first part: the opposition between "τί" and "ποιόν τι". Plato seems to be asking the reader whether he really understands why διαλέγεσθαι is the key to attaining truth. Personally, I confess it took me a while to get there (assuming I did). In the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates complains that Polus is well equipped for rhetoric, but poorly so for διαλέγεσθαι.⁴⁰ The proof is that, when Chaerephon asks by what name Gorgias is to be called and what his art

⁴⁰ 448d-e.

is⁴¹, Polus starts a long speech about rhetoric being the best τέχνη and the best men being in charge of the best τέχνηαι. Socrates then tells Polus: "Ἄλλ' οὐδεὶς ἐρωτᾷ ποία τις εἴη ἡ Γοργίου τέχνη, ἀλλὰ τίς, καὶ ὅν τινα δέοι καλεῖν τὸν Γοργίαν."⁴² And now, after quite a while, Polus still does not seem to understand the difference between "τί" and "ποιόν τι". Neither does he seem to understand why διαλέγεσθαι is so important — and this it is the key to grasping the difference in question. This is why he still maintains that he can answer all questions, just as Gorgias did at the beginning. This suggests that Polus is unable to follow the subtleties in Socrates' questions, especially the ones regarding the difference between "τί" and "ποιόν τι". And what about us? Do we as readers see the difference?

But the question is: who among us is able to see the reason Polus asks why he is not allowed to speak as much as he wants? And even if we do, do we see it the first time we read the text? I know I did not. It is only because Polus does not understand some very important aspects in the dialogue's first part that he asks this question. And pretty much the same holds for those readers who see no harm in Polus' question. So this resistance to διαλέγεσθαι is a symptom of another form of resistance, a deeper one that is connected to our resistance to ask "τί ἐστίν"-questions instead of "ποιόν ἐστίν"-questions. We resist Socrates by resisting διαλέγεσθαι, and the reason *why* we resist to διαλέγεσθαι is that we do not understand the importance of the question "τί ἐστίν".

And the funny thing about this is that the second or third time one reads Polus' question about why he is not allowed to speak at length, some kind of bell rings inside one's head. This bell is another form of resistance, and at least a partially "good" one, for a change. This bell means something like: why does he ask this? And as a result one ends up reading the text again and again. This is another form of resistance, one that Plato tries to encourage, since it makes his reader work harder, so that he can comprehend better what he missed the first couple of times he read the text.

To further show how Polus and his reader do not get the way the question "τί ἐστίν" works, Plato makes Polus try to mimic the Socratic way of questioning — with disastrous results. This brief attempt helps to highlight a handful of important things

⁴¹ 448c: Χαιρεφῶν· νῦν δ' ἐπειδὴ τίνος τέχνης ἐπιστήμων ἐστίν, τίνα ἂν καλοῦντες αὐτὸν ὀρθῶς καλοῖμεν;
⁴² 448e6-7.

regarding the history of resistance, and it draws our attention to the possibility of a *distracted* relationship with this very important question.

The very first question Polus asks — what account or opinion does Socrates have of rhetoric?⁴³ — shows the first problem; for Socrates is immediately forced to clarify Polus' question.⁴⁴ The question seems very clear to Polus; and most readers would not guess that Socrates feels any need to clarify it by asking Polus whether he wants to know what kind of τέχνη rhetoric is in Socrates' view. At the same time, there is no shock in Socrates asking this question. The reader does not even notice that he has allowed himself to be carried away by a *confused* question, and, when Socrates introduces the correction, the reader does not even realize that this correction is also addressed to anyone who thought the question was well formulated.⁴⁵

As if nothing happened, Polus continues questioning Socrates, pressing him to say what he thinks rhetoric is. But he does so in a hurry, for he lacks the serenity and patience Socrates has to tune the details. According to Socrates, this happens because he is young (νέος) and hasty (ὀξύς), and just like a young man rushes to get where he wants to.⁴⁶ Indeed, Polus already suggests why he does not agree with what Socrates and Gorgias said. And now he is anxious to jump right to that point. He *thinks he knows* how to trap Socrates and cannot wait to do it. Here we find again οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς and self-interest. Obviously, when Plato shows Polus in a clumsy hurry, he is suggesting that pretty much the same holds true for the reader who goes on board with him — and this is a form of resistance, as we have seen in the first part of this paper. Moreover, Plato is anticipating what is going to come a few pages below, when Socrates speaks of a trial before children, or before men that are like children.⁴⁷ In other words, he is indirectly accusing the reader of being childish. This may also work as a trigger for resistance in a second or third reading of the *Gorgias*, once the reader actually realizes he is being insulted, and accordingly feels forced to defend himself. To do so, he tries to comprehend why Plato is comparing him to a

⁴³ 462b: Πῶλος· ἀλλὰ ποιήσω ταῦτα. καί μοι ἀπόκριναι, ὃ Σώκρατες· ἐπειδὴ Γοργίας ἀπορεῖν σοι δοκεῖ περὶ τῆς ῥητορικῆς, σὺ αὐτὴν τίνα φῆς εἶναι;

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*: Σωκράτης· ἄρα ἐρωτᾷς ἥντινα τέχνην φημί εἶναι;

⁴⁵ The point is the following: though Polus is trying to mimic Socrates' way of asking questions, on closer inspection it emerges that his question goes in the opposite direction. For he is taking for granted that rhetoric is a τέχνη and thereby misses the whole point, namely the task of asking a full-blown τί-question: a full-blown τί-question is characterized by the fact that it takes nothing for granted.

⁴⁶ 463e2.

⁴⁷ 465d5-7.

child, and that forces him to get closer to an actual questioning of his views and consequently brings him closer to philosophy.

The purpose of this rhetorical strategy is to communicate some kind of *disquiet* or *unrest* to the reader. Indeed, while disapproving of a certain kind of rhetoric, Plato himself is *using* another form of rhetoric, which leads his reader to unrest and forces him to struggle in order to escape this unrest. In this struggle he may either try to fight Socrates and his claims or try to understand them. As pointed out above, both can be combined in a complicated manner. But in either case, Plato has already made his reader enter the philosophical way of thinking, at least up to a certain point. So, this unrest is something the author of the *Gorgias* believes leads to philosophy, and he uses a particular kind of rhetoric to trigger this state.

There is then another important moment, one in which there should have been resistance to Socrates but there was not. It happens when Socrates describes ῥητορική as ἐμπειρία.⁴⁸ Had Polus understood the way the question "τί ἐστίν;" works, he would have asked "τί ἐστὶν ἐμπειρία;" But he does not. Instead he asks a "ποιόν τι"-question: "τίνος ἐμπειρία;"⁴⁹ This also holds good for the reader; for, if he accepts Polus' question,⁵⁰ this means that he too forgot the difference and did not get the meaning of "τί ἐστίν;" and of διαλέγεσθαι. But this is an illusion: οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι. As pointed out above, the latter is the decisive moment, for it amounts to a singular and particularly effective form of resistance. But why does Socrates not correct him? Socrates does get the difference, does he not?

The first reason for Socrates not to stop Polus here is the fact that Plato does not seem interested in discussing ἐμπειρία (what is ἐμπειρία?) in this context. Accordingly, as it is common in Plato's works, he indicates the problem with a small incongruence, which points out to the attentive reader the existence of a problem, but then does not tackle it.

⁴⁸ 462bc.

⁴⁹ 462c: Πῶλος· ἐμπειρία ἄρα σοι δοκεῖ ἡ ῥητορική εἶναι;
Σωκράτης· ἔμοιγε, εἰ μὴ τι σὺ ἄλλο λέγεις.
Πῶλος· τίνος ἐμπειρία;

To be sure, Polus' question is the starting point of another τί-question – namely the τί-question concerning the object of rhetoric — which turns out to be the τί-question concerning the very structure of human life itself. But the point is that Polus has absolutely nothing of the sort in mind. He is asking a ποιόν- question — and that is all there is to it. It is Socrates who changes his ποιόν-question into a τί ἐστίν-question.

⁵⁰ If Polus' question turns out to be the question he would have asked.

The second reason is also an interesting one, for Plato also seems to only let this one question slide by, so that the reader and Polus can gain momentum and then fall with their face flat on the ground. It is a trap, and a good one. He does not want to catch us in a "small" matter. Instead, he waits until Polus steps inside the pantry and surprises him with his hand in the cookie jar. Indeed, when Socrates tells Polus that he takes rhetoric to be an ἐμπειρία that produces gratification (χάρις) and pleasure (ἡδονή)⁵¹ he is setting the trap, for he knows Polus will identify χάρις and ἡδονή with something related to the so-called ἀμφοισβητήσιμον core of the *priamel*. In this case, Polus uses the word καλόν, and this means two things as regards a history of resistance:

First of all, it means once again, as Socrates immediately points out, a slip from "τί ἐστίν;" to "ποιὸν ἐστίν;" regarding the definition of rhetoric. This shows our natural tendency to resist the question "τί ἐστίν;" and the consequent inertia that straps us to the question "ποιὸν ἐστίν". Accordingly, it demonstrates our presumption about knowing what rhetoric is, but more importantly it demonstrates our presumption about knowing what χάρις and ἡδονή are, for we would not declare them to be καλαί if we had no idea whatsoever of what they are. At stake are also εἰδέναι and οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι and the relation between this presumption and self-interest (and therefore also the relation with the superlative). Once again, as soon as I think that Polus' question is pertinent, I too am caught with my hand in the cookie jar. So Plato is telling me that I should have resisted Polus' connection between ἡδονή and χάρις and καλόν. And this is why Socrates only stops him now. This also shows that the main focus here is not actually rhetoric, but rather what leads Gorgias, Polus, Callicles and most readers to consider it καλή. And Plato is telling us that it has something to do with the fact that we consider rhetoric to have something to do with ἡδονή and χάρις, and at the same time take ἡδονή and χάρις to be καλαί. It is a problem of confusion: we should resist this identification, but not resisting shows confusion⁵² and this confusion is itself a different and *deeper* form of resistance.

Secondly, it means that we do not get the difference between ἀγαθόν, καλόν, δίκαιον and all other terms used to describe the core of the *priamel*, which is the superlative. Thus, Plato is showing that we should ask why it is that he sometimes uses ἀγαθόν and at other times καλόν or δίκαιον, but also βέλτιστον or ἄριστον,

⁵¹ 462c: Σωκράτης· χάριτός τινος καὶ ἡδονῆς ἀπεργασίας.

⁵² A kind of confusion Socrates calls our attention to in his "anthropology of κολακεία".

among others. This is also a form of confusion, and therefore also a form of silent resistance that has managed to survive the dialogue between Socrates and Gorgias.

The problem of confusion mentioned above is exemplified in the following questions, when Polus asks whether Socrates takes rhetoric and cookery to be the same.⁵³ This hints that he has not grasped what is at stake, and this is reinforced by the comical fact that, although Polus chooses to ask the questions, it is Socrates who ends up telling Polus what he should ask.

Plato then prepares the reader for an important point, which is the definition of rhetoric as a branch of flattery (κολακεία).⁵⁴ Indeed, when Socrates pretends to be afraid to insult Gorgias with his account of rhetoric, this is meant to show that the word κολακεία radically changes the meaning of ἡδονή and χάρις. Indeed, although Socrates' mention of them makes Polus assume Socrates has a positive idea of rhetoric, the negative connotation of the word κολακεία transforms the meaning of ἡδονή and χάρις and consequently of ῥητορική. Κολακεία was not held in high regard, and the word κόλαξ could even signify a kind of bloodsucking being, which spends the day adulating someone, *i.e.* giving that someone ἡδονή and χάρις just to take advantage of him. So, it is no exaggeration to say that the introduction of κολακεία changes the meaning of ἡδονή and χάρις; and, since rhetoric is related to them, the meaning of rhetoric changes as well. Plato helps the reader understand that this is a very important step in the dialogue — and also to understand that Polus will obviously resist what Socrates is about to say. In fact, the following step in the discussion helps us clarify the very essence of our natural resistance to questioning the apparently self-evident equation between pleasure (ἡδονή) and good (ἀγαθόν) — an equation that plays a major role in our daily lives. This alleged self-evidence is what makes both the characters and the reader keep resisting Socrates throughout the whole dialogue. Plato's intention is very clear, and he fully expresses it by associating rhetoric with κολακεία and κολακεία with ἡδονή and χάρις. He says that rhetoric is a branch of κολακεία, and that this πράγμα has nothing fine about it — "πράγματός τινός ἐστιν μόνον οὐδενὸς τῶν καλῶν."⁵⁵

After Gorgias allows Socrates to go on, he re-states the importance of the difference between the questions "τί ἐστιν;" and "ποιὸν ἐστίν;", saying that he will not

⁵³ 462e.

⁵⁴ 462e-463c

⁵⁵ 463a.

answer the second until he has answered the first.⁵⁶ He then tells Polus what to ask him and ends up defining rhetoric as an εἶδωλον of a branch of politics.⁵⁷ But Polus continues to ask whether he thinks rhetoric to be good, still without realising what Socrates means by rhetoric or by a branch of politics and especially what he means by εἶδωλον.⁵⁸ This shows how hasty Polus is and how *interested* he is in getting to whether or not rhetoric is good or bad, for this being good or bad looks like the most important element in a structure defined by self-interest. But it also shows that he still does not grasp that one cannot *know* if something is good before knowing *what* it is. He overlooks this because he thinks he knows pleasure is good and he also thinks he knows that rhetoric gives pleasure.

Gorgias then comes in as the "saviour" and asks Socrates to explain himself.⁵⁹ We acknowledge him, because just as Socrates says, his words are not clear at all. This asking Socrates to explain himself seems like a good form of resistance, for it shows an interest in understanding what is at stake. Accordingly, it shows some willingness to gain a new perspective, even if it remains unclear what kind of prejudices or preconceptions are still intact and still contaminate this positive development.

The following step is very complicated and long, but also decisive.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, I cannot explore it and explain how it describes a pivotal structure of the *Gorgias*, for it would go beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, some of the critical elements expressed in it have already been mentioned. Since these are the important ones for a history of resistance, I will just remind the reader of them in order before continuing. The fundamental thing here is the idea of εἶδωλον and the way an εἶδωλον impersonates the thing of which it is an εἶδωλον, and thereby gives, say, the οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς the appearance of real εἰδέναι. This same kind of εἶδωλον-related equation makes the connection between ἡδονή and ἀγαθόν, between cookery and medicine, between gymnastics and κομμωτική, between rhetoric and the corrective branch of politics, and between sophistry and the preventive branch of

⁵⁶ 463c: ἐγὼ δὲ αὐτῷ οὐκ ἀποκρινοῦμαι πρότερον εἴτε καλὸν εἴτε αἰσχρὸν ἡγοῦμαι εἶναι τὴν ῥητορικὴν πρὶν ἂν πρῶτον ἀποκρίνωμαι ὅτι ἐστίν. οὐ γὰρ δίκαιον, ὦ Πῶλε (...).

⁵⁷ 463c: (...) ἀλλ' εἶπερ βούλει πυθέσθαι, ἐρώτα ὅποιον μῦθον τῆς κολακείας φημί εἶναι τὴν ῥητορικὴν.

⁵⁸ 463d.

⁵⁹ 463d-e: Σωκράτης· αἰσχρὸν ἔγωγε—τὰ γὰρ κακὰ αἰσχροῦ καλῶ—ἐπειδὴ δεῖ σοι ἀποκρίνασθαι ὥς ἤδη εἰδότε ἃ ἐγὼ λέγω.

Γοργίας· μὰ τὸν Δία, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐδὲ αὐτὸς συνίημι ὅτι λέγεις.

⁶⁰ 463c-465e.

politics. But the really important aspect is that cookery is actually seen as medicine, in the sense that it is described as if it were a τέχνη that concerns itself with what is best for the body. So every time someone takes cookery as the τέχνη that knows what is best for the body, that someone sees cookery immediately as medicine, and this is the meaning of εἶδωλον — we take cookery *as if* it were medicine. This happens because we associate εὐεξία⁶¹ with pleasure, and indeed in such a way that we see pleasure *immediately* as εὐεξία. So we think we know what is best for the body and for the soul — it is pleasure. We see pleasure as if it were just the same thing as good. So we think we know what is ἀγαθόν. This presumption, which is a form of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, appears to us as real εἰδέναι; it works as an εἶδωλον of εἰδέναι — just as ἡδονή appears as an εἶδωλον of εὐεξία.

A more thorough analysis of the meaning of εἶδωλον would be imperative in a text specially dedicated to this passage. What we can say now is that εἶδωλον works as an equation, an equation that hides both the terms and even the fact that there is an equation that connects two *different* things. For example, pleasure and good are different things, but we see one as if it were the other — when we have pleasure we say "this is good", and hence forget that we are dealing with two different things. By forgetting this difference we forget to ask what each one of these things is: we forget to ask "what is ἡδονή?" and we forget to ask "what is ἀγαθόν?" Hence, we lose the meaning of ἡδονή and ἀγαθόν and we even dismiss the fact that we equate one with the other. By doing so, we also lose track of this equation, *i.e.*, we also lose track of the role played by εἶδωλον. It is only because we forget this difference between pleasure and εὐεξία⁶² that we forget the difference between cookery and medicine, as well as the difference between all the other τέχναι and their respective εἶδωλα.

This brief paragraph — together with what was stated previously — will have to suffice regarding this important step. It is worth stressing that this same equation works as a form of *confusion*, only made possible by the above-mentioned lack of acuity. Indeed, this equation takes two distinct things that look alike and makes them look like one.⁶³ This confusion is a form of resistance that can lead either to resisting

⁶¹ Another word that is used, without further notice, as a synonym for ἀγαθόν and βέλτιστον, etc.

⁶² Or ἀγαθόν or all the other ways to describe the core of the priamel.

⁶³ Socrates alludes to Anaxagoras (*DK 59 [46]*, B1, 5) and to the idea of ὁμοῦ. This reference suggests that our "inner eyes" are just like the eyes of human beings prior to the advent of τέχνη and νόυς— people who "saw without seeing". Cf. AESCHYLUS, *Prometheus vinctus*, 442ff. — and, on βλέπειν μάτην, 447. Contrary to what Dodds' thinks — cf. E. R. DODDS (ed.), *Plato Gorgias. A Revised Text With Introduction and Commentary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, 232—, Plato is in a

what Socrates is saying by disagreeing with him for trying to separate pleasure and good, or else to sulking and other silent forms of resistance, once the identification between pleasure and good is challenged. Both these forms of resistance are to be found in Polus and then in Callicles (and obviously in the reader).

Now the next moment of resistance is quite ironical. After the long and very important passage concerning the definition of rhetoric, in which Socrates describes it as a branch of flattery, Polus asks, rather shocked, if Socrates really takes rhetoric to be flattery. This question is not meant to be a real question, but rather an expression of surprise. But Polus' surprise only shows that he did not get or try to get what Socrates was really saying. It shows that the vital insight we have spoken about is still intact — still alive and kicking. Indeed, what this surprise means is that Polus does not buy the description of rhetoric as a branch of flattery. In complete honesty, neither did I when I read the text for the first time. This resistance of this vital insight (according to which pleasure is good) *stays alive* (and so is the belief that rhetoric is able to give pleasure). Another proof of this is the fact that in the following lines Polus tries to begin a speech, and only asks questions to keep up the formal structure of διαλέγεσθαι, although he does not give any indication of having understood the importance of the question "τί ἐστίν;". The fact that he is beginning a speech also means that he has something to say about this description of rhetoric *i.e.* that there is something that still resists what Socrates just said.

Another important detail at the end of Socrates' long description is that Polus asks whether Socrates considers rhetoric to be flattery, forgetting that he said a branch of flattery. Once again, he is so eager to refute Socrates that he keeps missing the details and keeps not distinguishing between things that should be separated. In other words, he stays confused. The same goes for the reader who is caught in the trap. When we fail to notice this difference, we slip right into Polus' shoes. And once again this shows our resistance to what Socrates is saying, both in the fact that we overlook the differences in our hastiness, and in the sense that we, too, still seem to keep the so-called vital insight perfectly alive and healthy.

way telling both Polus and his reader that their way of seeing is still confused, and hence one that is unable to discern what should be distinguished. This means that he is describing Polus and Gorgias and Callicles, who are some of the Athenian top rhetors, as similar to the primitive, the cave man. Needless to say there is a close connection between the comparison with children and the implicit comparison with the cave man and the like.

The next sign of resistance is afforded by Polus when he asks whether or not the rhetors have power in their cities.⁶⁴ If they were flatterers they would not be powerful, but the fact is that they *are* powerful.⁶⁵ This appears as an argument *de facto*, for it seems obvious that they do what they want and when they want, apparently not depending on anybody — and this is power, no matter what Socrates tries to say. And, by God, did I agree with that! There is still an inner core of self-evidence (*viz.* of the vital insight tacitly invoked by Gorgias and Polus) that continues to be untouched and resisting.

Socrates is again forced to put on the breaks. Once more this comes in the form of clearing up the confusion. Socrates asks whether power (δυνάσθαι) should or not be good for him who has it, in order to be actual power. And the answer is obviously yes, as the reader immediately perceives.⁶⁶ This reinforces the importance of self-interest and the fundamental relation it has with τὸ βέλτιστον. But the decisive moment comes when Socrates tells Polus that he is actually asking two questions, instead of one.⁶⁷ Polus is surprised, just like the reader: how can there be two? We do not see two questions, only one. The way *in which* we resist is by asking how on earth can there be two questions. But *why* do we resist? Because of confusion and lack of acuity, which pave the way to an "εἶδωλον-equation" and at the same time are substantiated by it. Plato is saying that we take "doing what one thinks fit" (ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ) as if it were the same as "doing what one wants" (ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται). This happens because the first works as an εἶδωλον of the second. However, since neither Polus nor the reader grasps what Socrates means by εἶδωλον,⁶⁸ no one can yet understand what he is saying. Once again, this happens because we already think we know what is the best, in which case there is no difference between ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ and ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται. But if what we think we know to be the best turns out not to be the best, then there is a difference between the two, a difference which was previously hidden by the fact that — in this regard too — we took οἶσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς as an εἶδωλον of εἰδέναι, that is, as εἰδέναι. This is the reason why we resist

⁶⁴ 466a-b.

⁶⁵ 466b: Πῶλος· πῶς οὐ νομίζεσθαι; οὐ μέγιστον δύνανται ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν;

⁶⁶ 466b: Σωκράτης· οὐκ, εἰ τὸ δύνασθαι γε λέγεις ἀγαθόν τι εἶναι τῷ δυναμένῳ.

Πῶλος· ἀλλὰ μὴν λέγω γε.

⁶⁷ 466c: Σωκράτης· εἶεν, ὦ φίλε· ἔπειτα δύο ἅμα με ἐρωτᾷς;

Πῶλος· πῶς δύο;

⁶⁸ And here I do not mean the word or the notion it stands for, but the very phenomenon that takes place in our own "inner eye": in the way we see or perceive things — and in the way we lead our lives.

Socrates in this passage. Actually this is the main reason underlying all our resistance while reading the *Gorgias*.

The following lines are expressly meant to show *how* Polus strongly resists Socrates' distinction between *ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ* and *ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται*. When Socrates asks if there is no need for *νόδς*, Polus says yes, but still does not get that Socrates is trying to tell him that he does not know what he thinks he knows.⁶⁹ The same thing happened to me while reading the text, and again because what I think I know poses as something I really know⁷⁰. In these lines, by connecting power with the capability to attain what is good, and by relating the latter with the necessity of *knowing* what is good, Socrates is once again stating the important relationship between self-interest and *ἀγαθόν*, but also with *εἰδέναι*; for power without *εἰδέναι* would be blind and hence could not lead to what is good.⁷¹ This shows that neither Polus nor the reader has paid much attention to the dialogue between Socrates and Gorgias, for this is precisely what was discussed there: the need for knowledge outside of rhetoric that would guide it. This is also a rather ironical way to anticipate the end of this discussion, for it predicts that the conclusion will not differ from the one already attained.

I believe the passage between 466b and 467c to be the perfect example of *how* we resist Socrates. In this passage the way we resist him is described in a rather ironic fashion. Plato does not seem to be a great enthusiast of flattery, and this passage shows us in an unflattering light. Indeed, by agreeing with Polus and sharing his surprise, we resist Socrates. At first, we think that his statements are preposterous. We ask him again and again the questions he has already answered — as if the repetition of the same question would make him change his mind. In this process we forget to question ourselves, and hence look like the kid who gets stuck on one question and just will not let go. This happens because what we think we know survives as an alleged self-evidence and still conducts our life.

The first textual expression of this childish anger is "Οὗτος ἀνὴρ —", in 467b. We take Socrates to be teasing us, and he is. He does have a point; but we are so stunned by his subtleties that we think he is discussing small things just to win the

⁶⁹ 466e-467b.

⁷⁰ There are multiple terms used by Plato to describe this, namely *προσποιεῖν* viz. *προσποιεῖσθαι* and *ὑποδῶναι*, both of them used in the previous description of rhetoric as a branch of flattery. See notably 464d1, c7, 464c7-d1 and 464d4.

⁷¹ The result being that it would turn out not to be power at all.

argument. It is important to notice that Polus is himself a rhetor, and hence when Socrates implies that rhetors have no *νοῦς*, he is insulting Polus and calling him a child for the third time. But the way Polus reacts is really comical, because instead of acting like a grownup he does behave like a child, throwing a tantrum and getting really angry and prickly — and thus proving Socrates right. We, twenty-first-century readers, even if we side with Polus, might not get that upset, since most of us do not intend to be rhetors *stricto sensu* (although this would have been different for ancient readers). However, if we side with Polus, not being upset with what Socrates is saying is not very flattering either; for it means that we are also suffering from ἀμαθία or ἄνοια. In other words: perhaps I am stupid — and indeed so much so that I do not even perceive that Plato is calling me stupid. Indeed, this would show my ἀμαθία regarding the fact that what Socrates is talking about is not rhetoric *stricto sensu*, but *what* stands behind flattery as an εἰδωλον of the ψυχῆ's corrective τέχνη.⁷² And what stands behind flattery is nothing less than the vital structures that enable κολακεία to play such an important role in our lives. So in a way, in Socrates' definition of rhetoric, we may still be rhetors; and not getting this is also a form of stupidity (Plato's words, not mine). By going along with Polus and questioning Socrates the way he does, I am unwittingly showing my ἀμαθία and proving Plato right. This passage therefore shows that we resist like children (that is *how* we resist) because we are like a child (and that is *why* we resist).

The second expression of the head-on resistance we offer is the culmination of this passage, when Polus says "Σχέτλια λέγεις καὶ ὑπερφυῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες."⁷³ This sentence sums up what we actually think about what Socrates just said and the way we use to dismiss his arguments. It is indeed one of the best sentences to describe our attitude towards the *Gorgias* and the resistance we offer Socrates. Accordingly, all the above-mentioned forms of resistance that were said to be possibly "good" turn out to be contaminated by a deeper form of resistance, in this case a "bad" one. It consists in being confused and at the same time being so convinced there is no confusion that we feel no need to question what we think. At the end of the day, if our actions show that we still behave like Polus and still identify pleasure with the superlative, what we are actually saying is "Σχέτλια λέγεις καὶ ὑπερφυῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες."

⁷² Or as the τέχνη of the ψυχῆ, since rhetors and sophists cannot discern between the two τέχναι. In sum, Socrates is discussing all the εἰδωλα involved in our normal comprehension of the ψυχῆ. Cf. 465c-e.

⁷³ 467b.

At the same time, this passage leads to a more profound analysis of what has been said about *κολακεία*. As a matter of fact, Plato only reveals a certain amount of information up to this point — which is intended to make us angry and shocked, to make us resist what Socrates is saying. He then makes Polus curious about what in the world Socrates means by all he said, and this is also the position we are left in.

In order for Socrates' claims to become clearer, he further develops his analysis of the basic structure of our lives *viz.* of our *ψυχή*. Socrates does this by focusing on another central component of human life: what might be termed the "*ἔνεκά τι*ος-structure".⁷⁴ Now this, too, cannot be discussed in any detail here. The main aspects have to do with a) the complex structure of *ἔνεκά τι*ος, b) the connection between *ἔνεκά τι*ος and *μεταξύ* and c) the fact that *ἔνεκά τι*ος entails another form of *equation*, in the above mentioned sense, and adds depth to the previous analysis. The third aspect is particularly important because it can help us fully understand the pivotal role played by the formal superlative and hence dismiss the idea that we are bound to a *material* agenda, *i.e.* to a set of concrete desiderata that are automatically established by nature and therefore absolutely unquestionable. Our reaction to this further development adds a new chapter to the history of the reader's resistance to Socrates and philosophy.

The examples that substantiate Socrates' claims regarding the *ἔνεκά τι*ος are simple: we usually do things for the sake of other things, for we take medicines to be cured, take a boat or a flight to get somewhere, and so on. Things like walking and sitting and taking medicines are neither good nor bad, but *μεταξύ*.⁷⁵ However, this does not mean that health itself is not good, or pleasure itself is not good, or that honour itself is not good. Taking a medicine is a good thing when it gives me health; but it is a bad thing if it makes me unhealthy. There is a form of *equation* when we see the medicine immediately as a good thing, for the medicine is only good *if* it makes me healthy — the medicine itself is not good. But in our daily life it is seen by me as a "good thing in itself" because I think I know it will make me healthy. This happens because the things that are *μεταξύ partake* (*μετέχειν*) of the things for the sake of which (*ἔνεκά τι*ος) they are done.⁷⁶ So once again we have an equation and something playing the role of an *εἰδωλον*, although here this structure works in a

⁷⁴ 467cff.

⁷⁵ 467dff.

⁷⁶ 467e7.

slightly different manner. This time we do not see medicine as if it were exactly the same thing as ἀγαθόν itself: we see it as if it were inseparable from ἀγαθόν, and indeed as if it *were* ἀγαθόν. And this happens because we *think we know* that such medicine is good. So a medicine appears as ἀγαθόν in the guise of a pill or in the guise of an injection. Nevertheless, this seems not to raise the question whether health and honour and pleasures are good things *per se*. And if we consider that not only good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) but also the superlative (τὸ βέλτιστον) are at stake, things get even more complicated. But, as stated above, this cannot be discussed here in any detail.

However, the main point Socrates is trying to make is that neither health nor pleasure nor honour nor anything else is good or superlative in itself. They all act as the transforming "deformalizations" of the superlative. I will choose eating a lot instead of eating healthily if I am convinced that pleasure is better than health. Moreover, I will only sit at the table eating a lot if I think it is better than training or studying. In sum: I will only do whatever I do if I take it to be the *best* thing I can do at that time. All this would obviously require a much more careful explanation, but this brief outline will have to suffice. So studying is the best thing to do right now... This might happen because I want to make my mother proud, or because I am vain, or because I want a scholarship in the future, and I might want a scholarship to make my mother proud or because I want to live by myself or because I want to live abroad, and I might want to live abroad because... This chain must end somewhere, and this somewhere is something I take to be the best, and this makes me want to find the best means to get there. Now these means are seen by me as the best things in themselves, they are seen as the superlative in the guise of a lot of different things. In this particular case, the chain of ἔνεκά τινος ends up determining that the best thing for me is to be sitting in the library instead of surfing. I might want to go surfing because it gives me pleasure, but in the end this does not mean that I am not sitting here *for the sake of* pleasure, for I can be sitting here and studying because I think this will enable me to move out in the future and then surf more, which would give me pleasure. Socrates is trying to say that in the end there might still be a fundamental equation that equals pleasure and good (εἰδωλον in the first sense) and that this very fundamental equation spreads throughout all other things in a chain of multiple "ἔνεκά τινος-equations". The various levels of equations are marked by a lack of acuity that a) allows what we think we know (οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι) to work as an εἰδωλον

of actual knowledge (εἰδέναι) and b) allows us to lose track of the centrepiece around which everything revolves.

All this is important because it also increases the levels of resistance. The fact that everything in our lives relies on several layers of links connecting us with a formal superlative multiplies the chances for resistance. Indeed, even if we concede that pleasure is not good in itself when it is time to take a painful medicine, this does not mean we do not want to get healthy just to be able to have other forms of pleasure. These examples could go on forever, in length and in depth. However, the really important aspect to this analysis is once again confusion and lack of acuity; only this time multiplied. On the one hand, our real resistance is a resistance to acuity, to seeing things clearly: *i.e.* distinguishing between different things, perceiving what is identical and grasping the exact connection between each A and each B. Because this is far from being what we usually do, Socrates suggests that the way we see things (and in particular what we have termed our vital insight) resembles Anaxagoras' ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα.⁷⁷ On the one hand, it is easier to resist because, as pointed out above, we tend to lose sight of the centrepiece around which everything else revolves. That is, we are constituted in such a way that our most important assumptions are tacit: our "inner eye" tends to look at the periphery and forget the centre, so that the innermost layer of what we have termed the vital insight remains impervious to what Socrates says.

And to prove Plato right, Polus maintains what he said previously — and ignores Socrates' objections to his claims. Indeed, he does not believe that Socrates would not be willing to have the power to do whatever he pleases: to become a τύραννος.⁷⁸ And this means that he did not understand what Socrates just said and that the way he thinks is still completely intact. The same holds true for the reader; for what Plato is really asking is whether I would be unwilling to have the power to do whatever I think fit — to become a τύραννος if I had the chance — just because Socrates drew my attention to the fact that ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ ἐμοί is a double-edged sword and can lead to the exact opposite of ποιεῖν ἃ βούλομαι. And the fact that I hesitate (and I only hesitate in the best case scenario...) shows that I still resist everything Socrates just

⁷⁷ N.B.: not in the sense that we see everything as one and the same, but in the sense that many things that are different appear to us as being the same. Cf. 465d and note 63 above.

⁷⁸ Πῶλος· ὥς δὴ σύ, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ ἂν δέξαιο ἐξεῖναι σοι ποιεῖν ὅτι δοκεῖ σοι ἐν τῇ πόλει μᾶλλον ἢ μή, οὐδὲ ζηλοῖς ὅταν ἴδῃς τινὰ ἢ ἀποκτείναντα ὃν ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ ἢ ἀφελόμενον χρήματα ἢ δήσαντα.

said, even if I do understand what is theoretically involved and that Socrates might have a point. Put another way: let us take it for granted a) that I only do X for the sake of Y, and Y for the sake of Z, and that I only want Z because I take Z to be the best and b) that I realize that it is questionable whether Z is really the correct “deformalization” of the superlative; at the end of the day, none of this prevents me from continuing to assume that the equation is sound. And this is why I can be willing (and even eager) to accept complete power right after reading this passage and becoming completely aware of the problems raised by Socrates. If Socrates is right, what we are dealing with here is a form of inertia: we are short-sighted and keep forgetting to use our glasses.

Polus' resistance to Socrates is further evident in the answer he gives immediately after he says he does not believe Socrates would not be willing to accept absolute power. Socrates asks Polus whether he means the power to do whatever one sees fit in a just (δικαίως) or unjust (ἀδίκως) manner.⁷⁹ But Polus does not see any difference, for, in his view, the only important thing is the μέγα δύνασθαι (the ἐξεῖναι μοι ποιεῖν ὅ τι δοκεῖ μοι) as such.⁸⁰ To sum up, he still believes that μέγα δύνασθαι *viz.* absolute power is worthy *per se*, no matter what. And this shows that he completely ignores what Socrates has just said regarding the difference between ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ and ἃ βούλεται. And if the reader feels that Polus has a point in what he says, pretty much the same holds true for him.

Deep down, Polus still thinks that he knows what is good and that power enables one to achieve things that are good in themselves. And that is why he still believes that power is a good thing in itself: it enables one to get those things that are the best⁸¹ — and hence power (μέγα δύνασθαι and indeed *absolute* power) is also a good thing, or even the *best* thing. The point is that there is an essential connection between the kind of agenda Polus is tacitly invoking — *viz.* the kind of agenda the reader has — and the question of δύνασθαι, power (or, to be more precise, of absolute power). Plato points out that this kind of agenda is essentially related to a desire for power (and indeed for *absolute* power) — if it were up to each one of us, each one of us would have *absolute* power. And the fact that Polus — and for that matter, the reader — clings to this fundamental belief shows that, in fact, everything remains the same.

⁷⁹ 468e: Σωκράτης· δικαίως λέγεις ἢ ἀδίκως;

⁸⁰ Cf. 468e6.

⁸¹ Or good, as once again Plato plays with both the normal and the superlative degree of the adjective; more often than not, we do not notice this fact and take them to be the same.

Polus does not realize that power is only good if it is used to get really good things (indeed the best things) and that he may be mistaken about which things are best, in which case power would not be good for anyone who has it, since it would only give him what he does not want. In this case, power is not power. Accordingly, Polus' resistance to what Socrates is saying is still based on the vital insight that remains unaltered from the very beginning of the *Gorgias*. This resistance is Plato's way of telling the reader to look at himself and ask if the insight connecting pleasure and good (power and good, etc.) is still there or not.⁸² According to my experience, it still is, and the proof is that we still understand where Polus' questions and resistance come from. The parental examples used in the first part are useful for illustrating this, for this is exactly the same thing that happens usually when we argue with our parents about something (at least that is my experience). In this sense the *Gorgias* puts a mirror before us — a mirror in which we can behold ourselves, and, in particular, our "inner eye". And among the most important things that can be seen in this mirror is our own resistance to Socrates and what Socrates stands for.

All this leads to a new and unsettling statement by Socrates, the one that presents ἀδικεῖν as the worst possible thing (μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν), even worse than ἀδικεῖσθαι.⁸³ Once again, Polus asks in a rather rhetorical fashion: "Σύ ἄρα βούλοιο ἂν μᾶλλον ἀδικεῖσθαι ἢ ἀδικεῖν;"⁸⁴ This question expresses clearly that Polus cannot believe Socrates' words (*i.e.* that he cannot? believe Socrates believes in his own words). For him, Socrates' new claim is absolute nonsense; Socrates can only be joking. Once again, Polus does not try to refute Socrates, and, as will be clear later on, he does not do so because he thinks Socrates' proposition to be sort-of self-refutative.⁸⁵ Even a child with no νοῦς knows better.⁸⁶ This is also a way for Plato to tell his reader that if he really agrees with Socrates, this is what he is agreeing with. Do I really believe this? In the end, it is quite difficult not to resist this, for it would mean I would have to choose to be hurt rather than hurting unjustly. Polus obviously resists and there is at least some part of any honest reader that shivers a bit. This slight

⁸² And this once again relates to the description of πειθῶ πιστευτική in the dialogue between Socrates and Gorgias.

⁸³ 469b: Σωκράτης· οὕτως, ὡς μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν τυγχάνει ὃν τὸ ἀδικεῖν.

Πῶλος· ἢ γὰρ τοῦτο μέγιστον; οὐ τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι μείζον;

Σωκράτης· ἥκιστα γε.

⁸⁴ 469b.

⁸⁵ One might perhaps say that it is "*vitally self-refutative*", for it is *in contradiction with life itself*: with the very life of whoever makes such a statement.

⁸⁶ Cf. 470c4-5 and 471d5-8.

resistance from the reader means once again that the above-mentioned insight is still intact and does not like where this is heading.

The knife example follows this passage and is meant to show how we are still at a loss about the conflict of use between Polus and Socrates. Indeed, just like Polus, we realize the example given by Socrates does not illustrate real power. It shows that absolute power alone can turn out to be the very opposite of what seems to make it so attractive.⁸⁷ And when we realize this, we admit that doing what one thinks fit (ποιεῖν ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ) is not real power if it happens to have bad results. If by doing what we think fit we end up being punished, then it is a bad thing. But why? In the end it is because we suffer: and this means that the connection between ἡδονή and βέλτιστον also entails the connection between λύπη (and in particular μέγιστη λύπη) and μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν. There is a negative counterpart to the positive superlative, namely, a negative superlative, and both are established at the same time. The other important thing about this example is that we immediately see what Socrates' aim is. Nevertheless we are still unable to see it by ourselves before Plato calls our attention to this fact. The knife example does correspond to what Polus said before, but he is still unable to see that such an example does follow from what he said. Likewise, unless the reader anticipates Socrates' question, the same goes for him. So once again there is a problem of confusion and of not being able to see what is at stake in our own views. It is Socrates who forces our eyes to focus and to grasp that we are still missing something.

3. To be continued...

The knife example is also a pretext for introducing a further development, namely Socrates' and Polus' discussion of two exemplary figures: Archelaus and his counterpart, the "anti-Archelaus". Socrates and Polus place these two exemplary figures in a very different position in the framework defined by the positive superlative, the negative superlative and what might be described as the graduated

⁸⁷ So that this example challenges the equation that absolute power equals τὸ ἀγαθόν (τὸ βέλτιστον etc.).

scale between them. And all this is closely connected to the questions as to whether it is worse to be punished or to escape wrongdoing without being punished.⁸⁸

Sadly, I will not be able to further examine the history of resistance in the dialogue between Socrates and Polus. Nevertheless, I will try to describe very briefly and superficially how resistance still plays a major role in what is to come.

The most important thing to stress is that choosing being Archelaus and the opposite is nothing but an *internal* consequence of Polus' views. This is the same as bringing to the surface the hidden claims that for the most part we did not even know were involved in what we usually think. Accordingly, siding with Archelaus and wishing to be in his shoes represents a resistance to everything Socrates said previously: it means that what we termed the vital insight *still rules our lives*: pleasure is *still* taken to be βέλτιστον and pain to be the μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν. This is a fundamental moment in the history of resistance; for it shows a) how this vital insight survives and b) that it still survives because of confusion and a lack of acuity owing to which Socrates is "writing on water". This confusion and this lack of acuity keep working despite all Socrates said, and this shows the inertia of our natural way of perceiving life and what is at stake in it. In a way, this inertia consists in constantly erasing what was previously discussed. Hence, even if our preconceptions (and especially the ones concerning the vital insight) have undertaken some form of revision, we easily forget this revision. And this is so much so that, in the final analysis, we keep falling into the same blindness: we resist seeing that our own views (and in particular our own vital insight) have feet of clay.

There are a number of passages in what follows in the *Gorgias* that are particularly important in this respect. One example is the formal structure of resistance, which comes to the surface when we resist what Socrates said and then become curious about what he really means, and thus eager to understand him (474c). Besides this, there are many occasions of express resistance to Socrates, as for example in 470e, where Polus is shocked by the fact that Socrates defines εὐδαιμονία in terms of παιδεία and δικαιοσύνη; or in 471e where Polus says "οὐ γὰρ ἐθέλεις, ἐπεὶ δοκεῖ γέ σοι ὡς ἐγὼ λέγω"; or in 473a where he says "Ἀτοπά γε, ὦ Σώκратες, ἐπιχειρεῖς λέγειν"; or in 473b where he uses all these examples to shock us and to depict a terribly painful death; or also in 473e where he rhetorically asks "Οὐκ οἶει

⁸⁸ See notably 472.

ἐξεληλέγχθαι, ὃ Σώκρατες, ὅταν τοιαῦτα λέγῃς ἃ φήσειεν ἀνθρώπων; Ἐπεὶ ἐροῦ τινα τούτωνί"; and in many other passages. This last quote also helps to show that the above-mentioned vital insight has a social dimension, and hence is also reinforced by what others think. Besides this, this last quote triggers an investigation into the meaning of ἐξελέγχω, ἐλέγχω and the like (which is obviously significant in a history of resistance).

It would also be important to consider another form of confusion, which consists in separating what belongs together. This form of confusion enters the stage when Polus separates ἀγαθόν and καλόν.⁸⁹ This is also the moment that leads to Polus' refutation and to Callicles' appearance. Here, too, the structure of the text replicates what happened in the discussion between Socrates and Gorgias, thus suggesting that what will come next is another reappraisal of what was at stake from the beginning. Put in a nutshell, what comes next puts to the test the vital insight that guides our lives and raises the possibility that it might not be as self-evident as we take it to be.

But all this amounts to a sort of "sneak peak" into the next chapters of "*A History of Resistance in Plato's Gorgias*". It does not fully reveal what is contained therein, but it is still enough to give a preview of what is to follow. However, it would be an illusion to think that this kind of "sneak peak" is any more than that, rendering it no longer necessary to watch the upcoming episodes.

⁸⁹ See notably 474d ff.

The dialectics of domination:

Hegelian echoes in Plato's *Gorgias*

Bernardo Ferro^{*}

“Ubi enim id, quod intus est atque nostrum,
impune evolare potest contraque nos pugnare,
fit in dominatu servitus, in servitute dominatus.”¹
Cicero, *Oratio Pro Rege Deiotaro* XI, 30

Like all of Plato's dialogues, the *Gorgias* is a debate about human life. More specifically, it revolves around the issue of what one should do with one's life, or of how one should spend one's time on earth. And this issue, as Socrates points out, is of no small importance: it is a matter “on which it is most honourable to have knowledge, and most disgraceful to lack it”; for it involves “our knowing or not knowing who is happy and who is not.”²

The long dispute between Socrates, Gorgias, Polus and Callicles is based on a primary and seemingly unalterable existential fact: all human beings are naturally self-interested, that is, naturally burdened with a continual concern for their own good. Whether conscious or unconsciously, all human projects and decisions are endorsed in view of what is perceived, at each different moment, as the best or more advantageous course of action. And conversely what is seen as harming is naturally

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¹ “For when what is ours, and kept within, can break out with impunity and fight against us, then the slave becomes master and the master becomes slave.”

² *Gorgias* 472c6-d1, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, in *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, Cambridge (MA), Cambridge University Press, 1925. All quotations of Plato's works will henceforth be taken from this edition.

avoided, and what is thought to afford but a limited share of satisfaction is replaced, whenever possible, by a more satisfying alternative. In short, one's goal is always to achieve what is deemed best, even when the latter seems incompatible with, or contrary to, one's immediate enjoyment or well being – “for men are prepared to have their own feet and hands cut off if they feel these belongings to be harmful.”³

But Plato's main aim – in the *Gorgias*, as in many other dialogues – is not simply to highlight this continual or “transcendental” urge towards the greatest good. He also insists on its *abstract* or *formal* nature: although “what men love is simply and solely the good”⁴, and although “the good is the end of all our actions”⁵, this universal inclination is not directed at a specific objective content. Whereas all of us seek the greatest good, not all of us agree on what the greatest good *is*. And herein lies the crux of the matter, and the starting point of the dialogue's heated debate.

1. *Young lions, deposed kings*

Socrates, Gorgias and his followers are called upon to debate “a question which has the highest conceivable claims to the serious interest even of a person who has but little intelligence – namely, what course of life is best.”⁶ But the *Gorgias* does not amount simply to a contest between different versions of the best or happiest kind of life. The discussion hinges on the more basic issue of how wide the margin for disagreement actually is. While for Socrates the concrete definition of the greatest good (τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, or τὸ βέλτιστον) is not a self-evident matter, and calls for a thorough and complex philosophical inquiry, Polus and Callicles maintain that the best things in life are not that ambiguous or difficult to recognize. Granted, each person's version of the greatest good is not only personal and specific, but liable to change with time and with circumstances: while one man may choose to spend his entire days eating and drinking, another may wish to devote all of his efforts to the study of mathematics; and what is more, while the former may with time come to regard the study of mathematics as a vital priority, the latter may relapse in turn into

³ *Symposium* 205e3-5

⁴ *Symposium* 205e7-206a1

⁵ *Gorgias* 499e8-9. See also 468a-b; 509e5-7; *Meno* 77b-78b; *Euthydemus* 282a2; or *Philebus* 20d.

⁶ *Gorgias* 500c1-4

gluttony. Yet even though the variety of life projects available to us is endless, Polus and Callicles argue that there is nonetheless a particular definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν which we all agree upon.

As we will see below in more detail, the concrete definition offered by Socrates' opponents is not the same throughout the whole dialogue. Its first clear formulation appears in connection with Gorgias' initial defence of rhetoric, the art for which he is renowned. Gorgias identifies the power afforded by rhetoric as the greatest good, and argues it is a "cause not merely of freedom to mankind at large, but also of dominion to single persons in their several cities."⁷ By persuading others to do what he says, the rhetorician can get them to do what he wants.⁸ He is able to use their labour and expertise to his own advantage and to turn their quest for the greatest good into the means of his own satisfaction.

This initial claim is subjected to Socrates' dialectical charges and shown to be self-contradictory and in need of revision. A new and more daring alternative is voiced by Polus, who moves the focus of the argument from rhetorical domination to actual political domination and praises the power enjoyed by despots to act "at their own discretion" and to do "everything [they think] fit in their own city."⁹ This, he argues, is not only a great advantage, but one that every human being longs to possess. Most people refrain from acting as they please for fear of punishment or retaliation, but the despot is free of these dangers, and therefore utterly happy.

This new claim is once again criticized and replaced by a simpler and even more daring one. Whereas Polus' position paves the way for moral relativism, Callicles embraces it wholeheartedly. In his view, for a man to attain the greatest good "he should let his desires be as strong as possible and not chasten them, and should be able to minister to them when they are at their height by reason of his manliness and intelligence, and satisfy each appetite in turn with what it desires."¹⁰

For Polus and Callicles, albeit in different degrees, τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν is a pure or unrestrained power, based simultaneously on absolute freedom of action and on the absolute lack of accountability. Accordingly, true happiness is associated with the political autonomy of kings or masters and contrasted with the political heteronomy

⁷ *Gorgias* 452d5-8

⁸ For the sake of convenience, and in accordance with Plato's historical and cultural context, I will use masculine pronouns in connection with word such as "rhetorician", "philosopher", "master" or "slave", but also "subject" or "individual".

⁹ *Gorgias* 469c5-7

¹⁰ *Gorgias* 491e8-492a3

of vassals or slaves. On one side, masters are happy because they are free to do as they please. Their will is usually uncontested and their welfare is usually guaranteed. They do not need to be just or wise, provided their power is great enough, for the latter is the surest means of protection against the inconvenient results of their actions. On the other side, slaves are neither happy nor free. They are bound to an alien will and exposed to all kinds of dangers. Although their main concern is also the greatest good, they are continually forced to sacrifice their happiness and welfare to the happiness and welfare of others.

At first glance, Callicles' praise of the first of these alternatives seems to disagree with most people's conception of the best possible life. His despotic and hedonistic views come across as overly radical, and his rejection of moral and social conventions is usually perceived as a potential source of disorder, injustice and evil. Furthermore, his distinction between masters and slaves strikes most of us as extreme and oversimplified. We do not see ourselves as masters or despots, but neither do we regard our life as one of servitude or slavery. Our life is lived somewhere in between, and our usual definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν is likewise less extreme: it amounts to something like an enhanced or perfected version of our "normal" or "reasonable" selves, which rests in turn on a compromise between the unrestrained freedom of despotism and the moral judiciousness of civilized social life.

But this is so only at first glance. According to Callicles, if we look beyond the thin veil of reasonableness or respectability, we will find that our actual views are not that different from his – he is just bold enough to spell them out and to follow through their logical implications. In addition, we will be led to recognize that our usual objections are not grounded on an actual condemnation of Callicles' position, but on the acknowledgement of its practical inconveniences. What we oppose is not the definition of happiness as unrestrained freedom, but the lawlessness and the danger it leads to, which we tend to view precisely as a restraint of our freedom. Therefore, although we usually reject Callicles' views, we do so out of necessity. Our "reasonableness" is not perceived as the best course of action, but as *the best one available*. And although we accept our usual powerlessness, and resign ourselves to a life of respectability, we secretly yearn for an absolute or despotic power, actually capable of neutralizing all forms of retaliation.

Plato is all too aware of the universal appeal of Callicles' ideas and his first aim is to show that our most immediate conception of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν is usually

aligned with Callicles': we are all natural born despots, or natural born hedonists; but unlike Polus and Callicles we do not own up to our natural condition – we are *deposed despots*, as it were, or *ashamed hedonists*. To borrow one of the dialogue's many metaphors, we resemble the "young lions" mentioned by Callicles, convinced they must have but their equal share of freedom and happiness, and taught by experience not to ask for more.¹¹ But although we usually accept these limitations, they contradict our original or most primitive nature. We are tamed lions, but we are lions all the same, and our moral submissiveness is but the outer finishing, as it were, of our inner selves. Therefore, even though absolute freedom and absolute impunity are usually deemed morally unsound and actually unattainable, they are the limits towards which the common definition of happiness *naturally* aspires. And in spite of admitting that most of our actions and decisions are restrained in a myriad of different ways, we nonetheless tend to envisage the best possible life in a *negative* way, as a life free of restraints.

Throughout the *Gorgias*, Socrates' role is to expose the immediate or automatic nature of this attitude and to uncover its inner contradictions. His dialectical critique is meant to show that the power held by masters and despots, despite its widespread appeal, is not *intrinsically* good or *intrinsically* desirable, but merely a possible definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν. And, moreover, a definition that lacks appropriate substantiation. Because of this, its benefits are far from granted, and can easily turn into disadvantages. Ultimately, inasmuch as the sovereignty craved by Polus and Callicles rests on a mistaken interpretation of what the greatest good is, it may just as well amount to a form of slavery.

The previous considerations, albeit still vague, already bring out the resemblance between Plato's critique of power and domination and a much later, but equally well-known philosophical theory. The dialectic reversibility of the Platonic notions of mastery and slavery anticipates, in many ways, Hegel's so-called master-slave dialectic, expounded in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and (in a more condensed form) in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*.

The differences between the Platonic and the Hegelian accounts are of course considerable. Their arguments have different structures, different aims and very different historical contexts. Moreover, they diverge in a number of important aspects.

¹¹ See *Gorgias* 483e4-484a2

Nevertheless, these differences are compensated by an equally significant set of similarities. Like Plato, Hegel discusses the fundamental issues of human happiness and human freedom in light of the opposition between a domineering standpoint and a submissive one, and he also points out their dialectical interdependence. Furthermore, following Plato, Hegel argues that the most basic form of self-realization consists in an equally basic form of desire, and that its social equivalent is an immediate drive for domination. Finally, just like Plato, Hegel claims that this drive for domination, based on the idea of unrestrained freedom, rests on a series of self-contradictory and ultimately unintelligible assumptions.

In what follows, I will outline and discuss the main features of these two models. I will start with a brief characterization of Plato's dialectics of domination, as set out in the *Gorgias* (section II), and will go on to consider Hegel's phenomenological account of domination (section III). The affinities and divergences of the two accounts will be summarized in a series of concluding remarks (section IV).

2. Plato's dialectics of domination

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel argues that one of the main conceptual breakthroughs of Socratic philosophy is its demand that the greatest good be rationally determined. In Hegel's words, Socrates shows that "this good, which must count for me as a substantial end, must come to be known by me [*von mir erkannt werden muß*]." ¹² His doctrine of the greatest good signals a departure from the stage of *Sittlichkeit* – that is, from the ethical element that used to preside over ancient communal life – and a transition to the stage of *Moralität* – in which each individual is challenged to question the accepted moral standards and to find a truly rational definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν. Socrates seeks to show that the good, albeit universally compelling, is not immediately available or recognizable. It must be pursued and provided, "just as a ship must make provision of water when it is bound for places where none is to be found."

¹² G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Frankfurt-am-Main, Suhrkamp, 1986, vol. 18, p. 442. This edition will henceforth be referred to as HW, followed by the volume and page numbers. The translations are mine.

In Socratic morality, “the immediate is no longer valid, and must answer before thought.”¹³ And this demand is restated in various ways throughout the *Gorgias*. Initially, as we have seen, τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν is equated with a specific τέχνη, namely ἡ τέχνη ῥητορική. The word τέχνη is usually translated as “art”, “skill” or “ability” and plays a very important role in Plato’s dialogues. It refers to a knowledge that is not available to the ordinary man and must be acquired or conquered through a specific practice or study. Those who have learnt a particular τέχνη possess a privileged insight into a particular set of phenomena, and know for certain what others can only guess. Whereas most people can appreciate, for example, the comfort or the elegance of a good pair of shoes, they do not know what it takes to recreate those qualities, for they are not skilled in the art of shoemaking. Likewise whereas most people are able to acknowledge the decrease of pain brought about by a given therapy or medication, they are usually ignorant of its specific causes. Only a doctor or a pharmacist perceive such improvement as the necessary result of a specific physiological or biochemical process, which can be re-enacted, intensified or prevented.

For Gorgias, rhetoric is the best and most useful of all τέχναι. However, it is not a τέχνη in the same way shoemaking or medicine are τέχναι. And herein resides the source of its alleged superiority. Whereas other skills are directed at specific human activities, and offer therefore limited insights into reality, rhetoric’s scope is much wider. The rhetorician’s skill lies in his ability to talk other people into putting their own expertise, whatever they may be, at his disposal. Through sheer eloquence, and with no concrete knowledge of shoemaking or medicine, the rhetorician is able to reap the benefits provided by these and all other τέχναι.

This initial praise of rhetoric rests on two fundamental assumptions, whose inconsistencies will be exposed and explored by Socrates. To begin with, Gorgias maintains that the rhetorician’s versatility grants him unlimited power – and in more ways than one: not only is he able to persuade other τεχνῖται to put their skills at his disposal, but he is also more convincing and influential than other τεχνῖται as regards their own field of expertise. For “there is no subject on which the rhetorician could not speak more persuasively than a member of any other profession whatsoever,

¹³ HW 18, 470f.

before a multitude.”¹⁴ Secondly, such a power, precisely because of its universal reach, must be handled with care. Although the rhetorician is indeed able to talk the multitude into thinking and doing anything he pleases, “he is no whit the more entitled to deprive the doctors of their credit, just because he could do so, or other professional of theirs”, but must “use his rhetoric fairly.”¹⁵

These two claims elicit two different lines of refutation. On the one hand, as regards the rhetorician’s eloquence, Socrates distinguishes between two different kinds of persuasion, namely the kind from which we get knowledge (ἐξ ἧς τὸ εἰδέναι γίγνεται) and the kind from which we get belief without knowledge (ἐξ ἧς τὸ πιστεύειν γίγνεται ἄνευ τοῦ εἰδέναι).¹⁶ Rhetoric, he points out, produces the second kind of persuasion: inasmuch as the rhetorician is ignorant of the matters he proposes to teach, he can only persuade those who are as ignorant as himself (i.e. the multitude, or the many, οἱ πολλοί). And this means that rhetoric is not really a τέχνη, but merely the *image* or the *appearance* (εἰδωλον) of one. It consists in having other people believe that one knows what one does not, and this deception is usually achieved through flattery (κολακεία).

Rhetoricians can speak more convincingly than doctors about medical matters because their aim is not to convey the truth about such matters, but simply to win over their audience. Truth is often less appealing than falsehood and a truly beneficial treatment or therapy, whose effects only an actual doctor can fully understand, is often rejected in favour of more agreeable, but less effective or even harmful therapeutical solutions. With the aid of this and similar examples, Socrates highlights the disagreement between our natural inclination towards the greatest good and what we take the greatest good to be. In this case, doctors and rhetoricians propose different versions of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, based either in actual knowledge or in mere belief. Whereas doctors seek to restore the health of their patients, and are often forced to prescribe disagreeable or incommodious treatments, rhetoricians secure their own popularity by recommending what is agreeable or pleasant (ἡδύ, χαρίεις). In other words, whereas doctors sacrifice the patient’s *immediate* good in view of his or her *ultimate* good, the rhetorician eliminates this distinction and equates τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν with τὸ ἥδιστον.

¹⁴ *Gorgias* 456c4-6

¹⁵ *Gorgias* 457b1-4

¹⁶ *Gorgias* 454e7-8

Yet it is easy to see that health and pleasure often contradict one another, and that the most pleasurable life can easily turn into a life of suffering. Even though all pleasures are immediately enjoyable, not all of them are good, and to determine which of them are actually beneficial is not always an easy or straightforward task. To determine what τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν actually stands for – in medicine or shoemaking, but also in life in general – requires a specific knowledge, or a specific τέχνη.

On the other hand, as regards Gorgias' claim that rhetoric should be used fairly, Socrates points out that this demand requires in turn that the rhetorician know how to distinguish between what is just and what is unjust. And if he does possess this knowledge, he is bound to act justly, for to act otherwise would reveal either ignorance or bad faith. This new paradox catches Gorgias off guard and precipitates Polus' intervention. It also signals the onset of the moral theme that will dominate the remainder of the dialogue.

With Polus, the subject of domination becomes more explicit. For him, Gorgias let himself be contradicted by Socrates because he gave in to αἰσχύνῃ, that is, because he was ashamed to admit that rhetoricians are not always honest or just. When it comes to fairness and justice, he argues, rhetoricians are just like other people: they place their own interests above everyone else's. What separates them from the many is rather their power to neutralize all forms of opposition and to evade the negative consequences of their actions. Like tyrants and despots, they are immune to the dangers that persuade most of us to act fairly, to obey the law and to renounce certain pleasures and certain inclinations.

Henceforth the debate is no longer simply about rhetoric, but about power, its nature and legitimacy. For Polus, justice and fairness are not good or desirable *in themselves*, but merely as substitutes for the despot's unlimited power. Accordingly, moral concerns are not grounded in fixed or categorical principles. They are merely the result of a given distribution of power – the more powerful one is, the less moral one needs to be; and, conversely, the least powerful one is, the more one needs to abide by moral standards and socially accepted norms.

If despotic power is indeed boundless, it is also irresistible. "The liberty to do anything one thinks fit" is not merely Polus' particular definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, but also most people's, if not everyone's idea of the greatest good. Whether publicly praised or secretly envied, this unlimited freedom amounts to the most

immediate and most universal definition of happiness. Everything short of it is seen as a compromise and accepted with resignation.

But this definition, however appealing, is also purely negative. The “freedom to do what one thinks fit”, or “to do everything at one’s discretion” is not yet indicative of what the greatest good actually is. It merely states, in circular fashion, that the greatest good is the absolute liberty to pursue the greatest good. As Hegel will argue, this definition of freedom amounts to the *abstract certainty* of freedom, but not yet to its *truth*.¹⁷ It is a purely subjective drive, whose object remains undetermined and unessential. Since it lacks a specific content, one must be given to it, and renewed whenever necessary. Therefore, the freedom to do what one pleases usually translates as the freedom to indulge one’s natural desires and inclinations, and is usually measured by one’s power to remove the obstacles that might hinder or prevent one’s enjoyment.

Yet precisely because freedom is entirely dependent on an outside source, its content is not freely determined. It is contingent and arbitrary, brought in from the outside and imposed on one’s will. True freedom, on the contrary, is more than pure arbitrariness. It requires an “intellectual training” (*eine Bildung des Gedankens*) that is capable of elevating enjoyment from a merely natural phenomenon to a truly rational one: *viz.* a kind of freedom that is both subjective and objective, and “has itself [simultaneously] as its purpose and content.”¹⁸

Socrates’ refutation of Polus’ standpoint is based on a similar critique. His aim is to show that the unrestrained freedom of despotism is not automatically liberating or empowering. Inasmuch as the despot lacks the knowledge necessary to determine what the good is, “what he thinks fit” is not necessarily what he wishes, and in “doing everything at his own discretion” he may well be acting against his own interest. At stake is once again the divorce between what is agreeable or pleasurable and what is actually beneficial. For Plato, as for Hegel, the correct definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν requires a specific τέχνη, or a specific *Bildung des Gedankens*.

This main idea is the source of Socrates’ two well-known paradoxes, stated respectively at 466b-e and 469b-472e. Firstly, against commonly held views, he contends that rhetoricians and despots are not only powerless, but indeed the least powerful of all citizens. This statement is met with perplexity and deemed “shocking”

¹⁷ Cf. HW 7, 66ff.

¹⁸ HW 7, 66

(σχετλίη) and “monstrous” (ὑπερφυής).¹⁹ Secondly, and even more controversially, Socrates maintains that to do wrong is worse than to suffer wrong, and even worse when the wrongdoer is left unpunished. Once again, Polus points out the “bizarre” or “displaced” (ἄτοπος)²⁰ nature of this claim and underlines its utter lack of appeal. He accuses Socrates of not being sincere, laughs at his arguments and offers various examples of tyrants whose iniquity was not only left unpunished, but rewarded by wealth, fame and political power.

Throughout this entire section, Socrates’ argument rests once more on the distinction between what is pleasant (τὸ ἡδύ) and what is good (τὸ ἀγαθόν). Although Polus is bolder than Gorgias and does not hesitate to extol the benefits of tyranny, he concedes that doing wrong is not “fair” or “admirable” (καλόν), but “ugly” or “foul” (αἰσχρόν). In doing so, he admits to a divorce between morality and personal self-interest, and accepts the duplicity of a life where one’s public behaviour is secretly contradicted by one’s actual goals.²¹ E. R. Dodds observes that “a philosophy which admits this divorce is in the end faced with a choice between two extreme doctrines: either it must deny that morality is anything but an illusion ... or it must deny that the good of the individual *qua* individual, has any importance. ... Polus, the spokesman of the current ‘shame-culture’, is not prepared to take either way out, and is thus impaled on the horns of the dilemma.”²²

Socrates is aware of this contradiction. In order to prove his first statement, namely that “doing wrong is worse than suffering it”, he has Polus admit that what is deemed “fair” (καλόν) is usually thought to be either pleasant (ἡδύ) and/or beneficial (ὠφέλιμον). Therefore, if doing wrong is “fouler” than suffering wrong, it must be either less pleasant and/or less beneficial than suffering wrong. But since doing wrong is not less pleasant than suffering it – a point that was eloquently brought home by Polus’ eulogy of Archelaus and other successful tyrants – it is necessarily less beneficial. And hence, doing wrong is indeed worse than suffering wrong.

As regards Socrates’ second statement, namely that “to do wrong is worse than to suffer wrong, and even worse when the wrongdoer is left unpunished”, the argument is also built on the distinction between τὸ καλόν and τὸ αἰσχρόν. If just actions are

¹⁹ *Gorgias* 467b10

²⁰ *Gorgias* 473a1; 480e1.

²¹ Cf. *Gorgias, A Revised Text with and Commentary* by E. R. Dodds, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, 11f.; 249.

²² *Ibid.*, 249

“fair”, they must be pleasant and/or beneficial. Since to punish someone justly is not pleasant, it is necessarily beneficial, and therefore good. Conversely, since to be justly punished is not pleasant, it is necessarily beneficial, and therefore good – *quod erat demonstrandum*.

Just like before, Socrates’ refutation catches Polus off guard and precipitates the entrance of a new and even bolder interlocutor. Callicles starts by repeating the reproach made by Polus to Gorgias, but alters its scope. He also claims that Polus was defeated because he gave in to αἰσχύνῃ, but not simply because he was ashamed to admit that rhetoricians are not always honest or just. His lack of courage consisted above all in his refusal to admit that public morality is nothing but a fabrication, which must be abolished and replaced by a new set of values.

With Callicles, the debate reaches its final stage, and the theme of domination evolves into a full-blown contrast between *Herrschaft* and *Knechtschaft*, or between a *Herrenmoral* and a *Sklavenmoral*. Whereas Polus’ divorce between morality and self-interest had led to a seemingly insoluble contradiction, “Callicles and Socrates ... escape the dilemma by denying the divorce. Callicles holds that the only true morality is the self-realization of the individual; Socrates, that the only true self-realization is necessarily moral.”²³

According to Callicles, when Socrates and Polus used the words καλόν and αἰσχρόν, they mistook their socially accepted meaning for their true or *natural* one. What is “fair” or “foul” according to convention (κατὰ νόμον) is usually not so according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν), and Socrates’ trick was precisely to get Polus to agree to socially accepted, albeit thoroughly unnatural claims. For Callicles, the only true criterion to distinguish between fairness and foulness, good and evil, justice and injustice, etc., is life itself, or the “law of nature” (νόμος τῆς φύσεως) – for nature herself “proclaims the fact that it is right for the better to have advantage of the worse, and the abler of the feeble.” And it is obvious “not only in the animal world, but in the states and races, collectively, of men – that right has been decided to consist in the sway and advantage of the stronger over the weaker.”²⁴ Therefore, human conventions are a historical invention, designed to counter the law of nature and to prevent the domination of a natural born elite.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Gorgias* 483c8-d6

As is often pointed out, Callicles' "genealogy of morals" conveys one of the most important and controversial themes of Greek sophistical thought.²⁵ Moreover, it echoes Glaucon's and Thrasymachus' standpoints in the *Republic's* First and Second Books²⁶ and amounts to one of the earliest formulations of social contractualism. In Callicles' view, the makers of laws are the "weaker sort of men", but also the most numerous. Their spurious morality is thus directed against life itself. It is an artificial compensation for their natural weakness and a way of guaranteeing their survival.

In the remainder of the dialogue, Callicles and Socrates move in different, but nonetheless symmetrical directions. Each envisages the contrast between moral duty and personal self-interest in terms of a master-slave dialectic, and each advocates the transition from a state of bondage to a state of freedom and independence.

For Callicles, Socrates' claim that "to do wrong is worse than to suffer wrong" epitomizes the kind of self-abasement that defines slave morality, and that must be fought and overcome. "This endurance of wrong done is not a man's part at all, but a poor slave's, for whom it is better to be dead than alive."²⁷ And this claim can only be maintained because the natural categories of mastery and slavery have undergone a complete historical transformation: since natural slaves are more numerous than their opponents, they have managed to shape social life in their own image and to create a *Sklavenkultur* intent on punishing the strong and rewarding the weak. The "young lions" mentioned by Callicles at 483e6 are the primary victims of this cultural and historical degeneration. They were tamed, disciplined, and taught early on to conform to a life of mediocrity and obedience.

But this state of affairs is spurious, unnatural, and bound to be overcome. In a striking anticipation of Nietzsche, Callicles prophesies the birth of a man with sufficient force to burst the bonds of law and custom, to rise in revolt and to show himself a true master.²⁸ When asked about the exact nature of this revolutionary standpoint, Callicles ventures a series of self-contradictory definitions, and finally settles for a eulogy of *πλεονεξία*, that is, the power to "let [one's] desires be as strong as possible, and not chasten them", and "to minister to them when they are at their

²⁵ Cf. *Respublica* 336b-362c

²⁶ See notably N. Heinemann, *Nomos und Physis, Herkunft und Bedeutung einer Antithese im griechischen Denken des 5. Jahrhunderts*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965; W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, 55-134; and G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 111-132.

²⁷ *Gorgias* 483a8-b2

²⁸ See *Gorgias* 484a2-b1

height”, and “to satisfy each appetite with what it desires.”²⁹ For Callicles, this absolute freedom of enjoyment amounts to the complete triumph of φύσις over νόμος, and to the ultimate definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν.

For Socrates, on the other hand, human beings are also enslaved, but for very different reasons. His refutation of Callicles’ standpoint rests yet again on the idea that pleasure does not coincide with good, and that there are good or beneficial pleasures and bad or harmful ones. Since most human beings overlook this distinction, they are naturally led to do what they please and not what they wish. Although they do not know what the greatest good actually amounts to, they are convinced they do, and therein lays the source of their enslavement. True power, or true mastery, consists rather in knowing how to distinguish good from evil, and how to align one’s thoughts and actions with one’s real aims. In other words, true freedom hinges on the correct definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, which requires in turn a specific τέχνη. According to Plato, this τέχνη is called *philosophy*, and unlike the rhetorical power praised by Gorgias and Polus, or the hedonism prescribed by Callicles, it is the only attitude liable to break the immediate spell of pleasure and gratification and to look beyond the automatic assumptions of ordinary consciousness.

It must be noted, however, that the *Gorgias* is not simply a negative undertaking, or a systematic *reductio ad absurdum*. We have seen that Socrates’ strategy consists in refuting Gorgias’, Polus’ and Callicles’ definitions of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν by showing that none of his interlocutors possesses the knowledge or the power he claims to possess. Socrates argues that there is no good reason to envy the rhetorician or the despot, for their supposed power often turns into submission. And he establishes, furthermore, that the freedom to do wrong is not automatically beneficial, and can prove far more harmful than to suffer wrong. Yet Socrates’ aim is not simply to contradict his interlocutors, nor is he content with showing that the debate about the greatest good is ultimately undecidable. Having proven that the unjust man is not necessarily powerful, he goes on to state, quite unmistakably, that the just man is the happiest of all men; and having proven that pleasure is not necessarily beneficial, he goes on to assert that justice is the greatest of all goods. These positive claims, however, inasmuch as they rest on a presumption of knowledge which the dialogue does not put to the test, are ultimately as dogmatic as Gorgias’, Polus’ and Callicles’

²⁹ *Gorgias* 491e8-492a3

hypotheses. To borrow Dodds' formula, although Socrates succeeds in showing, against Callicles, that "true morality is *not* the self-realization of the individual", he does not offer an equally substantiated account of the opposite claim, namely that "true self-realization is necessarily moral." In the *Gorgias*, the acceptance of this claim is ultimately a matter of faith.³⁰

3. Hegel's dialectics of domination

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel also deals with the complex relationship between happiness, freedom and knowledge. Just as Plato's quest for τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν is essentially a quest for true knowledge (*viz.* a quest for the τέχνη or the "science" of human happiness), the phenomenological progression is "the task of leading the individual from his uneducated standpoint" to the standpoint of "genuine knowledge", or to the "element of Science"³¹. For Hegel, self-realization also hinges on the scope and truthfulness of one's knowledge, and to an equally great extent: in order to achieve the greatest good, human consciousness must rise to the stage of "absolute knowledge."

Furthermore, both Plato and Hegel believe that the acquisition of true knowledge requires a preliminary critique of one's ordinary knowledge. Just like Plato's dialogues, the examination carried out in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is primarily aimed at what is familiar or well known, at what is taken for granted and automatically assumed to be true. Hegel observes, in Socratic fashion, that "the familiar [*das Bekannte*], just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood [*erkannt*]. And the commonest way in which we deceive ourselves or others about understanding is by assuming something as familiar, and accepting it on that

³⁰ A thorough discussion of this issue would require a much longer analysis, which cannot be attempted at present. In the *Gorgias*, as in many other Platonic dialogues, Socrates' alleged resolution of the question at hand is never truly definitive. In view of his own critical standards, his refutation of Callicles' standpoint would require in turn a new refutation, and the dialogue might be continued — perhaps indefinitely. Indeed, regardless of whether Plato's dialogues are deemed 'resolutive' or 'aporetic', they can be read as fragments of the same global dialogue, or pieces of the same global puzzle. The final solution lies always ahead, and the truthfulness of one's standpoint is always open to revision.

³¹ HW 3, 31; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970, 15f. This translation will henceforth be referred to as PS, followed by the page number(s). Alterations to the translation will be indicated in the footnotes.

As regards the use of pronouns, I will apply the same rule adopted in connection with Plato's texts. See fn. 8.

account.”³² The *Phenomenology* proposes to counter this tendency by exposing the inner contradictions of our usual standpoint. Its main purpose is to show that our usual understanding of reality rests on a series of unverified and unintelligible beliefs, which must be revised and corrected. The truth they are supposed to convey lies elsewhere, and the acknowledgement of this absence is the first step towards its fulfilment.

But Hegel’s formal strategy is very different from Plato’s. Whereas in the *Gorgias* different characters embody different standpoints, and each is called in to defend the merits of his version of the greatest good, the phenomenological progression is best defined as a long monologue – or rather, to borrow the *Sophist*’s well-known formulation, as “a silent inner conversation of the soul with itself.”³³ The *Phenomenology* amounts to an immanent path of self-discovery, in which the phenomenological subject is led to recognize, criticize and correct his understanding of himself and his outlook on reality. But this procedure does not amount merely to the replacement of a series of false beliefs with a series of true or scientific ones. The exposure of the inadequacies of human consciousness’ usual mode of cognition prompts the adoption of a new mode of cognition, which must also be criticized and corrected. This procedure is repeated again and again throughout the progression, leading to increasingly wide and increasingly complex cognitive solutions. The elevation of natural consciousness to the element of Science is achieved through an immanent succession of interconnected stages or “shapes” of consciousness (*Gestalten des Bewußtseins*). According to Hegel, only by endorsing, criticising and correcting all of the shapes found along the way can consciousness hope to achieve true knowledge.

My present aim is not to discuss Hegel’s phenomenological method, but simply to point out the similarities between his theory of domination, whose clearest formulation can be found in the *Phenomenology*’s “Self-consciousness” chapter, and Plato’s theory of domination, as expounded in the *Gorgias*. With this purpose in mind, I will start by locating the phenomenological dialectic of self-consciousness within the *Phenomenology*’s overall structure, and will then offer a very brief characterization of his views on desire, domination and freedom.

³² HW 3, 35; PS, 18.

³³ *Sophista* 263e3. Cf. also *Theaetetus* 190a2-6.

The phenomenological progression opens with the consideration of the most simple or most immediate mode of cognition. And this simplicity is to be understood in two different, albeit complementary ways: the first phenomenological *Gestalt* does not amount simply to the most naïve or uneducated form of consciousness, but also to the latter's idea of the most simple or most immediate mode of cognition, *i.e.* sense-perception. This clarification is very important, lest one interpret the stage of sense-certainty as the description of a pure αἴσθησις, or a pure nominalism. The “I” of sense-certainty is not a purely sensuous subject, but one who regards all knowledge as an extension of αἴσθησις, that is, as a highly complex combination of simple sensorial units (αἰσθητήματα).

The critique of this first standpoint leads consciousness to realize that its outlook on reality is irreducible to sense-certainty. Although it is not usually aware of it, its customary knowledge already implies the distinction between *substances* and *accidents* (introduced and criticized in the *Phenomenology's* second chapter, entitled *Wahrnehmung*), *forces* and their *expression* (introduced and criticized in the *Phenomenology's* third chapter, entitled *Kraft und Verstand*), *laws* and their *instantiations* (*ibidem*). All of these categories result from the negation of previous categories, belonging to naïve and self-contradictory cognitive models. Their endorsement and sublation (*Aufhebung*) makes up the *Phenomenology's* first main section, entitled *Bewußtsein*, and paves the way for its second big section, entitled *Selbstbewußtsein*.

The different *Gestalten* comprised in the “Consciousness” section rest on a fundamentally realist understanding of human cognition. In the beginning of the progression, consciousness sees itself as a mere lens, so to speak, added to a pre-existing and pre-formed objective world. In this first stage, reality is independent of one's knowledge of it and the subject's task is simply to apprehend the objective world, to take notice of it. In the course of the progression, however, this naïve realism is called into question. Consciousness comes to realize that its outlook on reality is not neutral, and that knowledge itself conditions and transforms what is known. Apprehending (*Auffassen*) gives way to comprehending (*Begreifen*): truth is no longer merely objective, but the result of the dialectical interaction between subject and object, and the cognitive operators devised by consciousness (“things”, “forces”

and “laws”) are simultaneously subjective and objective, mental constructs and actual physical agents.

The transition from “Consciousness” to “Self-Consciousness” represents the inversion of the subject’s initial attitude and the emancipation of the subjective component of human cognition. The dialectic of Understanding (*Verstand*), which culminates in the opposition between a transcendental subject and a “thing in-itself”, leads to the discovery that self-consciousness is in fact “the truth of appearance”³⁴, and that all objective contents are merely specific “modes” or “functions” of self-consciousness. As Hegel puts it, whereas “in the previous modes of certainty what is true for consciousness is something other than itself ... the notion of this truth vanishes in the experience of it ... Certainty is to itself its own object, and consciousness is to itself the truth.”³⁵

This new standpoint is not the *Phenomenology*’s (or Hegel’s) final say on the matter. The dialectic of Self-consciousness will lead to the dialectic of Reason and to the stages of Spirit, Morality and Absolute Knowledge. Yet although Self-consciousness is but an intermediate stage, it harbours what is arguably the clearest exposition of Hegel’s understanding of the intricate relationship between desire, domination and freedom. The fact that Hegel chose to discuss these topics at this particular juncture of the progression is by no means irrelevant, and suggests a further parallel with the Platonic model. In the *Gorgias*, the topics of desire, domination and freedom are considered in the context of a debate about the greatest good. The whole exercise is based on the idea that human life is an open-ended project, as it were, and that human beings are faced with the ineludible challenge of having to decide who they are and who they want to be, what matters most to them and what kind of life they want to lead. In the *Phenomenology*, this same challenge is construed in a systematic manner, as a dialectical critique of selfhood. The quest for the greatest good takes the form of a quest for self-identity and the pursuit of happiness is translated into the pursuit of a truly consistent and truly accomplished self.

Let us now consider the different stages of Hegel’s argument. Whereas previously cognition was defined in terms of the opposition between a knowing subject and a known object, and whereas their lack of coincidence was the motor, so to speak, of the progression’s successive transformations, the stage of Self-

³⁴ HW 3, 137; PS, 103

³⁵ HW 3, 137; PS, 104

consciousness puts an end to this dualism. The dialectic of the Understanding leads to the revelation that objective reality is nothing *in itself*: all that *is* is so *for consciousness*, and the latter's truth is therefore *self-consciousness*. In other words, this transition leads to the supersession of the objective element of the relationship, and to the discovery that consciousness is both the subject and the object, the knower and what is known. According to Hegel, "the 'I' is the content of the connection and the connecting itself. Opposed to an other, the 'I' is its own self, and at the same time it overarches this other which, for the 'I', is equally only the 'I' itself."³⁶

Henceforth everything is contained in the "I" – but the "I" itself is nothing more than this immediate acknowledgement. In other words, what it *is* is defined by what it *is not*, and its identity is the result of a circular movement: on the one hand, self-consciousness declares the nothingness of the objective world and posits its own self-coincidence as its truth (*viz.* the positive tautology $I = I$); on the other hand, this self-coincidence has no other content than the negation of otherness, and can only be conceived by returning to otherness and re-enacting its negation (*viz.* the negative tautology $I \neq \text{Not-I}$). At this point, the "I" is not yet an Ego, or a *Selbst*, but a purely evanescent moment, continually conquered and continually lost. The movement whereby self-coincidence emerges out of otherness, only to vanish and to emerge anew, is named *Begierde* (i.e., "desire", "appetite", "eagerness" or "lust") and corresponds to the first and most immediate form of self-realization.

The acknowledgement of this circularity leads the phenomenological subject to revise its initial standpoint and to endow self-consciousness with a more concrete or positive meaning. Desire as the immediate negation of otherness is replaced by desire as a global physiological cycle, set against the endless flow of organic life. Self-consciousness becomes a living being among other living beings, each moved by its own vital desire, and self-identity is found to depend on actual physical survival, on bodily growth, on the satisfaction of thirst and hunger, etc.

By feeding on plants and animals, the individual eliminates their otherness and reinstates its own integrity. The objects of desire, in being consumed, are literally disintegrated and incorporated into the self. However, this movement still amounts to what Hegel calls a "simple" or "abstract" negation. It still consists in the immediate transition from the pure otherness of objectivity ($I \neq \text{Not-I}$) to the pure self-

³⁶ HW 3, 137f.; PS, 104

coincidence of the subject ($I = I$). “Human life at this level is an alternation between being for another which is wholly foreign, and having incorporated this, being before nothing at all.”³⁷ Once again, each pole of the opposition is really only the negative of the other, and no stability is to be found in either of them: desire leads to consumption, consumption reawakens desire, and so on indefinitely.

This perpetual cycle evokes Callicles’ definition of *πλεονεξία*, criticized by Socrates through a series of cunning metaphors. In order to show that a life ruled by desire is doomed to insatiability and wretchedness, Socrates compares the desiring soul to a leaky jar, whose vanishing content must be constantly replaced (493a-494a); he likens the satisfaction of desire to the plovers’ habit of drinking water and ejecting it afterwards (494b); he associates the licentiousness praised by Callicles with the urge of scratching an itch or masturbating (494e). What is emphasized in all of these images is the idea that desire and satisfaction are dialectically bound to one another: although satisfaction is meant to put an end to desire, it is simultaneously the cause of its resurgence.

For Hegel, human self-consciousness cannot be defined in this way. True self-identity is not a physiological process, but a *spiritual* one – it is the consciousness of oneself as a truly independent being, over and above the contingencies of natural life. Since the *Selbstgefühl* afforded by desire and consumption is fleeting and inconsistent, the phenomenological subject must direct its attention to a different object, capable of generating a new and more lasting sense of self. As Charles Taylor puts it, “Man, as a being who depends on external reality, can only come to integrity if he discovers a reality which could undergo a standing negation, whose otherness could be negated without its being abolished. But the negation of otherness without self-abolition, this is a prerogative of human, not animal consciousness.”³⁸

If self-consciousness is to achieve a true sense of self, its return to self must cease to be immediate, and become *mediated*. For that to happen, the object must resist elimination and overcome the one-sidedness of desire. It must oppose the subject’s negation with its own negation, and assert thereby its own sense of self. In other words, it must cease to be an object, and become a subject, or *another self-consciousness* – not merely something to be desired and eliminated ($I \neq \text{Not-I} = I$), but *someone* to be *recognized* ($I \neq I = I$). This dialectical transition leads to the important

³⁷ C. Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, 152

³⁸ *Ibid.*

conclusion that “self-consciousness attains satisfaction only in another self-consciousness”³⁹, and introduces one of the most famous themes of Hegel’s entire philosophy.

The truth of self-consciousness is no longer desire, but recognition (*Anerkennung*). And this means, first of all, that self-consciousness is not an individual or private phenomenon, but a social or intersubjective one. “Self-consciousness exists *in* and *for itself* when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged [*als ein Anerkanntes*].”⁴⁰ But this conceptual change is perceived at first as a mere change of object. The logic of desire is maintained but applied to another human being: self-consciousness, now faced with another self-consciousness, tries to eliminate it and to re-establish its own self-coincidence. The other self-consciousness, however, animated by a similar desire, also seeks to eliminate its rival and to re-establish its own self-coincidence. Each sees the other as an impediment to the full accomplishment of selfhood.

What takes place, therefore, is a fight to the death. But this new solution proves once again unsatisfactory, for the death of the vanquished party deprives the victor of the recognition he craves and reinstates the circular logic of desire. For the victor to become a truly self-conscious individual, he must be recognized as such, and that can only happen if his rival remains alive. With the acknowledgement of this new contradiction, the life-and-death struggle is abandoned and gives way to a new phenomenological compromise. The vanquished individual is kept alive, but turned into a slave, and the victor becomes his master and takes possession of his will, his body and the fruits of his labour.

The master interposes the slave between himself and the things he desires, and the dialectic of *Begierde* is repeated at a new and more sophisticated level: the slave, having traded his survival for the recognition of the master’s authority, is forced to work, to transform the natural world and to prepare it for consumption; the master, having deprived the slave of his freedom and independence, has only to collect the fruits of his labour and enjoy them.

However, since the slave was reduced to a mere instrument, devoid of freedom and autonomy, his acknowledgement of the master’s independence no longer satisfies the requirements initially set for *Anerkennung*. His recognition is no recognition at all,

³⁹ HW 3, 144; PS, 110

⁴⁰ HW 3, 144; PS, 111

but merely the passive resistance offered by a thing or an object. Faced with this new contradiction, the master relapses once more into the logic of desire. His independence is denied and his alleged authority is shown to be an illusion. The truth of mastery is the slavishness of desire, and the truth of self-consciousness must be looked for elsewhere.

The slave, on the other hand, undergoes a very different transformation. Although he agreed to give up his independence, he also faced the fear of death. In the struggle for recognition, he managed to detach himself, albeit very briefly, from the constraints of natural existence and to experience a feeling of absolute power over life itself. In this defining moment, he succeeded in rising above mere animality and catching a glimpse of true self-consciousness.

Following the struggle, the slave resigns to servitude and gives himself up to his work. But the initial seed of independence is not eliminated. It lies dormant, and is bound to be revived. Hegel establishes a very interesting parallel between the master's domination of the slave and the latter's domination of the objects he works on. The slave's transformation of the natural world is a prelude to his own inner transformation, and the acknowledgement of his creative power leads to a new and more radical form of independence. While the master's satisfaction is "only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of *objectivity* and *permanence*", work is "desire *held in check*, fleetingness *staved off*." Its "negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence. This *negative* middle term, or the formative *activity*, is at the same time *the individuality* or pure being-for-self of consciousness, which now, in the work outside of it, steps into the element of permanence. Hereby the working consciousness comes to see the independent being [of the object] *as its own self*."⁴¹

Through work, the slave recognizes himself as a truly independent being. His formative activity, initially confined to a specific object, is granted a more general meaning and revealed as the ability to master the whole of objectivity. This new metamorphosis amounts to the fulfilment of Callicles' prophesy, but in reverse: instead a master breaking his chains and reclaiming his natural sovereignty, Hegel speaks of a slave who turns his servitude into a new form of power. But although the slave holds the key to unlock Hegel's dialectic, his emancipated self is neither slavish

⁴¹ HW 3, 153f.; PS, 118. Translation altered.

nor magisterial, in the former sense of these words. He embodies the dialectical *Aufhebung* of the initial conflict, and the discovery of a new and more complete mode of self-realization.

4. Concluding remarks

It is not hard to make out the main similarities between Hegel's and Plato's arguments. To begin with, both of them hold that the most immediate and most appealing form of self-realization rests on a purely selfish conception of desire – whether it is named ἐπιθυμία, πλεονεξία or *Begierde*. Moreover, both of them claim that this model is naïve and self-contradictory. Its true meaning is not self-evident, and a correct assessment of its implications requires a dialectical critique of desire.

Secondly, both Plato and Hegel point out that the gratification craved by the desiring subject cannot be achieved individually. The satisfaction of desire is a necessarily social affair and must conform to the concrete circumstances of social life. This is especially clear, for instance, in Plato's critique of Polus' definition of power as "the liberty to do what one thinks fit". At 469c-470a, Socrates gives the example of a man who walks into a crowded market with a dagger hidden under his cloak, and boasts about his power to dispose of the lives of everyone present. Polus admits that this is not the kind of power he had in mind, for its exercise is bound to lead to some kind of retaliation. In other words, this power is not beneficial because its legitimacy is not *recognized* by other people, and is therefore deemed illegal. The man in the example may well kill whom he pleases, but he risks being killed in return.

On the contrary, both despotism and the rhetorician's ability to "enslave" others amount to socially recognized forms of power. The reasons for their acceptance are of course very different: whereas the despot is usually strong enough or well armed enough to prevent rebellion and dissent, the rhetorician's teachings are usually too convincing to be refused. The point, however, is that in both cases domination is grounded in a compromise between the instant gratification of one's desires and the accommodation of other people's desires. In these and similar cases, power does not consist simply in "doing what one thinks fit", but in subordinating other people's desires to one's own – be it by force, eloquence, or any other means of persuasion.

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel also highlights this distinction. Whereas the life-and-death struggle amounts to an immediate confrontation, based on the direct use of violence, the master-slave dialectic amounts to a *mediate* confrontation, based on an *indirect* use of violence. The master's domination rests on his ability to convince the slave that his interests are better served by being sacrificed to the interests of the master. Therefore, the latter's satisfaction is not a direct product of his own actions, but of the slave's. The slave is the necessary means whereby the master achieves his satisfaction.

Thirdly, both Plato and Hegel aim to show that domination, although more sophisticated than immediate gratification, is nonetheless a contradictory and ultimately inefficient form of self-realization. In Plato's case, this point is argued simultaneously in a negative and in a positive way. On the one hand, Socrates highlights the master's fundamental ignorance regarding the greatest good, and the unforeseen disadvantages bound to arise from his usual equating of what is pleasant with what is beneficial. This line of argument, initially illustrated by the comparison between medicine and cookery, or rhetoric and politics⁴², is further emphasized through the familiar theme of the unhappy tyrant, forced to requite violence with violence, surrounded by false friends and undeclared rivals.⁴³ On the other hand, Socrates offers a more positive, but ultimately dogmatic defence of justice against domination and tyranny. He maintains, "with reasons of steel and adamant"⁴⁴, that the problem with despotism is not simply a matter of ignorance or indetermination, but one of moral iniquity. Were the tyrant and the flatterer able to calculate and avoid every kind of unpleasantness, and to suffer no inconvenience throughout their entire lives, they would still be the object of pity, rather than envy. For the greatest good is irreducible to pleasure or convenience, and even to physical integrity and longevity. This radical refusal of consequentialism is the basis for Socrates' claim that "injustice is the greatest of evils to the wrongdoer, and still greater than this greatest, if such can be, when the wrongdoer pays no penalty."⁴⁵ Hence, "if his crimes have deserved a flogging, he must submit to the rod; if fetters, to their grip; if a fine, to its payment; if banishment, to be banished; or if death to die."⁴⁶

⁴² See *Gorgias* 462b-465e and 500a-505b

⁴³ See *Gorgias* 510a-511a

⁴⁴ See *Gorgias* 510b-511c, but also *Respublica* 467d-569c.

⁴⁵ *Gorgias* 509b1-3

⁴⁶ *Gorgias* 480c8-d3

Plato's denouncement of injustice and iniquity as the greatest of evils, *regardless of their actual consequences*, is naturally accompanied by the symmetrical claim that justice and rectitude are the greatest of goods, *regardless of their actual consequences*. In Socrates' eyes, the despot is not a master, but a slave; and his victims, if they are morally virtuous, are only slaves *in appearance*. Their real power is ultimately independent from their actual social situation. They are slaves if they let themselves be governed by outward circumstances, and masters if they know how to govern themselves.

The Platonic motif of ἐγκράτεια ἑαυτοῦ, as it appears in the *Gorgias*⁴⁷, suggests yet another parallel with Hegel's dialectic. For Plato, the virtuous man possesses an independence that transcends the concrete definitions of power, freedom and pleasure ventured by Socrates' interlocutors, and usually endorsed by most people. Since the just man is his own master, his actual slavery is of no real consequence to him, and his indifference anticipates the intellectual detachment championed by Stoicism. Whereas Callicles, attached to the model of πλεονεξία, had claimed that "the endurance of wrong is not man's part at all, but a poor slave's", Socrates will offer him, at the end of the dialogue, the opposite advice: "allow anyone to condemn you and to foully maltreat if he chooses; yes, by Heaven, and suffer undaunted the shock of that ignominious cuff; for you will come to no harm if you be really a good and upright man, practising virtue [ἐὰν τῷ ὄντι ᾗς καλὸς καὶ γαθός, ἀσκῶν ἀρετήν]." ⁴⁸

In the Hegelian account, the usual definitions of mastery and slavery are equally turned upside down – and also in a double manner. True to his dialectical method, Hegel takes up the issue from the standpoint of the master and from the standpoint of the slave. In the first case, following the struggle for recognition, the master attempts to overcome the circularity of desire by using the slave as a shield against the contingencies of the natural world. But his strategy leads to contradiction and his purported independence is revealed as a new mode of submission. In the second case, the master starts by alienating his freedom and his will. But the glimpse of independence he was granted during the life-and-death struggle, coupled with his newly found ability to handle and reshape the objective world, culminate in a different and more profound self-awareness. As a result, the slave is revealed not only

⁴⁷ See notably 491d-e

⁴⁸ See *Gorgias* 527c6-d2.

as the master's new master, but as his own true master. And this new authority is different and much wider than the one at stake in the previous conflict.

Presently, self-consciousness no longer cares for the fleeting rewards of desire. Its truth is not to be found outside of itself, in the world of contingency and change. Its freedom is no longer the circumstantial freedom of the rhetorician or the despot, but the intellectual freedom of the Stoic. And its power, precisely because it is not dependent on outward circumstances, can no longer be destroyed or taken away: it is the inner power of self-determination, the autonomy of ἐγκράτεια ἐαυτοῦ.

The phenomenological transition from slavery to Stoicism, just like Socrates' retreat into the "life of philosophy", signals the first step towards a definitive break with the logic of desire and domination. Although a detailed analysis of Hegel's phenomenological conception of stoicism cannot be attempted here, and although a serious discussion of how it relates to Plato's own brand of stoicism would require a whole new paper, two brief remarks are nonetheless in order. Firstly, as is well known, the "Freedom of Self-consciousness" (section B of the *Phenomenology's* Fourth Chapter) is not the final stage of Hegel's progression, nor indeed Hegel's final solution to the issues of domination and recognition. The *Phenomenology* will go on to reveal new forms of conflict, based on different and more complex shapes of consciousness. The freedom of Stoicism and the subsequent stages of Scepticism and the so-called Unhappy Consciousness amount to intermediate phenomenological *Gestalten*, whose truth is to be found in higher and more comprehensive ones.

Secondly, although the *Phenomenology's* account of Stoicism does echo the *Gorgias's* defence of ἐγκράτεια ἐαυτοῦ, Hegel and Plato hold different views on how to overcome the contradictions of desire and domination. For Plato, the only true antidote to Calicles' immoralism is a philosophical defence of justice and morality, based on a relentless critique of the inconsistencies entailed in any other definition of τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν. Regardless of its social and political implications, the Platonic project is grounded in an individual quest for the greatest good. The notions of virtue and justice advocated by Socrates are ultimately independent of their material or historical actualization, and must be upheld, "with reasons of steel and adamant", against the opinions of the whole world.

For Hegel, on the other hand, the only real alternative to the logic of desire and domination lies in the notion of Spirit (*Geist*), that is, in the acknowledgement that self-consciousness can only be truly grasped as a social and historical phenomenon.

We have seen that the notion of *Anerkennung* plays a very important part in Hegel's master-slave dialectic. At this point in the progression, however, recognition is not yet truly reciprocal: the slave recognizes the master and the master is recognized by the slave. The relationship is still asymmetrical, and will remain so, in varying degrees, throughout the following stages of the progression. But the phenomenological subject will eventually be led to acknowledge that no individual or a-historical standpoint is free from contradiction. Personal selfhood is originally tied to other people's selfhood – and what is more, to a universal web of mutually recognising selves.

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