



# Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy

---

---

*Edited by*

DANIEL BLOOM  
LAURENCE BLOOM  
MIRIAM BYRD

palgrave  
macmillan

# Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy

Daniel Bloom • Laurence Bloom  
Miriam Byrd  
Editors

# Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy

palgrave  
macmillan

*Editors*

Daniel Bloom  
Department of English, Philosophy  
and Modern Languages  
West Texas A&M University  
Canyon, TX, USA

Laurence Bloom  
Department of Philosophy  
Rhodes University  
Grahamstown, South Africa

Miriam Byrd  
Department of Philosophy and  
Humanities  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
Arlington, TX, USA

ISBN 978-3-030-98903-3      ISBN 978-3-030-98904-0 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to express our gratitude to Nicholas Marshall, Graham Schuster, Jeffrey Doty and Anna Bloom-Christen for their editing work, to Slavka Halper for getting the ball rolling on this project, and to Aaron Halper for putting us in touch with our publisher at Palgrave Macmillan. We are also grateful to the English, Philosophy, and Modern Languages Departments at West Texas A&M University for their generous financial support through the Urban Fund.

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	Daniel Bloom and Laurence Bloom	
	<b>Section I Knowing and Being</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>In What Ways Are the Souls of Human Beings Immortal According to Plato?</b>	<b>11</b>
	Luc Brisson	
<b>3</b>	<b>One and Many in Plato's Metaphysics</b>	<b>19</b>
	William H. F. Altman	
<b>4</b>	<b>Sensibles as <i>Me Onta</i>: The Harmony of <i>Sophist</i> and <i>Timaeus</i></b>	<b>43</b>
	Richard Patterson	
<b>5</b>	<b>Syllogisms: In Theory and Practice</b>	<b>49</b>
	Lenn E. Goodman	
<b>6</b>	<b>Monism, Metaphysics, and Paradox</b>	<b>73</b>
	Owen Goldin	
<b>7</b>	<b>Understanding the Image of the Sun: Aristotle, Descartes, and Spinoza on Imagination</b>	<b>97</b>
	Nastassja Pugliese	

<b>8</b>	<b>Moving Naturally for Aristotle, Laozi, and Zhuangzi</b> May Sim	123
<b>9</b>	<b>Parmenides 143d–144a and the Pebble-Arithmetical Representation of Number</b> Mitchell Miller	149
<b>Section II Goodness as Knowing How to Be</b>		167
<b>10</b>	<b>VIRTUE AND SELF-RESTRAINT: Maimonides’ Dialogue with Aristotle in <i>Eight Chapters</i></b> Ronna Burger	169
<b>11</b>	<b>Socrates’ Failures and their Implications for Moral Psychology in the Early Dialogues</b> Miriam Byrd	189
<b>12</b>	<b>Pleasure, Pain, Calm, and the Philosophical Life</b> Richard D. Parry	205
<b>13</b>	<b>Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Socrates on Justice</b> Roslyn Weiss	221
<b>14</b>	<b>A Reading of the First Book of the <i>Republic</i>: A Look to the Whole</b> Chad Wiener	237
<b>15</b>	<b>Popper’s Plato Revisited</b> John Rist	251
<b>Publications of Edward Charles Halper</b>		283
<b>Index</b>		289

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**William H. F. Altman**, a retired public high school teacher, overlapped with Edward Halper at the University of Toronto in the late 1970s. He is the author of a five-volume study of Plato's dialogues (2012–2020) and other studies in ancient and modern philosophy.

**Daniel Bloom** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at West Texas A&M University. He began teaching at WTAMU in 2014 after completing his graduate studies at the University of Georgia under the supervision of Edward Halper. His research is primarily in Ancient Western Philosophy. He is the author of *The Unity of Oneness and Plurality in Plato's Theaetetus* (2015).

**Laurence Bloom** is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Rhodes University in Makhanda, South Africa. He completed a PhD under the supervision of Professor Halper in 2010. Although he publishes primarily on Plato, his philosophical interests extend throughout the history of philosophy. His recent book *The Principle of Non-contradiction in Plato's Republic: An Argument for Form* (2017) argues for a reading of the *Republic* that looks after an underlying *noetic* unity pointed to by the text's *dianoetic* argumentation—in particular, in Socrates' division of the soul.

**Luc Brisson**, Director of Research [Emeritus] at the National Center for Scientific Research (Paris [Villejuif], France; Centre Jean Pépin, UMR 8230 CNRS-ENS, PSL), is known for his works on both Plato and Plotinus, including bibliographies, translations, and commentaries. He has also published numerous works on the history of philosophy and religions in Antiquity.

**Ronna Burger** is Catherine & Henry J. Gaisman Chair, Professor of Philosophy and Affiliate Professor of Jewish Studies at Tulane University, where she has been teaching since 1980, after receiving her PhD in Philosophy from the New School for Social Research. Burger is the author of *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as books on Plato's *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and a monograph *On the Euthyphro*. Along with numerous articles on Greek philosophy, she has written on Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* I.2 (in *Political Philosophy Cross-Examined*, 2013), the Book of Esther (in *Writing The Poetic Soul of Philosophy*, 2020) and "the female drama" in the Book of Genesis (in *Athens, Arden, Jerusalem*, 2017). In addition to seminars and public lectures on Plato and Aristotle, she teaches a series of courses on "Bible and Philosophy" and has spoken at various campuses and conferences on biblical themes and figures.

**Miriam Byrd** is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Arlington. She completed her dissertation under Edward Halper's supervision in 2001 and specializes in ancient philosophy. Her publications include journal articles and book chapters, mainly on Plato, and her current research interests are Plato's method of hypothesis, mathematical intermediates, and moral psychology in the early dialogues.

**Owen Goldin** is Professor of Philosophy at Marquette University. He has written mostly on ancient philosophy. He is the author of *Explaining an Eclipse: Aristotle's Posterior Analytics 2 8–10* (University of Michigan Press, 1996) and a number of articles on the Peripatetics, Plato, Aristotle, and Hellenistic philosophers. He is the translator of *Philoponus (?): On Aristotle, Posterior Analytics 2* (London, Duckworth Press, 2009), and, with Marije Martijn, of *Philoponus: On Aristotle, Posterior Analytics I. 19–31* (Bristol, Bristol Classical Press), 2012. He has also published in the areas of Jewish philosophy, social philosophy, and metaphysics.

**Lenn E. Goodman** is Professor of Philosophy and Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Vanderbilt University. He publishes widely in Jewish, Islamic, and general philosophy. His writings on Aristotle include the chapters on Aristotle in *Aristotle's Politics Today* and in *Consciousness in the Great Philosophers* and on the challenge of the Diodorean modalities. He has also written extensively on Aristotelian virtue ethics. His recent books include *The Holy One of Israel, Religious*

*Pluralism and Values in the Public Sphere, Coming to Mind: The Soul and its Body*, and his Gifford Lectures: *Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself*.

**Mitchell Miller** is Dexter Ferry Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Vassar College. He works in the history of philosophy, ranging from the Presocratics and Plato and Aristotle to late medieval philosophy, Descartes and Leibniz, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century continental philosophy. He has published two books on Plato, *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* (Princeton 1986, Penn State ppk 1991) and *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* (Martinus Nijhoff 1980, reissued with "Dialectical Education and Unwritten Teachings in Plato's *Statesman*," Parmenides Publishing 2004), a number of essays on Plato, and studies of Hesiod, Parmenides, and Hegel. His most recent work concentrates on the *Philebus*, the "so-called unwritten teachings" of Plato, and, as the larger context for these studies, the notion of "the longer way" to the dialectical study of the Good and a "more precise grasp" of the city, the soul, and (he argues) the cosmos that Plato has Socrates project at *Republic* 435c-d and 504b-e.

**Richard D. Parry** is the Fuller E. Callaway Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, having taught at Agnes Scott College for thirty-nine years. In the Atlanta area, he also conducted graduate seminars on Aristotle and Plato at Emory University and Georgia State University. In 1987–88, he worked at the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, DC, as a humanities administrator. Since retiring in 2006, he has been involved in the work of the International Plato Society, where he now serves as vice president. His publications include *Plato's Craft of Justice* (1996) and many articles, mostly on Plato's moral psychology.

**Richard Patterson** is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Ancient Mediterranean Studies at Emory University. He is the author of *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics*, *Aristotle's Modal Logic*, and a (to be published someday) commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, along with assorted articles in ancient philosophy and (with coauthors), in cognitive science.

**Nastassja Pugliese** is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Faculty of Education at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Professor of the Graduate Program in Logic and Metaphysics and of the Graduate Program in Education at the same university. Pugliese holds a PhD from the University of Georgia where she was advised by Dr. Halper on a the-

sis on Spinoza's metaphysics of imagination. Pugliese is the coordinator of the Other Classics—History of Philosophy and Education Research Group (CNPq) where she and her students research hidden figures in the history of philosophy and education, especially European women philosophers of the seventeenth century. Pugliese is currently serving on the board of the North American Spinoza Society (2021) and on the editorial board of the *Cadernos Espinosanos* of the University of São Paulo. Pugliese has published on Spinoza's reception and influences as well as on women philosophers from modernity.

**John Rist** has taught philosophy and classics for more than 60 years, mainly at the University of Toronto, but also at the University of Aberdeen, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Catholic University of America. He has written extensively on ethics, ancient philosophy, and patristics (especially Augustine). His most recent book is *What is Person?* (Cambridge University Press).

**May Sim** is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Asian Studies at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts. She is the Director of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy and served as the past president of a couple of regional societies, as well as the Metaphysical Society of America. Her publications include *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius* and over 50 essays on Eastern and Western philosophies. She is the contributing editor of *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature: Essays on Aristotle's Ethics and Metaphysics* and *From Puzzles to Principles?: Essays on Aristotle's Dialectic*. Her current research includes two books: a Confucian account of human rights, and *Metaphysics and Ethics: East & West*.

**Roslyn Weiss** is the Clara H. Stewardson Professor of Philosophy at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA. She earned her doctorate in philosophy from Columbia University in 1982 and a Master's degree in Jewish Studies from Baltimore Hebrew University in 1992. Her fields of expertise are ancient Greek philosophy and medieval Jewish philosophy. She has published four books on Plato, *Socrates Dissatisfied: An Analysis of Plato's 'Crito'* (Oxford, 1998); *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's 'Meno'* (Oxford, 2001); *The Socratic Paradox and Its Enemies* (Chicago, 2006); and *Philosophers in the 'Republic': Plato's Two Paradigms* (Cornell, 2012); and more than fifty scholarly articles on

Greek and Jewish philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of religion. Her most recent publication is the first complete translation into English of the medieval Hebrew philosophical work, *Light of the Lord*, by Hasdai Crescas (Oxford, 2018).

**Chad Wiener** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy of Religious Studies at Old Dominion University and has published articles on Plato and Aristotle, primarily on method.



## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

*Daniel Bloom and Laurence Bloom*

We present this collection of essays in honor of Edward Halper. Most of the essays are written by Professor Halper's colleagues, a few are by former students, and one is by a former teacher. Each in its own way relates to Halper's work. Some of the essays respond to or disagree with his work; some focus on themes that the author has discussed with Halper; in several cases the essays seek to take ideas developed by Halper—usually in his dynamic reading of Aristotle—and use those ideas to shed light on other philosophers or issues. Halper's work is diverse both in terms of topic and historical period, and this volume too covers a wide range of issues. The volume is unified by the recognition that at the root of philosophical issues are the fundamental questions of metaphysics. In this respect we have followed Halper's lead; metaphysics as a unifying principle is a theme found throughout his work. In the introduction to his second book, *Form and*

---

D. Bloom (✉)

Department of English, Philosophy and Modern Languages, West Texas A&M University, Canyon, TX, USA

e-mail: [dbloom@wtamu.edu](mailto:dbloom@wtamu.edu)

L. Bloom

Department of Philosophy, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

e-mail: [l.bloom@ru.ac.za](mailto:l.bloom@ru.ac.za)

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

D. Bloom et al. (eds.), *Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0_1)

*Reason*, he writes, “scholarly topics are manifestations of deeper philosophical issues. It is in order to focus attention on these deeper problems at issue in the essays that I have collected them together here: one way to see the forest is to look at a lot of different trees.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, in this volume the focus is on understanding issues in terms of their fundamental, metaphysical basis.

Section I of this volume addresses the closely connected issues of *knowing and being*. Section II deals with ethics as the human science of *knowing how to be*. The relation between knowing and being in Sect. I reflects Halper’s understanding of the connection between metaphysics and epistemology. Though the details of the connection admit of various formulations, Halper identifies a particular character that the world must have if it is to be knowable—one that runs like a thread through the various formulations. In short, to be knowable the world must possess its own rationality. That is to say, if it is to be known as it is, without our distorting it through the very act of coming to know it, the world must possess what we might clumsily refer to as a metaphysical rationality—a rationality that it embodies in terms of its own being, independently of any attempt to know it. Halper has identified this metaphysical principle of rationality in its various forms throughout the history of philosophy. He most emphatically identifies it in his account of Aristotelian actuality,<sup>2</sup> but it is also present in his accounts of other philosophers.<sup>3</sup> More recently, he has both defended<sup>4</sup> and problematized<sup>5</sup> it in general terms.

The connection between ethics, knowledge, and being explored in Sect. II of the book yet again mirrors Halper’s work. As he himself says of the inclusion of ethical themes in *Form and Reason*, “the Greeks think that being good consists of acquiring a form. Thus, ethics depends on the existence of certain metaphysical entities, forms.”<sup>6</sup> More generally perhaps, ethics requires that there is some mode of being that corresponds to a person’s being good; the full embodiment of this goodness itself depends on an understanding of what the good is and how it comes to be. This is true for those who understand ethics as being about the character of the person, like the Greeks and most Medievals did, or about action, as many

<sup>1</sup> Halper (1993, 3).

<sup>2</sup> Halper (1984a; see also 1984b).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Halper (1998 and 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See Halper (2015).

<sup>5</sup> See Halper (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Halper (1993, 4).

of the Moderns did. In either case, ethical norms depend upon a knowledge of independent being, and thereby lead us to a metaphysical investigation.<sup>7</sup>

Halper began his career at a time when there was often an aversion to “metaphysical baggage.” He stood out as a counterpoint. His philosophy has always been and continues to be explicitly and proudly metaphysical, not as a necessary or unavoidable consequence, but as the very substance and focus. Yet, Halper’s method is never simply to affirm or insist on a metaphysical aspect to the account. Far from some kind of dogmatic insistence, he is always careful to show how, on its own terms, an account makes certain metaphysical presuppositions. It is the one who would refuse to acknowledge such an inevitable metaphysical component to his view that inevitably carries such a component around like so much baggage. On the other hand, those who, like Halper, acknowledge and explore that fundamental component of the account are able to transform it from a weight to be dragged into an engine—perhaps the engine—that propels the account forward.

Halper’s remarkable ability to identify an account’s metaphysical presuppositions provides his papers and commentaries with a clarity of interpretation that is rarely found. It allows him to understand a text on its own terms and to appreciate its power and uniqueness. This ability is perhaps connected to his virtuosity with arguments and reasoning—both of the deductive variety and of the sort that moves toward principles—a virtuosity that already sets him apart as a scholar. However, this ability is always subordinated to an imperative to view the account as a whole and understand the overall position; his facility with arguments and the technicalities of reasoning is used in the service of getting a more nuanced and focused grasp of the big picture. The trees, so to speak, are always examined in context of their place in the forest. This tendency is never more powerfully demonstrated than in chapter four of his *One and Many in Aristotle’s Metaphysics: Central Books*.<sup>8</sup> After three chapters of very challenging and technical scholarship in which Halper offers his own readings of particular passages and arguments and refutes alternative readings, he orchestrates a stunning convergence of argumentation: his interpretations of specific, apparently isolated, technical arguments, each in isolation no less

<sup>7</sup>For examples of Halper’s work that deal with the relation between ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology see Halper (1992, 1995, 1999, 2004, et al.).

<sup>8</sup>Halper (1989).

convincing than other leading interpretations, resolve beautifully into a unified and utterly compelling account. Where others see more or less convincing separate arguments, he sees a coherent whole; Halper reveals a forest where others have seen only isolated trees.

His ability to work through the details of Aristotle's arguments with care and precision, yet without losing sight of the central challenges of the science of metaphysics, is demonstrated throughout the entirety of the first two volumes of *One and Many*, and we expect it will be no less forcefully on display in the much anticipated third volume.<sup>9</sup> As its title suggests, this far reaching work shows how the problem of the one and many, already an ancient problem in Aristotle's time, serves as a linchpin for understanding Aristotle's account of *ousia* as form and actuality. Perhaps the most striking accomplishment of *One and Many* is that it reveals Aristotle's text to be all the more impressive, putting on display the stunning complexity and unity of the philosopher's masterpiece. In addition, by clarifying the nature of *ousia*, Aristotle's central metaphysical idea, Halper has given us a foothold from which to gain a coherent picture of Aristotle's philosophy as a whole, one that grounds his own, always enlightening papers on all parts of the Aristotelian corpus.<sup>10</sup>

Halper's work on other great philosophers is no less powerful and unique. This, again, is a result of identifying and keeping in mind the core problems with which these philosophers are wrestling. In uncovering and seeing the value of these problems, Halper is able to make works in the history of philosophy come alive and show them to be the exciting and fresh inquiries that they are. The breadth of metaphysical accounts with which Halper is proficient—he has published widely in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Philosophy—gives him a perspective on the foundational and perennial philosophical questions that transcends the particulars of any account, affording him original insights into these questions. These insights have become more prevalent in his writing in recent years, a development that we find very exciting.<sup>11</sup>

In his teaching too Halper displays the same virtues. Those of us who have had the pleasure of taking his university courses have seen the force

<sup>9</sup>Halper (2022).

<sup>10</sup>Halper's work on Aristotle is far reaching. He has published extensively on Aristotelian science and ethics as well as on Aristotle's logic, mathematics, and poetics. His writings always highlight the fundamentally metaphysical grounding of Aristotle's philosophy.

<sup>11</sup>For a more complete list of Halper's publications see the appendix to this collected volume.

of his combination of unusual philosophical talent and unwavering drive to the root of an issue. In his courses the push to the metaphysical source is a continual process, often leading to a transformation in the class participants' shared activity; the *seeking* of the source becomes as much an end as its acquisition. To put it in Ancient terms, the *noetic* grasp of first principles is not something that can be finished; it is an active state that one must maintain. Inquiry is an instantiation of this active state. As such, the primacy of inquiry in his classes is another manifestation of Halper's deep commitment to metaphysical truth.

Part of the joy of the shared inquiry found in his courses is that the depth of Halper's grasp of the material gives the impression that we, his students, are inquiring with the philosopher under investigation. The result is that after a course with Professor Halper one does not feel she has merely learned what a philosopher says, or even what he thinks; one gains an appreciation for the way in which the philosopher thinks. Halper thus presents his students with the possibility of thinking through ideas for themselves. He makes philosophy an activity to be engaged in as opposed to a study of work that has already been done by others. This ability to make philosophy "come to life" for his students is closely connected to Halper's appreciation for what makes a philosophy or philosopher relevant for the student: an appreciation which again requires a deep understanding of the motivations and metaphysical underpinnings of an account and of what led the philosopher to their position in the first place.

The primacy of inquiry accounts for a pair of goals present in any Halper course: cultivating the student's ability to think productively and meaningfully about a philosophical issue or text and giving the corresponding sense of the importance, depth, and mysteriousness of that issue or text. Insofar as one is convinced of Socrates' claim that the unexamined life is not worth living, Halper's courses, with their call to inquiry, come to be far more than mere intellectual endeavors; they are opportunities for ethical development. As the teacher of these courses Halper is thereby engaged in an ethical activity himself, and he certainly gives the sense of taking this role very seriously. His deep understanding of the material, when wielded in the classroom, becomes a tool for ethical cultivation—for both student and teacher. The seriousness with which he takes this ethical cultivation demonstrates another way in which Halper shows the relation between knowledge, ethics, and being. His deep understanding is clearly reflected in his thoughtful action. This is a significant part of the draw that

his students feel toward him; not the pull of a cult of personality, but the beauty of the embodiment of deeply thought values.

The contributors to this volume all share in our appreciation of Halper's approach to philosophy. In addition, they share his ability to engage with philosophers in the history of philosophy in a substantial and meaningful way. We have been heartened by the quality and breadth of the works submitted for this volume in honor of Professor Halper, as well as by the enthusiasm with which the work has been supported.

The chapters included in Sect. I of this volume either focus directly on the relationship between metaphysics and epistemology, or they seek to unpack our understanding of some metaphysical question. Falling into the latter category are Luc Brisson's carefully focused account of the embodied soul's immortality and of this immortality's close connection to the soul's rationality, as well as William Altman's far ranging Platonic reply to Halper's *One and Many*. Richard Patterson's chapter on the *me onta* of the *Sophist* and *Timaeus* also falls into this latter category. He shares with Brisson an ability to see a unity to Plato's metaphysical account across different dialogues. In the former category, Lenn Goodman and Owen Goldin struggle explicitly with the unity of knowing and being in Aristotle's *Analytics* and Heraclitus' *logos* respectively; both engage directly with Halper's work on these texts and issues, with Goodman discussing the rational structure of reality, and Goldin considering the metaphysical status of metaphysical claims. Nastassja Pugliese and May Sim both use Halperian resources to make sense of central epistemic and metaphysical issues, in Spinoza and in the classical Daoists Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, respectively; while Mitchell Miller gives an original and enlightening account of the being of number as derived from the great and the small in Plato's *Parmenides*.

Section II focuses on ethical issues but with a strong metaphysical foundation. Ronna Burger's contribution uses resources from her own account of Aristotle on *phronesis*, and from Halper's account of a central puzzle in Maimonides' ethics, to explain Maimonides' attempted reconciliation of the sages and the philosophers. Miriam Byrd, in a move reminiscent of Halper, reveals the fundamentally Platonic underpinnings of the early "Socratic" dialogues. And Richard Parry investigates the Platonic triad of pleasure, pain, and calm, in which the third member, calm, is revealed to possess a deeper type of reality as compared to the first two. The collected volume ends with three essays on the *Republic*, a text that, unsurprisingly, is an object of great affection for Professor Halper as it shares with him an

ability to combine the ethical and epistemic with the metaphysical. Rosalyn Weiss and Chad Weiner both focus on Book I. Weiss offers an account of pedagogy on which Socrates' examinations of proposed definitions of justice become part of the instantiation of justice itself. Weiner argues for a closer connection between the definitions of justice offered in Book I and the definition offered in Book IV than has generally been acknowledged. Lastly, we are pleased to end this collection with a contribution from John Rist, Professor Halper's former teacher. Professor Rist offers an essay showing how Karl Popper's infamous criticism of Plato fails to take into account the metaphysical underpinnings and general worldview of the Ancient Athenians.

### WORKS CITED

- Halper, E. 1984a. Aristotle on Knowledge of Nature. *The Review of Metaphysics* 37: 811–835.
- . 1984b. Aristotle on the Extension of Non-Contradiction. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1: 369–380.
- . 1989. *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. Reprinted with a new introduction by Parmenides Press, 2005.
- . 1992. The 'Socrates' of Plato's Early Dialogues. In *The Philosophy of Socrates: Elenchus, Ethics, and Truth*, ed. K. Boudouris, 81–87. Vol. 2 of the Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Greek Philosophy. Athens: Kardamista.
- . 1993. *Form and Reason: Essays in Metaphysics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . 1995. The Substance of Aristotle's Ethics. In *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature: Essays on Aristotle's Ethics and Metaphysics*, ed. May Sim, 3–28. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- . 1998. The Logic of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Nature, Space, and Time. In *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate, 29–49. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . 1999. The Unity of the Virtues in Aristotle. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 17: 115–143.
- . 2004. Plato's Case for Philosophy as the Examined Life. In *Conceptions of Philosophy. Ancient and Modern*, ed. K. Boudouris, 133–150. Athens: Ionia Publications.
- . 2007. Plato on the Rationality of Nature. *Skepsis* 18: 159–172.
- . 2015. The Rationality of Being. *The Review of Metaphysics* 68: 487–520. Reprinted in Chinese translation in *Modern Foreign Philosophy*, 2021.

- . 2017. Heraclitus and the Possibility of Metaphysics. *The Review of Metaphysics* 70: 453–472.
- . 2022. *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: Books I-N*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Press, forthcoming.

SECTION I

---

Knowing and Being



## In What Ways Are the Souls of Human Beings Immortal According to Plato?

*Luc Brisson*

According to Plato, every living being is a combination of soul and body; even gods and daimons have bodies and souls (*Phaedrus* 246c–d). The soul of human beings is fashioned by the demiurge out of the same mixture (*Timaeus* 41d4–7) as the world soul and the souls of gods and daimons (*Timaeus* 35a1–b1). The divine souls are fastened to a body which is indestructible, not in itself, but because the demiurge does not want to undo his handiwork (*Timaeus* 41a3–d3). Even if it is less pure (*Timaeus* 41d4–e3), the human soul is also immortal; however, it is tied to a body which is destructible. That is why the demiurge asks the newly born gods to take care of this temporary association (*Timaeus* 42d5–e4). Hence, the distinction between immortal and mortal living beings. The immortality of the human soul is a consequence of its being made from the same soul-stuff as the world-soul, gods, and daimons; and its immortality is universal through participation in this larger and more generalized

---

L. Brisson (✉)

Centre Jean Pépin (UMR 8230 CNRS-ENS, PSL), Centre de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, France  
e-mail: [lbrisson@agalma.net](mailto:lbrisson@agalma.net)

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

D. Bloom et al. (eds.), *Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0_2)

category. But to what extent is the soul of a human being, linked to a mortal body, immortal as an individual?

## 2.1 WHAT IS A SOUL?

As a being (*ousía*), intermediary between the intelligible and sensible realms, the soul can, by definition (*lógos*), be considered the principle of ordered motion and hence of life in the world. It must therefore, according to Plato, neither be born nor die. Indeed, if the soul would stop or die, all things in the world would stop or die (*Phaedrus* 245d6–246a2). In order to avoid contradiction, the making of the soul in the *Timaeus* (35a1–b1) should be understood not as its birth, but as the indication of its inferiority compared to the intelligible realm.

The soul is by nature a composite power (*sumphutè dunámis*). It includes three elements. In the central myth of the *Phaedrus*, Plato does not give an argued description of the structure of the soul; he limits himself to comparing the soul to a chariot drawn by two horses that are led by a charioteer (*Phaedrus* 246a6–b4).

If one refers to other dialogues,<sup>1</sup> the charioteer can be identified with intellect (*noús*), and the two horses with spirit (*thumós*) and desire (*epithumía*). Intellection (*noésis*) is the highest faculty of the soul, and intellect (*noús*) has the intelligible realities as its objects. There can be no intellect without a soul (*Philebus* 30b), and soul must be directed by its own intellect (*Timaeus* 90a–e). This is the entirety of what can be gleaned from the dialogues as to the structure of the soul. To augment our understanding of the human soul's destiny, we next turn to its wanderings.

### 2.1.1 *The Soul as a Traveling Entity*

In the central myth of the *Phaedrus* (245c–246b),<sup>2</sup> the human soul, source of all physical and psychical movements, is described as a traveling entity within a temporal cycle of ten periods.<sup>3</sup> In this magnificent myth, Plato

<sup>1</sup> *Timaeus* 69c–72c, and *Republic* IV.

<sup>2</sup> Myth has soul as its subject (see Brisson 1998). The main characters of myth are gods, daimons, heroes, inhabitants of Hades, and men (Plato, *Republic* III 309a3–9). These characters all have a soul.

<sup>3</sup> “Of all these (human souls), any who have led their lives with justice will change to a better fate, and any who have led theirs with injustice, to a worse one. In fact, no soul returns to the place from which it came before ten thousand years, since its wings will not grow

describes first the ascent of human souls during the initial period of a cycle. In order to contemplate the intelligible realities, these souls follow the troop of the gods and daimons, arriving at their resting place on the external envelope of the sphere that constitutes the body of the world. All three beings have the same soul-structure as outlined in the preceding section: a guiding charioteer and two subordinate horses. While the two horses of the gods and daimons are good and therefore permit easy contemplation of the intelligible realities, human souls have only a partial view of the intelligible realm because their driver cannot control one of the rebellious horses. The quality of this contemplation (whether human, daimonic, or divine), and the quality of the remembrance of this contemplation,<sup>4</sup> determines the quality of their subsequent knowledge based on reminiscence or remembrance of this primal contemplation, and hence the quality of the life of each class of being.

Throughout the nine other periods of a cycle, a human soul must be attached to a given terrestrial body subject to destruction. In this way, the soul can be rewarded or punished in view of the quality of its previous life; punished, for instance, by becoming attached to the body of an animal (*Phaedrus* 248e–249c), which in turn may be further punished by rebirth as an animal of even less intelligence (*Timaeus* 91d–92c).

### 2.1.2 *The Soul as Host of a Body*

Each soul is linked to a body, even in the case of a god. Plato gives the following definition of god: “an immortal living being, which has a soul and a body, both naturally united forever” (*Phaedrus* 246d1).<sup>5</sup> Yet there are several kinds of gods. First of all, there is the universe, whose body made of fire, air, water, and earth and shaped as a sphere, contains sensible objects; then the celestial bodies; and finally the traditional divinities, gods and daimons, are also endowed with a body, though we do not know what it is made of. The bodies of gods and daimons are not in themselves indestructible, but they will not be destroyed, as a function of the will of the demiurge who made them.<sup>6</sup> What is more, the gods, whose bodies cannot

before then, except for the soul of a man who practices philosophy without guile or who loves boys philosophically” (*Phaedrus* 248e–249a, trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, modified).

<sup>4</sup> See Brisson (2008).

<sup>5</sup> See Brisson (2003).

<sup>6</sup> *Timaeus* 41a–b.

be destroyed, cannot take on other appearances (*Republic* II 380d–382c); in other words, they cannot metamorphose themselves. The souls of gods and daimons are thus always associated with the same bodies.

Beneath the gods in the hierarchy are souls that are endowed with an intellect like the gods but liable to be attached to an earthly body, which, unlike that of the gods, is destructible. These inferior souls are subject to temporality. Their existence is marked by the aforementioned cycles of ten periods,<sup>7</sup> imposed by destiny, which involve a system of retribution based on metempsychosis or reincarnation, that is moving from one body to another after death. The hierarchy between human beings and animals, as a function of the exercise of intellectual activity, is marked by the body.<sup>8</sup> The body in which a soul is located illustrates the quality of that soul's intellectual activity.

In this context, the excellence of a soul is determined by the quality of the exercise of the activity of its intellect.<sup>9</sup> While the immortals are always using their intellect, mortals constantly struggle with the distractions of spirit (*thumós*) and desire (*epithumía*). By taking time away from the exercise of the intellect, these two parts<sup>10</sup> of the soul are detrimental to the activity of the intellect.

The *Timaeus* establishes a hierarchy of being, since, in the final analysis, any mythical construction whose purpose is to influence human behavior cannot elude the prior establishment of a value system.<sup>11</sup> The highest rank in this hierarchy is occupied by gods and daimons; then come human beings, men, and women; then the animals that live in the air, on earth, and in the water; while plants (*Timaeus* 76e7–77c5) are at the bottom.

This hierarchy is based on two criteria: (1) the quantity and the quality of the relations between the soul and the intelligible, and (2) the nature of the body which the soul enables to move or to change. The first criterion establishes an impassable border between plants and the rest of living beings because the soul of plants is fitted only with desire (*epithumía*). And the second criterion establishes another barrier, just as impassable,

<sup>7</sup> See note 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Cratylus* 400a–b

<sup>9</sup> According to this hypothesis, to learn is to make an effort to remember, on the occasion of a sensible experience, an intellectual knowledge acquired by the soul in an undetermined past, when, separated from all earthly bodies, it contemplated the genuine realities. See note 4.

<sup>10</sup> The term “part” does not have a material meaning here, but indicates an aspect, or rather a capacity or faculty, of the soul (*Timaeus* 69c3–70a7).

<sup>11</sup> See Brisson (2004).

between the gods and daimons on the one hand, and the rest of living beings on the other, because the bodies of gods and daimons are indestructible, while the bodies of all other living beings will be destroyed.

## 2.2 THE SOUL'S IMMORTALITY

This hierarchy of being has consequences for Plato's ontology of the soul. The soul, insofar as it is superior to the matter it drives, is necessarily separate from and thus not subject to the temporal destruction of the earthly body. However, this observation raises a further question: do the souls of mortal beings, such as humans, possess the same immortality as the souls of their divine counterparts? And does this immortality extend even to the individual human soul?

### 2.2.1 *Immortality as a Whole*

When in a destructible body, the soul, by means of one of its activities, the intellect (*noûs*), remains in contact with the intelligible. However, it has to concern itself with the body to which it is attached. Desire (*epithumía*) ensures the survival of the individual body by searching for food and drink, and the survival of the species by reproduction. Spirit (*thumós*) defends the individual body and the city against external and internal aggressions; this is why spirit and desire are necessary. They are, so to speak, interfaces between the intellect and the body.

What happens, however, when this soul is, by death, separated from its earthly body? Detached from the body for which it cared, the soul's activities in these areas, spirit and desire, cease being exercised, and it loses the memory of the events, initiated by spirit and desire, of its previous life. Indeed, in Plato, a soul contemplates and recollects intelligible objects or processes, but never recalls empirical events associated with a previous existence, which is not the case in, for example, the Hindu Buddhist literature or Pythagoras.<sup>12</sup> For its part, the intellect maintains the memory of the intelligible it contemplated in the initial period, because the intelligible and the intellect's recollection of the intelligible are immutable. But when the soul is incarnate, it is distracted by desire (*epithumía*) and spirit (*thumós*). Because moral goodness is a consequence of the soul's

<sup>12</sup>Diogenes Laertius VIII, 5; Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 45; Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 63.

recollection and focus on the intelligible, the soul is morally weakened. Hence, the retributive system based on reincarnation. During the last nine periods of a cycle a soul may inhabit the body of a man, a woman, a bird, a beast or a fish, the oyster being the lowest kind of living being. Philosophers can free themselves from their body after three periods only.

When the soul becomes detached from the body for which it cared, its corporeal activities cease being exercised, and it loses the memory of events associated with these activities. In this twofold sense one can, it seems to me, declare the functions known as the spirit (*thumós*) and desire (*epithumía*) to be “mortal” (*Timaeus* 69c5–d6).<sup>13</sup> As a result of the soul’s separation from its body, spirit and desire cease to be exercised after death, and since no memory of what they have done in the past persists, they can be qualified as “mortal,” even if they remain as specific functions of the soul. From this perspective, death, that stops the functions of the human soul known as spirit and desire, may be defined as a forgetting of the body they took care of. Insofar as they are the activities of a soul, these functions share the soul’s immortality, but they are in “standby,” so to speak, as long as the soul has not yet been reincarnated.

By way of conclusion, the intellect of a soul is individualized, on earth, by the quality of its contemplation of the intelligible. In this context, individuality is associated with the body in a negative way, in the sense that the body reduces the quality of intellectual activity. Individuality is therefore defined by a deficit regarding the pure contemplation of the intelligible. It makes possible a system of retribution where bodies are signs of the quality of a soul depending on its intellectual activity.

### 2.2.2 *Individual Immortality*

Assuming the soul is not that of a philosopher on its third incarnation, the souls of mortal beings incarnate after a certain time lapse. Spirit and desire then make a brand-new start and adapt to this new body; they persist in relation with it, until the body is destroyed. There would be different human souls contemplating the intelligible with different levels of accuracy, these souls being in a sense individual, since they have separate contemplations and subsequent destinies. The individuality of a soul is thus dependent on the series of its particular existences. This individuality persists for a certain stretch of time, but not for eternity, for it is linked to the

<sup>13</sup> See Brisson (2011).

history of a soul during a cycle of ten periods. At the end of each cycle, one may think that the soul loses its individuality, before resuming its re-ascent toward the intelligible with the gods and daimons, and acquiring, for another cycle of ten periods, a new individuality which will be placed in question once again. In other words, it is the soul as a soul that is immortal, not any individualized soul; individualization begins anew with each cycle. Therefore, Plato's thought on soul is not very different from oriental doctrines of reincarnation. In this scheme, it is not the individual soul that persists, but so to speak the available pool of human souls.

There is therefore no contradiction in Plato's dialogues on the question of immortality.

- In the *Phaedrus* as in the *Timaeus*, the soul as the principle and the source of movement is, by definition, presented as immortal.
- The souls of gods and daimons always keep their individuality, because their body is indestructible. At the other end of the living chain, the souls of plants are deprived of any individuality because they lack intellect (*noûs*), individuality being linked to the quality of the intellect.
- In the case of the human soul, immortality and mortality are dependent on this soul's relations with a body. Because the body it animates is destructible, one may qualify certain functions of this soul, spirit, and desire, as "mortal."
- During its life on earth, the intellect of a soul is individualized, in the sense that the care of the body reduces the quality of intellectual activity. Individuality is therefore defined by a deficit with regard to the intelligible.
- At the end of each cycle, this individuality disappears since the soul must lose all its characteristics before being re-integrated within another cycle. In short, the human soul in Plato has only a relative individual immortality, limited in time.

## WORKS CITED

- Brisson, L. 1998. *Plato the Myth Maker*, translated with an introduction by G. Naddaf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2003. Le corps des dieux. In *Les dieux de Platon: Actes du Colloque international organisé à l'Université de Caen Basse-Normandie*, ed. J. Laurent, 11–23. Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen.

- . 2004. Myths in Plato's ethics. In *Plato Ethicus. Philosophy of Life*, ed. M. Migliori, L.M. Napolitano Valditara, and D. Del Forno, 63–76. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.
- . 2008. Reminiscence in Plato. In *Platonism and forms of intelligence*, ed. J. Dillon and M.É. Zovko, 179–190. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- . 2011. The mortal parts of the soul, or death forgetting the body. In *Inner life and soul: Psyche in Plato*, ed. M. Migliori, L.M. Napolitano Valditara, and A. Fermani, 63–70. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.



## CHAPTER 3

---

# One and Many in Plato's *Metaphysics*

*William H. F. Altman*

There is, of course, no such book as Plato's *Metaphysics*; apart from his *Letters*, he survives by design only in his dialogues. But if someone *were* to write a book called *Plato's Metaphysics*,<sup>1</sup> it is Aristotle who would make such a thing possible. Consider, by way of proof, the early and perhaps doubled mention of Aristotle in the opening lines of Terry Irwin's *Plato's Ethics*:

Anyone who is interested in the contribution of Aristotle [N. B.], Hume, or Kant to moral philosophy can turn to at least one book in English that tries to give a fairly full and detailed account of the philosopher's main

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Allen (1965); this book was required reading when Ed and I were graduate students at the University of Toronto in the late 1970s. I do not remember conversing with him at that time—it turns out we both took the same class with Gregory Vlastos in the Spring of 1979—and in any case I was only in my second year while he was about to finish.

---

In Honor of Edward C. Halper

---

W. H. F. Altman (✉)  
Independent Scholar, Calais, ME, USA

ethical views. The same cannot be said of Plato's *ethics* [emphasis mine; I take this to be the second mention].<sup>2</sup>

As for "Plato's metaphysics," I doubt that even Edward Halper would claim that he could find the One and the Indefinite Dyad in Plato's dialogues (or some set of them) without Aristotle's help, but I could be wrong about that; in any case, as the great Aristotelian that he is, Halper brings a recognizably Aristotelian sensibility to reading Plato, and it is appropriate to honor the greatest Aristotle scholar these States have produced by reconsidering Plato in relation to the One and the Many.

Ed Halper was Father Owens's student at Toronto but this explains only in part the brilliance of his first book. Given that W. D. Ross was the great authority on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* for our generation, the neatness and dexterity with which Halper repeatedly snubbed the Englishman's interpretive nose, dancing lightly while in fact riding roughshod over his views in the notes, is a thing of great beauty. By way of illustration, consider the times he crossed swords with Sir David in his first volume on the central books (Halper 1989). The young Halper advanced with boldness and skill, showing why Ross was wrong to distinguish "a particular object that happens to be a triangle" from a "triangle having angles equal to two right angles" (Halper 1989, 259n13). Sir David is also proved wrong through inconsistency on "what it is" (Halper 1989, 270n76) and through misunderstanding on "materiate universal" (Halper 1989, 274n114). Halper's technique is especially interesting to observe when he undertakes to defend Aristotle from Ross; since Ross was a committed Aristotelian and had frequently defended the Stagirite, this was a particularly neat trick. Consider the following (Halper 1989, 273n11) as an indication of bold and incisive polemic:

He [sc. Ross] thinks that Aristotle should have concluded that the definitions of mathematical do include matter, namely space. This is not Aristotle's view of space, but even if it were, Ross's proposal could not apply to numbers.

<sup>2</sup>Irwin (1995, vii). Note that in chapter 1 ("Plato, Socrates, and the Dialogues"), two of the eight sections name Aristotle in their titles (i.e., "3. Aristotle and the Dialogues" and "5. Aristotle and Socrates"). Cf. "6. The Order of the Dialogues" on page 11: "Aristotle's comments [sc. on Socrates] help us to identify a group of dialogues that we can in any case distinguish (without his help) on doctrinal grounds; he gives us good reason for regarding this group as Socratic."

Examples could be multiplied.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt in my mind that when Parmenides Press publishes the third and final volume of Halper's *One and Many*, we will be in possession of a masterpiece of amazing dimensions, one that I believe will stand the test of time, for Halper's concentration on "One and Many" is a brilliant structural insight which organizes, enlivens, and elevates the whole. But as he admitted in the "Preface to the Second Edition" of his first volume (Halper 2005a, xxv–xxxiv), few critics were able to appreciate the value of his insight. As a result, he was forced to respond and thus to explain the importance of the Problem of the One and the Many for understanding Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and I will use a few statements from this importantly explanatory document to introduce the role that "the Problem"—hereafter referring to the Problem of the One and the Many—plays in Plato. To begin with, there is Halper's definition of the Problem: "in the central books, the problem of the one and the many appears as the problem of how *ousia* can be one and, thereby, a first principle despite its apparent plurality," that is, "with the question of how *ousia* can be one" (Halper 2005a, xxvi). After noting the inseparability of a singular οὐσία from its many attributes and its many parts, the necessary interplay of both genus and differentiae in its definition, and finally the fact that for Aristotle "an individual sensible *ousia* is a composite of form and matter" (Halper 2005a, xxvi–vii), Halper subsumes these difficulties to the Problem:

In general, the problem is how to identify or define *ousia* in such a way that it is indeed one if the features that enable us to identify or define *ousia* seem to make it many and if *ousia* cannot exist apart from these features, nor they from it. In short, the question of how *ousia* can be one is a real problem that requires coming to grips with the nature of *ousia* (Halper 2005a, xxvii).

Although Halper defends the use of the Problem as "a tool to understand, and to assess, the nature that he ascribes to *ousia*," he compares it to a ladder that will ultimately be discarded (Halper 2005a, xxix); indeed he concludes the Preface: "Ironically, it is the exploration of a dead issue, the problem of the one and the many, that allows Aristotle's metaphysics to come alive" (Halper 2005a, xxxiv). But apart from the question of whether the Problem really is "a dead issue," we are forced to wonder how

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Halper (1989, 261n18, a series of notes on 269, and 274n117; he also fights him to a draw at 274a118).

it came to be so, and more specifically, what role Aristotle himself played in killing it, or at least trying to do so. The crucial point here is that “the problem of how *ousia* can be one and, thereby, a first principle despite its apparent plurality” is not so much the solution of the Problem as its assassination, for the core of the Problem is the insight that the One cannot be Many and that many different things can by no means be synthesized into something that in any meaningful sense can be called “one.” In other words, “one” would indeed need “to be said in many ways” in order to make one of those ways consistent with the unity possessed by a synthesis or composite.

Since Halper has spent his professional career in Georgia, it may be useful to recall that *e pluribus unum* notwithstanding, the United States of America *were* appropriately referred to as plural in a grammatical sense before the War Between the States, and that the Confederacy in particular was opposed to the Yankee Nation’s “solution” to the Problem of the One and the Many. So when Walt Whitman wrote in 1855 that “the United States themselves are perhaps the greatest poem” (First Preface to *Leaves of Grass*), or when even the arch-Federalist John Marshall was forced to write: “the United States form, for many, and for most important purposes, a single nation” (*Cohens v. Virginia*; 1821), there still remained some national awareness that even when modified by the adjective “united,” the plural subject “states” *require* a plural verb. Nor is the Problem confined to “these States,” but was in play every time a plural neuter noun took a singular verb in classical Greek. If this was grammatical, it was still Problematic in the strict sense, for one thing that *all things* (πάντα) cannot possibly be is *one* (ἓν), and that is true regardless of whether it is Heraclitus or the λόγος—just as if the two could be distinguished if “all things are one [ἓν πάντα εἶναι]”—who is telling us that they are (DK 22, B50).

And therefore, no matter how important it is for understanding Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* to gasp the way in which “*ousia*’s form and matter are one, a single actuality or function that constitutes the organism as a single entity” (Halper 2005a, xxxiii), this formulation does not solve or even dissolve the Problem; rather, it *overcomes* it, and that’s a polite way of saying that it rides roughshod over it. The Problem is not as dead as Halper thinks it is. By way of proof, consider the following sentence:

Part of the significance of the one and the many is in its providing an interpretive thread that ties together the central books' complex and seemingly disparate discussions into a single, rich and coherent argument (Halper 2005a, xxvii).

Even in his own voice, Halper is untroubled by recasting plural "discussions" as a singularity, and in this he shows himself once again to be true to the spirit of Aristotle. But the Problem lives on. Thanks to the prefix "com-" in "complex" and even "co-" in "coherent," both describe what must necessarily be plural before being recast as singular. And thanks to the prefix "dis-" in both "disparate" and "discussions," we don't need to wait for the final "s" in the latter to recognize it as plural: one thing can't be "disparate," and only what has parts can be "complex." At least two things are required in order for them to "cohere," and unless we're thinking of the kind of thing that Socrates offers us in Plato's *Republic*, no monologue is really a "discussion," which requires "difference" if not "dissonance"; neither a single note nor a single thing can provide either.

It's not as if Aristotle was unaware of this, and when it suited him, he could deploy the Problem against others. It is because of the Problem, for example, that "the equal itself" cannot be a Platonic Form, because such a thing cannot possibly be singular: at least two things are necessary for there to be "equality,"<sup>4</sup> and if he had a mind to do so, Aristotle could have added "difference" and "sameness" to his critique of Plato in *Περὶ ἰδέων*.<sup>5</sup> As for *Metaphysics* M and N, Aristotle's critique of Plato's "Theory of Number," and of "Ideal Number" in particular, depends on exactly the same kind of naïve awareness of the Problem that the Stagirite sees fit to overcome in upholding the alleged unity of οὐσία: "To Aristotle it appeared self-evident that all genuine number is a plurality of units" (Wedberg 1955, 82.). This explains why Aristotle gets tangled up in explaining the kind of μονάδες, whether "combinable" within εἰδητικὸν ἀριθμὸν, or ἀσύμβλητοι, instead of attributing to Plato or the Platonists the absurd

<sup>4</sup> See fragment 3 of Aristotle's *Περὶ ἰδέων* in Ross (1955, 125).

<sup>5</sup> See Owen (1975, 110): "αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον is indeed equal, but how can we without absurdity ask to what it is equal? It cannot be equal to everything or to nothing (both would engender paradoxes), and it cannot be equal to some things but not others (which would re-import just the compresence of opposites that the Form was invented [note the sarcasm] to avoid: *Prm.* 129b–130a). The incompleteness which so embarrassingly characterizes 'equal' in its ordinary applications cannot, it seems, characterize it when it designates the Form."

doctrine that any number could lack μονάδες entirely, and hence be an atomic unity of a merely ideal plurality.

Halper will need to sort out the meaning of ἀσύμβλητοι when it comes to μονάδες in his third volume. For the present, it is enough to explain that Aristotle's testimony suggests that Plato had two distinct conceptions of number—apart, that is, from a collection of cows, none of which are true μονάδες (*Phlb.* 56d10; cf. the second of the ἐνάδων at *Phlb.* 15a5)—one in which number was intrinsically plural or μοναδικός (i.e., composed of a plurality of μονάδες) and the other where unitary *numbers*—not the μονάδες *in* them, but the numbers themselves—are ἀσύμβλητοι, or what he called τὸ εἰδητικὸν ἀριθμὸν. The first conception respects the Problem: every number is necessarily plural, composed of monads that are themselves the antithesis of complex. But the second promptly runs afoul of the Problem, and once again, the prefixes tell the story. There is no “monadic” sense in which a number is or can be one, the very thing that only its—rather “their,” since every number is necessarily plural—components are.

Consider the two prefixes in ἀσύμβλητοι. In this case, the Greek prefix “σύμ-” takes the place of the Latin “com-,” and apart from the alpha-privative, the word refers to something in which at least two disparate things have been “thrown together.” The word ἀσύμβλητοι thus includes a past element of plurality that is then subsequently negated by the addition of “α-,” and this element is well captured by the conception of μοναδικός: a number of μονάδες, each one of them singular, are “thrown together” to create a necessarily plural ἀριθμός. If the purpose of ἀσύμβλητοι ἀριθμοί were to *negate* that conception—to deny that any number was or could be μοναδικός—it is impossible to believe that the word ἀσύμβλητοι would be the appropriate means for that negation, implying as it does that there are σύμβλητοι ἀριθμοί but that there is *another* class, in addition, that are ἀσύμβλητοι, and moreover, that Plato subscribed to the existence of this class *as well*.

One thing is clear: if Plato did this, he too fell afoul of the Problem. But what makes Halper's work so important is that even if the Problem were really dead *for us*—which it will never be—it was alive for Aristotle, and therefore Aristotle can only conceive of Ideal Number *as being composed of monads*. Whether these are combinable or not *within* the number itself, Halper must explain. But for lesser scholars, the Problem had long since died, and this led to disastrous results where Plato is concerned. In rejecting Aristotle's claim that Plato had regarded at least one kind of number

as μοναδικός and therefore as intermediate between Ideas and sensible objects,<sup>6</sup> Harold Cherniss thought he was defending Plato against Aristotle when he attributed a unitary conception of Number to him.<sup>7</sup> Following Paul Shorey in the view that numbers too are Platonic Ideas,<sup>8</sup> and subscribing to John Cook Wilson's view that as Ideas, Plato's Numbers must therefore be ἀσύμβλητοι,<sup>9</sup> Cherniss was able to find atomic or singular "numbers" not only in *Phaedo*, where there is a textual basis for finding them, but also in *Philebus* and the arithmetic lesson in *Republic* 7 (Cherniss 1947, 238–40n79), where only "the one itself" is indivisible, not any Number that is composed of them.

In order to prove to Cebes that the soul is both deathless and indestructible, Socrates concocts an analogy of dubious validity that he prefaces with a lengthy discussion of method (*Phd.* 99c8–100c7). We may well wonder if he was right to jettison the notion that there are two units in two (*Phd.* 96e6–97a6)<sup>10</sup> even while we applaud his refusal to generate "two" by splitting "one" (*Phd.* 97a6–8), but the preliminary defense of a unitary "twoness" as the *cause* of "two" (*Phd.* 101c4–5)—and it is no accident that Aristotle must cite the Final Argument in *Phaedo* in order to prove that Plato regarded his Ideas as causes<sup>11</sup>—is necessary for the proof that follows. When conceived as an "occupier"<sup>12</sup> that compels three things to be three (*Phd.* 104d1–3), "the triad" also necessarily causes them to be "odd" as well (*Phd.* 104d5–7), and in just this way, when soul occupies the body, it causes it to be alive (*Phd.* 105d3–4). For the same reason, we are told, that "three" cannot admit of being "even," so too "soul" cannot admit of being "dead" (*Phd.* 105e2–106a1).

The Problem is even more evident in the Final Argument than it is in the Recollection Argument: there, only a single use of the plural (the

<sup>6</sup> On Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A6 (987b14–16), see Ross (1924, 1.iii–lvii and 1.166–68). Note the references on ἔτι δὲ παρὰ τὰ αἰσθητά κτλ.

<sup>7</sup> Cherniss (1944, 513–524), and Cherniss (1945, 75–78, 93n6, and 102n79).

<sup>8</sup> Shorey (1903, 83); cf. Shorey (1884, 37n3): "De portentosa voce . . . satis habeo monere omnes ideas Platonicas aequae ac numeros ideales ἀσυμβλήτους esse in se spectantes."

<sup>9</sup> Wilson (1904); cf. Cherniss (1945, 47–48, 93n6, and 96n86).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wedberg (1955, 154n14): "Part of the problem that Plato pretends to find in the generation of 2 through the addition of 1 to 1, he himself resolves in *Hippias Major* 302a–b, where he observes that 2 is predicated of Socrates and Hippias collectively, not individually."

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A9 (991b3–4); the reference (Ross) is to "*Phd.* 100d."

<sup>12</sup> A term coined in Schiller (1967, 54n13), but popularized by Gallop (1975, 202). For illuminating discussion, see Bae (1996).

famous αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα at *Phd.* 74c1) in distinction to the two singulars τὸ ἴσον and ἡ ἰσότης offers a ray of Platonic sunshine to an otherwise unitary and thus self-contradictory conception of “equality” and “the equal.” Aristotle allows the same kind of Platonic sunshine to invade *Metaphysics* when he writes in M7: “If all the units are combinable and without difference, mathematical number results and only this one kind, and Forms cannot be numbers.”<sup>13</sup> How right he is! To spell out the connection: “the equals themselves” are σύμβλητοι μονάδες, and each one of them is singular: equal and identical to all the rest. The sunshine becomes brighter in the Final Argument, where Socrates not only permits the intrusion of a plural τὰ τρία amidst the talk of a singular ἡ τριάς and even ἡ ἰδέα τῶν τριῶν, but dances between referring to other numbers as singular and plural. Things become even more amusing when Socrates claims that ἡ μόνάς is the cause of “oddness” and not the cause of “the odd and the even,” that is, of number as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

To begin with, this erroneous claim sets up an equivocation on the term μόνάς between *Phaedo* 101c7 and 105c5: in the latter passage, it is merely one of the constituent μονάδες—albeit “the odd man out” or “monad in the middle”—of a necessarily μοναδικὸς ἀριθμὸς; in the former, it is “the idea of one.” But two conceptions of μόνάς are insufficient to trigger the Problem even if they do point to two rival conceptions of number, one of which is Problematic. Only when a number is referred to as a singular do we encounter the Problem, and Socrates uses the Odd and the Even at 104a5–b4 to emphasize it. Knowing that the monad-based conception of number is about to be applied *to odd numbers only*, Plato makes the error visible not only by referring to odd numbers *in the singular* at 104a8, with the Triad now joined by ἡ πεμπτάς (cf. *Tht.* 196a2), but by promptly using the *properly* plural number-words to describe *even numbers* at 104b2, where we find τὰ δύο καὶ τέτταρα (see Stone 2014). Placed between the Problem-spawning ἡ δυάς at 101c5 and the false claim that ἡ μόνάς is the cause of odd numbers alone at 105c5, this properly plural τὰ δύο, immediately following the useful but self-contradictory ἡ τριάς, forces us to ask ourselves: “Which formulation is right?”

Before answering this question, an earlier point must be cleared up. In his third volume, Halper will need to provide an alternative to Julia Annas’s

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* M7 (1081a5–7), translation in Annas (1976, 102).

<sup>14</sup> See Denyer (2008, 192) on *Prt.* 356e6–357a1: “the numbers generally were described as ‘the odd and the even’” (cf., e.g., *R.* 510c, *Tht.* 198a).

1976 commentary on M and N. It would be difficult to make a more misleading observation than this one: “Plato regarded Form numbers to be μοναδικοί ἀριθμοί” (Annas 1976, 15). Since the closest things in Plato’s dialogues to Aristotle’s εἰδητικοὶ ἀριθμοί are ἡ δυάς, ἡ τριάς, and ἡ πεμπτάς in *Phaedo*, and since the only basis for considering these ἀριθμοί to be μοναδικοί is Aristotle’s lengthy discussion of whether the μονάδες that make them so are ἀσύμβλητοι or not, Annas is wrong to identify Plato as the agent here, especially because Shorey, Cook Wilson, Cherniss, and Ross had all insisted that Plato’s Ideal Numbers were *not* μοναδικοί, reserving that adjective for the “Intermediates” or “mathematical numbers” that all of them denied had a place in “Plato’s Theory of Number.”<sup>15</sup> But even worse is Annas’s way of reading Plato:

And in the *Phaedo* passage the Greek words for ‘twoness’ and ‘threeness’ are used interchangeably with those of ‘two’ and ‘three.’ In the dialogues Plato shows no awareness that these are very different ways of regarding numbers. But there is a tension between them, and it leads Plato into an elaborately misguided theory (Annas 1976, 13).

So here’s hoping that Halper will not assume that Aristotle’s lengthy discussion of the kind of μονάδες of which εἰδητικοὶ ἀριθμοί are composed sheds any light on “an elaborately misguided theory” for which *Plato* is responsible. It is probably true that if Aristotle had referred to ἡ τριάς καὶ ἡ πεμπτάς in the same sentence in which he also referred to even numbers as τὰ δύο καὶ τέτταρα, we might well be warranted in saying he used them “interchangeably.” But since we are dealing with Plato, who is repeatedly and indeed ubiquitously challenging his readers to determine whether or not what one of his characters has just said or is about to say is true or not (cf. *Prt.* 343c6–7 and 358a1–4, *Grg.* 505e3–506a3, and *R.* 507a4–6), it would be better not to read him as if he were Aristotle, and to resolve these “two very different ways of regarding numbers” not on the basis of the claim that “Plato shows no awareness” of the difference, but rather to see him challenging the reader to decide: “Which formulation is right?”

We have been given a great deal of advanced training in how to answer this question correctly long before Socrates dies in *Phaedo*. Consider

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ross (1924, 2.427): “The weakness of Aristotle’s position is that he believes in mathematical numbers, which do not exist, and does not believe in ideal or universal numbers, which do.” I fondly hope that Ed will wring Ross’s neck for this error.

Annas one more time: “In earlier works [sc. earlier than *Phlb.*] Plato does not seem to have distinguished carefully between *one* and *unit*: they are confused in *Phaedo*.” The fact that Socrates explains the philosopher’s ἀριθμοί as composed of infinitely repeatable and always identical μονάδες in the apparently late *Philebus* causes Annas some trouble: how can the earlier *Phaedo* anticipate Aristotle’s discussion of inter-Academy debate on the qualities of εἰδητικοὶ ἀριθμοί whereas there is no trace of such numbers in *Philebus*? Since I attach more importance than she does to Plato’s *Phaedo* as dramatically late, and indeed *latest* with respect to Socrates (see Altman 2016b, xiii–xv and 446–451), this would pose no problem for me if I believed that Socrates had arrived at a Shorey-Cherniss-Cook Wilson-Ross conception of unitary Ideal Numbers only at the end of his life, thus outgrowing the necessarily *earlier* number-conception he had articulated in *Philebus*. But I don’t, believing instead that the Final Argument in *Phaedo* constitutes the Final Exam on “One and Many in Plato’s Metaphysics.”

To answer the foregoing question, then, Plato is challenging his readers to reject in *Phaedo* a number-conception that is opposed to the one we find or rather have found in *Philebus* and elsewhere: the μόνας is a “unit,” not simply “one,” τὰ δύο καὶ τέτταρα are therefore preferable to ἡ τριάς καὶ ἡ πεμπτάς, and just as ἀντὰ τὰ ἴσα capture the truth more accurately than either τὸ ἴσον or ἡ ἰσότης, so too τὰ τρία do the same with respect to ἡ τριάς. The latter is a contradiction in terms because it triggers the Problem: “three” cannot be singular because the Many are in no sense One—in no Platonic sense, that is—nor can a One be Many (*Sph.* 251b7–8). I won’t expect any Aristotelian to acknowledge that the argument for the soul’s immortality in *Phaedo* has reached its persuasive apex with the swan-song (*Phd.* 84d9–85b7), and that our Socratic Penelope will be reweaving (*Phd.* 84a2–b3) in the Final Argument—through the Ideas as causes of Becoming (*Phd.* 100c6–d8)—what the Affinity Argument (*Phd.* 74b4–84b8) has just put asunder: that is, the Ideas as the cause of the soul’s emancipation from the body (*Phd.* 79d1–9). But I would try to persuade a Platonist that only if you understand why numbers are *not* Ideas will your soul be properly prepared for immortality, and that’s because Aristotle was right: Plato regarded τὰ μαθηματικά as τὰ μεταξύ, and thus as “intermediate” between the transcendent Ideas and sensible objects. So if you think that ἡ τριάς is a Platonic Idea, your thinking has not emancipated itself from the sensible world, because the Intermediates are no closer to one than to the other.

When Aristotelians turn to interpreting Plato, they are necessarily more interested in the “Problem of Participation,” that is, how the Ideas interact with sensible objects, than in the properly Platonic project of emancipating ourselves from the sensible world through an ascent to the Ideas. Within the pedagogical economy of that attempted emancipation and ascent, Plato’s One, the final solution to the Problem of the One and the Many, plays the principal and indispensable role. If the One were an Idea, especially if it were the ἀρχή of all Ideas, every sensible thing—and Aristotle’s οὐσία in particular—would “participate” in it, and this “participation” would explain how a complex plurality of parts and attributes, of form and matter, could nevertheless be One. Instead, Plato used Parmenides to identify the One that is nothing but unitary, without parts, indivisible, and atomic—and thus the only One worthy of the name—as a product of δῖάνοια in *Parmenides* (143a7),<sup>16</sup> and Halper was kind enough to praise a paper I gave in Paris in the summer of 2019 on this very point (Altman 2019). As a necessarily non-existent concept—for Parmenides separates it from its οὐσία in order to make it nothing but one (ἐν μόνον at *Prm.* 143a8)—the One is invaluable for a Platonist. Although it is the ἀρχή of all five of the most precise sciences as described in *Republic* 7, it remains a mere Hypothesis in accordance with the method of the Second Part of the Divided Line: an intelligible Image of what every sensible thing would be when considered solely with respect to its unity, individuality, and singularity, but which no sensible thing actually is *or possibly could be*, Aristotle’s οὐσία included (see Altman 2019, 2020).

For Plato, then, it is the One that solves the Problem, and it alone can do so: it is the only thing that cannot be Many, as each and every number must be. But since all sensible things necessarily have parts, components, or attributes—and that holds true even when we reach the level of generality required by Aristotle’s form and matter—we leave the sensible world behind the moment we imagine this hypothetical, individual, and necessarily indivisible One. Plato’s One is therefore the first step (and nothing more) toward his Ideas, for it emancipates our thought from the physical world. On its foundation, an elaborate structure is built, beginning with geometry in *Republic* 7, but in no way confined, as Aristotle took Plato’s

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Prm.* 135b5–c6, 158c2–7, 165a5–b4, and 165b4–7; thanks to the use of λαμβάνειν, the application of δῖάνοια is also implicit at 164c7–d5. If ἄπειρον πλήθει is “the Indefinite Dyad—see Sayre (2005, 124–133)—then *both* of the so-called ἀρχαί are shown to be products of dianoetic abstraction in *Parmenides*.

Intermediates to be, to τὰ μαθηματικά. And with the elimination of that restriction, Aristotle's critique of Plato's Ideas falls to pieces, for it is only as "one-over-many" singularities, in which many sensible things participate and thus resemble, that the Third Man can achieve its infinite regress. "The Idea of Man" cannot be thought without an Image, and it depends on the Hypothesis of the One, for such an "Idea" is really an Intermediate, and nothing more than the imagined unity of what all men equally are. As a three-dimensional thing, it is in a direct line of descent from the point, the sphere, and the planets, not because Plato regarded physical reality as an emanation from the One and the Infinite Dyad through Ideal Number, but because all of the Intermediates depend equally on the merely hypothetical One, no closer to the true Ideas than to the sensible objects, of each of which it is merely the most highly abstracted Image.

No closer, but likewise no farther: the Intermediates are infinitely closer to the Ideas than sensible things are, and so important is the One in the economy of Platonic pedagogy that it is only in a single easily and heretofore overlooked passage in *Parmenides* that he links it to the Second Part of the Divided Line through δίανοια. It is easy to see why defenders of Plato like Shorey and Cherniss thought it best to insist that the objects of mathematics—necessarily abstract, universal, and of unquestionable utility to the life of the mind—were Platonic Ideas, for it is easiest to explain and defend the Ideas by using, for example, "right-angled triangularity" or "the circle itself" as instances of them. The problem, then, is that apart from the One that makes the three sides of a triangle three and the three kinds of angles possible—to say nothing of the center of the circle and its radii and circumference, neither of which are "indivisible lines"—all of the other Intermediates are necessarily Many, not One. The reason that Plato tests us with ἡ τριάς and ἡ ἰσότης in *Phaedo* is because if we think *they* are Ideas, we have not solved the Problem, for we are regarding something that is Many as One. Only if we know that the One alone is truly one—and by the One I obviously don't mean the cosmological and neo-Pythagorean ἀρχή of the *Prinzipienlehre*, but merely the humble subject of the arithmetic lesson in *Republic* 7—will we have solved the Problem and thus definitively and permanently emancipated ourselves from a conception of "one" that "is said in many ways" and which can be construed as *in any way* present in sensible things, whether through participation, resemblance, or constitutive and synthesizing com-presence.

Halper has demonstrated that if we were somehow to strip Aristotle's οὐσία of its unity, it would no longer be οὐσία; what Plato demonstrates

in *Parmenides* is that *unless* we strip from “the one that is” or “the one being” of its οὐσία by an act of abstractive intellection—hence λαμβάνειν διάνοια at *Parmenides* 143a7—it cannot be truly One. Ed mentions the crucial passage in a footnote:

The regress of Z5 bears some similarity to the argument at the beginning of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (142c–143a) that shows the inseparability of one and being. Plato begins with the being that is one and then attempts to separate its oneness from its being. However the one that is separated from the one being also *is* and the being that is separated from the one being is one. Thus each of the two components is exactly the same as the original one being (Halper 1989, 270n71).

This brilliant argument in defense of Aristotle is as worthy of Hegel as it is unworthy of Plato.

Halper's only basis for claiming that “the one that is separated from the one being also *is*” is that we are talking about it, and a quick look back to the end of the First Hypothesis in *Parmenides* proves that we have been talking about and describing something *that doesn't exist* (*Prm.* 141e9–142a6). Parmenides “takes in thought” the One “without that of which we said it to be participating,” that is, οὐσία; it's difficult to see how Plato could have made it any clearer that the One that is μόνον καθ' αὐτό and thus ἐν μόνον does not exist. Halper comes closer to the truth with the other component that survives this dianoetic act of abstraction, that is, that “the being that is separated from the one being is one,” and that's good because Parmenides promptly tries to use it as a second unit, in addition to the non-existent but “one only” One, to generate two. In fact, however, the first act is the only important one, for Plato's numbers—as per *Philebus*, for example—are made up of μονάδες that are in every way identical to each other (*Phlb.* 56e2–3 and *R.* 526a3–4), and this identity does not rest on the alleged identity of the (one) being that has been separated from the one, and the (existent) one that has likewise been separated from being. As a result, when Halper concludes this note with the words: “the regress is intended to show the inseparability of two constituents in a composite,” he has ignored Plato's solution to the Problem by preferring Aristotle's assassination of it.

The expression “the inseparability of two constituents in a composite” illustrates why *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics* is such a towering achievement, especially since the relevant “composite” here isn't the

inseparability of God and Man in Jesus or the indivisibility of divine substance from baked-in attributes in the Eucharist. It also explains why Halper has elsewhere displayed a high degree of interest in Christian August Brandis (1790–1867), whose “On the Lost Books of Aristotle on the Ideas and the Good” (Brandis 1823) constituted an important milestone in the pre-Tübingen School exploration of Plato’s *Prinzipienlehre* (Summerell 2005). Leaving aside for a moment exactly what it is that the One and the Indefinite Dyad will come together to create or constitute, the simple point is that *whatever* that may be—whether the Ideal Numbers or the cosmos as whole as well as every single thing in it—will be a composite of two constituents which will be inseparable. In short: it will trigger the Problem of the One and the Many, since one thing will be two. If ever there were a good time to use an infinite regress to destroy a Platonic “doctrine,” it would be here, since the kind of One that in no way partakes of “indeterminate dyadicity” must certainly be different from the kind of “One” that makes the One and the Indefinite Dyad inseparable constituents of a composite, and which allows us to consider that composite as “One” (and so on).

It is no accident that the greatest Aristotelian these States have produced should, when turning attention to Plato, become a proponent of the *Prinzipienlehre*. It is not just that the best evidence for this view is found *in* Aristotle, but that the most coherent version of this view *is* *Aristotelianism itself*. One of the greatest products of the Tübingen School is a study by Heinz Happ on the origins of Aristotle’s concept of matter (Happ 1971), and he demonstrates how the “Aristotelian Matter-Concept” (*Materie-Begriff*) emerged from the Indeterminate Dyad or “the great and the small” (Happ 1971, 256–73; see also 93–95, 110–13, and 133–35), Happ’s is a much sounder approach than the one that has motivated so many to assert the compatibility of Plato and Aristotle in general; we are on better ground asserting the compatibility of Aristotle with a principles-based conception of Platonism for which Aristotle is our primary source.

After all, “the unity of Plato and Aristotle” already begs the Problem, and the simplest explanation for the incompatibility of Plato and Aristotle is their radically different responses to the Problem of the One and the Many. In case it isn’t obvious, I am claiming that what makes Halper’s work such a towering achievement is that it really is *his* approach to the Problem “that allows Aristotle’s metaphysics to come alive” (Halper 2005a, xxxiv). But Plato’s response to the Problem, that is, the One that

cannot be Many, is antithetical to Aristotle's, and therefore points beyond itself to a kingdom "not of this world." It is the eternal *Jenseits* of the Idea of the Good—as opposed to the merely dianoetic One that begins to free our souls from concern with what Aristotle calls οὐσία—that makes Plato and Aristotle incompatible.

In the essay "Plato's Principles of Mathematics" that Halper wrote for the Brandis translation, he claims that Plato failed to explain how the Intermediates emerged from the two ἀρχαί of the *Prinzipienlehre*:

The form-numbers are not identical with the mathematical intermediates, and the latter are not the sensibles and, indeed, exist apart from sensibles. The obvious gap in the account is how the mathematical intermediates emerge from the principles, and just how these intermediates are connected with the sensibles (Halper 2005b, 106).

As far as Halper is concerned, there is no difficulty and hence no "gap in the account" of how *form-numbers* "emerge from the principles": since numbers are at once Many and One,<sup>17</sup> it is easy to see how Ideal Numbers emerge from and are products of the One and the Indefinite Dyad. But there is an "obvious gap in the account" of this emergence and production as well: *Plato never says a single word about it*. And in the balance of this paper, I intend to show that Halper, although right about Aristotle, is wrong about Plato on two counts: not only is there no account in Plato of how form-numbers emerge from the principles—how could there be when none of them are mentioned?—but that Plato *does* give an account of how "mathematical intermediates," and the One above all, emerge from what will eventually become, through a series of misunderstandings, the Indefinite Dyad.

Before embarking on this Quixotic project, some review is requisite. I have been claiming that the only evidence for "form-numbers" in the dialogues is found in the final argument of *Phaedo*, whereas the evidence for "mathematical intermediates" can be found in *Republic*, *Philebus*, and other dialogues as well (Wedberg 1955, 122–28; cy. Ross 1951, 59–67). I have also claimed that it is because a unified number like ἡ τριάς triggers the Problem that Plato expects us to recognize its fraudulence, no matter

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Halper (2005b, 112): "A number is a plurality of units that has been united somehow into a single entity." Note that this is precisely the view endorsed by an anonymous reviewer for Palgrave.

how useful it may be for Socrates in persuading Cebes that even if his soul returns to human form again and again (*Phd.* 87d6–e5)—which it will only do if it remains attached to material things (*Phd.* 82b10–c9)—it must nevertheless prove to be indestructible (*Phd.* 88b3–6). Only if we recognize that numbers are merely Intermediates (and necessarily plural) can we fully emancipate our thought from sensible οὐσία, a phrase that is either a Platonic contradiction in terms (*R.* 525b2–c6) or which explains why Plato famously calls the Idea of the Good not ἄνευ (*Prm.* 143a8) but ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (*R.* 509b8). Finally, I will state as a claim what I have been implying throughout: Plato’s One is the humble αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν of the arithmetic lesson in *Republic* 7, not the neo-Pythagorean ἀρχή of which Aristotle spoke in *Metaphysics* A6.

In the arithmetic lesson, Plato describes how “thought” will summon the One in opposition to the Indefinite Dyad, albeit not the principle of that name. Although there is no basis in the text for proving that Plato regarded the One and the Indefinite Dyad as principles, it is possible to see how regarding them as such could emerge from what he did regard them to be, especially for those in the Academy, like Aristotle, who were more interested in physics than any true follower of Socrates could be.<sup>18</sup> The only un-hypothetical ἀρχή in Plato is the Idea of the Good,<sup>19</sup> and its role in Plato’s thought is rather ethical than cosmological.<sup>20</sup> Far closer to the sensible world is Plato’s One, and in the arithmetic lesson, Socrates shows how the merely hypothetical ἀρχή emerges from the pseudo-dyadic indistinctiveness of sense perception that I am claiming is the Platonic basis for what others would celebrate as “the Indefinite Dyad” and “the great and the small.” It is important to emphasize that I am not claiming that the One and the Indefinite Dyad cannot be found in Plato’s dialogues, only that it is not as the constituent ἀρχαί of any composite that they do so. Neither am I denying that Plato discussed “atomic lines” or ἀσύμβλητοι ἀριθμοί any more than he refrained from writing about ἡ τριάς or ἡ ἰσότης in *Phaedo*. What I am claiming is that all five of these conceptions trigger the Problem, and that it is in their opposite responses to it that we should,

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A6 (987b1–2): Σωκράτους δὲ, περὶ μὲν τὰ ἠθικὰ πραγματευομένου, περὶ δὲ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως οὐθέν.

<sup>19</sup> Following Adam (1905, 2.67) on ἀρχὴν ἀνυπόθετον at 510c6–7: “The only ἀρχὴ ἀνυπόθετος is the Idea of the Good: cf. 532a f.”

<sup>20</sup> Ed, along with Aristotle, thinks that Plato speaks through Timaeus; for the alternative view, see Altman (2016a, chapter 1).

with Halper's *One and Many* by our side, differentiate Aristotle from Plato as ἀσύμβλητοι.

Although Socrates has already mentioned “the bigness of them and the smallness” (*R.* 523e1) in the context of the famous Three Fingers (*R.* 523c4–524a1), it will save space to begin a few lines later when other opposite pairs do the same work:

‘In the first place, the sensation [ἡ αἴσθησις] that is set over the hard is of necessity related also to the soft, and it reports to the soul that the same thing is both hard and soft to its perception.’ ‘It is so,’ he said. ‘Then,’ said I, ‘is not this again a case where the soul must be at a loss [the verb is ἀπορεῖν] as to what significance for it the sensation of hardness has, if the sense reports the same thing as also soft? And, similarly, as to what the sensation [ἡ αἴσθησις] of light and heavy means by light and heavy, if it reports the heavy as light, and the light as heavy?’ ‘Yes, indeed,’ he said, ‘these communications to the soul are strange and invite reconsideration.’<sup>21</sup>

Plato is setting up the distinction between perception and intellection; hence the doubled use of ἡ αἴσθησις for the first. And just as it is the mark of ἡ αἴσθησις to be confused, that is, to ἀπορεῖν in the context of opposed doublets, so too it will be the mark of intellection to bring forth the One.

‘Naturally, then,’ said I, ‘it is in such cases as these that the soul first attempts—summoning both calculating reason and noetic insight [λογισμός τε καὶ νόησις]—to consider whether one or two is each of the things reported to it [εἴτε ἔν εἴτε δύο ἐστὶν ἕκαστα τῶν εἰσαγγελλομένων.].’ ‘Of course.’ (*R.* 524b3–6; Shorey modified).

The second bracketed phrase is a nice instance of the Problem: since ἕκαστα is neuter plural, it takes a singular verb, ἐστὶν in this case. There is, of course, no difficulty saying in English: “each of the two is,” since our “each” is singular, but since the Greek ἕκαστα is plural, it requires a peculiarity of Greek grammar—and note that the Problem is built into the language by its grammar—to say grammatically what Plato says here. But until we reach the neuter ἕκαστα, we are confronted with the not yet necessarily neuter δύο, and thus must think our way through δύο ἐστὶν, which

<sup>21</sup> *R.* 524a1–b2 (Paul Shorey translation). I will be using the nominative for nouns in the brackets for the inflected forms in the text for the sake of clarity in the exegesis; for the same reason, I will use the infinitive form of bracketed verbs.

in isolation means: “two is.” Since Greek has a dual verb form, it is possible to say “two eyes are better than one” as opposed to the ungrammatical “two eyes is better than one,” which is analogous to what we come across here. In any case, it is going to be through another hendiadys—that is, λογισμός τε καὶ νόησις—that we will move beyond the two different things that ἡ αἴσθησις reports about what the soul sees to seeing each of them distinguished as one. A moment’s reflection should be sufficient to recognize that “the Indefinite Dyad” is treating as one thing what is really two, and that it will be at the intersection of λογισμός τε καὶ νόησις—and I would locate that intersection in διάνοια—that each of the components of “both hard and soft” become one.

‘Therefore, if it should appear to be two, they seem to be different and each of them one? ‘Yes.’ ‘If, then, each is one and both two, it [sc. the soul] will know [νοεῖν] the two having been differentiated [τά γε δύο κεχωρισμένα; the plural article emphasized by γε], for it would not be an Undifferentiated Two [ἀχώριστά γε δύο, the ‘undifferentiated’ emphasized by γε] that it was knowing, but One (R. 524b7–c1; Shorey modified).

It is here that Plato fills the alleged “gap in the account is how the mathematical intermediates emerge from the principles.” Of course ἀχώριστά γε δύο is not an ἀρχή in any sense that would be useful to a physicist; it is at best “first for us” thanks to the phenomenological priority of ἡ αἴσθησις το λογισμός τε καὶ νόησις. In fact it describes the confused data of sense perception, where the same thing is perceived equally as two opposite things. What emerges out of this confusion are τά γε δύο κεχωρισμένα, and as Plato loved to point out, since both are two, each is one (cf. R. 476a3 with *Hp. Ma.* 301d5–e8). And in that singular “each,” we meet what really is an ἀρχή: the ἀρχή of Number and all the other One-over-Many Intermediates, that is, the One. Without the ἀχώριστά γε δύο of sense perception, there is no need to summon our capacity to νοεῖν, but once having summoned it, τά γε δύο κεχωρισμένα become an object of intellection. The One has made possible the real Two—that is, two separate Ones—for an “undifferentiated two” is neither truly two nor one, but rather something like the pseudo-dyadic indeterminacy of the unsynthesized sensory manifold. In short: Plato’s Indeterminate Dyad pertains to epistemology, not to physics.

'Sight too saw great and also again small [μέγα αὖ καὶ μικρόν], we say, not having been differentiated but as something having been all mixed together [οὐ κεχωρισμένον ἀλλὰ συγκεχυμένον τι]. Is not that so?' 'Yes.' 'And for the clarification of this, intellectual insight [ἡ νόησις] is compelled to contemplate great and small, not having been all mixed together but as separated things [οὐ συγκεχυμένα ἀλλὰ διωρισμένα], in the opposite way from sensation.' 'True.' 'And is it not in some such experience as this that the question first occurs to us, whatever then is the Great and also again the Small [τὸ μέγα αὖ καὶ τὸ μικρόν]?' 'By all means.' 'And this is the origin of the designation 'intelligible' for the one, and 'visible' for the other.' 'Just so,' he said (*R.* 524c3–14).

At this point, Socrates has reached the point where he can explain the difference between sensation and intellection in terms of the Problem. For ἡ αἴσθησις, the opposite qualities of a single thing are συγκεχυμένα; thanks to the One that makes the two qualities διωρισμένα, ἡ νόησις eliminates a pseudo-dyadic indistinctiveness, and replaces it with two Ones,<sup>22</sup> each of them κεχωρισμένον with respect to each other and even more importantly from the sensory manifold that reports "Great and also Small." In a footnote to this passage, Shorey penned the following lament:

My suggestion that this passage is the probable source of the notion which still infests the history of philosophy, that the great-and-the-small was a metaphysical entity or principle in Plato's later philosophy, to be identified with indeterminate dyad, has been disregarded (Shorey 1935, 2.159 note 'e').

No longer is that true, Professor Shorey; rest in peace. Plato has answered the immortal Socratic question: "Whatever then is [τὶ οὖν ποτ' ἐστὶ] the Great-and-the Small?" But it's not an answer that Aristotle would accept,

<sup>22</sup>This use of νοήσις will tempt those who want to place "the big and the small" among what Socrates calls τὸ νοητόν (*R.* 524c13) and thus to make them Ideas in accordance with the use of νοήσις at *R.* 511d8. But by doing so, they will not only be undermining a claim they will need later—that is, that διάνοια is not used as a technical term at *Prm.* 143a7 on the basis of *R.* 533d7–9—but are themselves promptly undermined by Plato when he uses interchangeably ἐγερτικά τῆς νοήσεως and παρακλητικά τῆς διανοίας at 524d1–5, immediately before the arrival of "both number and the one" at *R.* 524d6. Only the authority accorded to Aristotle's testimony can explain why the opposition between the One, Number, and the οὐ κεχωρισμένον ἀλλὰ συγκεχυμένον τι of *R.* 524c3–4 has not been recognized as undermining his claims about Plato's commitment to the Indefinite Dyad, a.k.a., the Great and the Small; cf. "Shorey's Lament" below.

nor is it likely that his great expositor will do so. In either case, Socrates leaves the ball in the reader's court:

'This, then, is just what I was trying to explain a little while ago when I said that some things are provocative of thought [ἡ διάνοια] and some are not, defining as provocative things that impinge upon the senses together with their opposites, while those that do not I said do not tend to awaken reflection [ἡ νοήσις].' 'Well, now I understand,' he said, 'and agree.' 'To which class, then, do you think Number and the One belong?' 'I cannot conceive,' he said. 'Well, reason it out from what has already been said.' (R. 524d1–8)

I am claiming, of course, that Number and the One belong to the class of Intermediates, and that the διάνοια that is awakened by the problem of how the same thing can be two different and indeed opposite things all mixed together—that is, the epistemological or rather perceptual origin of the Indefinite Dyad—leads upward, through νοήσις, to the Idea of the Good. But despite Shorey's insight that it is here that Socrates disposes of the notion that "the great-and-the-small was a metaphysical entity or principle in Plato's later philosophy," he remained an enemy of the Intermediates—recall his insistence that each number is a Platonic Idea—and therefore failed to see the role of "One and Many in Plato's Metaphysics." As proof, consider the following note to the passage just quoted:

Unity is, as modern mathematicians say, a concept of the mind which experience breaks up. The thought is familiar to Plato from the *Meno* to the *Parmenides*. But it is not true that Plato derived the very notion of the concept from the problem of the one and the many. Unity is a typical concept, but the consciousness of the concept was developed by the Socratic quest for the definition. (Shorey 1935, 2.160 note 'a')

This is a curious position for Shorey to take because he's absolutely right: the One—he's calling it "unity" here—is "a concept of the mind," that's what its origin in διάνοια proves it to be as opposed to "a metaphysical entity or principle in Plato's later philosophy." But apart from the faculty that produces it, it is precisely the Problem from which it derives: Parmenides will only use διάνοια to separate "the one that is" from its οὐσία after reaching the last word in Problematic conclusions: "therefore the one that is would be unbounded in its multitude" (*Prm.* 143a2). So Shorey is right that "unity is a typical concept," although it might be better to call it "the archetypical concept" since, thanks to the synthesis of

many sense perceptions into what is ἐν λογισμῷ (*Phdr.* 249c1), it is the unity that makes every “one-over-many” concept possible.<sup>23</sup> Following Aristotle’s account of Socrates, Shorey derives Socrates’s concern with unity from his attempt to define the virtues, and it is true that the Problem of the One and the Many is already visible when Socrates bruits about the possibility that all the virtues are one in *Protagoras* (*Prt.* 329c4–6; cf. 323e3–324a1, 324d7–325a2, and 349b1–d1). But an awareness of the Problem’s importance isn’t Shorey’s strong suit, and that’s why he thinks Plato’s numbers are Ideal “form-numbers.” American Platonists are too comfortable with e pluribus unum, nor is this surprising.

In 2022, Edward Halper will preside over a conference on Plato’s *Sophist* in Athens, Georgia, as President of the International Plato Society. There is a great deal that happens in that dialogue that justifies an Aristotle-inspired reading of Plato, and doubtless such readings will predominate in Athens. At *Sophist* 245a8–9, Plato allows the Stranger to articulate one important part of his solution to the Problem: “Surely a thing that’s truly one, properly speaking, has to be completely without parts” (Nicholas P. White translation). Whether this solution is compatible with the Stranger’s earlier claim that we should place the whole of number among “the things that are” (*Sph.* 238b1) or with his later account of “the things that are” that defines them in terms of a capacity to act and be acted upon (*Sph.* 247d8–e4) is a complicated question best left to those who think the Stranger speaks for Plato.

But as one who only used to think that, I have grown so fond of the Late Learners (*Sph.* 251b7) that I have lately recognized myself as one of them. The fact that I, along with whatever “friends of the forms” may still remain among us, insist that it is only the Platonic Idea that can truly be said “to be,” that it is “separate from the others” and “in itself” (cf. εἶναι, χωρίς, τῶν ἄλλων, and καθ’ αὐτό at *Sph.* 252c2–4) does not reduce me to the status of some ancient predecessor of *Le Pétomane* (*Sph.* 252c8), nor does it refute the notion, introduced by Father Parmenides (DK 28, B8.26 and 38), that Being is ἀκίνητον (*Sph.* 248d10–249a2), and thus is by no means changed by being known (*Sph.* 248e3–4). It is the Late Learners who assert that it is impossible for the Many to be One and the One to be Many (*Sph.* 251b8–8), and I have tried to show how carefully Plato has prepared us to recognize that they are right. Nobody who has recognized that none of the things that have what Aristotle called οὐσία can actually be One in Plato’s sense could possibly think that the opsimaths are

<sup>23</sup> For the influence of this passage on Kant, see Baum (2019).

speaking of concrete particulars (Frede 1967, 61–2), which are all of them Many, even as indivisible composites. And when the opsimaths delight in not allowing us to say the man is good but that only the Good is good (*Sph.* 251b9–c2),<sup>24</sup> they have given us a remarkably clear picture of Plato’s metaphysics: the Good is an Idea, the man is a sensible thing, and the One that cannot be Many is an Intermediate (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A6; 987b14–16). Plato allows the Stranger to ridicule the Late Learners because he wants the Friends of the Forms to come to their aid, and a good place to begin is acknowledging that this is the only time in the dialogues that the Good and the One appear in the same sentence (*Sph.* 251b7–c2). The key to Plato’s metaphysics is the gulf between them, and it is the Problem of the One and the Many that enlivens the pedagogy that opens the door, making wise the simple.

### WORKS CITED

- Adam, J., ed. 1905. *The Republic of Plato, edited with Critical Notes, Commentary and Appendices*. Two volumes. Cambridge: At the University Press.
- Allen, R.E., ed. 1965. *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics*. London: Routledge & Kegan Powell.
- Altman, W. 2016a. *The Guardians in Action: Plato the Teacher and the Post-Republic Dialogues from Timaeus to Theaetetus*. Lanham: Lexington.
- . 2016b. *The Guardians on Trial: The Reading Order of Plato’s Dialogues from Euthyphro to Phaedo*. Lanham: Lexington.
- . 2019. Three Reasons that the Five Uses of διάνοια in *Parmenides* are Significant. Paper presented in Paris at *Symposium Platonicum XII*.
- . 2020. In Defense of Plato’s Intermediates. *Plato 20*: 151–166.
- Annas, J., ed. 1976. *Aristotle’s Metaphysics: Books M and N; Translated with Introduction and Notes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bae, E. 1996. Soul and Intermediates in Plato’s *Phaedo*. Ph.D. dissertation in Classics, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Baum, M. 2019. Kant and Plato: An Introduction. In *Brill’s Companion to German Platonism*, ed. A. Kim, 109–131. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Brandis, C. 1823. *De perditis Aristotelis libris de ideis et de bono sive philosophia*. Bonn: E. Weber.
- Cherniss, H.F. 1944. *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy*. Vol. 1. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 1945. *The Riddle of the Early Academy*. New York: Russell & Russell.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Phd.* 100d7–8; if only τὸ καλόν is καλόν, then πάντα τὰ καλὰ do not exist. It is Aristotle who needs Plato’s Ideas to be causes; Plato points to them as ends.

- . 1947. Some War-Time Publications Concerning Plato. *American Journal of Philology* 68: 225–265.
- Denyer, N., ed. 2008. *Plato, Protagoras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frede, M. 1967. *Prädikation und Existenzaussage: Platons Gebrauch von "... ist ..." und "... ist nicht ..." in Sophistes. Hypomnemata*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- Gallop, D. 1975. *Plato, Phaedo: Translated with Notes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Halper, E.C. 1989. *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- . 2005a. Preface to the Second Edition. In *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*, xxv–xxxiv. Las Vegas: Parmenides Press.
- . 2005b. Plato's Principles of Mathematics. In *Christian August Brandis: A Study of the Lost Books of Aristotle on the Ideas and on the Good or on Philosophy (Studia Philosophia et Historia, Bd. 27)*, ed. and trans. O. F. Summerell, 99–122. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Happ, H. 1971. *Hyle: Studien zum aristotelischen Materie-Begriff*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.
- Irwin, T. 1995. *Plato's Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Owen, G. 1975. A Proof in the Περὶ ἰδεῶν. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77: 103–111.
- Ross, W.D. 1924. *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Revised Text and Commentary*. Two volumes. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1951. *Plato's Theory of Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1955. *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sayre, K. 2005. *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved; with a new introduction and the essay, "Excess and deficiency at Statesman 283C–285C."* Las Vegas: Parmenides.
- Schiller, J. 1967. *Phaedo* 104–105: Is the Soul a Form? *Phronesis* 12: 50–58.
- Shorey, P. 1884. *De Platonis idearum doctrina atque mentis humanae notionibus commentatio*. München: Theodor Ackermann.
- . 1903. *The Unity of Plato's Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1935. *Plato, The Republic*. Two volumes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Stone, S. 2014. The role of ἀριθμός in Plato's *Phaedo*. *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 30: 137–149.
- Summerell O., ed. and trans. 2005. *Christian August Brandis: A Study of the Lost Books of Aristotle on the Ideas and on the Good or on Philosophy (Studia Philosophia et Historia, Bd. 27)*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Wedberg, A. 1955. *Plato's Philosophy of Mathematics*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Wilson, J.C. 1904. On the Platonist Doctrine of the ἀσύμβλητοι ἀριθμοί. *Classical Review* 18: 247–260.



## Sensibles as *Me Onta*: The Harmony of *Sophist* and *Timaeus*

*Richard Patterson*

Timaeus' concise remarks on the terminology of being and becoming at *Timaeus* 38a–b5 have a distinctive role to play in a very large controversy about the nature of Platonic Forms and the course of Plato's philosophical development. If Plato considered the arguments he himself put into the mouth of Parmenides in the *Parmenides* fatal to the “classical” theory of Forms (as found in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, etc.), including the notion of Forms as models (*paradeigmata*) of which the created world and its contents are only imitations or images (*mimemata*, *eidola*, *eikones*, *phantasmata*), and if he consequently abandoned that notion, it is scarcely credible that the *Timaeus*, with its creation story based on a metaphysics of model and image, should post-date the *Parmenides*. G.E.L. Owen, as one part of an attempt “to deliver the late dialogues from the shadow of paradigmaticism” argues that the *Timaeus* must be earlier than the *Sophist* as well as the *Parmenides*: “For the tenet on which the [*Sophist*’s] whole new account of negation is based, namely that [what is not is what is not], *to me on esti me on* (e.g., 254d1), is contradicted unreservedly by Timaeus’ assertion

---

R. Patterson (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA

e-mail: [rpatt01@emory.edu](mailto:rpatt01@emory.edu)

that it is illegitimate to say *to me on esti me on* (38b2–3); and thereby the *Timaeus* at once ranks itself with the *Republic* and *Euthydemus*” (1953, 89).

The most thorough discussion of this alleged contradiction is still, after all these years, Harold Cherniss’ (1957a, b) responses to Owen. Cherniss raises several difficulties about dating dialogues by the criterion of Platonic characters’ apparent approval or disapproval of particular uses of *me on* (1957a, 18–21). But the positive interpretation of the *Timaeus* passage seems to me still in some doubt. The disputed text with its immediate context reads as follows:

*Was* and *will be* are created sorts of time, which we unwittingly apply incorrectly to eternal being. For we say that *it was and is and will be*, but according to the correct account, *is* alone belongs to it. *Was* and *will be* are correctly said about becoming that proceeds in time—for these are changes (37e4–38a2)...[we say] also that that which has become is what has become, that which is becoming is what is becoming, and that which will become is that which will become, and that which is not is what is not (*to gegonos einai gegonos, to gignomenon einai gignomenon, to genesomenon einai genesomenon, to me on me on einai*) none of which is precise--*hon ouden akribes legomen.* (38a8–b5)

Cherniss’ view is that in the passage as a whole *Timaeus* might at first seem to condone the use of those last four phrases, at least when handled with care: *Timaeus*’ denial of them to eternal being on grounds that they inevitably introduce becoming suggests that they would be perfectly in order when speaking of a world subject to change. But as Cherniss (1957a, 21) notes, the “imprecision” in these expressions arises precisely when we do apply them to *gignomena*. Cherniss believes the alleged imprecision consists in the fact that there are numerous ways in which *to me on me on einai*, along with *Timaeus*’ phrases involving explicit language of becoming, can be interpreted, and elegantly spells out alternative possibilities.

Thus Cherniss argues that while the expression quoted from the *Sophist* (*to me on me on esti*) is there given a precise interpretation on which it is correctly used to state something about a Form (about Not-being as the Form of Difference), it is sometimes used of sensibles in a way that leaves its meaning ambiguous. One could distinguish two main implications of Cherniss’ reading: first, there is no contradiction between the *Sophist* and *Timaeus* concerning the disputed statement that *to me on me on einai*, because the *Sophist* affirms this as a (correct) claim about a Form, whereas

the *Timaeus* says that the phrase is ambiguous as applied to *gignomena*. With Cherniss, I take it that Timaeus is speaking of *gignomena* throughout the sentence quoted above, so that there is no contradiction with the *Sophist*. But since Timaeus does not use the overt language of becoming in the last clause (concerning not-being), might not he be abruptly changing the subject from *gignomena* to something else—utter non-being, the opposite of true being, as at *Sophist* 237ff., or the form of not-being considered as difference, as also in the *Sophist*? Either change of subject would be, in this context, abrupt, unmotivated, and cryptic. By contrast, the clause is well-motivated and makes good sense if Timaeus is alluding to the negative counterparts of the three clauses about *gignomena* he has just rather laboriously spelled out. For example, “what has become hungry *is* what has become hungry” has a negative counterpart in “what has not become hungry *is* what has not become hungry”; “what *is* not becoming hungry” has the negative correlate, “what is not becoming hungry *is* something that is not becoming hungry”; and so on. These negative statements are objectionable for the same reason as their positive counterparts: they apply “is” to things in the realm of becoming. That Timaeus does not spell them out expressly incorporating the terms “is becoming,” “has become,” and “will become” leaves the point no less clear; that is, both positive and negative assertions about *gignomena* are, if they apply “is” to things that only become, imprecise or inaccurate. And of course, Timaeus’ efficient “blanket” inclusion of those negative statements—as opposed to tediously spelling them all out—is on stylistic grounds much to be preferred.

To return to our point of departure, notice that in any case it is stretching things a good deal to say simply that Timaeus “contradicts unreservedly” the statement, “what is not is what is not”; indeed, there is no contradiction at all.

The question remains whether it is likely that Timaeus would express himself in that way if the *Sophist* had already shown with great fanfare that in one sense of “what is not” we can correctly say that what *is* not *is* what is not? If the *Timaeus* postdates the *Sophist*, Timaeus’ words are likely to call to mind, at least for readers of the *Sophist* if not for Timaeus’ interlocuters, the Eleatic Visitor’s discussion of not-being, and the manner in which we can strictly or precisely say, “what is not *is* what is not”. Here is where some would maintain that Plato would not have had Timaeus utter such a phrase if the *Sophist* had already been written. But it seems to me that Timaeus’ words are not only consistent with the *Sophist*, but could be

an allusion to it, even as it makes a direct point about *gignomena*. As for consistency, we have already seen that Timaeus' words—interpreted in context—apply to statements about mutable things, and so are consistent with the *Sophist's* discussion of what-is-not, whether in the sense of the opposite of being or of not-being as difference and thence as a form. Moreover, we have also seen that Timaeus does not reject the statement, “what is not is what is not” outright, as if there is no sense in which it could be correct. Rather, he says that “we” say, imprecisely or inaccurately, that what becomes is what is becoming, . . . , and that what is not is what is not. Timaeus diplomatically includes himself (“we say”) along with his interlocutors among those people who say that what becomes is what becomes . . . and what is not is what is not. Timaeus indicates that he knows of better (more precise, correct) way of speaking, but says that this is not the occasion to be meticulous about the matter, and so returns to his creation story. Of course it is the *Sophist* that hammers out a better, accurate, and fully justified way of speaking about what is not. I see no reason why Timaeus could not be alluding to that discussion, and no reason—as he remarks—to go into all of that in the middle of his creation narrative.

To sum up so far, Timaeus makes a pair of complementary points at 37e–38b: strictly speaking, one should not apply tensed forms of *einai* such as “was” and “will be” to eternal being(s), as these terms connote becoming rather than true being; conversely, one should not apply “is” (*einai*) to things that only become—whether in affirmations or negations—but only to that which truly is. The passage thus recalls and linguistically reinforces the foundation laid down at the outset and governing Timaeus' whole account of creation, that is, the basic distinction between that which always is but never becomes (*to on aei, genesis de ouk echon*) and that which only becomes and never truly is (*gignomenon [aei], on de oude pote, 27d6–28a1*). This is all entirely consistent with what the *Sophist* says about not-being; again, Timaeus' remark about the imprecision or inaccuracy of the way “we” allow ourselves to speak about what-is-not could be in part a veiled reference to the *Sophist*.

Finally, note an important note of harmony between the *Sophist* and *Timaeus* regarding mutable things. The *Sophist* comments on the status of images vis-à-vis their models (240a–c) in a manner very like that of those who according to Timaeus imprecisely say that becoming is becoming:

Theaetetus: Well, what could we say an image was, if not another thing of the same sort, modeled on the real thing?

Eleatic Visitor: Of the same sort (*toiouton*)? Do you mean another genuine thing? Or what do you mean by “of the same sort”?

T: Certainly not genuine, but such as (*eikos*) it.

EV: Meaning by genuine, a thing that really is?

T: Yes

EV: Well, then, is not that which is not genuine the opposite of the genuine?

T: Yes. And?

EV: Then you say the like (*eikos*) is not really (or is not really real), since you say it is not genuine.

T: But it is in some way (*esti pos*).

EV: But not truly (genuinely, *alethos*).

T: No, except that it really is an image (*plen g'eikon ontos*).

EV: Not being really real, it really is what we call an image? (*ouk on ara ontos, estin ontos hen legomen eikona*).

T: It seems that somehow not-being (*to me on*) has gotten combined with being (*to on*) and in a very perplexing way.

In searching for a way to express the status of images, Theaetetus falls into a version of the “imprecise” kind of speech criticized by Timaeus, applying forms of *eimai* to what-is-not. But the essential point that emerges in the following lines is clearly correct: the image or imitation ox (e.g., a painting, statue, mirror reflection, or dream image) of an ox is not a real (flesh-and-blood) ox, nor is it nothing at all: it is, to be precise, an imitation ox (cf. imitation leather). Thus Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor are endorsing the intermediate status of sensibles endorsed by Socrates in the *Republic* and Timaeus in the *Timaeus*. Timaeus might, in the language of the *Sophist*, say, “all that becoming really is, is becoming, not true being.” But then, Timaeus is too much of a stickler to let such a statement pass without expressing some reservation about its strict accuracy.

Although I do not believe that Plato ever abandoned the theory of separate intelligible forms (principally because he had no reason to), it is important to emphasize that the philosophical contributions of the *Sophist*—regarding the uses of “is,” the analysis of *logoi* in terms of *onoma* and *rhema*, the suggestion that being in general might be a matter of capacity (*dynamis*) to act or be acted on, and so on—are of great interest and reflect important developments in Plato’s thought. But they are developed within the familiar Platonic framework of full, unqualified being, utter non-being, and an intermediate status shared by all mutable, created things. With all due respect, it is only by ignoring the context—and with

it the intended meaning—of certain phrases from the *Timaeus* and *Sophist* that one can produce an apparent contradiction between the two dialogues.

It is a great pleasure to be part of a festschrift in honor of Ed Halper—a long-time friend, colleague, and pillar of the Plato Academy of North Georgia (PANG).

#### WORKS CITED

- Cherniss, Harold. 1957a. *Timaeus* 38A8-B5. *JHS* 77 Part 1: 18–23.  
———. 1957b. The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues. *AJP* 78: 225–266.  
Owen, G.E.L. 1953. The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues. *Classical Quarterly* N.S. III–XLVII: 79–95.



## Syllogisms: In Theory and Practice

*Lenn E. Goodman*

In 1939, Sir David Ross called Aristotle’s “discovery of the syllogism and its laws,” even after all the achievements of modern logicians, “the greatest single discovery in the whole history of logic.” The syllogism “was a brilliant discovery” of Aristotle’s, “one of the supreme products of his genius.” Ross quotes Locke: “God has not been so sparing to men to make them barely two-legged creatures and left it to Aristotle to make them rational”(1939, 251 and 269). Locke knew that humans reasoned before Aristotle put his mind to formalizing logic. Aristotle, indeed, could hardly have conceived the project had he not already known a fair amount about reasoning, his own and that of others. But rationality does rise to a higher plane once one can formalize the rules that can regulate its use. Likewise with grammar, logic’s cousin; and Aristotle himself implies as much regarding ethics: It’s one thing to have *phronesis* and quite another, a higher order good, to know what *phronesis* is and how the human virtues function in human lives.

---

L. E. Goodman (✉)  
Philosophy Department, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA  
e-mail: [lenn.e.goodman@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:lenn.e.goodman@vanderbilt.edu)

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature  
Switzerland AG 2022

D. Bloom et al. (eds.), *Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0_5)

## 5.1 THE SCIENTIFIC SYLLOGISM

Much of Ross' article seeks to determine which of the *Analytiks* came first. Bracketing their familiar, post-Aristotelian titles, was it the *Prior* or the *Posterior Analytiks*? Did Aristotle start with a paradigm case and then generalize like a mathematician, gradually advancing to the "purely logical"? Or did he start with formal structures and then turn from formal logic toward nature and the sciences? But Aristotle's scientific work began early and lasted long; and, given his penchant for reworking his lecture courses, we can see the conceptual shards in each of the two *Analytiks* pointing toward the other (Ross 1939, 258–61)—although Ross is clearly right that Friedrich Solmsen "seems to have underestimated the maturity of thought in the *Posterior Analytiks*" (272). Questions about the order of composition of the two analyses, however, divert attention from examining the real meaning of Aristotle's discovery, as Ed Halper does in his key essay, "The Metaphysics of the Syllogism," (2018, 31–60) asking what a syllogism is about. For Halper's reading clearly shows the complementarity of the two perspectives: "Inasmuch as the syllogism is a tool for deriving or, at least, affirming some truths about the world on the basis of others, the assertions that constitute a sound syllogism must be linked together somehow not only in our minds, but also in the world" (32).

The title *Analytiks* is informative. If the *Categories* deals with the things that are and are said to be and seeks to tease out the diverse senses of the verb to be, we can say the work is focused on terms and the variety of things they signify, by scrutinizing the *ways* in which they signify. *De Interpretatione* moves on to sentences: When terms are interwoven (*symploke*) in a certain way we can use them to form sentences that affirm or deny propositions, which can be true or false (Aristotle, *Categories* 2) (cf. Plato, *Sophist* 261d–262e).<sup>1</sup> The *Analytiks* address arguments. Here it is propositions that are linked. Etymologically, as James Duerlinger notes, a syllogism is a collection—not just any collection but a gathering "of propositions from which a conclusion necessarily follows" (1968, 495). The fruitful analogy, Duerlinger observes, lies in mathematics, where *syllogizesthai* means "to compute or reckon up a number of things, which may be understood as a sort of collecting." For Aristotle, the collections that

<sup>1</sup>As William Charlton explains, we understand Plato's passage better if we recognize that *onomata* and *rhemata* here are not nouns and verbs but something more like subject and predicate phrase. See "Speaking and Signifying" (Charlton 2019, 8).

matter most are not just additive: A house is more than a pile of bricks, an organism (we can say) is not just a mass of cells. A state is not just any body of people, and a sentence is far from being a mere group of words. An Aristotelian syllogism, similarly, is no mere gathering of sentences but a collection that can represent sound or unsound paths of reasoning (495 n. 1).

Analysis in the *Categories* regards the structural anatomy of predicates of diverse sorts, their logic, as we like to say today. Quantity terms point to the ways in which things are said to be more or less; but quantities have no opposite. Qualities can be more or less so, but quantities cannot be more or less equal; and a given quantity, for Aristotle—say 5 lbs. or 6'8"—cannot be more or less so (*Categories* 6, 5b11–6a26; 8, 10b26). The analysis in *De Interpretatione* seeks the conditions in which truth values can be found in sentences, and how the Law of the Excluded Middle can be applied. But soundness is the quarry of the *Posterior Analytics*; validity, of the *Prior Analytics*. Validity is readily seen as a formal matter. Hence the interest of today's logicians, leaving questions about the truth of premises to those presumed to know something of the world. But, to Aristotle, sound reasoning is paramount, and knowledge of the world is integral to sound reasoning—lest all one's arguments prove vacuous—or dialectical, teetering on stipulated premises.

In making his case that the *Posterior Analytics* advances beyond a concern with mathematics and a Platonic “chain of Forms,” Ross notes that Aristotle distinguishes (a) the recognition that there was a flash of lightning while a man was walking, from (b) the death of a beast when put to the knife for sacrifice: *a* was a coincidence, but Aristotle's interest is in causal connections (Ross 1939, 263, citing *Posterior Analytics* 73b10–16).

It's here that Ed Halper's reasoning takes hold, turning on Aristotle's distinction between a syllogism of fact and a syllogism of reasoned fact—and here that modern readings of Aristotle's logic often go astray. As Halper points out, following Jonathan Barnes' analysis, modern logicians think of causal connections in terms of Humean constant conjunction. So they are notoriously challenged about distinguishing causal connections from coincidences. Inference, in modern systems, is typically set within the bell jar of an artificial universe, where facts have entry only as stipulated. Construing inference in purely formal terms collapses the distinction of the syllogism of fact from the syllogism of reasoned fact. But that distinction was critical for Aristotle. For in a syllogism of reasoned fact, the middle term represents a cause. In a syllogism of fact, the inference is

extensional (within the artificial ambience of what is posited), and the middle term becomes a mere concomitant (Halper 2018, 39–42). As Halper puts it, “a syllogism whose validity depends on the nature of its terms has an intrinsic and necessary connection among these terms that the syllogism depending only on extension cannot have” (43).

To see best why this matters we need to understand Aristotle’s conception of the purpose of a syllogism. The ready answer: Syllogisms serve to demonstrate, that is, *to show*. Indeed, when the *Organon* was translated into Arabic, the *Posterior Analytics* was titled *The Book of Demonstration* (*Kitāb al-Burhān*), and the arguments it analyzes were seen as paradigms of demonstration—taken in the sense of rigorous reasoning (as distinguished, say, from dialectic). But students and scholars of Aristotle have long recognized that he rarely runs a syllogistic argument in the course of his own inquiries. Halper quotes G. E. L. Owen for making that point in 1968, when he “famously declares that Aristotle’s sciences do not follow the method he set out in the *Posterior Analytics*” (47 n. 8). The reason is not far to seek, if we understand the centrality, for Aristotle, of the middle term.

Aristotle credits Socrates with two seminal contributions to logic: definition and induction. Induction here is not mere toting up of sensory events (or conjunctions). It rests on the intellectual intuition of meaning in a pattern: “e.g. the argument that supposing the skilled pilot is the most effective, and likewise the skilled charioteer, then in general the skilled man is best at his particular task” (*Topics* I 12, 105a14); or, again, the argument that “Dionysius, in asking, as he does, for a bodyguard, is scheming to become a despot. For in the past Peisistratus, too, when plotting, kept asking for a bodyguard” (*Rhetoric* I 1357b31–33; cf. Plato, *Republic* VIII 566d). In both cases the inference from the known to the unseen rests on intuitions informed by experience. In the first case, Aristotle names the middle term: Skill is what suits one to a task. In the second example, as we might expect in rhetoric, we are invited to reach the middle term ourselves. For we make an inference our own when we see for ourselves what makes it work: Dionysius must be up to no good, or he would not feel the need for protection from his people.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle defined intelligence (*anchinoia*, sometimes translated “acumen” or even “cleverness”) as “facility in hitting the middle term,

<sup>2</sup>For Errol Harris’ incisive account of induction, see Harris (1970, 122–202) and the discussion of Mill, Whewell, and Rescher in Goodman (2001, 192–200).

imperceptibly fast” (*Posterior Analytics* I 34, 89b10). He gives two examples, both within inductions: One might reason that the moon gets its light from the sun since the moon’s illuminated side always faces the sun. And one might infer from watching how a man addresses a wealthy acquaintance that he is hitting him up for a loan (89b12–14). Intelligence is the right term here, even at the risk of confusion with *noesis*. For the pattern inferred lays the basis for discovering an unseen link between two seemingly unrelated facts: Why is A talking to B in this ingratiating way? Because he needs a favor. Why is the moon lit up as it is? Because its light comes from the sun (which it always faces when lit up). The inference is not obvious. For the pattern is not obvious, or not obviously relevant. In both cases, further knowledge—background knowledge—helps, additional middle terms shoring up the one that insight, intuition, or intelligence will favor. Seeing patterns and seeing their relevance go hand in hand (and strengthen one another). Their linkage points to the middle term.

The middle term in a syllogism enables one to connect two seemingly unrelated things. In a scientific syllogism, it names the causal connection Aristotle seeks between two things that on the face of it are unrelated. That’s why intelligence is the right term. For what I.Q. tests are meant to gauge is facility (swiftly and independently) to relate seemingly unrelated things: to see differences between things seemingly alike, and to connect things seemingly unrelated. But the relations to which a scientific syllogism points are causal. “The middle term,” as Aristotle puts it, “is explanatory.” It names a cause (*Posterior Analytics* II 2, 90a7). The name, of course, is not the cause—and neither is the pattern. But the pattern points us to the cause if we’re intelligent and on the qui vive. Pattern and cause belong to different categories. But we might detect the cause when we see the pattern: We can see a cause when we realize its relevance, and seeing a cause’s relevance helps us see the cause itself. That’s why it’s right to say that this kind of insight lies at the root of induction of the kind that Aristotle credits to Socrates.

Aristotle defines the syllogism as an argument (*logos*) in which certain things have been supposed and something different follows of necessity (*Prior Analytics* I 2, 24b18–20). But the syllogism Aristotle most prizes is not trivial: The conclusion must follow from these premises in a scientific syllogism because of what they say. We are dealing here with a *relevance* logic: No mere formal relation will anchor a scientific syllogism, as

modern logicians will, for example, allow an inconsistent set of claims to imply *anything*.

We can see why Aristotle felt proud of the syllogism as a method of discovery,<sup>3</sup> as contrasted with Plato's method of division. For division can never lead us beyond the knowledge we already have<sup>4</sup>—timelessly, on Plato's account. We begin to see what syllogisms are for, why they are called demonstrations, and why Aristotle did not foreground them in his own scientific work when we realize that syllogisms, as conventionally read, are read backward. Halper puts it succinctly: “where the syllogism is being used for inquiry, the assumption is that we know the conclusion: it is prior to us. What we are seeking is the cause, which is prior in nature” (Halper 2018, 47).<sup>5</sup> Here is the answer to the question that has puzzled so many casual and not so casual lecturers: Why it is that for Aristotle, “There is absolutely no notion of pursuing inquiry by syllogistic demonstration” (loc. cit.).

Conventionally a syllogism starts with two premises, the major and the minor, and reasons to the conclusion. That's fine if proof is the point of

<sup>3</sup>“We have never yet discovered anything by definition” (*Posterior Analytics* II 3, 90b14–15). Definitions, Aristotle goes on to argue, in urging the superiority of syllogistic to *anamnesis*, that no definition predicates one thing of another. Besides, “proving what a thing is and that it is are different.” A definition may make clear *what* a thing is. But it does not prove *that* a thing exists. So definitions have at best an ancillary, clarificatory use in science: They have too little truck with facts (II 3, 90b20–91a6).

<sup>4</sup>Plato's method of division, Aristotle says (*Prior Analytics* I 31), is “as it were, a weak deduction; for what it ought to prove, it begs, and it always deduces something more general than the attribute in question.... it takes the universal as the middle... it is not necessary that man should be a mortal animal – this is begged.” Platonists, relying on the method of division, Aristotle concludes (loc. cit.), do not reach (new and) necessary conclusions, but they apply their method, “never even suspecting the presence of the rich supply of evidence which might be used.” Cf. *Posterior Analytics* II 5. Shorey finds the roots of the syllogism in Plato's *Phaedo* since Socrates appeals (at 100c) to the idea of causality (1924, 1–19). But Plato's appeal there is to *formal* causes—and that with an insistence that renders the causality he prizes there too constrained a notion to meet Aristotle's needs. For the inferences the Forms can yield prove trivial at best for the purposes of inquiry.

<sup>5</sup>Al-Fārābī sees a complementarity of Plato and Aristotle's methods when he calls the former analytical and the latter synthetic, “like a ladder on which one can go up or down” (1892, 13–14), giving a new sense to Heraclitus' thought that the way up is the way down. Ibn Tibbon (1165–1232) takes up the thought in comparing Isaiah's consummate vision to the gradual, bottom-up progress symbolized in Jacob's dream of the ladder ascending to heaven. See Alexander Altmann (1969, 59–61), citing Ibn Tibbon (1837). But for more earthly purposes than Plato's or Isaiah's, we need to start, as Aristotle holds with what we know and discover rather than “remember” the relationships of things.

demonstration and the point is to *show* how certain facts (and the propositions stating them) are related. But discovery arises when, in pursuit of our natural human desire to know (cf. *Metaphysics* A 1, 980a22; Plato, *Theaetetus* 155 cd), we start with a problem, typified by our wondering how to relate A to C. How do we know that all men are mortal? There's no surface connection between "man" and "mortal." If we represent these two natural kinds by terms, we can call the terms extremes. That name is a natural enough metaphor. For Aristotle's thinking about the syllogism has roots in geometry, as Duerlinger explained (1968, 482). And if A and C are extremes, the middle term is a bridge that links them. Here "animal" will do the job—especially if we know enough about animals. Typically, more premises are needed in reality than just the familiar minor, "All men are animals." Ultimately, we'll need to know a bit of thermodynamics and how entropy renders impossible a perpetual motion machine. But Galen had what he thought sufficient when he reasoned that a being of the sort of matter we're made of cannot hold up forever.<sup>6</sup> Given the right supporting premises (but *not* an infinite store of them<sup>7</sup>), one can make the inference we were looking for.

The centrality of the middle term, seconded by Aristotle's demand that it be *causal*, helps explain why an Aristotelian syllogism is no merely formal exercise (and why it does not map the progress of the Stagirite's own inquiries). Halper explains, "Only one of the terms of the syllogism is properly causal." For if any other term "somehow belongs to the subject" that is "*because* it belongs to the middle term.... to say that the truth of the conclusion follows from a single, specific causal term is to deny that the conclusion follows merely from the extension of the terms!" (2018, 41).<sup>8</sup> The Aristotelian scientific syllogism rests on and helps us construct a

<sup>6</sup>Consider well the material of which a thing is made, and cherish no idle hope that you could put together from the catamenia and semen an animal that would be deathless, exempt from pain, endowed with never-ending motion, and as radiantly beautiful as the sun" (Galen 1968, 189) (Cf. Plato, *Statesman* 273b).

<sup>7</sup>See *Posterior Analytics* I 19, 81b18–82a9. A syllogism remains merely dialectical if the truth values of its premises are only stipulative. But, he urges, demonstration would be impossible if syllogisms needed infinite premises since the quest for ever deeper grounds in that case would never end. Cf. C. I. Lewis on non-terminating judgments (1950, 184–195). Aristotle's premise that knowledge is possible and thus that we must be able to draw a line and say when we have background information enough reveals the deep pragmatism of his views, not least because his zeal for inquiry leaves open the door for ever further inquiry into nature and revision of our generative hypotheses.

<sup>8</sup>Italics are Halper's.

fabric of causal realism. Scientific syllogisms help us toward an understanding of nature *because* they are not merely extensional but explanatory. Here Aristotle is not interested in judgments that just happen to be true or arguments that just happen to be valid. His focus is on claims that must be true and arguments that cotton on to natural necessities, causal necessities at work in nature, not factitious relations that may be posited in the artificial domain of an abstract or fictive structure, a closed system, as Halper puts it, meaning a system that allows entry only to truths already posited (47). What scientific syllogisms point to, beyond the formalism, are the essences of things—and thus, the causes active in nature (cf. 44–45). It is for this reason that these syllogisms are not trivial and can, indeed, be vehicles of discovery.

Modern logicians, confident that logic is a formal enterprise and weaned away from causal realism by Hume, can find Aristotelian syllogistic sorely wanting: Aristotle, they may concede, can anchor imperfect syllogisms by reduction to the more perfect form he most approves. But reduction is not proof, and if it's treated as such we rapidly spin into an infinite regress: Syllogisms are proved only by way of other syllogisms. For, in Aristotle's view, "the syllogism is the only method of proof" (Patzig 1968, 133).<sup>9</sup> Only induction remains, a clearly fragile crutch, we are told, since induction cannot produce the formal closure that is the glory and pride of mathematical logic. What Aristotle needs, as Günther Patzig argues, inspired by the rediscovery of Stoic logic by Łukasiewicz, is a friendly boost from a (seemingly more primitive) propositional logic (134). This was a road not taken by Aristotle; and, as I pointed out years ago, there's danger ahead for seekers of truth regardless of their admiration for propositional logic.

The Stoics had a bias against class logic, and not just because the product was of Aristotelian manufacture. Skeptic pressure made it seem safer to talk of signs (*semeia*) than to make categorical judgments; and the Stoic penchant for monism and the determinism that rode shotgun for it made Stoic philosophers chary of talk of substances and their varied states or invariant, essential predicates. Propositional logic seemed quite adequate to the tasks of reasoning. It readily reflected the disjunctive mode of posing a problem that harked back to the Eleatic elenchus and to Megarian deterministic readings of the law of the excluded middle (Goodman 1999,

<sup>9</sup>For the pitfalls of treating propositional (truth functional) logic as "primitive to" Aristotelian syllogistic, see Goodman (1970, 27–51).

15–37). It could hardly hurt to urge that Aristotle’s syllogistic presupposed the Stoic primitive that we now call *modus ponens*: “If the first, then the second. But the first, therefore the second.”

Skeptics readily boarded the Stoic craft: Aristotle’s syllogism was suppositious. But the same critics could just as easily throw the Stoic navigators overboard: Why should a Stoic undemonstrated syllogism be allowed on deck unproven? Wasn’t it, in fact, circular, sustained only by the supposition of its soundness? And wouldn’t that demand yet another paradigm of its propriety; and that, in turn, another—*ad infinitum*? Aristotle had ready access to his own riposte. For an infinite chain of premised rules of inference was just as suppositious as the Platonic appeal to ever higher universals. Neither would prove of much use to the enterprise of inquiry if discovery was its goal: “Those who hold with circular demonstration... say only that this is so if this is so – an easy way of proving anything” (*Posterior Analytics* I 3, 72a33–35). Further evidence, here, that Aristotle’s concern reached beyond sheerly formal validity.

Both the Stoic and the Peripatetic schemes have their strengths and weaknesses, and it was characteristic of the Skeptics to play them off against each other, using either to critique the other.<sup>10</sup> But what matters for our present purposes is that the soundness of a scientific syllogism in *Barbara* rests most critically not on the formal relations of its propositions but on the material content of its terms. To formalists that may seem a flaw. To Aristotle it signals the scientific bite of such a syllogism: It points toward nature. For this reason, as Halper points out, the requirements that Aristotle stipulates as distinguishing a scientific syllogism—that its premises must be not only true but necessary and also “primitive, immediate, more familiar than, prior to, and explanatory of the conclusion”—are not mere supplemental conditions “grafted on” to a normal syllogism. They are essential and organic if a scientific syllogism is to do its work as an instrument of discovery. As Aristotle himself explains: There may be valid syllogisms without these requirements, but they will not produce understanding (Halper 2018, 37–44; *Posterior Analytics* I 2, 71b19–24).

Lewis Carroll saw an opening to infinite regress in the notion that any syllogism needs a rule of inference to reach closure. He pictured Achilles and the tortoise sitting down to debate the point once the race Zeno had set for them has ended (1895, 278–80). What brings the proposed regress to a halt in the case of Aristotle’s scientific syllogism is not the formal

<sup>10</sup>See Goodman (2001, 28–41). I first raised the issue in “Skepticism” (1983, 819–848).

irrefragability of a Stoic undemonstrated syllogism but the material content of an Aristotelian middle term.

It is by induction, indeed, that middle terms are found. This may mean that framing scientific syllogisms depends on insight—intelligence in a broad sense—not mere mechanism.<sup>11</sup> Scientific syllogisms will not be generated by algorithms. That is why logical formalists have such trouble understanding creativity and why they so often appeal to chance, or play, or intellectual “borrowings” to explain how new hypotheses are framed (Goodman and Caramenico 2013, 211–36). Our attempts to build scientific syllogisms, even given our best efforts, will often rest on premises that prove uncertain or untrue. As a result, many of Aristotle’s prime examples prove unsound, for want of adequate scientific knowledge on his part—and the same is true of modern theories and understandings, from those most alive and bruited about today to the many wrecked frameworks left by the roadside of scientific discovery. But, as Socrates was fond of showing in his gadfly mode, corrigibility marks the domain where knowledge is possible. The corresponding truth, all too visible to Plato: Self-certitude is the tragic flaw of dogmatism.

Seeing a pattern, forming a concept, “hitting upon” a middle term—these are metaphors of the sort to which we, no less than Aristotle, resort when we try to describe one kind of work our minds do when not just following a recipe or coloring inside the lines. Plato, as we know, is fond of myth. When facing what he knows may prove imponderables, the philosopher in him lets the poet take the helm. Aristotle, for his part, often seeks to translate Plato’s poetry into prose. But when he cannot, he’s not averse to minting images of his own. A salient case is the Homeric simile he coins as the *Posterior Analytics* reaches an epistemic climax. The image here is about what we call concept formation; more specifically, the phases of the process in which middle terms are found. It’s not quite an anatomy or analysis, and still less an explanation, but more like a natural history, analogous to what Aristotle saw on opening eggs on successive days—although the time scale is far more compact, as Aristotle himself suggests when he speaks of intelligence as doing its work instantaneously, or as he puts it, (almost) in no time. Here are the steps of the process, as Aristotle describes them once he slows them down enough to be named:

<sup>11</sup> As Halper (48) writes, citing *Posterior Analytics* I 3, 72b18–25, “A scientific syllogism must begin (ultimately) from what is indemonstrable”—unless, of course, one opts for the infinite loop of circularity. But then we’re back inside the bell jar.

Out of sense-perception arises memory, as we call it; and out of frequently repeated memories of the same thing, experience. For a number of memories form a single experience. From experience again – with the universal fully stabilized in the soul, the one over and against the many, uniting them all – come art and understanding: art in the realm of coming-to-be and understanding in the realm of being.

These states, then, are neither innate in us in a determinate form, nor derived from other, higher states of knowledge. Rather, they stem from sense-perception. It is like a rout in battle stopped by first one man making a stand and then another, until order is established. And the soul is such as to be capable of this. (II 19, 100a4–14)

Aristotle is clearly feeling his way here, and at the end he punts, with the throwaway observation that, evidently, the soul can do such things. What things? Form concepts, grasp patterns, frame hypotheses—although it’s hard, ultimately, to say just how. Plato lurks in the background, not as an *éminence grise* but as holder of a marker to avoid: The concepts we achieve are not innate and not derivative of yet higher, but still innate ideas—as Plato suggests when he has Meno argue that we cannot look for something when we don’t know what it is, a gambit that opens the way to the timeless knowledge of the forms by the immortal soul (*Meno* 80d–81e).

That Aristotle is searching for a non-Platonic answer to the question he has raised is evident from the start of the passage, when he says “memory as we call it,” treating memory as a gathering of perceptions rather than a timeless treasury of eternal ideas. *Anamnesis*, for Aristotle, is not the well-spring of our concepts. If it were, there would be no discovery, and all that we know would arise by analysis, through processes of *division*, teasing out the latent content of eternal ideas that do not come to us from our experience in and of the world but from the depths of our divine, immortal souls.

Plato, as Aristotle sees it, has boxed himself in. He finds not even seeds of knowledge in what the senses convey, only hints, clues, and prompts at best. Beyond immediate intuitions, sensory or otherwise, we have inferences. But sensory intuitions, no matter how we stack them up, can never become propositional, let alone rise to the generality aspired to by *episteme*. Inferences, as Plato’s scheme describes them depend upon dialectic—which for Plato, as Aristotle reads him, rests on division, the road to rational intuitions, which are, for Plato, the stuff of *anamnesis*.

We can see here why Aristotle (rightly) thought his discovery of syllogistic so vitally important: Syllogisms, unlike division (analysis), are a

pathway of discovery. They afford new knowledge. Plato, as Aristotle reads him, has locked himself inside the box of memory, a divine box, in Plato's view, but still shut tight. To be fair, the knowledge that is the real object of Plato's interest is of the forms. But Aristotle's first focus is on nature and only then on God. What he proposes is that we *develop* concepts out of our perceptual encounters with the world.<sup>12</sup> We do not simply collect them from the soul's eternal store, needing only to cleanse the mind of biases and accretions, the false conceit of wisdom that impedes our access to the truth.

Aristotle does draw on memories to tell his story here, but not of pure ideas drawn up from the well of Forms. His thoughts turn to the ways that memories coalesce to form experiences and then experience itself, which underwrites the theory and practice of professionals, whether in the sciences or the arts—not least in medicine, where science and art join hands in expertise like that prized among the members of his parents' medically engaged clan, and all physicians before and since. We attain knowledge piecemeal, Aristotle argues. Instruction is part of the process, of course, but so is induction, as we piece together a picture not just of the world but of every particular and type that we encounter. The *Meno* problem is not a stopper here. The self-conscious sophistry in Plato's playful prelude to talk of *anamnesis*, does not block the path to inquiry. On the contrary, for Aristotle it becomes a *modus tollens*: If we do not build our understanding stepwise, we cannot have knowledge—as we clearly do (*Posterior Analytics* I 1, 71a1–30).

It is in induction that we find our starting point, Aristotle argues, with an earnestness to match the irony Plato hears echoing in his memories of Socrates' broaching of the *Meno* puzzle: "For it never happens that a man has foreknowledge of the particular, but in the process of induction he receives a knowledge of the particulars, as though by an act of recognition" (*Prior Analytics* II 21, 67a21–24).

Perceptions, as Aristotle writes, are woven into memories, and memories become experiences, and coalesce into that more remarkable acquired talent called experience, the expertise gleaned and grown over time, that makes art, technique, or science possible. The flurry of sensations that

<sup>12</sup>Navigating between the *generatio equivoca* of the empiricists and the preformationism of Platonism, Kant, as he proclaims, charts an Aristotelian developmental "middle course," of "epigenesis." See Kant (166–167; Smith, 174); cf. the discussion in Goodman (1970, 221–222).

Aristotle calls a rout might suggest the aviary of Plato's *Theaetetus*, but it's more akin to James' "blooming, buzzing confusion." Hence the need to stabilize and group, "one over and against the many" as Aristotle puts it, echoing the language but not the metaphysics behind Plato's label for the work that finds the Forms.<sup>13</sup> The mind's work in sorting and classifying the materials of cognition may suggest that concepts are already in use even in the early stages. That's the point that so struck Leibniz in Plato's *Meno* and gave him the springboard he needed to answer Locke in his *New Essays*. But for Aristotle what's most striking in the process is that it must begin with what Plato deemed pre-cognitive, the inchoate if suggestive sensations that Plato does not treat even as raw materials but at best as shadowy reminders—and so situates *below* the Divided Line—since they do not even pretend to make the minimal claims to truth discerned in images.

It's here, with the materials of perception and experience loosely arrayed in what Kant would call schemata (reflecting Plato's talk of images)—decisively *not* concepts fit to anchor a sound syllogism—that Aristotle launches his Homeric simile: "It's like a rout in a battle." There's the confusion of conflicting and competing, jarring, often perhaps irrelevant perceptions. Then one man takes a stand, and then another. A classic Iwo Jima image. Notions begin to sort themselves out and build on their affinities, the linkages, and contrasts that intelligence can discern or propose among them. The soldiers need not regroup in their original order or formation. To say that might suggest recourse to Platonism. Some men may have fallen in the field, some may have gotten or taken field promotions. But the troops do group up into a working order, a formation capable of fighting and holding a position. These concepts are not innocent of the sensory world. It's for that reason that they may prove useful in understanding it.

Aristotle does not profess to know just how we form scientifically usable concepts out of images. But he does know that we do and takes that as a premise: Concepts are not just gaggles of perceptions or congeries of memories collated as experience. They're not just thrown together, or amassed, or even merely gathered. They're shaped and organized and made complete in ways that perception and experience alone could never

<sup>13</sup>As Ross (1939, 264) explains in glossing what I've called Aristotle's Homeric simile, "The passage is not concerned with metaphysics; it is concerned with the growth of knowledge." He goes on (265) to cite Aristotle's dispensing with the Forms at I 11, 77a5 and declaring them dispensable and "for they are mere sound without sense" at I 22, 83a32.

rigorously justify. Some notions may take the lead and help others firm up and form up as usable ideas. In that sense we can say that the cognitive process here is spontaneous, self-organizing. But, in truth, as Gestalt psychologists have seen, the mind is active and opportunistic all along, even in building perceptions from sensations; and, beyond that, in seeing potential in a pattern: We connect the dots and form concepts where experience offers only skeletal suggestions.<sup>14</sup> Our Gestalten suggest the terms and elements of hypotheses, the trial balloons, or candidates for honored and pivotal places as middle terms.

The deductive display of a syllogistic demonstration does not announce how tentative the early steps may be and how progressive, collaborative, and cumulatively accelerating the work of discovery will prove to be historically. Intuition, after all, as we know all too well, is fallible, suggestible, easily distracted, as Thomas Kuhn explained, with ample historical experience, Ptolemaic, phlogistical, and even Aristotelian.<sup>15</sup> Intuition, at its core, as we see and use it, may be little better than a hunch. But, informed by background knowledge, intuition is an educated hunch, its caliber and accuracy of aim resting solidly on the quality, scope, and breadth of the learning, experience, *and experiment*, that informs it. It's very clear that for Aristotle *nous qua nous* does not go wrong. But when the desideratum is discovery, the question at issue is not what knowledge is but how we get from sensory experience, as the raw materials of knowledge, to knowledge itself; and here we learn that not everything that calls itself an intuition earns credence as a rational intuition—and that science is itself a living, growing, and evolving organism.

Still, one thing is clear: Patzig's dire warnings are misguided that unless the syllogism is made apodeictic, we'll have only induction to fall back on—hence the need to bolster Aristotle's logic with the underpinnings of a propositional calculus. On the contrary. Syllogisms get their power, as Halper argues warmly and well, from the *content* of their terms, not from their form alone. And their soundness as demonstrations rests on the solidity of middle terms, the discoveries intuited in thoughtful encounters with nature. The identity and relevance of a middle term are learned from experience: Induction is not the homely sister of deductive rigor but its fertile mother.

<sup>14</sup> See Goodman and Caramenico (2013, 49, 54–57, 65–67, 123, 135, and 224–226).

<sup>15</sup> For the distracting effects of non-scientific factors in the emergence of scientific theories, see Thomas Kuhn (1962).

## 5.2 THE PRACTICAL SYLLOGISM AND *AKRASIA*

Virtue was knowledge for Socrates; no one willingly goes wrong. Plato's *Protagoras* portrays Socrates making the point rhetorically, treating as a *reductio ad absurdum* the image of pleasure or passion, love or fear "dragging knowledge about like a slave" (Plato, *Protagoras* 352c–357c). The common view is that we often act against our better judgment and do what we know is wrong. But the truth, Socrates maintains, is that knowledge is not just the rightful ruler in the soul but what is strongest there. It cannot be overruled by pleasure or passion. Just as virtue amounts to knowledge, vice is mere ignorance. It is the common view, for Socrates, that is the paradox—the notion that we are capable of doing what we know is wrong. But that common view remains very much alive today, capped by Hume's claim, that reason is powerless—just as Hobbes caps Glaucon's view that justice is an agreement to refrain from harming others in exchange for their undertaking not to harm us (Plato, *Republic* II 358e–361d; Hobbes 1651, Ch. 17–18; Hume 1751, IX 2).

Alive to the vehemence conveyed by Socrates' colorful image and his cavalier dismissal of "the opinions of the common man, who says whatever comes into his head" (353a), Aristotle calls Socrates "utterly opposed" to the view that one can countermand his better judgment. He softens the argument a bit, having Socrates make it "strange" for one's knowledge to be dragged about like a slave. But he also calls the view that Socrates affirmed plainly at odds with the phenomena. He cites the views of those who say that it is not knowledge but opinion that is overcome in such a case. But that again belies the *phenomena*. For it is not uncertainty about what one ought to do that seems salient when we fail to heed our better judgment (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII 2).

Respect for the phenomena is the hallmark of Aristotle's methods of inquiry. And, as we learned from G. E. L. Owen, the phenomena, for Aristotle, include the opinions of the many and the wise ([1961] 1967, [83–103] 167–90).<sup>16</sup> Is there a way in which Aristotle's practical syllogism can help him square the opinion of the many with the view of Socrates

<sup>16</sup> In *Form and Reason: Essays in Metaphysics* (1993, 57–73 and 117–130). Halper offers a salutary correction of the reading of Aristotle as an "ordinary language philosopher" in his treatment of Akkrill's "linguistic reading" of the Aristotelian texts and explains why it is mistaken to anchor Aristotelian virtues in *endoxa*. He thus heads off Martha Nussbaum's relativistic reading. For my own treatment of Aristotelian ethics in terms of human practical and theoretical reason and natural law, see "Moral and Intellectual Virtue from Greek to Arabic

when it comes to *akrasia*? In a practical syllogism, the role of the major premise is taken over by a generality that might function as a rule, its normative force never fully sheathed in descriptive language about what is good for one, or wholesome, proper, healthful, noble, or worthwhile. The minor, drives that general principle home, giving it application in current circumstances. The conclusion, distinctively, is not a proposition at all but an act. So, if white meat is healthful for a hungry man, and this is white meat (other things being equal), we can see why it's rational for one to take a bite.

Here, as in a scientific syllogism, we best see what's going on if we read the reasoning backward. The practical syllogism aims to explain why someone does something—why an act was reasonable, or at least why someone thought so. Here one syllogistic “extreme” has become the status quo ante; the other is the act. What links the two are not middle terms but means. And, in place of intelligence swiftly hitting on a middle term, comes *phronesis*, practical wisdom, now tagged as excellence in deliberation—that is, discovering means to our ends (Nicomachean Ethics VI 5). But there's an added proviso: The *phronimos* must also know what ends are worth pursuing.

We can see the need for the proviso readily enough. Aristotle helps us see that with a holistic stipulation: The means we seek must conduce not just to some more specific end like health or strength but to the good life. His point grows crystal clear in light of the paradox latent in calling someone wise in a practical way merely because he knows how to get what he wants. For the fellow may not know what's worth wanting.<sup>17</sup> If *phronesis* is a kind of wisdom, then adeptness with means alone is little more than cunning. Shedding light on that distinction lay at the heart of the Socratic project. Hence Socrates' rebuke of Thrasymachus in the *Republic*: “Do you think it a small matter you are attempting to determine and not the entire conduct of life that for each of us would make living most worth while?” (*Republic* I 344e, tr. Paul Shorey). Thrasymachus may be proud of the sophistication of his notions about power and how it may be gotten and sustained. But he's a babe in his notions of interest, having devoted

Philosophy,” and “Moral and Intellectual Virtues in the Medieval Latin Tradition – and the Limits of Virtue Ethics” (2018, 111–136, 136–152); and Chapter 7, “Natural Law” (2019).

<sup>17</sup>The counterpart in formal logic: Reasoning well about the relations of terms without regard to what they represent, or whether they represent anything at all. It's no surprise that in Aristotle's logic a universal premise bears existential import, whereas universal premises in modern formal systems typically do not.

little of the sophistication he's so proud of to questions about what a good life really amounts to. He's taken all that for granted, the target of Aristotle's inquiry in the *Nicomachaeon Ethics*, where human virtues are probed on the understanding that they will point the way to *eudaimonia*, since, as Aristotle reads the case, they are our means to it—in much the way that Plato uses the quest for knowledge to point the way to the true nature of reality, since reality is what knowledge must know.

It is because *phronesis* regards means, playing the role of middle terms, that it comes with age:

The reason is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, which a young man lacks. For it is length of time that gives experience. In fact, one might also ask why a boy may become a mathematician, but not wise or a natural scientist. Perhaps it is because the objects of mathematics stem from abstraction, whereas the fundamental principles of philosophy and natural science come from experience. (*Nicomachaeon Ethics* 1142a13–19, tr. after Ross/Urmson and Ostwald)

*Phronesis* stands in for insight or intuition here in the practical sphere, with personal experience aided by the example of others (very much as physicians enrich their experience by watching and modeling their efforts on others' practice and technique) and given greater depth and breadth (in the role of background knowledge) even by what one might see represented on the stage or hear in music, at once the most abstract and the most concrete of the arts (*Poetics* 6, 1449b24–28; *Politics* VIII 5–6).

“Socrates,” Anthony Kenny writes, “said that incontinence as popularly conceived was impossible” (1966, 164). Can sense be made of the Socratic view? Can it be reconciled somehow with the popular view? “We cannot assume that Aristotle himself would necessarily endorse every detail of the popular concept of incontinence: but that is where he starts from” (Loc. cit.). If the views of Socrates and what is pleased to call itself common sense are to be squared, I think, it must be because Socrates holds a different view of knowledge from that presumed in the popular view and at times confessed by the remorseful, as Paul does in pressing the inadequacy of reason: “For the good that I would I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:19).

The issue is not that the incontinent have only an opinion about good and evil. As Aristotle says, even opinion is regularly treated and regarded as knowledge by those who rely on it in action (*Nicomachaeon Ethics* VII 3, 1146b24–30). The difficulty in *akrasia* is not weakness of conviction.

Nor is it a kind of impotence, despite the favor now enjoyed by the periphrastic translation of *akrasia* as weakness of will. The roots of the difficulty, I suspect, lie more likely in strength of will than in its weakness. Here, as in the scientific syllogism, the middle term is the key: Scientifically it names a cause; morally, it stands at the critical nexus between idea and act.

In *akrasia*, I would say, a subject has the major and the minor but declines, refuses, or neglects to link them and act as they command. One who is committed to his vice rejects the major. At best he gives it lip service. For, as the saying goes, hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue. But in *akrasia* one fails to apply the rule he seems to know and may ruefully confess he knows full well. The akratic individual fails in that way often, perhaps habitually.

The issue is not that he doesn't see or acknowledge the principle or prudential premise he fails to apply or that he somehow misses its relevance. He brackets or suspends it. He sets aside the linkage of the major to the minor, as if he'd said or thought: "Just this once," or "Not this time," or "This won't matter," or "It doesn't matter for me – at least for now." Augustine, a past master of introspection and honest enough to reflect publicly on the moral failings of his youth, captures the phenomenology famously when he puts his erstwhile moral posture as if his prayer had been, "O, Lord, make me chaste, *sed non modo* – just not yet" (1909, VIII 7).

Unlike the vicious, who may take evil (or an evil) as good, the incontinent (by hypothesis) know what they should and should not do, but fail to act accordingly, whether on occasion or quite regularly. They don't use the knowledge they have. Thus the relevance of Aristotle's insistence on the distinction between having knowledge and putting it to work (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII 3, 1146b31–35; Kenny, 1964, 168). As he says, one may have both the major and the minor but not use the minor (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII 3, 1147a2–3). That is not the same as not knowing it or merely believing it, or even not knowing its pertinence.

What I see here, on Socrates' part, is a refusal to call knowledge notions that are not lived by or lived up to. Kenny quotes Albertus Magnus to similar effect: One might *have* knowledge. But having it and failing to act on it is merely entertaining it, "like looking at pictures of delights on a wall." For Socrates, knowledge is real only when lived by. In Albert's words, "*uti scientia in agere, ita scilicet quod sit principium actionis*"

(1964, 169). Or, as Seneca puts it, “Sometimes we know but pay no mind” (1968, 94).

The Socratic paradox, I believe, like a koan, is meant to be instructive. Socrates wants his hearers to see that there’s more to knowledge than they may know. We can say that’s in part because one’s cognitions have not yet shimmied high enough up Plato’s steep Divided Line. As one nears the summit knowledge grows surer, more peremptory and more pervasive of one’s being. Aristotle makes a similar point, resolving Plato’s poetry into prose, as he so often does, when he claims that true knowledge (*epistêmê*), when present and active, is not susceptible to the weakness of *akrasia* (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII 3, 1147b15–1).

I think this is right. But something more needs to be said, beyond Socrates’ implicit point that Aristotle makes explicit: That knowledge doesn’t really count as knowledge if one doesn’t live by it. The further point is that intelligence, for better and for worse, may reserve to itself the option of setting aside even the best of what we know. Our minds don’t work like computers running algorithms: We can choose among the options open to us where to set the foundations of our reasoning or our choices. So we can bracket principles we know are sound. We can do so permanently, or for a time, or for the nonce. Principles, even when we know them and see their rightness, don’t always hold sway. We may willfully set them aside. The real paradox is that the same capacities of reason that in Plato’s view show us the way to Truth also make room for its denial.

For Plato, as for Socrates, his ideal, reason is the true self. The same is true for Aristotle, whose aim it is not to refute the Socratic view but to save it and square it with common sense, by resolving the Socratic paradox, turning its arresting claims into what they mean in more straightforward terms. This is part of Aristotle’s project of translating Plato’s poetry into prose. But it’s critical for us, if we’re to understand why the Socratic claim so readily rings false, to recognize that ego may develop and entertain or hold fast quite un-Socratic ideas about who or what we really are and what matters ultimately. Ego may trump even the acknowledged dictates of reason by appeal to the presumptive higher court of a higher reason, be it called *raison d’état*, or harsh necessity, or love of life, or lust, or faith, or passion. We see that when Huck Finn makes his existential choice: It may be theft to let Jim escape; it may mean Hell for Huck, and he can’t say it won’t. But Jim has become a friend, and every maxim Huck has been taught, and all the consequences he’s been given grounds to fear cannot override that far simpler, existential fact.

Reason may caricature itself as too narrow and abstract to deal with human decisions or moral tensions, tragic choices and dilemmas, real or ad hoc, conjured up for self-serving or other-regarding purposes. But reason speaks alongside the unreason that calls itself a higher or more basic or more natural rationality. Reason, at its most reflective, does not give up its final say in our most crucial choices. It may find voice and make itself heard as conscience or as a Socratic *daimonion*, guiding one toward moral truths and away from moral lies. But it can also subvert itself. For passion is not unaided when it seeks to drag one about like a slave.

Knowledge, for Plato's Socrates cannot be mistaken and cannot fail to be alive and lived by. The principles a young man has been taught, Kenny remarks, might remain mere opinions for him so long as "he lacks the experience which would have grounded them as knowledge." They are as yet, in Aristotle's terms, still abstractions (1964, 168). There's much truth in this. But the rootedness of knowledge that Socrates celebrates by the paradox that bears his name goes beyond the difference between *pistis* and *episteme*. It goes to the heart of the equivocation on which the resolution of his well-known paradox turns: Socrates does not count as knowledge what others (in his view thoughtlessly) assign the name—not just because it is too uncertain but because it is not lived by. That alone, for Socrates, suffices to prove it is not knowledge.

Knowledge, as Plato's Socrates conceives it, is anchored in the heavens—more specifically, in the Forms. It cannot be mistaken; and it does not fail or quail, since the subject who owns it (and is owned by it) is the true self and is known to itself as such. All this is implicit in Socrates' finding it not just strange but absurd to think of appetite or passion dragging reason about like a slave. It's not that Socrates has never seen anything that looks a lot like such dragging. If he failed to notice such things the caricature he sketches would have no target. But when we are dragged about by appetite, fear, greed, or passion, or convention, it isn't reason that's been enslaved, or knowledge in the full, rich Socratic sense that's been bucked and ignored. Reason has been set aside or shelved. But the real paradox lies in the fact that it is reason itself that has the power to do that.

Our power to breach the nexus between the major and the minor in a practical syllogism, despite our common resort to such a power in derailing an action that might have been our conclusion, is a distinctive feature of our standing as moral agents: We do not act mechanically but weigh and choose among the considerations we deem most relevant. Our ability

to do so, that is, to break set, is critical to our moral freedom—and not less to our political, religious, and even aesthetic freedoms. It means that we can and often do reappraise what a mere decision machine might treat as givens. We can even move creatively in this space. Witness the moral testimony of the lives of moral virtuosi like Gandhi—or Socrates himself: There would be no such virtuosi if it were impossible to break set and refuse to take the seeming moral givens as givens.

But we pay a price for our moral liberty. For not everything we take to be creative or liberating is really such. All too often it turns self-serving, and not in the best of senses. When we break set to serve some appetite, bias, convention, or some ambient passion (including the passions of self-assertion or self-aggrandizement, or those of freedom itself, or falsely named creativity waving banners of liberation, and so readily turned tyrannical), it is not inapt to say that reason has been made a slave—if not dragged about then self-deceived.

*Akrasia* is not often called “incontinence” nowadays. It’s more often called weakness of will. But in one respect it resembles a strength more than a weakness. For our power to bracket maxims we have taken to be principles is a close congener of free will—and, indeed, of creativity. Non-human animals may balk or dither, but they do not seem able to dismiss the general rules implicit in their behavior. In the human case, however, the same capacities of reason that allow us to frame a maxim also allow us to suspend it. The same intellect can decide if our present maxim is choice-worthy, or relevant in good conscience, and can regret its misformulation or misapplication. And here a strength can become a weakness, even a tragic flaw: Just as we can suspend a rule or principle in a given case or for a given cause, hearing a higher call, we can act against our own conscience, or in defiance of principles we know (or should have known) are right. What we encounter here is not weakness of will but willfulness, reason itself taking the bit between its teeth and saying, in effect, reason be damned: Heroism, saintliness, self-indulgence, and self-deception of every sort take root in the same soil, the fertile soil of reason itself, which (pace Plato) is not infallible, but can be intransigent, for better and for worse.

## WORKS CITED

- Altmann, A. 1969. The ladder of Ascension. In *Studies in religious philosophy and mysticism*. Plainview, NY: Books for Libraries.
- Al-Fārābī. 1892. The harmony between Plato and Aristotle. In *Alpharabi's Philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. F. Dieterici, 13–14. Leiden.

- Augustine. *The Confessions*. Trans. E.B. Pusey. London: Dent, 1909. Repr. Everyman, 1951.
- Carroll, L. 1895. What the tortoise said to Achilles. *Mind* 4 (14): 278–280.
- Charlton, W. 2019. Speaking and signifying. *Philosophy* 94: 3–25.
- Duerlinger, J. 1968. Aristotle's conception of the syllogism. *Mind N.S.* 77: 480–499.
- Galen. ca. 170 c.e. 1968. *De Usu Partium*. Trans. M. T. May, as *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Goodman, L.E. 1970. *In defense of truth*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Press.
- . 1983. Skepticism. *Review of Metaphysics* 36: 819–848.
- . 1999. The Diodorean modalities and the master argument. In *From puzzles to principles?: Essays on Aristotle's dialectic*, ed. M. Sim, 15–37. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- . 2001. *In defense of truth: A pluralistic approach*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.
- . 2018. “Moral and intellectual virtue from Greek to Arabic philosophy,” and “moral and intellectual virtues in the medieval Latin tradition – And the limits of virtue ethics”. In *The bright and the good: The connection between intellectual and moral virtues*, ed. A.L. Anton, vol. 111–36, 136–152. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- . 2019. Natural Law. In *The holy one of Israel*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goodman, L.E., and D.G. Caramenico. 2013. *Coming to mind: The soul and its body*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Halper, E.C. 2018. The metaphysics of the syllogism. *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy* 33: 31–60.
- . 1993. *Form and reason: Essays in metaphysics*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Harris, E. 1970. *Hypothesis and perception*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Hobbes, T. 1651. *Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott. Oxford: Blackwell, 1946.
- Hume, D. 1751. *Enquiry concerning the principles of morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Kant, I. 1781. *Critique of pure reason* B. Trans. N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan, 1963.
- Kenny, A. 1964. The practical syllogism and incontinence. *Phronesis* 11: 163–184.
- Kuhn, T. 1962. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lewis, C.I. 1950. *An analysis of knowledge and valuation*. La Salle: Open Court.
- Owen, G. E. L. 1961. “Tithenai ta Phainomena.” *Aristotle et les problèmes de la méthode*, 83–103. Louvain: Symposium Aristotelicum, Reprinted 1967 in *Aristotle: A collection of critical essays*, ed. Julius Moravcsik, 167–190. Garden City, NY: Anchor.

- Patzig, G. 1968. *Aristotle's Theory of the Syllogism: A Logico-Philological Study of Book A of the Prior Analytics*. Trans. J. Barnes. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Ross, W.D. 1939. The discovery of the syllogism. *The Philosophical Review* 48: 251–272.
- Seneca. (ca. 63–65) *Epistles*. Trans. M. Hadas. New York: Norton, 1968.
- Shorey, P. 1924. The origin of the syllogism. *Classical Philology* 19: 1–19.
- Tibbon, I. 1837. *Ma'amar Yiqavvu Mayyim*, ed. M.L. Bisliches. Pressburg.



# Monism, Metaphysics, and Paradox

*Owen Goldin*

Paradox has been defined as “an apparently unacceptable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises.”<sup>1</sup> Metaphysical premises seem especially prone to generate paradox. This is for two reasons.

Many paradoxes (call them *R paradoxes*) arise as a result of recursive reference, in which a statement, or part of a statement, explicitly or implicitly refers to itself. Examples are the liar paradox (“this sentence is a lie”) and the Russell paradox (“Is the set of all sets that are not members of themselves a member of itself?”).<sup>2</sup> Metaphysical paradoxes are prone to recursive reference as metaphysical discourse itself is an aspect of reality for which metaphysics must give an account. For example, a radical metaphysical relativism, according to which any position is true only

<sup>1</sup>Sainsbury (2009, 1).

<sup>2</sup>“This sentence” refers to the very sentence that contains the phrase. The Russell paradox draws our attention to a set whose membership is determined by implicit reference to the membership of that very set.

---

O. Goldin (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, USA  
e-mail: [owen.goldin@marquette.edu](mailto:owen.goldin@marquette.edu)

relative to a particular believer or belief system, generates a paradox as a result of a “turning of tables” argument, like that of Plato’s *Theaetetus* 170c–171c.

Other philosophical paradoxes arise from the inevitable inadequacy of metaphysical language. For while ordinary discourse relates how things are in the world, metaphysics aims at giving an account of how things are with how things are in the world. This requires a uniquely metaphysical second-order language, by which one refers to metaphysical entities and relationships. But anything we say about such beings would be unintelligible without at least a partial overlap with the first-order language. Hence, metaphysics must discuss the structure of reality by employing the same language and conceptual scheme by which one speaks of first-order realities. That can lead to trouble.<sup>3</sup> There is an important subcategory of this sort of paradox: paradox that arises because language proportionate to particulars generates unacceptable conclusions when applied to the totality of things. For example, as Kant showed, paradoxes arise when certain features, such as having a determinate size, unproblematic in regard to particular things (possible objects of experience) are unreflectively predicated of the whole of things (which is not a possible object of experience).<sup>4</sup> Call such paradoxes *W paradoxes*.<sup>5</sup>

In a paper marked by his usual profundity and insight,<sup>6</sup> Ed Halper discusses a puzzle, latent in Heraclitus’ fragments, which is both an R and W paradox. On the basis of his metaphysical holism, Heraclitus accepts as a principle that any particular insight into things is necessarily partial and perspectival. Hence it is in principle impossible for a particular thinker to attain the perspective of the Logos by which the whole can be made intelligible. So metaphysics itself tells us that metaphysics is impossible. The premises that a logos is an act of communication, and that its content is

<sup>3</sup> Consider Plato’s struggles to find the right way of talking about the relation between Forms and particulars. “A takes part in B” is unproblematic when referring to divvying up a pie, but generates paradoxes when referring to the relation between a tall man and Tallness Itself.

<sup>4</sup> Kant (2007, A517/B545—A523/B551).

<sup>5</sup> Rescher (2001, 145–51) calls these “illicit totalization paradoxes.” There are of course yet other kinds of paradox. Zeno’s paradoxes of motion, for example, do not fall neatly into one or another of these kinds.

<sup>6</sup> Halper (2017, 453–72).

intelligible, are extrapolated from our knowledge of particulars, but Heraclitus' logos concerning the whole of things is in principle incommunicable. So the paradox here is a W paradox. Further, it falls to metaphysics to give an account of the whole of things, and metaphysical inquiry is part of that whole. So the paradox generated is an R paradox too.

In this paper I further explore this paradox. What are its sources and what is a fitting response? Halper argues that the inference that generates the paradox is unsound, as one of its premises is untrue unless qualified. According to Halper, Heraclitus was wrong to take the Logos as applying to itself. Although a metaphysical account has *some* ontological status, that status is different from that of the things in the world for which metaphysical accounts are adequate, namely entities that do not depend on human agency. But the metaphysical account itself is dependent on human agency insofar as it is cognized. In order to avoid paradox, we should restrict the whole with which metaphysics is concerned to the whole of things that do not depend on human agency. I argue that Halper's move cannot serve as a corrective patch to Heraclitus' metaphysical thought, since it posits a distinction between the human and the rest of the reality which Heraclitus could never accept. Although not a radical monist who denies the reality of all multiplicity, a fundamental principle of his thought is that all distinctions and oppositions are grounded in a more fundamental unity. The human soul and what it does and thinks are governed by the Logos just as much as the transformations of the elements are. I suggest Heraclitus' paradox cannot be so easily resolved, but that it can be developed in a manner more in line with Heraclitus' thought than Halper's resolution. This is the strategy, familiar from a number of ancient Greek philosophers, of making a distinction between different levels of knowledge inherent within the same knower. I close by suggesting that similar paradoxes arose for Parmenides and call for a similar response. Such a response perhaps only moves the bump in the rug into a different spot, but the new paradox concerns not human knowledge but a kind of divine knowledge. Accordingly, the possibility of a human kind of metaphysics is preserved.

Following Halper, we begin DK B 1 and 50.

Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it, and once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Logos men are like people of no experience, even when they experience such words and deeds as I explain,

when I distinguish each thing according to its constitution and declare how it is; but most men fail to notice what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do when asleep. (DK B 1 KRS tr.)

Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to agree that all things are One. (DK B 50)

Like Kirk, Raven, and Schofield,<sup>7</sup> I group with these DK B 2: “Therefore it is necessary to follow the common, but although the Logos is common the many live as though they have a private understanding.”

Much ink has been spilled on what exactly “Logos” refers to in these and other fragments. Is it the linguistic entity written or uttered by Heraclitus as he makes his pronouncements? Is it the message conveyed by this linguistic entity? Is it the principle behind things, to which this message calls our attention? If so, is it a metaphysical principle, insofar as it is an ultimate cause, giving things their structure and direction? Or is it an epistemological principle, by which one could in principle have knowledge of all things? Both Halper and I proceed on the understanding that the Logos is all of the above.<sup>8</sup>

As the principle behind things, “the Logos” is an active entity that both directs and informs. But the term also refers to the direction given and information communicated. (The same speech is both delivered and heard. Consider also how the English terms “law,” “order,” or “direction” can all have such double senses. The same law is both given and followed.) The logos as directive, that on account of which things are as they are, is not to be distinguished from the manifestation of this direction in how things are in fact as they are. DK B 60 (“The path up and down is one and the same”) suggests that it is a single event or process by which the logos gives its direction and that the direction is received. How exactly is it that the same logos exists as cause and effect?

Heraclitus’ identification of fire and the logos sheds light on this. Fire is more than a metaphor; it plays a special role in his chemistry, biology, and psychology, as the perceptible, bodily mechanism by which the logos is made manifest. But that is not to say that it does not also serve as a metaphor, to account for how the logos can be both directive and immanent in

<sup>7</sup> Kirk, Raven and Schofield (2007, 187). Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise noted, translations given are from this volume.

<sup>8</sup> For this view, see Conche (1986, 23–4).

that which is suitably directed. For while fire (“the thunderbolt”) steers the cosmos (DK B 64, 66), at the same time the cosmos is itself fire (DK B 30). So fire steers by virtue of its wisdom (DK B 41), that is, by virtue of its knowledge of the Logos that it embodies. Just as fire heats by giving of itself and being present in what is heated, so the Logos directs, by giving of itself.

Heraclitus takes the cosmos to be teleologically ordered.<sup>9</sup> Human beings are such as to comprehend how it is that things are so directed.<sup>10</sup> What is so comprehended is logos as information. One way of speaking of how people come to know this is to say that they hear the logos, an expression of this information. Logos in its root sense is that which is said. So it here functions as a metaphor; the Logos as directive principle is a text to be listened to and understood.<sup>11</sup> But it is more than metaphor,<sup>12</sup> as DK B 1 makes clear that one of the vehicles by which the logos is “heard” is in fact Heraclitus’ own text, which is a linguistic entity accounting for these things.<sup>13</sup> He says things, as they are, but his auditors do not hear what he has to say.

Heraclitus is in part engaging in the usual professorial complaint concerning unworthy students. But the “always” (*aiei*) in fragment 1, whether

<sup>9</sup>On the apparently anomalous DK B 124 see n. 37 below.

<sup>10</sup>See DK B 41: “The wise is one thing, to be acquainted with true judgment, how all things are steered through all.” The fragment contains two ambiguities. “The wise” both refers to the Logos, as a wise directive principle, and the content of wisdom. Further, the fragment is ambiguous between saying that wisdom consists in knowing that there is a principle of intelligence directive of all things, and knowing the content of that directive intelligence.

<sup>11</sup>On this see Lebedev (2017, 231–67).

<sup>12</sup>We have here a prime example of what Kahn (1979, 89) called “linguistic density,” “the phenomenon by which a multiplicity of ideas are expressed in a single word or phrase.”

<sup>13</sup>In DK B 108: “Of all of the logoi that I have heard, none have reached the point by which one could know this, that which is wise, separate from all” (my translation.) Heraclitus is distinguishing between the logoi of others, which he has heard, and the logos that he himself expresses. Presumably what his own logos expresses is the Logos as wise, directive principle; his logos alone expresses the Logos as it is. On the other hand, in the fragments now in question, Heraclitus affirms that even his own logos does not reach the point by which others can know the Logos, for they fail to attain that knowledge even after hearing it. There is however the clear implication that the problem with the other logoi consists in what is being said, while the problem with his own logos is how it is heard. I take DK B 50 to explain the deficiency in the auditors: if they heed Heraclitus at all, it is by virtue of accepting his word, as wise or learned, as opposed to seeing how things are, for themselves.

modifying “is as I describe it” or “are comprehending” (or both)<sup>14</sup> indicates that here the main concern is not with Heraclitus’ *particular* proclamation<sup>15</sup> but the Logos to which his particular logos is pointing. The message is simply not such as to be heard, though it is such as to be expressed.<sup>16</sup> Heraclitus makes this point in DK B 2 in which the Logos is said to be “common” (*xunos*), in contrast to the private understanding of the many. No matter where and when one expresses the Logos, the message is the same, but each auditor misunderstands it in his or her own way.<sup>17</sup>

The Logos, then, is fundamental both epistemologically and metaphysically. Although one must be on one’s guard in employing Aristotelian terminology in regard to earlier philosophers, the term “principle” (*arkhē*), which refers to both an epistemological and metaphysical source is especially apposite here. For Aristotle, a principle is both an epistemological

<sup>14</sup>On the controversy, and an appeal to “linguistic density” in support of the answer “both” see Aristotle (*Rhet.* 3.5 1407b11ff) and Kahn (1979, 92–5).

<sup>15</sup>As Dilcher (1995, 11–12) points out, Heraclitus’ “both before they have heard it and once they have heard it” indicates that people’s ignorance of the logos is an unalterable fact about human nature but also has a temporal, causal dimension. A particular discourse that relates the Logos, such as the uttering of Heraclitus’ own words, is a cause that leads to people’s estrangement from it.

<sup>16</sup>Dilcher (1995, 91–5) tentatively argues that some of Heraclitus’ readers, and Heraclitus himself, are thought to be able to follow the Logos. On this interpretation, the paradox to which Halper draws attention would not arise, and Halper’s paper, and this one, can be disregarded, at least as interpretations of Heraclitus’ thought. But the *aiēi* (“always”) speaks against that; to avoid this result one must deny syntactic ambiguity and take the adverb to modify *eontos* alone—which is what Dilcher does. DK B 78 (“The human character has no intelligence, but the Divine does”) suggests that Heraclitus, as human, is no exception to the rule that human beings cannot comprehend the logos. So even the one who utters the Logos cannot “hear” the Logos.

<sup>17</sup>Philosophers had not yet come to an explicit recognition of the need to distinguish between the logos as a conceptual or linguistic intermediary between the mind and reality. The logos is both what one thinks or says, and that which one is thinking or talking about. See Palmer (2009, 88), according to whom early Greek philosophers “had yet to take proper account of the fact that our apprehension of the world is mediated by a level of conceptualization and linguistic representation. The transition to the new model of understanding and inquiry is most famously represented in the account of Socrates’ intellectual development in Plato’s *Phaedo*.” It is this feature of Heraclitus’ thought that makes the paradox to which Halper is drawing attention so acute. That most people fail to understand the logos would be less problematic if the logos is an intermediary between the mind and reality. In that case, something goes wrong in the gap between the communication and what is communicated. But if the very act of communication is the communicated, the logos does not mediate, and the expression of the logos should be as complete and adequate as what is expressed.

and metaphysical source. One knows something and understands why it is how it is by virtue of a cognitive grasp of the principle (*Meta* Δ 1). The Logos indicated by Heraclitus' own logos is such an *arkhē* (which Halper with justification calls a "law"<sup>18</sup>) and that which, when we know it, allows us to understand all things as they are, doing what they do.

In DK B 1 Heraclitus is saying both that this principle is an act of communication and is such that it is not to be successfully communicated. Why not? The reason why this is always so is the reason why any unalterable truth is so: the Logos has so determined. Just as the Logos determines that all stones fall, and the various kinds of stuffs are involved in mutual transformations according to unalterable ratios (*logoi*), the Logos determines that, qua communicative act, it conveys a message that is such that it will not be heeded. Insofar as this failure to comprehend the Logos is determined by the Logos itself, it is eternal and without exception. This determination is as unalterable as any other aspect of the Logos, even though human beings each have their own opinions about things and pursue their individual lives accordingly. The misunderstandings of particular auditors of the Logos are authorized by the Logos itself and are accordingly "good" from a cosmic point of view. For we particular beings, the ignorance that is the result of not hearing the Logos is bad, but "for the god, all things are beautiful, good, and just" (DK B 102).<sup>19</sup>

*Logos* is derived from *legein*, to say. If a logos is not a matter of solipsistic muttering but is a legitimate act of communication, that which is expressed must be such as can be comprehended.<sup>20</sup> In effect, Heraclitus has propounded a paradox that the Logos is no logos. For Heraclitus posits the Logos as the communication of metaphysical truth. But what the Logos communicates is that it is at bottom incommunicable. Note that framed in this matter, the paradox is an R paradox, as the Logos is making a claim about itself, and is a W paradox as well, insofar as the paradox arises

<sup>18</sup> Heraclitus himself makes the connection between the logos, directing the cosmos, and law, directing the polis, at DK B 114.

<sup>19</sup> As Long (1975, 148; 2001, 23–57) points out, in spite of the great influence Heraclitus had on the Stoics, this Heraclitean view, according to which everything is, at bottom, good, insofar as is the direct result of the governance of the Logos, differs from the Stoic understanding, deriving from Cleanthes, that evil is a real aspect of the world, and that the Logos "can accommodate those exceptionally recalcitrant parts of the cosmos that are bad.

<sup>20</sup> The intuitive appeal of this is made explicit in Gorgias' "On What is Not": *hōi gar mēnuomen esti logos* ("For *logos* is that by which we communicate.") (Sextus Empiricus *Ad. Math.* 7.84). *mēnuoin* has the connotation of successful disclosure.

as a result of the application of a premise which holds in regard to particulars (logos must be intelligible, where the particularity at issue is both that of the communicative act and its particular content) when taken to hold in regard to a whole (the Logos of which particular acts of communication are parts).

As Halper unpacks the fragments, they generate a contradiction that if taken seriously, should lead us to conclude that metaphysical discourse is impossible. For the Logos can be understood as an expression of how reality is. But this Logos cannot be expressed in a logos. “Heraclitus seems to see the perception of the law and the assertion of the law as not governed by the law, even as he insists that the law does govern everything. On the one hand, Heraclitus laments men’s failure to appreciate the law though they have it in their power to heed the law. On the other, he claims that all things happen in accordance with this law.”<sup>21</sup>

The Logos, for Heraclitus, is not merely the expression of how things are. The Logos is not only informational: it is directive. It is by virtue of the expression of that Logos that the world is as it is. As *directive*, the Logos has illocutionary force. Like a promise, by which the reality of an obligation comes about by means of its very expression, the Logos, which expresses what things are and what they are to do, makes them what they are and creates that obligation.

As informational, the Logos is an act of communication which, like a law, can either be heard or disregarded. If this is all there were to the Logos, no paradox is generated. No paradox is generated by the fact that none of us have adequately cognized the laws of nature. But as directive, the Logos is omnipotent.<sup>22</sup> If we don’t understand it, it is only because the Logos so decrees that it will not be received. This duality of the Logos generates paradox.

Halper’s own analysis of the paradox rests on the distinction between the universality of the logos as such and the particularity of both Heraclitus’ text and its reception by auditors. The universal (the principle that governs all things and accordingly enables one to explain all things) apparently does not apply to the particular act of reception.<sup>23</sup> The one, call him

<sup>21</sup> Halper (2017, 456)

<sup>22</sup> See DK B 41 (“The wise is one thing, to be acquainted with true judgment, how all things are steered through all”) and DK B 64 (“Thunderbolt steers all things”).

<sup>23</sup> Halper (2017, 458) appeals to the universal/particular distinction to make sense of the paradox as follows: “Heraclitus’ point, if I have understood him, is that no universal law could include the possibility of its own assertion.” I am not sure that I fully understand. Why

Zeus,<sup>24</sup> is the principle by which the totality of things is what it is. Yet (as directive) is unable to arrange particular things according to plan, since particular auditors of the logos do not achieve wisdom. Although particulars are what they are, understand what they understand, and do what they do by virtue of this Logos, somehow this Logos determines that they fail to have the understanding of that principle that the principle itself wills them to have.

Is there some positive content to this paradox? Does Heraclitus think that its recognition can help us hear and follow the Logos? In contexts outside of metaphysics, any universal assertion that does not hold of a particular falling under that universal would contradict that assertion and would thereby render it false. A single instance in which a swan is not white would refute the claim that all swans are white. This case is different. Recall that as directive, the Logos is both a principle of the whole and the principle at work in each particular thing; as informational, the Logos is an epistemological principle, that which allows us to understand both the workings of particular things and the whole. An epistemological principle is among the beings in the cosmos. Accordingly, the Logos as ontological principle is directive of itself as communicative act. This includes its reception by virtue of which it is the primary epistemological principle. While the assertion that all swans are white is not a swan, the assertion that all things happen in accordance with the logos is to be understood as among “all things” and this is why the logos is understood to generate a paradox and not a mere contradiction. The Logos as communicative act negates itself through self-reference, as well as by virtue of the fact that communication as normally understood has particular subjects. Yet this communication is directed to the whole. To employ another metaphor: consider a teacher who is engaged in explaining a certain matter. There is nothing paradoxical considering the event in which this act of explanation fails. We

must *all* universal laws exclude their assertion? This does not seem to be the case even when there is recursive reference. How is a contradiction generated by “all universal propositions are predications”? (See Rescher 2001, 206): “[I]t is best to take a discerning and differentiated view of self-reference, recognizing that it can take both lawful and illicit forms.”) Perhaps the idea is that as Heraclitus understands things, any universal law derives from and cannot be understood in isolation from the Logos, considered as a unified principle governing everything, and it is the content of this unified universal principle that renders itself such as cannot be coherently asserted.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. DK B 32: “One thing, the only truly wise, does not and does consent to be called by the name of Zeus.”

teachers find it happening all too often, for a variety of reasons, some of which involve culpability in regard to the teacher or student, and some of which do not. But a teacher who teaches in such a way that it is assured that nothing is explained to the class as a whole would not be a teacher at all. To say that the lack of intelligible content being conveyed is the very content being taught would either be nonsense or self-contradictory. If the Logos is such that its expression guarantees its unintelligibility, why bother expressing it? What does Heraclitus think is to be gained through propounding the paradox?

Halper argues that Heraclitus (and by extension, the logos he expresses) does not have the goal of simply leading us to affirm a conjunction of  $p$  and not- $p$ . Such a contradiction terminates all discourse (and it is precisely this that Aristotle takes to be the consequence of a Heraclitean endorsement of contradiction<sup>25</sup>). Rather, the contradiction, such as it is, is one moment in an ongoing process which constitutes the comprehension of the logos. Halper compares Heraclitus' logos with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: to understand what it is saying is to understand that what it is saying cannot be expressed. "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it. 6.54. tr. Ramsey and Ogden)." While Wittgenstein asserts that the contents of the *Tractatus* must be rejected by those who comprehend it, Heraclitus, on Halper's view, goes further. "Heraclitus' solution is to have the universal law assert that the act of asserting it is at odds with it."<sup>26</sup> The logos is in fact that the logos cannot be said, that the particular cannot fall under the universal. Heraclitus' full message can only be understood through a process by which the original assertion is contradicted and comes to be fully understood only by virtue of that contradiction. The logos is grasped only through meditating on the very oscillating thought process that constitutes meditating on the paradox of the Logos.

Heraclitus' paradox has much in common with the liar's paradox, also an R paradox. The liar's paradox arises only insofar as what the

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Aristotle is careful not to attribute to Heraclitus himself a denial of the principle of non-contradiction: "For it is impossible for anyone to believe the same thing to be and not to be, as *some* think Heraclitus says; for what a man says he does not necessarily believe." (*Meta.* Γ 31005b23–6)

<sup>26</sup> Halper (2017, 461)

paradox-inducing expression says is heeded; it is only insofar as we heed the declaration “this is a lie” that the paradox arises. So too with Heraclitus’ paradox. We are not faced with a bit of metaphysical gobbledygook containing internal confusions or misuse of language that leads us to condemn it to the flames. Only insofar as we heed the Logos does it become clear that we cannot heed the Logos. But while the active heeding of the liar’s paradox leads to a state in which thought is paralyzed and is left with no object at all, Halper understands Heraclitus as offering a paradox that is supposed to leave us with some sort of deeper insight. Like a koan, the paradox is put forward as an object of meditation which will lead to some sort of higher, perhaps non-discursive, form of awareness.

Such an approach to the paradox grasps it with both hands and insists that in the very act of going beyond the bounds of meaningful speech, one is nonetheless somehow speaking meaningfully. But there are two other lines of approach one of which Halper himself takes in the resolution of Heraclitus’ paradox.

One, an antimetaphysical approach, would be to point to metaphysical paradoxes as grounds for denying the very possibility of metaphysical discourse.<sup>27</sup> Language and thought that works just fine in dealing with first-order realities inevitably fails in its attempt to deal with second-order realities, the realities by which first-order realities are structured—hence we must abandon the effort to do metaphysics at all. Generally speaking, Hume, Kant, the later Wittgenstein, and the logical positivists took different paths in this direction.

Halper does not consider this a live option, for him or for Heraclitus. He approaches this paradox as Aristotle approaches his *aporiai*: diagnosis of the source of the puzzle allows for replacing the false premises with true ones, free of dangerous imprecisions and containing the appropriate qualifications. This is the kind of strategy that Halper pursues in defanging Heraclitus’ paradox. Halper accepts what he takes to be the core insight of Heraclitus, that acts of knowledge are beings, and as such are to be governed by whatever law or principle governs all beings. The question is:

<sup>27</sup> Falling in this group are the first of the two alternative approaches to the paradox sketched at Halper (2017, 464–70): to deny that changing reality (including ourselves as cognitive agents) can be known (Plato and Aristotle), and to limit the object of knowledge to the processes of cognition (pre-Hegelian moderns). The third alternative approach indicated by Halper, to accept a multiplicity of knowers and objects known, but to posit a higher level synthesis that resolves contradictions (Hegel), may be a version of the monistic metaphysics I discuss below, but my understanding of Hegel is too deficient to say for sure.

which metaphysical principles hold of *all* beings? Halper stresses that what is true of the whole need not be true of the parts, and vice versa. “The act of asserting a law need not itself fall under a law that applies only to narrowly metaphysical entities, though there might be some such assertions that would.”<sup>28</sup> The idea is that the Logos is a universal and unchangeable principle which determines such matters as the measures by which the basic kinds undergo mutual transformation, or opposites are unified. But that is not to say that the Logos is an unchanging principle in regard to how people hear, conceptualize, and express universal principles, for these things are the results of human agency, and human agency somehow stands apart from the Logos that governs the rest of the cosmos. According to Halper, even if the Logos in general determines that the way in which human beings regard the world is partial and to that extent to some degree false, the particular acts by which we hear or express the Logos have the potential of standing outside of that mandate.

Recall that Heraclitus’ paradox is both an R and a W paradox. Halper’s solution, that the Logos as metaphysical principle does not apply to expressions of the logos as a result of human agency, blocks a W paradox, for particular expressions of the logos are excluded from the scope of the whole Logos. The logos, as universal, is to be qualified so that it does not apply to a particular assertion of the Logos. If this move, according to which what holds of the whole does not necessarily hold of the parts, makes sense,<sup>29</sup> there is no W paradox. Because what is said by the Logos, as universal “law,” will not apply to the particular utterance expressed by Heraclitus himself there is no recursive reference, and no R paradox is generated. The possibility of metaphysics is preserved. The law, that all things hold in accordance with the Logos, does not hold in regard to the expression and reception of that Logos itself.

Halper generated Heraclitus’ paradox on the basis of Fragments 1 and 50, to which I have supplemented Fragment 2. These fragments offer a notion of metaphysical truth (the Logos) that excludes the possibility of the knowledge of metaphysical truth. The paradox generated by these fragments taken in isolation is like the liar’s paradox insofar as it says nothing about anything except itself. For just as “this statement is false” speaks only of the referent of this statement “This Logos is incommunicable”

<sup>28</sup> Halper (2017, 471)

<sup>29</sup> It might not. The move is parallel to attempts to preserve free will in the face of omnipotent divine governance, which are often found to be philosophically problematic.

speaks only of the Logos. But Heraclitus' Logos is not restricted to this bare statement.

Heraclitus' dicta as a whole constitute an integrated account of the ways in which things hang together. They work through how unity is found in change, how opposites are both sources of and manifestations of unities, and how both the personal and civic good require heeding the Logos, in spite of how in their thought and action people focus on their private goods. A central teaching throughout is that things are unified even as they are distinct and plural. All distinctions are provisional and not fully understood until one sees the unity behind the distinction. But note that Halper's resolution to Heraclitus' paradox depends on making two distinctions between universal and particular for which there is no further integration. The first concerns language. Entities that fall under the law are to be distinguished from those that do not, and the latter include some communicative acts. The second concerns knowledge. The Logos which is the principle by which the whole is to be understood cannot serve as principle for all of the parts. I suggest that distinctions of this sort are antithetical to Heraclitus' Logos.

DK B 50 is explicit that the Logos mandates that a unity underlies *all* distinctions: "Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to agree that *all* things are One"<sup>30</sup>. There are two ways of understanding the universality of the claim being made here. The first is to say that, of all things that there are, each is a unity. It would be anachronistic to take Heraclitus to be declaring that it is a logical law that unity and being are coextensive. For this reason, most scholars take Heraclitus to be here alluding to the principle of the unity of opposites. To say that all things are one is to say that all things are constituted or characterized by an opposition or duality which is responsible for their unity. Examples are the path, which is both up and down (DK B 60), or the bow, manifesting and constituted by both inward and outward tensions (DK B 51). This opposition sometimes manifests itself as forces or agencies pulling in opposite directions, as is made clear by DK B 53 ("War is the father and king of all" and DK B 80 ("It is necessary to know that war is common and right is strife and that all things happen by strife and by necessity.)) Heraclitus is saying both that tensions and oppositions serve as constitute principles of unities and that all unities are constituted by pairs of opposites.

<sup>30</sup> Emphasis added.

But a monistic<sup>31</sup> reading of the fragment is also possible, to the effect that reality is in some sense a single thing. There are of course different varieties of monism. It would be a strained reading of Heraclitus (though not, I think, an impossible one) that would take him to be a radical numerical monist,<sup>32</sup> according to whom all multiplicity is a matter of appearance. Heraclitus speaks of the opposites as real. Even if opposites O and P are unified in ways indicated by Heraclitus,<sup>33</sup> that is not to say that there is only O or only P, as though the other is illusory. What is illusory is not that there is both day and night, but that the two subsist as independent of one another.<sup>34</sup>

There is however good reason to follow Cleanthes in taking Heraclitus to be a numerical monist, holding the view that the cosmos, with all of its inherent tensions and distinctions, is a unique and unified entity, all of the parts of which are to be understood only in relation to this whole.<sup>35</sup> On this reading, just as each entity is constituted by its own logos, so too the Logos as a whole constitutes the whole cosmos.

Admittedly, there is no direct evidence of the view that the cosmos is a whole animated by the Logos as a whole, unless we interpret DK B 30 and B 66 to the effect that the cosmos as a whole is subject to periodic conflagration.<sup>36</sup> For if the cosmos is subject to the *ekpurōsis*, it would have its own life cycle, as a whole, which suggests that it is an organized whole as

<sup>31</sup> “Monism” as I am employing the term refers to a view that comprehends both Schaffer’s “existence monism” and “priority monism.” “Existence monism targets concrete objects and counts by tokens. This is the doctrine that exactly one concrete object token exists. Priority monism also targets concrete objects but counts by basic tokens. This is the doctrine that exactly one concrete object token is basic, and is equivalent to the classical doctrine that the whole is prior to its (proper) parts” (Schaffer 2018).

<sup>32</sup> This is the thesis that there is just one being. See Curd (1998, xviii).

<sup>33</sup> What is O from one perspective is P from another, O and P are complementary aspects of a thing, what is O at one time is P at another, and vice versa, and O can only be understood as not-P, and vice versa.

<sup>34</sup> In DK B 57 Heraclitus takes Hesiod to have made this mistake. “Hesiod is the teacher of most people. They ‘know’ that he knew many things, someone unaware of day and night. For they are one” (My translation). The reference is to *Theogony* 124.

<sup>35</sup> This was a principle of Stoicism from the start; Zeno declared “the cosmos is one” (SVF 1.97). Although Zeno’s relation to Heraclitus is unclear, Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus explicitly hearkens to Heraclitus, celebrating Zeus/fire as animating and directing the cosmos as an organized whole.

<sup>36</sup> In support of this reading see Mondolfo and Aires (1958, 75–82), Kahn (1979, 134–53), Finkelberg (1998, 195–222); against, Kirk (1959, 73–6).

much as any of its parts. But the matter is controversial, and most scholars now shy away from attributing to Heraclitus the doctrine of the *epkurosis*.

There is however convincing albeit indirect evidence that Heraclitus did subscribe to a kind of holism in regard to the cosmos. First, if we accept that DK B 1 is semantically ambiguous, the content of Heraclitus' text (his *logos*) is referred to not as the *logoi* but as the *Logos*, in the singular. This suggests that, just as a particular *logos* is responsible for the constitution of each particular thing it governs, so a singular *Logos* is responsible for the whole of things, as a whole. DK B 10 points to such a reading: "Things taken together are wholes and not wholes, something which is being brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity, and out of a unity all things." "The one" could conceivably be taken to refer to only this or that individual unity, but the very point of the fragment is that all apparent multiplicities are manifestations of more primal unities and that unities are manifestations of multiplicities. So too, it would seem, the singular cosmos both arises from many things and is the source from which many things arise.

DK B 67 is more explicit: "God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger; he undergoes alteration in the way that fire, when it is mixed with spices, is named according to the scent of each of them." Most commentators on this fragment concentrate on how Heraclitus here takes up and develops the Milesian strategy of accounting for a multiplicity of things that come and go, on the basis of a single underlying stuff. On this reading, Heraclitus accepts that there is a single principle out of which things emerge, but recognizes the need for positing a principle that determines what emerges, when. This he takes to be fire itself, insofar as it is identified with Zeus, the principle of intelligence, manifest as the thunderbolt, which steers all things. Not as often recognized is the numerical monism strongly suggested by the fragment. If that which shapes and directs is identified with that which is shaped and directed, it stands to reason that the cosmos that is animated and organized by a singular Zeus would similarly be a single unity.<sup>37</sup> (Indeed, given the inevitable deficiency

<sup>37</sup> A problem is DK B 124. The text is vexed, that endorsed by Diels I translate "The fairest cosmos is a rubbish-heap spilling out at random." On the surface the fragment is denying that there is *logos* even for the cosmos, which one might think manifests unity, order, and beauty to the highest degree. Such a blanket denial is to be avoided as inconsistent with the other fragments. If we preserve the Diels text it is best to see the fragment as an application of the principle that predicates such as "beautiful" are perspectival, attributed only from a

of human understanding, the divine alone has intelligence (*gnōmē*) (DK B 78.) The declaration that thought is common to all (DK B 113) is not only a declaration of panpsychism; it follows logically from the premises that all things are directed by the Logos as a principle of intelligence, that this principle is fire, and that all things are, at bottom, stages of the cycles undergone by fire. The cosmos is an intelligent, thinking being, which organizes itself according to the unitary Logos that is the object of its own thought.

The Logos not only governs the whole; it is the whole. And that whole includes the many auditors, who do not understand the Logos. So, for Heraclitus, it is a basic truth of the cosmos that the principle of intelligence that governs all things is both aware and unaware of itself. If the contradiction is to be resolved, it is not, as Halper would have it, through making ontological distinctions between the beings that are aware, and those that are not, but by distinguishing the ways in which the Logos is both aware and unaware of what it is and what it is doing. The paradox to which Heraclitus is pointing arises not from a failure to make an ontological distinction between the whole (to which the logos applies) and many parts (to which it does not) but from a real epistemological distinction, within the whole of reality itself, between the awareness of things as they are, and occluded awareness, by which things are seen partially and imperfectly. The imperfect deficient awareness coexists with a perfect, adequate awareness.<sup>38</sup> This occlusion is fundamental to how things are. As Heraclitus reminds us in DK B 123, “Nature loves to hide.”<sup>39</sup> It is this very same nature, *phusis*, which is the constitution of each thing, from which, in accordance with DK B 1, each thing is to be distinguished. The paradox is not so much a matter of the part not conforming to a truth that holds of a whole, as that of a knower not knowing what it knows. We are dealing with a state of affairs in which at some level one is in cognitive contact with reality but at another level one is not, and is not even aware of this lack of

point of view. This holds not only in regard to the particulars that constitute the cosmos, but to the whole itself.

<sup>38</sup> There is no need to appeal to a psychology of the “unconscious” to find parallels here. Plato’s teaching that learning is recollection rests on the view that what the mind at some level knows it does not at another. The same idea, arguably, is present in Aristotle’s view that the active intellect eternally knows that which can be known but, “we do not remember” on account of the destructibility of the passive element of intellect (*DA* 3.5).

<sup>39</sup> I here depart from Kirk’s translation.

cognitive contact.<sup>40</sup> This reality is, at bottom, oneself, as logos. As Heraclitus put it, “I searched out myself” (DK B 101).

Heraclitus is here giving a metaphysical twist to a teaching with deep roots in ancient Greek religion. The gods were thought to have spoken to human beings through oracles, and the oracles’ messages were notoriously ... oracular. Unlike the evil dream sent by Zeus to Agamemnon, the oracles do not out and out lie. They do however give ambiguous messages. Whether or not the message is interpreted correctly is a function of the extent to which the auditor is subject to hubris, a culpable lack of self-understanding. For Heraclitus too, it is through hubris that the communication from the Divine (the Logos) is not heard. As DK B 43 tells us, “Insolence (*hubris*) is more to be extinguished than conflagration.” Here hubris, that by which the fiery logos is extinguished<sup>41</sup> is itself represented as a destructive fire, with the implication that it is in our power to bring it under control. It is somehow part of the Logos of things that people will fail at what the Logos demands: the kind of humble self-understanding that allows one to hear the Logos, that, at some level one already knows.

Although nothing that Heraclitus says indicates that progress cannot be made in this matter, one will always to some extent fail to comprehend the logos, even if its message is in principle loud and clear. “Nature loves to hide.” That is the paradox: that which is truly wise hides its own wisdom from itself.

In this respect, as in others, it is illuminating to understand Heraclitus and Parmenides as in dialogue.<sup>42</sup> Here I will only signal the general lines of the interpretation of Parmenides’ poem I accept, which, even if somewhat heterodox, are at least not unsupported in the secondary literature. I do so in order to indicate that, although the arguments by which they support this conclusion are very different, both arrive at the view that the whole of things is a radical unity that is intelligent, yet is both aware of its radical unity and unaware of it. This, not the least of the paradoxes found within the poem, is, like the Heraclitean paradox we have been discussing, to be resolved by distinguishing between two basic modes of cognition found in reality as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup>As an anonymous reviewer has pointed out, how this stands with Heraclitus himself is deeply ambiguous.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. DK B 107 and B 108.

<sup>42</sup>I do not take a stand regarding chronological priority.

<sup>43</sup>Space precludes even a brief discussion, but parallel paradoxes and parallel approaches to resolution are found in both the Advaita Vedanta of Shankara and in Lurianic kabbala. Both

The poem consists of three parts. In the first, Parmenides, depicted as a youth, comes to be in the presence of a goddess, who announces her intention to show the youth two ways of inquiry (a third, to which she refers, that of “it is not,” is excluded as totally impassable.) The first way is that of truth, that “it is.” The second is said to be that of doxa, and is that which is followed by most human beings, who do not realize that this path deviates from truth, insofar as it makes implicit appeal to what is not, and inevitably finds itself implicated in contradictions. It is unclear whether the youth who follows the way of truth is thereby exempt from the way of doxa, or whether like everyone else he is condemned to follow the path in question. Even if salvation from doxa were somehow possible, the use of negation in the argument by which the goddess discusses the way of truth indicates that following the way of doxa is to a certain extent inevitable, if it is to be discussed at all.

Heraclitus both does and does not blame the many auditors of the Logos for their failure to heed it. The many are castigated for their lack of insight, in language that suggests moral blame. At the same time, as we have seen, they are ultimately to be regarded as parts of a greater whole, and it is the Logos of that whole that determines that this same Logos cannot be heeded by the many. There is a parallel ambiguity in Parmenides’ poem. The many, who pursue the way of doxa, are said to wander, while the youth is told that if he heeds the words of the goddess, he can avoid wandering, and will pursue his inquiry along the way of Truth. The goddess thus indicates that whether one’s thought is errant is to some extent up to him or her, that it is in some sense up to them to not wander. But the situation is not so simple, for two reasons. First, the way of “is and is not” is called the way of doxa. Doxa is not to be understood as “belief” but as a mode of appearance. How the world presents itself is not up to the individual.

There is a kind of moral paradox here: the many both are and are not responsible for their lack of insight. This paradox is underscored if we

offer a radical monistic metaphysics according to which there is the appearance of plurality although in reality there is just one being, conscious of its own unity. For Shankara, the appearance of independent realities arises on account of maya, a mode by which the true reality, Brahman, manifests itself. For the Lurianic kabbala, it arises through a contraction of G-d, by which G-d willingly hides from himself. For interesting explorations of parallels between Shankara and Parmenides, see Robbiano (2016b, 290–327). For an attempt to understand the notion of the divine contraction, as dealing with the issues of unity and multiplicity that arise out of ancient Greek thought, see Goldin (1999, 59–74).

follow the tradition and take the goddess to be arguing for what Curd has coined numerical monism. For this is incompatible with there actually being “the many” for whom things both are and are not. But the paradox is as yet not as acute as that of Heraclitus, as it is not internal to the mind that knows “it is” as it is. That mind grasps the truth, inviolate, and that there seem to be many does not threaten or contradict this mind that knows things as they are.

A deeper paradox is generated for Parmenides only if we take an interpretative step as old as Clement and Plotinus, which, if still a minority view among scholars, is attracting new adherents: the one being that is indicated by the goddess is identical with the mind that thinks it. This interpretation is both numerical monist and idealist and finds explicit support in what is now a heterodox reading of Fr. 3 (*to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*). These days, the infinitives taken to be datives, these words are usually as offering a basic methodological premise: “the same thing is for thinking and for being.” The fragment on this reading introduces the thought experiment as a metatheoretical principle, and it is on this basis that any logos that posits “is not” or worse “is and is not” must be banished from the way of truth.<sup>44</sup> This reading has been challenged on both philosophical and philological grounds.<sup>45</sup> Here I can only briefly explore the alternative reading, which takes the infinitives to function as articular infinitives (missing the article): “to be is the same as to think.” There are in general two ways to understand the role that this declaration plays in the argument of the way of truth. The first is to understand it as the goddess’ directive to the youth, to attend to his own thinking as a being. The argument of Fr. 8 could then be taken as laying down a path by which that thought is purified of error, showing that thought is always erroneous if it takes its object to be something distinct from the thought itself.<sup>46</sup> By virtue of the argument, the mind is led to grasp itself as a unitary and unchanging reality. The second is to see Fr. 3 as the conclusion of an inference, not explicitly present in the fragments we have. We are to conjoin Fr. 8, understood as excluding multiplicity from being, with the fact that the goddess, and the youth, think “it is.” If the latter thought is itself not to

<sup>44</sup>Zeller (1881, 584), followed by Burnet (1930, 173), Owen (1960, 94–5), and many others, including Goldin (1993, 22–5), an interpretation that I no longer endorse, having come to accept what I here call the alternative reading.

<sup>45</sup>See Giancola (2001, 26:635–653).

<sup>46</sup>Such an interpretation is the project of Robbiano (2006, 2016a, 263–301).

be dispensed with as mere doxa (if it is, why is it so important what we think?) we must identify the thinker as that which is. So understood, the fragment could be understood as an inferred conclusion.<sup>47</sup>

A defense of this admittedly heterodox reading of Parmenides' poem is beyond the scope of this paper. But if there is some plausibility to it, the following parallels with Heraclitus are worthy of note. The author presents a metaphysical logos which bears not only on the nature of being but on the role that knowledge plays in the ontology of the whole. What is real is posited as subject to cognition, and as such, as engaged in a comprehension of how things are. At the same time, misapprehension and ignorance are real; they somehow belong to being. We ourselves, as a plurality of thinkers, are unreal. The very plurality by which we independently exist is a function of ignorance and wayward thinking. This erring thought thinking properly belongs to the intellect that is the one Being, even though that is the same being which thinks things as they are.

There are however differences with Heraclitus as well. Most significantly, Heraclitus is not a radical numerical monist. Even if the cosmos is a unique whole, the existence of the individual entities that constitute it is real, and the partial knowledge that is found in them is somehow mandated by the Logos itself.<sup>48</sup> The Logos demands that there be such, even if it demands that we turn from such partial knowledge by heeding the Logos. For Parmenides, at least on the reading that I have been briefly exploring, that which is is, and that is all we can say accurately about it.

<sup>47</sup>This general line of reasoning is endorsed by Vlastos (1946, 71–72; 1953, 167–8), Sedley (1999, 120), and Crystal (2002, 207–219).

<sup>48</sup>As an anonymous reviewer has pointed out, the approach of Parmenides I outline here has much in common with what is identified as the stance of Plato and Aristotle in Halper (2017, 464–7): knowledge is of what is, for which reason aspects of things that generate contradiction are excluded from contradiction. Given the immense influence of Parmenides on later thinkers, this is to be expected. But there is an important difference. As I understand him, Parmenides is not saying that we, as human inquirers, are capable of two modes of cognition, only one of which steers clear of paradox. Rather, there is only one being, not to be identified with any of us as individuals, and it alone grasps things without contradiction. We, as separate thinkers, faced with contradiction and paradox, are just as unreal as the contradictions that are objections of our cognition. The deep mystery is how errant minds such as ours have whatever ontological standing they have. Parmenides, on my understanding, denies them ontological standing, while for Heraclitus they have the cosmic Logos as source. The same reviewer insists that the “somehow” here, and in the preceding paragraph, indicates that the paradox has not been resolved, only displaced. I agree. This is the displacement of the “bump in the rug” to which I allude at the beginning of this paper. Some such displacement, I think, is intended by both Heraclitus and Parmenides.

What is, as perfectly unitary self-contained being, is in no way responsible for doxa and the things that seem to both be and not be. In a sense, this makes Parmenides' logos the more paradoxical of the two, for if what is not responsible for what is and is not, and there is nothing outside of what is, how can doxa be possible? But in another sense, it is Heraclitus' paradox that is the more paradoxical of the two, for while Parmenides' doxa is a kind of unexplainable metaphysical surd, lying entirely outside of Being, for Heraclitus, the fact that people do need to heed the Logos is necessitated by the Logos itself. That which is without the Logos is located in the Logos itself. We have here yet another unity of opposites.

So, does metaphysics tell us that metaphysics is impossible? Well, it all depends on your metaphysics. At the root of Western metaphysics are, arguably, two accounts grounded on positing a unitary principle of intelligibility and reality, which principle is both responsible for the fact that there is the metaphysical account which posits the principle, and for the fact that the human condition is such that a wholly adequate metaphysical insight into that reality is beyond human capacity. We owe Ed Halper a debt of gratitude in bringing to light the paradoxical account contained in Heraclitus' logos. Heraclitus himself, however, might well tell us that the paradox has its roots, not in the fact that his logos derives from his own human agency, and accordingly does not fall under the Logos itself, but from the fact that human agency, with all of its limitations, derives from and is governed by the Logos itself. Even if the Logos necessitates that any human logos is partial, the existence of this human logos is mandated by the Logos that transcends the human. In this way, space is cleared for the sort of metaphysics possible for us.

#### WORKS CITED

- Burnet, J. 1930. *Early Greek philosophy*. London: Adam and Charles Black.
- Conche, M. 1986. *Héraclite: Fragments, Texte Établi, Traduit Et Commenté*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Crystal, I. 2002. The scope of thought in Parmenides. *The Classical Quarterly* 52 (1): 207–219.
- Curd, P. 1998. *The legacy of Parmenides: Eleatic monism and later Presocratic thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dilcher, R. 1995. *Studies in Heraclitus*. Hildesheim: Olms.
- Finkelberg, A. 1998. On cosmogony and Ecpyrosis in Heraclitus. *American Journal of Philology* 119 (2): 195–222.

- Gaon, S. 2002. *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, trans. and abridged, A. Altmann. Indianapolis: Hackett Press.
- Giancola, D.M. 2001. Toward a radical reinterpretation of Parmenides' B3. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 26: 635–653.
- Goldin, O. 1993. Parmenides on possibility and thought. *Apeiron* 26 (1): 22–25.
- . 1999. Causality and creation in Chasidic Kabbalism. *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 8 (1): 59–74.
- Halper, E.C. 2017. Heraclitus and the possibility of metaphysics. *The Review of Metaphysics* 70 (3): 453–472.
- Kahn, C.H. 1979. *The art and thought of Heraclitus: An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, I. 2007. *Critique of pure reason*. Trans. F. Max Müller. London: Penguin Classics.
- Kirk, G.S. 1959. Ecpyrosis in Heraclitus: Some comments. *Phronesis* 4 (2): 73–76.
- Kirk, G.S., J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield. 2007. *The Presocratic philosophers: A critical history with a selection of texts*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lebedev, A.V. 2017. The metaphor of liber Naturae and the alphabet analogy in Heraclitus' logos-fragments (with some remarks on Plato's 'dream theory' and the origin of the concept of elements). *Studia Praesocratica* 8: 231–268.
- Long, A.A. 1975. Heraclitus and stoicism. *Philosophia* 5 (6): 133–156.
- . 2001. *Stoic Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mondolfo, R., and B. Aires. 1958. Evidence of Plato and Aristotle relating to the Ecpyrosis in Heraclitus I. *Phronesis* 3 (2): 75–82.
- Owen, G.E. 1960. Eleatic questions. *The Classical Quarterly* 10 (1): 84–102.
- Palmer, J.A. 2009. *Parmenides and Presocratic philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rescher, N. 2001. *Paradoxes: Their roots, range, and resolution*. Peru: Open Court Publishing.
- Robbiano, C. 2006. *Becoming being: On Parmenides' transformative philosophy. International pre-platonic studies*. Vol. 2. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.
- . 2016a. Being is not an object: An interpretation of Parmenides' fragment DK B 2 and a reflection on assumptions. *Ancient Philosophy* 36 (2): 263–301.
- . 2016b. Parmenides' and Śāṅkara's nondual being without not-being. *Philosophy East and West* 66 (1): 290–327.
- Sainsbury, R.M. 2009. *Paradoxes*. 3rd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schaffer, J. 2018. "Monism." ed. Edward N. Zalta. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. December 10. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/monism/>.
- Sedley, D. 1999. "Parmenides and Melissus." In *The Cambridge companion to early Greek philosophy*, ed. A.A. Long, 113–133. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Vlastos, G. 1946. Parmenides' theory of knowledge. *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 77: 66–72.
- . 1953. Review of J. Zafiropoulo. *L'école éléate: Parménide, Zénon, Méliossos*. *Gnomon* 25: 166–169.
- Zeller, E. 1881. *A History of Greek Philosophy from the Earliest Period to the Time of Socrates: with a General Introduction*. Trans. Sarah Frances Alleyne. Vol. 1. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.



# Understanding the Image of the Sun: Aristotle, Descartes, and Spinoza on Imagination

*Nastassja Pugliese*

Imagination, as an activity of the mind, is responsible for the formation of images that represent things and events that are experienced or were experienced by the senses. By capturing things as they appear, and by making present what is absent, imagination has been traditionally considered as an activity that is responsible for mistaken apprehensions and errors in knowledge. The mental representation of the image of the sun is one such case. In this chapter, I will reconstruct the problem that the sun example poses and describe the role it plays in the search for the philosophical roots of Spinoza's defense of a positive role of imagination in knowledge. The sun example appears in the writings of philosophers that were the target of Spinoza's critique: Aristotle and Descartes. As a connecting thread, the example of the sun allows us to weave their views on imagination and compare their explanations on the phenomenon. I will argue that, although

---

N. Pugliese (✉)

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education,  
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
e-mail: [nastassjapugliese@ufjr.br](mailto:nastassjapugliese@ufjr.br)

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature  
Switzerland AG 2022

D. Bloom et al. (eds.), *Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0_7)

there are some important differences in the three views, the Aristotelian and the Cartesian models of the faculties can nonetheless shed new light on Spinoza's theory of imagination.

## 7.1 UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGE OF THE SUN: WHAT IS IMAGINATION?

Imagination is traditionally considered as a faculty or an activity responsible for image production. As a representational capacity, imagination serves the function of constructing mental images of external objects. The epistemological problem of imagination is that it provides an image of an object that is sometimes in conflict with the true idea about the nature of the given object. The image of the sun is one such example; at the same time that we see the sun as small, we know that it is not small—and this knowledge does not make us stop seeing the sun as small. This example is used by Aristotle in *De Anima*, by Descartes in the *Meditations*, and by Spinoza in the *Ethics* to discuss the nature and function of imagination.<sup>1</sup> The following are excerpts of the sun example as they appear in *De Anima*, the *Meditations*, and the *Ethics* respectively:

But what we imagine is sometimes false though our contemporaneous judgement about it is true; e.g. we imagine the sun to be a foot in diameter though we are convinced that it is larger than the inhabited part of the earth. Thus either while the fact has not changed and the observer has neither forgotten nor lost belief in the true opinion which he had, that opinion has disappeared, or if he retains it then his opinion is at once true and false. (DA 3.3, 428b2-6)

<sup>1</sup>The following standard abbreviations are used throughout the work. For the work of Aristotle, *De Anima*, I will use DA. The *De Anima* translation being used is by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton / Bollingen Series LXXI 1984. E stands for Spinoza's *Ethics*. The internal references are as follows: app= appendix, ax = axiom, c = corollary, d = definition, dem = demonstration, exp. = explanation, p = proposition, s = scholium. So, the reference will be given, for example, as E2p17, which should be read as *Ethics*, part 2, proposition 17. For Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1628) will simply be referred to as *Rules*. *The Discourse on Method* (1637) will be referred to as *Discourse* and the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) as *Meditations*. I use the AT pagination (Adam and Tannery volumes of the *Oeuvres de Descartes*) followed by volume and page number, and I also refer to PW, which is the Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny translation, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols (one can find the AT pagination in the margins).

And finally, even if these ideas did proceed from things other than myself, it does not therefore follow that they must resemble those things. Indeed it seems I have frequently noticed a vast difference in many respects. For example, I find within myself two distinct ideas of the sun. One idea is drawn, as it were, from the senses. Now it is this idea which, of all those that I take to be derived from outside me, is most in need of examination. By means of this idea the sun appears to me to be quite small. But there is another idea, one derived from astronomical reasoning, that is, it is elicited from certain notions that are innate in me, or else is fashioned by me in some other way. Through this idea the sun is shown to be several times larger than the earth. Both ideas surely cannot resemble the sun existing outside me; and reason convinces me that the idea that seems to have emanated from the sun itself from so close is the very one that least resembles the sun. All these points demonstrate sufficiently that up to this point it was not a well-founded judgement, but only a blind impulse that formed the basis of my belief that things existing outside me send ideas or images of themselves to me through the sense organs or by some other means. (AT VIII, 39–40)

Similarly, when we look at the sun, we imagine it as about 200 feet away from us, an error that does not consist simply in this imagining, but in the fact that while we imagine it in this way, we are ignorant of its true distance and of the cause of this imagining. For even if we later come to know that it is more than 600 diameters of the earth away from us, we nevertheless imagine it as near. For we imagine the sun so near not because we do not know its true distance, but because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun. (E2p35s)

Although the three philosophers have the image of the sun as a shared example, the image serves a different function in each of their arguments. In Aristotle, the example appears in the context of the distinction between imagination, sensory experience, and judgment. The example is used to show that imagination cannot be reduced to or identified with the senses and that it is imagination that makes the intellect think. In Descartes, the example appears to show how imagination and the senses are not good foundations for knowledge, for they bring false ideas to the mind. Finally, in Spinoza, the sun example is used to contextualize imagination and distinguish an imagination from an error in knowledge. Spinoza's example appears to demonstrate that the imagination is not in itself a mistake, but a result of an affection that involves the essence of the sun itself and our affected bodies. The mistake is to interpret imagination as if it were

providing adequate ideas about the objects themselves, while what imagination in fact does is provide ideas about the relationship between the perceived object and the perceiving subject. In this sense, for Spinoza, imagination offers important information about how our bodies interact with other bodies.

In all three examples the image of the sun raises the problem that the mind simultaneously represents an object falsely (the sun as a small disk) and aids us in grasping a true idea about the nature of that same object (the idea that the sun is not small). As a shared example appearing in Aristotle, Descartes, and Spinoza, it gives a direction, a map with which to investigate the differences among their definitions of imagination. In this work, I will offer such a map and I will compare their explanations. I will argue that the rationalism of Descartes depends upon a rejection of the Aristotelian interpretation,<sup>2</sup> and that this difference between Aristotle's and Descartes' explanations is a useful background against which Spinoza's own theory of imagination can be interpreted.

## 7.2 THE ARISTOTELIAN EXPLANATION

The sun example in Aristotle appears in *De Anima* to illustrate the conflict between having an image that provides false information (that the sun is small—it looks like it is “a foot in diameter”) while the mind believes the opposite (that the sun is not small—for it is “larger than the inhabited part of the earth”). The contemplation of the sun astonishes us with the following mental conflict: at the same time we believe that the sun is small, we also have the idea that it is not small. Since our idea that the sun is not small does not stop our eyes from seeing it as small, we must accept that it is true that the sun appears as small, and that there is a sense in which we

<sup>2</sup> Pasnau (2008) in his discussion of the mind-soul problem claims that Descartes' usage of the concept of soul is different from Aristotle's understanding of soul. Referring to the Replies to Gassendi in the *Meditations*, Pasnau indicates that Descartes understands that “soul” should refer only to the principle by which we think and it should not include other aspects of human nature. In this sense, Descartes, by using *mentis* instead of *animae* is reducing “the principal form of human being” (*praecipua hominis forma*) to the mind so as to avoid referring to thought and extension through the same concept. For Aristotle, according to Pasnau, “the soul is the first, basic actuality that gives a body life, as distinct from those actualities responsible for the subsequent operations (motion, perception, thought) associated with life” and because of that, “if we are speaking as Aristotelians, then surely we do not want to treat the soul as just the mind.”

can say truly that the sun is small and another sense in which it is not. In order to solve this conflict, Aristotle distinguishes between the senses, imagination, judgment, and thinking.

In the Aristotelian model of mental faculties,<sup>3</sup> imagination is a faculty or disposition having two characteristics: (1) it is one of the faculties in virtue of which we judge truly or falsely, and (2) it is the faculty by which we construct mental images. The first one constitutes its function and the second its nature. This important definition appears in *De Anima* 428a1:

“If, then, imagination [*phantasia*] is that in virtue of which an image arises for us, excluding metaphorical uses of the term, is it a single faculty or disposition relative to images, in virtue of which we discriminate and are either in error or not?”

Contained in this question is a general definition of *phantasia* in which Aristotle presents imagination as distinct from perception and intellect. Imagination is taken as a specific kind of movement of the soul.<sup>4</sup> Imagination fulfills an intermediary function that mediates the unity of sensory experience in common sense and the intellection of the forms of the objects through thought. The objects of imagination, the images or *phantasmata*, act upon the intellect bringing it to an active exercise. Imagination integrates the lower and the higher faculties of the mind and for this reason it is vital to knowledge. According to Aristotle, “the soul never thinks without an image” (DA 431a16).<sup>5</sup> Aristotle makes a strong claim about the nature of the intellect and its relation to imagination: the

<sup>3</sup>Aware of the difficulties for establishing an understanding of *phantasia* in Aristotle, I decided to focus on the theory that appears in *De Anima* where we can find his most developed view on imagination. According to Schofield (1995), the third chapter of the third book of *De Anima* can be considered as the “official and principal discussion” of Aristotle on imagination: “in that chapter lurk most of the pleasures and puzzles which the student of Aristotle’s views on imagination will want to savour” because in there lies the fundamental constructions and problems of his theory. However, according to Ross (1923), it is also important to investigate other places such as *De Memoria*, *De Sensu*, *De Somno*, *De Insomniis*, and the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle makes use of *phantasia*. Considering the goal of this historical and comparative chapter, I will focus on *De Anima* but without limiting my analysis to the third chapter of the third book. In fact, I think that if one neglects chapter 7, the resulting theory of imagination will turn out to be a theory of representation in general.

<sup>4</sup>It is only in chapter 7 of book three that the definition of imagination as the means for judgment will become clear.

<sup>5</sup>*De Anima* III-7 (431a16): *Dió oudépote noei aneu phantásmatos he psýké.*

intellect never thinks without images, and it is only when engaged with images that the intellect is moved to act.

Imagination is characterized as that in virtue of which we say that a phantasm presents itself to us. A phantasm is an image that appears in the mind either with or without an external object to generate it. These images generated by imagination (*phantasmata*) are different from the images formed by sight, so this faculty should not be confused with the organ of vision.<sup>6</sup> While seeing implies the appearance of visual images—and therefore physical images—coming from an external object, the images of imagination are mental. This means that they are not sensorial themselves although they are always associated with the sensory qualities that caused the mental images to be produced. The image of imagination is not the same as the image from perception because the imaginative mind can have an image without an object being present, such as in dreaming and in memory. Imagination is, then, an intermediary faculty that lies between perception and reason giving the conditions for genuine intellection. Aristotle's definition of imagination as the faculty that is responsible for the emergence of mental images resulting from the unity of sense perception became representative of his own view on imagination. But it is the imagination's role in knowing that distinguishes Aristotle's view from other traditional views.<sup>7</sup>

The function of imagination appears in the first part of Aristotle's definition in DA 3.3: imagination is that in virtue of which we judge. But how does judgment happen? Sensations coming from perception are always true because they involve the presence of external objects and they are an effect of the object in the perceiving subject. They are true not in the same sense that we call a statement true, but they are true in the sense that they

<sup>6</sup>The sight has a major role to play in the construction of this unity of sensory experience since it allows the mind to discern perceptible objects and retain the object without its matter. Nevertheless, images of objects can remain in the sense organs even when the objects are absent, meaning that we can form images of the sensations coming from the five senses even after having had them. It is from the combination of sight and common sense that the faculty of imagination emerges. Imagination, however, is not the combination of sight and common sense. It is an activity or a movement that is caused by the combination of sight and common sense. Sight is understood by Aristotle as being the one among the five senses that is the paradigm for sense perception. For this reason, it is also the most influential sense in the appearance of phantasms in the mind. Aristotle in DA428b10 highlights the etymology of *phantasia* (imagination): "And, since sight is the paradigm for sense perception, imagination has derived its name (*phantasia*) from light (*phaos*), because without light one cannot see."

<sup>7</sup>Such as, for example, the Stoic and Platonic views on imagination.

are what they are supposed to be without failure: they are the effect of the interaction between an external body and the perceiving body. But an imagination, on the other hand, may be true or false because an image produced by imagination can fail to refer to that of which it is an image, or because the image constructed by imagination can misrepresent what is actually true of the object (i.e., what is true about the object with respect to the always true judgment of the intellect).

For example, Aristotle considers that the image of the sun is an example of a false image. When we see the sun, we perceive it as if it were an object measuring one foot. The immediate perception of the sun produces the imagination that the sun is a yellow object in the sky measuring one foot. However, we continue to observe the distance between the sun and the earth and, with the aid of the intellect, we calculate the size of the sun and arrive at the conclusion that the sun is much larger than a foot. That the sun is larger than a foot is a conclusion that does not come from perception or imagination alone, since the sun appears to the eye as a small object and consequently to the mind as a small object. But after reasoning about this event and calculating the distances, the mind then has to account for the coexistence of two judgments: “the object that measures one foot” and “the object that is larger than a foot.” Aristotle’s quick solution for this impasse is to say that the mind rationally judges the first imagination as false (given that it was a result of mere perception without rational interpretation) and rejects it. For Aristotle, both cannot be true at the same time and since the intellect always judges truly, by elimination the imagination is responsible for the false judgment.

The explanation that the judgment of imagination is false and the judgment of intellect is always true does not address the fundamental problem: how is it possible for imagination to misrepresent an object if it is also, in one sense, representing it? Imagination represents the object in a strong sense because by experiencing it, imagination carries the form of the object to the mind. So, if it is carrying the form of an object, how can the phantasm (or the image) be false? Aristotle’s account of misrepresentation cannot be explained by appealing to imagination alone. Since imagination is an intermediary activity, in order to address this problem it is necessary to appeal to the activities that come immediately before and after imagination. Misrepresentation is explained by an appeal to the relationship between common sense and imagination, and the relationship between imagination and the intellect.

The explanation coming from the activity of common sense works because imagination is derived from the function of sensory organs. The perception of an object appears to the individual as a unity because the faculty of the common sense unifies in a single perception what the five senses had perceived separately. For Aristotle, each of the five senses has a particular function, causing only the kind of sensation specific to its function. But the fact that we have five sensory organs creates the following situation: a unified object of experience is perceived by the subject through distinct organs that are made to perceive a single property of the object. That is, the object of experience, containing a certain color, smell, size, taste, and so on is perceived by means of its various properties that are each sorted by the senses of the experiencing subject. The experiencing subject will perceive each property through the sense that is responsible for that kind of property. So the complex of properties of an object will be experienced by each organ of perception separately. This means that all the qualities of the tangible are perceived through touch, all the qualities of sight are perceived through seeing, and each sensory organ captures a different quality of the same object. These perceived properties are then reunited in the subject in a process of recomposition of the perceived object.

This next stage starts when the senses begin to perceive incidentally the proper objects of other senses. Incidental perception is a movement of unification of these different properties. This movement of composition is called common sense and it is due to common sense that perceptions from different organs are experienced as a cluster of properties coming from the same object. For example, the visual experience of bile indicates that it is yellow and the experience of taste indicates that it is bitter. When perceiving yellow, the sight is capturing the sensorial yellow quality of the object and when it is perceiving bitter, the taste is perceiving the sensorial bitterness of the object. The simultaneity of the experience of different sensorial properties leads the mind to infer that these properties belong to the same object. This inference is an activity that is proper to common sense. Imagination, then, forms an image of the perceived object retaining its characteristics without retaining its matter (or the proper sensorial qualities of the object). This image or phantasm allows the mind to discern objects because their properties remain in the mind even after the sensible object has ceased to be experienced. So, when does the misrepresentation occur? The mind can misrepresent the object while reconstructing its unity according to the qualities perceived by the senses. The image can lead the mind to false judgments by making one sensory organ perceive

incidentally the qualities of other sensory organs, for example, the mind can infer that all yellow objects taste bitter because bile is yellow and bitter. So, in this sense, the image is said to be false because it does not serve as a good standard for judging either the actual experience or future experiences. But it is not the image itself that carries false content, the falsity is a result of an inference made after an incidental perception.

Another possible source of the falsity of imagination comes from the relationship between imagination and the intellect. This explanation appeals to principles coming from Aristotelian metaphysics. For Aristotle the faculties are exercised through a dynamic process of potentiality and actualization. When the intellect is in conflict with an imagination, that is, when we see an object such as the sun and arrive at two opposed descriptions (e.g., “the sun measures one foot” and “the sun measures more than one foot”), the falsity of imagination will be attributed to its lack of actualization. A false imagination is an image that has not been reinterpreted by the intellect. By taking this kind of imagination as it is, that is, by finding the cause of the given image, the intellect actualizes both itself and the imagination eliminating the judgment that the imagination failed to capture or representing the object it was supposed to represent. If the intellect does not take images as objects that also need to be known by their causes, then the mind will be more often deceived by imaginations.

For example, the sun was seen as measuring one foot, but after making calculations, the mind realizes that it measures more than a foot. The imagination that “the sun measures one foot” is then judged as false. However, the mind will not stop seeing the sun as small even when knowing that it is larger than a foot. This kind of conflict should cause the intellect to act. Why is it that we see the sun as measuring one foot? In one sense it is false to say that the sun is small, but in what sense? This persisting “false imagination” that the sun is small allows the intellect to actualize itself and its judgment of imagination. So that when the sun is seen again, it is taken as “an object that *appears* to measure one foot – but in fact measures more than one foot.” In this way, the thought that the sun measures more than a foot can coexist consistently with the imagination that the sun appears to measure one foot. By taking the false image as an object to be known, the intellect realizes, in this particular case, why a faraway object appears to the mind as smaller than it actually is and concludes that the image is not false, but indicative of the relationship that exists between the sun and the eye. In this sense, the image misrepresents the object because it is a representation not only of the object, but of the

object in relation to the perceiving individual. Hence, the imagination is a true representation of the relationship between size and distance.

In all these cases, the imagination is associating the perceptions from sensory experience that are unified in common sense and generating a mental image that gathers all the different sensations into a single mental object that is itself susceptible to being judged because it is an object to the rational mind. The main point in these examples is to show that imagination is part of the thinking process in Aristotle and is not merely perception; imagination produces objects that are a necessary part of the thinking process.

This, then, is the nature of imagination: a faculty that produces images formed by the perception of the unity of objects and which retains these images in the mind in the absence of the external object. Given that these images constructed by imagination carry the form of the object captured by the senses, there is no imagination without sensory perception (united in and through the common sense). The function of imagination is to carry the form of the object to the intellect and to keep the form of the object associated with sensations and the reasoning about these very forms. In carrying the form of the sensible object to the mind, imagination judges and causes the intellect to think. The intellect is a capacity that does not come to actuality if it is not stimulated to act. In this sense, there is no thinking without imagination. Hence, in Aristotle, there is no intellect without imagination and no imagination without sense perception (common sense).

In conclusion, taking into consideration that what is of interest here is the nature and function of imagination, the Aristotelian model of faculties can be summarized as follows. Imagination is that by which we judge; it is that by which a phantasm is present to the mind, and, more importantly, imagination and its objects (the phantasms) are the conditions for both thought and knowledge of the external objects. This model was generally accepted in the Middle Ages and by most of the Aristotelian philosophers (Aquinas, Avicena, Averroes, Maimonides). During Early Modernity, the period of rejection of the old Aristotelian science, this model was challenged. Although it was first accepted and used by Descartes in his early writings on imagination (*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*), it was rejected in the later writings (*Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*). It was the Descartes of the later writings who entered history and impacted the philosophical debates of the following centuries. The groundbreaking elements of the later writings are anti-Aristotelian and

incompatible with the previous scholastic model of faculty psychology. In the following, I will reconstruct Descartes' view on the relationships between sensory perception, imagination, and intellect so as to show the alleged incompatibility.

### 7.3 THE CARTESIAN EXPLANATION

The sun example in Descartes appears in the third meditation, the part of the *Meditations* dedicated to the nature and existence of god. The example is a step in the argument showing the falsity of the hypothesis that external objects are responsible for sending ideas about themselves to the mind. Like Aristotle, Descartes describes the two conflicting images of the sun that we carry in our minds: the one in which the sun is small ("quite small"), and the one in which the sun is not small (for it is "several times larger than the earth").<sup>8</sup> By comparing them, he concludes that the first idea, which seems to have emanated directly from the sun and, for this reason, would be closer to it, is the one that least resembles the sun. The image of the sun derived from reasoning gives a better idea of what the sun is like than the idea drawn directly from the senses, though it is not obvious that this is the case. Descartes himself shifted positions.

There are two places to look for Descartes' theory of imagination: the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1628) and the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), the first contains his early theory and the second his late theory of imagination. The main difference between the early and the late theory of imagination is its role in knowledge. Descartes starts with an optimistic view of imagination, where imagination has a positive and pivotal role in knowledge due to its instrumental character and the properties of the contents it produces. He then shifts his theory to one that, although it doesn't disregard imagination completely, is pessimistic with respect to the reliability of the contents of imagination. In the late theory, imagination remains instrumental for the application and construction of the method, but its products are considered false and deceitful. While the early theory has a lot of similarities with the Aristotelian model, the later theory is incompatible with it because true knowledge can only be acquired at the expense of imagination.

It is in the *Rules* that Descartes claims imagination is important for knowledge both because of the character of its content and its

<sup>8</sup> AT VIII, 39–40.

instrumental nature. In this work, written twenty years prior to the *Meditations*, the mind is conceived as consisting of a single cognitive power that is separated into different faculties depending on the function that the cognitive power is performing. This cognitive power is called *ingenium*, an inborn and individually embodied cognitive capacity<sup>9</sup> that is used as synonymous with *vis cognoscens*. Among the functions performed by the *ingenium*, the most important for knowing is imagination. With imagination, the mind has the capacity to organize and reorder the images that capture the simple nature of objects. Imagination has an instrumental function in knowledge because it is the faculty that orders the images of objects in the mind. The organization is a chief part of the cognitive process because it is due to an ordained sequence that the mind is then able to deduce truths by going through them as swiftly as possible.<sup>10</sup> Also, imagination is the faculty that is responsible for true understanding since it is necessary for the ordering of images which in turn allows the mind to make deductions and enumerations (inductions).

In the *Rules*, the origin of mistakes is not in the content of the images or the nature of the images. Mistakes are explained by an appeal to the body and mind union. The cognitive power can work independently from its expression in the bodily function, and it is this independence that ends up being responsible for errors. This is so because intellect can judge material objects as if they were independent from matter, and in failing to take the corporeal aspect into account, intellect incorrectly judges the object. Most of these mistakes are the misjudging of simple natures as if

<sup>9</sup>Schlutz claims that there is a metaphysical shift from the *Rules* to the *Meditations* that is exemplified by the shift from the *ingenium* to the *cogito*: “It is in the *Meditations*, where Descartes turns to those metaphysical problems with which the *Rules* are not concerned, that imagination becomes problematic in a way unprecedented in the *mathesis universalis* Descartes had begun to develop in 1625. In the metaphysical shift from *ingenium* to *cogito*, imagination loses its place among the fundamental mental operations of the self” (2009, 47). See also Schlutz’ characterization of *ingenium* (2009, 43).

<sup>10</sup>It is important to note that the *ingenium* in the *Rules* is constituted by three operations: *intuitus*, *deductio*, and *enumeratio* (*inductio*). Sepper (1996) explains that deduction in the *Rules* is similar to having a single intuition. He also claims that imagination has a pivotal role in the acquisition of science in the *Regulae* and that Descartes has a faculty psychology that is much more intimately connected with the body than the one in the later writings. Imagination is then responsible for the construction of method and for problem solving. This is the case because for deduction to take place, imagination has to arrange and order the images in a way that allows the mind to best “see” the order and connection of things and thereby deduce new truths.

they were compound natures and vice versa. Imagination, then, has the auxiliary function of guiding the intellect to the truth of the corporeal natures given that the intellect, when acting alone, can misjudge a particular experience as if it were universal.

Imagination in the *Rules* also has the role of providing true content because it is the faculty that produces the images of objects in the mind. Descartes explains this content-related claim through the discussion of the ability of the mind to grasp simple natures from experience. In this discussion, it is clear that imagination can also be responsible for mistakes, not insofar as it is the faculty that allows us to grasp the external object, but because it offers the object to the mind according to the order of experience and not the order of intellect. For example, when the *ingenium* perceives an object from experience, imagination sees it as a simple unity because it perceives the object in all of the properties that it takes to make the object what it is (shape, color, size, etc.). However, according to the intellect, a simple object of imagination is actually a compound intellectual object consisting of a diversity of simple properties such as extension, shape, size, color, and so on. Imagination, then, provides the true content of experience to the mind, but it is the function of the intellect to order the images and this content in a way that is true to the intellect itself. If the intellect is able to reorganize the order of experience provided by imagination and turn it into the order of the intellect, then mistakes can be avoided. In any case, imagination does not offer false content to the mind, and the images do refer to the objects of which they are images.

The true representation of the content is possible because imagination is closer to experience than the intellect. Imagination perceives and reconstructs the objects quasi-immediately (because they first appear to the common sense), whereas the intellect is an activity that is further away from experience and is therefore further away from the true nature of corporeal things. This quasi-immediate character of imagination is illustrated through the analogy of the seal and the wax in Rule 12. In the analogy, Descartes gives the impression that there is an immediacy and directness in the transfer of information from the senses to the imagination, and then again from the imagination to the intellect, all without a loss of information in the process. Just like the wax that takes the shape of the seal, the senses are shaped by the external objects:

we must think of the external shape of the sentient body as being really changed by the object in exactly the same way as the shape of the surface of

the wax is altered by the seal. This is the case, we must admit, not only when we feel some body as having a shape, as being hard or rough to the touch etc., but also when we have a tactile perception of heat or cold and the like. The same is true of other senses: thus, in the eye, the first opaque membrane receives the shape impressed upon it by the multi-coloured light; and in the ears, the nose and the tongue, the first membrane which is impervious to the passage of the object thus takes on a new shape from the sound, the smell and the flavour respectively. (PW 1, 40)

Descartes considers that the senses receive the shape of things by taking the form of these things just as if they were wax receiving an imprint. The figure received by the sense organ is conveyed to the common sense immediately, and then from common sense to imagination. The motion from the external object to the sense, then from the sense to the common sense, and finally from common sense to imagination, is a single motion that results in the imprint. If the sensory organs are shaped as if they were wax, then the common sense functions like a seal that will take the shape that the objects left in the sensory organs and carry it to shape the imagination. The imagination then is like both a seal and a wax. It is a wax because it takes the imprint of common sense, and it is a seal because the shaped wax will, in its turn, act on the intellect.

Imagination or *phantasia*, according to this analogy, is a “genuine part of the body” (PW 1, 41) which is “large enough to allow different parts of it to take on many different figures” (PW 1, 42) and even retain them for some time. Although Descartes defines sense perception, common sense, and imagination as faculties belonging to the body, he nonetheless maintains that the nature of the faculties is one and the same with the purely spiritual cognitive power (*vis cognoscens*). In all the functions (imagination, common sense, etc.), the cognitive power is sometimes active, sometimes passive; sometimes it resembles the seal, sometimes the wax. As purely spiritual, the claim that it resembles a seal or a wax and is caused by these bodily movements is “merely an analogy, for nothing quite like this power is to be found in corporeal things” (PW 1, 42). This conflict between a bodily imagination and a purely mental imagination will remain in the later writings. In the *Rules*, imagination is a faculty that bridges the gap between objects of experience and the intellect, so it is a necessary component of intuiting corporeal objects. Descartes claims that in the very moment when the mind perceives an external object, imagination directly reproduces the characteristics that compose that object which is

present to the mind. This reproduction, he says, exactly corresponds to the way in which the mind is perceiving it.<sup>11</sup>

Here we have a difference with respect to Aristotle. For Aristotle, imagination captures the sensible forms of the experienced objects and is responsible for providing information to the intellect on the nature of the given object. But for Descartes, and this is apparent in the *Rules*, imagination—even when it provides true content coming from the direct impression of the object in the senses—reproduces the object in a way that corresponds to the way in which the individual is perceiving the object. The point here for Descartes is that imagination is able to provide images that represent its content truthfully insofar as the content is considered to be the relation between the object and the perceiving subject, while for Aristotle the imagination tells us about the object itself as well as its relation with the perceiving subject. Another difference is that for Descartes, imagination provides the characteristics of the corporeal nature of the object such as color and shape while the intellect has an a priori concept of the object perceived. For Aristotle, it is imagination which carries the forms of the object—without its matter—to the intellect, causing it to

<sup>11</sup> Sepper (1996) claims that Descartes' idea is that there is an instantaneous rigid transmission between senses, imagination, and intellect and that this idea could only be made in the moments prior to his anatomical studies (which began in 1630s and led to the *Le Monde* and *Passions of the Soul*). After the studies of the mechanisms of the body, Descartes would have realized that this psychophysiological hypothesis was untenable: "the transmission of images was neither perfect, nor rigid, nor probably even instantaneous; in fact it was not so much transmission of an integral image as the tugging at multiple nerve fibres (or the flow of spirits in the nerves), each of which could transmit information concerning only a tiny part of the image. Moreover, only motion was transmitted; nothing like hue or tone, or even image or impression, would be identifiable in these nerve events. As a result, what arrived at the *phantasia* from the external world would have no great cognitive value, and the ability of the imagination (the *vis cognoscens* applying itself to the *phantasia*) to modify images presented to it, to recall old ones, and to invent new would amount to the unrestricted play of fantasy" (Sepper 1996, 534). I agree with Sepper to a certain extent. It seems that imagination exactly represents how the object appears to the mind and not how the object is in itself. Descartes in the *Rules* also considers that imagination can be responsible for mistakes, although this claim appears quickly in a small passage: "while he [the wise man] will judge that whatever comes to him from his imagination really is depicted in it, he will never assert that it passes, complete and unaltered, from the external world to his senses, and from his senses to the corporeal imagination unless he already has some other grounds for claiming to know this." So, in the *Regulae*, Descartes claims that imagination is a useful and a necessary tool to knowing simple natures that belong to the body and common notion, but when imagination composes entities, then it is a source of deceit.

think. This difference in the causal interaction between imagination and intellect will become more prominent in the *Meditations* where imagination is excluded from the essential nature of the *cogito*. The difference is present in the arguments for the deduction of the *cogito*, arguments that include another wax analogy.

The analogy of the wax in the *Rules* has a very different role than the analogy of the wax in the *Meditations*. Although both are used to convey something about the nature of the mind, in the *Rules* the wax/seal represents the mechanisms of imagination, while in the *Meditations* the wax is an object that is being perceived by the mind and is used to prove the innate character of ideas. Accompanying the shift in Descartes' theory of imagination in these works is a difference in the metaphysical status of corporeal things. In the *Meditations*, the senses deceive and the mind is better known than the body. In the *Rules*, on the other hand, corporeal natures can be known by the mind because imagination gives it the ability to grasp simple natures, and the intellect can be deceived by its autonomous nature. In the *Meditations*, the intellect is never the source of errors and its autonomous character is what grounds all that can be known. The wax argument in the *Meditations* serves to show that there is a priority of the mental over the material; the mind is only capable of experiencing an object as persisting in time and space because the mind itself has the ability to perceive the object. This is expressed in the conclusion of the analogy: "I must therefore admit that the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the mind alone" (PW 2, 21). Since the mind alone (pure intellect) is able to perceive the object, it is able to experience it changing and still understand it as a single unity. The analogy of the wax in the *Meditations* is part of an argument for nativism, an argument that implies that although all content coming from imagination and the senses are false and deceitful, the mind is able to have true ideas if it relies on the intellect and its innate objects.

The shift in the role of imagination from the *Rules* to the *Meditations* can be explained through the foundational role of the *cogito*. The *cogito* as a safe ground for knowledge results in the restriction of the role of imagination and in the exclusion of its objects (and its contents) from the thought process.<sup>12</sup> The objects of imagination are no longer considered as

<sup>12</sup>According to Schlutz: "René Descartes, for example, forcefully excludes imagination from his conception of the *cogito*, convinced that the deceptive and misleading products of this image-producing faculty could play no part in the abstract certainty of self-reflexive

truthful representations of external objects, instead they are taken to be images that misrepresent objective reality. Imagination has now the potential to jeopardize knowledge and should be controlled or even excluded from reasoning. The images produced by imagination have ceased to be considered as true representations of objects because there is nothing in the images themselves that guarantee that the content they have actually captures the external reality. Descartes puts into question this representational capacity by doubting the information coming from, and associated with, the senses, and the result of this doubt was that the only thing that cannot be put into question is the very capacity to think. Imagination is then excluded from the essential nature of the *cogito*:

“I thus realize that none of the things that the imagination enables me to grasp is at all relevant to this knowledge of myself which I possess, and that the mind must therefore be most carefully diverted from such things if it is to perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible.” (PW 2, 19)

From this passage it is clear that imagination should be kept to a minimum if one is to acquire knowledge. However, imagination is not completely excluded from the *cogito*: “But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions” (ibid). Imagination is part of the *cogito*, but it is not through imagination that the *cogito* will know itself because the *cogito* is “this puzzling ‘I’ which cannot be pictured in the imagination” (AT 2, 29).

It is important to note, however, that although the objects of imagination are considered to be doubtful and therefore cannot offer stable foundations for knowledge, imagination does play an instrumental and methodological role. It is due to the false and unreliable nature of its objects that the hyperbolic doubt can be entertained. Also, the dream argument and the evil demon argument are both hypotheses that are engendered by imagination. Imagination in the *Meditations* becomes purely instrumental and is helpful insofar as it contributes to the intellect finding its firm foundations. As we have seen before, although imagination has a role in the method, its objects are only considered in their falsity of content. Hence, imagination does not have any role in providing true

thought. Hence, the Cartesian *cogito* is, from its inception into philosophical discourse, defined against imagination” (2009, 4).

objects to the mind.<sup>13</sup> This pessimism with respect to the content of imaginary representations is a fundamental cause of the puzzle of sensory representation.<sup>14</sup>

This brief analysis of the *Rules* and the *Meditations* leads us to conclude that the Cartesian model of the faculties is not only different than the Aristotelian model, it is inconsistent with it. In Aristotle, the intellect is caused to exist by the imagination, and it does not exist prior to the point at which the mind starts thinking. Contrarily, in Descartes the intellect exists prior to all experience and is the condition for imagination's ability to perceive the objects of the senses as unified objects. In the *Meditations*, imagination does not lose its cognitive character (due to its proximity to experience), but it loses its former pivotal role in knowledge acquisition. It is undeniable that imagination plays a certain role in knowledge in the *Meditations*, for it is that through which radical doubt and supposition (such as the evil genius and the dreaming hypothesis) are possible. Nevertheless, this role of imagination does not come from the truth of its objects (the true nature of images), but is due to its capacity to create false images or images that do not represent objects as they are. Imagination ceases to be the faculty that aids intellect to think by providing true objects for the mind, and instead becomes a faculty that creates false objects. These objects most of the time cause mental confusion, but if properly used, they can still aid the intellect. In any case, for Descartes, imagination does not cause the intellect to think, it is the intellect that can use

<sup>13</sup>Schlutz has a stronger claim: "A close reading of Descartes' philosophical texts . . . reveals that poetic inspiration and divine enthusiasm leave stronger traces in Descartes' thought than one might expect, exposing an irrational moment at the foundation of the philosophical system that lies outside the subject's control. At the same time, Descartes cannot hide the representational and hence fictional nature of the cogito, which emerges as a narrative product of the Cartesian text no matter how persistently Descartes attempts to divest it of any representational remnants. Thus, the very centerpiece of Cartesian philosophy depends upon the faculty of imagination that Descartes has so rigorously attempted to exclude from it." So, Schlutz considers that the cogito is a product of Descartes' imagination and that all theses in the *Meditations* depend upon imagination. I agree with that only to a certain extent. The theses depend upon imagination insofar as it is an instrument, but not insofar as it provides the structure of ideas or even their content. Descartes is an internalist in the *Meditations* and this should be captured by a theory of imagination.

<sup>14</sup>The puzzle elaborated by DeRosa (2010) is the following: if imagination is somehow capturing the objects of experience, how is it possible to misrepresent them at all? This puzzle is important because it shows that if Descartes is completely ignoring the true content of the objects of imagination, then this indicates that knowledge of experience is impossible.

imagination to its advantage. Also, the intellect in Descartes has existential priority over imagination, and the mind intuits before it imagines.

So far I have argued that for Aristotle imagination causes the intellect to act and is a necessary part of the thinking activity. This is the case because imagination generates images (phantasms) that carry the forms to the intellect and, at the same time, is a kind of judgment of sensory experience that can be true or false. On the other hand, I have argued that Descartes claims that imagination does not cause the intellect to act because the intellect is separate from and prior to imagination. I will now show how the explanations of Aristotle and Descartes on the works of imagination are related to Spinoza's account of the same faculty.

#### 7.4 SPINOZA BETWEEN (AND BEYOND) ARISTOTLE AND DESCARTES

Spinoza uses the sun example to show that imaginations are not in themselves false. Like Aristotle and Descartes, he focuses on the two conflicting ideas of the sun. Yet, instead of talking about the size of the sun (that it is small and not small), Spinoza uses the example to talk about its distance. This interpretive shift is at the core of Spinoza's critique of Aristotle and Descartes. Spinoza, when analyzing imaginative ideas, is not looking for properties of the objects in themselves, but for the relations objects have to the observer. Distance is a relational property that influences the apparent magnitude of objects. In Spinoza's examples, the conflicting ideas are (1) that the sun is close to us (looks like it is "200 feet away from us") and (2) that the sun is not close to us ("it is more than 600 diameters of the earth away from us") (E2p35s). Unlike his predecessors, Spinoza is not comparing the imaginative idea and the idea conceived by the mind. He is interested in the genesis of these ideas, and that is why the property described is not the effect of the distance (the size of the sun as it appears) but the distance itself.

The sun example appears again in the *Ethics*, in E4p1sch, where he explicitly rejects the previous explanations: "we do not imagine the sun to be so near us, because we are ignorant of its distance, but because the mind conceives the magnitude of the sun to the extent that the body is affected thereby." This explanation shows that the idea produced by imagination (that the sun is close) is actually connected and related to the adequate idea of the sun (that the sun is distant). For Spinoza, we see the

sun as if it were close because of the laws of nature, which also explains the necessity of us seeing the sun as small. With this turn in the interpretation of the sun example, Spinoza structures his defense of imagination as a kind of knowledge. Imagination does not provide us with the essence of singular things, but it gives, through an affection of our body, the essence of the object insofar as our body is affected by the object. It informs us of the relationship between the external object and our affected body. An idea of imagination “indicates rather the present disposition of the human body than the nature of the external body” (E4p1sch) and for this reason, this idea does not vanish in the presence of an adequate idea about the nature of the object. The sun example is then key to exploring the positive role that imagination plays in knowledge.

However, in other parts of the *Ethics*, the sun also appears as an example of the negative workings of imaginations. It is used to describe the causal structure that leads to ideas of future contingents (E2p44sch), and as an example of teleological explanations imagined by the mind (E1app). Spinoza, in E2p41, claims that imagination is the only cause of falsity and that all ideas which are inadequate and confused belong to imagination. Spinoza’s reading of the example results in the following explanation: when I look at the sun, I see it as if it were a small object in the sky. My mind then imagines that the sun is a small object because of the relationship that I have with the real sun when I see it. Since objects that are very distant from each other appear small to the eye, then the sun appears small to my mind. This image of the sun is an inadequate idea or an imaginative idea about the sun; it is false to say that the sun is a small object in relation to the usual things that strike us as small. So, when I imagine the sun as small, this is merely the result of an interaction between my visual apparatus and the sun. To misrepresent the sun in imagination is to assume that the result of the interaction between the sun and me is true of the thing alone and not true of that particular interaction (which is what is the case). The idea of the relationship between the sun and me is inadequate at this point because the mind does not know the causes or the limitations of this idea, and it does not know that it is about a relation and not about the object itself. These ideas are “like conclusions without premises” (E2p28def). Had the mind known that it sees the sun as small because of its distance from the sun, it would not have misapprehended the object but it would have learned something from it. This learning can happen, like in Aristotle, when reason comes into play; by seeing the sun as small, and by not seeing its shadow anywhere, the mind can infer that the sun

looks small but just because it is far away. In this sense, when the sun appears as small, we can say that this idea is not about the sun, but rather about the relationship between the sun and the optical structure of my visual apparatus. So, when perceiving the sun as small, and taking this perception as an adequate idea, Spinoza says that we are imagining and therefore, misunderstanding what reality is. But when we perceive the sun as small, and connect this perception with other ideas that we have about the sun, then the inadequate idea can become a true idea. That is, we are able to have a rational understanding of the properties of the sun, and hold at the same time an imagination (inadequate idea) and a rational idea (the cause of that particular imagination).

Although we can have a true idea about the sun, this idea is not going to prevent us from seeing the sun as small. When I have a true idea of the sun, I do not stop imagining it as small, so I simultaneously see it as small (the content of the inadequate idea) and as an enormous star in the solar system that appears to me as small because of its distance from where I stand (an adequate idea). When I look at the sun, the imaginative idea formed by my mind is not connected with its cause, so it is an inadequate and partial idea. When I form a true idea about the sun and look at the sun, I continue to see the sun as small, but the content of this inadequate idea (seeing the sun as small) is connected with the idea of its cause (large objects such as stars are seen as small from a distance). So although the content of the inadequate idea is still present, when this content is connected with the idea of its cause it has the characteristics of an adequate idea and is no longer partial.

The mind can only form adequate ideas from inadequate ideas because imagination and reason work simultaneously with one another. That is, while I have an inadequate idea about *x*, I can, at the same time, have an adequate idea about that inadequate idea of *x*. This simultaneity of ideas is possible because the initial content of the inadequate idea is present while the structure of that idea has changed (now the idea is connected with its cause) and more content has been added to the idea of *x* (content coming from the adequate idea of *x*). This explanation is only possible if we consider that reason and imagination are not—in a metaphysical sense—prior to one another. The possibility of interactions between inadequate and adequate ideas occurs when imagination and reason are seen as movements of the mind that can happen at the same time.

Chauí recognizes that, in Spinoza, simultaneity is an essential trait of the activities of the mind. She argues that Spinoza is constantly using the

expression *plura simul* (“several things at once”) to refer to the workings of the cognitive structure of the mind: “each kind of knowledge is a cognitive structure that distinguishes itself from others through the way in which the mind operates with the simultaneous plurality [*plura simul*]” (2016, 246). The capacity of the mind to understand and perceive many things at once reflects the nature of substance as a unified whole that contains simultaneously a multiplicity of changing parts. Not only the mind but nature itself is constituted by the simultaneous presence of multiple objects and ideas.<sup>15</sup> So when the individual experiences reality, the individual experiences at the same time its own affections and the ideas of these affections, and these experiences are perceived not separately from one another but as a complex unity that has multiple parts. In this way, the activities of the mind do not occur one after another where for one to occur the other has to stop acting; the activities occur simultaneously. We have true ideas while having false ones, we have imaginations, and we reason—all at the same time. So inadequate ideas and adequate ideas are all of the time interacting.

Spinoza understands imagination as a complex activity that involves the generation of images, the generation of ideas of images, the composition of ideas, memory, dreaming, hallucinating, prophecy, misunderstandings, and illusions. Instead of treating each of these activities separately, Spinoza calls all these different phenomena *imaginatio*. His view on imagination is a complex metaphysical theory that has implications that are still to be further investigated. Interpreting Spinoza’s metaphysics from the point of view of the simultaneous plurality (*plura simul*) can shed new light on his theory of imagination. At the same time, as we have seen, Spinoza’s ambivalence toward imagination can be read as resulting from a reaction toward Descartes’ late theory of faculties. In criticizing Descartes, Spinoza ends up with a theory of imagination that—although substantially different—has a lot in common with the ancient and medieval Aristotelian theories of imagination<sup>16</sup> in so far as he recognizes the relationships between

<sup>15</sup>I used Chauí’s understanding of *plura simul* as an interpretative key to argue for other characteristics of the interactions among the kinds of knowledge in Spinoza (Pugliese 2017a), and to argue that imagination itself occurs simultaneously in the body and in the mind (Pugliese 2017b).

<sup>16</sup>Chauí (1999) argues that Spinoza and Aristotle had very distinct metaphysical principles guiding their philosophies and this makes their epistemology incomparable. I do agree that Spinoza and Aristotle work from within different metaphysical principles, but my hypothesis is that they agree with the claim that “imagination helps the intellect to think.”

reason and imagination and the positive role of imagination in knowledge. But Spinoza is not trying to find which activity of the mind is prior to the other (like in Aristotle and Descartes), nor is he trying to figure out how to detach reason from imagination (like in Descartes). The use of the sun example can help us to unveil these similarities and differences, even when taking into consideration the fact that Spinoza himself would deny any Aristotelian and Cartesian influence. This influence, however, is present in some tensions in the text and in the fact that, while Spinoza rarely cites the names of the philosophers he is criticizing, he does cite both Aristotle<sup>17</sup> and Descartes.<sup>18</sup> Comparative strategies are enlightening because, since Spinoza's philosophy is not detached from its historical context, the analysis of theoretical models that Spinoza is in dialogue with does bring further instruments to the task of accounting for concepts inside his system. The present comparative study of the sun example, and the way it leads to different explanations coming from various philosophical systems, shows the influences of Aristotle and Descartes on Spinoza's theory of imagination, and also shows how an imagination can in itself inspire philosophical

<sup>17</sup>With respect to Aristotle, for example, in the preface of the *TTP*, Spinoza refers to the "delusions of the Aristotelians" and in the Ep56 to Hugo Boxel he states "the opinion of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates carries little weight to me." But still, it is not clear whether the reaction to Aristotle is due merely to the philosophical context of the seventeenth century or whether it comes from the fact that Spinoza read Aristotle. There are, however, a few scholars trying to show that Spinoza closely read Aristotle, but even if their hypothesis is correct, it does not tell us much about the similarities and differences in their accounts of the faculties. Manzini (2009), for example, argues that it was due to a typo in an edition of the *Metaphysics* that scholars were able to find the exact version of Aristotle that Spinoza had access to and read. This typo had been reproduced by Spinoza in the text of the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, the appendix to his book on *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*. Manzini was able to trace the typo (a reference to book XI instead of book XII of *Metaphysics*) back to an edition of Aristotle's work printed in Basel in 1548 by Johannes Oporinus. Manzini claims that his discovery indicates that Spinoza read Aristotle very closely.

<sup>18</sup>Barbone and Rice (1998) in the introduction to the *PPC* explain that this was Spinoza's first published work and the only one that was printed under his own name. Spinoza's friend Lodewijk Meyer was responsible for the publication and he was supposed to write a preface to the work. The correspondence between Spinoza and Meyer (Ep 13 and Ep 15) regarding the preface and publication seems to indicate that Spinoza was willing to be seen as adhering to Descartes' position and not as a critic. This correspondence, however, also leaves in the air whether this adherence was because of Spinoza's actual agreement with Descartes' philosophical theses in his *Principles of Philosophy* or whether the willingness to be seen as a Cartesian adherent was coming out of fear of rejection. The case of the *PPC*, *CM*, and the *KV* are similar to one another with respect to the difficulty in addressing the extent of Spinoza's critique. All of the early writings seem to be marked by a trace of Cartesianism.

reflection. Although it is controversial whether imaginations are in themselves good pieces of knowledge, it is clear that—at least for Spinoza—they serve as a propaedeutic to thinking and serve a pedagogical purpose. They are propaedeutic because the use of the sun example serves as an introduction to an investigation on the nature and function of imagination, and they are pedagogical because they provide intellectual tools to stimulate further rational investigation. The sun example, like all good propaedeutic and pedagogical examples, is an experience that is both common (though not universal) and particular (it is always one's own experience of the sun), both philosophical and mundane.

### WORKS CITED

- Aristotle. 1984. *De Anima* in Barnes, Jonathan. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Vol. I. Princeton: Bollingen Series.
- Barbone, S., and L. Rice. 1998. *Principles of Cartesian philosophy and metaphysical thoughts*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Chauí, M. 1999. *A Nervura do Real: imanência e liberdade em Espinosa*. Vol. I. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- . 2016. *A Nervura do Real II: imanência e liberdade em Espinosa*. Vol. II. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Descartes. 1987. *Discours de la Méthode*. Texte et Commentaire par É. Gilson. Paris: Vrin.
- . 1998. *Discourse on Method*. Trans. D. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- . 1989. *The Passions of the Soul*. Trans. S. Voss. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- . 1985. *Philosophical Writings*. Vol. 1 & 2. Trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Cambridge University Press.
- DeRosa, R. 2010. *Descartes & the puzzle of sensory representation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Domínguez, A. 1997. Las Fuentes de los Cogitata Metaphysica. Analogías Lexicas con Suárez y Heereboord. In *Spinoziana Recherche di Terminologia Filosofica e Critica Testuale. Seminario Internazionale Roma, 29–30 settembre 1995*, ed. Pina Totaro. Madrid: Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- Israel, J. 2001. *Radical enlightenment: Philosophy and the making of modernity 1650–1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- James, S. 2010. Narrative as the means to freedom. In *Spinoza's theological-political treatise – A critical guide*, ed. Y. Melamed and M. Rosenthal. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Klever, W. 1993. More about Hume's debt to Spinoza. *Hume Studies*. Volume XIX 1: 55–74.
- Lachiéze-Rey, P. 1960. *Les Origines Cartésiennes du Dieu de Spinoza*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin.
- Manzini, F. 2009. *Spinoza: Une Lecture d'Aristote*. Paris: PUF.
- Melamed, Y. 2011. Spinoza: Une Lecture d'Aristote (review). *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 49 (1): 126–127.
- Nyden-Bullock, T. 2007. *Spinoza's Radical Cartesian Mind*. Bristol: Continuum Publishing.
- Pasnau, R. 2008. In Quo Cognoscimus. In *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. S. Kärkkäinen and P. Knuuttila, 131–149. Hilderberg: Springer Netherlands.
- Pugliese, N. 2017a. Os três gêneros de conhecimento e a natureza de suas relações. In *Spinoza e Nós*, ed. R. Becker, E. Fragosos, and F. Guimaraes, 114–127. Rio de Janeiro: Editora PUC-Rio.
- . 2017b. Spinoza's argument for a bodily imagination. *Unisinos Journal of Philosophy* 3: 172–176.
- Ross, W.D. 1923. *Aristotle*. London: Methuen.
- Schlutz, A. 2009. *Mind's world: Imagination and subjectivity from Descartes to romanticism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Schofield, M. 1995. Aristotle on Imagination. In Martha C. Nussbaum & Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (pp. 250–279). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2000. Aristotle: An introduction. In *The Cambridge history of Greek and Roman political thought*, ed. C. Rowe and M. Schofield, 310–320. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sepper, D. 1996. *Descartes's imagination: Proportion, images, and the activity of thinking*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Spinoza. 1985. The collected works of Spinoza. Vol. 1, ed. and trans. E. Curley. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- . 2016. The collected works of Spinoza. Vol. 2, ed. and trans. E. Curley. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Stone, M.W.F. 2002. Aristotelianism and scholasticism in early modern philosophy. In *A companion to early modern philosophy*, ed. S. Nadler, 7–24. New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing.
- Van Rooijen, A.J. 1889. *Inventaire des livres formant la bibliothèque de Bénédicte Spinoza*. La Haye: Martins Nijhoff.
- Wolfson, H.A. 1948. *The philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the latent processes of his reasoning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Yovel, Y. 2003. Spinoza, the first anti-Cartesian. *Idealistic Studies* 33: 121–140.



# Moving Naturally for Aristotle, Laozi, and Zhuangzi

*May Sim*

My aim is to compare Aristotle and the Daoists (specifically, Laozi and Zhuangzi) about moving naturally. I consider their views of self-motion enabling one to move or cross any physical boundaries, to whether the motion is natural or artificial such that natural motion is easier than artificial motion. Ethics can be regarded as the ease of moving across the boundaries that separate one from another, not only physically, but psychologically. I draw on Ed Halper's solution to how nature is knowable for Aristotle, by interpreting the various sorts of motions—per se and accidental—as complete and incomplete actualities, and hence as more or less knowable, respectively. Comparing Halper's interpretation of how the various sorts of motions are distinct and knowable for Aristotle, to the functional equivalent motions and how they are knowable in Daoism, will reveal similarities and differences regarding these traditions' accounts of motion.<sup>1</sup> However, what will become clear is that whereas these various

---

<sup>1</sup>Halper (1984).

---

M. Sim (✉)

Philosophy Department, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA, USA  
e-mail: [msim@holycross.edu](mailto:msim@holycross.edu)

types of motions are distinct and hierarchically rank ordered in Aristotle, they are intimately related for the Daoists. The fluidity and kinship between these motions for the Daoists will reveal that moving naturally is the norm for them. More elaborately, even artificial and accidental motions are modeled upon natural movement because what is natural (*ziran* 自然, translated as “spontaneous,” “self-soing,” or “effortless,”) is characteristic of the *Dao*, which is constant and knowable. I trace these Eastern and Western thinkers’ accounts of the ease with which one moves naturally to their respective first principles: the unmoved mover for Aristotle, and the *Dao* for the Daoists. Finally, I briefly gesture toward which of the two philosophies have the stronger ethical resources for dealing with our current environmental challenges.<sup>2</sup>

## 8.1 NATURAL THINGS AND KNOWLEDGE

Both Aristotle and Daoists, such as Laozi and Zhuangzi, emphasize that things that are by nature have their sources of motion in themselves. The boundary between natural and artificial things is in the ability of the former to move themselves, in contrast to the latter. Aristotle defines each of the things that exist by nature, such as animals, the parts of animals, plants, and the four elements (earth, air, fire, water) in his *Physics* II.1 as having in itself “a principle of motion and rest (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration).”<sup>3</sup> In contrast, artificial things such as beds and plates, “have no innate impulse to change,” but to the extent that they are made of the four elements, they do have impulses to change, but not in virtue of what they are essentially, but accidentally.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Daoists maintain that the 10,000 natural things (*wanwu*)<sup>5</sup> cannot live

<sup>2</sup>This essay’s focus is on motions and knowledge of motions for Aristotle and the Daoists. I’ve elaborated on these thinkers’ respective resources for ethics and environmental ethics in separate articles.

<sup>3</sup>Hardie and Gaye (1994–2009), *Physics* II.1192b14–15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 192b18–21. For instance, insofar as a crafted object is made of earth, its tendency is to move downward. Alternatively, consider Aristotle’s discussion of Antiphon’s example about planting a bed 193a12–14. Antiphon’s claim is that if the rotten wood generated a shoot, it would have developed into a tree rather than a bed, showing that it is the accidental material (in this case, wood) instead of the essential nature of the crafted bed that is capable of moving itself.

<sup>5</sup>As *Daodejing* 1 (“DDJ” hereafter, Ivanhoe 2002) states, the 10,000 things originate from the *Dao* (Way), and even though *Dao* “grows” or nourishes everything, it doesn’t rule them (DDJ 3, 34). Instead, the 10,000 things on earth take their laws from heaven, and

without *de*, which can be translated as “virtue,” or the “potency” and “power” to move to express what is unique to something’s nature.<sup>6</sup> Zhuangzi states, “Virtue (*de* 德) is the perfect cultivation of harmony. Virtue without shape (*de bu xing* 德不形) is something all things (*wu* 物) cannot leave,”<sup>7</sup> meaning that all natural things have the power to move themselves to express their natures. More elaborately, since all things originate from the *Dao*, are nourished (DDJ 1, 3, 34), and caused by it to move spontaneously according to its laws (DDJ 25, 64), they are all endowed with virtue, or the power to move, without any particular shape. Once this shapeless virtue in a human being is perfectly cultivated by someone [which cultivation is unique to human beings], one is then able to realize the *Dao*, accord with it, and harmonize with everything. Just as the *Dao* nourishes everything without lording over them or taking possession of them, one who has cultivated virtue perfectly is able to model the *Dao*’s nourishing activities and harmonize with everything by supporting them in their natural conditions (DDJ 64) instead of using them for one’s selfish desires.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Daoists talk about virtue without shape in all natural things so that human cultivation of virtue is intimately bound up with, and supportive of virtue in the natural world, Aristotle’s talk of virtue in natural things is specific to their functions, without relating the

heaven takes its law from the *Dao*, which law in turn is the natural (*ziran*, self-soing, spontaneous)(DDJ 25). Again, DDJ 64 states that *wanwu* (萬物) develops spontaneously (*ziran*). Supporting the spontaneous movement (*ziran*) of natural things, Lai (2003, 257) quotes Chung-ying Cheng’s “On the Environmental Ethics of the Tao and the Ch’I,” saying: “*ziran* is not something beyond and above the *Dao*. It is the movement of the *Dao* as *Dao*, namely as the underlying unity of all things as well as the underlying source of the life of all things. One important aspect of *ziran* is that the movement of things must come from the *internal life* of things and never results from engineering or conditioning by an external power” (my italics and substitution of Pinyin for Wade Giles romanization). This internal life refers to *de*.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper (2014, 100) translates *de* as “native powers” and Ziporyn (2009, 5.14) translates *de* as “innate powers.” For Lai (2003, 255) “*De* is that distinctiveness, integrity, or excellence of each thing that can be realized only in the context of the whole, the ideal *dao*.”

<sup>7</sup> *Zhuangzi* 5.17, my translation. The Chinese text for my translation of the *Zhuangzi* is from *Zhuangzi 2006–2021*. <http://ctext.org/zhuangzi>; I use Ziporyn (2009) for the chapter references. Unless stated otherwise, all references and translations of the *Zhuangzi* are, with modifications, from Ziporyn (2009).

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of Laozi’s talk of harmony as the object of knowledge, which consists in the natural harmony of opposites as the norm of everything, so that one is to assist everything in its natural condition rather than pursuing one extreme of an opposite, see Sim (2014, 55–56).

perfection of human virtues to the natural world. Moreover, unlike Aristotle's sharp contrast between natural and artificial motions, Daoists maintain a continuity between natural and artificial motions.

To elaborate on what nature is, Aristotle considers four candidates for the nature or substance of something in *Physics* II.1193a28–b18. Some, according to Aristotle, consider the underlying matter (*hupokeimenê hulê*) of something that can move itself as its nature (e.g., the wood that makes up the bed, or the bronze that makes up the statue) because matter is what persists through all change (193a28–30). In contrast, others maintain that the shape (*morphê*) or form (*eidos*), stated in the definition (*logon*) of something, rather than its matter, is its nature because without form, something is only potentially and not yet actually, its nature, say, a bed, a statue, or a man (193a30–b6). Besides, matter undergoes changes when it is sculpted into the shape of a bed. Moreover, because “man is born from man,” (193b8) it is the shape or form that is man's nature. Finally, something's nature is its final end into which it grows, and that again, is its form (*Physics* II.1193b12–18).

Halper compares Aristotle's form of a sensible thing to a complete actuality which has its end in itself, so that it doesn't stop being what it is when it reaches its end, as opposed to an incomplete motion such as building a house, which would stop when one arrives at the external end of a house. Examples of complete actualities are when one sees, it is also true to say that one has seen, or when one thinks or lives well, it is always true to say that one has thought or has lived well. If complete actualities don't end by becoming something else, but always remain as themselves, they satisfy Aristotle's criteria of unity (in that each actuality remains one and the same), definability, and hence, knowability.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Referring to *Metaphysics* IX.61048b18–35, Halper says, “Aristotle describes motions as incomplete because their ends do not belong to them. In contrast actualities have their ends present within them” (1984, 815). Again, Halper says, “Actualities last through time, but they are not temporal because they are complete at all times . . . motions remain incomplete until they attain their ends: ‘all motions are in time and are for an end’ (1174a19–20)” (1984, 818). Explaining the unity and unchanging nature of actualities, Halper says, “actualities are never in the process of change; they never alter. Hence there is no objection to unchanging knowledge of them. Further, because each actuality is unchanging, there is no possibility that an actuality might become something else. Thus, there are no objections to ascribing unity to an actuality. It follows that there are no objections to identifying actualities as forms” (Halper 1984, 818).

In contrast to the senses of nature that focus on the sharp division between matter and form in Aristotle, followed by the elevation of the form or actuality of something as its nature that is also the definition of the thing, Daoists such as Laozi and Zhuangzi do not separate form and matter, let alone prioritize the form or actuality as something's nature that can be defined. Instead of naming things or defining them according to how they are carved up, analogous to carving up unhewn wood so that the wood becomes things that can be named, Laozi says, "When unhewn wood is carved up, then there are names. Now that there are names, know enough to stop!" (DDJ 32). For Laozi, unhewn wood is the epitome of nature or what's natural. Whereas Aristotle stresses that the shape or form makes something actual and defines its nature, Laozi maintains that it is the uncarved wood with its potential to become an infinite number of things that makes it natural. This is because the *Dao*/Way that has created heaven and earth and set everything in motion (DDJ 16), "does nothing and yet nothing is left undone" (DDJ 37). Accordingly, no craftsman is needed to carve the wood into the shape of a bed or a plate for a particular piece of wood to be such an object. Alternatively, if one were to carve the wood at all, the best carving for Laozi is the sort that cuts nothing off (DDJ 28), meaning that the *Dao* has already enabled the wood's nature to move itself to become certain things. Laozi holds that the law of the *Dao* is the natural (*ziran* 自然); everything else, heaven, earth, and people, ultimately model themselves on the *Dao*, and hence, also model themselves on the natural (DDJ 25). There is no need for anyone to be doing anything or carving up unhewn wood if nature is already set up to complete itself. As Laozi puts it, "Nameless unhewn wood is but freedom from desire. Without desire and still, the world will settle itself" (DDJ 37).

Again, instead of separating opposites and maintaining that opposites are mutually exclusive, the DDJ states:

Know the male but preserve the female, and be a canyon for all the world.  
 If you are a canyon for all the world, constant virtue will never leave you,  
 And you can return home to be a child. (DDJ 28)

This passage continues with the parallel construction that to know one extreme of opposites (such as white or glory) and preserve the other extreme (such as black or disgrace), which equal concern for both extremes would enable one to be "a model for all the world," and be "a valley for all the world," is to have constant virtue. Like becoming a child again, the

passage ends with how one with equal regard for both opposite extremes “can return to being unhewn wood.” But

[w]hen unhewn wood is broken up, it becomes vessels.  
Sages put these to use and become leaders of the officials.  
And so the greatest carving cuts nothing off. (DDJ 28)

One could interpret this passage to rival Aristotle’s separation of form (immaterial) and matter (material) as opposites, and his prioritizing form as the definition of something. The ability to distinguish opposites and make them mutually exclusive isn’t something that a child does for Laozi, hence, he relates having constant virtue to being a child who is closer to the natural state of not making distinctions and separating things. Similarly, the activity of carving unhewn wood produces vessels that have specific functions, just as government officials have their specific roles. Laozi doesn’t support limiting things to specific functions, nor people to specific roles because he associates constant virtue with being open “for all the world,” like being a canyon, a valley, or a model for all the world. For Laozi, to say that “the greatest carving cuts nothing off,” goes with his remark about returning to “being unhewn wood” that isn’t carved into something that is opposed to something else, or its limited to being a particular thing that is prevented from being anything else. For example, if wood were carved into a plate, it is no longer possible for it to be a vase. This limits the use of the wood when compared to its unhewn state.

Contrary to how Aristotle chose form and excluded matter as the proper definition of something, Laozi puts down naming and defining things because names and definitions not only limit things and curtail their potentialities, but limit our perspectives and relations to the world. Consider Laozi’s remarks:

The five colors blind our eyes.  
The five notes deafen our ears.  
The five flavors deaden our palates. (DDJ 12)

In other words, one’s ability to name and define five colors or notes also limits one’s preferences to these five colors and notes. By excluding everything else that isn’t any of the five colors or five notes, one is closed to the rest of the world and isn’t capable of acting virtuously toward it, contradicting the movement of the *Dao*.

Zhuangzi agrees with Laozi's skepticism about the use of words or speech to depict what's right or wrong as if the nature of each thing is fixed rather than unfixed. Zhuangzi thinks that right and wrong are constantly in a process of alternation so that by asserting that something is right rather than wrong, one fails to understand the process of transformation in something created by the *Dao*. Contrariwise, Zhuangzi likens the nature of something to the *Dao* in being invisible, without "definite form," yet capable of moving and stopping (*Zhuangzi* 2.8). Zhuangzi says,

If we follow whatever has so far taken shape, fully formed in our minds, making that our teacher, who could ever be without a teacher? The mind comes to be what it is by taking possession of whatever it selects out of the process of alternation—but does that mean it has to truly understand that process? The fool takes something up from it too. But to claim that there are any such things as "right" and "wrong" before they come to be fully formed in someone's mind in this way—that is like saying you left for Yue today and arrived there yesterday. This is to regard the nonexistent as existent. (*Zhuangzi* 2.11–2.13)

Put otherwise, because opposites such as "right" and "wrong" are constantly transforming into each other, to assert that a certain way/thing is *always* right is to claim that something that doesn't exist permanently has permanent existence. Again, Zhuangzi responds to those who claim that speech always has a reference by saying,

what it [speech] refers to is peculiarly unfixed. So is there really anything it refers to? Or has nothing ever been referred to? You take it to be different from the chirping of baby birds. But is there really any difference between them? Or is there no difference? (*Zhuangzi* 2.14)

Celebrating the indefiniteness of the *Dao*, and deprecating sharp distinctions between opposites, along with definitions that capture permanent existence, Daoists, like Laozi and Zhuangzi, don't pursue knowledge of the natures of particular things as if they were fixed. Rather, just as the natural (*ziran*) that is the law of the *Dao* is best captured by unhewn wood that is nameless and free from desire to become any particular thing, the sort of knowledge that is genuine for Daoists loosens the boundaries between different things, especially opposite extremes, and is open to how

the nature of something is constantly transforming.<sup>10</sup> Such knowledge is about the present particular thing and what is the right “action” to perform or “inaction,” rather than Aristotle’s fixed knowledge of some unchangeable universals or abstract definitions.

## 8.2 NATURAL MOTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

Daoists accommodate the constant motion and change that natural things undergo by eschewing the fixity and universality of knowledge and definitions. Contrastingly, Aristotle focuses on the universal or unchanging in knowledge of how things move by examining the causes or the reasons “why” natural things come to be, go out of existence, and undergo changes. He says,

Knowledge is object of inquiry and hence, one must know the ‘why’ or the causes of something’s coming to be/passing away and physical changes, to know something’s principle (*archén*) of motion (*kinéseôs*) or change (*metabolés*). (*Physics* II.3 194b17–23)

Responding to the “why” or causes which make up the knowledge of the principle of motion or change, Aristotle offers the four causes. These are: (a) the material cause or that out of which something is generated (e.g., wood/bronze) which persists after the generation (194b23–26); (b) the form and model (*eidos* and *paradeigma*) that is the *logos* (definition) that captures the essence of the thing (194b26–29); (c) the principle (*archén*) of the change (*metabolés*), or the efficient cause that effects the change (e.g., the father that causes the child) (194b30–32); last but not least, (d) the final cause or the end (*telos*), or “that for the sake of which” (*hou heneka*), the good or apparent good, for which a motion or change occurs (e.g., health is the end which causes one to take walks)

<sup>10</sup> Zhuangzi’s ideal for human beings is for them to be without their “characteristic inclinations” to distinguish between things that are right and wrong, or to like or dislike certain things, as such practices are the stuff of unnatural, or conventional knowledge. Rather, he maintains that one should “follow along with the way each thing is of itself, going by whatever it affirms as right, without trying to add anything to the process of life” (Ziporyn 2009, 5.22–5.23). The implication is that natural things are constantly changing so that we cannot identify them by fixed categories. Instead, going by what is momentarily right for the thing in whatever context it happens to be is to abide by its natural motion or process in life that is also in harmony with other things, in its present context of the *Dao*. See also *Zhuangzi* 7.3–7.4., 2.16, 2.11–2.14, and DDJ 64.

(194b32–195a3). Apart from the first of the four causes (i.e., matter), the last three causes refer to the form, either in the cause that initiated the change, or the particular form of the caused object which coincides with the final end toward which the caused object moves. Not surprisingly, these four causes coincide with Aristotle’s candidates for nature or substance which have in themselves the principles of motion and rest. Again, Aristotle’s emphasis is on the actuality, definiteness, and fixity of the form as the cause of any motion rather than on the indefiniteness of matter.

To elaborate on Aristotle’s emphasis on form as the cause of motion, let me turn to Halper’s helpful explanation of how Aristotle relates form and matter in the motion of natural existents. Halper explains that Aristotle’s “chief contention is that forms persist unaltered in generation and destruction” (1984, 819) such that natural motions can be known. Halper maintains that generation and destruction for Aristotle “involve a form that comes to be or ceases to be present in a matter, but the form persists unchanged” (1984, 819). Matter, Halper maintains, is excluded from form, and hence, excluded from the definition or actuality of a thing “on the ground that things with material parts are destructible” (1984, 819). Halper explains that natural motions are knowable for Aristotle because they belong to the nature of the thing such that these motions don’t change the nature of the thing. Offering an example, Halper says, “Growth clearly does not alter nature; generation is from nature and the result is a nature of the same sort” (1984, 827). Consider how a child grows into a man without altering his nature as a rational animal. Similarly, it is in the nature of a man to generate another man; the offspring is the same in nature as the man who generated it. Why are there natural motions? Halper answers this question as follows:

Since physical actualities always exist in matter, they require natural motions... Since the essence of an animal occurs in matter, it is necessary that the essence comes to be present in matter by a process of generation, that the matter develop through growth, that the composite decay, and thus that the composite reproduce to preserve the essence. Growth, generation, decay and all the other natural motions consist of an essence or form coming to be or ceasing to be present in a matter. (1984, 829)

In short, Halper’s explanation of Aristotle is that “no natural change alters a nature,” (1984, 827) because the essences or forms of such natural substances are the unchanging causes of these natural motions. Neither

the forms nor the motions they cause change. Since natural motions such as generation, growth, and so on are regular and the same for things of the same nature, they are knowable for Aristotle.

Unlike Daoists who stress practical knowledge to address particular things that are constantly changing, Aristotle emphasizes theoretical knowledge of universals that are unchanging, dictating how certain types of things always move and change in the same ways. Whereas Daoists focus on potential transformations of a thing, ensuring that the knower is always aware of the surrounding context, for example, whether the fish is going to be eaten by a bear or caught and sold by a fisherman, Aristotle attends to the actual form of the fish producing other fish, or the form that is the final end into which a fish grows. As regards the possibility that the fish may become bear food, that's not a matter of knowledge for Aristotle; it is an accidental particularity that is only accessible by perception. In contrast, Daoism's celebration of how natural things are potentially moving and changing so that they don't always result in the same specific things means that Daoists don't subscribe to the sharp separation between universals and particulars, knowledge and perception, or theory and practice that characterize Aristotle's understanding of how nature moves.

Ultimately, Aristotle solves the problem of knowing motion and change in natural things that can move themselves by relying on the principles, such as forms, that cause such changes, which are universals and thus knowable. For example, a dog which exists by nature comes to be what it is by another dog which has the same form. After being generated, its matter grows until it reaches its final end, which is also its form. Because form is the substance of a thing that is definable and determines the generation and growth of a particular natural thing toward its end/goal, such motions and changes of generation and growth are knowable for Aristotle. He says,

Now, the causes being four, it is the business of the physicist to know about them all, and if he refers his problems back to all of them, he will assign the 'why' in the way proper to his science – the matter, the form, the mover, 'that for the sake of which'. The last three often coincide; for the 'what' and 'that for the sake of which' are one, while the primary source of motion is the same in species as these (for man generates man), and so too, in general, are all things which cause movement by being themselves moved.. . Hence there are three branches of study, one of things which are incapable of motion, the second of things in motion, but indestructible, the third of destructible things. (*Physics* II.7 198a22–31)

More specifically, by things that are “incapable of motion,” Aristotle means the forms or definitions of the things which are and are not without themselves being generated or destroyed (Met. Z10 1035a28–30). By things in motion but indestructible, he means the form of the father which moves the individual man to cause his son (which form again is indestructible). Finally, by “destructible things,” he means the matter that is shaped into the form of the thing in generation and growth; losing the form in death.<sup>11</sup>

In opposition to the linear and predictable movement of natural things toward their respective ends/goals for Aristotle, such that a certain natural substance produces another that is the same in form, that in turn grows toward the same final end, Daoists maintain the unpredictability of how natural things move, for example, the fish that doesn’t produce other fish. If there is a general characteristic of how natural things move for Daoists, it is that of turning back or returning to the root. For example, consider DDJ 16:

The myriad creatures (*wanwu* 萬物/ten thousand things) are all in motion!  
I watch as they turn back.  
The teeming multitude of things, each returns home to its root;  
And returning to one’s root is called stillness. (*jing* 靜)

DDJ 16 continues to identify this root of stillness with destiny and constancy (*chang* 常), claiming that the one who knows constancy has understanding (*ming* 明, literally, “clear” or “bright”) whereas those who lack such knowledge would produce misfortune. The text then states that one with knowledge of constancy would be accommodating, meaning that one would work for the common good, and hence is a king who is heavenly, and embodies the *Dao*. Put otherwise, for Laozi, knowing how things move is also to know how the *Dao* moves, which is to be the source of the 10,000 things, nourishing them, and not having any personal desires (DDJ 34). As a result, when all things return to the root of stillness of the *Dao*, they also return to the state “before there were things... called the formless form, the image of no thing” (DDJ 14). Note the contrast of each natural thing’s moving toward a definite form and individuality for Aristotle, and Laozi’s characterization of how natural things move toward

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the various senses of substance or form in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* upon which the last three of these causes are based, see Sim (1995).

formlessness. Again, Aristotle's emphasis is on knowing the definition of a form to know how something by nature would move toward its specific end, whereas Laozi stresses knowing how every natural thing's motion is to return to formlessness, and thus, to being one with the *Dao*. Accordingly, Laozi and Zhuangzi maintain that names and definitions don't reveal how things move because if all things are moving toward nothing, whatever names and definitions attributed to them would no longer be relevant when they change.

### 8.3 ARTIFICIAL MOTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

That the essence or definition of something dictates the way the thing moves to its actual or complete state is even more evident in artistic production for Aristotle. Just as Aristotle prioritizes form and how it determines the movement of a natural thing toward its final end, forms are also prioritized in the movement of artificial things, which don't have their ends/goals in themselves and can't move toward these ends by themselves. Instead of moving themselves, artificial things, such as houses and health are brought about by the builder and doctor shaping the matter into the respective forms. In addition, not only is the craftsman required to initiate the movement in the matter, even the type of matter that is required for a product is determined by the form and final end. More specifically, in order for an artificial thing to perform its function, for example, for the saw to cut up things, it must have teeth, which in turn must be made of iron (*Physics* II.8–9). Hence, the end, or for the sake of which, of a saw dictates the type of matter in artificial things. Aristotle states,

Similarly in all other things which involve production for an end; the product cannot come to be without things which have a necessary nature, but it is not due to these (except as its material); it comes to be for an end. For instance, why is a saw such as it is? To effect so-and-so and for the sake of so-and-so. This end, however, cannot be realized unless the saw is made of iron. It is, therefore, necessary for it to be of iron, if we are to have a saw and perform the operation of sawing. (II.9, 200a7–13)

In other words, form or the final end dictates the sort of matter the craftsman would choose for his production.

In stark contrast, for Zhuangzi, instead of a craftsman's imposing a form on some generic matter, such that form is presumed to be separate

from and prior to matter, there's a coincidence of the two such that the craftsman's task is to look for how the nature of the matter/material is already shaped into the object he is supposed to make. Speaking of the craftsman, Qing, who was commissioned to carve a bell-stand, we were told that he fasted for seven days in order to "still his heart-mind" (靜心) after which he had no thought of reward nor condemnation that might accompany this project. He had even "forgotten that [he] has a body shape with four limbs" (忘吾有四肢形體). He then,

Entered the forest 入山林,  
 Looked at heaven's nature 觀天性;  
 Arrived [at the] shape of a body 形軀至矣 (xíng qu zhì yì),  
 Then he sees the completed bell stand 成見鑿 (jù),  
 Then he added his hand (craft) 加手焉;  
 Otherwise, he would have then stopped 不然則 (zé) 已 (yì).  
 His craft that accords with heaven combined with heaven's  
 [nature] 則以天合天  
 Is he the instrument that relies on the spirit? 器之所以疑(yí)神者, 其(qí)是  
 與(yú)? (12:11 "The Full Understanding of Life," my translation.)<sup>12</sup>

Far from craftsman Qing's imposing a definite form on a generic type of matter for the sake of supporting a bell, the wood already contains the completed bell stand. Craftsman Qing forgot his own desires (about praise and condemnation) and relied on heaven's nature as the source of that particular bell stand's nature. By supporting the particular way this tree has grown, Qing's craft united with heaven's way and resulted in a product that looked like it was crafted by a spirit. As mentioned earlier, this is the sort of carving that cuts nothing off. More importantly, whereas Aristotle separates sharply the way natural and artificial objects move (i.e., how the former moves itself whereas the latter is moved by the craftsman), Zhuangzi's account of crafting the bell-stand relates the natural and artificial intimately. More explicitly, Zhuangzi has artificial objects grow out of nature so that the craftsman doesn't need to cut anything off from nature to sculpt the bell-stand, making his action completely effortless (*wuwei*) because he is going with the flow of heaven's *Dao*, or letting the natural growth of the tree guide his art.

If Qing doesn't need to cut anything off to sculpt the bell-stand which originated from the way that the tree has grown in accord with heaven's

<sup>12</sup> See Zhuangzi 2006–2021 for the Chinese text. Chapter reference is from Ziporyn (2009).

nature, one might ask: is Qing needed at all to produce the bell-stand? Despite the fact that Zhuangzi and Laozi both praise the sort of cutting that cuts nothing off, to be precise, the craftsman does cut, but so minimally that he could be said to have cut nothing off, especially from the nature of things. Let me illustrate Qing's crafting the bell-stand with the way a professional would harvest cherries. To begin, a professional cherry picker will know when cherries are ripe, as well as the fact that cherries don't ripen after they've been harvested. Thus, it's important to be able to "see" which cherries are ripe, which ripeness is determined by heaven's nature and how much sun, rain, heat, cold, and wind, heaven has offered. Like the cherry picker, the bell-stand carver looks to heaven's nature to "see" if it has enabled a tree to grow into a completed bell-stand. Just as unripe cherries shouldn't be harvested, an incomplete bell-stand shouldn't be "harvested" from the tree. When harvesting ripe cherries, the professional picker will also know that he is to pluck the cherries with their stems attached to preserve their freshness, and yet not disturb the "spurs" which connect the stems to the tree or that will hinder next year's cherry production. Likewise, Qing will know exactly where, and how much to cut to "harvest" the completed bell-stand from the rest of the tree so as not to damage the tree's continual growth nor the integrity of the bell-stand. From this comparison of the bell-stand carver to the cherry picker, what is evident is that Daoist craftsmanship entails knowledge of the *Dao* that informs heaven's nature as well as the movements in nature, in addition to expertise in using one's tools. The appearance that Qing is cutting nothing off from nature, actually reflects the most skilled sculptor who effortlessly exercises his craft so as not to violate the law of nature that is modeled after the *Dao*. Instead of pursuing the craftsman's personal desires, for example, of seeking praise and fame, he acts like the *Dao* in supporting the tree and the bell-stand in their natural conditions. Only by acting selflessly and letting his art be guided by nature, could Qing produce a bell-stand that was so perfect that it looked like a spirit's work reflecting heaven's way which adheres to the *Dao* or the law of nature.

Rather than the intimate relation between art and nature for Zhuangzi, Aristotle contrasts the ways art and nature move. Whereas natural things can move themselves and have their final ends/goals in themselves, artificial objects can neither move themselves nor have their ends in themselves. Natural motions are complete actualities (*energeia*) because things by nature already have their ends or forms internally, toward which they

move.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, *kinêsis* is the sort of incomplete motion in artificial production, for example, the motion of building a house, isn't complete, or doesn't stop, until the house has been built.

Despite the aforementioned sharp contrasts between the motions of natural objects and productions, Aristotle seems to draw them closer by comparing the steps or processes both traverse to reach their respective ends. He states,

where a series has a completion, all the preceding steps are for the sake of that. .. Now intelligent action [i.e., art] is for the sake of an end; therefore the nature of things also is so. Thus if a house, e.g., had been a thing made by nature, it would have been made in the same way as it is now by art; and if things made by nature were made also by art, they would come to be in the same way as by nature. Each step then in the series is for the sake of the next; and generally art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish, and partly imitates her. If, therefore, artificial products are for the sake of an end, so clearly also are natural products. The relation of the later to the earlier terms of the series is the same in both. (*Physics* II.8 199a8–19)

This passage emphasizes the systematic way that natural and artificial things move to reach their ends for Aristotle. For instance, in order for a house to act as a shelter, it must have a foundation (e.g., that is made of stones) that is heavier than the walls (e.g., that is made of bricks) it supports. In turn, the lightest material, say the roof (e.g., that is made of wood) is supported by the walls. The steps must proceed from the foundation up in order to install the roof which provides the shelter or the final end. Aristotle's claim is that these steps of reaching the final end would be replicated in nature should the house be made by nature, that is, it'll be natural for the stones to fall to the lowest part because they are the heaviest, followed by the bricks on top, and so on. Art's imitation of nature is shown in how it too follows the same order of putting the heaviest material at the bottom of the house, followed by the lightest on top as the roof. An instance of how art completes what nature fails to finish is how farmers erect trellises for grapevines, should they not be supported by other sturdier trees or bushes in nature, so that they could climb upward to obtain nourishment and protection for the grapes.

<sup>13</sup>See Halper's distinction between incomplete motions and actualities in note 9 and especially (1984, 817, 820, and 830).

In spite of appearances, the aforementioned analysis of art imitating or completing nature doesn't reduce the gap between artificial and natural motions because Aristotle's priority is on the form or the final end/that for the sake of which the motions occur. He highlights the final end/form that eventually dictates the steps in how art imitates nature or moves toward an end. Like the priority he attributes to form in natural and artificial motions, Aristotle is insisting that it is the form that causes the matter to move. Without the final end of the natural or artificial thing, matter would not have grown or moved in certain steps. The gap between artificial and natural motions remains because the final end or form of the latter is already in the natural thing, whereas the form or final end of the former is outside of the artificial thing, in the mind of the craftsman. Whereas the natural thing moves itself, the artificial thing must be moved by the craftsman. Moreover, while one can know how a natural thing is going to move just by knowing what sort of thing it is, one cannot know how the matter of an artificial thing will move to become this artifact just by examining the matter itself, for example, an examination of the matter won't show that this wood is going to move to become a bed or a bow.

Applying Aristotle's analysis of how art imitates nature or completes nature to how Zhuangzi's tree grew into a bell-stand, Aristotle would not have been able to explain the final end of the tree as the form of a bell-stand, nor its growth for the sake of supporting a bell. This is because Aristotle's account of how a tree grows is to fulfill its nature as a tree rather than to take on the form of a bell-stand. For a craftsman to carve the tree into a bell-stand, he would not be completing the tree's nature in Aristotle's view. The steps the craftsman would take to carve a bell-stand would not be a replica of how the tree is growing to become a bell-stand because being a bell-stand is not the final end of the tree's growth. Rather, prioritizing the form of the tree and the form of the bell-stand, forms which are radically different, the coincidence of the tree's growth and the bell-stand would be inconceivable as a case in which art imitates or completes nature for Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Aristotle would characterize Zhuangzi's tree's

<sup>14</sup>What "art imitates nature" means is ambiguous for interpreters of Aristotle, according to Coughlin (2018). On one interpretation, Coughlin maintains that the analogy between art and nature could mean that because productive arts are teleological, so too must things in nature be teleological. He states, "Evidence for this view is found in *Physics* II 8,... generally art in some cases completes [ἡ τέχνη τὰ μὲν ἐπιτελεῖ] what nature is unable to complete, and in other cases imitates it [τὰ δὲ μιμῆται]. If, therefore, artificial products are for the sake of an end, so clearly also are natural products" (Coughlin 2018, 2). On another interpretation,

growth into the shape of a bell-stand as an accident or a freak of nature. Contrariwise, Zhuangzi is open to the possibility that heaven's nature enables particular trees to grow into completed bell-stands because of the fluid boundaries between different things, his de-emphasis on specific forms, and how all things are always transforming for him. Unlike Aristotle, he doesn't insist that certain steps precede others in natural or artificial motions, nor does he prioritize form over the matter. If Zhuangzi had insisted on definite steps for art to imitate nature, he would not have been open to the artist's discovery of the completed bell-stand in the tree, as that sort of "production"/discovery would skip over the definite steps of craftsmanship upon which Aristotle insists.

#### 8.4 ACCIDENTAL MOTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

If Aristotle would regard the tree's growth into a complete bell-stand as an accident, would he think that such an accidental motion is knowable? A standard interpretation of the changeability of accidents would result in the unknowability of accidental motions, for example, one can't know for sure that Socrates would change from white to being tanned. Even though Halper would agree that there is no way to anticipate accidental motions by examining their substrates, for example, that Socrates is "walking to the agora" (1984, 832), he nevertheless maintains that for Aristotle, one could know accidental motions as motions because they "have essences of a sort, and their essences are actualities of a sort" (1984, 832). Drawing an analogy between the actuality of a natural substance and that of an accident, and how the motions of both are actualities which are knowable, Halper leans on the principles that explain motion, namely form, matter, and privation in *Physics* 191a7–15 to explain how accidental motions can be known for Aristotle. If Halper is correct in his explanation of the knowability of accidental motions, then it'll be another point of contrast

Coughlin claims that "art imitates nature" could mean that the sort of knowledge in natural science should be the model for artistic knowledge. Coughlin says, "if Aristotle thinks artistic forms of knowledge imitate natural science, then natural science should be used as a model for inquiring into artefacts" (Coughlin 2018, 3). Neither of these analyses regarding the teleology in nature and art, nor knowledge of natural science and art could bridge the gap between art and nature sufficiently to explain Zhuangzi's example of how the tree grew into a bell-stand because each interpretation of art and nature hangs on the sharp distinction between the two which doesn't exist for Zhuangzi.

between Aristotle and Zhuangzi regarding natural and accidental motions because of Zhuangzi's emphasis on the fluidity and unpredictability of all motions.

More elaborately, Halper compares the accidental motion of something's becoming white and the building of a house to the natural motion of a thing, say, its generation and growth (1984, 833). Since accidental motions are explained by the actualization of a form in matter, one can know how an accident is actualized just as one can know how a natural substance is the actualization of a form in its generation and growth, according to Halper's interpretation of Aristotle. More explicitly, Halper holds that one can know the accidental motion of something that is black becoming white, and can know the accidental motion of a collapsing house just by focusing on "pairs of contraries like white and black [or house and non-house/rubble of a house] consist(ing) of positive and privative terms" (1984, 833). Put otherwise, just as the form of a thing determines the specific steps a natural substance undergoes or moves through to achieve its nature, likewise, the form of an accident dictates the specific motions that something undergoes to have that accident. As Halper explains,

Just as the course of generation is determined by the form that comes to be present in matter, so too the course of becoming white or of building a house is also determined by the (accidental) form that comes to be present in the matter. Accidental motions are like natural motions in that they follow a determinate path. In this sense they too are unchanging, and therefore can be known. (1984, 833)

In other words, Halper focuses on the regularity or unchanging characteristics of Aristotle's motions, be they of natural substances, accidental changes, or artificial productions, to explain the knowability of such motions or changes in the sensible world.

Again, Halper's analysis of how accidental motions can be known by comparing them to natural motions, and how they are similar in the actualization of natural or accidental forms, illustrates how different Aristotle and Zhuangzi are regarding accidental motions. Whereas it is the regularity and unchangeability of the forms of accidents that enable us to know accidental motions, for example, that something black will move to be something white, or a pile of wood that isn't a house will move to become a house, that Halper emphasizes for Aristotle, it's the unpredictability of a

natural thing's motion, say, that of a tree's growth, that might lead to the accident of a bell-stand for Zhuangzi. While Aristotle's focus on accidents is entirely on accidents as accidents or universals abstracted from particulars in which they inhere, according to Halper, Zhuangzi's focus is entirely on accidents in unity with the particulars in which they inhere. Contrary to the Aristotelian separation of substance, production, and accidents, Zhuangzi's unity is so robust that it combines the natural (tree), with the artificial (skill of the bell-stand carver), and the accidental (shape of the bell-stand in the tree). Instead of universal knowledge, Zhuangzi's knowledge of craftsmanship is entirely consistent with the accidental growth, and hence the unpredictability of a natural tree. Zhuangzi's account is the very antithesis of Aristotle's emphasis on the knowability of natural substances and the regularity or stability of their motions. Zhuangzi would also object to the priority Aristotle accords to the knowability of natural substances in comparison to artificial motions, and how both natural and artificial motions are in turn more knowable than accidental motions. This is because Zhuangzi unites the natural, artificial, and accidental motions, wherein each of these motions accords equally with the law of the *Dao*.

### 8.5 FIRST PRINCIPLES, MOTION (OR LACK THEREOF), AND UNITY

We've seen thus far that Aristotle and Daoists, such as Laozi and Zhuangzi, have different accounts of how natural and artificial things move. I've alluded to how these Daoists' perspective is based on the *Dao's* being the source of the 10,000 things/everything and its characteristics of being indefinite, formless,<sup>15</sup> and being the model of the natural (*ziran*). Ultimately, *Dao* nourishes everything indiscriminately and is free from desires. Put otherwise, Zhuangzi's *Dao* is empty and formless, and is the source of everything (heaven and earth) (*Zhuangzi* 6.29–32). *Dao* does not have a particular purpose or goal at which it aims, causing only certain things to exist while excluding others, nor does it support the flourishing

<sup>15</sup>Zhuangzi says of the source of the transformations of everything in the world, including joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, day, and night, that "If there is some controller behind it all, it is peculiarly devoid of any manifest sign. Its ability to flow and to stop makes its presence plausible, but even then it shows no definite form. That would make it a reality with no definite form" (2.6–2.8).

of certain things and not others. Rather, the same *Dao* is the source of generation and destruction of all things.<sup>16</sup> Zhuangzi says,

So no thing is not right, no thing is not acceptable. For whatever we may define as a beam as opposed to a pillar, as a leper as opposed to the great beauty Xishi, or whatever might be [from some perspective] strange, grotesque, uncanny, or deceptive, there is some *Dao* that opens them into one another, connecting them to form a oneness. Whenever fragmentation is going on, formation, completion, is also going on. Whenever formation is going on, destruction is also going on. (*Zhuangzi* 2.19)

For Zhuangzi, instead of each thing being discrete from another, and all things being ranked or ordered on a scale of better and worse, they are all one because they come from the same *Dao*, are transformed by it so that they do not remain the same things eternally.<sup>17</sup> Everything is united in the *Dao* because it does not give preferential treatment to any particular thing or perspective. The great beauty and attraction of Lady Li from the human perspective is also the source of repulsion from the perspective of fish, birds, and deer for Zhuangzi (2.38). The same thing is both attractive and repulsive, right and wrong. Thus opposites, things presumed to be extremes and exclusive of one another, are actually united and one because of the *Dao* for Zhuangzi.

The way that Zhuangzi's *Dao* causes is by being immanent in everything in this world. Zhuangzi says, "Where does *Dao* go and doesn't exist?" (道惡乎往而不存?) (*Zhuangzi* 2.4, my trans., see also 6.27–29). Because *Dao* is the condition of everything, it exists *in* this world instead of separately; one cannot go to a place where *Dao* does not exist. It is not transcendent and separate. Rather, Zhuangzi's *Dao* unites the 10,000 things by being inseparable from them.

Like the *Dao*, Aristotle's God is the cause of the natures/substances of all things. Unlike Aristotle's God, *Dao* acts as a cause by inhering in everything it transforms instead of being transcendent. God works by being the

<sup>16</sup> For an explanation of how *Dao* rules everything by an innate spontaneity or what is natural (*ziran* 自然) to each thing, see Xu (2011, 445–462), Sim (2011, 304–23), and Sim (2014, 53–70).

<sup>17</sup> For an account of the oneness of all things because they issue from an undifferentiated one that in turn issues from the *Dao*, see Chai 2014, 363–64 and 371. For Chai's account of how they are the same because they incline toward rest, timelessness, and non-exclusiveness, see 2014, 366–68.

primary substance that causes everything else. By being an unmoved mover that is an actuality that exists necessarily, God must be transcendent. For concrete things that are combinations of form and matter to exist for Aristotle, we need some sort of matter, form, and an efficient cause that instills the form into the matter to make the resulting thing, as we've seen earlier. Additionally, there must be something else, that is neither the matter nor form of the thing, but which causes the motion, say, of the efficient cause. He says,

The cause of a man is (i) his elements: fire and earth as matter, and the particular form; (ii) some external formal cause, viz. his father; and besides these (iii) the sun and the ecliptic, which are neither matter nor form nor privation nor identical in form with him, but cause motion.<sup>18</sup>

More specifically, the sun and movements of the heavenly bodies are responsible for the generation, growth, and motion of everything in the universe. However, because these celestial bodies are themselves moved, Aristotle thinks that there must be an unmoved mover, a first complete reality (*to prôton entelecheia*),<sup>19</sup> a principle (*archên*) which substance (*ousia*) is an actuality (*energeia*) that exists eternally<sup>20</sup> and necessarily, to move them. Aristotle insists on the actuality of an unmoved mover to explain the movement of the universe for he denies that a mover that is moved can be the first principle. This is because a moved mover, like the first heaven (*prôtos ouranos*) requires a mover to move it.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from being an unmoved mover that causes motion in the universe and everything in it, and is thus prior in causality and time, Aristotle's God also causes by being the one primary substance by which all other substances are defined, for they are more or less united as substances depending on how nearly they can approximate God's characteristics. Even though physical substances have the sources of motion in themselves, they aren't prior in motion and causality because they depend on a prior mover. Similarly, although mathematical substances are immovable, they aren't like God for they aren't capable of separability or independence, and hence cannot be primary substances. Only God satisfies the conditions of immovability and separability required of a primary

<sup>18</sup>Tredennick & Armstrong 1935, 1071a14–18.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, 1071a37.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, 1071b20–21.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, 1072a21–25.

substance. God is the one substance that is most stable and definable because He is immovable, prior in cause, time, and separability. Consequently, God is the primary substance that is most knowable.<sup>22</sup> The conditions that characterize God's existence are the standards of oneness by which we measure the substantiality of all things. Things that are more knowable, stable, and definable accord more to the one (*pros hen*) God, and thus, are more substantial than others that aren't. These, as we've seen, are the natural substances that are defined by their forms and can move themselves toward their final ends. With these characteristics in mind, God and *Dao* differ in that while God is most definable, *Dao*, being indefinite and formless, is not definable. Aristotle's understanding of God as the *pros hen* cause of substances is also different from the *Dao* since the latter is neither separate from everything in which it inheres nor immovable, nor are things ordered hierarchically in relation to the *Dao*.<sup>23</sup>

## 8.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Given the indeterminateness of the *Dao* and how everything is constantly transforming so that there is not a clear distinction between what is good and bad, virtue does not consist in the pursuit of knowledge of absolute truths or the practice of specific virtues. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no knowledge or virtue for Daoists. Consider Zhuangzi's account that contrasts two clans: the Youyu clan which represents the Confucians, and the Tai clan which represents the Daoists. We are told that the Youyu clan still believes in the virtue of *ren* (仁-humaneness) which is used to constrain and criticize others. In contrast, one in the Tai clan behaves as follows:

<sup>22</sup>Tredennick 1933, 1028a31–b3.

<sup>23</sup>Gabbe maintains that there is order and interconnectedness of all living things in the universe for Aristotle by arguing that there's a common good they share by contributing to the eternity and unity of the universe, which are ultimately "attributes that also belong to god" (2012, 378). Despite the initial similarity between the orderliness and unity in this account of Aristotle's universe and the Daoists' harmonious cosmos governed by the law of the *Dao*, they differ when we consider how Aristotle's God is transcendent and separate from everything else, while the *Dao* is both transcendent and immanent. Moreover, whereas Aristotle's universe is hierarchically and teleologically ordered, the former cannot be asserted without qualification for the Daoists, and the latter cannot be true for them since the *Dao* does not set a definite end or goal for everything.

Sometimes he regards himself as a horse, sometimes he regards himself as an ox, his knowledge of reality is trustworthy, the extent of his virtue is real, and he has not yet begun to enter into what contradicts man (一以己為馬, 一以己為牛, 其知情信, 其德甚真, 而未始入於非人). (*Zhuangzi* 7.1, my trans.)

This passage illustrates that for Zhuangzi, a Daoist possesses knowledge of reality and has real virtue. However, the fact that the Tai person could regard himself as various animals and, unlike the Youyu person, does not contradict or criticize others, shows that his knowledge is not of something fixed. Rather than being in conflict and contention with others like the Confucians, the Daoists would go by what is right for the present moment (*Zhuangzi* 2.15, 2.33). Zhuangzi says, “The sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter’s wheel” (*Zhuangzi* 2.23). By not having preconceptions that certain things are always right or good as opposed to others that are always wrong or bad, the sage is able to do what is right in any situation by harmonizing with others (harmony being a characteristic of virtue), or supporting things in their natural conditions, instead of pursuing his own selfish desires. Illustrating this point with an anecdote about Wang Tai, a one-footed ex-con, we are told that he takes the perspective of seeing everything as one and the same, so that he is free of all preconceptions. Consequently, he would “just wander (*you* 遊) in the virtue (*de* 德) of harmony (*he* 和).” Nothing would be perceived as a loss for him so that Wang Tai “viewed the chopping off of his foot as nothing more than the casting away of a clump of soil” (*Zhuangzi* 5.5–7). Zhuangzi’s account of virtue equalizes virtues and vices by having an ex-con exemplify the virtue of impartiality by regarding his own foot as a clump of soil, and a sage who harmonizes rights and wrongs rather than prioritizing the right over the wrong.

In opposition to an indeterminate *Dao*, Aristotle’s God is determinate, self-sufficient, unchanging, independent, and is the norm for the highest human good of contemplative wisdom. Contemplative wisdom, as the highest good and activity of primary happiness is contrasted with the secondary good of *phronesis*.<sup>24</sup> This is because *phronésis* is directed at things that can be changed, issuing in generous and just actions, while contemplation is about unchangeable things that can be known. The latter activity is consistent with God’s independence, self-sufficiency, and

<sup>24</sup>For the characteristics of God, see Tredennick 1933: 1028a31 and 1029a28. For God’s independence, see Tredennick & Armstrong 1935: 1074b35.

unchangeability, while the former isn't, since generous and just actions depend on others who are in need, and God is independent. Accordingly, Aristotle separates contemplative and practical wisdom so that one who is a *phronimos* is not necessarily a *sophos*. Because the *phronimos* doesn't need to be wise about unchanging truths, for example, he doesn't need to be wise about the heavenly bodies, nor have knowledge of physics and how things move in the natural world. His concerns and effectiveness are limited to the human realm. Put otherwise, ethical actions are only directed toward other human beings.<sup>25</sup>

Comparing Aristotle and the Daoists on ethics, it is noteworthy that ethical actions are not as superior for Aristotle as they are for the Daoists. Because Aristotle's first principle is a transcendent and immovable God, the ethical world of change is no match for the theoretical world that deals with the unmoved. Nor would contemplative wisdom help one with *phronêsis*. On the contrary, Daoists don't set up sharp boundaries between the theoretical, physical, artistic, and ethical. What's right for Daoism consists in harmonizing with humans and nonhumans without any preconceptions favoring one's own desires, or that of one's species. Accordingly, Daoists would have more resources for addressing environmental problems that stem from privileging human desires. Instead of a first principle that is separate from, or transcends this world, the *Dao's* immanence in everything, moving them toward the same formlessness that characterizes itself, as well as its transcendence in pre-existing everything, can offer us a non-anthropocentric perspective and standard, from which we could, as Laozi puts it, "support the 10,000 things in their natural condition" (DDJ 64).

## WORKS CITED

- Chai, D. 2014. Zhuangzi's Meontological Notion of Time. *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 13: 361–377.
- Cooper, D.E. 2014. Daoism, Nature and Humanity. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 74: 95–108.
- Coughlin, S. 2018. Art and Nature in Aristotle's *Physics*: Some antecedents. In *Metaphors in Ancient Cultures*, ed. C. Barth, C. Ferella, and D. Werning, 1–28. Berlin: Edition Topoi.

<sup>25</sup>For detailed discussions that Aristotle's metaphysics results in his prioritizing *theôria* over *phronêsis*, and how his ethics is limited to human communities rather than the cosmic world, unlike the Confucians and Daoists, see Sim (2010, 5–7 and 9).

- Gabbe, M. 2012. Aristotle on the Starting-Point of Motion in the Soul. *Phronesis* 57: 358–379.
- Halper, E. 1984. Aristotle on Knowledge of Nature. *The Review of Metaphysics* 37: 811–835.
- Hardie, R.P., and R.K. Gaye, trans. 1994–2009. *Physics by Aristotle*. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.2.ii.html>
- Ivanhoe, P.J., trans. 2002. *The Daodejing of Laozi*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Lai, K. 2003. Conceptual Foundations for Environmental Ethics: A Daoist Perspective. *Environmental Ethics* 25: 247–266.
- Sim, M. 1995. Senses of Being in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature: Essays on Aristotle's Ethics and Metaphysics*, ed. M. Sim, 51–78. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- . 2010. From Metaphysics to Environmental Ethics: Aristotle or Zhu Xi? In *Democracy, Ecological Integrity and International Law*, ed. R. Engel, L. Westra, and K. Bosselmann, 77–90. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- . 2011. Being and Unity in the Ethics and Metaphysics of Aristotle and Liezi. In *How Should One Live? Comparing Ethics in Ancient China & Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. R.A.H. King and D. Schilling, 304–323. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter.
- . 2014. Travelling with Laozi and Plato. In *Landscape and Travelling East and West: A Philosophical Journey*, ed. H.-G. Möller and A. Whitehead, 53–70. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Tredennick, H., trans. 1933. *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Vol. I: Books 1–9. Loeb Classical Library 271. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tredennick, H., and G.C. Armstrong, trans. 1935. *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Vol. II: Books 10–14. *Oeconomica. Magna Moralia*. Loeb Classical Library 287. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Xu, K. 2011. A Different Type of Individualism in Zhuangzi. *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 10: 445–462.
- Zhuangzi, 2006–2021. *Chinese Text Project: Zhuangzi*. <http://ctext.org/zhuangzi>
- Ziporyn, B. 2009. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.



# Parmenides 143d–144a and the Pebble-Arithmetical Representation of Number

*Mitchell Miller*

The purpose of this short reflection is to draw on a largely ignored, if not forgotten, ancient resource in order to suggest a fresh reading of a problematic passage in Plato's *Parmenides*, Parmenides' proof for the being of number at 143d–144a. I shall first translate the passage (Sect. 9.1), then note the key problems and explain why I think we should be unsatisfied with the best of the responses that, to my knowledge, have been offered in the secondary literature (Sect. 9.2), and then offer the fresh reading (Sect. 9.3). I shall close with an aside on the possible fit of our passage, under this reading, with one of the otherwise obscure teachings that Aristotle credits to Plato in his report of various unwritten teachings in *Metaphysics* A6 (Sect. 9.4).

---

M. Miller (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA  
e-mail: [mimiller@vassar.edu](mailto:mimiller@vassar.edu)

## 9.1 THE PASSAGE

The passage is *Parmenides* 143d8–144a4.<sup>1</sup> Here is the immediate argumentative context: Parmenides is in the midst of his long and serpentine argument that “the one itself” (αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν, 143a6, 144e6) is many (144e6–7). He begins by distinguishing the characters “one,” “being,” and “different” (143b1–8), goes through the several ways in which any two of these can be paired and called “both” (143c1–9),<sup>2</sup> infers from the being of such a pair that “there are two” and that “each of these is one” (143d1–5), and infers from the possibility of “adding any one to any pair” (συντεθέντος ἑνὸς ὁποιοῦν ἡτινιοῦν συζυγία) that the result will be “three” (143d5–7); finally, he observes that “three is odd and two is even” (143d7–8). With this preparation, Parmenides leads his interlocutor, the young “Aristotle,”<sup>3</sup> through this reflection:

— “What about this? Given that there are two, must there not also be twice (δις), and given that there are three, thrice (τρίς), since twice one belongs to two and thrice one, to three (εἴπερ ὑπάρχει τῷ τε δύο τὸ δις ἔν καὶ τῷ τρία τὸ τρίς ἔν)?”

— “Necessarily.”

— “Given that there are two and twice, must there not be two twice (δύο δις)? And, again, given that there are three and thrice, must there not be three thrice (τρία τρίς)?”

— “Of course.”

— “And what of this? Given that there are three and there are twice and given that there are two and there are thrice, must there not be both three twice (τρία δις) and two thrice (δύο τρίς)?”

— “Very much so.”

— “Accordingly, there would be evens an even number of times (ἄρτια ... ἀρτιάκις) and odds an odd number of times (περιττὰ περιττάκις) and evens an odd number of times (ἄρτια περιττάκις) and odds an even number of times (περιττὰ ἀρτιάκις).”

— “That is so.”

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Rachel Kitzinger for illuminating conversation about nuances of the Greek.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this passage Plato has Parmenides use the dual, referring to each of the various pairs not just as a two but, more strongly, as a couple: τινε, ἀμφοτέρω, αὐτοῖν, ἄμφω. See Brumbaugh (1961, 95); Allen (1970, 32; 1974, 710; and 1983, 225); Curd (1990, 27).

<sup>3</sup> Not Plato’s great successor. Not only is the dramatic date of the dialogue about 450 BCE, but this *dramatis persona* is identified as “the man who later became one of the Thirty” (127d), the pro-Spartan aristocrats who, with Lysander’s support, seized control of Athens in 404–403.

— “Then if that is so, do you think there is any number left over (τινὰ ἀριθμὸν ὑπολείπεσθαι), which must not necessarily be?”

— “In no way at all.” (Οὐδαμῶς γε.)

## 9.2 PROBLEMS, FAMILIAR RESPONSES, DISSATISFACTIONS

There are at least three conspicuous apparent problems<sup>4</sup> with Parmenides’ fourfold classification of number.

[1] *The first problem: the apparent omission of the primes.* By his leading question at 144a2–3, Parmenides wins Aristotle’s emphatic agreement that “there is [no] number left over.” But Parmenides’ four classes, evens an even number of times, odds an odd number of times, evens an odd number of times, and odds an even number of times, do not include prime numbers.<sup>5</sup> For each prime has as its only factors itself and one, and one was held to be neither odd nor even<sup>6</sup>—or, perhaps,<sup>7</sup> both odd and even at once.<sup>8</sup> If one is neither odd nor even, then of course it cannot count as a factor in any of the four classes. If, on the other hand, it is considered both odd and even, then each of the primes, as a combination of an odd, namely, itself, and a both-even-and-odd, namely, one, will no more fall within the

<sup>4</sup>These three problems are succinctly stated by Allen (1974, 713n45 and 1983, 311n159).

<sup>5</sup>This objection was made as early as Aristotle, at least on the widely accepted reading of ἔξω τῶν πρώτων at *Metaphysics* A6: 987b34. I shall offer a possible alternative to this reading in Sect. 9.4 below.

<sup>6</sup>The exceptional status of one in ancient Greek arithmetic is widely acknowledged. If number is defined as “a multitude of units” (see Euclid, *Elements* VII, Def.2), then one is not a number; rather, as Aristotle, for whom the notion of a multitude of countable units figures in all of his definitions of number (see Heath 1921, 70), writes, one is “the measure” (τὸ μέτρον) and the “starting-point” (or “principle,” ἀρχή) of number (*Metaphysics* N1: 1088a5–7) and, so, stands apart from and is prior to the rest of the series of integers. See n8 below.

<sup>7</sup>Philolaus fr. 5, discussed in M.E. Hager (1962, 1–2).

<sup>8</sup>That Plato grants to his *dramatis persona* Parmenides the recognition that one ought not be classified as odd or even is evidenced by his having Parmenides jump over one in silence and declare two to be the first even number and three to be the first odd number (143d7–8).—It is also striking that in the *Phaedo* when Socrates needs a paradigmatic participant in the form Oddness, Plato has him cite three, not one. The only text that appears to differ from the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedo* on this question is *Hippias Major* 302a. As Knorr (1975, 167) writes, “the *Hippias*-passage utilizes a conception of the unit (as an odd number) not recognized in the arithmetic theories known to Plato, Archytas, and Philolaus.” I am persuaded by Allen’s observation (1974, 711n37) that Plato there has Socrates “treat one as an odd number” as a “dialectical” tactic, not “a matter of abstract number theory.”

class of odds an odd number of times than within the class of odds an even number of times (or, if for the moment we take this as its equivalent, evens an odd number of times), in which case it would no more count as a prime than as not a prime.

Are there resources in our text to overcome this objection? At least three main possibilities have been advanced. We may reach back to the earlier argumentation and cite 143d5–7 as a precedent for supplementing multiplication with addition: there, as we have noted, Parmenides argues that “adding any one to any pair” will yield three; if we take “any pair” as an exemplary case of even and three as an exemplary prime, we can take this addition of one to two as a precedent licensing the account of each of the following primes as the result of adding one to the even number that immediately precedes it.<sup>9</sup> Or, secondly, we can dispense with the citing of any prior passage and argue, instead, that multiplication is a form of addition so that when Parmenides distinguishes his four putative multiplication sets, he tacitly invokes addition and invites us to add one wherever it might be needed.<sup>10</sup> Or, thirdly, we can point ahead to Parmenides’ inference at 144a5–7 that “given that there is number, there would be many,

<sup>9</sup>This appears to be the approach of Cornford 1939, 141n2 (for objections to his formulations, see Allen 1974, 713n44 and 1983, 310n158), of Brumbaugh (1961, 98 (“The primes, omitted in the cross-classification [of odds and evens], are presumably generated by addition.”), and of Sayre (1996, 170–171). Scolnicov (2003) dissents, arguing that Plato conceives number “primarily as proportions and structures, and only secondarily as (denumerable) collections” (106); he denies that “primes greater than three” can be established “by the addition of a unit to a previously derived collection, for this would make them *συνθέσεις μονάδων*” (105). Scolnicov’s interpretation of Plato’s conception of number is, in my view (Miller 1999, 76–83), a good insight into the notion of number as it emerges in the final four members of the five mathematical studies that Plato has Socrates prescribe for the would-be philosopher in *Republic* VII, for in the several forms of geometry and in harmonic theory number always appears in and as ratio, even when, as with the paradigm case of the relation of the side and the diagonal of the square, there is no common unit of measure; but as I shall argue, it misses the notion of number that governs the first study, “logistic and arithmetic” (525a, also 522c), and that is the conception in force in *Parmenides* 143d–144a (see Sect. 9.3 below). An outlier is Turnbull (1998), whose ingenious notions of the “two machine” and the “three machine” appear, if I follow his constructions, to derive from Parmenides’ pairs and triads at 143c–d operations of selective grouping that, in opportune combinations, can yield prime numbers of the things grouped; as he acknowledges, however, “[t]here is nothing in [143a–144e] or elsewhere in the *Parmenides* to back up [this] procedure for generating the primes” (79).

<sup>10</sup>Allen, who at several points describes Parmenides as “proceeding by addition and multiplication” (1974, 712 and 1983, 227), also takes the stronger position that “multiplication is abbreviated addition” (1974, 713n44 and 1983, 310n158, my stress).

namely, an unlimited number of beings” and, reading this as a recognition of the infinite series of integers, argue that primes are tacitly established and acknowledged just insofar as they fall within that series.<sup>11</sup>

Each of these three responses to the question of the apparent omission of the primes can be argued and, as a supplement to Parmenides’ argument at 143d8–144a4, is potentially persuasive. The problem is that Plato does not have Parmenides suggest any of these moves; on the contrary, once Parmenides has established the being of one and two and three, he proceeds straightaway to establish the existence of the four classes, and it is with reference to these—one, two, and three and the four classes—that he wins from Aristotle the agreement that “there is [no] number left over.” Plato does not have Parmenides give the slightest indication that there is a problem with the status of primes. The three responses to the problem, accordingly, have the character of uninvited and ad hoc efforts to fill in a lacuna in his four classes that he does not acknowledge. Is there a better response, one that makes good sense of the fact that Parmenides does not acknowledge the problem in the first place?

*The second and third problems:* [2] *the redundancy of two of the classes* and [3] *ambiguities in class membership*. Two other problems have been much less frequently noted.<sup>12</sup> First, there is the striking apparent redundancy of the classes of “evens an odd number of times” and “odds an even number of times” and, in the paradigm cases by which Parmenides first establishes these, of “two thrice” and “three twice.” This redundancy does not result in any number being “left over,” of course; but it is a puzzling feature of Parmenides’ argument, and it is even more puzzling that he does not even acknowledge it, much less offer any explanation. Secondly, there is the related problem of an apparently superfluous multiplicity in class membership: each number that is a product of an odd and an even factor—in the case at hand, six—evidently belongs to both of the two classes. This multiplicity in class membership is compounded in the case of numbers that are products of even factors as well as of even and odd

<sup>11</sup>This is strongly implied by Allen when he writes that “the existence of any number implies the existence of every number” (1974, 714)—but note Sayre’s observant reservation at 1996, 343n17—and, again, when he writes that “any of Parmenides’ methods—multiplication of even numbers, of odd numbers, or of odd and even numbers—will suffice to prove the existence of any number, since any of these methods, by repeated application, will prove the existence of a number larger than any number desired” (1983, 228).

<sup>12</sup>See the citations of Allen (1974 and 1983) in n4 above, also Brumbaugh (1961, 98), Turnbull (1998, 78), and Sanday (2014, 204n14).

factors: twelve, to take the first example of this in the series of integers, belongs at once to evens an even number of times (for it is six twice, or two six-times), to evens an odd number of times (for it is four thrice), and to odds an even number of times (for it is three four-times). As with the apparent redundancy of classes, this is, if an error at all, one of superfluity rather than omission; that is, no number is “left over” as a consequence of it. But, again, it is puzzling that Parmenides would leave his classification of numbers open to these problems without the least acknowledgment. Is there a reading of Parmenides’ argument that would obviate these problems?

### 9.3 A POSSIBLE RESOURCE FOR PARMENIDES: THE “PEBBLE ARITHMETIC” OF SQUARES AND OBLONGS

To begin with the second problem, the apparent redundancy of the classes of “evens an odd number of times” and “odds an even number of times,” we have so far left unchallenged a point on which there is a general consensus in the literature we have cited, that Parmenides’ four classes are pairs of factors in straightforward relations of multiplication. But in fact this is problematic. Any such relations are commutative, and, further, each yields a product. Not only does Parmenides distinguish his third and fourth classes, “evens an odd number of times” (ἄρτια περιττάκις) and “odds an even number of times” (περιττὰ ἄρτιάκις), by the sequence of their factors, but in first distinguishing their paradigm cases, “two thrice” and “three twice”—and, as well, the cases “two twice” and “three thrice”—, he makes no mention at all of any products. If we seek another way to understand “evens an odd number of times” and “odds an even number of times,” a way in which the sequence matters and what products they might have is, if a concern at all, not a primary one, we might turn to the so-called pebble arithmetic of the fifth-century Pythagoreans, in which numbers were represented and studied not as mere multitudes of units but, rather, as figured arrays.<sup>13</sup> Here the sequence of factors—if, indeed, the word “factors” is not too suggestive of the operations of multiplication to do justice to the terms involved<sup>14</sup>—makes all the difference. “Three

<sup>13</sup>For an illuminating discussion of the “pebble arithmetic” and its mathematical power, see Knorr (1975, ch. V).

<sup>14</sup>This is also, arguably, a problem with the familiar translation of the suffix -άκις as “times” in ἄρτιάκις (“even times”) at 143e7 and ff. and in περιττάκις (“odd times”) at 144a1 and ff.

twice” and “two thrice” are expressed by different figures, “three twice” by two horizontal rows of three units, an oblong rectangle that is wider than it is tall by one, namely,

```
* * *
* * *
```

and “two thrice” by three horizontal rows of two units, an oblong rectangle that is taller than it is wide by one, namely,

```
* *
* *
* *
```

Thus “three twice” and “two thrice”—and, correspondingly, “odds an even number of times” and “evens an odd number of times”—would no longer be redundant.<sup>15</sup>

Why, however, would Plato be interested in this so-called pebble arithmetic? To step back and begin with a general reflection, the possibility that Plato might be making use of the pebble arithmetic shouldn’t come as a surprise. In his reconstruction of the history of fifth- and fourth-century Greek mathematics, Wilbur Knorr has argued that the representation of number by means of figurative arrays of discrete units—triangular and square and oblong rectangular arrays of, for example, dots or pebbles—was still practiced in the early Academy and, indeed, was preserved as a mode of arithmetic even while “mathematicians like Theaetetus” were also anticipating Euclid by “formaliz[ing] parts of the theory of number by ... represent[ing number] by continuous quantities, [namely,] lines, plane figures and solids.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the co-presence of these two modes of representation, argued for as an historical matter by Knorr, appears to have

To the English ear this suggests multiplication, and while this meaning is quite possible, it is too specific to stand without contextual support; -άκις need signify no more than “[taken] a number of times,” without respect to the multiplication of a number by another number and the product this yields. Hence my more neutral translations of ἀρτιάκις as “an even number of times” and of περιττάκις as “an odd number of times” in Sect. 9.1. See LSJ under ἀρτιάκις and περιττάκις.

<sup>15</sup> Brumbaugh (1961, 98) and Sanday (2014, 204n14, cited in n12), notice this, but neither goes on to work out the implications of the possibility that Plato may be making use of the pebble arithmetical representation of numbers for our other two problems, [1] and [3].

<sup>16</sup> Knorr (1975, 145–146). Indirect evidence of the preservation of pebble arithmetic in the Academy is Speusippus’ tract “On Pythagorean Numbers.”

been a constitutive feature of the pedagogical system by which Plato has Socrates order the five disciplines in his prescription of mathematics as a propaedeutic for the philosopher-to-be in *Republic* VII. A full recapitulation of this ordering and its significance would go beyond the bounds of our present reflection and must be reserved for another occasion.<sup>17</sup> For the present it should suffice to gather the following three observations: first, that Socrates asserts that the first of the five studies, “logistic and arithmetic,” takes as its subject matter an indefinite plurality of absolutely equal, invariant, and partless units (*Republic* 526a); second, that, according to Socrates, even while the arithmetician knows that these units are purely intelligible, he nonetheless “makes use of visible figures” (τοῖς ὀρωμένοις εἶδεσι προσχρῶνται, 510d5) to represent them; and third, that, albeit with a degree of pedagogical irony, Socrates repeatedly encourages Glaucon to see in calculation and arithmetic an indispensable help for the warrior in determining the spatial “arrangements” of his troops (τὰς τάξεις, 522d3, τὰξέων, e4, διὰ τὰς τάξεις, 525b4)—that is, in designing the appropriate “formations” of his soldiers on the battlefield and on the march and in setting up camp (526d2–5, esp. ὅσα δὴ ἄλλα σχηματίζουσι τὰ στρατόπεδα). If, taking these three observations together, we step back to ask what “visible forms” for the representation of the homogeneous and partless units of arithmetic would fit with designing the “arrangements” and “formations” of troops, we should be led to think of the triangular and square and oblong arrays of the pebble arithmetic. And if that is right, then Plato has Socrates preserve the two modes of the representation of number—that of arrays of units and that of lines and planes and solids—as the first and the middle three, respectively, of the five mathematical disciplines; it would be part of the pedagogical process of the five studies that the student moves from the representation of numbers by figured arrays of units in logistic and arithmetic to the representation of them by the figures of plane and solid geometry and of theoretical astronomy.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>I have attempted a recapitulation of this ordering and a study of its significance on several other occasions. See Miller (1999), also Miller (2007, 318–323).

<sup>18</sup>In short, the student moves from logistic and arithmetic to the three geometrical studies by dropping the units in the figurative arrays of logistic and arithmetic and focusing his attention on the figures, as such, that the arrays of units express; analogously, he moves from the three geometrical studies to harmonics by dropping the figures and focusing his attention on the ratios, as such, that the figures express. On the pedagogical value of these refocusing for the student preparing for dialectic, see the work cited in n17.

Recognizing the possible place of the pebble arithmetic in the practice of mathematics in the Academy and in the pedagogical curriculum of the *Republic* should motivate us to consider its possible presence in the *Parmenides*. But what difference might its presence there make? We have just seen how recourse to the pebble arithmetic eliminates the problem of the redundancy of Parmenides' classes. It also eliminates both the problem of the apparent omission of the primes and the problem of ambiguous class membership. To see this, consider the pebble arithmetical procedures for establishing the existence of the series of odd numbers and the existence of the series of even numbers by expanding square and oblong numbers, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

The square numbers take as their starting point the unit, \*, with the first square number constructed by adding a new unit to the right (to form a horizontal row of two) and another new unit directly below (to form a vertical column of two) and, to complete the square, a third new unit in the open space below the first of the two added units and to the right of the second of them, like so:

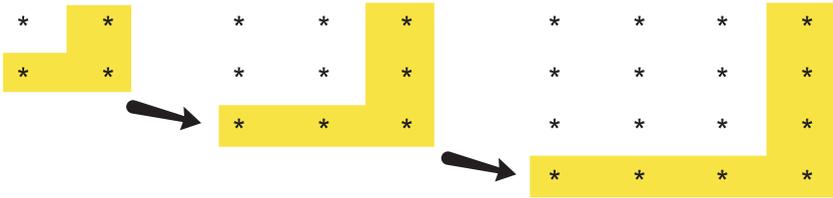


Thus we have “two twice,” the first member of the class of “evens an even number of times.” The three added units, forming a right angle around the first unit, make up the first “gnomon.”<sup>20</sup> Each successive

<sup>19</sup> I owe a great debt to a fine paper, “Revisiting Plato’s Generation of Number (*Parmenides* 143c1–144a5),” prepared for an SAGP meeting in 2008 by Michael Barkasi, then an undergraduate at Kutztown who later went on to receive his doctorate in philosophy at Rice. My own earlier work on the *Parmenides* (Miller 1986 [1991] and 1995) and on the pebble arithmetical representation of numbers in the first of the five studies in *Republic* VII (Miller 1999) moved me to seek him out when I first came across an announcement of his paper, and while he was writing it, we shared a rich correspondence from which I benefited greatly. Unfortunately, he did not go on to publish his paper, so one of the services of the present chapter, above all in Sect. 9.3, is to make available, with his advance approval but in my own more informal manner of presentation, much of what we shared in the course of our correspondence.

<sup>20</sup> The original referent of the Greek γνῶμων was a carpenter’s square, the tool by which the carpenter marked a right angle; Knorr (1975) gives its mathematical sense as “that number which, when added to a term in a given class of consecutive figured numbers, produces the next term in that class” (143). I have indicated each of the gnomons in my diagrams by highlighting the asterisks, or “ones,” that constitute them.

expansion of the square is achieved by adding a new gnomon, like so<sup>21</sup> and so on.<sup>22</sup> This form of representation makes intuitively evident how the successive expansions of the square alternate between an “even an even number of times” and an “odd an odd number of times” and give us, in the series of gnomons, the series of odd numbers: starting with the three in the gnomon of the square that is “two twice,” we move to the five in the gnomon of the square that is “three thrice,” then to the seven in the gnomon of the square that is “four four-times,” and so on.



The oblong numbers, in turn, take as their starting point a dyad, \* \*, with the first oblong number constructed by adding a new unit to the right (to form a row of three), a new unit below each of the initial two (to form two columns of two), and, to complete the oblong, a fourth new unit in the open space below the first added unit and to the right of the second two added units, like so:

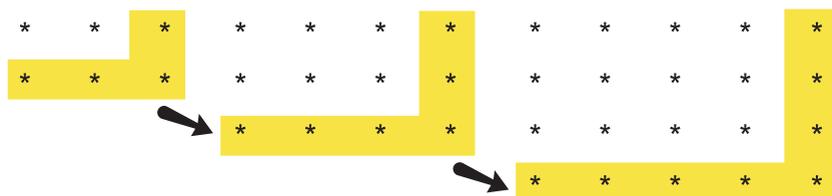


Thus we have “three twice,” the first member of the class of “odds an even number of times.” The four added units, forming a right angle

<sup>21</sup> My thanks to Glenn Johnson of Penn State for help with the design of this and the following diagrams.

<sup>22</sup> An alternative but equivalent mode of representation is to “wrap” each new gnomon “around” (cf. περιτιθεμένων, Aristotle *Physics* 203a13) the preceding figure, setting the pebbles that make it up on the two sides of the figure opposite to the sides on which the preceding gnomon was placed; thus the figures would be expanded in opposite directions, first downward and to the right, then upward and to the left, then downward and to the right, then upward and to the left, and so on. I have chosen the mode of expanding each figure in the same two directions simply for convenience’s sake.

around the initial two, make up the first gnomon, and each successive expansion of the oblong is achieved by adding a new gnomon, like so: and



so on. And again, as with the expansion of the square, so here, it is intuitively evident how the successive expansions of the oblong alternate, now between an “odd an even number of times” and an “even an odd number of times,” and give us, in the series of gnomons, the series of even numbers: starting with the four in the gnomon of the oblong that is “three twice,” we move on, preserving the shape of the oblong<sup>23</sup> in each expansion, to the six in the gnomon of the oblong that is “four thrice,” then to the eight in the gnomon of the oblong that is “five four-times,” and so on.

And of course—setting in abeyance the question of the status of the first unit and the first dyad, the one and the two, that are the starting-points for the two series—the series of the odds presented in the series of the gnomons in the successive expansions of the square and the series of the evens presented in the series of the gnomons in the successive expansions of the oblong are together exhaustive of all numbers; there is no “number left over.”

Surveying these two sets of figures, we can see immediately how reading Parmenides’ four classes of numbers as classes of pebble arithmetical figurative arrays obviates each of the three problems that otherwise seem to burden his proof for the being of number. Rather than being omitted, the primes arise unproblematically within the series of odd gnomons. Nor is there any issue of ambiguity in class membership, for each member of each of Parmenides’ four classes is represented by just one pairing of equal or non-equal rows and columns of units. And, to repeat what we already

<sup>23</sup>We must add the obvious caveat that in the series of oblongs the preservation of the shape is inexact: since one dimension (in our diagrams, the width) of the oblong exceeds the other (the height) by one, preserving the oblong as we expand it involves a regular diminishing of the ratio of that excess; we move from a “three twice” to a “four thrice” to a “five four-times,” and so on.

established in our opening observation in this section, the two classes, “evens an odd number of times” and “odds an even number of times,” are not redundant; each of these phrases signifies a single figure, and the two figures differ.<sup>24</sup> No wonder, then, that Parmenides fails even to acknowledge any of the three problems; if, that is, it is right that he is drawing on the pebble arithmetical expansions of the square and the oblong and is focused on the two series of gnomons they yield, none of the three problems arise at all.

#### 9.4 POSTSCRIPT: A POSSIBLE FIT WITH ARISTOTLE’S REPORT IN *METAPHYSICS A6* OF PLATO’S DERIVATION OF NUMBERS?

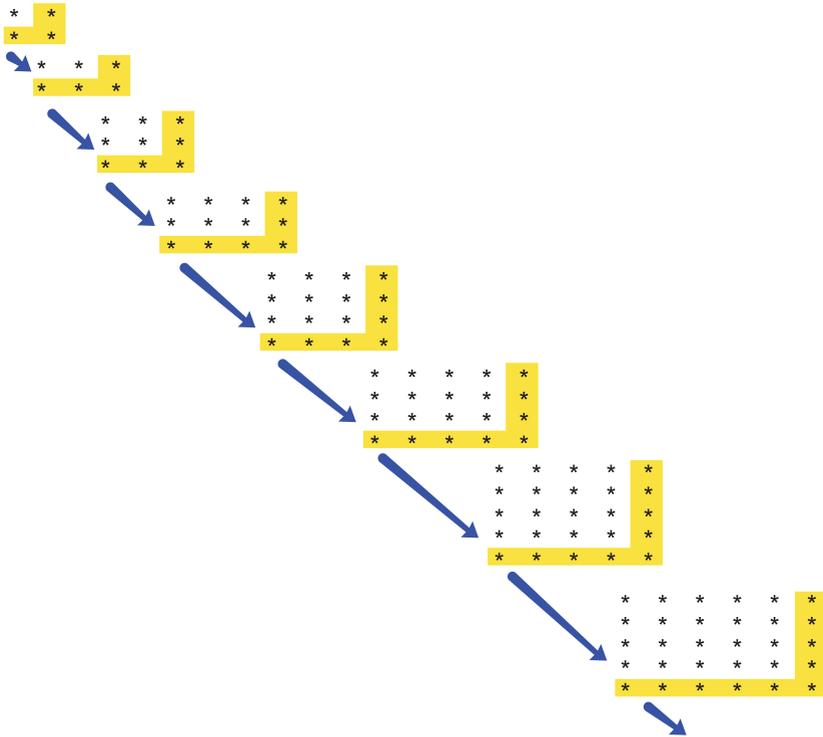
In *Metaphysics A6* Aristotle claims that Plato held that the One (τὸ ἓν) and the dyad of the Great and the Small (τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν) are jointly the ultimate causes of number.<sup>25</sup> And he reports specifically that “[Plato] made the other nature [than the One] a dyad because of the ready derivability (τὸ ... εὐφυῶς ... γεννᾶσθαι) of the numbers (except for the primary ones [ἔξω τῶν πρώτων]) from it, as though from something malleable (ὥσπερ ἔκ τινος ἐκμαγείου)” (987b32–988a1). Though we read *Parmenides* 143d–144a as offering a proof for the being of number, not

<sup>24</sup>This is not to deny, of course, that we mightn’t equally well represent the first oblong number as “three twice” (as we in fact did), hence as a member of “odds an even number of times,” or as “two thrice” (as we might have but did not), hence as a member of “even an odd number of times.” But whichever way we choose to begin, the oblong produced by the next expansion will be a case of the reverse pairing, and the series of expansions will proceed as an alternation of the two classes. If we take our first pairing to be “three twice,” that is, a member of “odds an even number of times,” its first expansion will yield its reversal, a member of “evens an odd number of times,” and the expansion of that member of “evens an odd number of times” will yield *its* reversal, a member of “odds an even number of times.” And the analogous alternation will result if we begin, instead, with “two thrice,” that is, with a member of “evens an odd number of times,” and expand it to yield a member of “odds an even number of times,” and so on.

<sup>25</sup>In the following pages I restrict myself to the question of the process of deriving the numbers from the Great and the Small as Aristotle raises it at *Metaphysics A6*: 987b32–988a1; I have treated the distinct question of the status of the One and the Great and the Small as the joint causes of the being of the series of integers, as this is suggested by *Parmenides* 144b–e, in Miller (1995, 612–614). For the all-important distinction between Aristotle’s report that the One and the dyad are responsible for the being of the series of integers and the (supposed—but, I have argued, widely misinterpreted) report that they are responsible for the being of the forms, see Miller (1995, 599–600 and 622–629).

an account of their formation or genesis, our suggestion that he is drawing on the resources of the pebble arithmetic does invite one to bring *Parmenides* 143d–144a into relation with what Aristotle reports in this cryptic sentence. Have we happened upon the process—or, more precisely, the structures that serve and illustrate each of the stages of the process<sup>26</sup>—of the “derivation” of number that Aristotle credits to Plato? In Sect. 9.3 we glimpsed as two processes—the expansion of pebble-arithmetical squares and the expansion of pebble-arithmetical oblongs—an in-principle endless derivation, in the gnomons by which each expansion is achieved, of the series of odds and the series of evens, respectively. Suppose, now, we pair and alternate the stages of these series, moving from the first “even an even number of times” square to the first “odd an even number of times” oblong to the first “odd an odd number of times” square to the first “even an odd number of times” oblong and then moving through this whole series in the same order again and again, in principle forever? As is easily seen by re-ordering and then extending the series of squares and oblongs in our two main diagrams in Sect. 9.3, these stages would be the figures for “two twice,” “three twice,” “three thrice,” “four thrice,” and then “four four-times,” “five four-times,” “five five-times,” “six five-times,” and so on, and the series of gnomons by which these expansions would be achieved would give us, correspondingly, the numbers three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and so on.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to stress that by the reflections in this section I do not mean to imply that in *Parmenides* 143d–144a Plato has Parmenides offer a deduction or derivation of the being of number; Parmenides’ argument is, as Allen (1970, 1974, 712–714; and 1983, 227–228) and Schofield (1972, 103) rightly stress, an existence proof, not a deduction or derivation from prior principles. But this does not prevent us from recognizing, in Parmenides’ four classes, the conceptual terms by which, when their members are set in the right order and taken as stages of an endlessly iterable sequence, the series of integers might be derived.



On three counts, our reading of *Parmenides* 143d–144a seems to provide the materials, so to speak, for an interpretation of the thought that Aristotle credits to Plato at *Metaphysics* A6: 987b32–988a1. (i) As we have just shown, by pairing and alternating our expansions of the pebble-arithmetical squares and oblongs, one can “readily derive,” at least in principle, all the numbers in their proper order—with the exception, to be considered shortly, of “one” and “two.” (ii) If we think of each of the instantiations of the eidetic dyad of the Great and the Small as, albeit in a conceptual-imaginative rather than a sense-perceptible sense, a space-taking magnitude, the “pebble arithmetic,” in representing numbers not just as multitudes but rather as figurative arrays of units, provides us with just the sort of magnitudes that the instantiation of the Great and the Small requires. Actual arrays of actual pebbles (or, needless to say, of actual asterisks or dots, as in our figures in Sect. 9.3) do, of course, take up actual spreads of physical space. But the units these pebbles represent are, as Socrates stresses in *Republic* VII: 526a, absolutely equal, invariant, and

partless, and, so, they are not physical and not sense-perceptible; rather, they exist as the first class of the much disputed “mathematicals” and dwell, so to speak, as “intermediates between” sensibles and forms, as Aristotle reports at *Metaphysics* A6: 987b14–18.<sup>27</sup> (iii) Further, if we focus on the alterations of these arrays as successive shapings by which the conceptual imaginative space that each array takes is reshaped to constitute the next, we touch on the dynamism that makes appropriate the simile of the Great and the Small as an ἐκμαγείον τι, a “something malleable”—and further, now to exploit the prefix ἐκ-, a “something malleable out of which” something else, namely, the series of numbers, might be fashioned.<sup>28</sup>

To these three counts, a fourth, already briefly alluded to in n5 above, might now possibly be added. We have argued that our pebble-arithmetical reading of Parmenides’ four classes prevents the apparent problem of the omission of the primes from arising in the first place; the primes present themselves unproblematically within the series of square numbers as the arrays of units that make up various of its gnomons. But we have also seen—and now in two distinct ways, one textual and the other mathematical-figurative—that “one” and “two” have a special status in the formation of Parmenides’ four classes. Textually, Parmenides is able to establish the being of his four classes only on the prior bases of the “two” that he first finds exhibited in the “both” and the “pair” (143d1–2) and of the “one” that he finds “each member of the pair” to be (143d2–5); for the “two” is the first of the evens, and the addition of the “one” to the “two” yields the first of the odds, and it is the various pairings of these, the even and the odd, that first yield each of the four classes. Mathematical-figuratively, the “one,” that is, a single unit, is the starting point for the formation, by the addition of the succession of gnomons, of the series of square numbers, and the “two,” that is, a dyad of units, is the starting point for the formation, by the addition of its succession of gnomons, of the series of oblong numbers. Thus “one” and “two” are basic and, so, prior to the four classes. Could it have been to these, then—the “one” and the “two”—and not to the primes that Aristotle was referring in his report

<sup>27</sup> For Plato’s own implied argument for the being of “mathematicals” of such supersensible but intermediate status, see *Republic* 532b–c as discussed by Miller (1999, 74–76 and 2007, 318–319), and cf. *Philebus* 59c as discussed by Miller (2010, 46–47 and 65–77 (esp. 70–71)).

<sup>28</sup> Needless to say, on this interpretation of Aristotle’s sentence, not only the idea of “something malleable” but also the idea of an “engendering,” a γεννάσθαι, of the numbers must be given the non-literal sense of a metaphor for “derivation.”

that Plato thought all of the numbers  $\xi\xi\omega$  τῶν πρώτων, “except for the primary [ones],” could be “readily derived” from the Great and the Small?<sup>29</sup>

### WORKS CITED

- Allen, R.E. 1970. The Generation of Numbers in Plato’s *Parmenides*. *Classical Philology* 65: 30–34.
- . 1974. Unity and Infinity. *The Review of Metaphysics* 27: 697–725.
- . 1983. *Plato’s Parmenides: Translation and Analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Barkasi, M. 2008. Revisiting Plato’s Generation of Number (*Parmenides* 143c1-144a5). Unpublished essay prepared for a 2008 meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy.
- Brumbaugh, R. 1961. *Plato on the One*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Cornford, F. 1939. *Plato and Parmenides*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Curd, P. 1990. *Parmenides* 142b5-144e7: The ‘Unity Is Many’ Arguments. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* xxviii: 19–35.
- Hager, M.E. 1962. Philolaus and the Even-Odd. *The Classical Review* 12: 1–2.
- Heath, T. 1921. *A History of Greek Mathematics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Knorr, W. 1975. *The Evolution of the Euclidean Elements*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

<sup>29</sup> Does reading τῶν πρώτων as “the primary [ones],” that is, “the primary [numbers],” imply that Plato as we are interpretively reconstructing Aristotle’s report of his teachings violates the principle that, as Aristotle formulates it, “one” is not a number but rather the “starting-point” (ἀρχή) and “measure” (μέτρον) of number? (Recall n.6.) Our suggested reading of *Parmenides* 143d–144a puts us in position to answer in the negative. If it is right that Plato’s *Parmenides* is drawing on the pebble arithmetical account of the expansions of the square and of the oblong, then, precisely as the bases for the very formation of these figures, “one” and “two” are not mere members of the series generated by their gnomons; rather, to repeat Aristotle’s language, they are “starting-points” and “measures” of the series of numbers. To this we might add that it is striking that Plato does not have *Parmenides* attempt a metaphysical account of what is basic to “one” and to “two”; instead, as we saw at the outset of these reflections and have just noted again, Plato has *Parmenides* find the being of “two” to be exhibited by any pairing of the eidetic characters “one” and “being” and “different,” and find the being of “one” to be exhibited by the members of any such “two.” This leaves it open to us to ask, what might such a metaphysical account, were Plato to offer one, consist in? In the context of Aristotle’s report in *Metaphysics* A6 it is of course tempting to return to the starting point of this postscript and ponder the relations of “one” to “the One” (τὸ ἓν) and of “two” to the so-called dyad. But undertaking this difficult reflection would require a wider textual basis and a deeper array of ontological possibilities than we have had occasion to consider in this chapter. For a beginning, see Miller (1995).

- Miller, M. 1986 [1991]. *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Repr. State College: Pennsylvania State University Press].
- . 1995. 'Unwritten Teachings' in the *Parmenides*. *The Review of Metaphysics* 48: 591–633.
- . 1999. Figure, Ratio, Form: Plato's Five Mathematical Studies. In *Recognition, Remembrance and Reality: New Essays on Plato's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, ed. M. McPherran, 73–88. Special issue of *Apeiron* 32: 4.
- . 2007. Beginning the 'Longer Way'. In *Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, 310–344. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2010. A More 'Exact Grasp' of the Soul? Tripartition in *Republic* IV and Dialectic in the *Philebus*. In *Truth*, ed. K. Pritzl, 57–135. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.
- Sanday, E. 2014. *A Study of Dialectic in Plato's Parmenides*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Sayre, K. 1996. *Parmenides' Lesson: Translation and Explication of Plato's Parmenides*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.
- Schofield, M. 1972. The Dissection of Unity in Plato's *Parmenides*. *Classical Philology* 67: 102–109.
- Scolnicov, S. 2003. *Plato's Parmenides: Translated with introduction and commentary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Turnbull, R. 1998. *The Parmenides and Plato's Late Ontology: Translation and Commentary on the Parmenides*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

SECTION II

---

Goodness as Knowing How to Be



# VIRTUE AND SELF-RESTRAINT: Maimonides' Dialogue with Aristotle in *Eight Chapters*

*Ronna Burger*

Know that the things about which we shall speak in these chapters. . . are not matters invented on my own. . . they are matters gathered from the discourse of the sages. . . as well as from the discourse of both the ancient and modern philosophers. . . Hear the truth from whoever says it. (Maimonides' Introduction to *Eight Chapters*)

The natural [part of political justice] is that which has the same capacity everywhere and is not dependent on being held to exist or not, whereas the conventional part is that which at the beginning makes no difference whether it is thus or otherwise, but once people have set it down it does make a difference. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1134b18–23)

Statutes which I have prescribed for you, you have no permission to investigate. The nations of the world argue against them and Satan criticizes them. . . (B.T., Yoma 67b, cited in *Eight Chapters*)

Whereas the benefits of religious laws are indirect and thus not apparent. . . no one puzzles about [moral laws] because their utility is clear. . . by repeat-

---

R. Burger (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, USA  
e-mail: [rburger@tulane.edu](mailto:rburger@tulane.edu)

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature  
Switzerland AG 2022

D. Bloom et al. (eds.), *Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98904-0_10)

edly practicing these commandments, a person comes to possess those dispositions that Maimonides, following Aristotle, regards as moral virtues. Edward Halper, “Torah as Political Philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

Maimonides’ *Eight Chapters* (*Shemonah Perakim*) is the introduction to his commentary on *Pirquei Avot*, a tractate of the *Mishnah* popularly known as “Ethics of the Fathers.” In his own introduction to *Eight Chapters* Maimonides explains that before giving an account of particular laws, he wanted to provide “some useful chapters,” which would enable one to acquire certain principles, and at the same time, provide a key to what is presented in the commentary. He tells his reader that the ideas are drawn from ancient and modern philosophers, as well as the sages, but to name all his sources would be “useless prolixity.” There are undoubtedly more significant reasons for precisely what remains anonymous:<sup>2</sup> while *Eight Chapters* is replete with citations from Torah and Talmud, there are none from any philosophers, ancient or modern. In fact, however, the opening chapters read like a paraphrase, sometimes a direct quotation, of Alfarabi’s “Selected Aphorisms” (or “Aphorisms of the Statesman”).<sup>3</sup> That work, in turn, has its roots in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the imprint of the *Ethics* is vividly present in Maimonides’ *Eight Chapters*.

Not only do we find almost every major topic of Aristotle’s *Ethics* taken up,<sup>4</sup> but the development of the argument of the *Ethics* from Books I through VII provides a model of sorts for that of *Eight Chapters*. The driving question of Aristotle’s *Ethics*—What is happiness, or the human

<sup>1</sup>For these quotations, see Weiss and Butterworth (1983, 60 and 80), Aristotle (2011), and Halper (2011, 195). I am grateful to Ed for inviting me to participate in a panel he organized at the Academy for Jewish Philosophy in the American Philosophical Association meeting, December 2006. The roots of this paper go back to that occasion, and Ed’s comments inspired me to continue with the exciting but challenging study of Maimonides.

<sup>2</sup>Maimonides’ defense of anonymity is especially striking in light of the fact that, in *Pirquei Avot* itself (6.6), repeating a statement in the name of the speaker is said to bring redemption to the world. See Halper, “Maimonides’ Aristotelianism in the *Eight Chapters*,” paper based on a talk delivered at the Society for Jewish Studies, December 2004, ms., 1.

<sup>3</sup>See especially Aphorisms 1 through 21, in Butterworth (2001, 11–22). All subsequent references to *Selected Aphorisms* are from this translation.

<sup>4</sup>The notable exception is friendship, the most extended topic of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, to which Maimonides in fact alludes in his commentary on *Avot* I.6: “Acquire a friend for yourself.”

good?—leads by the end of Book I to an analysis of the human soul, as the basis for an investigation of virtue conducted in Books II through VI. That investigation reaches a peak at the end of VI with the subordination of moral virtue and prudence to wisdom (*sophia*), understood as comprehensive knowledge of the cosmos, or the most eminent knowledge of the highest beings in the cosmos. It seems as if the *Ethics* has reached its conclusion at that point, but Book VII ushers in a new beginning, which adopts a different orientation toward understanding human character and happiness. The concern with praise and blame in the preceding analysis of moral virtue is largely replaced by an interest in nature, which underlies an examination of pleasure and friendship, arriving finally at a conclusion about human happiness. The issue that enters at the pivotal point between the two phases of the argument of Aristotle's *Ethics* is the problem of *akrasia*, or lack of self-mastery—the culminating problem in Aristotle's debate with Socrates, whose characteristic teaching is the idea that no one who knows what is good will act against it.<sup>5</sup>

An analogous pivotal point divides two phases of the argument of Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*. The work sets out from an opening discussion entirely Greek in character, beginning with an analysis of the human soul, which provides the basis for a consideration of virtues, construed as health of soul, and vices, understood as diseases requiring medical treatment. The inquiry reaches a peak of sorts in Ch. 5, which holds up the standard of a single goal—an activity of contemplation—to which all powers of the soul should be directed. Maimonides' work then turns, in its two concluding chapters, to issues of particular concern in Jewish thought.<sup>6</sup> The sixth chapter, which marks the pivotal point between these two phases, is the only one to begin with a reference to “the philosophers,” and in it Maimonides admits explicitly for the first time their apparent conflict with the sages. The issue at stake—as in the pivotal point in Book VII of Aristotle's *Ethics*—is the relation between virtue and self-restraint,

<sup>5</sup>On this characterization of the movement of the argument of the *Ethics*, see my Introduction, especially pp. 6–8, in Burger (2008).

<sup>6</sup>In Ch. 7, which begins for the first time with references to *Midrash*, *Haggadah*, and *Talmud*, we watch Greek philosophy get transformed into Biblical and Rabbinic language, as the vices, which were originally diseased states of the soul, become the “veils” through which the prophets are said to see God (Weiss and Butterworth, 82). The eighth and final chapter takes up the subject of responsibility for action, in light of the distinctively biblical problem of justifying divine punishment if God preordains human action.

or vice and *akrasia*. While both philosophers and sages as presented here accept the difference between these states of human character, they disagree about which is superior to the other. Maimonides ends the chapter with a claim to have provided an analysis of “marvelous subtlety,” which offers a “wonderful reconciliation of the two views” (Weiss and Butterworth 1983, 80).<sup>7</sup> The aim of this chapter is to understand and evaluate that claim.

## 10.2 HEALTH AND DISEASE OF SOUL

The psychology at the end of Book I of the *Ethics*, on which Aristotle’s account of virtue and vice is based, announces a tripartite division of the soul, distinguishing the rational from the non-rational, then separating the non-rational into the nutritive and the desiring part, which is the locus of the moral virtues.<sup>8</sup> *Eight Chapters* in contrast differentiates five parts.<sup>9</sup> The rational part includes the powers of perceiving intelligibles, deliberating, acquiring the sciences, and recognizing base versus noble actions, some of these activities said to be theoretical, some practical. Four other parts of the soul are distinguished: the nutritive, the sentient, the imaginative, and the appetitive or desiring.<sup>10</sup> To the three parts of the soul that provided the foundation for Aristotle’s ethics, the psychology of *Eight Chapters* adds two—the sentient and the imaginative—which are subjects of Aristotle’s theoretical account of the soul in *De Anima*. Why does Maimonides, in contrast with Aristotle, include perception and imagination in the psychology required for his account of virtue and vice?

Ch. 2 offers the first clue, beginning with its title: “On the disobedience of the soul’s powers and on knowledge of the part in which the virtues and vices are primarily found.” Obedience and disobedience of the

<sup>7</sup> All quotations from and references to pagination of the *Eight Chapters* are from Weiss and Butterworth (1983).

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle notes that the function of desire, insofar as it can listen to reason, could be subsumed under the rational part of the soul, but when he returns to an analysis of the soul in Ch. 1 of Book VI, as the basis for the treatment of intellectual virtues, he does not bring up desire, but divides the rational part of the soul into a theoretical and a practical function, whose respective virtues are prudence and wisdom.

<sup>9</sup> Maimonides follows Alfarabi here almost word for word. See Aphorism 7 (14).

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle raises but brushes aside the question whether speaking of “parts” of the soul means divisions like parts of the body or only distinctions in speech (*Ethics* 1102a29–31). Maimonides seems much more concerned with emphasizing the unitary character of the soul of man, so any power within it that seems to be shared with other animals is not in fact the same in another species: the nutritive part in the human soul is not the same as in a donkey. Whatever the case may be with other species, the unity of the human soul is apparently due to the intellect, if, as Maimonides concludes, intellect stands to the other powers as form does to matter.

Law are to be found in two parts of the soul, the sentient and the appetitive. Those actions cannot be ascribed to the nutritive or imaginative parts, and while the rational part, through its opinions, can indirectly bring about obedience or disobedience, it is not itself subject to commandment or prohibition. Disobedience traced to the appetitive or desiring part of the soul is understandable, but can the senses really be blamed for disobedience? That question arises especially since virtues and vices are said to be found in only one part, the appetitive, to which the sentient part is subservient. Without highlighting the point, Maimonides differentiates two spheres: the Law, which is obeyed or disobeyed, on the one hand, moral virtues and vices, on the other, and the difference is indicated by the status of the sentient part of the soul: while virtues and vices are praiseworthy or blameworthy dispositions of the desiring part of the soul, the Law apparently blames even the senses for disobedience.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of the imaginative power included in the psychology of *Eight Chapters*, in contrast to Aristotle's *Ethics*, is suggested in Chapter 3, which describes individuals with sick souls by analogy with sick bodies. Just as those physically ill, with corrupted senses, imagine the sweet to be bitter and the bitter sweet, those with sick souls imagine bad things as good and good things as bad.<sup>12</sup> Ch. 2 argued that the imaginative part of the soul is no more responsible for obedience or disobedience than the nutritive part. Like the nutritive, the imaginative part is active even during sleep, it has no virtues or vices, and cannot be praised or blamed, but simply flows properly or improperly. If, however, imagining the bad things as good or the good things as bad is the starting point from which all further action derives, and that origin cannot be subject to praise or blame, it seems to put into question the assumption of responsibility for action altogether and the justification of praise or blame.

The movement of the argument of *Eight Chapters* reflects that perspective. Maimonides' discussion of human character and action takes its bearings from the simile by which Aristotle introduces his psychology at the end of *Ethics* I: just as the doctor who is to heal the eye must know the whole body, so the *politikos* must study the whole soul (1102a18–20): the true statesman is a doctor of the soul. In Aristotle's *Ethics*, however, an orientation indicated by the medical model is deferred until the analysis of virtue and vice is completed: it is not until Book VII that the inquiry seeks

<sup>11</sup>We might think of the "delight to the eye" that the first woman perceived in the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6).

<sup>12</sup>Once more, Maimonides follows Alfarabi. See Aphorism 4 (32).

to understand soul and human character not through the lens of praise and blame but rather disease and cure. *Eight Chapters* advances more or less in the opposite direction. From the psychology of the first two chapters, it goes on immediately to an account of the diseased soul in need of medical treatment, coming to the issue of free will and responsibility for action only in the eighth and final chapter.

The healthy condition of soul, Maimonides explains in Ch. 3, leads to doing good and fine things and performing noble actions, while a diseased condition leads to bad and ugly things and base actions (65–66). People suffering from bodily illness who are aware of their condition turn to doctors who prohibit them from pursuing what they imagine pleasurable and compel them to take bitter things, all with the aim of healing them so they will be able to enjoy what is really pleasant. Sick souls, by analogy, should seek doctors of soul, who will prohibit them from pursuing the bad things they consider good. Maimonides labels those doctors of soul “wise men,” replacing the assignment of the title Aristotle gives to the statesman, or Alfarabi to “the statesman and the one called the king.”<sup>13</sup> The analogy of psychic with bodily illness raises the question of whether we are as easily aware of one condition as the other, and whether we recognize as easily the competent physicians. Maimonides admits that there are sick souls who are not aware of their illness—the significant case being those who believe their diseased state is in fact a healthy one. Those, on the other hand, who are aware of their diseased condition but won’t seek medical treatment to be cured, presumably suffer from a divided soul, which Maimonides illustrates with a biblical citation: “For in the stubbornness of my heart I walk” (Deut. 29:18).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See Aphorisms 4–5 (12–13).

<sup>14</sup> With *Eight Chapters*’ first set of biblical citations, Maimonides seems to acknowledge these possibilities:

1. “For in the stubbornness of my heart I walk” (Deut. 29:18):  
those who recognize their illness but continue pursuing their pleasures.
2. “The way of the fool is straight in his eyes, but he who listens to counsel is wise” (Prov. 12:15):  
The first phrase, as Maimonides notes, characterizes those who do not recognize their illness, which the biblical passage contrasts with the wisdom of those who listen to counsel; but Maimonides does not characterize as wise one who simply “accepts the opinion of the wise man.”
3. “There is a way which seems straight to a man, but its end is the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12):  
those who do not recognize their illness and do not submit to medical treatment.
4. “The way of the wicked is like darkness; they know not why they stumble” (Prov. 4:19):  
those, as Maimonides put it, “whose souls are sick and who do not know what is harmful or useful to them.”

Maimonides prepares for his account of medical treatment of psychic disease with an Aristotelian analysis, in Ch. 4, of virtue as a mean disposition between two states of vice, all formed by habituation. His list of examples, in its deviations from Aristotle's, is of great interest.<sup>15</sup> But whatever the particular virtues may be, Maimonides follows Aristotle in acknowledging the shifting character or perspectival appearance that makes it difficult to recognize the mean.<sup>16</sup> That standard determines the equilibrium of the healthy soul, while the sick soul is one that has inclined toward one extreme or the other. Medical treatment aims to restore equilibrium by encouraging, or compelling, the individual to perform actions in the contrary direction: if someone has become miserly toward himself, medical treatment would advise repeated acts of extravagance, with the aim of reaching the mean state of liberality; if he were inclined toward extravagance, he would be required to repeat miserly action. But the two extremes, Maimonides observes—in agreement with Aristotle—are not symmetrical:<sup>17</sup> it is more difficult to reach the mean of liberality from miserliness than extravagance, or the mean of moderation from lust rather than insensitivity to pleasure. Given these differences, medical treatment of soul requires subtle knowledge of individual character and of human nature in general.

Maimonides begins leaving Aristotle behind when he goes on to describe “the virtuous men,” who would incline a little toward excess or deficiency as a precaution, in particular a little toward abasement, beyond humility—acting “inside the line of the law” (69).<sup>18</sup> Practices such as fasting, abstaining from meat or wine, or living in isolation, must be understood as medical treatment, meant only to cure disease; they are not commanded by “the perfect Law,” which aims at the middle way. Yet, as Maimonides illustrates, the commandments can only move us toward the mean by ordering actions that move us away from the extreme to which we are naturally inclined and toward the contrary, which is closer to the mean—away from lust and

<sup>15</sup> See the last note in this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics* II.8, 1108b20–26.

<sup>17</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics* II.8, 1108b31–1109a19.

<sup>18</sup> The “virtuous man” referred to here is, in Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, “Laws Concerning Character Traits” Ch. 1, the “pious man,” who moves away from a haughty heart to the opposite extreme, in contrast to “the wise man,” who moves only to the mean of humility. Acting “inside the line of the law,” Maimonides remarks in that context, characterizes the behavior of the pious, who direct themselves away from the mean toward one extreme (29–30).

toward insensibility, which is closer to moderation, away from stinginess and toward prodigality which is closer to generosity.<sup>19</sup> The Law seems to operate on the assumption that the human soul is always or typically in a predictably diseased condition, in need of medical treatment.

The function of the commandments is to discipline the powers of the soul (72).<sup>20</sup> Yet the “perfect man” has defects like all of us; he just inspects himself continually and acts as his own doctor of soul. This weighing of one’s actions while aiming at the mean may be the most perfect way of worship (74). But as Maimonides argues in the fifth chapter, just as bodily actions should be directed toward physical health, in order to furnish the best instrument for soul, activities of the soul should be directed toward the sciences and acquiring the virtues with an eye to the ultimate goal, knowledge of God as far as we are capable (75).<sup>21</sup> Maimonides appeals to Proverbs, “In all your ways know Him” (3:6), and then cites a Talmudic line (Berakhot 63a): “Even with a transgression” (78). Quoting *Pirquei Avot* for the first time, Maimonides praises the sages for capturing “the magnificence of this notion” with marvelous brevity: “Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven” (II.15).<sup>22</sup> This looks like the peak of the argument of *Eight Chapters*, equivalent to the point Aristotle’s *Ethics* reaches at the end of Book VI, when *sophia* is declared to be the final end of human life. Just as the argument of Aristotle’s *Ethics* turns from there to its new

<sup>19</sup> In the last chapter of *Ethics* II, Aristotle revises the original discussion of the mean as a standard and introduces the need for a “second sailing” (1109a35): one cannot aim directly at the mean but must incline toward the opposite of the extreme most opposed to the mean, in general or for oneself individually.

<sup>20</sup> “Maimonides’ central move,” as Halper puts it, “is to identify obeying the commandments with the repeated performance of virtuous acts: both are repetitive acts that habituate the desires and so instill moral virtue in the soul. The equation assumes that the commandments dictate actions that are in accordance with the mean” (Halper 2004, 2–3).

<sup>21</sup> It is by denying the status of the moral virtues as ends in themselves, Ralph Lerner observes, that Maimonides’ argument can hold out “the possibility of bridging the chasm between the philosophers’ understanding of ethics, on the one hand, and that of Scripture and the Talmudic sages, on the other (2000, 68).

<sup>22</sup> Maimonides does not explain the “greatness and magnificence of this notion.” One wonders if he could be driving at something like the radical consequences Socrates implies in *Republic* IV, when he identifies justice as health of soul and insists that everything else should be called just or unjust only insofar as it enhances or harms this proper inner order (443e–444a). Discussing the problem Maimonides faces in his effort to explain certain secrets of the Law, when such explanation in public is forbidden, Leo Strauss (1963, xv) observes: “Maimonides transgresses the Law ‘for the sake of heaven,’ i.e. in order to uphold or to fulfill the Law.”

beginning in Book VII, with an investigation of psychic conflict, *Eight Chapters* descends from knowledge of God as the single goal of all the soul's powers to take up, in Ch. 6, the same problem of psychic conflict.

### 10.3 SELF-RESTRAINT AND VIRTUE

In Aristotle's *Ethics*, the account of moral virtue and vice proceeds from Book II to V as if these two praiseworthy and blameworthy conditions are exhaustive. Each is understood to be a state of internal unity, either positive or negative, formed by habit: in the virtuous character, desire has supposedly been molded to harmonize with correct *logos*, while in the vicious character, an opinion about the good has been shaped to serve desires contrary to reason. These two alternatives leave no place for a condition in which the desiring part of the soul could move on its own contrary to the direction reason chooses. The psychology at the end of Book I alerted us to the possibility of this experience of *akrasia* or lack of self-restraint (1102b13–19), but it is only at the beginning of Book VII that it comes up for consideration. Aristotle traces the perplexity of this psychological experience to Socrates, with his insistence that no one acts against his own best interest provided that he is not ignorant of it (1145b25–27).<sup>23</sup> That idea “clearly disputes the phenomena,” Aristotle begins, but he seems in the end to come around in some way to acknowledge the grounds for the Socratic principle.<sup>24</sup>

One sign of that development comes with the consideration of curing psychic disease, which concludes with the opposite view of the initial opinion proposed. At first glance, it might seem easy to cure the individual with the vice of indulgence, who pursues pleasure in the wrong way without believing it wrong, since presumably he only needs to be persuaded that he is wrong. The person lacking self-restraint, on the contrary, already knows what he's doing is wrong, so curing him is like trying to give someone water when he's choking on water (1146a32–35). But the analysis

<sup>23</sup> Socrates could not accept that, when knowledge (*epistēmē*) is present in a person, something contrary could prevail and “drag it around like a slave” (*Ethics* 1145b24–25). Aristotle alludes to Plato's *Protagoras*, where Socrates questions the Sophist whether he shares the opinion of the many, who “think about knowledge as they do about a slave, that it is dragged around by all else.” Or does he believe that “if in fact someone knows the good things and the bad, he won't be overpowered by anything so as to do anything other than what knowledge bids him to do, but rather prudence is competent to come to the person's aid?” See *Protagoras* 352a–c, translated by Bartlett (2004).

<sup>24</sup> See my analysis in Burger (2008), especially 143–145 and 151–152.

leads Aristotle finally to acknowledge that the indulgent person, just as much or more than the akratic, is someone who seeks excessive bodily pleasure, he is just so habituated that his opinion has been shaped to harmonize with those desires. Vice is like chronic disease, *akrasia* only intermittent. If the vicious person begins to see how he is wrong and submits to an attempted cure, he is bound to fall into akratic states along the way (1150b30–34).

Maimonides' account of psychic conflict in *Eight Chapters* begins with a claim about what “the philosophers” say—apparently, Aristotle's debate with Socrates can be passed over. The discussion assumes a distinction between the self-restrained person, who does virtuous actions struggling against his strong desire to perform bad ones, and the virtuous person, who acts in accordance with his desire and what “the state of his soul arouses him to do” (78). The philosophers agree, Maimonides maintains, about the superiority of the virtuous to the self-restrained man.<sup>25</sup> And he finds “speeches of the Law” in agreement with the philosophers, appealing to a line in Proverbs as evidence: “The soul of the wicked desires evil” (Prov. 21:10). Of course, this claim does not treat lack of self-restraint as a unique condition, distinct from vice, since both involve the desire for evil; but it does imply the superiority of virtue over self-restraint, if the desire for evil is always the mark of a wicked person and the self-restrained person has such a desire while the virtuous person does not.<sup>26</sup>

While he has found some sign of harmony between the “speeches of the Law” and the philosophers, Maimonides goes on to admit a general ground of conflict. In the eyes of the sages,

someone who craves and strongly desires transgressions is more virtuous and perfect than someone who does not crave them and suffers no pain in abstaining from them. They even said that the more virtuous and perfect an

<sup>25</sup> The self-restrained person, Maimonides adds, can replace the virtuous in most things, paraphrasing Alfarabi. See Aphorism 14 (19). On Alfarabi's ranking of the two conditions, see note 30 below.

<sup>26</sup> Maimonides cites one other line from Proverbs that is supposed to show the “speeches of the Law” in agreement with the philosophers: “A joy to the righteous is the doing of justice, but dismay to evil-doers” (21:15). That statement does imply the Aristotelian notion that there is a pleasure accompanying virtuous action when it flows from a virtuous character; it is not clear, however, that the evil-doers who perform just actions without any satisfaction are necessarily the self-restrained, and not just those acting under some external source of compulsion.

individual is, the stronger is both his craving for transgressions and his pain in abstaining from them. . . . As if this were not enough, they said that the reward of the [self-restrained] man is proportionate to his pain in restraining himself.

This view is encapsulated in the last sentence of the tractate *Avot* (V.19): “The reward is according to the pain” (79).

As the sages see it, there is something superior about suffering the experience of psychic conflict, then overcoming a recalcitrant desire by submitting to one’s obligation. To have no need for such overcoming is too easy a condition to be admired. Maimonides prepares for his explanation of this view by citing Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel:

Let a man not say, ‘I do not want to eat meat with milk, I do not want to wear mixed fabric, I do not want to have illicit sexual relations,’ but [let him say] ‘I want to, but what shall I do—my Father in heaven has forbidden me.’<sup>27</sup>

The Talmudic sage wants to discourage anyone from claiming never to have desires for things prohibited by the Law. Such a claim could be viewed as a boast about the sufficiency of one’s own condition, which makes any external legal constraint unnecessary. It is only, he implies, by admitting a desire for the forbidden that one demonstrates respect for the Law as the sole ground for doing what one should, while acknowledging the insufficiency of one’s natural condition. This seems to be precisely what would lie behind the philosophers’ evaluation of the inferior status of having to overcome inner conflict, in comparison with the harmonious soul of the virtuous. This divergent ranking of virtue and self-restraint surely looks like a fundamental difference between philosophers and sages.

#### 10.4 GENERALLY ACCEPTED OPINIONS VERSUS TRADITIONAL LAWS

Having brought to light the apparent disagreement of the sages with the philosophers, Maimonides sets out to demonstrate that the conflict is only on the surface; in fact both views are true, if one recognizes that they are

<sup>27</sup> See Weiss and Butterworth (1983, 79). Butterworth and Weiss do not provide a reference for this passage, but refer to the *Sifra* to Lev. 20:26, where a similar statement is attributed to R. Elazer ben Azariah (101n10).

talking about two different classes of actions. What the philosophers are speaking of when they argue for the superiority of virtue over self-restraint are the things generally accepted by all people as bad—Aristotelian *endoxa*.<sup>28</sup> Maimonides offers a set of examples: murder, theft, robbery, fraud, harming an innocent man, repaying a benefactor with evil, degrading parents, and the like (79). These actions are recognized as bad by all peoples and there is no need of revealed law to prohibit them. They are the matters about which the sages said, “If they were not written down, they would deserve to be written down.” Maimonides is citing here a passage from the tractate *Yoma* (67b), which offers this list of examples: [laws concerning] idolatry, illicit sexual unions, murder, robbery, the blessing of the Name (a Rabbinic euphemism for blasphemy).<sup>29</sup> In comparison with this passage, it is striking that Maimonides’ list of generally accepted bad actions includes nothing concerning our relation to God, only human interaction, and then, no case of sexual relations.

Whatever members belong to it, it is the class of actions generally accepted as bad that the philosophers have in mind, Maimonides contends, when they argue that only a defective soul would strongly desire such actions, while no virtuous soul would long for them or suffer pain in abstaining from them. When, on the other hand, the sages admire the self-restrained person, who desires the forbidden action but overcomes his desire, what they are thinking of are actions prohibited by the “traditional laws.”<sup>30</sup> Maimonides’ designation of these two classes of law is clarified in the eighth chapter of his *Logic*. Discussing there propositions that are

<sup>28</sup> See Aristotle *Topics* I.1. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* VII. 1145b2–8.

<sup>29</sup> These are five of the seven Noahide commandments, which Maimonides discusses in his *Mishneh Torah* “Laws of Kings and Their Wars.” He does not speak of these commandments as natural law, Leo Strauss observes, since, for one thing, he considers the prohibition against incest or in chastity to belong to revealed laws. See Strauss (1973, 97n4).

<sup>30</sup> Alfarabi contrasts the self-restrained person, who “does the actions of the traditional law, while his yearning is for their contrary,” with the individual possessing the virtue of moderation who “does only what traditional law requires of him with respect to eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse, without having a desire or a longing for what is in addition to what the traditional law requires” (19, Aphorism 14). He goes on to distinguish the case in which virtue is superior from the one in which self-restraint is superior—a ranking based, not on different actions, but different classes of individuals: natural virtue is preferable for the ruler, restraining oneself in accordance with what *nomos* requires is preferable for the ruled (Aphorism 15). If Maimonides had Alfarabi’s distinction in mind, his analysis of the different rankings of virtue and self-restraint would imply that the philosophers find their standard in the ruler, the sages in the ruled.

known without needing any proof of their validity, he distinguishes those based on traditions, which are received by a particular people from a sanctioned individual or assembly,<sup>31</sup> and those based on generally accepted opinions, such as recognizing the baseness of uncovering the genitals or the nobility of compensating a benefactor generously (Weiss and Butterworth 1983, 156).

Actions prohibited by traditional laws, as characterized in *Eight Chapters*, would not be bad at all if they were not pronounced wrong by the Law. It is in the case of such actions, and only such actions, Maimonides argues, that the sages believed a person must let his soul remain attracted to what is forbidden.<sup>32</sup> Having a desire for the forbidden would guarantee the presence of an obstacle to be overcome; but in these matters that desire would not be the sign of a defective nature, since there is nothing intrinsically bad about the forbidden action. Of course, one wonders whether the actions prohibited by traditional laws would ever be the object of a natural desire: one might want to eat a particular food, or wear a particular piece of clothing, which happens to violate the Law, but there hardly seems to be a natural desire with the aim of eating meat and milk together or wearing wool and linen together. If there were such a desire, it looks as if it would be a sign of defiance, chafing against the bit of the Law. And perhaps it would not be surprising if there were a rebellious reaction against the restraint of the Law above all when one cannot understand the reason for its proscription. The Law's demand for obedience in such a case serves the purpose of confirming its authority.

Maimonides connects his division of the Law with the language of the Torah by identifying traditional laws with everything God calls "My

<sup>31</sup> *Avot* begins: "Moses received the Torah at Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, Joshua to elders, and elders to prophets. And prophets handed in on to the men of the great assembly."

<sup>32</sup> Maimonides returns to Rabban ben Gamliel: he did not try to prevent anyone from claiming "I do not want to kill, or steal, or lie," but only traditionally forbidden actions—eating meat with milk, wearing mixed fabric, or engaging in illicit sexual unions. Maimonides does not dispute the inclusion here of "illicit sexual unions" in the class of traditional laws, after just referring to a Talmudic passage (*Yoma* 67b) that places such actions among the generally accepted things. The status of "illicit sexual unions" looks like a particularly controversial issue for the separation of the two categories of law.

statutes” (*huqqim*), in contrast with the “commandments” (*mitzvot*).<sup>33</sup> In the *Guide*, in the context of discussing the purposes of the Law (III. 26), Maimonides takes up what appears to be the same division, though with a different terminology: “commandments” (*mitzvot*) designates the genus, which is in turn divided between statutes and judgments (*huqqim* and *mishpatim*). In that context, Maimonides is examining the “disagreement among the men of speculation among the adherents of Law” whether there is a reason for all the divine laws. He finds “the multitude of the sages” in accord that there is indeed a reason for all of them, though it is not always evident; the division of *mishpatim* and *huqqim* is based, accordingly, on whether the utility of the law is clear to the multitude or not. Despite the supposedly widespread agreement about there being reasons for all divine Law, Maimonides claims to have found one text of the sages (in *Beresith Rabbah*) that appears to imply there are some commandments given with no intention other than merely to prescribe a law that must be obeyed. Faced with this supposedly singular exception, he proposes an interpretation that will not conflict with the principle that all the divine laws have a useful end: it is only the details about which it was said that commandments have been given merely for the sake of commanding something, whereas the generalities of the commandments necessarily have a reason and have been given because of some utility.<sup>34</sup> This looks like a point that would be applicable to law of all sorts; but if the general principle of a law is typically more evident in the case of the *mishpatim*, whereas the mysterious details loom large in the *huqqim*—the proscription of meat mixed with milk, or wool mixed with linen—that would account for the more hidden purposes of the one class relative to the other.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Halper (2004, 13) notes the seemingly inconsistent way Maimonides speaks of certain prohibitions—forbidden foods as well as sexual relations—which in Ch. 6 he seems to designate “statutes” (*huqqim*) rather than commandments, while in Ch. 4 (71–72), he includes them among commandments whose purpose is to move us far from the extreme of lust toward the other extreme, insensibility, in order to inculcate the mean disposition of moderation. Since Ch. 4 is concerned with the aim of all divine laws to foster virtue, “commandment” may be meant to designate the genus, like *mitzvot* in *Guide* III.26. Still, when Maimonides includes “illicit sexual unions” among traditional laws in Ch. 6, perhaps he does put into question, as Raymond Weiss (1991, 76) observes, the usefulness of such laws for moral training.

<sup>34</sup> See the *Guide of the Perplexed*, especially III.26 (Pines 1963, 508).

<sup>35</sup> The *huqqim* or religious laws, Halper (2011, 194) argues, can be understood as ruses or devices that operate indirectly to produce decent social conditions, without their utility being apparent to the person who observes them.

Maimonides' characterization of traditional laws brings to mind Aristotle's discussion, in Book V of the *Ethics*, of the just by *nomos*, in contrast with nature:<sup>36</sup> actions unjust by *nomos* are indifferent in themselves until, by some kind of contract, the law pronounces them forbidden. Maimonides echoes this in his description of traditional laws in Ch. 6: if it were not for the prohibition itself, the proscribed action would not be bad at all (80). But it is striking that he does not speak of the other class as being "by nature." He does go out of his way, however, to criticize "our modern wise men," who label the set of actions that are recognizably bad as "rational laws," or more precisely, "intellectual laws." The use of this language, Maimonides charges, is a sign of the sickness of the dialectical theologians (the *Mutakallimun*).<sup>37</sup> Why is it so important for Maimonides to reject the designation "intellectual laws"?

According to the psychology of Ch. 2, there are two parts of the soul capable of disobedience or obedience of the Law, the sentient and the appetitive or desiring.<sup>38</sup> While the rational faculty can influence our desires and actions through true and false opinions, it is not itself an agent of obedience or disobedience. All divine laws, then, may have a reason, that is, a purpose they are meant to serve; but if "rational laws" or "intellectual laws" means commandments and prohibitions issued to the rational part of the soul, which is not capable of obeying or disobeying, such a category is impossible.

This issue underlies Maimonides' interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis, which he presents in the second chapter of the *Guide* (Weiss and Butterworth 1983, 130 ff.). A learned man, Maimonides

<sup>36</sup>Halper (2004, 1) calls attention to this connection in "Maimonides' Aristotelianism in *Eight Chapters*."

<sup>37</sup>This would include Saadia Gaon, who distinguishes, among the laws God gave us through the prophets, those our reason recognizes as good or bad from those tradition imposes on us. In the one class, God has implanted a sense of approval or disapproval in our reason, whereas the Law has made the others objects of commandment or prohibition and reason passes no judgment. Those sorts of commandments are imposed primarily for us to be rewarded for obedience, although, Saadia remarks, he can discern some minor motives that explain them. While Saadia includes adultery, along with bloodshed, theft, and falsehood among laws of reason, he speaks of prohibitions against certain forms of sexual intercourse as traditional laws. See Altmann (2002, 94–100).

<sup>38</sup>We now understand better why, as the title of Ch. 2 indicated, the presence of a virtuous disposition is not identical with obedience to the Law: obedience could result from self-restraint as much as from a virtuous disposition, or indeed, more clearly through self-restraint.

relates, once presented him with a curious objection: why should it be that only through an act of disobedience was man granted the great perfection peculiar to him, namely the capacity to distinguish good and evil? Why should the punishment for disobedience be the acquisition of a new perfection? Maimonides reprimands his interlocutor in a shockingly abusive diatribe, apparently meant to trace the objection the learned man raises to his defective character, above all his vice of indulgence. When Maimonides finally responds to the objection itself, he appeals to the teaching of Ch. 1 of the *Guide*: the perfection that identifies man in the image and likeness of God is the intellect that God made overflow onto man in his original creation. In that condition, man possessed intellectual cognitions of the true and false, but no apprehension of “fine and bad,” among generally accepted things—not even the most manifestly bad of such actions, uncovering the genitals.<sup>39</sup> It was only through his act of disobedience that man lost pure intellectual apprehension and became absorbed in viewing things as fine or bad.<sup>40</sup> If the commandments and prohibitions of the Law are concerned with those matters, not truth and falsehood, there would be no commandments and prohibitions issued to the intellect, that is, no “intellectual laws.”

## 10.5 SAGES AND PHILOSOPHERS

In Ch. 6 of *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides calls upon the distinction between actions generally accepted as bad and those prohibited by traditional laws in order to address the problem of the apparent conflict between philosophers and sages on the ranking of self-restraint and virtue. The differentiation of these two classes of law, he claims, dissolves that apparent conflict and shows how both views can be true. The philosophers rightly argue that to desire forbidden things, even if one overcomes the desire, is

<sup>39</sup> Maimonides puts this distinction to work when he identifies only the first two propositions of the Decalogue as “rational”—knowable by human speculation alone—while the other commandments belong to the class of generally accepted opinions or those adopted by tradition (*Guide* II. 33). Cf. Strauss (1973, 97).

<sup>40</sup> In quoting Genesis 3, Maimonides refers to “good and evil,” which seems to be the knowledge required by *Elohim* in the sense introduced at the beginning of *Guide* I.2—the rulers governing the cities. The result, though, of acquiring the forbidden knowledge is a descent from apprehending only truth and falsehood to discerning things as “fine and bad” (or “noble and base”), and that dichotomy leaves open the status of good and evil.

inferior to having no such desire, if the actions at stake are those considered bad according to generally accepted opinions. The sages are right, at the same time, to insist that desiring forbidden things but abstaining from them out of obedience to the Law is a superior condition, if the actions at stake are those not bad in themselves but only because of the prohibitions of traditional laws.

Maimonides ends the chapter by declaring the “marvelous subtlety” of this solution and the “wonderful reconciliation” it achieves. But his separation of the territory with which the two views are concerned in fact appears to be a disclosure of two very different ideals for human life. In the eyes of the philosophers, the highest state is a harmonious order of the soul, where desire and reason have been so integrated that the appetites stand in no need of regulation imposed by any authority apart from the individual. Within such an individual, reason is not an alien authority relative to desire, because of the way its principles have been internalized by desire. The most natural inner harmony, Aristotle implies, is found in the soul of the philosopher, where desire and reason cannot be separated in the first place: the philosopher provides the paradigm of the human soul whose unifying principle could be called “desiring reason” just as much as “rational desire” (1139b5–6). The closest approximation is the disposition of moral virtue, produced by molding the desires to conform to the rational principles initially supplied by another. The soul harmonized through habituation, or even more, one unified by a natural fusion of desire and reason, has a self-sufficiency that makes the external authority of the law unnecessary. This, as Maimonides indicates, is what the philosophers admire. The ideal human condition as the sages see it, on the other hand, is one of obedience to divine Law; and that motive is most obvious when one bows down to the Law in conflict with desire, recognizing one’s dependence on the Law for self-control. The greater the struggle involved, the greater the achievement: as the last sentence of Avot puts it, “The reward is according to the pain.”

The difference between the sages and the philosophers in their evaluation of two different psychic conditions is reflected in their table of virtues. The list of the virtues in Ch. 4, which presumably represents the viewpoint of the sages, places humility at the center and sense of shame at the end. Corresponding to humility in that list, Aristotle has greatness of soul, which he designates a peak of the moral virtues, while denying that shame

deserves the title of virtue at all.<sup>41</sup> At the pivotal point of *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides displays his skill in eliminating the appearance of contradiction between philosophers and sages. But his “wonderful reconciliation” sheds light on a fundamental divide between different standards, guiding different ways of life.

## WORKS CITED

- Alfarabi. 2001. *The Political Writings*, trans. C. Butterworth. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Aristotle. 2011. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. R. Bartlett and S. Collins. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burger, R. 2008. *Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates: on the Nicomachean Ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

41

Eight Chapters	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	
Ch. 2	Ch. 4	Book II
Moderation	Insensibility—moderation—lust	Cowardice—courage—rashness
Liberality	Miserliness—liberality—extravagance	Insensibility—moderation—indulgence
Justice	Cowardice—courage—rashness	Stinginess—liberality—prodigality
Gentleness	Dullness—wittiness—buffoonery	Meanness—magnificence—vulgarity
Humility	Abasement—humility—haughtiness	Smallness of soul—greatness of soul—vanity
Contentment	Stinginess—generosity—prodigality	Lack of love of honor—anonymous—love of honor
Courage	Laziness—contentment—greed	Unirascibility—gentleness—irascibility
	Servility—gentleness—irascibility	Surliness—friendliness—obsequiousness
	Shyness—modesty (shame)—impudence	Irony—sincerity—boastfulness
		Boorishness—wittiness—buffoonery
		Bashfulness—shame (not a virtue)—shamelessness
		Schadenfreude—nemesis (not a virtue)—envy

- Gaon, Saadia. 2002. *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, trans. and abridged A. Altmann. Indianapolis: Hackett Press.
- Halper, E. 2004. Maimonides' Aristotelianism in the *Eight Chapters*. Presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies, December, Chicago.
- . 2011. Torah as Political Philosophy: Maimonides and Spinoza on Religious Law. In *Judaic Sources and Western Thought: Jerusalem's Enduring Presence*, ed. Jonathan Jacobs, 190–214. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lerner, R. 2000. *Maimonides' Empire of Light*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Maimonides. 1963. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1983. *Eight Chapters*. In *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, trans. Weiss, R.L. and C. Butterworth. New York: Dover.
- Plato. 2004. *Protagoras*, trans. R. Bartlett. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Strauss, L. 1963. How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*. In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1973. The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 95–141. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Weiss, R.L. 1991. *Maimonides' Ethics: The Encounter of Philosophic and Religious Morality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



## Socrates' Failures and their Implications for Moral Psychology in the Early Dialogues

*Miriam Byrd*

The field of Socratic studies has focused attention on a group of dialogues considered to have been written early in Plato's career. These dialogues, termed "Socratic," are characterized by Socrates' use of *elenchus* and have been classified by stylometric studies as belonging to the same group.<sup>1</sup> Proponents of Socratic studies are committed to the hypothesis that a distinct philosophy may be found in these dialogues, a Socratic philosophy

<sup>1</sup>Dialogues usually included in this "Socratic" group include *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras*, and Book 1 of the *Republic*.

---

M. Byrd (✉)

Department of Philosophy and Humanities, The University of Texas at  
Arlington, Arlington, TX, USA  
e-mail: [mbyrd@uta.edu](mailto:mbyrd@uta.edu)

separate from the Platonic philosophy of other works.<sup>2</sup> Many interpreters in this tradition accept, in addition, the developmentalist hypothesis that the early dialogues were written from the philosophical perspective of the historic Socrates.<sup>3</sup>

In “‘Socrates’ of Plato’s Early Dialogues,” Edward Halper challenges the developmentalist position on Plato’s early dialogues. He begins by rejecting the method of dialogue interpretation on which it is based, a method he terms “evidentiary literalism.” According to Halper, evidentiary literalism is the view that no doctrine may be ascribed to Plato unless it is explicitly stated in the text or is presupposed by explicit argumentation.<sup>4</sup> Pointing out that these standards of evidence are less appropriate for dramatic dialogues, especially aporetic ones, than they are for typical philosophical treatises, Halper introduces two additional types of evidence that should be included for consideration: internal structure and context.<sup>5</sup> Taking these into account, Halper opposes the developmentalist view of metaphysics in the early dialogues by arguing that Plato, in these works, constructs an implicit argument for the necessity of positing transcendent Forms.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, I take up Halper’s project, focusing not on Forms but on moral psychology.<sup>7</sup> I incorporate the criteria of internal structure and context in order to challenge the sharp divide between “Socratic” and “Platonic” philosophy in regard to moral psychology. An interpretation of moral psychology based on the principles of evidentiary literalism supports

<sup>2</sup>For classic examples of this approach, see Irwin (1977), Santas (1979), Penner (1992), Benson (1992), Brickhouse and Smith (1994), and Vlastos (1991).

<sup>3</sup>An excellent overview of the contemporary field of Socratic studies may be found in Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 11–42).

<sup>4</sup>Halper (1993, 15–16).

<sup>5</sup>Halper (1993, 16) writes: “I propose that there are other types of evidence that are important for understanding the arguments, namely, structural and contextual evidence. The sequence in which arguments appear could be philosophically significant if it supports a conclusion. Likewise, a single argument, read in the context of a dialogue, could support a conclusion left to the reader to infer. It is widely recognized that the dialogues are carefully constructed; there is no good reason not to consider structure and context as philosophical evidence.”

<sup>6</sup>Halper (1993, 13–33).

<sup>7</sup>Cooper (1999, x) provides a helpful description of what we mean by “moral psychology” within the context of ancient philosophy: “the study of the psychological conditions required – the sorts of desires, the attitudes to self and others, the states of mind and feeling, the kind of knowledge and insight required – if one is to lead the best life humanly possible....”

the developmentalist view of a distinctly Socratic philosophy in these works. In the early dialogues, Socrates argues for a view of human motivation known as intellectualism: human behavior is rational, for we always desire and pursue what we know or believe to be best for us.<sup>8</sup> Since desire is directed by evaluative beliefs, Socrates denies that people act akratically in the sense that desires or passions lead them to act contrary to what they know, or even believe, to be best. Instead, cases of bad behavior are attributed to ignorance. Consequently, many interpreters believe that Socrates' moral psychology implies that it is impossible for nonrational desires to affect our judgment or behavior, and that moral education need target reason alone.<sup>9</sup>

The moral psychology Socrates presents in the *Republic* differs from that in the Socratic dialogues. Socrates argues that the human soul consists of three parts—reason, spirit, and appetite—each possessing its own pleasures and desires.<sup>10</sup> When these motivational forces come into conflict, the desires of the dominant part win out in motivating action. Thus, it is possible for a person to act contrary to what his or her reason, at the time, considers best in the situation. Scholars have disagreed over the significance of these changes, debating the truth of claims that (1) Plato is rejecting the Socratic claim that all desire is good-dependent<sup>11</sup> and (2) Plato is

<sup>8</sup>For descriptions of Socratic intellectualism, see Penner (1992, 127–128), Reshotko (2006, 74), Mackenzie (1981, 134n3), Devereux (2012, 218), Taylor (2000, 62–63), and Rowe (2003, 24). Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 1) distinguish between “virtue intellectualism” and “motivational intellectualism”; whereas Socrates is believed to be a virtue intellectualist on grounds that he believed that all virtue is knowledge, he “is regarded as a motivational intellectualist because he believed that all human actions are in some way directly or immediately the result of what those acting think is best for them.” I will restrict my discussion to Socratic motivational intellectualism.

<sup>9</sup>Brickhouse and Smith label this view the “standard interpretation” (2010, 326). See Chap. 2 of this work for their argument that most contemporary interpreters take this approach. Brickhouse and Smith oppose the standard interpretation and argue that Socratic intellectualism is closer to Platonic moral psychology than is generally acknowledged. However, they remain fully committed to the Socratic studies approach distinguishing a Socratic perspective in the early dialogues from a Platonic perspective in the middle.

<sup>10</sup>For Socrates' argument for tripartition of the soul, see 436a–441c. For his claim that each part has its own pleasures and desires, see 580d.

<sup>11</sup>Many, appealing to 437d–438a, argue that Plato is intentionally rejecting the Socratic claim that all desire is for the good. For those holding this position, see Reeve (1988, 132–134), Lorenz (2006, 28–29), Penner (1971, 106–107; 1992, 129; 2000, 165–170), Irwin (1995, 206–211), and Rowe (2006, 165). For opposing positions see Moss (2006,

rejecting the Socratic denial of *akrasia*.<sup>12</sup> All, however, recognize that the moral psychology is linked to a framework for moral education missing from the early dialogues.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the Socratic dialogues, the *Republic* emphasizes the importance of early childhood education: In Books 2 and 3, Socrates establishes a curriculum for early education that tames and conditions the nonrational parts of the soul with the goal of creating a harmonious balance that will provide the structure necessary for the rule of reason. Developmentalists conclude from these differences that the mature Plato has rejected the Socratic moral philosophy of the early dialogues.

Consideration of internal structure and context challenges the Socratic studies perspective on moral psychology in the early dialogues. In the early dialogues, Plato repeatedly presents dramatic depictions of Socrates' failed attempts to educate through application of *elenchus*. When passages expressing intellectualism are viewed from within this context, the reader is presented with a puzzle: If the early dialogues were promoting intellectualism, we would expect techniques such as *elenchus* to be successful in effecting change in the belief and behavior of those with whom Socrates converses. However, dialogue after dialogue, Socrates' attempts to do this are portrayed as ineffective. I attempt to explain this consistent failure by positing that the early dialogues are written from a Platonic rather than a Socratic perspective and work to establish the need for the more elaborate moral psychology as developed in the *Republic*.

524–527), Annas (1981, 129–130), Carone (2001, 118–120 and 130–131), and Lesses (1987, 147–157).

<sup>12</sup>Though most recognize a shift in Socrates' stand on *akrasia* between the early dialogues and the *Republic*, there is controversy concerning its nature. Socratic philosophy rejects the possibility of both synchronic knowledge *akrasia* and synchronic belief *akrasia*. Reeve (1988, 134–135) thinks that the *Republic* allows for both, but Penner (1992, 129), Lesses (1987, 155), and Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 107; 2012, 337) believe that it allows only for synchronic belief *akrasia*. On the other hand, Carone (2001, 131–143) argues that the *Republic* does not acknowledge either type of synchronic *akrasia*.

<sup>13</sup>Though Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 143) argue that the Socratic view of moral psychology bears strong similarity to that of Plato in the *Republic*, they acknowledge that the Socratic dialogues neglect the topic of early childhood education.

### 11.1 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO SOCRATIC INTELLECTUALISM IN THE EARLY DIALOGUES

Socrates' intellectualism in the early dialogues is illustrated by his “paradoxes,” provocative statements concerning moral psychology. Socrates' prudential paradox is his assertion that those who pursue bad things do so involuntarily, and his moral paradox is his assertion that those who do unjust things do so involuntarily.<sup>14</sup> These assertions are labeled as paradoxes because they present us with an apparent contradiction between Socrates' words and our own experience of human action.

The prudential paradox is found in Socrates' arguments in *Meno* 77b–78b and *Gorgias* 467e–468c.<sup>15</sup> In these passages, Socrates argues that we always desire and pursue things we believe to be beneficial to us. In the argument in *Meno* 77b–78b, Socrates challenges Meno's assumption that some people desire bad things. Meno believes that, in addition to those who desire good things, there are two groups of people who desire bad ones: first, those desiring bad things because they erroneously believe them to be good and beneficial and, second, those desiring bad things knowing them to be bad and harmful (77c–d). Socrates clarifies that the first group does not really desire bad things but good ones. He argues: “It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things” (77d–e).<sup>16</sup>

Socrates continues on to exclude the possibility of the second group—those desiring bad things knowing that they are bad. Socrates asks Meno if he believes that those who “desire bad things, believing that bad things harm their possessor, know that they will be harmed by them?” (77e). After Meno answers in the affirmative, Socrates, in a series of questions spanning 77e–78b, shows him the implications of his beliefs. Socrates begins:

And do they not think that those who are harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed? —That too is inevitable. —And that those who are miserable are unhappy? —I think so. —Does anyone wish to be misera-

<sup>14</sup>See Santas (1979, 183–194) for the distinction between the prudential and the moral paradoxes. These two so-called paradoxes are widely recognized as core elements of Socratic intellectualism.

<sup>15</sup>See also *Protagoras* 358c–d.

<sup>16</sup>All translations of the *Meno* are from Grube and Cooper (2002).

ble and unhappy?—I do not think so, Socrates. —No one then wants what is bad, Meno, unless he wants to be such. For what else is being miserable but to desire bad things and secure them? (78a1–8)

Consequently, Meno agrees with Socrates that no one desires bad things (78b).

In *Gorgias* 467e–468c, Socrates introduces new terminology to distinguish between the good people desire and the bad that they pursue, this time contrasting “doing what one wants” with “doing what one sees fit.” He reasons as follows. If a person does one thing for the sake of another, he does not want the thing he is doing but the thing for the sake of which he is doing it (467d). All things may be divided into the categories of good, bad, and neither good nor bad (467e). Those things that are neither good nor bad are neither intrinsically good nor intrinsically bad but have value contingent upon the situation. People do things that are neither good nor bad for the sake of good things (468b). Therefore, people do not want the neither good nor bad things they do, but, instead, the good for the sake of which they do these things (468b–c). If a person performs an action that is neither good nor bad, it is because he believes that this action is instrumental toward benefiting himself. So, if instead these actions are harmful to him, he is doing what he sees fit but not what he wants (468d).

The moral paradox, that all wrongdoing is involuntary, builds upon Socrates’ reasoning for the prudential paradox. The moral paradox is stated without explanation in *Protagoras* 345d9–e4. During the discussion of Simonides’ poem, Socrates says: “I am pretty sure that none of the wise men thinks that any human being willingly makes a mistake or willingly does anything wrong or bad. They know very well that anyone who does anything wrong or bad does so involuntarily.”<sup>17</sup> In the *Gorgias*, Socrates provides reasoning in support of this statement. According to the prudential paradox, those who do bad things do so involuntarily. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates classifies unjust things as bad. For example, in 469b he says that “doing what’s unjust is actually the worst thing there is,” and in 470e he says that the person “who’s unjust and wicked is miserable.”<sup>18</sup> This leads to the conclusion that those who do unjust things do so involuntarily. In 509e3–7 Socrates himself connects the moral paradox to the prudential

<sup>17</sup>All translations of the *Protagoras* are from Lombardo and Bell (1992).

<sup>18</sup>All translations of the *Gorgias* are from Zeyl (1987).

paradox, asking: “Do you think Polus and I were or were not correct in being compelled to agree in our previous discussion (*Gorgias* 476c–478e) when we agreed that no one does what’s unjust because he wants to, but that all who do so do it unwillingly?”

I argue that Socratic intellectualism, as expressed in the above passages, implies that *elenchus* is a valuable tool in moral education.<sup>19</sup> Since humans desire only what is good, and all pursuit of bad things is involuntary due to ignorance, moral education will involve enabling agents to avoid misidentification of bad things as good. Though Socrates claims neither to have ‘divine’ knowledge of the good nor to impart it to others, he does confess to possessing a ‘human’ knowledge of his own ignorance (20d, 21d).<sup>20</sup> Socrates believes that his use of *elenchus* can share this knowledge with others (23a–b). By exposing inconsistency within an interlocutor’s belief set, Socrates can reveal to that person that he, too, lacks knowledge. Since desire is based on belief, and since *elenchus* alters belief concerning one’s own knowledge that something is good, *elenchus* has the potential to alter desires and motivate action. Not only should *elenchus* help us avoid involuntary bad behavior, but, becoming aware that we lack the knowledge necessary for achieving the real good should motivate us to do our best to learn.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>There has been much debate over the nature of *elenchus*. Vlastos, a proponent of the so-called constructivist interpretation, defines the pattern of ‘Standard *Elenchus*’ as follows: “(1) The interlocutor asserts a thesis which Socrates considers false and targets for refutation. (2) Socrates secures agreement to further premises, say q and r (each of which may stand for a conjunct of propositions). The argument is ad hoc: Socrates argues from q and r but not to them. (3) Socrates then argues, and the interlocutor agrees, that q and r entail not-p. (4) Thereupon Socrates claims that not-p has been proved true, p false” (1983, 39). Non-constructivists, on the other hand, deny that Socrates is using *elenchus* to support positive knowledge claims. For examples of their arguments, see Benson (1995), Stokes (1986), and Grote (1888, 449–450 and 457). I accept the non-constructivist interpretation. For interesting discussions of *elenchus* from multiple perspectives, see Scott (2002).

<sup>20</sup>For a comprehensive list of passages in which the Socrates of the early dialogues claims not to have knowledge of virtue, see Nehamas (1986, 294–295).

<sup>21</sup>For interpreters who conclude that the Socrates of the early dialogues believes that moral education takes place through reasoning alone and associates moral education with *elenchus*, see Nehamas (1986, 308), Penner (1992, 126; 2000, 170), and Rowe (2006, 166).

## 11.2 SOCRATES' FAILURES

Plato's dramatic portrayal of *elenchus* reveals that, though Socrates does make his interlocutors aware that they cannot offer consistent accounts in support of knowledge claims, this information does not initiate the expected transformation in their beliefs or desires.<sup>22</sup>

In this section, I discuss three difficulties Socrates encounters in using *elenchus*, difficulties that detract from his effectiveness as a moral educator: (1) interlocutors blaming Socrates for their inability to provide consistent accounts, (2) agonistic interlocutors treating Socratic *elenchus* as a contest, and (3) refuted interlocutors rejecting Socrates' invitation to continue philosophic inquiry. I conclude this section by noting Plato's use of historical figures known for their lack of virtue to underscore Socrates' failure to change lives.

Some interlocutors hold Socrates—not themselves—responsible for their inability to define a term. In the *Euthyphro*, after Socrates' refutation of his second attempt to define piety, Euthyphro appears to undergo *aporia* when he admits “I have no way of telling you what I have in mind, for whatever proposition we put forward goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it” (11b6–8).<sup>23</sup> However, in the subsequent conversation, Euthyphro blames Socrates, not his own ignorance, for his failure to offer a successful definition of piety. We see this when Socrates compares the way Euthyphro's statements move around to the statues of Daedalus, which refused to stay where they were put. Euthyphro replies: “I am not the one who makes them go around and not remain in the same place; it is you who are the Daedalus....” (11c9–d1). A similar example is found in the *Meno*. Having made multiple failed attempts to define virtue, Meno addresses Socrates:

[Y]ou seem, in appearance and in every other way, to be like the broad torpedo fish, for it too makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb, and you now seem to have had that kind of effect on me, for both my mind and my tongue are numb, and I have no answer to give you. Yet I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is. (80a5–b4)

<sup>22</sup> See Teloh (1986, 20–21) for a similar view.

<sup>23</sup> All translations of *Euthyphro* are from Grube and Cooper (2002).

In both cases, interlocutors blame their inability to provide a consistent account on Socrates rather than accepting responsibility for their own ignorance.

Another difficulty Socrates encounters is the combative nature of interlocutors. Occasionally, Socrates uses *elenchus* on an interlocutor who is too undisciplined, agonistic, and shameless to engage in productive inquiry. For example, in *Republic* I Thrasymachus is depicted as uncivilized and forceful. Socrates compares him to a wild animal. After having been restrained by others when he earlier attempted to take over Socrates' discussion with Polemarchus, Thrasymachus is unable to contain himself. Socrates describes him: "He coiled himself up like a wild beast about to spring, and he hurled himself at us as if to tear us to pieces" (336b4–6).<sup>24</sup> Socrates continues: "Polemarchus and I were frightened and flustered as he roared into our midst..." (336b7–8). Not only does Thrasymachus attempt to dominate Socrates by demanding that he define justice while at the same time forbidding him use of certain words, but he insists that Socrates be penalized if he loses the contest. Thrasymachus stipulates that the penalty will be a monetary fine (336c, 337d). This attitude persists through most of the debate, with Thrasymachus aggressively insulting Socrates at 336b–c, 341b–c, and 343a.

Socrates is finally able to tame Thrasymachus by repeatedly leading him to contradict himself. Though at 342e it is clear to all that Thrasymachus' definition of justice as the advantage of the stronger has been refuted, Thrasymachus does not concede defeat and poses an immoralist argument that being unjust rather than just is in the individual's best interest (343a–344c). Socrates is able to show inconsistencies in this account, and Thrasymachus eventually recognizes that he has been bested. At 350c12–d3 Socrates describes the turning point: "Thrasymachus agreed to all this, not easily as I'm telling it, but reluctantly, with toil, trouble, and – since it was summer – a quantity of sweat that was a wonder to behold. And then I saw something I'd never seen before – Thrasymachus blushing." However, though Thrasymachus becomes gentle and ceases to give Socrates rough treatment (345a), Socrates has not convinced Thrasymachus that justice is beneficial and has not inspired him to pursue philosophy.

<sup>24</sup> All translations of the *Republic* are from Grube and Reeve (1992).

Thrasymachus, quiet for the rest of the dialogue, is silenced rather than persuaded.<sup>25</sup>

A third difficulty Socrates experiences is reluctance of interlocutors to continue philosophical inquiry. In some cases, though an interlocutor has discovered his inability to provide an account, he is not motivated to carry on in the search for knowledge. For example, after five failed attempts to define piety, Euthyphro rejects Socrates' invitation at 15c–d to continue the investigation. He says: “Some other time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now, and it is time for me to go” (15e3–4). Similarly, at the end of the *Protagoras*, Socrates invites his interlocutor to continue the inquiry. Socrates points out that both he and Protagoras seem to have argued for positions inconsistent with their starting points. Socrates had earlier asserted that virtue cannot be taught, but his more recent argument that virtue is knowledge implies that it can. On the other hand, Protagoras, having earlier claimed that virtue is teachable, has implied the opposite by arguing that virtue is not knowledge. After commending Socrates for his enthusiasm, Protagoras declares: “now it is time to turn our attention elsewhere” (361e6).

In the *Laches*, too, interlocutors are reluctant to continue the search. After concluding that neither he nor Laches nor Nicias has knowledge of courage, Socrates says:

what I say we ought to do, my friends – since this is just between ourselves – is to join in searching for the best possible teacher, first for ourselves – we really need one – and then for the young men, sparing neither money nor anything else. What I don't advise is that we remain as we are.<sup>26</sup> (201a3–b7)

Lysimachus, who earlier mentioned that his memory is not good enough to engage in question and answer, is the only person present to take Socrates up on his suggestion (189c–d, 201c).

Three dialogues in particular show that undergoing *elenchus* need not have lasting beneficial effects on an interlocutor. These dialogues, *Meno*, *Charmides*, and *Laches*, feature interlocutors whom Plato's audience

<sup>25</sup>Though Socrates claims that he and Thrasymachus have become friends, the context of that passage suggests only that Thrasymachus is no longer verbally attacking Socrates, not that Thrasymachus has accepted Socrates' views or is actively participating in the philosophical inquiry. See 498c–d.

<sup>26</sup>All quotations of the *Laches* are from Sprague (1992).

would recognize as men who came to a bad end due to their lack of virtue.<sup>27</sup> In the *Meno*, Socrates encourages Meno to define virtue. Meno is confident that he knows what virtue is, but attempt after attempt, he fails to provide a successful account. The dialogue is set in 402 BCE, soon before the historical Meno joins the expedition of Cyrus. Xenophon's *Anabasis* (2.6.21–29) describes this expedition and depicts Meno as a treacherous man greedy for wealth and power who, because of his lack of virtue, was tortured and killed. Meno's attempts to define virtue hint at his later priorities. For example, at 73d Meno defines virtue as being able to rule over people, and at 78c he describes it as the power to acquire gold and silver.<sup>28</sup> Though Socrates has successfully shown Meno that his definitions, combined with other beliefs he claims to hold, lead to contradiction, Meno clings to his views and continues to desire wealth and power.

In the *Charmides*, Socrates leads Charmides and Critias in the search for a definition of temperance. Both interlocutors come to see that they are unable to define temperance, and Charmides sincerely acknowledges that, since he does not know what temperance is, he does not know that he has it. Charmides' awareness of his ignorance motivates him to learn, and he plans to have future conversations with Socrates. However, as Plato's contemporary readers were aware, Charmides' and Critias' involvement with the Thirty Tyrants later reveals them to be intemperate men.

Finally, in the *Laches*, Nicias appears untroubled by his inability to define courage. Nicias rejects Socrates' invitation for further investigation because he believes that this knowledge can easily be obtained from the sophist Damon (200b). Plato's contemporaries would have been aware of Nicias' role in the failure of the Sicilian expedition. Frightened by a lunar eclipse and taking the advice of seers, Nicias delayed retreat for one month. This decision led to a devastating military defeat. Plato reminds the reader of the historical consequences of Nicias' ignorance. At 199a1–3 Socrates says: “the law decrees, not that the seer should command the general, but

<sup>27</sup>Though Alcibiades, another historical figure who would fall into this category, is Socrates' principal interlocutor in the *Alcibiades*, that dialogue is generally considered spurious and thus will not be included in my argument.

<sup>28</sup>His words at 71e suggest that he views virtue as using political power to one's own advantage. He describes the virtue of a man as “being able to manage public affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies, and to be careful that no harm comes to himself.”

that the general should command the seer.”<sup>29</sup> Though Socrates shows Nicias that he lacks knowledge of courage, Nicias lacks motivation to seek it.

### 11.3 THE IMPLICIT ARGUMENT OF THE EARLY DIALOGUES

If Plato had written the early dialogues from the perspective that reasoning alone is sufficient for moral education, we should expect Socrates to enjoy greater success than he does in employing *elenchus*. *Elenchus* leads to “human” knowledge of one’s own ignorance. Though inferior to “divine” knowledge, “human” knowledge is motivationally beneficial. For example, assume that I believe that B is good and have a strong desire to pursue B. If, having undergone *elenchus*, I recognize that I cannot provide justification for my belief that B is good, and, further, that my valuation of B is inconsistent with other cherished beliefs, I should suspend belief. Having lost confidence that B is good, my desire for B should be weakened. And, since I want the real good and am aware that I do not yet know what that is, I should be motivated to embark on a journey of philosophical investigation. Plato’s dramatic portrayal of Socratic *elenchus*, on the contrary, leaves us with interlocutors who refuse to accept epistemic responsibility and do not alter their course of action. The reader is left to ponder why Socrates fails in his mission and what this failure suggests about moral psychology.

I propose that Plato uses the tension between Socratic intellectualism and Socrates’ failure to improve interlocutors to force readers to critically examine the view of moral psychology explicitly stated in the early dialogues and anticipate the need for innovations later suggested in the *Republic*. Just as Socrates, in an elenctic examination, leads the interlocutor to test a definition by considering the consistency of its implications with other standing beliefs,<sup>30</sup> Plato sets up a puzzle that encourages the

<sup>29</sup> See Devereux (1977, 134–135), O’Brien (1963, 145–146), and Teloh (1986, 54). For the interpretation that Laches’ death at Mantinea results from his lack of knowledge of courage, see Maiullo (2014, 83–84).

<sup>30</sup> See also Socrates’ description of the method of hypothesis in *Phaedo* 100a and 101d. In Byrd (2007), I argue that Plato includes apparent contradictions or tensions within the text to provoke thought.

reader to test a theory of moral psychology by considering whether its implications are consistent with the practical results of Socratic elenchus.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to address a likely objection to my interpretation.<sup>32</sup> A reader might object that there is no reason to accept my interpretation, because there are simpler explanations for the dramatic tension in the early dialogues. For example, Plato might simply be offering a historically accurate account of interlocutors' responses to Socrates. I think that this solution is problematic, for we have good reason to believe that the dialogues, even if inspired by the historic Socrates, are fictional: for example, Plato would have been absent from many of these conversations, and conflicts between dramatic settings of dialogues and the actual historical timeline suggest that not all of the conversations took place. And, even if we assume that Plato is generalizing from interactions he witnessed, we're faced with the question of why he disproportionately represents conversations in which Socrates' efforts prove ineffective. Presumably, members of Socrates' circle, close associates such as Plato, would have benefited from elenctic examination, and Plato would have included such examples in the early dialogues.

Another possible explanation is that, though Plato had a literary reason for emphasizing Socrates' failures, it is other than the one I have proposed. Perhaps Plato dramatically emphasizes Socrates' failures because he is using the early dialogues as an extended explanation of the trial and conviction. In the *Apology*, Socrates suggests that his service to the god has created animosity in former interlocutors. His failures would certainly confirm this view. However, though I am sympathetic to this explanation, I believe that it provides only a partial picture. I am impressed by how well the *Republic* explains problems depicted in the early dialogues: Socrates' explanation of why potential philosophers are corrupted by Athenian society (*Republic* 6, 490e–497b) elucidates Socrates' struggle to compete for influence on interlocutors, and the moral psychology of the *Republic*

<sup>31</sup> I take no stand regarding the issue of whether the dramatic refutation is meant to be a refutation of the philosophy of the early Socrates. The contrast I see between my position and that of Socratic studies is that I deny that the early dialogues are written from a "Socratic" vs. a "Platonic" perspective. I hold, instead, that Plato is consciously working through the implications of intellectualism.

<sup>32</sup> Though my argument would benefit from an in-depth examination of Plato's moral psychology in the *Republic*, such an examination would be far too lengthy for present purposes.

accounts for why these men are impervious to reason.<sup>33</sup> I do not think that it is coincidental that a middle dialogue provides solutions directly related to problems raised in earlier works.

In this chapter, I have argued that the Platonic perspective is present in the early dialogues. Though Socratic intellectualism differs from the more fully developed moral psychology of the *Republic*, I contend that Plato presents it within a context that encourages the reader to recognize that the theory, or at least its articulation, is incomplete and to consider how it might be revised: Socratic intellectualism is proposed as a position to be seriously considered but entertained provisionally, subject to further investigation. I conclude that the early dialogues should not be viewed as expressing a Socratic philosophy in opposition to the Platonic philosophy of the *Republic* but instead should be recognized as part of an ongoing inquiry conducted from a Platonic perspective.<sup>34</sup>

#### WORKS CITED

- Annas, J. 1981. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Benson, H., ed. 1992. *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1995. The Dissolution of the Problem of Elenchus. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 13: 45–112.
- Brickhouse, T., and N.D. Smith. 1994. *Plato's Socrates*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2010. *Socratic Moral Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2012. Reply to Rowe. *Journal of Ethics* 16: 325–338
- Byrd, M. 2007. The Summoner Approach. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45: 365–381.
- Carone, G.R. 2001. *Akrasia in the Republic: Does Plato Change His Mind?* *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 20: 107–148.
- Cooper, J. M. 1999. *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory*. Princeton University Press.
- Devereux, D. 1977. Courage and Wisdom in Plato's *Laches*. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15: 129–141.

<sup>33</sup>I argue for these claims in “Moral Psychology in Plato’s Early Dialogues,” presented at the 14th London Ancient Science Conference, University of London, 2020.

<sup>34</sup>My approach differs from the proleptic one advocated by Kahn (1996) in that I do not insist that Plato, in early works, had already worked out the positions later advocated in the *Republic*. I see the early dialogues as related to middle as earlier stages of an argument are related to later.

- . 2012. Comments on Socratic Moral Psychology. *Analytic Philosophy* 53: 216–223.
- Grote, G. 1888. *Plato and Other Companions of Sokrates*. Vol. 1. London: J. Murray.
- Grube, G.M.A. and J. Cooper, trans. 2002. *Plato Five Dialogues*. 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Grube, G. M. A., and C. D. C. Reeve, trans. 1992. *Plato Republic*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Halper, E. 1993. The ‘Socrates’ of Plato’s Early Dialogues. In *Form and Reason*, 13–33. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Irwin, T. 1977. *Plato’s Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1995. *Plato’s Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kahn, C. 1996. *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lesses, G. 1987. Weakness, Reason, and the Divided Soul in Plato’s *Republic*. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 4: 147–161.
- Lombardo, S., and K. Bell, trans. 1992. *Protagoras*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Lorenz, H. 2006. *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mackenzie, M.M. 1981. *Plato on Punishment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Maiullo, S. 2014. Philosophical Pursuit and Flight: Homer and Thucydides in Plato’s *Laches*. *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 8: 72–91.
- Moss, J. 2006. Pleasure and Illusion in Plato. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 772: 503–535.
- Nehamas, A. 1986. Socratic Intellectualism. *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 2: 275–316.
- O’Brien, M. 1963. The Unity of the *Laches*. *Yale Classical Studies* 18: 133–147.
- Penner, T. 1971. Thought and Desire in Plato. In *Plato II: Ethics, Politics And Philosophy of Art and Religion*, ed. G. Vlastos, 96–118. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- . 1992. Socrates and the Early Dialogues. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut, 121–169. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2000. Socrates. In *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. C.J. Rowe and Malcolm Schofield, 164–189. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reeve, C.D.C. 1988. *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato’s Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Reshotko, N. 2006. *Socratic Virtue: Making the Best of the Neither-Good-Nor-Bad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rowe, C.J. 2003. Plato, Socrates, and Developmentalism. In *Socrates and Plato: Desire, Identity and Existence*, ed. N. Reshotko, 17–32. Kelowna: Academic Printing and Publishing.
- . 2006. Socrates in Plato's Dialogues. In *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. S. Ahbel-Rappe and K. Rachana, 159–170. Malden/Oxford: Blackwell.
- Santas, G. 1979. *Socrates: Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Scott, G.A. 2002. *Does Socrates Have a Method? Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Sprague, R. K., trans. 1992. *Laches and Charmides*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Stokes, M. 1986. *Plato's Socratic Conversations: Drama and Dialectic in Three Dialogues*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Taylor, C.C.W. 2000. *Socrates: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Teloh, H. 1986. *Socratic Education in Plato's Early Dialogues*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Vlastos, G. 1983. The Socratic Elenchus. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1: 27–58.
- . 1991. *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zeyl, D. J., trans. 1987. *Plato Gorgias*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.



# Pleasure, Pain, Calm, and the Philosophical Life

*Richard D. Parry*

In *Republic* 9, Socrates presents the third of his arguments for the superiority of the life of the philosopher over that of the tyrant. This argument concludes that the first kind of life is vastly more pleasurable than the second. Its heart is the claim that the tyrant's pleasures are deceptive while those of the philosopher are true. Arguing that pleasures can be deceptive is problematic since having a pleasure seems to be incorrigible; if the tyrant feels that his life is pleasurable, then it is pleasurable. Nevertheless, it is not unusual for a story about moral wrongdoing to portray pleasure as misleading. Envisioned pleasure, seen as the good to be gained by an immoral act, can be disappointing. Perhaps, the tyrant's pleasure can be deceptive in this way. However, Socrates' approach to deceptive pleasure starts at a decidedly odd place. In Book 9, he argues for what we will call the three-state thesis. The soul has three distinct states: pleasure, pain, and a neutral state—neither pleasure nor pain—called calm (*hēsuchia*). Deception about pleasure arises because the calm that follows pain is taken to be pleasure (*Rep.* 583c–e). Thus, according to Socrates' argument, the correct belief

---

R. D. Parry (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA, USA

e-mail: [rparry@agnesscott.edu](mailto:rparry@agnesscott.edu)

is that there are three distinct psychic states—pleasure, pain, and calm. The belief that there are only two—pleasure and pain—is an error; it ignores the state of calm.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, we will leave aside the tyrant’s pleasure and, rather, focus on the three-state thesis. Starting with the argument for the three psychic states in *Republic* 9, we will compare it to a similar thesis in the *Philebus*, where we will see that the neutral state of calm is also associated with the life of the gods (29e–33c). Oddly, after defending, in both dialogues, the idea that there are three states—including a neutral state between pleasure and pain—Socrates seems to ignore the thesis. However, another kind of state of calm appears in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates argues that the soul of the philosopher, in its bodily existence, practices being dead. In doing so, it achieves peace (*galênê*) with respect to the body’s pleasure and pains and contemplates what is true and divine (84a–b). While the third, neutral state of calm in *Republic* 9 and *Philebus* is simply what happens when bodily pleasure and pain cease, the peace with respect to the body’s pleasures and pains in the *Phaedo* is an achievement. Still, we will argue that achieving peace depends on understanding the role of the third, neutral state of calm in the processes of bodily pleasure and pain.

We can begin with Socrates’ argument in the third proof of *Republic* 9. Its foundation is that, while pain and pleasure are opposites, there is a state that is neither pleasant nor painful. Being between the two, it is a kind of calm (*hêsuchia*) within the soul (583c). However, those who are sick say that nothing is sweeter than to be healthy, although they were not aware that it was the highest pleasure before they were ill (*hôs ouden ara estin hédion tou hygianein, alla spas elelêthei, prin kamein, hédiston on*). In general, people in severe pain say that there is no greater pleasure than the cessation of suffering (583c–d). Others may think that the cessation of pleasure is pain (583d–e). Socrates then explains why such beliefs are false. If calm becomes pleasurable or painful, then what is between pleasure and pain would be both pleasure and pain; but what is neither cannot be both.<sup>2</sup> This argument depends on the idea that the state of calm is really distinct from pleasure and pain. This distinction is that, while pleasures and pains

<sup>1</sup> In Book X, 136–137 of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Epicurus explicitly defends the claim that calm is pleasurable: “Peace of mind and freedom from pain are pleasures which imply a state of rest; joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity” (Hicks 2000, 660–663). One might suspect, then, that Plato’s Socrates has an anti-hedonist aim in defending the claim that there are three states of the soul.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Adam (1969, 350n583d28).

are kinds of motion (*kinēsis*), calm is not a motion. At least, Socrates assumes that calm is not a motion.<sup>3</sup> Later, the claim that pleasure is a motion finds support in the idea that the process of filling the emptiness of desire is pleasurable (585a–e).

Socrates ends this section with an explanation for the mistake of taking the cessation of pain to be pleasure. He concludes that when the state of calm is next to the painful, it appears (*phainetai*) to be pleasant and when it is next to pleasure it appears painful. But there is nothing sound in these appearances (*phantasmátōn*) with respect to the truth of pleasure; they are a kind of bewitchment (*goēteia*) (584a–b). This account claims there is an error with respect to calm. The way the error is explained, however, leaves an ambiguity about what the error actually is. “Next to” clearly has a temporal meaning; one state precedes and the other follows. Still, “the state of calm is next to the painful” can mean either (a) one is in a state of pain and the state of calm is in the future or (b) one is in a state of calm and the state of pain is in the past. If (a) is the case, the appearance is the false belief that what is actually a future state of calm will be pleasurable. If (b) is the case, the appearance is taking the state of calm as it is occurring to be pleasurable. The error of (a) is a false belief about the future. The error of (b) is the illusion of feeling pleasure when there is no pleasure. However, if pleasure is just the feeling of pleasure, (b) contradicts the idea that, if one feels pleasure, there is pleasure.<sup>4</sup> While which of these two readings is correct is important for understanding the entire argument of this passage, the issue does not need to be resolved for the purposes of the present investigation. Thus, we can refer to the error Socrates is pointing to as simply mistaking calm for pleasure.

In order to explain how this error arises, Socrates introduces an elaborate spatial analogy. In it, there are three regions—lower, mid, and upper. The one ignorant of the upper region will believe that, in moving from the lower to the mid region, he is arriving at the upper. In addition, when he is standing in the mid-region, looking down, he will (mistakenly) think

<sup>3</sup>Erginel (2011, 290–92) argues that cessation of pain is a state and liberation from pain is a process. He also uses this distinction to argue that ordinary bodily pleasure is different from the appearance of pleasure. The latter is a state, and the former is a motion.

<sup>4</sup>Another way to save Socrates from this objection is to allow that pleasure can refer both to the subjective state of feeling pleasure and an objective state, a bodily process that, in most cases, causes subjective pleasure. However, this solution implies that the objective state is a pleasure that need not be experienced as pleasure. Cf. Wolfsdorf (2013, 116). D. Frede (1992, 436) holds that the passage is ambiguous and may imply that pleasure is illusory.

that he is in the upper region. So, analogous to those who are ignorant of the upper region, those ignorant of pleasure will think that, when they are moving from pain to the neutral state of calm, they are arriving at pleasure and fulfillment instead of arriving at the state of calm (584d–585a). Clearly, the lower region is the analog of the painful state; the mid region is the analog of calm and the upper, of pleasure. The error of the one who is ignorant of the three states of the soul is to think that the neutral state is pleasure.

Later in the argument, Socrates introduces an account of bodily pleasure, which was absent in what has proceeded, where he has talked only about the transition from a painful state to the release from pain. Positing hunger and thirst as emptiness of the body and ignorance and foolishness as emptiness of the soul, he says that nourishment fills the first and wisdom the second. The truer filling comes from filling with what is more real. Knowledge, reason, and true opinion are more real than food and drink. So, the filling of the emptiness of the soul is truer than the filling of the emptiness of the body. Finally, being filled with what belongs to its nature, body or soul, is pleasure, although the filling of the soul's emptiness is a truer pleasure than the filling of the body's emptiness (585a–c). Thus, Socrates has said that filling bodily desire, for example, hunger and thirst, is actually pleasurable—not just an illusion of pleasure—although it is a less true pleasure than filling the emptiness of the soul. Then, he maps this account of pleasure onto the spatial analogy.

Before this account of pleasure, the spatial analogy represented the lower region as the analog of the painful state. However, now, the analogy is modified so that the lower region is the analog for a state of mixture of pleasure and pain; the upper region belongs to pure and true pleasure (586a–d). No reason is given for this change, although the lower region now also represents the satisfaction of bodily desire. In the dialogues, bodily desire is said to be painful (*Gorg.* 496c–e; *Phil.* 31e–32a; *Rep.* 573e–574a). If, in this passage, bodily desire is painful, then the lower region would represent the simultaneous mixture of the pain of desire and the pleasure of filling desire (586a–c).<sup>5</sup> In turn, the mistake represented by the analogy has become one of thinking that the mixture of pleasure and pain, in the satisfaction of desire, will be followed by pleasure alone, although what follows the mixture is calm. As a consequence, the two-state thesis is modified. While it still holds that there are only two states,

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Erginel (2019, 96–102).

pain and pleasure, the latter includes the pleasure of filling desire and the pleasure of filled desire, sometimes called the pleasure of satiety.

In the *Philebus*, Socrates again argues that there is a neutral state of calm that is neither pleasure nor pain. Having just given an account in which bodily pain is destruction of harmony and pleasure, its restoration (31d–e), Socrates posits a state in which neither destruction nor restoration is happening. In this condition there is neither pain nor pleasure, great or small; it is a third condition, apart from pleasure and pain. So far, this condition is just a state in which living beings would find themselves, compatible with experiencing the other states of pleasure and pain from time to time. However, Socrates next makes a surprising claim: Nothing stands in the way of one who pursues the life of wisdom from living in this way. For our purposes the point is that Socrates uses this odd claim in order to make an important comparison: The life of neither pleasure nor pain is the most divine. Protagoras adds that it is not likely that the gods would experience enjoyment and its opposite. Underlining the importance of this claim, Socrates agrees that it is not likely (*eikos*) because either state is unseemly (*aschémon*) for them. Now it might be unseemly for the gods to experience either state—for them to experience, on the one hand, bodily pleasure, and on the other hand, bodily pain. It also might be unseemly for them to experience the disturbance of alternating between these two states (32e–33c).

If we compare the account in *Republic* 9 with that in *Philebus*, we can see important differences with respect to the state of calm. In the former, calm is the state that naturally occurs once the bodily processes of pleasure and pain cease. In the latter, however, while calm is the state that occurs when there is neither painful destruction nor pleasurable restoration, it is possible for someone who pursues wisdom to experience this state of calm consistently, apart from pleasure and pain. So, what was a momentary state, occurring after the pleasure of restoration or before the pain of destruction, might somehow last long enough to be the psychological substrate of a life. In fact, a life consisting only of that state is like that of the gods. So, not only is a life of calm possible, it is something to envy, although Socrates had gotten Protarchus to agree previously that a life of reason without pleasure is not choice-worthy for humans (21d–e).<sup>6</sup> Finally,

<sup>6</sup> Carone (2000, 262–263) argues that these two positions are compatible because Socrates' argument only aims to show the life of the gods is free of the bodily pleasure of restoration, mixed as it is with the pain of destruction. If we follow this reading, calm is consistent with

that the life of calm is like that of the gods and that it is one that is possible for one who pursues the life of wisdom suggests that there are circumstances in which someone pursuing the life of wisdom might be able to lead a life that consisted only of calm.

These considerations raise the possibility that calm is a third affective state, that is, a feeling like serenity. In the *Philebus*, Socrates comes closest to assigning an affective character to calm. There he argues that pleasure and pain are perceptions of restoration and destruction. When restoration and destruction are small, the soul does not perceive them (43a–c). This latter state is calm. If this state were a perception of the absence of significant restoration and destruction, it might be a feeling, like serenity. However, this account seems not to have any way of distinguishing between the absence of the perception of restoration and destruction and the perception of the absence of significant restoration and destruction (33e–34a).<sup>7</sup> However, our analysis of the role of calm does not have to settle the issue of whether calm is an affective state, like serenity. We will just treat calm as a third psychological state.

The theme of freedom from pleasure and pain and its relation to the life of the gods occurs in a different context in *Phaedo*. As we shall see, Socrates there says the philosophical soul goes away—at bodily death—to what is like itself, that is, the invisible, divine, and immortal, to live with the gods. Socrates does not say in what ways this soul is like the divine, but it is the soul that has practiced death, including detachment from bodily desire and pleasure. In its bodily existence, it has achieved peace with respect to the body's pleasure and pain (84a–b). So, according to what Socrates says in the *Philebus*, this soul, in the afterlife, would be like the divine in that it would be free from bodily pleasure and pain. In the following, we will investigate this link between the neutral state of calm and the peace achieved by the philosopher. In the *Republic*, the spatial analogy implies that the philosopher knows that calm is a state distinct from pleasure and

pleasure that is not that of restoration. The gods, for instance, might be pleased at being free of the pain of destruction and the pleasure of restoration. Cf. Sommerville (2019, 260–261).

<sup>7</sup>In *Principal Doctrines III*, Epicurus said that the removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasure (Hicks 2000, 664–665). However, commentators have had difficulty in characterizing that pleasure as an affective state. One way around this difficulty is to hold that the pleasure is propositional, that is, one takes pleasure in the state of being free of pain. This approach implies that there is an underlying state that is neither pleasure nor pain in which one takes pleasure. However, this way of characterizing the pleasure would be congenial to the idea that calm is not an affective state but just the absence of pleasure and pain.

pain. In the *Philebus*, Socrates claims that the person who pursues wisdom could live a life that consisted only of calm; such a life resembles that of the gods. So, when, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates says that peace with respect to bodily pleasure and pain is an achievement that makes the philosopher fit, after death, to join the gods, we have reason to suspect that there is a link between this peace and the three-state thesis in the *Philebus* and in *Republic* 9.

Early in the *Phaedo*, Socrates shocks his interlocutors by saying that those who follow philosophy in the right way are doing nothing but practicing dying and being dead (64a). He tries to rescue the claim from paradox by claiming that death is the separation of the soul from the body and that, for the soul, being dead means existing itself by itself, apart from the body (64c). What is striking about Socrates' explication of philosophy as the practice of death is the way it presents philosophy as an ethical *askēsis*; it is not just a matter of reason's pursuing knowledge of the forms but also of the soul's achieving detachment from the body in order to aid the pursuit of knowledge. The first dimension of this detachment is the philosopher's lack of concern for the pleasures of eating and drinking—and of care for the body in general (64d–c). While the philosopher, then, separates himself as much as possible (*kath' hōson dunatai apesthanai*) from the body and turns to the soul, in the eyes of the many, those who separate themselves from these pleasures are close to being dead (65a–b). Socrates says that the philosophers would recognize that the body stands in the way of knowing what is real; the body fills us with passion and desires and fears (*erôtōn de kai epithumiōn kai phobōn*) and all sorts of phantasies and nonsense, so that, as is said, the truth of the matter is we cannot think (*phronēsai*) at all (66d–e). It would appear that the strife between the body's desires and the soul's knowledge is a zero-sum game. Either the soul is embodied or it knows the forms—but not both. As a consequence, only when one is free from the body, in death, can one know. Socrates says either the philosopher will never know or he must die in order to have such knowledge. This incompatibility between the soul's embodiment and knowledge of the intelligible could hardly be starker. In the next sentence, however, Socrates makes a surprising concession. He says that, in this life, we come closest to knowledge if, as much as possible, we do not associate with the body or have communion with it except in what is strictly necessary (66e–67b).

First of all, in the *Republic*, we have a clue about what is strictly necessary. There, Socrates recognizes the existence of those bodily desires from

which we cannot abstain. He distinguishes between necessary (*anagkaios*) desire and unnecessary. The former we cannot desist from because nature compels us to satisfy them; as well, their satisfaction is beneficial. His example is the desire for food such as bread; if it ceases, one is not able to live. By contrast, unnecessary desires are ones from which we can free ourselves and whose satisfaction does no good, even the opposite, harming the body (in ways that he does not specify) and harming the soul with respect to good judgment and moderation (558d–559c). Second, this concession in the *Phaedo* implies that there is a way for someone to have more or less of an association with the body. Not only might the association with the body be minimal but whether the association is minimal or not is under one's control. One way to have minimal association is to abstain from unnecessary desires. However, as the account makes clear, one cannot abstain from necessary desires and remain alive. With respect to these, then, the philosopher would have to achieve an attitude of detachment.<sup>8</sup> So, we should expect, in our reading of the *Phaedo*, that minimizing association with the body will include achieving such an attitude of detachment with respect to those bodily desires and pleasures from which one cannot abstain.

In the next part of the argument in the *Phaedo*, Socrates leaves aside the previous theme about the role of pleasures in entangling the soul with the body. What follows are three arguments for the immortality of the soul. The third of these—sometimes called the Affinity Argument—returns to the way bodily desires and pleasures entangle the soul with the body. In this context, Socrates distinguishes the philosopher from the non-philosopher on the basis of detachment from the body's desires and pleasures.

While the body ultimately dissolves, the soul's fate is different, although the type of fate that awaits it depends on its relation to its body in this life. The soul that departs to another place that is like itself—noble, pure, and invisible—is not dissolved and destroyed, as some say (80d). Rather it departs pure, dragging along nothing of the body because it did not willingly associate with it in life but fled it, gathering itself into itself. Pursuing philosophy in the right way, this soul in truth practiced being dead—for this is the practice of death (*meletê thanatou*) (80d–81a). When this soul goes away to what is like itself—the invisible, the divine, the immortal, the wise—it is happy, having rid itself of wandering, ignorance, fears, and wild

<sup>8</sup>For a contrary view, see Ebrey (2017).

passions (*phobôn kai agrôn erôtôn*); for the rest of time it leads a life with the gods (81a–b). So, philosophy pursued in the right way is the ascetical practice of death, which rids the soul of evils that plague reason—ignorance—and evils that plague the affective side of the soul—fears and wild passions. Thus, purified, it resembles the divine and goes to live with the gods. Then Socrates contrasts this soul with that of the non-philosopher, who has not practiced separation from the body. This soul leaves this life defiled and impure because it always associated with the body, took care of it, loved it, and was bewitched (*gegoêteumenê*) by it and by its desires and pleasures. At this point, Socrates presents a false belief due to this bewitchment: (1) this soul, in its bodily existence, believed nothing was true (*alêthes*) but the bodily, which one can touch and see and drink and eat and use for sexual pleasure (81b1–6). Then, Socrates sums up by saying that (2) each pleasure or pain nails the soul to the body so that it thinks true (*alêthê*) what the body says is true (83d). However, the philosopher would not give his soul into bondage to pleasure and pain; rather it achieves peace (*galênê*) from them, following reason which beholds that which is true and divine (84a–b).

In this account, the deceived soul holds the belief that nothing is true but the bodily. The bodily is described as the objects of sense perception—what one can touch and see—and as the objects of bodily desires—what one can drink, eat, and use for sexual pleasure. We should distinguish the two ways the notion of truth functions in this context. In one way, it qualifies the objects of sense perception; in another way, it qualifies the objects of desire. With respect to sense perception, Socrates argues that perception via the bodily senses is deceptive. Sight and hearing are the most accurate of the sense perceptions; but we do not see or hear anything accurately. In invoking the poets as his witnesses, Socrates seems to be referring to the ordinary experience of the way sight and hearing can be mistaken. Rather, the soul must not rely on sense perception in its search for truth; it thinks best when, alone by itself, it stretches toward what is real (65a–c). Although it is only referred to in a vague way, we understand how hearing and sight are deceptive because what they report can fail to be true. However, Socrates does not say how the body's desires and pleasures bewitch the soul (and thus, deceive it). Consequently, he does not explain how this bewitchment leads to the belief that only the objects of bodily desire are real.

Such a significant claim calls out for an explanation. As it turns out, in the claim that the defiled and impure soul was bewitched (*gegoêteumenê*)

by the body's desires and pleasures there is a textual link with the explanation of bewitchment (*goêteia*) in *Republic* 9 (584a–b). If we follow this link, we will see that what Socrates says about bewitchment in *Republic* 9 helps us to understand the non-philosopher's predicament in the *Phaedo*. In the latter dialogue, the non-philosopher is given over to the care of and love for his body; but he is also lost in bewitchment caused by its desires and pleasures so that he believes nothing is true but the bodily. Although, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates does not explain how the bewitchment arises, he does explain, in *Republic* 9, how bodily desires and pleasures can bewitch the soul. At this point, the use of these passages from *Republic* 9 to explain bewitchment in *Phaedo* poses a methodological question: whether we can use ideas and arguments from one dialogue to explain ideas and arguments in another. We cannot settle the issue here, but we will proceed under the assumption that bringing together such ideas can be philosophically fruitful. Whether doing so uncovers actually intended textual articulations we leave aside. In the present case, bringing together bewitchment by bodily pleasure in *Republic* 9 with bewitchment by bodily pleasure in *Phaedo* helps us to understand how the moral psychology of the former can play a role in the latter dialogue. Bewitchment in *Republic* 9 is, first of all, to be explained in terms of moral psychology. It disguises that, in filling the body's desires, there are the three states of the soul; the bewitched person thinks the neutral state of calm is pleasure. He is, thus, in the grip of the two-state thesis according to which the soul, in the filling of its bodily desires, has only two affective states: pleasure and pain.

Returning to the *Phaedo*, we see the way in which the account of bewitchment in *Republic* 9 can be helpful. First, bewitchment in *Republic* 9 entails the two-state thesis. In turn, as we shall see, this thesis leads to what we can call functional hedonism. This type of hedonism can explain why the non-philosopher's soul would fit the description in (1); this soul believes that nothing is true but the bodily, what one can touch and see and eat and drink and use for sexual pleasure. Second, the antidote to bewitchment is the three-state thesis, which offers a way out of this functional hedonism. In turn, since this hedonism is the source of fears and wild passions (*phobón kai agrón erótón*), the three-state thesis delivers the soul from that tumult and contributes to achieving peace, respite from these disturbances. We can begin with the functional hedonism.

Socrates says of the non-philosopher's soul that, in its embodied state, it always associated with the body, cared for it, and loved it. Clearly, this soul focused on the body's desires and pleasures, which have given rise to

fears and wild passions. Socrates does not explain why this soul experiences fears and wild passions, but these are themes that occur throughout the dialogues, where, as we have seen, desire is presented as painful. The tyrannical soul in *Republic* 9 is ruled by a passion—a large, winged drone—implanted with the sting of longing (*pothou kentron*) (572a–573b). Fear fills the tyrannical soul; Socrates suggests that the fear arises from this soul’s always being in need and insatiable (578a). It fears the pain of desire. Throughout the passages we have been considering in the *Phaedo*, the attractiveness of bodily pleasure has been represented as overwhelming for those who are not philosophers. We can understand the overwhelming attraction of pleasure if, for this soul, bodily pleasure and the pain of desire fill its horizon.

The attraction of pleasure for the non-philosophical soul is so overwhelming because it is the victim of what we can call functional hedonism. Now we are in a position to explain this type of hedonism. If, for the non-philosophical soul, there are only two values—one positive, that is, pleasure, and one negative, that is, pain, these two states will be exhaustive. The two states are exhaustive in that they exhaust all the psychic states available to the non-philosophical soul. According to the thesis, the soul experiences either the pain of empty desire or the pleasure of filling desire followed by the pleasure of filled desire. Next, pleasure is the only positive value and pain the only negative value. Since pleasure is the positive value, it is to be sought. Since pain is a negative value, it is to be avoided. Although they can occur together, they are exclusive values in that one is positive and the other negative. As a consequence, the only goal is seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. One cannot escape seeking one and avoiding the other. Thus, the attraction of pleasure is overwhelming because it is the only alternative to pain. What follows is that the soul that is focused on the body’s desires and pleasures will believe that having pleasure and avoiding pain is the sole focus of life. This belief does not amount to classical hedonism—the belief that pleasure is the good. It does not rise to the level of generalization about the good; at best, it is a sort of functional hedonism. It is a belief that regulates one’s conduct. If one believed that only bodily pleasure and avoidance of bodily pain are desirable, then she would value only what served that goal.

From this point of view, we can begin to understand the appeal of (1)—why the bewitched soul would believe that nothing is true but the bodily. What serves the goal of having pleasure and avoiding pain are those things that are bodily, what one can touch and see, what one can drink, eat, and

use for sexual pleasure. Only these things are relevant to the goal of having pleasure and avoiding pain. However, this two-valued hedonism does not just dictate what one desires and strives for, but it also entails what one believes to be real. As Socrates says, pleasure and pain are like nails that fasten the soul to the body and make it bodily, so that it believes those things to be true that the body says to be true (83d–e). Here ‘true’ has the sense of real—as it often does in the dialogues. So, the soul holds to be real what the body holds to be real. Due to functional hedonism, the body holds to be real what one can touch and see and eat and drink and use for sexual pleasure. We might render the argument in this form:

1. Pleasure and pain are like nails which fasten the soul to the body and make it bodily, so that it believes those things to be real that the body says to be real.
2. Thus, the bewitched soul believes nothing is real but the bodily, which one can touch and see and drink and eat and use for sexual pleasure.

Pleasure and pain nail the soul to the body because they are inescapable. Finally, what explains the fact that pleasures and pains nail the soul to the body is the two-state thesis. In the world of the two-state thesis, the soul is either in the pain of desire, or in the pleasure of filling desire and then in the pleasure of filled desire. The belief that there are only two psychic states, pleasure and pain, implies that these two states are exhaustive and that one is to be sought and the other is to be avoided. They are inescapable.

By contrast, the one who understands correctly that there are three psychic states and three corresponding values enjoys a certain detachment from bodily pleasure and pain because these two do not exhaust her psychic world. Thus, she does not have to take pleasure and pain as seriously as the one for whom these are the only affective states. The enlightened person would naturally have an interest in ridding herself of the pain of desire and in enjoying the pleasure of filling desire. However, in the three-state world, the configuration of values is more complex. For the one who understands the role of calm in this process, bodily pleasure is not the end of human existence. Pleasure is part of the process of release from pain; but calm is escape from both pleasure and pain. If there is a third state, one is delivered from the exhaustive and exclusive alternatives of pleasure and pain. So informed, one is no longer forced to believe that the goal of life

is to have pleasure and avoid pain. If these are not the only values, then one is freed from the need to believe that only what serves this goal is real. If so, one does not have to believe that nothing is true but the bodily, which one can touch and see and drink and eat and use for sexual pleasure.

This reading of the *Phaedo*, of course, has imported the moral psychology of *Republic* 9. The two-state thesis in moral psychology supports the false belief about what is solely desirable, and this false belief supports what we can call the bodily ontology—the sort of ontology expressed in such beliefs as are found in (1). Finally, without the reinforcement of the false belief about what is solely desirable, one is not constrained to hold the bodily ontology; the three-state thesis undermines the bodily ontology. This result helps explain why the philosopher in the *Phaedo* is able to avoid the bodily ontology; not forced to believe that only the bodily is true, he is free to hold that such things as the just itself, the good itself, and the beautiful itself are real (65d). So, if we import the three-state thesis from *Republic* 9 into these passages from the *Phaedo*, we can see how the philosopher would be free from the bodily ontology.

Besides undermining the bodily ontology, the three-state thesis also allows the philosopher to adopt an ascetical approach to desire and pleasure that promotes the achievement of peace. On the one hand, the non-philosopher lives either in the pleasure of filling desire, which is mixed with pain, or in the pain of unfulfilled desire. He also lives with the deception that fulfilled desire will be pleasurable. For him the only goal in fulfilling desire is pleasure. On the other hand, since the philosopher understands the three-state thesis, he can escape being whipsawed between pleasure and pain. He understands that pleasure and pain are not the only two psychic states and that the pleasurable filling of painful desire does not end in pleasure but in calm. While this calm is not itself an achievement, understanding that pleasure and pain end in calm allows the philosopher to adopt an ascetical approach to desire and pleasure. Instead of seeking pleasure as an end, the philosopher is able to treat pleasure as the means to calm, thus subordinating the value of pleasure to that of calm. That calm is more valuable than pleasure reflects Socrates' judgment about the life of the gods in the *Philebus*; it is free of pleasure and pain. It is better to be in the state of calm rather than being in either pleasure or pain. However, this *askēsis* does not aim at a life that consists only of this calm; this sort of existence is reserved for the afterlife.

Rather, this ascetical approach entails that the philosophical soul enjoys immunity from wild passions and fear. For the philosopher, bodily

pleasure and pain do not cease to occur, but their importance is diminished; this attitude would at least deliver the soul from wild passions and fears. As we have seen, fear arises in the face of wild passions because this soul is afraid of the pain of desire inherent in wild passions. Of course, desire is, by nature, painful. However, one can understand that the pain would become all the more fearsome insofar as it is inescapable, insofar as desire cannot be satisfied. Now, we can see how the philosopher's ascetical approach to desire and pleasure supports an attitude incompatible with fears and wild passions. If the philosopher treats the pleasure of filling bodily desire as a means to calm, then he knows that the cessation of the pleasure of satisfaction is coterminous with the cessation of the pain of desire. If there is no pain, there is no desire; desire has ceased. If desire has ceased, it is satisfied. Thus, his ascetical approach rests on an important claim about the satisfaction of desire. The satisfaction of desire is not found in some putative pleasure of satiety. Desire is satisfied when the pain ceases; when the pain ceases, the pleasure of filling ceases and there is calm. Realizing that calm is the state of one's soul when desire is satisfied is the basis for the philosopher's detachment, which is found in his expectations. Arriving at calm, the philosopher is delivered from the pain of desire; *a fortiori* he is delivered from the fear and wild passions inspired by the pain of desire. So, this attitude makes the philosopher immune to wild passions and fear.

We can summarize the heart of this interpretation by going back to a striking metaphor that Socrates uses in the *Phaedo*. He says that each pleasure or pain nails the soul to the body so that it thinks true what the body says is true (83d). In our interpretation, we understand this claim in the light of the two-state thesis. If the only two psychic states are pleasure and pain, each pleasure or pain nails the soul to the body because they embody exclusive and exhaustive alternatives. The positive value of pleasure is that it avoids pain; the negative value of pain is that it is relieved only by pleasure. Caught between these two states, this soul, then, thinks the only truth is bodily pleasure and avoidance of bodily pain. By contrast, the philosopher, who understands the three-state thesis, frees his soul from the exclusive and exhaustive universe of bondage to pleasure and pain. Thus, it achieves peace from the tumult of pleasure and pain so that it is able to behold that which is true and divine (84a–b).

## WORKS CITED

- Adam, J., ed. 1969. *The Republic of Plato*. Vol. II. Cambridge: The University Press.
- Carone, G. 2000. Hedonism and the Pleasureless Life in Plato's *Philebus*. *Phronesis* 45: 257–283.
- Ebrey, D. 2017. The Asceticism of the *Phaedo*: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul's Proper Activity. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 99: 1–30.
- Erginel, M. 2011. Plato on the Psychology of Pleasure and Pain. *Phoenix* 65: 288–314.
- . 2019. Plato on Pleasures Mixed with Pains: An Asymmetrical Account. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 56: 73–122.
- Frede, D. 1992. Disintegration and Restoration: Pleasure and Pain in Plato's *Philebus*. In *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut, 425–463. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hicks, R. D., trans. 2000. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. II. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sommerville, B.A. 2019. Attitudinal Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*. *Phronesis* 64: 247–276.
- Wolfsdorf, D. 2013. Pleasure and Truth in *Republic* 9. *Classical Quarterly* 63: 110–138.



# Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Socrates on Justice

*Roslyn Weiss*

This chapter focuses on Socrates, Cephalus, and Polemarchus as they interact at the beginning of the *Republic*. Attending to the opening scene, as well as to the characters of father and son and to the dynamic between them, puts in context the arguments that Socrates presents and the conclusions—peculiar, even bizarre at times—that he arrives at. My aim is to discover what Socrates hopes to teach his interlocutors about justice—or, more accurately, what he seeks to correct in their views.

It will be argued that Socrates seeks to correct Cephalus' view of justice as rule-following (for the sake of escaping the gods' wrath in the afterlife, in case there is one), with no attention—really, no notice—paid to the real person on the other end of the rule. Cephalus fails to ask the most basic question of justice: am I harming the person to whom my actions are directed?

Polemarchus' moral failing is precisely the opposite of that of his father: he knows nothing of rules and *only* sees the person on the other end of the agent's acts. Who that person is—friend or foe—determines for him how

---

R. Weiss (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA, USA

e-mail: [Rw03@lehigh.edu](mailto:Rw03@lehigh.edu)

one is to treat them “justly.” Socrates’ explicit lesson to Polemarchus is that just men in a position of authority harm no one; his implicit lesson is that they help all.

What emerges in the early part of *Rep.* 1 is that justice comes in two varieties, which I shall call (1) lay justice and (2) expert justice. Lay justice is ordinary justice, the kind that disposes us to relate to and treat others justly.<sup>1</sup> The justice that is new and unfamiliar—both to Socrates’ interlocutors and to us—is the other kind of justice, the justice that is like the practice of a craft.<sup>2</sup> It is this second sort of justice that Socrates often calls the political art or the craft of ruling. It is the business of this latter sort of justice and its practitioners to look out for the virtue of those they rule—specifically, if not exclusively, to instill in them *lay* justice.

The reason justice is defended—and not merely defined—in the *Republic* is that justice is precisely what most people think it is: the virtue and practice that serve the interests, in the first place, of *someone else*. Of all the virtues, justice is the one distinguished by its other-directedness.<sup>3</sup> As Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus all insist, it is *injustice* that is beneficial to oneself. As they see it, if justice is a virtue at all, it is a virtue of dupes and fools. The problem with justice is that its immediate beneficiary is not me, but my neighbor, my friend, or even my enemy.

Although it would appear that Socrates offers in *Rep.* 4—and in his own name—a straightforward definition of justice to which he subscribes (434c7–11; 443c9–444a2), a definition that must, one would think, surely supersede all earlier attempts by his interlocutors to define justice, the fact is that what justice really is, is most certainly *not* the internal order that Socrates *calls* justice in Book 4, a virtue that is clearly beneficial first and foremost to oneself. The harmony among parts—whether in the city or in the individual soul—is moderation; internal order fails to capture the

<sup>1</sup> One might further subdivide lay justice into justice as a disposition in the soul and justice as action. A just soul would be one that is disposed to treat others justly. Just action would concern how one actually treats others. As we shall see, just treatment of others might flow from the soul’s disposition to justice, but it might be motivated by other considerations. The person who treats others justly but is not disposed to have regard for them is not a just person.

<sup>2</sup> The great confusion that has arisen concerning whether justice is a craft or is analogous with crafts can be at least partially dispelled by distinguishing these two senses of justice. In the same way we might speak of a physician as a practitioner of health or as a health-expert or health-craftsman whose job it is to make other people healthy, to produce in them, as it were, lay-health. Physicians can produce not only other physicians but also healthy people.

<sup>3</sup> See Aristotle *EN* 5.1.1129b25–33.

distinctive feature of justice.<sup>4</sup> Internal good order is at most a necessary condition for, and perhaps also a consequence of, justice.

### 13.1 CEPHALUS

When the *Republic* begins, Cephalus is an old man. Although we are not explicitly told what kind of man he was when he was younger, it is not easy to avoid the suspicion that his current chastity, piety, and justice stand in sharp contrast to former excesses.<sup>5</sup> One thing, at any rate, is certain. Cephalus is afraid to face death as an unjust man: What if the stories he has heard about the punishments for which the unjust are destined in the afterlife are true after all? Tales he dismissed as nonsense when he was young now suddenly both frighten him and spur him to righteous action. Cephalus is glad to be wealthy: he can repay his debts and offer his sacrifices.<sup>6</sup> But, how did he make his money? We are left, again, to our suspicions.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>See chapter 5 of Weiss 2012. Socrates betrays in many ways his recognition that his characterization of justice as internal makes it not a distinct virtue but a replication of moderation: (1) by expressing his preference to define justice without first defining moderation—even though such a procedure clearly violates his strategy of discovering justice in what remains after the other three virtues are defined; (2) by his reluctance to define justice at all; (3) by his using nearly identical language and nearly identical metaphors for both—musical metaphors such as *sumphonia* and *harmonia* and the high, low, and middle placement on the musical scale, as well as the metaphor of friendship; (4) by having both pervade the whole soul; (5) by explicitly characterizing the just man as moderate; (6) by defining justice in the end as he had defined moderation at the start (at 430–431)—that is, as the superior by nature mastering the inferior; and (7) by calling justice “health of the soul.” Socrates has not, then, provided in Book IV a new definition of justice; instead, he has given moderation a second name. Yet justice, properly speaking, is the social and interpersonal virtue that disposes one to refrain from harming others, including refraining from depriving them of their due. It is closely connected to just acts. See 444e–445a: “to do just things, practice fine ones, and be just.”

<sup>5</sup>See Blondell 2002, 170, 173.

<sup>6</sup>Strauss (1964, 67) thinks Cephalus worries that he may have “involuntarily” done injustice to someone—cheated or lied. But in fact, Cephalus regards as one of the great benefits of being wealthy that one need never be in the position of having to do injustice “involuntarily”—that is, when one does not wish to, presumably because one’s poverty leaves one little choice. See note 8.

<sup>7</sup>Cephalus says of himself that he inherited much of his money (330b). But he clearly also made money: he calls himself a “moneymaker” (*chrēmastistēs*), and situates his moneymaking achievement midway between that of his grandfather, who increased his own inheritance

Socrates extracts from Cephalus' ramblings something approximating a definition of justice, but the definition Socrates constructs as if a mere paraphrase is designed not merely to refine and formalize Cephalus' conception, but to change it. For Cephalus, justice amounts to paying one's debts to gods and men and not lying or cheating to avoid payment.<sup>8</sup> These are duties owed from a position of subordination: one has borrowed and one must repay; one is in another's debt; and it is *not* up to the borrower to determine whether or not it is "best" for the creditor to be repaid. Lying and cheating to avoid paying one's debts is simply forbidden. But *Socrates'* recasting of Cephalus' conception in the form of a definition—"the truth<sup>9</sup> and giving back what a man has had given to him by another" (331c)—and the illustrations he offers place the agent in a position of power: in Socrates' first example, the agent who has had a weapon *entrusted* to him,<sup>10</sup> must consider whether or not to return it to its rightful owner; in the second, he is in possession of a truth, or of the "whole" truth, and he must now decide whether or not, or how much of it, to reveal. Socrates does not directly challenge the bindingness of Cephalus' rules of justice<sup>11</sup>:

many times over, and his father, who depleted his inheritance. It is known that Cephalus was an exceedingly wealthy arms manufacturer. See Gifford 2001.

<sup>8</sup>The term *akonta*, "unwillingly," in the phrase "to not cheating or lying *akonta*," signifies "when one does not want to." In other words, now that Cephalus wishes to pay his debts and not to cheat or lie, he is relieved not to have to cheat or lie because he lacks sufficient funds.

<sup>9</sup>Later, "to speak (*legein*) the truth" (331d).

<sup>10</sup>Very few commentators translate *labēi* (331c3, d3) and *laboi* (331c5) properly as: "have given to one." Most translate these terms as "take" or "borrow." Bloom (1968) has "takes" as does Joseph (1935), who softens the expression to "may have taken"; Sachs (2007) alternates "takes" and "receives"; Cross and Woosley (1964, 2), Lee (1955), and Reeve (2004) have "borrowed"—probably so that it doesn't sound like stealing, which clearly it isn't; Allen (2006) has "receives"; Griffith (2000) renders "received," then, "borrowed," and, finally, correctly, as I think, "have been given." Translating in terms of either taking or borrowing blurs the difference between the original statement and Socrates' reworking of it. It is true that Socrates doesn't make the shift from the one to the other fully transparent, but that is surely because he presents himself as simply paraphrasing what Cephalus had said. Nevertheless, it is quite certain at 331e9 that "have given to one" is Socrates' intended meaning, for here the word he uses is *parakatathemenou*—to have something deposited with one (by another who entrusts it to one). Cf. 332a1–2: *parakatetbeto*; 333c8: *parakatatēsthai*; and 442e6: *parakatathēkēn*.

<sup>11</sup>We see later on, in Book 4, that Socrates clearly regards as injustices such things as stealing, committing adultery, neglecting parents, etc. (442e–443a). And, although in Book 4 he recognizes the standards violated by these acts as "commonplace" (or "vulgar"—*ta phor-tika*—442e1), he nevertheless sees in the tendency not to violate them a mark of the just

he does not ask Cephalus whether there might be an occasion on which it is unjust to repay a debt or lie or cheat to avoid doing so.<sup>12</sup> And, if he were asked, Cephalus would surely say (as perhaps he should) that there is not. Instead, Socrates presents cases in which the agent must exercise discretion with respect to the rules, cases in which Socrates' question, "is to do these very things sometimes just and sometimes unjust?" (331c), is reasonable. Moreover, in Socrates' cases, the agent must address *a particular person in a particular situation*. Whereas in the sorts of cases Cephalus speaks of, those on the receiving end of just acts are mere placeholders, Socrates designs cases that force the agent to look at the person, see him, and ask with respect to *him*: Is there anything about the immediate particular circumstances of this individual that might make my doing what is normally the right thing to do harmful to him? For Socrates, then, although the directives of justice are for the most part perfectly acceptable rules of thumb, that is, reliable guides to just action in most instances, when one is put in the position where there is the possibility of an imminent harm that one can either enable or avert, that which is normally the right course of action might on this occasion not be right. In such a position one is both permitted and required to assess potential harm. And in order to do this the agent must *see* the person whose interests stand to be adversely affected by his actions; in ordinary rule-following there is no comparable demand because there is no comparable permission.<sup>13</sup>

man, and in the contrary tendency a mark of the unjust. A similar list of offenses appears at 344b, courtesy of Thrasymachus (though his list includes more egregious offenses such as kidnapping and enslaving); and at 360a–c, where Glaucon imagines the unjust activities of the man in possession of the ring of Gyges (these activities include murder, which is interestingly absent from both Socrates' and Thrasymachus' lists). See also the unjust acts said to be committed by gods against other gods that Socrates wants stricken from the literature to which his young guardians will be exposed (378b–d): wars, mistreatment of parents, beating, tying up, exiling, and the particular crime visited by cities on other cities, *viz.* enslavement (351b); see, too, the injustices enumerated in the Myth of Er at 10.615b–c.

<sup>12</sup>That Socrates' case differs from Cephalus' is evident in the agent's reason for considering not complying with the rules of justice. In Cephalus' cases any violation of the rules would be self-serving; in Socrates' examples, the violation would benefit not the agent but the other.

<sup>13</sup>The normally forbidden practice notoriously permitted in the *Republic* is, of course, lying, but it is certainly not lying to escape one's obligations. For there to be even the possibility of a justifiable lie, the lie would have to be for the sake of averting harm to which the person lied to is vulnerable—not for the sake of benefiting the liar. The first instance in which falsehood is condoned appears in Book 2 with the education of children.

Although the agent in Socrates' cases must see the other, he need not know anything more about him than how likely he is to be adversely affected by the agent's action. Who the person is and in what relationship he stands to the agent is wholly irrelevant. It is true that in Socrates' first example, it is a *friend* who stands to be harmed if his weapon is returned to him when he is not of sound mind<sup>14</sup>; nevertheless in the second, Socrates' concern is for *anyone* who might be harmed by being told the truth. Thus for Socrates justice does not differentiate between a friend and everyone else.<sup>15</sup> One thing, then, that Socrates seems to have in common with Cephalus—albeit not for the same reason—is that it makes no difference to either of them whether the person on the receiving end is friend or foe, good or bad. In Cephalus' case, this is because he follows rules mechanically—and blindly. In Socrates' case, as we shall see, it is because he thinks a just man harms *no one*.

We learn, then, at least two things from Socrates' conversation with Cephalus. The first is that, although justice can most of the time be served by following rules—and indeed following the rules is important—there are occasions on which we find ourselves in a position in which justice requires of us that we take care lest a person come to harm.<sup>16</sup> This is because the basic *principle* of justice is one of not doing or causing harm. It is from this principle that the rules derive; they are based or grounded in it. When we owe a debt we are almost always required to pay it and not to lie or cheat to avoid doing so. But when something is entrusted to us or when we are in possession of a truth that may do harm if divulged, we are often in a position where we must appeal directly to the *principle* of justice rather than rely on the rules based on that principle. The second thing we learn is that both the straightforward obligation to pay our debts

<sup>14</sup>Perhaps Socrates thinks that Cephalus could relate more easily to a case in which it is a friend who entrusted his weapon to someone.

<sup>15</sup>In Socrates' subsequent reference to this case he emphasizes "any man whatsoever" (*ti hotōioun*): one must not return to any man whatsoever something he has deposited when he is not of sound mind (331e–332a).

<sup>16</sup>By not returning a weapon to a madman, one protects not only the madman but potentially others as well. A just man's vigilance thus extends beyond the one person with whom he has dealings. One might say, too, that embedded in Socrates' lesson to Cephalus is an anticipation of the formulation soon to rival Thrasymachus' pronouncement that justice is the advantage of the stronger. For when one looks out for the interests of the man not in his right mind, one promotes the advantage, not of the stronger but of the weaker.

and the less determinate duty to avert harm obtain regardless of whether one is friend or foe.<sup>17</sup>

On this account of justice, Cephalus—even in old age—fails to be just. He obeys the rules, paying his debts and offering his sacrifices, hoping to save his own self. He acts “justly” for the sake of reward, or at least for the sake of avoiding punishment. He gives no thought to the needs of others; the harm-question never arises for him. Socrates has now raised doubts about such self-serving justice, for what lies at justice’s core is regard for others.

### 13.2 POLEMARCHUS

Cephalus’ son Polemarchus “inherits” his father’s argument, just as he stands to inherit his possessions (331d).<sup>18</sup> The son, however, unlike the craven aged father cowering in the face of impending death, approaches the matter of justice as a man at the height of his power. Polemarchus had earlier *ordered* (*keleuei*) his slave to run after Socrates and Glaucon. The slave tugged on Socrates’ cloak and told them that Polemarchus *orders* them to wait.<sup>19</sup> He tried to intimidate Socrates by calling attention to the large number of men in his entourage (327c). He declared himself and the others in his group not open to persuasion (327c), finally silencing all dissent by commanding: “So stay, and do not do otherwise” (328b).<sup>20</sup> Polemarchus’ dominance is signaled in other ways as well: He is identified at first as Cephalus’ son (327b), but it is not long before Cephalus is identified as Polemarchus’ father (328b); Lysias and Euthydemus are called

<sup>17</sup> One way, perhaps, to capture the difference between Cephalus’ cases and Socrates’ is to say that the former are cases in which one breaks the rules at another person’s expense or to his detriment; the latter are cases in which one breaks the rules to the other person’s benefit.

<sup>18</sup> Rather than as Bloom (1968) translates: “Am I not the heir of what belongs to you?” said Polemarchus,” it should be: “Am I, Polemarchus, not the heir of what belongs to you?” he said,” That this is the correct reading is confirmed by Socrates’ saying at 331e6–7: *su men, o Polemarche*.

<sup>19</sup> See, too, the beginning of Book 5 (449b), where Polemarchus tugs on Adeimantus’ cloak.

<sup>20</sup> At 340b Polemarchus characterizes Thrasymachus’ view that rulers make laws for their own advantage as: “sometimes the strong *order* (*keleuein*) those who are weaker. . .” (emphasis added). Note, too, how Socrates at 335a gently chides Polemarchus for his bullying ways by saying, “Polemarchus orders,” just when Polemarchus had actually conceded a point to Socrates. Our early passage at 327c is the first of many references in the *Republic* to the distinction between coercion and persuasion. Though distinct, coercion and persuasion are in the *Republic* not always at odds; on occasion they work in tandem (see, e.g., 7.519e).

Polemarchus' brothers rather than Cephalus' sons (328b); the house in which both Cephalus and his son Polemarchus live is referred to as "the home of Polemarchus" (328b); and although Cephalus has three sons who no doubt will share their father's estate equally (330b),<sup>21</sup> Polemarchus declares himself his father's heir (331d). This brazen son now rudely interrupts (*hupolabōn*) his father's conversation with an old friend.<sup>22</sup> Citing the poet Simonides, Polemarchus boldly expresses his conviction that justice is indeed giving to each what is owed him—in other words, friends helping friends, enemies harming enemies. As a man of means, Polemarchus is in a position to dole out to others both good things and bad.

Although Polemarchus presents his account of justice as if it were a mere seconding of his father's view,<sup>23</sup> his view differs significantly from his father's. First, it takes no notice of rules: Polemarchus acknowledges no constraints on what may be done to benefit friends and harm enemies.<sup>24</sup> Second, Polemarchus' account, insofar as it associates justice with benefit and harm, requires, unlike Cephalus', that one *see* the person on the receiving end. One can hardly give friends and foes what is owed to them without seeing them. And third, Polemarchus repositions justice as something bestowed, as something that does its work top-down. Whereas Cephalus saw justice as repayment of debt, in which as debtor he is obliged

<sup>21</sup> According to the Gortyn code of Greek law (c. 450 BCE), VII, sons inherit equally, with shares twice those of daughters. Note 330b, where Cephalus says: "I am satisfied if I leave not less, but rather a bit more than I inherited, to these here"—*toutoisin*, referring to his three sons, Lysias, Euthydemus, and Polemarchus.

<sup>22</sup> His companion Adeimantus does the same.

<sup>23</sup> In the *Meno*, Meno's conception of how he would exhibit the virtue of a man in his prime is to "engage in public affairs and so to help friends and harm enemies" (71e). Interestingly, he leaves the management of the household to women, and at 73a Socrates preserves Meno's distinction between the managing of public affairs, which is men's work, and household management, which is women's work. Tellingly, however, when Socrates at 91a reviews for Anytus' benefit the virtue Meno is hoping to acquire, he replaces "helping friends and harming enemies" with "looking after parents" and assigns to men the management of household affairs.

<sup>24</sup> Both Thrasymachus in Book 1 and Glaucon in Book 2 associate helping friends and harming enemies with *injustice*. Thrasymachus thinks the just man is the one who "incurs the ill will of his relatives and his acquaintances when he is unwilling to serve them against what is just" (343e). Thus, the "helping friends" that Polemarchus sees as integral to justice, Thrasymachus sees as incompatible with it. Glaucon, as we shall see, thinks it is the *unjust* man who, thanks to his wealth, "does good to friends and harm to enemies" (362c). In the *Meno* (71e), however, Meno (like Polemarchus) considers helping friends and harming enemies a mark of virtue for the adult male. (See previous note.)

to the creditor who is the superior in their relationship, Polemarchus' agent occupies the higher ground. Indeed, when, in talking to Cephalus, Socrates envisioned an agent who, for the sake of protecting unstable people from harm, must exercise discretion, he has helped facilitate the transition from Cephalus' original conception of justice as rule-following to Polemarchus' casting of justice as dispensing benefits and harms.

Socrates further eases the transition from Cephalus' justice that is bottom-up to Polemarchus' justice that is top-down in two ways: (1) He replaces "what is owed" (*to ophelomenon*) with "what is fitting" (*to prosēkon*)—importantly underscoring the change in the just man's position from low to high; and (2) he compares justice to the medical art and the cooking art, and asks Polemarchus to identify the specific work in which the just man is most able to help friends and harm enemies—that is, is most useful. Yet, once Polemarchus attempts to identify *how* the just man is useful, he loses his grip on the just man as dispenser of benefits and harms and slips into the common, pre-reflective view of the just man. For surely the reason Polemarchus thinks the just man is useful in war, and useful in partnerships, contracts, and money matters in peacetime, is not because of any special expertise the man has in distributing benefits and harms but that he thinks the just man is honest and does not steal or cheat, that he is just—in the lay sense. When Polemarchus says that the just man is more useful than other experts in those partnerships in which gold and silver "must be deposited and kept safe," it is clear that he is thinking about the just man as the kind of man one can trust.

To get Polemarchus' just man back on top Socrates argues that justice would not be "anything very serious (*spondaion*)" if the just man who is useful for *guarding* gold and silver is useful only when something is not being used or, as Socrates colorfully puts it, "for useless things." And so, to make justice more "serious," to give it, as it were, more heft, Socrates makes the man useful for guarding useful, too, for stealing. At least now the just man is good for something. From this shaky start Socrates produces a shamelessly faulty argument to conclude: (1) that "the just man has come to light as a kind of thief" (334a),<sup>25</sup> and (2) that justice is the art of stealing "for the benefit, to be sure, of friends and the harm of enemies"

<sup>25</sup> See *Hippias Minor*, where the good man is "he who does wrong willingly" (376b). In the *Hippias Minor* the offensive conclusion derives from the assumption that justice is a craft, that it is "power or knowledge or both" (375d). See following note.

(334b).<sup>26</sup> This argument's flaws are considerable. Is the man who is clever at guarding money also clever at stealing it? And must we conclude that this is so even if (doubtfully) (a) a boxer who is cleverest at landing a blow is also cleverest at guarding against it, (b) a man who is clever at guarding against disease is also clever at producing it (and getting away with doing so), and (c) a man who is good at guarding an army is also good at stealing the enemy's plans? Furthermore, must one who is *clever at* stealing money actually be a thief so that justice is actually therefore an art of stealing (334b)?<sup>27</sup> Despite its glaring flaws, however, Socrates' argument makes a strikingly important point. If, as Polemarchus believes, just men harm as readily as they help, it follows that there would be nothing—certainly not any concern never to do harm or any rules of justice—to keep them from stealing, albeit only to benefit their friends and harm their enemies. If they are good at stealing, they will steal—especially since justice for Polemarchus involves *actually* benefiting friends and harming enemies. Socrates wants his audience to see that Polemarchus' moral universe, unlike his father's, is not constrained by rules of justice. It can accommodate even such patently unjust acts as stealing. Whereas Cephalus' justice was a matter of mechanical adherence to a set of moral rules, Polemarchus cares not at all for ordinary moral rules. And since for Polemarchus the rules of morality have not even *prima facie* force<sup>28</sup>—his sole care is to benefit friends and harm enemies—Polemarchus' just man would indeed be a thief, a liar, a cheater, a killer, an adulterer—to help his friends and harm his enemies.

Despite Polemarchus' unhappiness with the conclusions Socrates draws from this argument, he remains steadfast in his view that justice is a matter of helping friends and harming enemies.<sup>29</sup> Socrates now asks whether one might misidentify one's friends, understood suddenly to mean men who

<sup>26</sup>The reasoning here seems to be: if justice is a craft, then, like other crafts, its practitioner ought to be equally skilled at satisfying and at sabotaging the craft's proper end; contrary ends are achieved via the same skill.

<sup>27</sup>The thief will appear again in Socrates' argument against Thrasymachus concerning the value of perfect injustice.

<sup>28</sup>Virtuous fathers whose sons are less virtuous than they are not uncommon in Plato. (See *Prot.* 319e–320b, *Meno* 93c–94d. In the *Meno* at 89e–90b, a case in point is Anytus and his father, Anthemion.)

<sup>29</sup>See *Crito* 45c, where Crito is ashamed of Socrates and regards him as unjust because he allows his enemies to get away with doing him harm. Note that Crito does not say on his own either that the *verdict* was unjust or that Socrates' accusers or jurors were committing an injustice—only that they were Socrates' enemies and that what is due enemies, in accordance with justice, is harm.

are good and thus just,<sup>30</sup> and might consequently assign benefits to people who do not merit them. And worse: would not misidentifying one's enemies, understood now as men who are bad and unjust, result in inadvertently *harming* good and just men?

Note that in Polemarchus' belief that "it is just to harm the *unjust* and help the *just*" (334d), just and unjust men have now moved to the *receiving* end of the dispensing of benefits and harms. The unjust and the just to *whom* the harm and help are distributed are surely not themselves *dispensers* of harm and benefit. Surely they are just and unjust in the ordinary rule-following way, just or unjust in the lay sense. Thus, what Socrates argues is that if justice-experts need to be able to distinguish lay-just men from the lay-unjust in order to dispense benefits and harms appropriately, they need to be able to distinguish the man who *seems* lay-just from the man who *is* lay-just. Polemarchus concedes the point, yet all he is willing in the end to say is that "it is just to do good to the friend, *if* he is good, and harm to the enemy, *if* he is bad" (335a). Socrates has still not succeeded in persuading Polemarchus to give up altogether the notion that justice is associated with helping friends and harming enemies.

Socrates' only hope now is to introduce a notion of expert justice that is wholly unfamiliar to Polemarchus, the notion that expert justice, rather than doling out benefits and harms, has the task of *making* others just—lay-just. If to harm entails causing the thing harmed to be worse with respect to its particular virtue—if indeed this is the worst harm one can inflict,<sup>31</sup> then surely if *horsemanship* cannot harm horses, it cannot make horses worse in their horse-virtue. Nor, by the same token, can *music* make men unmusical. It follows then that, if the specifically human virtue is justice, just men cannot make others unjust via justice; good men are not able to make other men bad by virtue, by *aretē*.

Socrates has here introduced what he regards as the worst harm one human being can visit on another (or even on animals), namely, making

<sup>30</sup> In a move no doubt surprising to Polemarchus and hardly in line with his intentions, Socrates turns friends into good men and enemies into bad ones, and then good men into just men and bad men into unjust.

<sup>31</sup> Socrates recognizes other things besides corruption as harms. In the *Apology* he feels it would be unjust to inflict upon himself either prison, which would deprive him of liberty, or exile, which would entail the unpleasantness of being expelled from city after city, at his advanced age (*Ap.* 37b–c).

them worse with respect to their proper virtue (335b–c).<sup>32</sup> This is what a justice *expert* would never be able to do by justice as expertise. Polemarchus has apparently already forgotten the recent argument in which Socrates contended that whoever can land a blow can also guard against one, and whoever can guard against disease is also cleverest at getting away with producing it (335c). Has Socrates forgotten as well? Hardly. If Socrates does not now argue that the very musicians who can make men musical by music can also make them unmusical, that the very men who are skilled in horsemanship are those who can make men by horsemanship incompetent riders, and therefore that the very men who are experts at justice are those who can by justice make men unjust,<sup>33</sup> it can only be because this way of arguing does not serve Socrates' *present* purpose. Socrates' goal *now* is to secure Polemarchus' consent to the proposition that a just man cannot by justice make another man unjust.

Not wishing to take any chances, Socrates bolsters his argument. Rather than rely on a comparison of justice only to such things as horsemanship and music—arts that can accomplish both benefit and harm—Socrates now compares justice to heat and dryness: just as it is not the work of heat to cool and it is not the work of dryness to wet<sup>34</sup>; so it is not the work of the good to harm. And since the just man is good, it is not the work of the

<sup>32</sup> See *Ap.* 20a–b, where Socrates says that young human beings need someone to improve them in human virtue just as the overseer of colts and calves makes them “noble and good in their appropriate virtue.” In the *Euthyphro* (13a–c), the definition of holiness as *therapeia* is abandoned because the tendance of horses, dogs, and cattle benefits them by making them better, yet men cannot make the gods better. And, of course, the reason Socrates thinks his accusers cannot really harm him (though they intend to—*Ap.* 41d–e) is that, although they can kill or banish or deprive him of the benefits of citizenship, they cannot make him—that is, his soul—worse (*Ap.* 30c).

<sup>33</sup> The idea that the skilled person can use his skill to produce good things or bad is found in the *Hippias Minor*. See, too *Crito* 44d: “Would that the many could produce the greatest evils, Crito, so that they could also produce the greatest goods!”

<sup>34</sup> The case of heat heating and coolness cooling, and of wetness wetting and dryness drying, is different from the horsemanship and music cases in two ways. First, horsemanship is not a horse and music is not musical, but wetness is wet and heat hot. To be a doctor one does not need to be healthy, but heat could not heat unless it were hot. Could a musician teach if he were not musical? It is an interesting and important question whether an expert at justice who makes others just in the lay sense must himself be just in the lay sense. Second, whereas Socrates *could* argue, if he so wished, that it is the musician who is most able deliberately to make someone unmusical through musicianship, heating and cooling cannot do anything but heat and cool, respectively.

*just* man to harm—anyone (335d).<sup>35</sup> The idea here is that coolness cools but heat does not, wetness wets but dryness does not, so the bad bads, that is, harms—and the good does not. And as in the earlier argument with Polemarchus in which a mistake about who are one’s friends and who are one’s enemies becomes a mistake about who is good and who is bad, which in turn becomes a mistake about who is just and who is unjust, the good here is immediately assimilated to the just. The just man is good; it is the bad who harm; so the just man never harms anyone.

Despite the general and unqualified conclusion—“it is not the work of the just man to harm either a friend or anyone else” (335d); and “it is never just to harm anyone” (335e)—the argument works only if (1) “to harm” is taken to mean “to worsen the condition of,” especially or most prominently in the sense of “making someone less just,” and (b) the just man is taken to denote the justice expert—he who is in a position to make others just. Since Polemarchus sees the just man as the dispenser of goods *and bads*, Socrates tries to teach him that a just man *in that superior position* cannot dispense bad and injustice—that is, cannot visit upon others anything that would make them worse.<sup>36</sup> Like heat that cannot have the effect of cooling—cooling is not among the effects it can have—and so, too, dryness that cannot have the effect of wetting, so goodness and justness, as well as the man who is good and just, can have no harmful (bad) effect on other persons—and, in particular, cannot make them worse.

In nothing Socrates has said up to this point does he go so far as to associate justice with *helping* all people,<sup>37</sup> though the point is implicit.

<sup>35</sup>The conclusion, “It is not the work of justice to make men unjust,” precedes the examples of cooling and drying that are adduced subsequently to support it. Nevertheless, the final conclusion also derives—and more successfully so—from the examples of cooling and drying: since (1) it is not the work of the *good* to harm, and (2) the just man is good, it follows that (3) “It is not the work of the just man to harm—anyone.”

<sup>36</sup>Socrates reveals his disapproval of Polemarchus’ view of justice by supposing it to be the view of Periander, Perdiccas, Xerxes, Ismenias the Theban, “or some other rich man who has a high opinion of what he can do” (336a). This “other rich man” is surely none other than Polemarchus himself, who not only proposes the view in question (as his interpretation of Simonides) but holds on to it with rather fierce tenacity. Socrates nevertheless permits him to save face.

<sup>37</sup>This is true also in the *Crito*, where at 49b–c, Socrates says: “one must in no way commit injustice... surely there is no difference between doing bad to human beings and doing injustice”; and in the *Gorgias* as well, where Socrates says at 460c: “The just man will never wish to do injustice.” In the *Apology* (37b), Socrates says he never did injustice to anyone, so he will not do injustice to himself now by proposing a penalty that is harmful to himself. When

(Socrates will make the point explicit in his conversation with Thrasymachus.) If we consider: “Cooling is not the work of heat, but of its opposite ... nor wetting the work of dryness but of its opposite ... nor harming the work of the good but of its opposite ... and it is the just man who is good” (335d3–10), the unmistakable implication is that benefiting (or making better or more just) *is* the work of the good or just man. Just as heat does not cool *but heats*, and dryness does not wet but dries, so would the just man not harm but benefit. It is only because of the refutative nature of Socrates’ engagement with Cephalus and Polemarchus that he goes no further than he needs to in order to discredit the objectionable aspects of their views: Socrates shows Polemarchus that one cannot be just even as one harms (= worsens) someone—even if one’s victim is one’s enemy.<sup>38</sup>

Although Cephalus and Polemarchus do not represent justice accurately, neither of them disparages it.<sup>39</sup> For the former, justice is a way to ensure a torment-free afterlife; for the latter, it is the *proper* way to exercise power. The view that justice is a bad thing awaits the outburst of the by now utterly exasperated Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus is irritated, first, by the conciliatory or deferential spirit Socrates and Polemarchus exhibit toward one another. For Thrasymachus, the purpose of debate is to win,

Socrates at *Ap.* 32d establishes his credentials as a just man, he says he has placed above all else not committing unjust or impious deeds. Although Socrates sees himself as Athens’ greatest benefactor (36c–e), he nevertheless tends to associate his justness with not harming others. And, of course, all the just acts at *Rep.* 4.442 are negative—including not neglecting parents or the gods. It is probably fair to say that justice is a virtue that for the most part enjoins refraining from harm. Would it not be odd, however, for a just man to strain to define non-harm as narrowly as possible so that it positively excludes helping others, or to be on his guard lest he actually help someone?

Although Polemarchus speaks of helping friends as part of his conception of justice, Socrates’ response is not to validate that part of Polemarchus’ definition but to ignore it: what is essential to justice is not harming. (See Brown 2004, 293 n. 3, who thinks Socrates does preserve the first part of Polemarchus’ definition.) Socrates emphasizes that a just person mistreats no one; he teaches that in that sense justice is blind.

<sup>38</sup> Socrates could easily have extended his argument as follows: It is the work of wetting to make things wet; so, it is the work of a good (just) man to confer benefit. Some scholars rightly attribute to Socrates the view that justice goes beyond not harming to engaging in a kind of benevolence. See Miller 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Dorter (2006, 32) notes correctly that Socrates at no point in his conversation with Cephalus and Polemarchus argues that justice is beneficial to just people themselves but only that it is beneficial to others. But Cephalus embraces justice for his own sake; and Polemarchus never raises the question.

to outshine the others, not to reach consensus together. But, beyond that, what surely provokes him most of all is the respect all participants thus far have shown for justice—even though, as everyone knows, justice is another man’s benefit and one’s own harm. For Polemarchus, the person in power is one who exercises justice and who is constrained by some sort of principle of justice. Only for Thrasymachus is the person in power not just; there are no constraints on him beyond the consideration of his own advantage. Were we to say, with Socrates, that the function of justice is to make *others* just, would Thrasymachus disagree? Perhaps not. The only question for him would be: but for whose benefit?

### WORKS CITED

- Allen, R. E., trans. 2006. *Plato: The Republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Blondell, R. 2002. *The Play of Character in Plato’s Dialogues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloom, A., trans. 1968. *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic Books.
- Brown, E. 2004. Minding the Gap in Plato’s *Republic*. *Philosophical Studies* 117: 275–302.
- Cross, R.C., and A.D. Woozley. 1964. *Plato’s Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*. London: Macmillan and Co.
- Dorter, K. 2006. *The Transformation of Plato’s Republic*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Gifford, M. 2001. Dramatic Dialectic in *Republic* Book 1. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 20: 35–106.
- Griffith, T., trans. 2000. *Plato: The Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Joseph, H.W.B. 1935. Plato’s *Republic*: The Argument with Polemarchus. In *Essays in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. H.W.B. Joseph, 1–14. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lee, D., trans. 1955. *Plato: The Republic*. London: Penguin Books.
- Miller, M. 1986. Platonic Provocations: Reflections on the Soul and the Good in the *Republic*. In *Platonic investigations*, ed. D.J. O’Meara, 163–193. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- Reeve, C. D. C., trans. 2004. *Plato’s Republic*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Sachs, J. 2007. *Plato: Republic*. Newburyport: R. Pullins Co.
- Strauss, L. 1964. *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weiss, R. 2012. *Philosophers in the Republic: Plato’s Two Paradigms*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.



## A Reading of the First Book of the *Republic*: A Look to the Whole

*Chad Wiener*

There are various ways to read the first book of Plato's *Republic*. Gregory Vlastos argues that it is actually an early dialogue attached to the rest of the work (1991, 248–51). Julia Annas similarly holds that the first book provides a sufficient introduction to the work and underwent a few revisions

---

This chapter is dedicated to Edward C. Halper. I took my first course from him in the Fall of 1996 on Plato. The third week into the term, he analyzed an argument in the *Symposium*, and it was at that moment I realized how I read and tried to do philosophy up to that point was all wrong. The chapter also was indirectly inspired by that class. Halper claimed that the definition of justice in Book IV was empty. I thought that this had to be wrong. This is my attempt to answer that charge as well as how Book I is often read. I have no idea whether this is Halper's view or not or whether he agrees with anything in this paper. I hope that it reflects how he has taught me to read Plato, with a close eye to detail, arguments, themes, and scenery. I would also like to thank Roslyn Weiss, who read two drafts of this paper and gave extensive comments that greatly improved what I have written. She whole-heartedly disagrees with my interpretation but was gracious in both her comments and our extended conversation of my interpretation. I also received very helpful, detailed comments from two anonymous reviewers enabling me to improve my arguments.

to foreshadow one or two arguments that occur in the other nine books (1981, 16–18). Terence Irwin, in contrast, rejects reading the first book as a stand-alone text or mere introduction. He claims that Socrates does not explicitly reject the Simonidean view that justice is rendering to each what is due to him (331e) and argues that this definition is incorporated into the just city of the *Republic* (1995, 172–74). Charles Kahn argues for a proleptic reading of the first book, where themes and issues are anticipated in the first book that shape our reading of the rest of the work (1993, 131–42). This chapter follows in the same vein as Irwin’s and Kahn’s readings. I argue that each view of justice presented in Book I offers a partial understanding of justice and forms a proper part of the definition of justice of the just city. Socrates’ refutation of each definition of justice presents the problems that must be resolved for the proper understanding of how that conception of justice fits with the whole. The first book is, thus, written with a look to the whole.

Plato’s definition of justice in the good city, each doing their own work and not meddling in the affairs of others (433b), implies that each class in the just city is just in a different way. The work of each class is distinct, so the citizens of different classes cannot be just in the same way. On my reading, each interlocutor represents a class in the just city and presents the formulation of the definition of justice that defines the work of that respective class. Socrates’ refutations set forth the challenges of a straightforward or naïve reading of these definitions. Plato resolves these problems over the next six books (II–VII), showing how it is possible to incorporate these partial understandings of justice into the whole definition expressed in Book IV.<sup>1</sup>

I should make two qualifications and a clarification of my view in this chapter. I do not hold that the definition of justice presented in Book IV is the definition that expresses the “what is” of Justice, the Form that is itself by itself. It merely presents what justice is in a city. Second, although each class in the just city has a distinct formulation of justice, each

---

C. Wiener (✉)

Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies, Old Dominion University,  
Norfolk, VA, USA  
e-mail: [cwiener@odu.edu](mailto:cwiener@odu.edu)

<sup>1</sup>I limit my discussion to Books II–VII, since those books are where I locate Plato resolving these sets of problems raised in Book I concerning the three interlocutors’ definitions.

formulation can also be understood in the Simonidean sense of what each owes to the other citizens and to the city as a whole.<sup>2</sup> But the same thing follows as with the formulation of justice in Book IV: Each class owes a different thing to the different classes and to the city as a whole. Finally, I cannot fully defend my view in this chapter, but my interpretation is that each higher class makes possible the justice of the class just below it with the implication that the rulers, the philosopher-kings, make possible the justice of each class directly or indirectly.<sup>3</sup>

My reading also has the advantage of addressing some common objections to Plato's definition of justice in Book IV. Some find the definition empty.<sup>4</sup> Others find the definition does not clarify any of our ordinary conceptions of justice.<sup>5</sup> My interpretation helps show how Plato can respond to these objections. I proceed by looking at some of the problems Socrates raises with each interlocutor's definition of justice, then I show how Socrates addresses these problems in the later books and connect them to help us understand the formulation of the definition we find in Book IV.

It is unreasonable to say that Cephalus proposes a definition of justice. He is, though, defending a way of life and one that he considers just. Socrates does not simply foist a definition on him, but Socrates does reformulate what Cephalus says justice is: Justice is telling the truth and giving back whatever one has taken (331c). Socrates quickly dismisses this view of justice, showing that paying back what one owes can be sometimes just, sometimes unjust. It follows that this view cannot express the "what is" of justice. How is Cephalus' view of justice the justice of the craftsmen, and how does Plato resolve the problem that paying one's debt is not always just?

An immediate problem follows from my view that Cephalus' view of justice is the justice of the craftsmen. We do not find Plato stressing craftsmen paying their debts or much about them telling the truth. But if Socrates is not foisting a definition upon Cephalus, we need to take Cephalus' words used to express his conception of justice seriously.

<sup>2</sup>The respective work of each class is what they owe to the rest of the city, and this work contributes to how the city functions as a whole.

<sup>3</sup>I provide some defense of the view in the paper, but much more needs to be said and cannot be developed in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup>This seems to be the view of Kraut (1992, 316). He claims the definition by itself does not tell us what kind of order we should bring about in our soul, so it follows on his reading that we do not know the proper work of each part.

<sup>5</sup>For example, see Annas (1981, 119) and Bloom (1991, 374).

Cephalus is asked by Socrates about the greatest good of wealth. Cephalus answers that money's greatest good is that one need not commit an injustice by having cheated or lied, owing (*opheilonta*) a god a sacrifice or a human being money (331b). There are several ideas embedded in these claims. First, Cephalus' emphasis is that wealth can prevent injustice. Second, having wealth or excess money can correct any injustice because one can pay the damage back, be it with money or a sacrifice. Third, and most importantly, being just entails not having cheated or lied to anyone to at all. The first two points are rejected by Plato's overall view of justice. Plato holds that good character and rationally grasping the Good prevents injustice and neither one can be brought about or corrected by wealth.<sup>6</sup> The third point, though, is central for Plato's understanding of the definition of justice for craftsmen.

In developing the just city in Book II, Socrates gets Adeimantus to agree that the primary work of the craftsmen is to supply for the needs of the citizens of the city (369c-370a). The goods are to be plentiful and well-made (370c). Each craftsman is expected to trade with the others to satisfy needs, and money is the medium by which all the goods produced will be measured and traded (371b). It is implied in this discussion that there is no surplus, neither of the goods made nor of the money used for exchange. Plato makes this explicit in Book IV: the craftsmen can be neither too wealthy nor poor, for wealthy craftsmen stop working and poor craftsman produce shoddy work. Both wealth and poverty encourage revolution (422a). Any consistent cheating or lying by a craftsman to gain more in a monetary transaction would lead to some craftsmen becoming wealthy and others poor. Further, even a single instance of such behavior would put a strain on satisfying someone's needs in the just city, but the point of their partnership is to satisfy need.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Cephalus's definition, once properly understood, expresses a limitation on any transaction in the just city: no craftsman can cheat or lie to another craftsman or a superior in the city.

<sup>6</sup>To be clear, I take good character to be what any citizen of the just city must have, and, in the lower two classes, these are virtues as Socrates claims in Book VII to be more akin to those of the body, produce by habit and practice (518d-e). So one can have good character but lack knowing the Good, which only philosopher-kings grasp.

<sup>7</sup>The craftsmen in the just city only make as much as is needed to maintain its moderate way of life. So, any cheating or lying would imply both a lack for at least one citizen and an unjust gain for another.

If justice is each doing their own work and not meddling in the affairs of others, we can see that the justice of the craftsmen is making goods and trading them fairly, so they become neither wealthy nor poor and meet the needs of the citizens. To do this, they must tell the truth and never cheat another, and they must also never allow themselves to be cheated by another in a trade. In this sense, their justice is the justice of Cephalus, but there is still a missing piece. How does the just city prevent this conception of justice from falling prey to Socrates' criticism, that paying one's debt is sometimes just, sometimes unjust? The craftsmen, and the other citizens of the city, must have good character. That is, they will not trade with a citizen or foreigner who is trying to cheat them or is out of their mind or mad (331c).<sup>8</sup> Part of this good character is being moderate. Moderation in the *Republic* is presented as the agreement between the ruler and ruled about who should rule (432a). This virtue also allows individuals to control their pleasures and desires (431c-d). The craftsmen must control their passions toward moneymaking and other associated desires if they will be neither too rich nor too poor. But this is either identical to or sufficiently overlaps justice in the just city. So, the justice instilled in the craftsmen will either make them moderate or require that they be such. Further, the rulers also serve as judges, so they can determine what property belongs to each citizen and what does not (433e). The rulers, then, play a role in moderating the craftsmen. So, only in the just city would paying one's debt and telling the truth always be just for the craftsmen, and this is made possible by the ruling class and, as we see below, the auxiliaries. Finally, Plato can show that his conception of justice, given the work of the craftsmen and the role of rulers as judges, fulfills two of our ordinary conceptions of justice: satisfying needs fairly and judging what properly belongs to each. First, the just city would satisfy the needs of all its citizens. Second, the judges can determine what properly belongs to each citizen. But the craftsmen do not become just simply by doing their own work but rather by doing their own work in the right way: they must have their appetites moderated to be just. This is the work of the auxiliaries, as I argue next.

<sup>8</sup>When rejecting Cephalus' definition of justice, Plato refutes the view by appealing to the following example: you have borrowed a weapon from a friend when they are of sound mind (*sōphronountos*), but now they are mad (*maneis*). It would now be unjust to return the weapon.

Polemarchus starts off defending Cephalus' definition of justice, but after being examined by Socrates, he clarifies that justice is benefiting one's friends and harming one's enemies. So, how is this the work of the auxiliaries, and does Plato resolve the problems raised against it? Socrates raises numerous problems with this definition. Justice is like a craft but does not have a specific product or, at least, one that is useful (332d–333e). One who knows a craft can also do the opposite of the craft well, so a just person would also be best at being unjust (333e–334b). A friend must not only appear good but also be good, otherwise you would end up harming a friend or helping an enemy (334c–335a). And a just person cannot harm another human being, since the work of a just person is to make others more virtuous, not less (335b–d). Socrates' final criticism seems to rule out my interpretation directly. Can the justice of the auxiliaries in the good city be benefiting their friends and harming their enemies?

It is explicitly stated that the work of the class is to guard (374d–375a). Guarding the city requires the auxiliaries to be savage to their enemies and gentle to their citizens (375b), so their work relates to fighting enemies of the city to protect the citizens as well as ensuring the citizens' overall benefit. Their work also requires them to distinguish friend from enemy (376b). Their work seems to be exactly the view of Polemarchus, but there is an immediate problem. The work of the auxiliaries is initially required by the luxurious city, the sick city (372e). Does the work of the auxiliaries remain the same in the cleansed city?

To perform their work, the auxiliaries need to be educated in gymnastics and music and poetry (376e). But the education in music and poetry purifies the city, and yet the class of the auxiliaries remains (399e). This education also has a determinate outcome: The auxiliaries are made graceful with the ability to determine what is omitted or lacking in a finely crafted thing (401d–e). Such a person finds beautiful things pleasant and rejects what is shameful (401e). What they can recognize are forms of moderation, courage, frankness, and magnificence, that is, people with good character (402c). This addresses two of the problems Socrates raises concerning Polemarchus' definition of justice. The auxiliaries, being educated in music and poetry, will have no interest in being unjust for personal gain insofar as they would be unwilling to do shameful actions. For the auxiliaries, it is the character they acquire through this education that prevents them from having interest in being unjust, but they still must recognize injustice and its aim—acquiring more than one's fair share—in order to do their work. Though they must recognize how to act unjustly,

they must at the same time lack the corresponding desire to commit unjust actions. Thus, the second problem above (333e–334b) is dissolved. And, given that they recognize virtue in other human beings, the auxiliaries will be able to distinguish friend from enemy, those who appear and actually are good from those who are not.<sup>9</sup> So, the third problem, too, is dissolved.

The product of this work is virtuous citizens (424a), in particular, the craftsmen. This resolves the first problem concerning the product of justice: The auxiliaries produce the appropriate virtues in the souls of the craftsmen, their own virtue being produced by the work of the rulers by means of their education. We can now address the final problem by addressing who is actually a friend and who is actually an enemy. The auxiliaries, being able to recognize virtue and vice, will be able to recognize when a craftsman is acting immoderately or unjustly: not paying one's debts or lying for personal gain. The auxiliaries, watching over the virtue of craftsmen, would then be able to guard the city from becoming wealthy or impoverished (421e–422a). Moderate desires and moderate craftsmen are friends, and immoderate desires and immoderate craftsmen are enemies. Thus, the auxiliaries would need to harm the immoderate desires of a citizen and remove them while remaining friendly to the moderate desires of moderate craftsmen. Thus, benefitting their friends (here, promoting moderate appetites) and harming their enemies (eliminating immoderate ones) is consistent with the just person not harming anyone. The auxiliaries perform their work in making the individual better and not harming them.

But the auxiliaries must also protect the city from any attack by foreigners. This appears to entail that the auxiliaries would make another human being worse, injuring or killing those invading the just city. Plato often considers not simply life, but the good life, worth living.<sup>10</sup> Plato holds that death is not always a wrong, so we cannot simply conclude that auxiliaries killing or injuring in war when they are attacked implies that they harm their enemies.<sup>11</sup> Further, the same reasoning above about handling

<sup>9</sup>To be clear, the auxiliaries do not know the Good but rather can recognize who is good, those who have any or all of the virtues, from those who lack them. They cannot distinguish them by means of a rational account.

<sup>10</sup>One instance is *Crito* 48b.

<sup>11</sup>See *Gorgias* 512a and 481a. Both passages imply that death could be a benefit to someone. But death need not be a benefit either. Socrates' case in *Crito* is an example. Socrates is simply not wronged in being killed. So, killing here could remain neutral: the auxiliaries do no wrong in killing their enemy.

immoderate desires can apply but with one caveat: the foreign enemy is not benefitted. In Book II, Socrates notes that the cause of war is exceeding the limits of the necessary (373d). Plato also assumes that any city that has excessive desires will have classes that oppose each other, so even if such a city appears one, it contains many cities (422e). What the auxiliaries do is turn these opposing classes in the attacking city against each other, using the excessive desires already present in these classes against each other, and the auxiliaries aid the non-ruling class to overthrow the current ruling class by offering them the money and power they currently lack (422d–423b). While the auxiliaries do not actively harm those they pit against each other, since it is the immoderate desires already present in the parts of the attacking city that do harm,<sup>12</sup> they nonetheless fail to benefit them. The immoderate desires remain in the enemy. This is not possible for a citizen in the just city. This seems acceptable, however, in Plato's eyes because they are not friends, insofar as they have immoderate desires and are foreign to the city.<sup>13</sup> The auxiliaries defend justice and prevent further harm by means of their character, recognizing how to defend themselves against external immoderate desires. And this is what they owe the city: the extermination of the threat of immoderate desires both internal and external to the city. They can do this by means of their education. But their education requires that someone actually know what Justice is and what the Good is to censor the stories and develop the virtues required of an auxiliary.

<sup>12</sup>Accepting the view of justice that each does their own work and not the work of others, the rulers of this immoderate city want more, hence attacking another city for its goods, but the auxiliaries can only pit another class against these rulers by offering them goods and the possibility of rule. One could argue that this is unjust. But the other class only agrees because of the immoderate desires already present in them. So, we can see that it might be possible that the rulers are benefitted by being killed or being dethroned, since they are not just rulers, but it is hard to argue that the other class is benefitted, the one that overthrows its rulers, since they will fail to be just rulers as well given that they also have excessive desires.

<sup>13</sup>I share a similar view as Leo Strauss on this particular issue (1964, 73). I do not take Plato to identify justice with beneficence or claim that the former entails the latter. Strauss, though, takes Polemarchus' view on justice to remain preserved in the discussion of the just city. My view is distinct in the sense that I take all three views to be present in the just city but not as preserved, per se, but as revised, resolving the problems Socrates raises. I also distinguish a distinct enemy that the auxiliaries have, immoderate desires and bad character, and not simply foreign regimes. This is important, since I take it that neither the auxiliaries nor philosopher-kings have interest in attacking another city or being enemies with them, since they have no need or desire for war, given that the source of war is going beyond need.

The greatest challenge to my reading is Thrasymachus' view, and this is for two reasons. First, there is both a moral and philosophical repugnance to Thrasymachus' views on justice and his praise of injustice. Second, and more importantly, his view, like those of Cephalus and Polemarchus, seems to be ruled out by Socrates' criticisms in Book I. Socrates gets Thrasymachus to agree that only the precise ruler would not mistake what is to their own advantage (340e–341a). But the precise ruler, like any other precise craftsman, does not pursue their own advantage but that of the subject matter of their craft, what they rule over (342e). Further, no ruler or craftsman rules willingly but seeks a wage for their rule (346e–347a). It is hard to accept these arguments and yet still hold that justice is the advantage of the stronger. On the other hand, between these two passages, Socrates claims that justice is more profitable than injustice (345a) and argues this at the end of Book I as well. So, we are either at an impasse or somehow both sets of claims are true. I argue that justice is both the good of another (the ruler rules for the good of the other citizens) and one's own good (justice is more profitable than injustice.)

The work of the guardians, the philosopher-kings, seems to be explicitly stated in the text: the rulers direct each individual to be raised and trained to do the work they are naturally suited for (423d). The result is that both the individual and the city will be, not many, but one (423d). In order to assign each citizen their work, the philosopher-king needs to know the Good, something that is separate from the sensible world. To know the Good, the philosopher-king must follow the path to this wisdom by turning their soul and power of reason in the right direction (518e). Once someone knows the Good, the agent can determine how to act rationally both in private and public (517c). If knowledge is what makes one stronger (340c, 477d),<sup>14</sup> and knowing the Good makes all other things beneficial (505a), including any action, private or public, then the rulers gain what is advantageous for themselves. Further, they order the city by means of this knowledge so they can raise those capable to be more equipped to pursue this knowledge and be better educated (520b–c). Finally, their work is not only to assign each individual one's work but also bring about good character in each, which includes themselves. Having complete virtue by knowing the Good is more

<sup>14</sup>The claim here is made by Glaucon, and he uses another term for “strong” (“*errōmenos*”), but it is hard to imagine Socrates denying this claim that knowledge is the strongest power to have. It sits at the top of the divided line.

advantageous than the virtue of the auxiliaries or craftsmen (518d–519a), since this enables them to make all things in public and private good.

But Socrates is also clear that these philosophers must be persuaded and compelled to come back down into the cave and rule from time to time to share in the work of the city (519e–520a). So, now it is clear that the rulers of the good city do not choose to rule for their own sake, thus, their work does not appear to be what is the advantage of the stronger. Further, Plato makes clear that the rulers care for and guard the well-being of the other citizens. We have arrived at the same impasse expressed at the beginning of this section: the rule of the philosophers is both advantageous for them and for those they rule.

I do not think we can resolve this tension completely, and Plato holds onto each view. To show Plato holds both views, I consider two objections from Plato himself and show that they leave us in the same impasse. The first criticism is that, like the ship's captain, the rulers of the just city do not seek their own good but that of those over whom they rule (341c–342e). The second criticism is that no one desires to rule willingly but demands a wage (347b–e). I argue that these criticisms are partially overcome or are consistent with justice being the advantage of the stronger for the philosopher-king.

The first criticism suffers at least two problems. The criticism requires the radical separation of the ship's captain from the sailors: the captain is not another sailor. But the ruler is another citizen and brother to all other citizens of the city (414e–415a).<sup>15</sup> So, if the ruler looks after the good of all the citizens, she must also look after her own good as well. Further, Plato admits in the *Gorgias* that the ship's captain does not know if he benefits the sailors or his passengers by moving them from place to place and not letting them drown (511e–512b). So, at best, the ship's captain looks after the good of sailors only in respect to sailing. This is not the case with the ruler of the just city. The philosopher-king must know the Good and look after the good of the other citizens. But knowing the Good is to the advantage of the rulers, making them the stronger and enabling them not just to govern well but to live well publicly and privately. In other words, the philosopher-kings, unlike the ship's captain, must look toward

<sup>15</sup>We cannot reject this view, even though it is part of the noble lie, since both the beginning of Book IV and the compulsion of philosopher-kings entail this view: No one group of the city is to be made extremely happy at the expense of the happiness of the whole city (420b–c, 519e–520a).

their own good, knowing the Good, to do their work of producing what is good for the other citizens.

The second criticism appears to hold straightforwardly until we look at the details in Book VII. Plato is clear that the philosopher-kings are persuaded, not merely compelled, to rule and would do so willingly (520d). The reason these rulers would be persuaded and be willing to rule is that they are better educated (520b) and truly rich and happy living a good and intelligent life (*emphronos*) (521a). Finally, why assert that their justice is the advantage of the stronger? Although the other citizens of the just city have various virtues, these virtues are claimed to be closer to things that belong to the body and are instilled by habit and practice. In contrast, the virtue of reason (*phronēesai*) is always present and, if turned in the right direction, is useful and beneficial (518e–519a). So, the virtue of the philosopher-king is superior, stronger, and more beneficial, even though coming down to rule the citizen is not desirable in itself.

The impasse itself does solve one problem: The rule of the philosopher-kings produces advantage for the rulers and the other citizens. So, the moral repugnance of Thrasymachus' view has been dissolved by the work of the philosopher-kings. But the philosopher-kings cannot achieve the good of the whole without producing their own advantage, real virtue in the human soul.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, the philosopher-kings do not find it desirable to rule the city, assigning jobs and making sure each does their own work, because it distracts them from contemplation of the Good. But it is just for them to do this work, since this is what they owe the city and the individuals in every class. On the contrary, the philosopher who spontaneously arises in a city with a different form of rule does no wrong by not ruling in her own city, since the city did not rear her to be a philosopher (520b). Does this mean that Thrasymachus' definition of justice does not apply, since the spontaneously produced philosopher has a more advantageous life? I answer "no" for two reasons. First, any human being must spend time in the sensible world. We have bodies. Plato stresses that the philosopher-king is more able to partake of both ways of life, practical

<sup>16</sup>Once again, I appear to have a similar view as Strauss. We both hold that just character is produced by doing the work of philosophy; knowing the Good is the advantage of the stronger. But Strauss excludes this completely from the life of the philosopher when they are ruling (1964, 127–28). But, as I show, Plato asserts that both lives have advantage insofar as having real virtue is always to one's advantage, that is, the life in the cave ruling the city and the life contemplating the Good and the interconnection between all intelligible things.

and contemplative (520c). We need to be able to live well in both the sensible and intelligible realms, although there is some disadvantage to that condition. Second, the philosopher who spontaneously arises in another form of rule must also dwell in a political community, one that might be hostile to her own being (517a). Neither philosopher can be said to have the greater advantage. It might just be the case for Plato that justice here in the cave is tragic: There is no conception of justice that can be fully instantiated to everyone's advantage in each case. This view is at least consistent with Plato's view that justice as a Form is separate and sensible beings in the cave can only participate in it.

My reading provides reasonable evidence that Plato wrote the first book of the *Republic* with the whole in mind. The definitions presented in Book I by three interlocutors, although shown to be problematic, are woven into the fabric of the just city. The definitions identify the work of each respective class, that is, what each class owes the city. Finally, by working out the problems of these definitions presented in Book I, we can say that the definition of justice stated in Book IV, doing one's own work and not meddling in the affairs of others, is neither empty nor completely devoid of our ordinary conceptions of justice. We come to know that Cephalus' definition (paying one's debts and telling the truth) is seen in the craftsmen's work of satisfying the needs of the citizens by trading fairly and telling the truth, Polemarchus' definition (benefitting one's friends and harming one's enemies) is seen in the auxiliaries' work of providing benefit for all citizens insofar as they ensure the craftsmen develop the right desires and eliminate unnecessary ones, and Thrasymachus' definition (the advantage of the stronger) is seen in the work of the philosopher-kings; organizing the city and assigning work to individuals benefits both other citizens by providing them with orderly lives and the appropriate virtues and themselves by developing real virtue through cultivating the knowledge necessary for ruling—knowledge of the Good.

### WORKS CITED

- Annas, J. 1981. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
 Bloom, A., trans. 1991. *The Republic of Plato*. 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books.  
 Irwin, T. 1995. *Plato's Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
 Kahn, C. 1993. Proleptic Composition in the *Republic*, Or Why Book I was Never a Separate Dialogue. *The Classical Quarterly* 43: 131–142.

- Kraut, R. 1992. The Defense of Justice in Plato's *Republic*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut, 311–337. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, L. 1964. *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vlastos, G. 1991. *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.



## Popper's Plato Revisited

*John Rist*

*"I understand that less than I understand Plato's Good."*

—*Amphis*, *Amphicrates fr. 6 Kassel* (fourth century comedy).

*"My cure from all Platonism has always been Thucydides. Thucydides and, perhaps, Machiavelli's Principe are most closely related to myself by the unconditional will not to gull oneself and to see reason in reality—not in "reason", still less in 'morality'."*

—*Nietzsche*, *Twilight of the Idols* 10.2.

*"The state should be considered as a society for the prevention of crime, i.e., of aggression."*

—*Karl Popper*, *The Open Society* 105.

Let me start with a distinction: between what an author intends—insofar as one can identify it—and the way he (or she) is interpreted or misinterpreted. Then we should ask how far we should blame an author for the effects of his work, especially if his work has been wittingly or unwittingly misinterpreted. When, after sixty years, I reread Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* and found him proclaiming Plato as perhaps the

---

J. Rist (✉)

Department of Classics, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

master philosopher of all time and simultaneously the purveyor of highly obnoxious “totalitarian” ideas (31), I wondered whether he was insufficiently aware of such distinctions, whether he was thinking of the more familiar subjects of part two of his book (Hegel and Marx) when composing part one, subtitled *The Spell of Plato*.<sup>1</sup>

Popper identifies Plato’s apparently totalitarian ideas within the framework of a distinction between open and closed societies. All societies can be roughly listed under one of these two rubrics: closed societies are “totalitarian,” albeit an old totalitarianism can be distinguished from a newer version, being apparently less obnoxious in that its star exponent, Plato, was fundamentally benevolent and his sociological analysis more perceptive than that of his successors (162–163).

Before accepting this, we need to know what precisely characterizes a closed society—and Popper lists several features of Plato’s various political constructions that he believes fill the bill. Starting with more general themes, he argues that Plato is a historicist: that is, a thinker who yearns for a past “tribal” society and believes that the transition from such “tribalism” to an Open Society is to be understood—apparently historically—as “the Fall of Man” (187). Secondly, he claims that Plato regards the state—note the word—as an organism (75, 165) to which the goods of the individual must be subordinated, not in the interests of the individual but of the “state” itself. Thirdly, he thinks that Plato has no time for “freedom.”

I shall reply that the first two of these claims are false and that the third raises questions of great interest for the historian of philosophy but is used by Popper—with the help of ambiguity and anachronism, spiced at times with historical fantasy—to support a consistently misguided account, depending not least on literalist readings of Plato’s “mythical” texts, of his political project as a whole. If Popper is mistaken about all three of these basic principles, it will be hardly surprising if, when he identifies what he thinks of as “totalitarian” features in Plato’s project, he fails to understand their true nature and conceptual origin.

Popper’s three claims must be understood against the historical realities of Greece in the fourth and fifth centuries BC. He paints earlier Greek society as “ridden with taboos” and “haunted by magic and superstition”: a closed aristocratic world run by warriors in which everyone knew their place and where that place was supposed to be natural. By way of contrast,

<sup>1</sup> My references to *The Open Society* are to Popper (2002).

he presents the “open” society: something like what was urged on us in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

Similar beliefs about the ideal society can be recognized more generally among the cultural élites in much of the West, though the United States—albeit rarely among its intellectuals—still to a degree bucks the trend. And the development of such orthodoxy in the years after World War II in part explains the astonishing success of Popper’s book. For though there have been protests against the historicity of some of Popper’s claims that Athens in the democratic days of the Great Generation “came very close to abolishing slavery” (42), or that Euripides alludes to “the Athenian *movement* (my italics) against slavery” (67), Popper continued to defend those claims in response to the objections of Levinson (1953) and others. And their unreality seemed little to worry his disciples.

There are many such oddities in *The Open Society*—and I merely note in passing that chapter seven is titled “The Principle of Leadership”: a phrase perhaps intended to remind the reader of the German “*Führerprinzip*.” Certainly one gets the impression that Popper believes Plato to be some kind of proto-fascist, and I can only explain the widespread acceptance of his presentation of Greek history as dependent on an acceptance by his readers of an idealized version of the myth of the “Glory that was Greece”: such readers being at the same time haunted by guilty memories of the many Western intellectuals whose all-too-frequent love for Hitler or Stalin in the 1930s contributed in its minor way to the coming of the concentration camps and gulags. Perhaps such guilt about the shameful past of many of their academic predecessors encouraged them to accept Popper’s account of whatever at first glance might look totalitarian while applauding whatever he might repeat uncritically about ancient regimes identified as “democracies.” Yet in some respects Athenian democracy resembled the People’s Democracies of postwar Eastern Europe rather than the Western version—as Socrates discovered to his cost when he was condemned to death (without right of appeal) by a larger majority of the jurors than those who had voted him guilty.

For, as we shall see, one thing Plato (as some his contemporaries such as Aristophanes and Thucydides) did understand is that the word “democracy” can conceal some very unpleasant realities, especially if you treat it as always implying egalitarianism. Needless to say, Popper (91–93) offers only very limited analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of that latter ideal, let alone whether it is a necessary feature of a flawless democracy: not least when he invites us to slide from accepting equality before the law

to accepting uncritical proposals about the suitability of particular individuals to determine what good laws are (439–440).

Part One of Popper's book deals with Plato as a second and greater enemy of the Open Society—Heraclitus being the first—and much of it has been recognized as grossly unfair. Yet, although many of Popper's claims are tendentious, they leave an unpleasant and disturbing taste in the mouth, which, if you reread the book, still lingers. For Popper was onto something important, though he misunderstood the data he was trying to explain. If that is the case, it remains to determine the nature of that "something important" and why Popper seems to lose sight of the wood for the trees, hence why his conclusions are significantly misguided.

In brief, I want to argue that Popper's heart was, to some extent, in the right place, but that his way of proceeding indicates that he neither understood what Plato wanted to do nor, more broadly, the basic nature and assumptions of Greek society, nor more psychologically the more than merely calculative mentalities required if human beings are to flourish; above all, if more controversially, that he was too ready to assume that Plato's pre-Christian philosophical world was close enough to our own to make superficial comparisons readily informative rather than deeply misleading.

Let us start by assuming that there is something "utopian" about the *Republic*. But what does that mean? Did Plato think of Callipolis as a merely unrealizable sketch on the basis of which we may model our own souls; sometimes, as at the end of Book IX, he appears to suggest that, and some modern readers have taken him in that sense. But there are too many passages that point to the contrary (458c, 466d, etc.); we cannot dispose of Popper so easily. Plato does seem to think, at least in the *Republic*, that although it is immensely difficult to establish the ideal society, it is not totally impossible.<sup>2</sup> That does not mean, however, that his ideal city, even if achievable, was not *also*, even primarily, intended as a template with reference to which we can remodel our own souls and thus defeat Greek premonitions about Fate of which Popper was very well aware.

Such preliminaries clarified, we can begin with one particular feature of the *Republic* which Popper repeatedly denounces as the advocacy of

<sup>2</sup> My view on this point approximates to that of Morrison (2007). By the time we come to the *Laws*, as we shall see, we find that Plato, if perhaps nostalgically (3.691c and more definitively 4.713c), has given up any hope of the inauguration of an ideal society: something second best is all that can be hoped for.

fraudulent “propaganda” (131–134, 189): Plato’s account, that is, of the “noble lie”<sup>3</sup>—and beyond that politically motivated lying more generally. It is not clear from *The Open Society* exactly what Popper’s view of lying, or more generally of deceiving is, but if he believes that anyone in antiquity thought that *all* lying and deceiving is immoral, he is seriously mistaken; it seems to have been Augustine who first took anything like such an extreme view (as later did Kant) —and from Christian principles, or at least his interpretation of them.

As for Plato, he tells us in the first book of the *Republic* that we should not tell the whole truth to a madman (331c), and it is certainly clear from his discussion of the noble lie that he believes that deception of some sort is often justified in the interest of the *polis* as a whole. Not that that implies, as Popper frequently charges, that Plato’s *polis* is an organic individual whose good transcends that of the individuals who compose it; on the contrary the good of the *polis* (the rendering of the Greek word as ‘state’ is misleading) is to be interpreted as whatever helps generate a patriotic society in which all rejoice at the same goods and are saddened by the same evils in the life of their country. In this sense, for Plato, our attitude to the *polis* is to reflect our individual experience: if my finger hurts, I am hurt; if my fellow citizen is harmed, I am harmed (5.462a ff.).

At this point in the story it looks as though Popper wants to reduce patriotism to nationalism, and he similarly misleads in assuming the decrees of the Guardians to be aimed at “class rule” (e.g. 89) if that phrase is meant to imply (as it normally does) that the aim of the rulers is to exploit the subjects. Popper’s analysis here (as elsewhere) is too simplistic, too reductionist, too literalist and too unwilling to examine why Plato says what he does.

Plato’s Guardians do not rule (and sometimes lie) merely for their own advantage—though it is right and therefore indirectly to their advantage to rule—but as Socrates points out first of all to Thrasymachus, the good ruler (the ruler “in the strict sense”) rules for the advantage of his subjects (1.342e). In fact, the noble lie is intended to persuade everyone to accept the truth about themselves and their capacities; indeed, it is primarily the *rulers* who are to be “deceived” by it. The real question therefore is what kind of deception the lie entails—even if it is believable—and that, as noted by Glaucon (3. 415c), is unlikely.

<sup>3</sup>Of the many accounts of the “noble lie” one of the most subtle and careful is that of Schofield (2007).

Schofield's approach to this (see note 4) is on the right lines. The lie is intended to supply a foundational myth for the ideal *polis*, as myths about Athena and Erechtheus were the foundational myths among the Athenians for the belief—which Plato knew few thinkers would have taken *au pied de la lettre*—that they alone are an autochthonous people. Plato's aim—even for those who recognize that the noble lie is strictly untrue—is to induce a mentality necessary for the good of the society in whole and in part. As citizens we are—whatever our various capacities—all in this together, all born from mother earth. The noble lie should be read as a Platonic myth—and all societies (and individuals) need myths; they cannot live, as Popper seems to believe, on arid rationalism alone. This myth points toward a desired and noble reality that must underlie the condition of the good man as of the good society, though its goodness, as we shall see, cannot be fully expressed. Contrary to Popper, it is arguable that the post-Cartesian world needs to be “re-mythologized”; all myths are not Wagnerian.

Although Popper recognizes that Plato's overriding concern in the *Republic* is to ensure the city's very survival, he seems to forget the importance of that basic fact when he examines what Plato believed necessary to ensure it. But it is not only Plato—nor Greeks more generally—who take such matters seriously; at the beginning of World War II, it required less than an hour for the British Parliament to suspend most of the freedoms developed in the nation since Magna Carta. In Greek times, as in a Britain threatened with annihilation by Hitler, defeat in war—often facilitated by home-grown betrayal by treasonable factions—could lead to the enslaving of entire populations, or at least of the women and children, the men having already had their throats cut.

At the end of the Peloponnesian War, the failure and substantially self-inflicted defeat of democratic Athens herself would have led to its total annihilation had it not been for the comparative generosity of the victorious Spartan militarists. Though those who feel themselves safe cozy can easily be induced to ignore it, genocidal activity is a recurring feature of past and present history. Hence, we should recall that in Book II of *Politics*, Aristotle agrees with Plato's claim that keeping the city unified is of paramount importance, even though he disagrees with the methods advocated in the *Republic* to ensure it: not, though, because they were ideologically undesirable but pragmatically and perceptively because they would not work.

Popper notes that Plato believes in some kind of Fall of Man (187), though he claims (wrongly) that he identified this with the breakdown of

a “closed society.” But Plato envisages the effects of that Fall quite differently from what we read in Christian accounts such as Augustine’s (with which Popper surely invites us to see parallels). For the absolute ban on all forms of direct deception prescribed by Augustine depends on a theology that holds that after the Fall we live in a penal condition in which survival in *worldly* terms depends on the need (both in just wars and if we sit as judges) to command objectively bad but pragmatically necessary acts. By contrast, in Plato’s world what matters in the first instance is the survival of the city, and beyond that the full-blooded (and un-Augustinian) integrity of the good man whether he lives in a good city or a bad. Despite Popper’s assault on Plato’s “propaganda,” he and Plato would presumably agree that some sorts of lying and deception—for example, by one’s own countries’ spies—are a wholly necessary, indeed desirable and morally acceptable “evil” not only in wartime but in times of concern about the prospect of some possibly upcoming war or other national disaster.

\* \* \*

Leaving aside the specific matter of lying in the interest of survival, we can pass to more general observations and, eventually, enquire how for Plato both the good of every individual and the related good of the society as a whole—a far from necessarily totalitarian aim—are to be realized. And we shall see that what causes Plato the kind of difficulties that Popper diagnoses is not his “historicism” or even his “hatred” of democracy but his account of human nature and human worth, as also of the nature of that Goodness itself to which his ideal society somehow is intended to approximate.

The nature of Popper’s Open Society is to be largely understood in terms of a particular account of what it is to be free: an account—though not unknown—normally considered incomplete, misleading, and often ultimately false until the end of the Middle Ages, and certainly alien to Plato’s philosophical thinking. Yet that account, though far from originally democratic, has come more recently to be held as pointing to a particular feature of democratic societies. So ancient *criticisms* of such “freedom” will often be linked with criticism of what then passed as democracies, whether or not they are democratic in the modern acceptance of the word.

Popper himself says (272) that “modern totalitarianism is only an episode within the perennial revolt against freedom and reason.” And he

assumes that we all know, and always have known, what freedom is. But that assumption, as I have suggested, is misleading: for most ancient and medieval thinkers, to be ‘free’ is not to exhibit a freedom of indifference—that is, to suppose that one is free when one has the opportunity to choose differently in accordance with what is now often referred to as the Principle of Alternative Possibilities—but as the ability only to choose what is good. Just as God would only choose the good, so the good man, in possession of Plato’s ring of Gyges, would reject the option of killing his political opponents, not because he has insufficient strength to pull the trigger of his Saturday Night Special, but because he is not that kind of person. The “could not” in the statement “I could not do that sort of thing” is a moral “could not.”

Plato himself, in his account of Athenian democracy in book eight of the *Republic*, argues that what we might call “unlimited autonomy”—here he calls it “freedom” pejoratively (cf. *Laws* 701d)—is taken to be a mere licence to do whatever one likes in so far as this is possible within the conventionally accepted rules of any particular—but especially democratic—society (though we have noticed that the word “democracy” itself introduces further problems). Popper predictably assumes that Plato’s criticism of democracy in the *Republic* is mere aristocratic propaganda. Plato would rightly disagree; he would say that whatever “real” democracy is, he is pointing to socially unacceptable, even wicked behavior existing in and encouraged by states identifiable as “democratic” in his own day. He would hope that Popper is not assuming that in a democracy politicians and public can do no wrong. And he would add that, contrary to Popper (114–115), we should be concerned not only with preventing bad rulers from doing too much harm, but hopefully preventing people like Hitler from seizing the sovereignty in the first place. Popper seems to think that because such people have to depend on their cronies and lackeys, their power is not unchecked and should not have attracted Plato’s excessive, as he thinks, attention. The only reply to that is that it is certainly too unchecked for the good of the citizenry.

But “freedom” and “democracy” are merely tips of the conceptual iceberg. The society that Popper thinks of as “open” is the product of a European civilization which—as I have already intimated when discussing lying—has developed an account of the human person quite different from anything known in antiquity, though foreshadowings of some parts of it are often visible in the writings of ancient philosophers, not least of Plato himself. And although Christianity has largely faded in Europe,

leaving the “person” free-floating, that is, undefended by the theistic supports by which it was once maintained and by the Christian world in which it had been developed, the concept of the person that emerged from that Christian world is still widely, if uncritically, accepted, though with dechristianization it is gradually being whittled away.

It is therefore worthwhile spelling out this concept of “person”—of which the ancient world was largely ignorant—a little further, and we may conveniently start with the definition of Boethius that a person is an individual substance of a rational nature. Ideally, this needs to be explicated and probably also clarified at length, not least to determine how ‘rational’ is to be understood, but it may seem not unreasonable to argue that the most important point on which Boethius might require us to reflect is encased in the word “individual.” Does this mean that an individual human being is simply a member of the human set, or is it to be understood as indicating a unique and intrinsically valuable personal substance whose worth (cf. *Laws* 744b) —or dignity, to use the more traditional term—depends on his raw existence, not ultimately on the *kind* of person he is: not, that is, on any particular set of qualities he may display.

According to the account developed in the West since the times of Augustine and Boethius, persons are understood as a combination of soul and body, capable of reasoning, self-awareness and other cognitive activities, possessors of a certain self-determination, capable of empathy with and sympathy for others—on whom their proper development depends from the time they were conceived—and possessed of some sort of moral capacity. Though often in radical disagreement about what morality is, persons are normally willing to admit that somehow there is a real difference between right and wrong. But above all persons are unique, not just members of the human set.<sup>4</sup> That last point is, of course, a major theme of Popper’s book, for the totalitarian regimes of which he wrote tried in their differing ways to subordinate the individual to the state, the race or at least to the March of History. And something similar is what Popper accuses Plato of doing.

Bearing in mind this emphasis on individual uniqueness that our Western concept of persons still exhibits, we now return directly to Plato—and it is not difficult to recognize the many features of his proposed Republic that Popper identified as totalitarian. Our question is, as already

<sup>4</sup>For a more detailed and historically sensitive version of this account of the person see Rist (2020).

noted, was he right to do so, and if not, whether he was misled by having a concept of the person, hence of metaethics and human psychology, by which to measure ancient ideas, which not only does not exist in Plato, but which is substantially absent from the general moral mentality of Greek antiquity. If we ask that question, we shall also better understand what Nietzsche (and Thucydides)—to whom I alluded at the outset—understood about ancient Greece, even though his view of Plato as a mere Christian-style moralist is obviously as inadequate as is Popper's view that he was a guiding-light for the fascists.

Nietzsche thought of Thucydides as a realist, a man who called a spade a spade, and as a reliable witness to the merits of Greek political realism, so let us start with two examples of that realism. The first is the debate in the Athenian democratic assembly about the treatment to be meted out to the rebellious Mytilenians (*History* 3.37); the second the so-called Melian dialogue between the representatives of Athens and its rebellious one-time "ally" Melos (*History* 5.89). There is no reason to deny that both passages—not to speak of both events—would have been known to Plato nor that he would have been interested in the moral problems they raise. First, then, consider the Mytilenians. The Athenian democratic politician Cleon wanted them put to the sword as an example to others; his victorious opponent in the Assembly (an otherwise unknown Diodotus) urged leniency, but—in Machiavellian spirit—because leniency would be more beneficial to the Athenians; Diodotus' arguments, that is, are not moral but prudential.

In the matter of Melos a similar "realism" is displayed, though in this case too it is virtually certain that the language Thucydides uses is his own rather than a mere transcript of what was said at the time. Nevertheless, the point the democratic Athenians want to make is that justice is something to which the weak (as in Glaucon's speech in *Republic* Book II) have to appeal because they have no other recourse; in Nietzschean terms it is in effect a sniveling way for the weak to try to exert their (in this case impotent) will to power.

Thus Thucydides on the mentality of democratic Athens, indeed of ancient political thinking more generally, and a glance at Plato will soon reveal that this kind of amoral, nihilistic approach to politics—whether or not encouraged by democracies—is exactly what he opposes: both in the cruder version of Calicles in the *Gorgias* who asserts some sort of natural law of the jungle and in a more radically cynical form with Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic*. According to Thrasymachus, we live in a

value-free universe where man is the measure of all things, and part of the “measuring” is the apparently convenient moral distinction between right and wrong. Plato holds that position to be philosophically incoherent.

If Plato were the sort of totalitarian Popper supposes him to be—and a spurious moral distinction between a nasty Plato and a nice, if hypothetical, Socrates to which Popper regularly appeals (179, 189) will not help him out for Book I of the *Republic*—why does he so severely reject the views of Callicles and Thrasymachus? The answer is that he is a politically minded psychologist and moralist, as Nietzsche recognized, but a moralist of a particular type, basing his morality on the existence of an extra-temporal spiritual order and cosmos to which we, at our best, will actively strive, whether personally or as a community, to belong. Goodness (hardly given more than a page or two in *The Open Society*), not power, is the center of Plato's moral and political world; modern totalitarians have hardly followed suit.

I have argued elsewhere the not unfamiliar thesis that Plato was drawn into metaphysics, and especially the metaphysics of goodness, in order to defend morality against the theories of constant change developed by serious thinkers such as Heraclitus and against the ‘sophists’ who, at the end of the fifth century, challenged the norms of what Popper calls the earlier Greek “tribal” society,<sup>5</sup> not least by denying the fixed sense of moral terms. Plato, Popper tells us again and again (e.g. 48), wants to go back to that primitive aristocratic model or a revised version of it, to that Golden age as described in Hesiod's famous myth of the metals to which he devotes much space in the *Republic* and elsewhere.

Such an interpretation radically misunderstands not only the *Republic* but the entire attitude of Plato—and Socrates—to traditional morality and traditional ways of thought. Plato's educational project is not to return to Homer (let alone to Hesiod) as the educator of Greece—indeed, as Popper well knows and castigates, he banishes Homer's work from the ideal city—unless, as he puts it, it can be shown to be morally harmless (*Republic* 10, 607e). What Plato wants is to substitute philosophy for such traditional teachings precisely because they have failed to meet sophistic—in capitals and lower-case—challenges: a fact of life that Plato's very different contemporaries Aristophanes and Euripides understood and recorded as well as he did, though—so far as we know—remaining unable to offer solutions for the problems they had unearthed.

<sup>5</sup> See Rist (2012), especially 4–5 and 63.

Plato may have been nostalgic about the old ways (as were others of his thinking contemporaries such as Aristophanes), but he knows that times have changed. The philosophical education he hopes to substitute for the older ways of holding society together is proposed, not least, because, after the sophists, there is no going back. The poets, Plato repeats, in the *Ion* as in the *Republic*, may or may not talk sense, but quite literally they do not know what they are talking about. The newly enlightened have destroyed the old civic virginity, and, like it or not, there is no returning to older educational practices and the society that followed them. That alone makes what Popper thinks of as Plato's antiprogressive historicism look like a seriously misguided account of Plato's analysis of the contemporary scene and of the remedies for its defects which he advocates.

This point can be developed if we glance at the "city of pigs," as Glaucon dismissively characterizes a primitive early society outlined in *Republic* Book II. It might be argued that Socrates hankers for it, but he makes no attempt to retain it and has no hesitation in accepting that 'realistically' they must debate the 'inflamed' city—with the intention, of course, of reforming it. Callipolis has very few resemblances to a city of pigs in which philosophical Guardians could find no place. Before the sophists, perhaps, we might have tolerated it, but Greece is now part of a world in which the understandings of philosophy, not the untested and fragile truths of poetry, must inform the minds of the wise. In the *Laws* too (3.679b) something like the city of pigs is again dismissed without much hesitation. In those days, the Athenian tells his friends, when people heard the words 'good' and 'bad', they accepted current interpretations. Their lack of sophistication has given way to that cynicism we meet in contemporary society that only philosophy can cure.

But now we reach the harder part of the story: What kind of goodness does Plato offer us in his defense of a value-laden universe, and what does such goodness imply for human psychology and therefore for human behavior at its best? Plato never delivers a complete answer to these questions, but in at least three dialogues he offers us hints. Hence, it is possible to recognize something of what he is getting at and at the same time understand why Popper, thinking in terms of modern "persons" (as he, but not Boethius, conceives their moral nature), so erroneously found him promoting "fascism"; indeed we shall find what look to Popper like "fascist" ideas to be the products of very non-fascist premises that *also* generate a number of non-"fascist" conclusions.

As a prologue to this discussion, we must note that Popper's claim (13) that for Plato the present world is an illusion is "simply" false, as is his political application of that "illusion" when he comments that Plato thinks that "*all* (my italics) social change is corruption or decay or degeneration." This claim (dependent on a literalist reading of the text in terms of Plato's belief in a supposed law of historical destiny (19, 23) is one that Plato would only make of the perfect state (which is—simply—perfect, and from which, by definition, any variation would generate something inferior). False too is Popper's persistent objection (18) that Plato's ideal society is "racist"; that, presumably, is his anachronistic reinterpretation of an empirical belief that Plato shares with virtually all his contemporaries that Greek society was an improvement on that of the Persians and other "barbarians."

\* \* \*

But the story of Goodness does not begin with the *Republic*. The first dialogue I shall consider is the *Symposium* (though two of its major themes—that there is a "first lovable" and that *eros* is characterized as the desire to satisfy a need—are to be found in embryo in the earlier discussion of friendship in the *Lysis*). In the *Symposium* theories of love, beauty and goodness are set in a standard aristocratic Athenian milieu in which teenage boys are the subject of the erotic attentions (almost as a *rite de passage*) of older lovers who are supposed to initiate them, as a reward, into the civic virtues, however understood. In the first three speeches (of Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus), we meet, directly or by implication, what turns out to be a genuine but misleadingly comprehended distinction between good and bad forms of love; all three speakers (however sophistically) claim to eulogize the good form.

This approach is corrected by Aristophanes, who sets the tone for the rest of the dialogue: He holds that all love is for what we lack and for the beautiful (or, as we might reasonably gloss him, for what seems to the agent to be beautiful). We need and lack that completion that a *specific* beautiful other can provide. That is accepted by Agathon whose flowery and flashy performance goes on to emphasize that love—for beauty—is always inspirational; it is not just a matter of satisfying a need for completion, as Aristophanes had amorally suggested. That correction is further developed by Diotima, whose remarks are passed on to us by Socrates, the next speaker; she tells us that real *eros* is not inspiration *just* by the

beautiful but by the *goodness* of the beautiful (205d), a goodness that urges us to act well, to “beget in the beautiful” (206e5).

What matters most from our present point of view is the latter part of Diotima’s prophetic utterance in which—female not only as a prophetess and perhaps a tribute to females in the Academy,<sup>6</sup> but also as an indicator that mentally there is no specific difference between men and women<sup>7</sup>—Diotima moves (210a) from the Lesser Mysteries to the Greater (in which she claims that Socrates may not be able—might we say not be willing?—to follow her). She begins her account of the erotic mysteries by explaining how on the ‘upward’ path the lover moves from the love of a beautiful body, via the recognition that there are many beautiful bodies, to the claim that the beauty of the soul is to be preferred to that of bodies, then to a recognition of the superior beauty of knowledge, and of laws and institutions (210c), then eventually to the beauty of Beauty itself.<sup>8</sup>

There is only one Form, that of Beauty, in the *Symposium*, but if we look below the surface, its majesty lies in the fact that it represents the greatest of all good things; beauty, that is, seems already to be the showing forth of Goodness. We shall return to that showing forth when we come to the *Republic*, but it is not unreasonable to note at this point that in the *Phaedrus* (250d), Socrates will claim specifically that in our ordinary world the images of beauty are brighter than those of other Forms.

The latter part of Diotima’s programmed ascent has always seemed puzzling, even implausible, since *eros* is now not for the personal *at all*—we have already seen that personal variations are insignificant in bodies, even in souls—but for the impersonal, and as Diotima proceeds further, we learn that the highest beauty is that of Beauty itself (a developed echo of the “first lovable” of the *Lysis*). In these latter stages of the ascent, love between persons (as we would understand it and them) *seems* to have been left behind. Yet Beauty itself is not envisaged as a mere abstraction; it is an

<sup>6</sup>For an argument in defense of that claim, see Rist (2008, 31): the names Axiotheia (=Diotima) plus Lastheneia of Mantinea may be combined as Diotima of Mantinea.

<sup>7</sup>For more on this theme see Rist (2008, 29–33).

<sup>8</sup>Lyne (1980, 262–264) points out that in Augustan Latin poetry (and there are Greek parallels) lovers may go for the romantic attachment to a single beloved, or (like Ovid) for a more cynical enjoyment of all beauties available: interestingly similar and dissimilar to what Diotima has in mind; both she and Ovid find it a mistake to concentrate on one person. The apparent lack of concern for the “partner” in the *Symposium* has regularly disturbed Platonic commentators and demands explanation (on which further below). See Vlastos (1973). Kraut (2008, 285–310, esp. 294–302) is helpful on Aristophanes versus Diotima.

abiding, unchanging metaphysical reality and as such the ultimate object of desire and hence source of creativity for both gods and men, the highest item in the Platonic universe. We shall have to wait for the *Republic* to explain how such a transmutation of “ordinary” love for individual persons (or promiscuously for lots of persons) can be achieved—and at what price.

In our longing for an impersonal metaphysical reality, we recognize that the post-antique concept of a person would seem something to be transcended; presumably one becomes (or is revealed as) a beautified and strictly immaterial mind (though that mind is not Cartesian), and since that mind is impersonal, all successful seekers after such beauty must be similarly characterized. What “we” and Popper might suppose to be the *uniqueness* of each individual person is to be transcended. Qualitatively identical is what good philosophers are at their best and should always try to be; apparently all perfect human beings, insofar as they are mentally perfected, will be only numerically distinct. Individual differences, insofar as they exist through genes or personal history, are metaphysically trivial. We are possessors of worth not because we exist as human beings but because we exist as potentially perfectly qualified souls. If that is a mistake, the mistake is not political, as Popper believed, but metaphysical (as Aristotle would rather have it), though the corrected metaphysics need not turn Plato into a full-blown Aristotelian metaphysician. A revised version of the theory of Forms would rule that out. That, however, is largely a story for another day.

For now, it might seem that when Plato thinks about humans “qualitatively,” what he means is that when we love other humans, what we love is the qualities they exhibit. If that is the case, then Diotima’s apparent move from the personal to the impersonal is less surprising. Plato thinks that what is of value in human beings is not their existence but their good qualities, if any.<sup>9</sup> As we shall see, those without such qualities appear to have no worth whatsoever. That “metaphysically” such a collection of qualities is what Plato thinks of in making evaluations is made more likely if we remember that in the *Timaeus* it seems that each individual item is explained as a sum of its qualities “generated” in the “receptacle” or matrix of transient being.<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \*

<sup>9</sup> See Vlastos (1973); also, Chappell (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Note also the idea of individuals as collections of qualities at *Theaetetus* 157b: a passage beloved of Neoplatonists, especially Porphyry.

But matters are more complicated, as we should expect if I am right that Plato's problems are caused not by political ideology but by metaphysical error. For there is another side to Plato's account of the relations between erotic individuals visible not only in the *Symposium*, but also elsewhere, especially in the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue that in antiquity seems often to have been considered a better version of Plato's theory of *eros*.<sup>11</sup> Yet in the *Symposium* itself we should not forget the speech of Aristophanes in which the unique worth for each of us of his or her "other half" is emphasized. And whatever his other perversities, Alcibiades' drunken antics in the final act of the dialogue indicate the very special character of Socrates himself; certainly in Alcibiades' view there is no one like him. Of course, one might hack away at the significance of this by saying that in the *Republic* the whole point of the exercise is to produce people like Socrates.

But how like? It is hard to believe that Plato thought that Socrates could, as it were, be cloned; yet that would seem to be the implication of his account of the Guardians when perfected, as we shall see. Perhaps he half-realizes the value of individual distinctions to which his own theories seem to object—which brings us back to the philosophical lovers of the *Phaedrus*. These remain together in their pursuit of wisdom (256b), but they are certainly not identical, being right from the start of their relationship of quite different ages. Perhaps they are still only partially perfected. Perhaps that semi-perfect state is the best that Plato's revised account of the three kinds of soul will permit him to claim. We shall return to other aspects of that changed psychology to which Popper should have paid more attention.

For the moment we need only note that the lovers persist in their love—and Plato coins the word "answer-love" (*anteros*) for the attitude developed in the boy in response to the perceived goodness and benevolence of his admirer. He thinks of this attitude as some sort of "friendship" (255e),<sup>12</sup> and at its best the now lifelong lovers rightly deny themselves physical consummation, living and loving together in their pursuit of

<sup>11</sup>For more on this see Rist (2001).

<sup>12</sup>In his earlier appearance in the *Symposium* active pederast Phaedrus hails a woman (Alcestis) in the same way: through *eros* she came to excel in "friendship" (179b). Plato has not yet coined the word *anteros*.

philosophy<sup>13</sup>; in that pursuit the older man persistently works to polish up the statue that is the image of the younger (252d). In brief we conclude that, while the *Symposium* concerns itself with the stages of the return to Beauty itself on the part of the lover of isolated reality, the *Phaedrus* leaves the lovers together in joint and benevolent philosophical pursuits: such perhaps might have been the happier lot for Alcibiades.

It seems that, at least when he wrote the *Phaedrus*, Plato does not require individual differences and interpersonal relations to be discarded in the ascent to Beauty itself but allows them to remain a continuing part of that very search. Perhaps we might conclude that he finds it hard to agree with himself about the absolute and possible desirability of human uniformity. Or perhaps he later came to realize that what he had seen as an ideal situation is impossible. But if that is the case, then Popper is misled not only by his “politically correct” reading of Plato’s Goodness but also by his failure to identify Plato the (perhaps reluctant) self-critic.

For now, however, that too must be left aside, as we turn to another apparently “homogenizing” feature of Diotima’s original proposals. When she speaks of the ascent to Beauty itself, she uses the language of both male and female fertility. Diotima’s beautified soul has joint male and female capacities to create at the highest level: in effect, apparently distinctive male and female minds are male. Distinctive reproductive roles can be bracketed out. That will explain why in the *Republic* females are so obviously appropriate members of the guardian class. Males and females at their best are mentally interchangeable. Plato seems to have no time for the more moderate view that if males and females can perform the same tasks, they will naturally perform them in significantly distinctive ways.

\* \* \*

In the *Symposium*, as we have noted, only one Form, the Form of Beauty, is on stage, though we know that beauty is somehow good—and many scholars in the past have assumed that the *Symposium*’s beauty simply *is* the *Republic*’s goodness: a claim which, as we shall see, is both right and wrong. But in the *Symposium*’s companion-dialogue,<sup>14</sup> the *Phaedo*, we

<sup>13</sup>For Plato’s rejection of anal intercourse in the *Phaedrus* and (more emphatically) in the *Laws* see further Rist (1997).

<sup>14</sup>I return to the “companionship” in the discussion of Plato’s developing psychology below.

find many Forms, though no preeminent Form; and there are also plenty of Forms—of various kinds (moral, mathematical, and of physical substances)—in the *Republic*. There, however, the *Phaedo* and *Symposium* are combined: there is a plurality of Forms *and* one preeminent Form, the Form of the Good. But before looking at the *Republic* we must make a necessary digression, which will eventually help explain something of Plato's uncertainty about "persons" (to use an anachronistic term) in the *Symposium* (and elsewhere) while indicating a wider metaphysical problem on which we have as yet had nothing to say.

Of what we might call (anachronistically) Plato's "spiritual" world there are two very different aspects: one is his account of the cosmic role of minds, whether of gods or men; that depends on a cleaned-up version of traditional religion, of the belief that there exists "something divine and active," namely, gods or a god. The other aspect of the same intelligible world is a set of new and highly original metaphysical proposals, springing primarily, but not exclusively, from Plato's growing conviction that the problems debated by Socrates and the Sophists about the stability of moral language—and the consequent need to prevent self-interested politicians and others from bending it for their own purposes—can only be resolved if we suppose that there exist, apart from the judgments of mortals, fixed, immortal, and unchanging moral standards. Putting it differently, unless such standards have some sort of real existence, Callicles, Thrasymachus and their parallel "Thucydidean" realists win. All of which left Plato the problem (which remained unfinished at his death) of how to blend the religious with the metaphysical: the possibly "personal"—the power to perceive and think and initiate action—with the impersonal objects of thought at its best.

\* \* \*

We have already looked at the impersonal object of love in the *Symposium*, though we have not found any explanation as to why it *has* to be impersonal. When we turn to the *Republic* (not to speak of the *Philebus* and of various remarks of Aristotle and others) we find that explanation, as also how it is related to Plato's account of mathematics and the intellectual benefits of mathematical training. (Plato and Aristotle have very different views on this aspect of mathematics, Aristotle's version presumably dependent on criticism of Plato's—and of the even more extreme speculation

about “cosmic” mathematics developed by some of his fellow members of the Academy.)

As for the Forms, they are first introduced in the *Republic* by Socrates, in reply to Glaucon (who appears to be familiar with them), in Book V (476a), the context being the distinction between those who love beautiful sights and sounds in the theatre and those who love Beauty itself. The text—note the immediate appearance of Beauty—runs as follows:

Since the beautiful is the opposite of the ugly, they are two. Of course.

And since they are two, each is one? That's right too.

And the same account (*logos*) is true of the just and the unjust, the good and the bad, and all the Forms. Each of them is itself one, but because they appear everywhere in association with actions, bodies and each another, each of them appears to be many'. That's right.

Here we recognize that blend of the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium* to which I referred. There is a plurality of moral and ‘aesthetic’ forms, as in the *Phaedo* and, as the discussion continues, we find ourselves reflecting especially on two of them (478d, 493c): Beauty itself, as in the *Symposium*, and Justice, which is, at least nominally, the major concern of the entire *Republic*. Recall too that we have already noticed how (in the *Phaedrus*) Plato speaks of Beauty as the form most clearly recognizable.

When we *first* meet the Forms in the *Republic*, it is easy to suppose that we are still in the world of the *Phaedo*: no hierarchy of Forms is yet suggested. But at 504d, in response to Glaucon's puzzled question as to whether there is something of even greater importance than “justice and the other virtues,” Socrates tells him that there certainly is, and that he Glaucon has often heard about it, something that he certainly would not have managed had he only read (or listened to) earlier Platonic dialogues. Socrates probably means that everyone knows something about this “greatest object of study,” even though they cannot describe it or even clearly identify it (505de).

In the detailed discussion that follows, and which leads up to the famous passages about the Sun, the Divided Line, and the Cave, Socrates introduces a series of entirely novel claims. The first is that without the form of the Good, justice would be neither useful nor beneficial. What he means by this certainly cryptic phrase seems to be that it is no use knowing (or knowing about) what is just, or beautiful, or whatever, unless we also understand that these qualities are good for us; it is their goodness, that is,

which turns knowledge of the mere fact that there is something called justice or beauty into a realization that in addition to knowing (or at least having some idea of) what justice is, we also need to know that it is valuable, that we cannot live well without it, that we should desire, even love it.

What goodness adds to knowledge of the mere fact of justice is the worth or value of justice. Whether we understand it philosophically or not, we know that justice has worth. As the *Symposium* had argued, everyone wants the good, even if they do not understand what is good. We might gloss this by saying that it would be as perverse to deny that it makes sense to pursue what at least seems to be good as to get into serious arguments while denying the validity of the law of contradiction.

Goodness is the source of value—and, as we shall see, of much more—and obviously we make mistakes about it. How can we minimize the risks of doing that? That brings us back to mathematics—and also back to problems about impersonality. Before the Guardians can proceed to metaphysics, they must complete a ten-year period of mathematical studies: A trained mathematical mind is essential for those undertaking advanced philosophy, not least, therefore, for reflection on the Form of the Good. Presumably it not only concentrates the mind on the basic mathematical infrastructure of the universe with which metaphysicians need to be familiar, but also teaches us to think “abstractly,” without reference to material objects.<sup>15</sup>

Mathematics works in general terms, without sideshow distractions, as pointed out in the *Philebus* (56d) where Plato distinguishes between philosophical and demotic arithmetic: philosophical arithmetic is concerned, let us say, not with two cows and two more cows but with two and two. And to think “abstractly” is what the Guardians need precisely because the higher objects of thought are in some sense abstract and impersonal. There is no such subject as “my” mathematics, or for that matter and importantly for Plato, as feminist mathematics.

Mathematics points to an immaterial, “abstract” world since it “focuses thought on a realm of unqualified truth and being” (Burnyeat’s phrase in a note glossing *Republic* 7. 526b). Furthermore, these higher objects of

<sup>15</sup> Of the many discussions of the mathematics of Plato’s day and of Plato’s concern that it teaches us to think abstractly perhaps the most helpful is Burnyeat (2000). Aristotle tells us (as at *Met* 1, 987b) that Plato recognized ‘mathematical objects’ (nonmaterial but many in number) as ‘intermediates’: to appeal to that ontological claim would have helped Socrates’ case in the *Republic*, but although he gets near it at times, the developed theory is not there: probably Plato had not yet fully enunciated it.

thought are precisely what they are; they are unities, and the Form of the Good makes them unities. And they introduce the trainee Guardian not only to unity but to the harmony that necessarily accompanies unity in the cosmos and in the soul of the perfect thinker (432a).<sup>16</sup> It is not difficult to understand why Plato came (though not in the *Republic*) to identify the Good as the One: the One, that is, that makes everything perfect exactly what it is and not another thing.

But in insisting on the abstract mathematical and dialectical training of the Guardians and of its effects, we may wonder whether Plato has not forgotten his earlier insistence that the trainee Guardian gain much practical experience. As he had emphasized, the philosopher-king must learn not only to reflect on eternity but also on time (6.486a), hence on what happens in the imperfect and variegated world of time. Yet if the minds of the Guardians are to be rendered entirely identical, we may wonder whether they will be able to give a full account of the empirical world and act effectively within it. They may be able to see that A and B are beautiful (i.e. that they partake in Beauty), but how can they be sure that my awareness of that beauty is different (if it is) from yours? They are supposed to be able to reflect on all time and all reality and to form a synoptic view of the world (7. 537c). Yet it might seem that their mathematical-style understanding would be merely “scientific,” incapable of explaining experience; or are we to assume that there is nothing individual or subjective to explain? Have we here another example of problems arising from Plato’s uncertain attitude to individual differences, especially those between human beings?

If humans are ideally identical, the apparent differences—or incompletenesses—will need to be erased, at least among potential Guardians; cultural attitudes aside, that helps to explain why on Plato’s account of the person it is not necessary to keep unwanted, let alone malformed, fetuses alive, nor necessary to bring up all children born, infanticide being an option. And of course, since Plato believes, it seems, that we are really just our souls, the elimination of undesirables—which Popper would identify as totalitarian—looks quite different; they may get a much better chance next time round. Thus, as I intimated earlier, we find apparently totalitarian actions arising from nontotalitarian and cultural intent.

<sup>16</sup>In the *Philebus* (64d–65a) measure and proportion (along with beauty) are on the threshold of the Good.

Hence, if Popper is right about Plato's attitude to human life, his error arises not from power-politics but from a metaphysical theory itself based inter alia on the apparent ancient assumption that human worth depends not on the *fact* of human existence—not, that is, on the fact *that* we are—but on *what* we are: in modern terms we might use language suggesting quality of life rather than life. Plato has only a weak belief that existence entails goodness; that view became common in later ages, though it has faded, being abolished out of hand in the eighteenth century by Pufendorf and others who reverted to something more like ancient assumptions.

But we may have forgotten a question that came up in the *Symposium*. If the Guardians (and only the Guardians) are to love the Forms and the Good instead of the bodies or souls of other human beings, how can they be rendered capable of such a strange feat? Paul Ludwig has argued rightly that what Plato says about the “sublimation” of erotic desire in the *Republic*<sup>17</sup>—which thus answers our questions about how it can be done—is to extend the Dorian codes (and to some degree the codes of other Greeks) about relations between men to relationships within the entire community: males and females alike. Just as male–male relationships can be, many Greeks supposed, transmuted into heroic patriotism, the same can be applied to the perhaps more difficult task of assimilating male–female relationships to those between males. We recall that the rearing of children and other burdens of motherhood are removed from the philosopher-queens so that their “male” minds can share duties of governance and war. Sexuality is simply corporeal—a view with which in the *Politics* Aristotle rightly and profoundly disagreed. Curiously, Popper has nothing to say about the role and nature of women.<sup>18</sup>

\* \* \*

Having seen that the Guardians must study mathematics not least because it enables them to think without reference to what is numbered but rather about the ‘immaterial’ numbers themselves—and hence about the importance of unity as the source of number—we can now proceed to the second major novelty effected in the *Republic* by the identification of the Good as the ‘greatest’ object of study and reflection, the first being that it is the explanation of moral and aesthetic evaluations (insofar as

<sup>17</sup> See Ludwig (2007).

<sup>18</sup> Noted by Bluestone (1987, 24–25).

Plato would differentiate them). That second novelty is the metaphysical differentiation of Goodness from the other Forms, even from Beauty, its most obvious manifestation. That differentiation needs emphasis, not least because it will point to further unresolved problems about the rift between Plato's 'religious' (in the sense of 'religious' I have identified) and metaphysical worlds, problems that will also affect the question of impersonality.

So, we need to be sure exactly how Plato understands that Goodness, which adds worth to other Forms and hence to the world more generally. It is, as he puts it in a notorious passage (6.509b), the Good that not only enables other Forms to be known but is the cause of their existence and being (*einai kai ousian*) though Goodness is not a particular nature (*ousia*) but exceeds that in rank and power. This passage, so beloved by Plotinus and the Neoplatonists, has proved embarrassing to more modern readers who often try to explain it away: thus, the Good is "being itself" (says Baltes 1997),<sup>19</sup> apparently ignoring that Plato tells that it is beyond any specific Form and that Plato never, not even in the *Sophist*, proposes a Form of being itself; rather all Forms are beings). Plato's view, however, is that the self-identity the Forms possess is due to the ontologically superior Good that supplies a finite unity in each case: justice is thus nothing else than justice, a single identifiable being. And that points to our next problem.

According to *Republic* Book VII, it is the mark of the dialectician to be able to "give and receive an account" of the Forms; that seems clear enough. In accordance with what Socrates has said in Book VI, we need to explain the dependence of each Form on the Form of the Good: to indicate that goodness is variously represented by each of the other Forms. But we then read that we must also give an account of the Good itself (534b). That seems more difficult: it is no explanation of the Form of the Good to say that it somehow depends on the Form of the Good. In other words, no explanation that will account for the other Forms will be adequate to explain goodness itself. Surely, it now becomes clear that Plato is unwilling to give an account of the Good in Book VI not because, as he says, Socrates' interlocutors will not be able to follow him, but because the very idea of giving an account of goodness itself might seem incoherent.

<sup>19</sup>Of course, the number of discussions of the Good is—appropriately—almost infinite; one of the more helpful is still that of Santas (1980).

Perhaps, as Plotinus says when facing exactly the same problem, “If you have seen it you know what I mean” (*Enn.*1.6).

But it is easy to be mistaken about what Plato actually says in Book VII: He certainly tells us that we must give an account of the Good, but he does not say that it has to be the same kind of account as that of the other Forms. An account of the Form of the Good could only be that the source of all else cannot be explained except insofar as its existence is necessary if there is anything at all. And, in a sense, Socrates has already claimed that in Book VI where the Good explains both why Forms (and therefore the cosmos) exist and why they are intelligible. The only alternative would be that without such a Form nothing would be intelligible, not least the claim that we want to understand the world. We would not only have a Thrasymachean nihilism about ethics, but a claim that nothing is intelligible except that nothing is intelligible.

To put it differently, we might say that you can learn that there is (or is claimed to be) a Form of the Good by reading Plato’s *Republic*, but unless you go through some sort of rigorous training—certainly for Plato in mathematics—you will not be able to know (by experience) what it is. The necessary first-hand experience of the Good cannot be reduced to some sort of ability to form propositions about goodness. According to Plato, all you can get from reading Plato’s *Republic* is true opinion about the Form of the Good.

It only remains to compare the *Republic* with other evidence. In the *Philebus* (65–66)—the very late dialogue that is generally allowed to match most closely some of the remarks of Aristotle about Plato’s “unwritten doctrines”—we learn, as we have noted, that on the threshold of the Good we recognize Beauty, Measure, and Proportion. And in an account of the Aristotelian anti-Platonist Aristoxenus, we hear that Plato gave a lecture on the Good in which he talked almost exclusively about mathematics, numbers, geometry, and—last but not least—about the Good as Unity.<sup>20</sup> That being so, it is hardly surprising that the ordinary man in the Athenian street, represented as often in Greece by the performer in the comic theatre, could make no sense of what Plato said about the Good. Nor should other very different Aristotelian evidence be passed over in silence: that is, where Aristotle observes that in ethics (and thus also in politics) we cannot deal in the same kind of certainties as in other disciplines (such as mathematics) (1094b13, 1104b2ff.).

<sup>20</sup> Aristoxenus, *Elements of Harmony* II, I, p.31 Meibom.

If the ideal human, in the *Republic*, is a member of an identical set,<sup>21</sup> then that very identity is the mark of his goodness and perfection; hence we can see why Plato (but not yet in the *Republic*) was inclined more and more to identify goodness with unity, seeing the Good—as Aristotle clearly says and which the Neoplatonists were quite happy to accept, though their reasons were not Platonic reasons—as the One.

\* \* \*

I have been arguing that what Popper identified as Plato's totalitarian politics in the *Republic* (and the *Laws*) depends on his assumption of a concept of the person of which Plato and his contemporaries had virtually no inkling—even though their writings supply some of the infrastructure from which later accounts of the person were developed. But I have also intimated that there are other aspects of the Platonic story that Popper ignores, but which must be taken seriously: not least that despite his dominant theme about impersonality, there is a second very different theme that would imply a more 'modern' (or at least medieval) account of the person. To be more fully developed, however, that secondary thesis would require a more personal account of goodness. And that brings us back not only to Plato's revised psychology after the *Republic* but also to our distinction between the 'metaphysical' and "religious" features of Plato's thinking.

And there is more: in the last analysis, and perfectly in accordance with his own theories of moral virtue and goodness, Plato tells us that the politics of an ideal *polis*—even the possibility of such a *polis*—may have to be left aside: Real political progress may be impossible, for as Plato puts it in perhaps its strongest form at the end of *Republic* Book IX (591e-592b), the ideal state may be merely "a paradigm in heaven" in accordance with which we should try to arrange our own soul (in whatever political world we live) as best, that is as harmoniously, as we can. As early as the *Gorgias* (521d), Socrates had claimed to be the only true "politician" in Athens, in the sense of the only man who works for the good of his society, and he

<sup>21</sup> It may be worth remembering that even in the Middle Ages when the Christian notion of the paramount importance of the individual person was well established, philosophical accounts of individuation seem rather aimed to explain why there can be a plurality of members in a set rather than in accounting for qualitative differences between those individuals. Duns Scotus was concerned about that.

has no illusion in that dialogue that what the Athenians called democracy—or any other actual political regime—is plausibly convertible into an ideal *polis*. So in the more “pessimistic” passages of the *Republic*, Socrates is ultimately concerned, as apparently is Plato, with ethics rather than with politics: in the character of the good man rather than the character of whatever society he is condemned to live in or able to construct.

\* \* \*

Plato’s understanding of the nature of the good man does not depend on the existence of *any* particular political system. The core of it, however, is summed up—ironically—in the motto of the far from harmonious English monarch, Elizabeth I: *semper eadem*: be always the same. That idea can be found throughout Plato’s works, hence marking the aims of politics and social life in those “pessimistic” remarks at the end of Book IX of the *Republic*: though perhaps it is best seen if we return briefly to the *Symposium*, and to its partner dialogue the *Phaedo*.

The *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, taken together and written at roughly the same time, form a diptych on how to overcome what were regarded by almost all Greek thinkers, not least Plato, as the great enemies of the good life: these can be briefly summarized as pleasure and pain.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in the *Phaedo* we find Socrates presented as mastering pain and fear, not least of the very unpleasant death brought about by hemlock poisoning (though in accordance with the canons of Greek tragedy the specifics are not presented on the stage).

In the *Symposium*, on the other hand, Socrates confronts pleasure in the form of erotic excess and the inability to hold one’s liquor: the closing scene shows him still arguing with the poets Agathon and Aristophanes who are trying—so long as they are able to stand up—resist his claim that the same man should be able to write both tragedy and comedy; a task that few in antiquity, it seems, undertook. And earlier in the same dialogue it had been agreed that the drinking should be restrained and the charms of the flute-girl resisted, largely because many of the other participants had indulged in too much of the one and probably also of the other the previous night. Socrates, for his part, is master of pleasure as in the *Phaedo* he is master of pain. He is always the same, unified—or almost—and

<sup>22</sup> At *Laws* I.633e the bad man is conquered by pleasure or pain, but conquest by pleasure is more common.

harmonious; he normally declines, as we might put it, to wear different hats in different company.

\* \* \*

Popper discusses the *Laws* as well as the *Republic*, and though he knows that the Guardians have disappeared from the *Laws*, he assimilates the two works, believing that the *Laws* also presents “totalitarian” features, not least the surveillance and punishing controls operated by the Nocturnal Council. But he pays insufficient attention to the fact that long before the *Laws*—and in part accounting for its substantial differences from the *Republic*—Plato’s psychological theories have changed, and to considerable political effect.

If we go back once more to the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, we find that vice is explained as the overcoming of the soul by the body and bodily desires. In the *Republic*, however, the story has become more complicated: There are three kinds of souls in each of us—and that tells us that we can become three kinds of people (philosophers, men of honor, or slaves of the passions). It is to be hoped that in the best city these three “souls” can be brought into a harmonious relationship whereby the two inferior “possible persons” are reconciled to the rule of reason.<sup>23</sup> Such reconciliation allows for the possibility of a Guardian, though, as we have seen, Plato hesitates as to whether such a perfect society is possible.

The three “kinds” of soul are also to be found in the *Phaedrus*, but the account of them is now significantly changed. Plato offers us the simile of the charioteer driving his two horses: the white horse of honor and the black horse of potentially irrational and immoral desires. But this time the black horse cannot be reconciled, only compelled against its will by brutal force to be obedient—and it is always liable to get out of control (254a-e). It follows from that, though the *Phaedrus* does not raise the matter specifically, that an all-wise and all-just Guardian is impossible. Even for those who manage to control their black horses and thus live a “blissful” life, it seems that perfection only comes after death (256b)—the soul having conveniently been earlier demonstrated to be immortal (245c-e). Such necessary imperfection, indeed, seems to have haunted Plato even in the *Republic* itself—not least in the curious mathematical passage in Book VIII about the eventual decline of all “earthly” things (546a-547a) where

<sup>23</sup> For defense of this interpretation see Rist (1992).

it seems that, in the end, even the Guardians will make mistakes in their eugenics program.

In the *Politicus* and the *Laws*, the political effects of the revised psychology are clear: the Guardians have gone. The rule of demi-gods is eventually replaced by the rule of law. What remains to be done is to decide which laws to prescribe, and the fact that Plato in the *Laws* is so careful to indicate the exact geographical situation of the city to be founded, indicates that those laws (though doubtless of similar kind and based on similar principles) will vary from case to case. There is no reason to think that the would-be Platonic lawgiver—and there were some—would be expected to follow the template slavishly.

\* \* \*

I have argued that there are two sources of Plato's thinking about the eternal world; he speaks of the gods and of the Forms, though the gods too are eventually to be more radically revised than they are in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. These two approaches I have dubbed the "religious"—Plato's cleaned-up version of traditional religion—and the "metaphysical," the first manifestation of which is the ever-evolving theory of Forms. In the *Sophist*, the two come into manifest collision. The relevant passage runs as follows (248e–249a):

Will we be persuaded that movement, life, soul and intelligence are not present in that which fully exists, and that it neither lives nor thinks but remains solely and wholly, changeless and without understanding?

Over the years (even the centuries) this passage has been disputed, and it seems that no interpretation will convince everyone. Perhaps that is because Plato himself does not know how far he wants to go in a new direction, or at least in developing a new emphasis. But progress can be made: The context is an attack by the Eleatic Stranger on those he calls "friends of the forms," who sound like people (perhaps Aristotle was one) who read the *Phaedo* as teaching that forms are the only causes, supposedly Plato's metaphysical claim. The "friends" have forgotten about the gods: not to mention human souls who, though ontologically inferior, share in the "divinity" of the Forms by becoming, to whatever degree, characterized by them. Plato tells us in the *Phaedrus* that the gods are

divine by participating in the Forms: thus, the Form of Justice explains that the gods are just.

So, the objection that the Stranger makes is that active principles are themselves immaterial and therefore can rightly claim to be part of "that which fully is." But what part? We can see that such a question entails enquiring as to the relationship between God (say the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*) and the Forms, especially the Form of the Good. It would be easy to conclude that we must identify the two. This is not the place to pursue that response, but the fact that it is so obvious a possibility might imply that Plato himself either adopted it or moved toward it.

As I have argued elsewhere, I do not think that Plato identified God and the Good, though I also argued that his thought points in that direction, but whether or not he went all the way, that very possibility would have serious consequences for our question about the importance (or non-importance) of individual differences between human beings. Not that it would have committed Plato to a more "personalist" approach; Plotinus moved beyond strictly Platonic metaphysics, though certainly not committing himself to anything we might call personalism. That alone indicates how difficult it was for any pre-Christian thinker to develop a metaphysic in which the first principle is personal and that our souls and/or we as human beings are of similar sort.

\* \* \*

After all this rambling, what is to be concluded from a return trip to Popper after so many years? Not that he has hit upon nothing important, as I pointed out at the start, but that his analysis is fatally damaged by his neglect of several important parts of the jigsaw. First—and primarily—that the concept of the person which he assumed as given is a concept developed only in Christian and post-Christian times, being originally dependent on the explicit belief that in asking whether humans have intrinsic individual worth, we must think of their mere existence, not simply of their excellent or other qualities. Nevertheless, a close examination of Plato's text reveals considerable ambiguity in his treatment of persons and impersonality which demand the attention of anyone attempting to understand his views of the best form of human life. One might even say that while Plato was learning to move away from what Popper thinks of as a totalitarian mentality, the subjects of the later part of his book (Hegel and Marx) were part of a more general movement toward it.

Second, Popper failed to realize the importance of myth, and of Platonic myths in particular. Third, he misunderstood a number of key features of Greek thought and society, not least their ideas of freedom and democracy. Fourth, he ignored important developments in Plato's psychology, with important implications for his developing political theorizing and for his ideas about the possibility of a "utopia." Fifth (and closely linked to First), he significantly failed to understand—indeed largely ignored—Plato's metaphysics, especially his insistence on the Good and its necessary role in accounts of human nature. If you attribute to Plato an anachronistic account of "persons" while ignoring his metaphysics, you are in trouble!

So, what is the "something important" that yet lies beneath Popper's over-hasty conclusions? We find it well expressed in several passages of *The Open Society* itself: on page 145 Popper writes, "Like many great works of literature, the *Republic* shows traces that its author experienced exhilarating and extravagant hopes of success;" and on page 154 he adds "Both Plato and Marx are dreaming of the apocalyptic revolution which will radically transfigure the whole social world." For, yes, there is no doubt that Plato was a revolutionary character and that—despite his gradual realization (after the *Phaedrus*) that in this life human nature will remain significantly unreformable—he continued to be overoptimistic about what a revamped legal structure, in the absence of a Callipolis, could achieve: neglecting above all the fact (clear enough in his own writings) that subversion of the commonwealth can be generated by its legitimately appointed leaders, not least by its judges. Indeed, such likely corruption of the leadership is especially displayed, as Popper points out (435), if they believe that they possess a perfect blueprint; that they can cling to that blueprint despite all kinds of criticism, whether intellectual, moral, or emotional.

Curiously enough, it was one of the most totalitarian of all our recent tyrants—Chairman Mao—who recognized the "black horse" most clearly even in his closest colleagues (except in his own case). Understanding that even in the "perfect" society the leaders were liable to sink back into a bourgeois complacency, he thought the only solution must be regular and merciless purges of the governing élite. That helps us to recognize that Plato, initially at least, did not understand the implications of his own theories about the black horse: but then, of course, he was living in a pre-Christian society, a society unencumbered—as Popper's liberal dream is even now revealing itself to be—by the Christian theory of original sin.

I note in conclusion that one later writer of utopia, Thomas More, did realize that in politics, utopianism leads to both despotism and hedonism, whatever the intentions of those who propose it; that politics, even if dependent on metaphysical theorizing, is not simply applied metaphysics, that the only hope for political and social reform (whether or not related to such theorizing) must lie in persistent gradualism.<sup>24</sup> When I first read Popper more than sixty years ago I failed to realize that this was the “important point” he too had got right.

### WORKS CITED

- Aristoxenus, *Elements of Harmony*. Meibom.
- Baltes, M. 1997. Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's *Republic* Beyond Being? In *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition*, ed. M. Joyal, 3–23. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Bluestone, N.H. 1987. *Women and the Ideal Society*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Burnyeat, M.F. 2000. Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul. In *Mathematics and Necessity: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, ed. T. Smiley, 1–81. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chappell, T.J.D. 2004. Absolutes and Particulars. In *Modern Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. O'Hear, 99–117. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kraut, R. 2008. Plato on Love. In *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. G. Fine, 285–310. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Levinson, R.B. 1953. *In Defense of Plato*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ludwig, P. 2007. Eros in the *Republic*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, 202–231. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyne, R.O.A.M. 1980. *The Latin Love Poets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morrison, D. 2007. The Utopian Character of Plato's Ideal City. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, 232–255. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Popper, K. 2002. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. 1. London/New York: Routledge.
- Rist, J.M. 1992. Plato Thinks We Have Tripartite Souls: If He is Right What Can We Do About It? In *Sophies Maïetores: Chercheurs de Sagesse: Hommage à Jean Pépin*, ed. M. Dixsaut and D. O'Brien, 103–124. Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes.

<sup>24</sup>For more comment see Rist (2016).

- . 1997. Plato and Professor Nussbaum on Acts ‘Contrary to Nature’. In *Plato and the Platonic Tradition: Essays Presented to John Whittaker*, ed. M. Joyal, 65–79. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- . 2001. Plutarch’s *Amatorius*: A Commentary on Plato’s Theories of Love. *Classical Quarterly* 51: 557–575.
- . 2008. *What is Truth?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2012. *Plato’s Moral Realism; The Discovery of the Presuppositions of Ethics*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- . 2016. From Dreamland ‘Humanism’ to Christian Political Reality, or from Nusquama to Utopia. *Review of Metaphysics* 69: 175–190.
- . 2020. *What is a Person: Realities, Constructs, Illusions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Santas, G. 1980. The Form of the Good in Plato’s *Republic*. *Philosophical Inquiry* 2: 374–403.
- Schofield, M. 2007. The Noble Lie. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, 138–164. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vlastos, G. 1973. The Individual as Object of Love in Plato. In *Platonic Studies*, 3–34. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

# PUBLICATIONS OF EDWARD CHARLES HALPER

## BOOKS

1. *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1989. Reprinted with a new introduction by Parmenides Press, 2005.
2. *Form and Reason: Essays in Metaphysics*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993.
3. *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: Books A-Δ*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Press, 2009.
4. *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: Books I-N*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Press, forthcoming.

## DATABASE

Metaphysics B-Γ, A Detailed Analysis of Aristotle's text, Project Archelogos, forthcoming.

## TEXTBOOK

*Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Reader's Guide*. London: Continuum, 2012.

## ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS

1. "An Aristotelian Problem." *Paideia: Special Aristotle Issue* (1978): 50–58.
2. "Self-Relation in Hegel's Science of Logic." *Philosophy Research Archives*, 7 (1981): 89–133.
3. "Ackrill, Aristotle, and Analytic Philosophy." *Ancient Philosophy*, 2 (1982): 142–151.
4. "Aristotle on the Extension of Non-Contradiction." *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1 (1984): 369–380.
5. "Aristotle on Knowledge of Nature." *The Review of Metaphysics*, 37 (1984): 811–835.
6. "Metaphysics Z 12 and H 6: The Unity of Form and Composite." *Ancient Philosophy*, 4 (1984): 146–159.
7. "Aristotle on the Convertibility of One and Being." *The New Scholasticism*, 59 (1985): 213–227.
8. "Metaphysics Z 4–5: An Argument from Addition." *Ancient Philosophy*, 6 (1986): 91–122.
9. "Being qua Being' in Metaphysics Γ." *Elenchos: Rivista di studi sul pensiero antico*, 8 (1987): 43–62.
10. "Aristotle's Solution to the Problem of Sensible Substance." *Journal of Philosophy*, 84 (1987): 666–72.
11. "Aristotle on the Possibility of Metaphysics." *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne*, 5 (1987): 99–131.
12. "The Origin of Aristotle's Metaphysical *Aporiai*." *Apeiron*, 21 (1988): 1–27. Reprinted in *Aristotle's Ontology, Vol. 5: Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, eds. A. Preus and J. Anton. 151–75. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
13. "Aristotle on the Convertibility of One and Being." *Philosophy and Culture: Proceedings of the XVIIth World Congress of Philosophy*. Vol. 3: 259–64. Montreal: Editions Montmorency, 1988.
14. "Is Creativity Good?" *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28 (1989): 47–56.
15. "Some Problems in Aristotle's Mathematical Ontology." *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 5 (1989): 247–75.
16. "Hegel and the Problem of the Differentia." *Essays on Hegel's Logic*, ed. George di Giovanni, 191–202. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
17. "A Note on the Unity of the *Parmenides*." *Hermes: Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie*, 118 (1990): 31–42.

18. "The 'Socrates' of Plato's Early Dialogues." *The Philosophy of Socrates: Elenchus, Ethics, and Truth*, ed. K. Boudouris, 81–87. Vol. 2 of the Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Greek Philosophy. Athens, Greece: Kardamista, 1992.
19. "The Substance of Aristotle's Ethics." *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature: Essays on Aristotle's Ethics and Metaphysics*, ed. May Sim, 3–28. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995. Reprinted in Serbo-Croatian translation in: *Filozofski Godisnjak*, 7 (1994): 260–87.
20. "Virtue and the State." *Aristotelian Political Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. K. Boudouris, 79–90. Athens, Greece: International Center of Greek Philosophy and Culture, 1995.
21. "The Logic of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Nature, Space, and Time." *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate, 29–49. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.
22. "Judaism and the Liberal State." *On Liberty: Jewish Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Daniel Frank, 63–81. London: Curzon Press, 1999.
23. "Poetry, History, and Dialectic." *From Puzzles to Problems?: Essays on Aristotle's Dialectic*, ed. May Sim, 211–23. Lexington Press, 1999.
24. "The Unity of the Virtues in Aristotle." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1999): 115–43.
25. "The Logic of Art: Beauty and Nature." *Hegel and Aesthetics*, ed. William Maker, 187–202. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
26. "Is Knowledge of Knowledge Possible?: *Charmides* 167a-169d." *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides: Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum*, eds. Thomas M. Robinson and Luc Brisson, 309–316. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academia Verlag, 2000.
27. "Hegel's Family Values." *The Review of Metaphysics*, 54 (2001), 815–858.
28. "Maimonides and Nachmanides on Sending Away the Mother Bird." *Thinking about the Environment: Our Debt to the Greek and Medieval Past*, eds. Thomas Robinson and Laura Westra, 185–201. Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2002.
29. "The Idealism of Hegel's System." *The Owl of Minerva*, 34 (2002), 19–58.
30. "Soul, Soul's Motions, and Virtue in Plato's *Laws*." *Proceedings of the VI Symposium Platonicum*, eds. Samuel Scolnicov and Luc Brisson, 257–67. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academia Verlag, 2003.

31. "Positive and Negative Dialectics: Hegel's Wissenschaft der Logik and Plato's *Parmenides*." *Platonismus im Idealismus: Die platonische Tradition in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, eds. Burkhard Mojsisch and Orrin F. Summerell, 211–245. Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 2003.
32. "Spinoza on the Political Value of Freedom of Religion." *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 21 (2004), 167–82. Reprinted (and abridged) in *Proceedings of the XXIth World Congress of Philosophy, vol. 8, Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William McBride, 37–44. 2006.
33. "Dialog und Argument in Platons *Protagoras*." *Platon Verstehen: Themen und Perspektiven*, ed. Marcel van Ackeren, 39–56. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004.
34. "Plato's Case for Philosophy as the Examined Life." *Conceptions of Philosophy. Ancient and Modern*, ed. K. Boudouris, 133–50. Athens: Ionia Publications, 2004.
35. "Plato's Principles of Mathematics." *Christian August Brandis: A Study of the Lost Books of Aristotle: On the Ideas and On the Good or On Philosophy (Studia Philosophia et Historia, vol. 27)*, ed. and trans. Orrin F. Summerell, 99–122. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005.
36. "Peut-on enseigner la vertu?" *La Philosophie de Platon*, vol. 2, ed. Michel Fattal, 271–290. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.
37. "A Tale of Two Metaphysics: Alison Stone's Environmental Hegel." *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, Double Issue, nos. 51/52 (2005), 1–12.
38. "The Idea of the Political and the Challenge of Particularity: Plato, Modernity, and Post-Modern Political Identification." *The Political Identity of the West*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell and Marcel van Ackeren, 70–89. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006.
39. "A Lesson from the *Meno*." *Gorgias–Menon: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum*, eds. Michael Erler and Luc Brisson, 234–42. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academica Verlag, 2007.
40. "Aristotle and the Liberal State." *Aristotle's Politics Today*, ed. Lenn Goodman and Robert Talisse, 33–43. Albany: SUNY Press, 2007.
41. "Aristotle's Paradigmatism: *Metaphysics* I and the Difference It Makes." *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2007), 69–103.
42. "Plato on the Rationality of Nature." *Skepsis*, 18 (2007), 159–72.
43. "Hegel's Criticism of Newton." *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Frederick Beiser, 311–43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

44. "The Ultimate Why Question: The Hegelian Alternative." *The Ultimate Why Question: Why is There Anything at All Rather Than Nothing Whatever?*, ed. John Wippel, 170–88. Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2011.
45. "Humor, Dialectic, and Human Nature in Plato." *Epoché: A Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 15 (2011), 319–330.
46. "Jacob Klein on Aristotle on Number." *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, 3 (2011), 277–87.
47. "Torah as Political Philosophy: Maimonides and Spinoza on Divine Law." *Judaic Sources and Western Thought: Jerusalem's Enduring Presence*, ed. Jonathan Jacobs, 190–214. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
48. "Knowledge of the Whole in the *Republic*." *Dialogues on Plato's Politeia (Republic): Selected Papers from the Ninth Symposium Platonicum*, eds. Noburu Notomi and Luc Brisson, 252–56. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academica Verlag, 2013.
49. "Klein and Cassirer: Symbol and Symbolic Form." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 29 (2015), 194–217.
50. "Maimonides on the Scope of Divine and Human Self-Knowledge." *Quaestio*, 15 (2015), 299–308.
51. "The Rationality of Being." *The Review of Metaphysics*, 68 (2015): 487–520. Reprinted in Chinese translation in *Modern Foreign Philosophy*, 2021.
52. "Alcibiades' Refutation of Socrates." *Proceedings of the Tenth Symposium Platonicum*, eds. Mauro Tulli and Michael Erler, 342–46. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academica Verlag, 2016.
53. "Divine Justice and the Nature of Human Suffering." *Jewish Philosophy Past and Present: Contemporary Responses to Classical Sources*, eds. Daniel Frank and Aaron Segal, 176–85. New York: Routledge, 2016.
54. "Heraclitus and the Possibility of Metaphysics." *The Review of Metaphysics*, 70 (2017), 453–472.
55. "The Value of Soul's Descent." *Platonic Inquiries: Selected Papers from the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, eds. Claudia D'Amico, Natalia Strok, and John Finamore, 93–110. Westbury, England: Prometheus Trust, 2017.
56. "Aristotle's Scientific Method." *Reading Aristotle*, eds. Ronald Polansky and William Wians, 50–96. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
57. "The Metaphysics of the Syllogism." *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 33 (2018), 31–60.

58. "Anger and Divine Perfection." *The Question of God's Perfection: Jewish and Christian Essays on the God of the Bible and Talmud*, eds. Dru Johnson and Yoram Hazony, 130–141. Leiden: Brill, 2019.
59. "The Currency of Virtue: *Phaedo* 68c-69d." *Plato's Phaedo: Selected Papers from the Eleventh Symposium Platonicum*, eds. Gabriele Cornelli, Francisco Bravo, and Thomas Robinson, 124–32. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academica Verlag, 2019.
60. "Aristotle's Moral Realism: Phronesis in Nicomachean Ethics 6." *Passionate Mind: Essays in Honor of John M. Rist*, ed. Barry David, 337–369. Sankt Augustin: Nomos Publishing, 2019.

### E-PUBLICATIONS

1. "Aristotle's Political Virtues." The Paideia Project On-Line: Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy [Essay - #010052–25.5 K] 1998. <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciHal2.htm>
2. "The Logic of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Nature, Space, and Time." Hegel's Philosophy of Nature, formerly: <http://www.hegel.net/Nature/eh.html> currently: <http://www.gwfhegel.org/Nature/eh.html>
3. "Poetry, History, and Dialectic." The Paideia Project On-Line: Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy [Essay - #010051–32.1 K]. 1998. <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciHal1.htm>
4. "Aristotle's Rethinking of Philosophy." Proceedings of the XXIInd World Congress of Philosophy, vol. 2 (2008): 107–14.

# INDEX<sup>1</sup>

## A

Afterlife, 210, 217, 221, 223, 234  
*Akrasia*, 63–69, 171, 172, 177, 178,  
192, 192n12  
Alfarabi, 170, 172n9, 174,  
178n25, 180n30  
works; *Selected Aphorisms*, 170  
Allen, R.E., 151n4, 151n8, 152n10,  
153n11, 161n26, 224n10  
*Anchinoia*, 52  
Annas, J., 27, 28  
Aristotle, 1, 4, 4n10, 6, 19–35, 20n2,  
23n4, 34n20, 37, 37n22, 39, 40,  
40n24, 49–68, 54n3, 54n4,  
54n5, 55n7, 61n13, 63n16,  
64n17, 78, 82, 82n25, 83,  
83n27, 88n38, 92n48, 97–120,  
123–146, 149–151, 151n5,  
151n6, 153, 160–164, 160n25,  
163n28, 164n29, 169–186, 256,  
265, 268, 270n15, 272, 274,  
275, 278

works; *Metaphysics*, 19–23, 26,  
34, 40, 55, 101n3, 119n17,  
126n9, 133n11, 149,  
151n5, 151n6, 160–164,  
160n25, 164n29;  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, 169,  
170; *Physics*, 124, 126, 130,  
132, 134, 137, 138n14,  
139, 158n22  
Ascetical, 213, 217, 218  
Autonomy, 112  
Auxiliaries, 109, 241–244, 243n9,  
243n11, 244n12, 244n13,  
246, 248

## B

Bae, E, 25n12  
Barkasi, Michael, 157n19  
Baum, M, 39n23  
Bewitched (*gēgoêteumenē*),  
213–216

<sup>1</sup>Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.

Body, 11–17, 14n9, 25, 28, 51, 99,  
100, 100n2, 103, 108–110,  
108n10, 111n11, 112, 115, 116,  
118n15, 135, 143, 146, 172n10,  
173, 206, 208, 210–216, 218,  
240n6, 247, 259, 264, 269,  
272, 277  
Brandis, C., 32, 33  
Burger, R., 6

## C

Calm (*hēsuchia*), 6, 205–218  
Carroll, Lewis, 57  
Cephalus, 221–235, 239–242, 241n8,  
245, 248  
Cessation of pain, 206, 207,  
207n3, 218  
Cherniss, Harold, 25, 27, 30,  
44, 45  
Contemplation, 13, 16, 100, 145,  
171, 247  
Contradiction, 12, 17, 28, 34, 44, 48,  
80–82, 81n23, 83n27, 88, 90,  
92n48, 186, 193, 199, 270  
Craft, 57, 135, 136, 222, 222n2,  
229n25, 230n26, 242, 245  
Craftsmen, 239–241, 240n7, 243,  
246, 248  
Cycle, 12–14, 16, 17, 86, 88

## D

Daimon, 11, 12n2, 13–15, 17  
Definition, 7, 12, 13, 17, 20, 21, 38,  
52, 54n3, 100–102, 101n4,  
126–131, 133, 134, 151n6, 196,  
197, 199, 200, 222, 223n4, 224,  
232n32, 234n37, 238–240,  
238n1, 239n4, 241n8, 242, 247,  
248, 259, 263

Democracy, 253, 257, 258, 260,  
276, 280  
Descartes, 97–120  
works; *Discourse on Method*, 98n1,  
106; *Meditations on First  
Philosophy*, 98n1, 106, 107  
Desire, 12, 14–17, 55, 125, 127,  
129, 133, 135, 136, 141, 145,  
146, 172n8, 176n20,  
177–181, 180n30, 183–185,  
190n7, 191, 191n10, 191n11,  
193–196, 199, 200, 207–218,  
241, 243, 244, 244n12,  
244n13, 246, 248, 263, 265,  
270, 272, 277  
Destruction, 13, 15, 131, 142, 209,  
209–210n6, 210  
Duerlinger, James, 50, 55

## E

*Elenchus*, 56, 189, 192, 195–198,  
195n19, 195n21, 200, 201  
Error, 26, 27n15, 91, 97, 99, 101,  
108, 112, 154, 206–208,  
266, 272  
Ethics, 2, 3n7, 4n10, 5, 6, 49, 63n16,  
123, 124n2, 144–146, 146n25,  
172, 176n21, 274, 276  
Experience and memory, 59–61  
Expertise, 60, 136, 229, 232

## F

Frede, D., 207n4  
Freedom, 69, 127, 206n1, 210, 252,  
256–258, 280  
Friends and enemies, 199n28,  
222, 228–231, 228n23,  
228n24, 231n30, 233, 242,  
243, 248

**G**

Galen, 55, 55n6

Gnomons, 157–161, 157n20,  
158n22, 163, 164n29

God, 11, 12n2, 13–15, 17, 32, 49,  
60, 79, 87, 89, 107, 142–146,  
144n23, 171n6, 176, 177, 180,  
181, 183n37, 184, 201, 206,  
209–211, 209–210n6, 213, 217,  
221, 224, 225n11, 232n32,  
234n37, 240, 258, 265, 268,  
278, 279

Good, 2, 13, 20n2, 31, 32, 40, 45,  
49, 52, 64–66, 69, 79, 79n19,  
85, 86, 99, 105, 120, 130, 133,  
144, 144n23, 145, 152n9, 153,  
171, 173, 173n11, 174, 177,  
177n23, 183n37, 184, 184n40,  
190n5, 191n11, 193–196, 198,  
200, 201, 205, 212, 215, 217,  
223, 226, 228–234, 228n24,  
229n25, 231n30, 232n32,  
232n33, 233n35, 234n38, 238,  
240–248, 240n6, 243n9,  
244n12, 247n16, 252, 254–258,  
262–265, 267, 269, 270,  
271n16, 272–276, 273n19,  
279, 280

Goodness, 2, 15, 233, 256, 257,  
261–264, 266, 267, 269,  
270, 272–275

Great and the small, the, 6, 32, 34, 37,  
38, 160, 160n25, 162–164

Guardians, 225n11, 245, 255, 262,  
266, 267, 270–272, 277, 278

**H**

Halper, Edward, 1–7, 3n7, 4n10,  
4n11, 20–24, 26, 27, 29–33, 35,  
39, 48, 50–52, 54–57, 62,  
63n16, 74–76, 78n16, 78n17,  
79, 80, 80n23, 82–85, 83n27,

88, 92n48, 93, 123, 126, 126n9,  
131, 139–141, 170, 176n20,  
182n33, 182n35, 183n36,  
190, 190n5

Heraclitus, 6, 22, 54n5, 74–93,  
77n13, 78n15, 78n16, 78n17,  
79n18, 79n19, 80–81n23,  
82n25, 86n34, 86n35, 89n40,  
92n48, 254, 261

Historicism, 257, 262

Homeric simile, 58, 61, 61n13

**I**

Images, 29, 30, 43, 46, 47, 58, 61,  
63, 97–120, 133, 184,  
264, 267

Imagination, 97–120, 172

Indefinite Dyad, 20, 32–34, 36,  
37n22, 38

Intellect, 12, 14–17, 69, 88n38,  
92, 99, 101–103, 105–115,  
111n11, 118n16,  
172n10, 184

Intellectualism, 191–195, 191n8,  
191n9, 200, 201n31, 202

Intermediates, 25, 27, 28, 30, 33,  
34, 36, 38, 40, 47,  
163n27, 270n15

Irwin, Terrence, 19, 238

**J**

Justice, 7, 12n3, 63, 154, 169,  
176n22, 178n26, 197, 221–235,  
238–248, 241n8, 244n12,  
244n13, 260, 269, 270, 273

**K**

Kant, Immanuel, 19, 39n23, 60n12,  
61, 74, 83, 255

Knorr, Wilbur, 151n8, 155, 157n20

Knowledge, 2, 3, 5, 13, 14n9, 51, 53, 54, 55n7, 58–60, 61n13, 62, 63, 65–68, 74–77, 77n13, 83–85, 83n27, 92, 92n48, 97–99, 101, 106–108, 112–114, 114n14, 116, 118–120, 118n15, 124–141, 144–146, 149, 171, 172, 173n11, 175–177, 177n23, 184n40, 190n7, 191n8, 192n12, 193, 195, 195n19, 195n20, 196, 198–200, 200n29, 208, 211, 229n25, 245, 245n14, 248, 264, 270

## L

*Logos*, 6, 12, 53, 74–93, 77n10, 77n13, 78n15, 78n16, 78n17, 79n18, 79n19, 79n20, 81n23, 87n37, 92n48, 130, 177, 269

Lukasiewicz, Jan, 56

Lying, 93, 224, 225n13, 240, 240n7, 243, 255, 257, 258

## M

Maimonides, 6, 106, 169–186  
works; *Eight Chapters*, 169–186

*Meno* paradox, 193

Metaphysics, 1, 2, 3n7, 4, 6, 19–40, 43, 61, 61n13, 73–93, 105, 118, 146n25, 190, 261, 265, 270, 279–281

Middle term, 51–53, 55, 58, 62, 64–66

Moderation, 175, 176, 180n30, 182n33, 212, 222, 223n4, 241, 242

Monism, 56, 73–93

Moral rules, 230

## N

Not-being, 44–46, 229

Not-being as difference, 46

Number

expansion of square and oblong numbers, 157, 160–162, 164n29

figurative numbers, 155, 156n18, 159, 162, 163

## O

Odd and the even, the, 26

One and the dyad, the, 160, 160n25

One and the Many, problem of, 21, 22, 29, 32, 38–40

Open society, 252–254, 257

Owen, G.E.L., 6, 20, 43, 44, 52, 63, 91n44

## P

Pain, 6, 55n6, 178–180, 185, 205–218, 276, 276n22

*Paradeigma*, 43, 130

Paradox, 63, 64, 67, 68, 73–93, 193–195, 193n14, 211

Parmenides, 29, 31, 38, 39, 43, 75, 89–93, 90n43, 92n48, 149–160, 150n2, 151n8, 152n9, 152n10, 153n11, 161n26, 163, 164n29

Patzig, Günther, 56, 62

Peace (*galênê*), 37, 87, 206, 206n1, 210, 211, 213, 214, 217, 218

Pebble arithmetic, 154–162

Persons, 2, 145, 170, 177, 177n23, 178, 178n25, 180, 180n30, 181, 182n35, 191, 194, 195, 198, 211, 214, 216, 221, 222n1, 225, 225n13, 226, 226n16, 227n17, 228, 232n33, 233, 234n37, 235, 242, 243, 258–260, 259n4, 262,

- 264, 264n8, 265, 268, 271, 275, 275n21, 279, 280
- Philolaus, 151n8
- Philosophers, 1, 2, 4–6, 16, 19, 28, 56, 58, 75, 78, 78n17, 97, 99, 106, 119, 152n9, 169–172, 176n21, 178–180, 178n26, 180n30, 184–186, 201, 205, 206, 210–213, 215, 217, 218, 246–248, 247n16, 252, 258, 265, 277
- Plato, 6, 7, 11–17, 19–40, 43, 45, 47, 50, 50n1, 52, 54, 54n4, 54n5, 55, 58–61, 63, 65, 67–69, 74, 74n3, 78n17, 83n27, 88n38, 92n48, 119n17, 149, 150n2, 150n3, 151n8, 152n9, 153, 155, 155n15, 156, 160–164, 177n23, 189–192, 191n11, 192n13, 196, 198–202, 201n31, 201n32, 202n34, 206n1, 230n28, 237–244, 238n1, 241n8, 244n13, 246–248, 247n16, 251–281
- method of division, 54, 54n4
- works; *Apology*, 189n1, 201, 231n31, 233n37; *Charmides*, 189n1, 198, 199; *Euthydemus*, 44, 189n1; *Euthyphro*, 189n1, 196, 196n23, 232n32; *Gorgias*, 189n1, 193–195, 194n18, 233n37, 246, 260, 275; *Laches*, 189n1, 198, 198n26, 199; *Meno*, 38, 59–61, 193, 193n16, 196, 198, 199, 228n23, 228n24; *Parmenides*, 6, 29–31, 38, 43, 149–164; *Phaedo*, 25–28, 30, 33, 34, 43, 54n4, 78n17, 151n8, 206, 210–212, 214, 215, 217, 218, 267–269, 276–278; *Phaedrus*, 11–13, 17, 266, 267, 267n13, 269, 277, 278, 280; *Protagoras*, 39, 63, 177n23, 194, 198; *Republic*, 6, 14, 23, 25, 29, 30, 33, 34, 43, 44, 47, 52, 63, 64, 152n9, 156, 157, 157n19, 162, 176n22, 191, 192, 192n12, 192n13, 197, 197n24, 200–202, 201n32, 202n34, 205, 206, 209–211, 214, 215, 217, 221–223, 225n13, 227n20, 237–248; *Sophist*, 6, 39, 43–48, 273, 278; *Timaeus*, 6, 11–14, 14n10, 16, 17, 43–48, 265, 279
- Platonic *eros*, 266
- Plato's unwritten teaching on the generation of number, 149
- Pleasure, 4, 6, 48, 63, 101n3, 171, 174n14, 175, 177, 178, 178n26, 191, 191n10, 205–218, 241, 276, 276n22
- Polemarchus, 197, 221–235, 242, 244n13, 245, 248
- Practice of death, 211–213
- Principle of Alternative Possibilities, 258
- Pythagoreans, 154
- R**
- Reincarnation, 14, 16, 17
- Remembrance, 13
- Restoration, 209, 209–210n6, 210
- Ross, W.D., 20, 27, 33, 49–51, 61n13, 65, 101n3
- S**
- Sages, 6, 128, 145, 169–172, 176, 176n21, 178–182, 180n30, 184–186
- Self-restraint, 169–186

- Shorey, P., 25, 27, 30, 35–39,  
54n4, 64
- Socrates, 5, 7, 23, 25–28, 34, 35,  
37–39, 37n22, 47, 52, 53,  
54n4, 58, 60, 63–69, 78n17,  
119n17, 139, 151n8, 152n9,  
156, 162, 171, 176n22, 177,  
177n23, 178, 189–202,  
205–218, 206n1, 207n4,  
209n6, 221–235, 238–242,  
240n6, 243n11, 244–246,  
244n13, 245n14, 253, 255,  
261–264, 266, 268, 269,  
270n15, 273–276
- Soul, 6, 11–17, 59, 60, 63, 75,  
100n2, 101, 171–181, 171n6,  
176n20, 176n22, 183, 185,  
191, 191n10, 192, 205, 206,  
206n1, 208, 210–218, 222,  
222n1, 223n4, 232n32, 239n4,  
243, 245, 247, 254, 259,  
264–267, 271, 272,  
275, 277–279
- Spinoza, 6, 97–120  
works; *Ethics*, 98, 98n1, 115, 116
- Spirit, 12, 14–17, 23, 111n11, 135,  
136, 191, 234, 260
- T**
- Three-state thesis, 205, 206, 211,  
214, 217, 218
- Two-state thesis, 208, 214, 216–218
- U**
- Usefulness, 182n33
- V**
- Value-free universe, 261
- Virtue, 4, 39, 49, 63, 63n16, 65, 66,  
77, 77n13, 79–82, 91, 101, 102,  
124–128, 144, 145, 169–186,  
191n8, 195n20, 196, 198, 199,  
199n28, 222, 223n4, 228n23,  
228n24, 231, 232, 234n37,  
240n6, 241, 243–248, 243n9,  
247n16, 263, 269, 275
- W**
- Wealth, 199, 228n24, 240
- Wild passions, 212–215, 217, 218
- Women, 14, 16, 173n11, 228n23,  
256, 264, 266n12, 272