

**PLATO (the philosopher): USER'S GUIDE**  
**(version of December 6, 2016, emended April 6, 2020)**

*“Unless either the philosophers become kings in the cities or those who are nowadays called kings and rulers get to philosophizing truly and adequately, and this falls together upon the same person, political power and philosophy, while the many natures of those who are driven toward the one apart from the other are forcibly set aside, there will be no cessation of evils, my dear Glaucon, for cities, nor, methinks, for the human race.”*

Plato, *République*, V, 473c11-d6<sup>1</sup>

*“I realised that it is not only the material world that is different from the aspect in which we see it; that all reality is perhaps equally dissimilar from what we think ourselves to be directly perceiving and that we compose by means of ideas which don't show up but are active, in the same way the trees, the sun and the sky would not be such as we see them if they were apprehended by beings having eyes differently constituted from ours, or else endowed for this task with organs other than eyes which would provide equivalents of trees and sky and sun, though not visual.”*

M. Proust, *The Guermantes Way*,  
translation C. K. Scott Moncrieff revised by me

(Note: a table of contents based on bookmarks is available for display on the left part of the screen in Adobe Reader)

Foreword: this paper is a translation by me into English of a paper I originally wrote in French, my native tongue, under the title “*Platon: mode d'emploi*” (version of December 6, 2016). Being both the author of the text to be translated and the translator, I felt free to adapt in some cases the original text and reformulate it in English rather than slavishly translating the French. Besides, some section of the original in French deal with specific problems of translation from Greek into French (e.g.: the fact that, in French, the Greek words *to agathon* may be translated as either “le bon” or “le bien”, which is not the case in English, where it is always translated as “the good”); in such cases, I obviously had to adapt the English text. And conversely, there may be problems of translation from Greek into English that don't exist in French. Regarding quotations from Plato, I always translated directly from Greek into English rather than translating my French translation into English. And finally, I apologize for the fact that my English may be at times clumsy, if not even faulty. Though I lived for six year in the USA (from 1972 to 1975 and again from 1983 to 1986), my English, more American English than British English, is obviously far from perfect. I only hope that it remains understandable without too much effort, so that the efforts of the reader may be focused on understanding what I say about Plato and Plato himself.

Note of April 6, 2020: I want to express my deepest gratitude to Phillip Lundberg who, without even knowing me, volunteered by e-mail to emend a printed version of my text of typos, spelling and grammatical errors and to send me the emended version over the Atlantic Ocean free of charge. This new edition is the result of his work. If imperfections or mistakes remain, it must be that I overlooked some of his emendations and the responsibility is mine.

### **Overview (to get a taste of what's coming)**

The thesis I intend to argue in this paper is that Plato didn't write his dialogues as independent works spread out over a span of fifty years of thinking, each presenting the state of his thoughts at the time he was writing it and the answers he himself was giving at that time of his life to the questions he was then working on, answers that might have evolved through the years

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<sup>1</sup> All the translations of Plato quotes in this paper are mine. References to dialogues are given using the universally accepted system based on the 1578 three volume edition of Plato complete works by Henri Estienne (Stephanus in latin), whose page numbering is reproduced in about all modern editions and translations of the dialogues. For those unfamiliar with this mode of quotation, it is explained in the page of my Internet site at address <http://plato-dialogues.org/faq/faq007.htm>. When references include the line number, it is based on the Oxford Classical Texts (OCT) edition of Plato complete works in 5 volumes by John Burnet.

based on the development of his thinking, but actually a single work in 28 volumes artfully structured by a master of pedagogy in light of his own *prior* evolution and his experience as a teacher at the Academy, the school he had founded in Athens to form future leaders, a work meant to accompany the student (and, more broadly, the reader) intent upon embracing a political career in his progression toward that goal, not by providing him with prepackaged answers but rather in eliciting thoughts on his part on the right issues, in pointing at the limits and weaknesses of speedy, simplistic answers and in showing how all the questions that must be addressed are intertwined and call for a set of answers consistent with one another and with the observed facts gathered from life experience.

The question which is at the root of all this, asked in the opening dialogue and remaining in the background of all others, is the following: “What entitles a human being to rule over fellow human beings? What skills must one have to play that role?” At the end of this journey, which should have made things clearer for us on this issue and given us leads toward appropriate answers devised by us along the road, Plato doesn't give his own answer, but only an example, necessarily dated, of the work awaiting a lawgiver, putting the stress more on the spirit in which this work has to be done than on the specifics of the laws he comes up with.

To talk of skills expected from a ruler means to assume knowledge that might be required for that role, which leads to the problem of knowledge and to the question “What can a human being know?” And when one realizes that all knowledge, and more generally speaking, all human thinking, is dependent upon words and *logos* (“speech”) through which it is expressed, either internally or vocally, the question becomes that of the power and limits of *logos*<sup>2</sup> and of

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<sup>2</sup> I don't translate in this paper the Greek word *logos*, whose array of meaning is too broad to be rendered in English by a single word without losing part of its richness, which it is important to keep in mind to properly understand Plato's problematics. The reader unfamiliar with ancient Greek should only know that its possible meanings include, among others: “verbal expression”, “speech”, “tale”, “definition”, “account”, “reason” (both as the faculty of the mind and as the “ground” for doing something), “proportion”, “explanation”, in short, almost anything that can be expressed through words. With the word *logos* and derived words such as the verbs *legein* (to speak) and *dialegesthai* (to dialogue, discuss), the stress is put on human speech as having meaning. When Plato want to stress the physical dimension of speech as the production of sounds, he uses the verb *phthegeisthai*, which may also mean “to speak”, but which has the much broader meaning of “producing a noise, a sound”, not only for a human being, but also for an animal or a material object. The fact of being endowed with *logos* is for Plato, even before Aristotle, what distinguishes human beings from all other animals.

From a more general standpoint, I ask the reader not familiar with ancient Greek to excuse me for using so many Greek words in this paper, sometimes without translating them, but it seems to me it is the price one has to pay if one is to properly understand Plato. Some of the words used by Plato cannot be translated into English by a single word without losing part of what he is trying to make us understand (*logos* is the most striking example of this). Plato had no intention of imposing his law upon words by forcing a unique meaning on each one in order to create a “technical” vocabulary, but on the contrary he wanted to start with speech as used by anybody else and to play with its ambiguities *in all consciousness* to reach his goals. We'll see another example of this with the word *politeia*, which he chose as the title for the central dialogue of his work (called in English the *Republic*), precisely because of the multiplicity of meanings of the word, which is lost in the English word “republic”. We'll see that it is also the case with words central to what scholars call the “theory of forms” which they ascribe to Plato. The end result is that one should be careful with *all* translations of Plato, all of which convey, through choices made by the translator to render into English those loaded Greek words, the understanding and assumptions, explicit or implicit, he or she made about what Plato was trying to say. For this reason, the less bad solution, for a reader who seeks more than a cursory overview of the dialogues, is to use several translations and compare them on problematic sections so that possible differences between them alert him to the fact that maybe the original Greek text was not so easy to understand and that a problem of understanding might exist there, before constructing broad theories about what Plato wanted to say based on faulty or biased translations. It is important, for a proper understanding of Plato, to be aware of the many uses he makes of a same word in different contexts, for it is often by masterfully orchestrated interplays between the many meanings of a word that he tries to make us understand what he is trying to say. And it is mistaken to hope to be able to always translate the same Greek word by the same English word: the range of meanings of words varies from one language to another and it is impossible to find, for each Greek word an English word having the exact same range of meanings. This is no problem for persons using words in only one meaning at a time, but it becomes one with Plato who, aware of the polysemy of

the relationship which might exist between words and what those words purport, rightly or wrongly, to point at that might not be them.

Thinkers of Socrates and Plato's time were looking for answers to those questions through discourses about "being", what we now call an "ontology",<sup>3</sup> which led to disputes between those who understood "being" as meaning tangible, visible, palpable, material, and those who, realizing that everything of this nature is in perpetual flux, always becoming different from what it was earlier, were looking for "being" elsewhere, on the side of "forms" or "ideas" exhibiting permanence and stability behind what is always changing.

Plato, after having shown in the *Parmenides* that any discourse on "being" which is not preceded by an investigation of the *logos* which makes it possible can only be sophistical, that is, devoid of meaning, even though it might scrupulously follow the rules of logic, shows in the *Sophist* how to ground a philosophy in a reflection on *logos* requiring no prior ontology and putting in its proper place the linguistic tool with no intrinsic meaning which the verb *einai* (to be) is, a mere function word meant to link a subject (a "being", *on* in Greek) and a predicative expression (a "beingness",<sup>4</sup> *ousia* in Greek), based upon two very simple principles: what I call the principle of selective associations, which, in the case of words, states that not all combinations of words are relevant, but which has a much broader range of applications beyond mere words, and the principle of validation by shared experience through dialogue (*to dialegesthai*<sup>5</sup> in Greek), which affords the tool for distinguishing, at least in some cases, between relevant combinations of words and others which "don't work", and offers us a proof that at least certain words point at something beyond themselves and which is "external" to our thoughts.

Earlier, in the *Republic*, the logical center of this educational journey and its cornerstone, Plato had given his readers a clue on what could serve as a starting point and guiding principle to apply the principle of validation by experience when leaving the sensible realm, namely the idea of the good (*hè tou agathou idea*),<sup>6</sup> as any human being always acts in view of what he/she believes, rightly or wrongly, to be good for himself/herself, but may realize over time that what he/she thought at an earlier time as good for himself/herself may turn out to have consequences that, based on his/her own criteria of good and bad, he/she now deems bad for himself/herself,

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many words, plays with it. And, to make matters worse, the fact that a Greek word has been transposed in English is no guarantee that it has now in English the meaning or meanings of his Greek original. We'll see an example of this with the word *hypothesis*, origin of the English word "hypothesis".

<sup>3</sup> The etymological meaning of "ontology" is "discourse (*logos*) about being", *onto-* being derived from the root of the present participle *ôn, ontos*, of the Greek verb *einai* (to be), which can be used as a substantive under the neuter form *to on* ("being" as a noun; genitive: *tou ontos*, nominative plural: *ta onta*).

<sup>4</sup> "Beingness" is formed in English on the same model as *ousia* in Greek, a substantive derived from the feminine form *ousa* of the present participle of the verb *einai* (to be). But the word should not be taken here in its usual English meaning implying "existence", which is precisely the meaning that Plato denies to *einai*. It should rather be understood as meaning "the "this" or "that" which a phrase built around the verb "to be" says that the subject is, whatever that is". The problem Plato was faced with in Greek is that, in his time, there was no Greek word for "predicate" in its grammatical meaning (and as a matter of fact, for most of the grammatical terms) and *ousia* had a common meaning of "wealth, substance property". In some cases, to talk about the "predicative expression", he uses the expression *to ti esti* ("the what it is"), but in other cases he uses the word *ousia* precisely because of its overtones of "wealth", that is, of something of "value", for reasons that will become clearer as we proceed. A proper understanding of this word untainted by what it became with Aristotle, is key to understanding Plato and I'll come back to this later in this paper.

<sup>5</sup> Plato seldom uses the word *dialogos* (at the root of the English word "dialogue"). He much prefers the expression *to dialegesthai*, which makes a substantive out of the infinitive of the verb *dialegesthai* ("to talk with one another, to dialogue") by preceding it with the neuter article *to* (literally: "the [fact of] dialoguing"), in order to make clearer that it refers to an activity, a practice, developing in time and always to be continued. And the fact that this infinitive is in the middle voice (intermediate between active and passive) emphasizes the fact that the subject (in the grammatical sense) of this activity takes personal interest in it, practices it for his/her own good.

<sup>6</sup> "Good" must be taken here in its broadest sense, not limited to moral good (that is, as the opposite of "bad" rather than "evil"), but including any kind of good thing, behavior, activity, or whatever, as we'll see as we proceed.

which thus proves that the good has an “objective” reality that doesn't depend on what each one thinks about it and invites us to seek through dialogue and the sharing of individual experience what is truly good. In other words, the goal of a true philosopher should be to seek not what “is”, but what is “good” and the foundation of philosophy properly understood is not an “ontology” (a discourse on “being” asking the question devoid of meaning of what “exists” and what “doesn't exist”), but an “agathology”<sup>7</sup> (common quest through dialogue of what is “good” and what isn't). And it should become obvious by now why those who have gone the farthest in this quest are the most apt to lead their fellow human beings.

Read in that perspective rather than with the goal of reconstructing (vainly if my hypotheses are on the mark), what could have been the “theories” of Plato, which is much more comfortable because less personally involving, the dialogues of Plato remain of foremost relevance for us today, since the problems they deal with are the same as ours despite considerable progress in the sciences that he would have called “physical”, about which he wants us to understand that they can only answer “how?” questions, “how to do this or that?”, and not “why?” questions, “why, to what end, good or bad, should we do this rather than that?”, which are the questions we should be most concerned with, all the more so as his time shared many similarities with ours: considerable progress in scientific knowledge—Hippocrates, the founder of “rational” rather than “magical” medicine, was a contemporary of Socrates—, materialism, atheism, relativism, democracy in the hands of fine talkers and public relations specialists, confiscation of power by a handful of wealthy families, and so on, and he questions and invites us to question precisely the value of all these features of his time.

Aside from this general thesis, this paper displays what I think is the overall structure of that 28 volumes work and the organizational principles of this arrangement. Thus, it can be used as a reading guide to the dialogues arranged in the order I indicate.

As those organizational principles are based on two analyses conducted in the *Republic*, cornerstone of this whole construct, the tripartite structure of the human soul (*psuchè*) and the identification of the four “affections (*pathèmata*)” induced in it by what is around us, sensible as well as intelligible, put forward in the analogy of the line read in light of the allegory of the cave and the parallel between sun and good (*to agathon*) which respectively follow and precede it, I'll take time, after a second pass through the founding principles of *logos* exhibited in the *Sophist*, to conduct an in-depth reading of those major texts, a reading which will allow us to realize that the key hypothesis of what is usually called the “theory of forms” ascribed to Plato, which implies that he would have used the same words, *eidos* and *idea*, both stemming from roots associated with the notion of sight and meaning in their primary sense “appearance”, to designate in the visible realm what has the less reality, a simple “image” or visible “appearance” of what is perceived by our eyes, which he keeps warning us to be wary of, and in the intelligible realm what would be the most “real”, what would constitute the ultimate “truth”<sup>8</sup> about “beings”, is not acceptable and that we should rather accept a continuity of meaning through the two realms of visible/sensible and of intelligible: in either realm an *eidos* or an *idea* remains a mere “appearance” conditioned by the nature, capabilities and limits of the “organ” which, in human beings, gives access to it, the eyes for the visible, the human mind for the intelligible, and we cannot gain access, as human beings living with a material body within space and time, to what things are in themselves (in Greek the *auta ta* \*\*\*, as for instance, *auto to kalon*, “the beautiful itself”, or *auto to agathon*, “the good itself”).

As I said already, human thought, whether inner or expressed through speech (*logos*), can only express itself with words, which are no more than arbitrary tags associated to what they

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<sup>7</sup> I create this neologism after the model of “onto-logy” from the Greek word *agathos* (“good”): “agathology” is a discourse (*logos*) on the good (*to agathon*, making a substantive of the neuter form of the adjective).

<sup>8</sup> *Alètheia* in Greek, whose primary meaning is « unveiling », formed on *alèthès*, whose etymological meaning is “not hidden”.

purport to designate. The primary task that awaits human beings should thus be to share their experience in order to try to reach by means of (one of the meanings of the Greek preposition *dia-*) words what is beyond (another possible meanings of the preposition *dia-*) words by practicing an activity that Plato designates by the expression *to dialegesthai* (literally “the [fact of] dialoguing”), which is not a specific technique (“dialectic”), but rather a state of mind toward language and speech. We’ll see that, in this perspective, the last step of the freed prisoner in the allegory of the cave, the contemplation of the sun, must be considered with utmost caution and as a display of Socrates’ irony and of the manner Plato has to put to task our attention and judgment in his dialogues.

A close reading of these three texts will also allow us to compare the almost “technical” meaning Plato gives to the word *ousia* in the *Sophist*, a meaning close to that of “predicative expression” in the grammatical sense, for which there was no word in Greek in his time, and a meaning importing the idea of “value” by virtue of the fact that the only criterion available in the intelligible realm to validate our investigations is the criterion of the “good”, which implies that the only “predicates” that we can reach about anything, or at least those we should be most concerned with, are those establishing a link with the good (*to agathon*), that is, in the end, its “value” for us. Indeed, thought has not been given to Man to grasp what “is”, period, but what is good (*agathon*) for him (this is the ultimate meaning of the parallel between good and sun). And the good, or its “idea” (*hè tou agathou idea*), the only thing we can grasp about it as embodied human beings, is not a concept among others, but what gives its value, its *ousia*, to everything else, which explains why Plato, at the end of the parallel between good and sun, says that the good is beyond *ousia*. Plato, while reverting to the etymological sense of the word, stays at the same time in the continuity of the usual meaning of *ousia* in his time, the meaning of “wealth” in a purely materialistic sense, especially real property, a meaning which he sometimes uses the word for in the dialogues; he simply suggests another way of evaluating the worth of things by questioning the shortcut almost built in the common meaning of *ousia* which implies that material wealth is the ultimate “good” for Man, the “greatest good” (*to megiston agathon*).<sup>9</sup>

We’ll also see that the word *pragma*, derived from the verb *prattein* (“to accomplish, act, practice”) and meaning “act (from a concrete standpoint as opposed to *praxis* meaning “act” in the abstract), business, affair”, often translated by “thing” when Plato uses it to designate what a word (*onoma*) refers to, should be related, when used in this sense, to the word *pathèma*, derived in the same manner from the verb *paschein* (“to suffer (in the general sense of having something done to oneself), be affected”) and meaning “affection” in the sense of what affects us, what befalls us, good or bad, used by Plato in the analogy of the line to collectively designate the various ways our *psuchè* (“soul”) is affected by the senses and by the *nous* (“mind”, “intelligence” (as a function)): *pragma* designates in such contexts what is “active” to produce the *pathèma* (“affection”) affecting our *psuchè* (“soul”) through our senses and/or our mind, that is, the “cause” of such *pathèma*. In this respect it may be worth noticing that *causa*, the Latin word from which “cause” is derived, is also the root of both French words “cause” and “chose”, the latter being the French for “thing” and thus the usual translation of *pragma* in French in such contexts.

### Plato’s “evolution”

The Ancients, especially those called Neoplatonists (third to sixth centuries AD, the first of them being Plotinus, who lived in Roma between 205 and 270) didn’t care much about the order in which

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<sup>9</sup> This is the deeper meaning of the question asked Cephalus (whose name means “head”) by Socrates at the beginning of the *Republic*, at *Rep. I*, 330d1-3, when he asks him what “greatest good (*megiston agathon*)” he thinks he derived from the fact of owning a “great wealth (*pollen ousian*)”: the rest of the dialogue will try to make us understand that the *ousia* which constitutes the greatest good for Man is not what Cephalus, and, along with him, all the Greeks using *ousia* in its material sense, believe it is, mistaking “having/owning” for “being” and suggesting that we “are” what we “own” (outside ourselves).

Plato's dialogues had been written. Most of them, being schoolmasters teaching philosophy to their students based on Plato's dialogues, were more concerned with the order in which they should be read to best understand Plato's teachings, at least the way they themselves had understood them and reformulated them, most often through commentaries of selected dialogues.

Diogenes Laertius, who wrote in the third century AD a work titled *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* still extant, recorded several traditions about Plato's dialogues. One of them mentions an author named Thrasyllus, supposed to have lived in the first century AD, who suggested that "*Plato was composing his dialogues after the model of antique tetralogies*"<sup>10</sup> and to whom he ascribes a grouping of the dialogues in tetralogies about which we don't know whether it is the work of Thrasyllus himself or the transcription by him of an earlier tradition.<sup>11</sup> But this arrangement is suspect, if only because he mixes genuine dialogues with works that almost everybody nowadays considers as apocryphal,<sup>12</sup> which suggests it being later than Plato. Diogenes Laertius also mentions a (partial) arrangement in trilogies, which he ascribes to Aristophanes of Byzantium (third century BC).<sup>13</sup> But here again, there is a mix of wheat and weed, the *Letters* being among the latter, most of them being spurious and, even if genuine, having no place among dialogues.

It's only during the last two centuries or so that scholars, in the wake of the wave of historical criticism started during the seventeenth century about the books of the Bible and leading over time to suspect the authenticity of most ancient writings and, in that perspective in the case of Plato, to point at supposed inconsistencies between dialogues that would make some of them suspect, ended up making use of the generalized "Darwinism" of the late nineteenth century to try to explain those supposed contradictions by an "evolution" of Plato's thought over the fifty years or so during which they assumed he wrote his dialogues, roughly between the death of Socrates in 399 BC and his own death around 347 BCE at the age of eighty. It is in this context and in order to support this "theory" that the question of the date of writing of the dialogues became key, as it is this assumed date which allows them to locate each dialogue in the evolution of the author's thoughts. Scholars thus developed over time and perfected this hypothesis, still undemonstrated, and undemonstrable since we know nothing about the way Plato wrote and "published" his dialogues, not even if he made them available (a more appropriate expression than "publish" for the time he lived in) during his lifetime outside the Academy or if some or all of them transpired against his will. According to this hypothesis, each dialogue is an independant self-sufficient work, with the exception of two or three cases where obvious links between dialogues can be found in the text (*Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, trilogy to which a *Philosopher*, lost or never written, was supposed to be added; *Timaeus*, *Critias*, with an unfinished *Critias* ending in the middle of a phrase, which should have been completed with a *Hermocrates* also lost or, more likely, never written; *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, which,

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<sup>10</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, III, 56. The « tetralogies » this refers to are the tetralogies of Greek classical theater: in order to compete in festivals regularly held in Athens and other Greek cities, each author had to compose a tetralogy, that is, a group of four plays made up of three tragedies forming a trilogy plus a satirical drama, which were played in a row by the same cast of actors during the contest.

<sup>11</sup> This arrangement, still used in certain editions of Plato's dialogues (eg.: the OCT) is as follows: T1: *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo* ; T2: *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* (sometimes called *Politicus*) ; T3: *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* ; T4: *Alcibiades 1 et 2*, *Hipparchus*, *Amatores* ; T5: *Theages*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis* ; T6: *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno* ; T7: *Greater Hippias*, *Lesser Hippias*, *Io*, *Menexenus* ; T8: *Clitopho*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Critias* ; T9: *Minos*, *Laws*, *Epinomis*, *Letters*.

<sup>12</sup> The idea of challenging the authorship of dialogues ascribed to Plato is not new and already in Antiquity some scholars challenged the genuineness of one or another dialogue. Thus, Diogenes Laertius, in the section where he mentions Thrasyllus, adds, after the list of dialogues included in his tetralogies, a supplementary list of dialogues deemed spurious. Some of those dubious dialogues were eventually dropped from the editions of Plato's works, other are still there.

<sup>13</sup> Trilogies he mentions are : TR1 : *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Critias* ; TR2 : *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Cratylus* ; TR3 : *Laws*, *Minos*, *Epinomis* ; TR4 : *Theaetetus*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology* ; TR5 : *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Letters*. Note, in light of what I said in an earlier note about the structure of classical Greek theater, that an ordering in trilogies is not incompatible with an ordering in tetralogies since a tetralogy includes a trilogy.

without being strictly speaking a report in three parts on the trial of Socrates, focuses on three key episodes, or even four if we add the *Phaedo*, which “relates” the last day of Socrates and his death). In this “evolutionist” approach scholars group the dialogues in three broad periods: the so-called “Socratic” or “early” dialogues, assumed to have been written first, at a time when Plato was still (so they suppose) under the dominant influence of the thought of his “master” Socrates, until he freed himself from this influence to develop his own theories in a second group of so-called “middle” dialogues or dialogues “of maturity”, among which the most famous of them, the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, the *Phaedo*, are found; but while growing old he would have noticed problems with some of his “theories” developed in the middle dialogues, especially with the so-called “theory of forms”, the most famous of them, problems witnessed primarily by a most arid dialogue, the *Parmenides*, but which remain in the background of all the dialogues written in his old age, thus labelled “late dialogues”, till the last one, left unfinished at his death, the *Laws*.

Aside from the fact that it relies on undemonstrable hypotheses, as I already said, one of the major defects of this approach, which is not peculiar to Plato's case as it has become the common lot of philosophy in general, but which is most regrettable in his case, as we will soon see, is that what it focuses on about an author, Plato in our case, is but the reconstruction from his writings of what could have been his “doctrines”, his “theories, without caring much about their relevance for us here and now. In other words, “philosophy” is no longer what Plato had in mind in using this word, but has become a mere history of thought that “tourists” visit under the direction of “guides” making a living from scholarly publications they write on their pet “thinker”, publications whose worth and seriousness are measured by the length of the bibliography they detail at the end of the work (and God knows it can be thick regarding Plato!), and in which the rule of the game is for the author to show that he has read everything already published on the topic at hand before challenging this or that thesis, not because it states something that he thinks is not true, but because he believes that it doesn't appropriately state what he understands this thinker said, be it right or wrong for him in the end...

### Why did Plato write dialogues?

The problem is that Plato, at least the way I understand him, didn't write to provide answers, since the purpose of his thoughts was not to explain the origin of the Universe or the structure of matter or some other “scientific” topic, but to try to figure out what makes a “good” life for human beings and to draw from that consequences for action in his own life even before attempting to share those thoughts with others, especially with those whose task would be to lead their city with the goal of making it possible for, if not all, at least the greatest possible number of their fellow citizens to have a share in this “good” life, each one within the limits of one's own natural capabilities and of the context in which (s)he lived, and he understood that, when it comes to one's own life, no one would blindly follow any rule unless (s)he is fully convinced deep inside that those are the rules to be obeyed. No one would choose to imitate Socrates preferring to accept a death sentence he believes unjust, but which was pronounced according to the laws in effect, rather than an escape arranged by his friends<sup>14</sup> simply because most people think (so long as their own life is not at stake) that Socrates was an admirable man and anybody should follow his example, or because Plato, who is one of the greatest thinkers of all times, has shown that Socrates was right and one should trust Plato.

What Plato tried to do through his teaching at the Academy and then through his writings, was to mark out the path that each one would have to follow *by oneself* in order to help the student/reader in the choices she alone would have to make to live her life; to clear the field, point at dead-ends and roads leading nowhere that he himself had already explored in order to facilitate the work of his students and readers, not to walk their path and make choices in their place in their own lives.

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<sup>14</sup> The justification of this choice by Socrates himself is the main topic of the *Crito*.

## The law of *logos*

And the first step in this task, which can only be done through words and *logos*, was to investigate *logos* itself, its rules, power and limits. *Logos* is indeed the faculty which makes us *anthrôpoi*,<sup>15</sup> that is, human beings, as distinct from all other living creatures. It is thus impossible to really understand what “to be an *anthrôpos*”, “to be a human being” means so long as we don’t know what *logos* is. But this word has so broad a range of meanings (“vocal expression”, “speech”, “reason”, “report”, “tale” and many more, see note 2) that it is part of the problem to determine in which sense it makes us *anthrôpoi*! Does it suffice to talk like a parrot could do to be an *anthrôpos*, or to be able to compose nice poems talking to listeners’ feelings and instinct, like Homer and other poets who “create”<sup>16</sup> an imaginary world, or to make nice speeches seeking to produce conviction with no care for truth, like Gorgias, or to pile up syllogisms with words devoid of meaning like Parmenides and Zeno, or...?

And for Plato, *logos* in a broad sense is not limited to vocal expression. For him, as he has the stranger from Elea (citizen of the same city as Parmenides in Italy), who has taken over the role of Socrates as leader in the discussion,<sup>17</sup> say in the *Sophist*: thought (*dianoia*<sup>18</sup>) is an “inner dialogue (dialogos) of the soul with itself without the production of sound” (*Sophist*, 263e3-5). Earlier, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates had defined the act of thinking (*to dianoieisthai*) as “a speech (logon) that the soul itself conducts from beginning to end with itself on what it examines” (*Theaetetus*, 189e6-7). In other words, even thought is dependant upon words, with which it inwardly formulates itself.

Indeed, for Plato, language and words, which are its building blocks, constitute the first “law” to which any human being is subject from the moment of birth, as they frame our analysis and understanding of the world around us and “force” upon us the values that are those of the society in which we live. This is the ultimate meaning of the choice made by Plato in the *Cratylus*, a dialogue investigating the origin of words, to have his Socrates use the word *nomothetês* (“lawmaker”), whose literal meaning is “maker of laws”, to designate those who first created the words we use. Plato doesn’t mean that it is the lawmakers in the usual sense who created words at the same time they were drawing laws for their city, but that whoever “invents” words makes “laws” for our understanding of what he is talking about as soon as those words are reused and become part of common usage (one of the possible meanings of *nomos*, upon which *nomothetês* is formed). It is this role of words which is in the background of the image of the aviary that Socrates uses in the *Theaetetus* to describe the activity of the soul in knowledge compatible with the possibility of error: Socrates likens to birds the *epistêmata* (“kinds/items of knowledge”) that each person “catches” since birth to store them in the “aviary” of his soul (*psuchê*), so he has them ready at hand in case of need. Presented this way, the image fails, but simply replacing the word *epistêmata* (“items of knowledge”) by *onomata* (“words”) makes it

<sup>15</sup> *Anthrôpos* in Greek (plural *anthrôpoi*), designates the human being as opposed to gods and other animals, while *anêr* (genitive *andros*, nominative plural *andres*), refers to man as a male by opposition to *gunê*, “woman” as a female. In the rest of this paper, I use the word *anthrôpos* left untranslated to refer to human being independant of sex (in Greek, the word *anthrôpos* can be either masculine or feminine simply by changing the article before it).

<sup>16</sup> The English word “poet” derives from the ancient Greek word *poiêtês*, substantive of action of the verb *poiein* meaning “to make, create”, having the original meaning of “maker”, eventually specialized for a specific class of “makers”, the makers of verses, that is, the “poets”.

<sup>17</sup> I’ll come back later on the meaning of this choice of a leader always addressed by the name « stranger (*xenos*) ».

<sup>18</sup> *Dianoia* is derived from the root *nous*, “thought, intelligence”, which leads to the verb *noein*, “to think”, and, with the adjunction of the prefix *dia-*, the same as is found in *dialegesthai* (“to engage in dialogue”) and *dialogos* (“dialogue”), to the verb *dianoieisthai*, close in meaning to *noein*, with the added idea of a process in progress (*dia-* in the sense of “through”), that is, of a thought process on the move, and the switch to the middle form (*noieisthai* rather than the active form *noein*) which implies personal implication and interest on the part of the subject in this activity. *Dianoia* is the substantive of action derived from the verbe *dianoieisthai*.

work satisfactorily. The failure is not Socrates' fault since, in this dialogue, he only delivers a "pregnant" Theaetetus of a *logos*, but Theaetetus' who, like most people, thinks that words give us "knowledge" of what they name, who conceives knowledge only as knowledge of "things" in themselves and not of relations between "things" which, in themselves, remain for us out of reach, and who attempts to define *epistèmè* ("knowledge") even before having given any thought to the power and status of words.

So long as we haven't been able to determine if *logos* gives us access to more than the words it is made up of, and, if that's the case, to what and how, we can pile up speech over speech, spoken or written, they rest only on quicksand. As a matter of fact, it is to this work of consolidation of the foundations that are devoted, directly or indirectly, through examples and by theoretical reflexion, most of the dialogues. But one must understand the difficulty Plato was faced with: the only tool at his disposal to investigate *logos*, was, and still is, for us today, ... *logos*! And, to make matters worse, he was engaging in this task as a forerunner with a language, ancient Greek, which didn't yet provide the conceptual tools and grammatical metalanguage available nowadays in modern languages. As can be seen in the *Sophist*, the only two kinds of words that his language allowed him to distinguish, yet with difficulty, were "nouns (*onomata*)" and "verbs (*rhèmata*)". The distinction between nouns and adjectives was not yet recognized, or at least not formalized in the language, and the fact that ancient Greek had a definite article which could be used to make a substantive not only of adjectives (like for instance in the expression *to agathon*, "the good"), but also of verbal forms (like for instance the present participle *to on*, "the being", or the present infinitive *to dialegesthai*, "the [fact of] engaging in dialogue") or even complete propositions (for instance *to ti esti*, "the what it is"), was no help in clarifying those notions. And he didn't have at his disposal either a preexisting vocabulary to name the various functions of words in a phrase, like "subject", "copula", "predicate", "complement", and so on, so that he had to use periphrases not always that clear for his readers, both then and now.

### The power of *to dialegesthai*

Eventually, what he has understood and tries to have us understand is that what allows us to break this vicious circle of a search with *logos* of what might be behind *logos*<sup>19</sup> is not theoretical discourses on what might be named by words, "things", "beings", "forms", "ideas", or you name it, but the empirical experience of the effectiveness of language in exchanges of words between people ("dialogue") in everyday life: to take an example which is not found in Plato, when I tell my son "Give me the key" and he hands over to me what I had in mind in using the word "key", acting in the way I expected in using the verb "give" in the direction implied by my use of the pronoun "me", I have the proof that "give", "me", and "key" are not mere words in my mind and refer to something which is not them and that I have just experienced, and that they give me a power to induce in others behaviors in accordance with what I expect in so talking to them.<sup>20</sup>

### Abstraction

What he had also understood and tried to have us understand is that words, all words, starting with those that designate tangible, visible, audible "things", things perceptible by our senses,

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<sup>19</sup> The preposition *dia-* found in *dialogos* has several meanings, so that the word *dialogos* may be understood in different ways, which are not exclusive from one another, at least for Plato: *dia-logos* may be understood as an attempt to reach *through* (one of the possible meanings of *dia*) language (*logos*) something that is *beyond* (another possible meaning of *dia*) words it used and to express it *by means of* (still another meaning of *dia*) language in a *dia-logos* with oneself (thought) or with others ("dialogue" in the usual sense, in which *dia* refers to the exchange "between one another" by means of vocal speech).

<sup>20</sup> The fact that it is not always the case doesn't invalidate the proof obtained when that's the case, but only suggests that those I'm talking to are not mere robots abiding by my will at all times, but have their own freedom of either doing or not doing what I ask them to do.

don't name what is perceived by our senses, that keeps changing all the time, but something which our mind (*nous* in Greek) "abstracts" from it in a process which develops from the first moments of our life so as to become, over time, almost instantaneous and unconscious, and which words themselves are a part of. This process, the most basic example of which is geometrical "figures (*schèmata*)", consists in eliminating certain circumstantial characteristics perceived by the senses in order to retain only characteristics that are stable over time for each "unit" so perceived at any given point in time (Socrates with whom I'm talking, the coat he is wearing, the horse which runs in front of me, the table on which I'm eating, the tone of the flute I hear playing, the melody it plays, independent of the specific tone of the flute, and so on) and repeatable in other instances (several coats, several horses, several tables, several interpretations of the same tune on different instruments at different tempos, and so on). And the two characteristics that are *always* ignored in this process are location in space and position in time. In other words, the "abstractions" that our mind associates with words are *always* cleared of spatio-temporal characteristics.<sup>21</sup> But that doesn't mean they are more "real" than that from which they are abstracted, only that they are "different". And it doesn't mean either that they are what our perceptions and thoughts originate from. They are nothing more, in the sensible realm (horse, square, flute, and so on) as well as in the intelligible realm (beautiful, just, good, and so on), than "appearances"<sup>22</sup> conditioned by the nature and constraints of the organs (eyes, ears, and so on, or human mind) which give us access to them. But this is the only "material" our *nous* (« mind, intelligence ») can work with. And since for Plato, "to be (*einai*)" has no intrinsic meaning but always calls for a predicative expression, implicit or explicit, it is futile to seek what has more "being". When Plato uses the verb "to be" without explicit predicative expression associated to it, it is most often in an opposition, explicit or implicit, between "to be (*einai*)" and "to become (*genesthai*)", that is, in the end, between "to be unchanging" and "to be changing". The only precedence that our mind might grant to the intelligible over the sensible is precisely that it can only name "abstractions" so that it is the only kind of "things" it can work on and acquire "knowledge" about. But the fact that it is the only "thing" our mind can grasp due to its constraints doesn't mean that only this "exists"! If only because all the abstractions developed by our mind start this abstraction process from sense data, even if the process is recursive and it is possible to further abstract from abstractions and end up with abstractions that no longer have any sensible features.

## Relations

And eventually, what we are able to know is not even those abstractions (*eidè*, *ideai*<sup>23</sup>) as such, but *relations* that may exist between them, the only things that our mind can subject to the test of experience: a noun or a succession of nouns doesn't/don't teach us anything about what those mere "tags" are associated with; to build a phrase having "meaning", it is necessary to associate nouns and verbs, describe relations between activities and actors, and submit the result for validation or invalidation to other people through dialogue, as the stranger from Elea explains and practices in the *Sophist*.

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<sup>21</sup> To say that they are outside space and time would be confusing as "outside" is a word having a spacial meaning! We are reaching there one of the limitations of language which cannot avoid referring to time (of verbs) and space, implied by most prepositions.

<sup>22</sup> This is the primary meaning of *eidòs* and *idea*, both derived from roots meaning "to see", that Plato uses to talk about them and which are usually translated in this context by "form" or "idea". But it would be a mistake to understand the word "appearance" as suggesting something unreal: what appears to me when I look at something is not all that thing is, and yet it reveals to me something about it which is quite "real", though partial. In the same way, when I think of someone as "man", it tells me something about that person, but not everything: I can't deduce from this word the color of his eyes, the shape of his nose or the sound of his voice, for instance, which are nonetheless features of this specific "man", even if they may change over time.

<sup>23</sup> *Eidè* is the plural (nominative) of *eidòs*, a word which is neuter and commands the article *ta* (*ta* in the plural); *ideai* is the plural (nominative) of *idea*, a word which is feminine and commands the article *hè* (*hai* in the plural).

Thus, if truth, or at least whatever part of it is within our reach, can only stem from the sharing of experience made possible by *to dialegesthai*, it is quite consistent with what Plato hoped to make us understand that he package it under the form of dialogues.

### “I know nothing”

Another limitation of *logos* is that it cannot give us absolute *certainty*, rigorously demonstrable in the same way one can demonstrate a theorem of geometry, on the questions most essential to live a good life of human being, those relating to the meaning of life, to what is *really* good for an *anthrôpos*, the question whether he is more than a bunch of purely material cells and can only be properly understood by assuming (without being able to rigorously demonstrate it) an immaterial part of him that Plato calls *psuchè*, a word usually translated by “soul”, a translation which unfortunately draws with it twenty centuries of christianity,<sup>24</sup> the question concerning what happens at death, particularly of this *psuchè* if it exists, since we can see with our eyes what happens to the body, the question of “transcendence”, that is of immaterial “beings” (whatever that word may mean), outside space and time, be they “gods” or “ideas”, or indeed of the *psuchè*, which would then be for *anthrôpoi*, by virtue of the *logos* it makes possible, which differentiates *anthrôpoi* from all other animals, a bridge between the sensible, material realm and this exclusively “intelligible” realm out of reach for the senses, and other such questions.

Indeed, if no *anthrôpos*, whether man or woman, can reach absolute certainty on such issues, can come up with demonstrations that would convince everybody and transform “opinions” into “knowledge”, if it is *hubris* (“outrage, insolence, pride”<sup>25</sup>) to believe the contrary, then why waste time putting on paper one’s personal opinions on such issues, bound to stay forever mere opinions without valid proofs? This is the meaning of the “I know nothing” which Plato has Socrates quote on several occasions: not “I know nothing at all”, since the dialogues prove that Socrates knows a few things such as, for instance, the theorem of geometry stating that the area of the square built on the diagonal of a given square is double that of the original square, a theorem he uses in the *Meno*, in a famous experience with a young slave boy,<sup>26</sup> to show his interlocutor that it is possible to learn what we ignored before; but “I know nothing”, in the strongest possible sense of “to know”, that is, of a knowledge that is absolutely certain and demonstrable in a way that is convincing for everybody, about the only things which it would be most important for us as *anthrôpoi* to have such knowledge on in order to lead a good life.

If that’s the case, what’s the use of staging oneself in discussions on those issues when the only thing that counts is, not the identity of who is talking, impressive as it may be, but the greater or lesser consistency *perceived and made one’s own by the reader* to whom the work is intended of the *opinions* under examination, between themselves and regarding the data drawn from *one’s own* experience? It is not because the words of the dialogue would be attributed to a person named Plato that they would be more trustworthy than attributed to an Aristotle, or a Socrates, or a Joe Smith or Bernard Suzanne nowadays, and, as I have already said, no one would be willing to accept, simply because it is Plato who said that it was the thing to do in such circumstances, the fate of a Socrates unjustly condemned to death from his own standpoint, but through a trial conducted according to the laws in effect, preferring to accept that fate rather than violate the laws he had so far accepted so long as his own life was not at stake, because,

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<sup>24</sup> This is the reason why I leave this word untranslated in this paper. *Psuchè* is the Greek root of “psych(o)-“ in such words as “psychology” or “psychiatry”.

<sup>25</sup> *Hubris* is the sin par excellence for the ancient Greeks, meaning that you think of yourself as more than what you really are, eventually a god while you are nothing more than an *anthrôpos*. This was the meaning of the motto *mèden agan* (“nothing in excess”) which was engraved on the pediment of the temple of Delphi, next to the famous *gnôthi sauton* (“know thyself”, or better “get to know thyself”). Plato mentions those two inscriptions in the *Charmides* (164c-165b) and the *Protagoras* (343b), and “nothing in excess” in the *Philebus* (45e1).

<sup>26</sup> *Meno*, 80d-86d.

in his opinion, even though he was unable to demonstrate it convincingly, laws are the track of human reason in the *Kosmos* (a word meaning “order” as opposed to “disorder”) he is a part of as an *anthrôpos*, the contribution to that *kosmos*, to that order, of those animals endowed with *logos* and bound by nature to live in society in a *polis* (“city”, become “state” nowadays), thus also, as Aristotle would say later, “political” animals,<sup>27</sup> and if each person individually conditions one’s abiding by the laws to the more or less painful consequences they might have for oneself when one becomes a victim of them, there are no more laws and it is the end of reason (one of the meanings of *logos*) on earth and of *anthrôpoi* as reasonable creatures.<sup>28</sup> The Socrates that Plato stages in his dialogues, which are not journalistic reports on events having actually occurred even when the mentioned events are historical, as is the case with Socrates’ trial and death, but literary fictions devised by Plato and meant to be truer to the spirit than to the historical letter of his master’s life, spends the last day of his life, *recreated* for us by Plato in the *Phaedo*,<sup>29</sup> trying to convince some of his most assiduous disciples that death is not the end of it all and that the *psuchè* doesn’t vanish at that ultimate instant when the body starts decaying within space and time, resorting to all kinds of arguments, including myth, knowing full well that none of them is really binding, as shown by the fact that he develops six or seven of these one after the other, to end up, minutes before drinking the hemlock, declaring that he has taken the “*beautiful risk*”<sup>30</sup> of accepting, even at the cost of his own life, the consequences of his understanding of justice, which, as understood by him in the way he tries to make us understand it in the *Republic* (I’ll come back to this later) without forcing it on us, is the idea(l) of *Anthrôpos* in this life.

If Plato chose to stage Socrates rather than himself as a guide in this task of “thought master” careful not to impose his own convictions upon others, it’s because, even if in the end nobody would imitate Socrates unless he is himself thoroughly, viscerally convinced of the principles he debated, he is, for having shown by acting consistently with his words even at the cost of his own life, that he was not merely a fine talker, a more credible witness than anybody else still alive (and obviously, Plato was not dead when writing his dialogues!) who might not act consistently with his words, spoken or written, in case of misfortune, and, among the dead, in Plato’s opinion as stated in the last words of the *Phaedo*, “*the man, so we might say, among those of our time we have come to know, [who was] the best, that is to say the wisest and most just*”.<sup>31</sup>

In short, Plato’s dialogues should not be read to seek in them ready-made answers to questions we might ask ourselves: Plato never provides prepackaged answers, whether his own or those of other thinkers, unless it is to submit them to thorough examination and to question their validity. It’s our own task as readers to dialogue with the dialogues, to do the “homework” in personal thought that he expects from us and to come up through that work with our own answers, keeping in mind that we will never be able to be sure that they accurately represent what we are trying to describe through the language (*logos*) of *anthrôpoi*.

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<sup>27</sup> As a matter of fact, if we thoroughly think about it, man can be endowed with *logos*, that is, able to *dialogue*, only so long as he is first a “political” animal bound to live in society: the development of language, which can only take place over many generations, implies a life in communities large enough and having a “political” organization stable enough on a long enough period of time to allow the formation over time of a vocabulary and grammar making exchanges of words between individuals conveying meaning possible.

<sup>28</sup> This is exactly what, in the *Crito*, Socrates tries to make clear to his childhood friend Crito visiting him in jail, where he awaits execution after having been condemned to death, to let him know that it will take place the next day and offer him one last time a plan of escape to avoid death.

<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of this dialogue (*Phaedo*, 59b10), Plato takes the trouble of warning us that he was not present in person that day in Socrates’ jail, a manner for him to warn us that the dialogue is not a “journalistic” report by an eyewitness. It’s one of only two instances where Plato mentions himself in dialogues, which gives even more weight to this remark.

<sup>30</sup> *Phaedo*, 114d6.

<sup>31</sup> *Phaedo*, 118a16-17.

## Plato's pedagogical program

We come now to the point where I part from all other scholars of whom I know: what I suggest, without having more *proof* of it than the holders of the “evolutionist” *hypothesis* have of theirs, is that the dialogues of Plato are not independent works, but steps in a program rigorously structured from the start, meant to accompany the training of future leaders and adapting to the expected evolution *of the students/readers* as they progress through this cursus, based on pedagogical tools developed by Plato on the basis of his own *earlier* “evolution” and experience as a teacher at the Academy, the school he founded in Athens.

This hypothesis suggests, but doesn't require, that Plato might have written all his dialogues over a much shorter period of time than generally assumed and voids of any relevance the question long debated among scholars of the probable date of writing of each dialogue: indeed, if they witness various stages in the evolution *of the author* himself, it is key to try to figure out when exactly and in which order they were written; but if, on the other hand, all of them are the different parts of a single work whose overall structure was laid out from the start, and more so if, as I suspect, Plato had no intention of letting them out of the Academy while he was still alive, the order in which they were written no longer matters, and it is not unreasonable to think that Plato wrote several of them in parallel, reworked earlier dialogues after having finished later ones, and so on (indeed, an extant tradition suggests that Plato kept working on some at least of his dialogues till his death<sup>32</sup>). What matters with my assumption is the order in which they should be read, not the order in which they were written. But I must immediately add that, in my opinion, for their author, they were not meant to be read only once in the intended order and then set aside and never reopened, in the same way a kid sets aside books from elementary school when reaching middle school, and those of middle school when entering high school and forgets all those books once he is done with studying, but, on the contrary, to be reopened to read anew earlier volumes after having completed the whole program, to find in them things that couldn't be uncovered at first reading, consider them in a new light which, in turn, would shed a different light on later steps, doing this time and again because one of the wonderful things about Plato's dialogues is that each new reading of a dialogue brings to light new discoveries unsuspected till then.

Let us come now to what I think is the overall structure of the dialogues and the leading thread through them all. The multi-volume work which I think Plato's dialogues constitute includes 28 dialogues (all those generally considered genuine nowadays) arranged in seven tetralogies (after the model of Greek classical theater<sup>33</sup>), each tetralogy being made up of an introductory dialogue and a trilogy (tetralogies of classical theater were made up of a trilogy of tragedies and a satirical drama). The overall layout is displayed in the array found in appendix 1, page 153, in which each dialogue is characterized by two or three words which are far from exhausting the matter at hand: each of Plato's dialogues is much too rich to be enclosed in a single idea and described by a single word or reduced to a single topic as was done in earlier editions. The purpose is rather to stress for each one of them, among the many themes it addresses, the one which helps understand its location in the overall organization and its relation to neighbouring dialogues. The same applies to the words and themes meant to characterize each tetralogy and the ordering of dialogues in the trilogies.

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<sup>32</sup> In his work *On Literary Composition* (*Peri suntheseōs onomatōn* in Greek, *De compositione verborum* in latin), Dionysus of Halicarnassus, a Greek rhetor and historian of the first century BC, wrote that “*Plato, having reached the age of eighty, wouldn't cease combing and curling his dialogues and enwreathing them in all possible manners*” (*On Literary Composition*, 25, 32). And he proceeds with a reference to stories supposedly known to all that a wax tablet containing several versions of the first phrase of the *Republic* was found after Plato's death.

<sup>33</sup> See note 10, page 5. The tetralogies I suggest have nothing to do with those ascribed to Thrasyllus as listed in note **Erreur ! Signet non défini.**, page 5.

The first thing a Plato scholar familiar with the ordering of the dialogues in three groups (early, middle and late) might notice is that, overall, the order I suggest is rather close to the one the holders of such an ordering arrive at, which is not too surprising if indeed Plato tried to adapt his plan, based on pedagogical considerations inspired by his own experience, to the expected evolution of the reader. There is indeed an “evolution” when proceeding through the dialogues, but rather than being that of the author while writing then, it is that of the reader as anticipated by the author!

### Alcibiades, the antihero of the dialogues

Before commenting in more detail on this structure, let us take a broad view of it and look at where it starts and ends, which will reveal its main goal. The introductory dialogue of the first tetralogy, serving as an introduction to the whole cycle, is the *Alcibiades*. This dialogue, which was indeed considered as the introductory dialogue to a study of Plato by several ancient Platonists, and whose genuineness was challenged by modern scholars (and is still a debated questions today) precisely because they deemed it too “academic”, stages a historical character, Alcibiades, one of the most gifted statesmen of his time, whose stormy life deserves more than a few words. He was born around 450 BC in one of the noblest families of Athens and lost, at age 6, his father, Clinias, killed when he was 34 in a battle against the Boeotians, the battle of Coronea,<sup>34</sup> lost by the Athenians. At the request of his father, after his death, Pericles, his uncle by his mother, who led Athens at the time, became his guardian.<sup>35</sup> He was most gifted in all areas, beautiful, intelligent and wealthy and all of this predestined him to play some day a leading role in his city.<sup>36</sup> From childhood on, in conformity with the mores of the time, he had a swarm of suitors around him, many of them in love with him. He had a strong interest in chariot races, the most prestigious event at the ancient Olympic Games and his fortune allowed him to finance no less than seven teams among those registered at the games of 416 BC, and his teams ended up with first, second and fourth place.<sup>37</sup> He married a rich heiress and was light-heartedly unfaithful to her (he was said to be the husband of all wives and the wife of all husbands). Some day when his wife, fed up with being so ill treated, tried to go to court to ask for a divorce, Alcibiades, learning about it, ran after her, caught her and, without saying a word, loaded her on his shoulder in front of the crowd and brought her back home like a mere bag of dirty laundry without a single spectator daring to intervene, so impressive he was.<sup>38</sup> He engaged in politics at a time when Athens was at war with Sparta (the Peloponnesian war) and his big idea was to set up an expedition to conquer Sicily, the granary of the Mediterranean region, several of its cities, including Syracuse, being allies or colonies of Sparta. Thucydides claims that, in his mind, this Sicilian project was only a first step toward conquering North Africa and all the western part of the Mediterranean basin, which seems likely.<sup>39</sup> In any event, he was challenged on this issue at the Assembly by a older and more cautious general, Nicias (who appears in one of Plato's dialogues, the *Laches*), who looked unfavorably upon this project which would be costly for Athens and would deprive it for some time of a large part of its army for a dubious result. But Alcibiades was a fine orator and he managed to convince the Athenians who, cautious nonetheless, chose as leaders of the expedition Alcibiades and... Nicias (plus a lesser known third general named Lamachus<sup>40</sup>). Unfortunately, at about the

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<sup>34</sup> *Alcibiades*, 104a-c.

<sup>35</sup> *Alcibiades*, 104b3-6.

<sup>36</sup> *Alcibiades*, 104b3-6.

<sup>37</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI, 16; Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI, 15-18, where Thucydides presents anew Alcibiades after a first portrait drawn at V, 43, and put in his mouth a speech in defense of the Sicilian Expedition. See also Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI, 8. These events took place during the spring of 415 BC.

time the expedition was supposed to leave, Alcibiades was implicated in two scandals which occurred simultaneously in Athens, scandals with religious overtones which could earn him a death sentence.<sup>41</sup> Alcibiades had enemies in Athens and it is possible that the accusations implicating him in those scandals were made up by some of them. Thanks to his oratory gifts, he managed to keep the coleadership of the Sicilian expedition, which soon after left Athens. But as soon as he was gone, his enemies resumed their attacks and went to court against him and other members of the Sicilian expedition who were also compromised in these scandals. As a result, Athens sent a squad in pursuit of the fleet led by Alcibiades with instructions to bring back to Athens all those indicted including Alcibiades. But he managed to escape before the squad reached the fleet<sup>42</sup> and took refuge... in Sparta, where he offered his help to the king to help him defeat the Athenians while, in Athens, he was condemned to death in absentia.<sup>43</sup> In Sparta, he was so convincing and relevant in his advice that the Spartans adopted him.<sup>44</sup> In the meanwhile the Sicilian expedition, left under the command of Nicias, turned into a fiasco: in bad position around Syracuse, which had received reinforcements, after several lost battles, Nicias delayed a retreat by sea because of a lunar eclipse taking place the very night his army was supposed to embark secretly, in which he saw a bad omen;<sup>45</sup> after this, the situation of the Athenian army kept growing worse until the final crush after a second failed attempt to retreat.<sup>46</sup> All the survivors of the Athenian contingent were taken prisoners, Nicias and the other officers were put to death and the remainder of the troop were locked at the bottom of quarries near Syracuse where they all perished one after the other from hunger or diseases.<sup>47</sup> This fiasco greatly weakened Athens and was probably partly responsible for its final defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, several years later. Meanwhile, shrewd advice from Alcibiades benefited Sparta, but he messed it up by having a son with the wife of the king at a time the latter had been away long enough to be sure the son was not his.<sup>48</sup> As a result, Alcibiades had to flee once again and this time took refuge in Asia Minor where he offered his services to Tissaphernes, satrap of Asia Minor at the service of the king of Persia, enemy of the Greeks at the time, who, not having succeeded in conquering Greece after two failed attempts (the Persian Wars, during which the famous battles of Marathon and Salamis, won by the Greeks, took place), contented themselves with pulling strings in continuous fights between Greek cities, helping the weakest one when the winning one threatened to become too strong and reversing their assistance depending on the changing fate of those quarrels. Here again, Alcibiades managed to earn Tissaphernes' favor<sup>49</sup> and tried to influence him in favor of Athens, hoping that his city would forgive him the wrong he had done it so that he could return home. He managed to become elected strategos of an Athenian colony and resumed the fight against Sparta, but he was not allowed to return to Athens. When the friends he still had in Athens eventually managed to secure a vote in favor of his return, he waited a few more years during which he kept fighting Sparta, before making a triumphal return home, despite his former betrayals, and being soon

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<sup>41</sup> One of these affairs involved parodies of the Eleusinian mysteries performed by young members of the aristocracy during drinking binges and the other the mutilation of phallic statues of Hermes, called "herms", which adorned the door of most houses in Athens, and were found one morning deprived of their phallus. On those two affairs and their links with the Sicilian expedition and Alcibiades, see Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI, 27-29, and Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 32-34.

<sup>42</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI, 53, 60-61.

<sup>43</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI, 61; Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 39-41.

<sup>44</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VI, 88-93.

<sup>45</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VII, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VII, 51-85.

<sup>47</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VII, 86-87.

<sup>48</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 44. Thucydides simply says that Alcibiades had become suspect to the Spartans without elaborating on the reasons of that suspicion (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, VIII, 45).

<sup>49</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VIII, 45-46; Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 47.

after elected strategos again by the Athenians.<sup>50</sup> The fact is Athens was in a still worsening situation in its war against Sparta and Alcibiades' military skills were real and well known. He thus took the lead of the Athenian fleet and set sail in pursuit of the Spartan fleet. Once close to the enemy, after a few successful encounters, he moored the Athenian fleet in a sheltered place along the coast of Asia Minor and there, seeing that the enemy fleet was not searching to engage in battle, left the fleet for a few days to collect funds to pay his troops, leaving it under the command, not of one of the leading officers, but of his pilot, a friend of his in drinking binges, whom he instructed to do nothing until he came back. Unfortunately, he didn't obey the order and, trying to shine in the eyes of his friend, he engaged in battle without waiting for Alcibiades' return and led the fleet to a dire defeat.<sup>51</sup> This time, it was too much for the Athenians and they didn't want to hear Alcibiades mentioned again.<sup>52</sup> So he stayed in Asia Minor, but this time far from the men in power, reduced to living in exile in one of the estates he owned there until one morning in 404 BC when henchmen of the Persian satrap Pharnabazus commissioned at the request of Sparta came to kill him in the house of one of his mistresses at that time.<sup>53</sup> But before this, he tried one more time to save Athens. From the place he lived at that time, he saw the Athenian fleet moored near Aegospotami, in Thracian Chersonese, on the banks of the Hellespont,<sup>54</sup> facing the Spartan fleet of Lysander. For several days despite repeated attempts by the Athenian fleet to force a battle, the Spartans didn't move and stayed in the port where they were anchored. Alcibiades, seeing the Athenian fleet moored in a location which didn't seem well chosen to him and the sailors and soldiers relaxing and wandering around after each unsuccessful attempt to engage in battle, came on horseback to meet the Athenian generals and made suggestions that they didn't want to take into account, coming from him. In the end, things turned out the way Alcibiades had anticipated, Lysander attacked the Athenian fleet at a time when the men were wandering around and destroyed it in what turned out to be the last battle of the Peloponnesian war and the sign of Athens' defeat.<sup>55</sup>

If I took the time to summarize this life which is worth the best of novels and is known to us through contemporary sources, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* and Xenophon's *Hellenica*, and through later sources, Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades*, it is because Alcibiades plays a major role in Plato's dialogues. He is the most often mentioned person after Socrates and he is for Plato the archetype of the antihero, the example par excellence of what can happen with a most gifted individual when he is subjected to bad influence and hasn't learned to control his own desires: rather than becoming the best toward the good, he becomes the best toward the bad; rather than benefiting his city, he brings havoc on it.

Another fact which worsens the case of Alcibiades in the eyes of Plato is that Socrates associated with him and many Athenians, who viewed Socrates as a sophist no better than the others, thought he was at least in part responsible for the ailments of Alcibiades and the misfortunes he brought on his city, and this supposed influence of Socrates upon Alcibiades probably played a role in his condemnation to death in 399 BC.

This is the probable reason why, in one of his most famous dialogues, the *Symposium*, Plato stages a drunken Alcibiades bursting with a bunch of jolly party-goers as drunk as him in the house of the tragedian Agathon, who was celebrating his recent victory in a tragedy contest in a banquet where Socrates had invited himself and the guests were taking turns to praise, each one in his own manner, Eros, the god of love. The speech of the drunken Alcibiades, coming

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<sup>50</sup> Xénophon, *Hellenica*, I, IV, 8-23; Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 64-68.

<sup>51</sup> Xénophon, *Hellenica*, I, v, 12-15; Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 72-73.

<sup>52</sup> Xénophon, *Hellenica*, I, v, 16-17.

<sup>53</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 80-81.

<sup>54</sup> Nowadays, the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, the northern (European) bank of the Dardanelles strait.

<sup>55</sup> Xénophon, *Hellenica*, II, I, 20-28, more specifically 25-26 for Alcibiades' intervention; Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, 75-76. The battle of Aegospotami took place in 405 BC.

after Socrates' speech, is the last one, and it is a praise of Socrates by an Alcibiades still in love with him and full of admiration for him, but acknowledging that he had been unable to benefit from this association: he relates several deeds of Socrates at war that he had witnessed, including one in which Socrates saved his life, but also a scene which is not to his own advantage in which, trying to seduce Socrates when he was young, he once invited him to stay at his place for the night but, for his own pique, Socrates stayed the whole night resting next to him in the same bed without touching him the least despite Alcibiades' incitations to that effect.

### What is needed to be fit to rule?

We may now return to the introductory dialogue, the *Alcibiades*. It stages an imaginary encounter between Socrates and Alcibiades the day before the latter, having reached the minimum age required to speak at the Assembly, that is, start a political career, intends to speak for the first time before the people of Athens. So, Socrates asks him what his intentions are, what he thinks he can do for his fellow citizens and his city and what makes him fit for that role, in other words, what part of his education so far has prepared him for ruling over his fellow citizens and allowed him to acquire the skills required for that task. During the course of the dialogue, Socrates gets Alcibiades to agree that what properly constitutes the *anthrôpos* is the *psuchè*, not the body, nor even the assembly of body and *psuchè*, and stresses the importance of the Delphic motto *gnôthi sauton*, which should be translated as “*Get to know thyself*” rather than “*Know thyself*” to better render the durative aspect of the verb, which describes an ongoing activity never to be completed. This motto must be understood as meaning not only “*Get to know thyself as Alcibiades, or Socrates, or Bernard Suzanne*”, but also and primarily as “*Get to know thyself as an anthrôpos<sup>56</sup> and try to figure out what makes the excellence of such a creature, both from a general standpoint and in the specific case of thyself based on thy own natural skills and limits and thy surroundings within the place and time thou live in*”.

The question which will occupy all the dialogues, directly or indirectly, is thus clearly stated from the start: what makes a man or a woman fit to rule over his fellow human beings (we'll see in the *Republic* that Plato, ahead of his time, wants the selection of leaders not to take sex into account, since it is not for him a relevant difference for the envisioned task)?

### Everything holds together

The long journey through the dialogues doesn't lead to an answer to this question, but it should allow us to understand how everything holds together and why it is impossible to answer this question without taking the time of a long meandering through questions on the power and limits of *logos*, the relations between words and what they name, the meaning or meanings of the verb “to be” (ontology: what “to be” means? What “is” and what “is not”? What does “is not” mean?), questions about truth, knowledge, what *anthrôpoi* may know and what is beyond their reach, what is good for them, questions about political action, about the various forms of government, about life and death, about what might happen “after” death, and so on, because if the goal of rulers is to try to make as many of those they rule as happy as possible by allowing them to best make use of the natural skills they have been endowed with at birth, for their own good and the good of the city they are a part of, as Plato has the lead character of his last dialogue, the *Laws*, an anonymous elderly Athenian who takes over the role of Socrates, say, then, the question whether death is the end of it all or something of the *anthrôpos* doesn't disappear at that moment, and, if that should be the case, what decides the fate of that “something”, is key for anybody working at making *anthrôpoi* happy. And this question leads to that of the form of a “life” outside space and time for an immaterial “being” (the *psuchè*), which brings us

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<sup>56</sup> See note 15, page 7, about the word *anthrôpos* (« human being »), which may as well be masculine or feminine without changing ending.

back to the meaning(s) of the verb “to be” and, one thing leading to another, to the relation between words and “things”, etc.

### Moving closer to the gods

Thus, at the end of the journey, Plato, as is usual with him, won't give us the answer, but offers us an *example*, tied to the time and place that were his, and hence not intended to be taken to the letter and implemented as is in other times and places, through the longest of his dialogues, the *Laws*. This dialogue is rather tedious, even if it takes the trouble to spend more time on what the Athenian who leads the discussion calls “preludes”, that is, explanatory and pedagogical introductions to the individual laws themselves, meant to explicit their meaning and rationale, to provide the spirit before the letter, than on the legislative prescriptions proper.

But this dialogue, as is the case with all of Plato's dialogues, talks to us also through its staging, even if, in the case of the *Laws*, it is minimal (unfortunately, most scholars, too anxious to deal with the logical value of reasonings developed by Plato, don't bother investigating the meaning of those circumstantial details, all the more so in the case of a dialogue such as the *Laws*, where they don't see what such circumstantial data on the context in which legislative prescriptions have been drawn could add to the body of laws thus proposed by Plato. They find it much more interesting to draw on our historical knowledge in attempting to figure out what the sources of Plato might have been for each individual piece of legislation he has his characters propound, to what extent he is conservative and where he is innovative, how much of the Athenian or Spartan laws he has reused, etc.)

But then, what is the context of this dialogue and what can it teach us? The dialogue stages three elderly men, an Athenian whose name Plato doesn't mention, a Spartan named Megillos and a Cretan named Clinias (the same name as that of Alcibiades' father, as if Plato was intent on rewinding the tape and reworking from the beginning the movie ruined by Alcibiades), meeting on the slopes of Mount Ida, in Crete, on a hot sunny day of summer, on their way to a cave called the cave of Zeus and the temple located nearby toward the top of the mountain. At some point during the conversation that develops between the three of them, toward the end of book III (out of the twelve that make up the *Laws*), we learn that Clinias has been commissioned by his city, Knossos, to found a new colony, that is, a new *polis* (“city”) and to draw up laws for it. The three companions will thus spend the rest of that hot summer day, while climbing toward the cave of Zeus, making laws for the future city, trying to make them the best they can, combining the experience drawn from Athens, Sparta and Crete, three of the most famous places of ancient Greece. Nothing there to get much excited about until we realize that the cave of Zeus on Mount Ida was the supposed place of birth of Zeus where, according to tradition, he had spent his childhood. But above all, it was the place where Minos, the first king of Crete, and the first king to have ruled his people justly through laws, who, as it happens, was said to be a son of Zeus and whose palace was in Knossos, would supposedly come every nine years to ask his father to dictate to him those laws that brought him fame.<sup>57</sup> It becomes clear then, with some help from the confrontation between the last words of the previous dialogue, the *Critias*, to which I'll come back later, and the first statement of the *Laws*,<sup>58</sup> that what Plato wants us to understand

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<sup>57</sup> The Athenian refers to this legend no later than in his second intervention (*Laws* I, 624a7-b3) by mentioning the tradition quoted by Homer that Minos would visit his father, Zeus, every nine years to ask him to dictate to him laws for his kingdom (the reference is to *Odyssey* XIX, 178-179).

<sup>58</sup> The *Critias*, a dialogue apparently unfinished (deliberately in my opinion, I'll come back to that later), ends up on an unfinished s depicting Zeus calling for a meeting of the gods to decide how to punish the inhabitants of the island of Atlantis corrupted by their successive kings descending from Poseidon through Atlas, the man who thought he could support the whole Earth on his shoulders, which reads: “*Zeus, the god of gods, who reigns through laws...said...*” (*Critias*, 121b7-e5; between those two parts, the depiction of the calling of the assembly of the gods by Zeus). The *Laws* opens on a question from the Athenian starting in Greek with the

through this is that it is not the gods, Zeus or some other one, who will solve our problems and dictate to us laws to bring order in our cities, but that we have been endowed (by them?) with a *logos* (meaning here “reason”), an intelligence (*nous*), that makes us able to do it ourselves and that it is in accomplishing this task, the noblest that an *anthrôpos* can accomplish, that we “deify”<sup>59</sup> ourselves and come closer to the “cave of Zeus”, that we become *dèmiourgoi* (“demiurges”, a word whose etymological meaning is “one who accomplishes a task (*ergon*) for the people (*de-mos*)”) of our cities, that we bring order (*kosmos*) in them by taking as our example the *dèmiourgos* depicted by Timaeus in the first dialogue of this ultimate trilogy, in what he himself calls “a likely myth”,<sup>60</sup> who brings order to the *Kosmos*, the well ordered Universe in which we live.

### **Politeia**

At the center of this journey from the *Alcibiades* to the *Laws* comes the *Republic*, central dialogue of the central trilogy, keystone of the whole structure and presenting the principles used to organize it. This is the reason why, before going through all the dialogues in order, I will spend some time on this dialogue, probably the most famous dialogue of Plato, to bring to light the organizing principles of the whole structure.

To begin with, we must consider the unfortunate title given this dialogue in English. The Greek title of the dialogue is *Politeia* and it is the title of a work by Cicero written in the manner of Plato under the form of a dialogue and heavily inspired by his *Politeia*, *De re publica* (literally: “about public affairs”), which has rubbed off on the original and led Latin speaking scholars to give the same title in Latin to Plato’s dialogue, later transcribed into English as *Republic*. But this translation washes away most of what Plato had managed to pack in this single word *politeia*, which is key to a proper understanding of the dialogue.

Indeed, *politeia* is a substantive derived from the word *politès*, itself derived from *polis*, the “city/(state)”. A *politès* is an inhabitant of a *polis*, a “citizen”, that is, based on what we saw earlier, an *anthrôpos* as an animal living in community, a “social” animal. From there, the word *politeia* takes a broad range of meanings addressing both the individual and collective dimensions of social life: it may simply mean “citizenship”, that is, the fact of being a *politès* of this or that city; it may further refer to the sum total of all the rights and duties that accrue to a *politès*; or else the lifestyle fitting for a *politès*; but also the gathering of all the *politai*;<sup>61</sup> or the organization of the *polis* which assigns different functions to different *politai*, in other words, the “constitution” organizing the city and the life of its citizens, provided “constitution” is understood in a much

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word *theos* (“god”), which reads: “[is it] a god or some man, in your opinion, strangers, [who] took responsibility for the arrangement of the laws?”

<sup>59</sup> In the section of the *Theaetetus* concluding what scholars view as a “digression” when it is a development intent on bringing forth the relationship between knowledge (*episteme*), the main theme of the dialogue, whose definition it is looking for, and “politics” (for what purpose do we seek “knowledge?”), an issue so “central” to the *Theaetetus* that it occupies almost exactly its material center, Socrates suggests that, in order to attempt to escape evils as much as possible, man should seek “a resemblance with the/a god”, that he describes as a kind of “escape ((*phugè*))” “from (down) here to (up) there (*enthende ekeise*)”, this resemblance consisting in “becoming just and pious through intelligence (*dikaion kai hosion meta phronèseôs genesthai*)” (*Theaetetus*, 176a9-b2). The *Laws* graphically illustrate this advice by showing that the (up) there (*ekeise*) Socrates was talking about is not God knows which empyreal heaven or other abode of the gods, and even less the ivory tower in which the supposed “philosopher” whose portrait Socrates draws in the first part of this “digression” dwells in order to avoid mingling with his kind, who is one of those he criticizes in his commentary of the allegory of the cave for “thinking they have already been carried alive in the islands of the blessed” (*Republic*, VII, 519c5-6), but a place which is within our reach in this life. To become just through intelligence implies using this intelligence, when it has the required qualities, for the good of the city to better the fate of all its citizens, possibly even of all men in cooperating in view of endowing the city (possibly even other cities, as is the case for the Athenian of the *Laws*) with laws that are as just as possible.

<sup>60</sup> See *Timaeus*, 29d2.

<sup>61</sup> *Politai* is the plural (nominative) of *politès*.

broader sense that is usual nowadays, including all the body of laws in effect in the city; and eventually, but only lately and most likely not before Aristotle, that is, not during Plato's lifetime, the word came to designate a specific form of government of the *politai* corresponding indeed to what we now call "republic". The problem is that Plato no doubt chose this word *politeia* as the title of his dialogue precisely because of the plurality of its meanings and with the clear intention of eliminating none of them, but rather to make his readers realize that they are all interdependent! One of the things Plato wants us to understand through this dialogue is that the interdependence between the city and its citizens is such that it is impossible to understand the one without the other: the citizens write the laws of the city, but the city raises and educates its citizens and instills its customs and values in them from birth on. The question then is not to decide whether the *Politeia* is a political dialogue about the best constitution for a city *or* a moral/psychological dialogue about justice in the individual (the subject explicitly acknowledged at the beginning of book II), because asking the question in those terms of either... or... is demonstrating a complete misunderstanding of Plato's purpose! The dialogue is *both* a dialogue about justice in the individual *and* a dialogue about the organization of cities. Socrates doesn't waste time to suggest it since, as soon as the issue of justice is raised by his interlocutors, he suggests, in order to make it easier to decipher the "small letters" of justice in the individual, to first examine the "large letters" of justice in the city! And when he later describes the degeneracy of political regimes, from aristocracy (to be understood as the government by the best (*aristoi*) and not as the government by a caste of "aristocrats" keeping this privilege from parents to children without consideration for the individual merits of its members) to timocracy (government by persons motivated by pride, a quest for honor and the esteem it brings on them (*timè*)), then to oligarchy (government by a small number (*oligoi*= "few") of wealthy families monopolizing most of the wealth of the city), then to democracy and ultimately to tyranny (dictatorship in modern terms), he alternates in each case a description of the political regime and a description of the individual typical of this regime.

### The festival in Piraeus

Now we have seen how careful Plato was in choosing as a title for his dialogue a single word that no English word can render in all its implications, it is well worth our time examining how careful he also was in staging the dialogue. According to the indictment, Socrates was condemned to death for introducing new deities in the city and corrupting the youth (Alcibiades, for instance!) And what does the *Republic* show us? Socrates, accompanied by two brothers of Plato, Adeimantus and Glaucon, coming down to Peiraeus, the cosmopolitan harbor of Athens, a place of debauchery and traffic of all kinds, populated mainly by metics (*metoikoi*, resident aliens at Athens) and slaves, that is persons who were not citizens (*politai*) of Athens, to attend the *first occurrence* of a festival organized by the city of Athens in honor of a foreign goddess whose cult was spreading in Athens, Bendis, a goddess of Thracian origin worshipped mainly by the many slaves originating from that country and living in Peiraeus, and there, diverting a bunch of youth, including Plato's two brothers, from the nightly part of the festival, which could only end in drinking binges and orgies, and keeping them around him in the house of the father of one of them to spend the night discussing justice and the best way to govern a city! In other words, it is the city, not Socrates, that introduces new deities, and Socrates who, far from corrupting the youth, tries to keep them away from occasions of debauchery and to educate them on the most important topics in relation to what is best for the city!

Taking this into account, the *Republic* may be seen as an alternate defense of Socrates at his trial, one he might have used had he not been limited in time by the clepsydra (see *Apology*, 19a2), one he offers to the jury of posterity. And this is no doubt the reason why the *Republic* takes the same form as the *Apology*: a long monologue by Socrates from beginning to end with no circumstantial information on whom he is talking to and in which context he does so apart

from those we can glean here and there from Socrates' own words. Such circumstantial hints are many in the *Apology* and more than enough for us to understand what is going on, while they are totally absent from the *Republic*, where Socrates is indeed talking directly to the “jury” composed by the readers who must understand it by themselves.

### The ideal city

In an attempt to uncover what justice might be, Socrates first looks for it in the « large letters » of the city, trying to imagine what an « ideal » city might look like. But watch out! The Socrates staged by Plato is not, in so doing, a sweet dreamer intent on suggesting a political organization whose unrealistic character is obvious to anybody, but one who, well aware of the utopian character of what he describes, is only trying to push to their ultimate consequences *rational* principles which should guide men in their political thinking, in order to set an ideal model so that, from there, we may ask ourselves what it is that prevents us from going so far. But we must notice that, if his city is indeed “ideal”, it implies nothing which would be contrary to human nature: he doesn't assume human beings capable of flying up high in the sky or living at the bottom of the sea, or human beings with a superhuman force or capable of spending all their time putting their mind to task without ever stopping to eat, drink, sleep or make love, not even a city whose citizens would be all geniuses and saints, but indeed a city inhabited by men and women of various levels of intelligence and capabilities in the same proportion as in any existing city.

The starting point of his reflexion is the fact that *anthrôpoi*, realizing that, if each one must satisfy by oneself one's own needs — food, shelter, clothing, and so on — no one will get very far owing to the amount of time each one would have to spend on those unavoidable tasks required to simply survive, decide to join forces and to distribute tasks amongst themselves based on each one's skills: one will grow food for everybody, another will manufacture clothes for all, still another shoes, and so on. In so doing, each one might become better and better, and thus more productive at the one thing he focuses on and, as a result, they all might end up having time left for other activities, beyond what is required to survive, such as artistic and intellectual activities, which, in turn, would induce new requirements to be shared among them, but might also introduce the risk of vice and disease, requiring new activities in the judicial and medical areas. At the end of this analysis, Socrates divides citizens into three categories: craftsmen and farmers, in charge of the production and trade of goods needed for the material life of the inhabitants of the city; “guardians”, in charge of the protection of the citizens against outer and inner threats (war against other cities, but also civil wars, rebellion, disruption of public order); and finally rulers, chosen amongst aged guardians having attended and fulfilled an appropriate program of training and selection.

But we should not view these categories of citizens as being hereditary “classes”! Quite the contrary. The main task assigned to rulers by Socrates is the selection and formation of their successors, and, in so doing, they should not hesitate to assign their own children to the category of craftsmen and farmers if they don't have the skills required to become guardians and maybe eventually rulers, and conversely to give a chance to children of craftsmen and farmers who display qualities suggesting that they might become good guardians and why not some day rulers.<sup>62</sup>

In this analysis and owing to the principles at the origin of the city, the specialization of tasks and their sharing among citizens, it is clear that justice in the city — that is what should allow it to best function — is the fact that each citizen does their assigned task (their “social” function) without interfering with the task of other citizens: a shoemaker makes shoes, a weaver weaves fabrics, a potter makes pottery, a merchant sells goods, an architect builds houses, a physician heals patients, and so on, a guardian guards the city and a ruler governs it. It is not the task of a potter to build houses, or that of a farmer to heal sick people, and it is not the task of either to govern the city.

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<sup>62</sup> See *Republic* III, 415a-c.

### The tripartite *psuchè*

On the basis of this analysis of the « large letters », Socrates attempts to describe analogically the structure of the human *psuchè* assuming that conflicts in it can only happen between distinct “parts”. The first kind of conflicts he identifies in it oppose the reasoning part (*logostikon*, whose name derives from *logos*) and the various desires/impulses/passions (*epithumiai*) stemming from the body which hosts it: thirst, hunger, sexual drive, and so on. Those appetites/impulses are many, as many as the needs of our body, but don't conflict with one another except for prioritization, and they share the common property of stemming from bodily needs. Socrates collectively refers to them as *epithumetikon*, meaning the desiring part of the *psuchè* as opposed to its reasoning part, akin to the category of craftsmen and farmers, in charge of the satisfaction of bodily needs as well, as opposed to the category of rulers, who are expected to display utmost reason.

Between those two “parts” of the *psuchè*, one siding with multiplicity (of desires/impulses), the other with unity (of thought), Socrates identifies a third one he calls *thumos* or the *thumoeidès* (“configured according to *thumos*”) part, using a word referring to the heart as the seat of life and of such behaviors as courage, anger, and so on, also associated with spiritedness, self-esteem, pride, in short, a part of the *psuchè* which is able to set the body in motion and to cause spontaneous action without the intervention of reason and thought, based on purely “intelligible” motivation not stemming from bodily needs, on symbolic “representations” such as words or images, olfactory, gustatory or tactile sensation as suggestive of the past, that is, in other words, in an “irrational” manner, “irrational” not necessarily meaning absurd or unfitting, but merely “not based on rational grounds”, coming directly from the “guts”.

### The winged chariot, the charioteer and the two horses

In the *Phaedrus*, the dialogue preceding the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates gives an image of the *psuchè* which anticipates this analysis of a tripartite soul: he likens it to a winged chariot driven by a charioteer and drawn by two horses, the one, black, spirited and stubborn, the other white and quieter. The chariot stands for the body, which can only be moved by the two horses; the charioteer stands for reason, the *logistikon* part of the *psuchè*, which can only induce motion in the chariot by acting on the horses through the reins and bringing them under control so they both move in the same direction at the same pace; the black horse, stubborn and quick to rear up and to kick, moving in all directions and trying to get rid of the reins stands for the passions/drives hard to keep in check; the white horse, quieter, but harnessed with the black horse, stands for the *thumos*, torn between the instructions coming from the charioteer/reason and the disorderly movements of the other horse. Only the horses can move the chariot/body but it can move efficiently only if both horses pull in the same direction. So, either the white horse gives in to the drives of the black horse and ends up drawing in that same direction, or the charioteer manages to rein in and subdue the black horse and to have it move in the direction he chooses and makes sure the white horse follows suit. The fact that the chariot has wings indicates that it is capable of flying up in the sky, a symbol of the fact that the *psuchè* of *anthrôpoi* can rise toward the “divine” (this is precisely what the myth of the *Phaedrus*, where this graphic description of the *psuchè* takes place, describes).

### A unity to be achieved

This description of human *psuchè* suggests that *anthrôpos* is not a creature whose inner unity is there from the start but a compound being whose unity remains to be achieved and, in this perspective, justice according to Socrates, even if he nowhere says so in such direct terms but let us find it by ourselves, consists in the inner harmony of this tripartite soul (*psychological* dimension of justice) as the foundation for social harmony (*political* dimension of justice) between the citizens of the *polis*. In other words, it is vain to hope to bring social harmony between

citizens who are not individually in agreement with themselves and masters of themselves. The history of Alcibiades offers the perfect example of what happens to a city when one of its citizens wants to rule it while he is unable to rule himself and to control his own passions/drives. Justice so understood is not an exclusively social “virtue” having only to do with the relations between individuals, despite what the discussions of book I and the first part of book II of the *Republic* suggest, but first an individual requirement of disciplining one’s own self in order to have a chance to behave in social life, that is, to be “just” with fellow citizens. It implies that each part of the *psuchè* plays the role which is its own and stays at its proper place (this is the transposition at the level of the individual of the definition of justice in the city, which requires that each one limits their social activity at the service of their city to their assigned task), in other words, that it be “just” with regard to the two other parts: reason should rule and the two other parts should accept its rule geared toward, not solely its own good, but the good of the compound that makes up the *anthrôpos*, in which each part, including “passions/desires/drives” should find some satisfaction so long as they stay “reasonable”, because that’s the price to pay for harmony to become possible within it. It is in this globalizing sense that justice so understood can be viewed as the “idea(l)” of Man as an embodied soul in this material world.

### The structuring principle for the trilogies

This tripartition of the soul is in the background of all the trilogies and serves as their structuring principle: in each trilogy, the first dialogue is more concerned with what, in *anthrôpos*, relates to the corporeal nature, the material world, while the third one is more concerned with reason and the intelligible order. And, in between, the central dialogue focuses on the white horse, the one which may either pull in the direction of passions or follow the orders of reason, by concentrating on problems associated with conflicts and choices.

This threefold partition may be seen as the origin of what would later become a classical partition of philosophy, especially among Stoics, the distinction between physics, ethics and logic:

– *physics*, whose name derives from the Greek *phusis*, meaning “nature” (etymologically “what grows/develops”, the word stemming from the verb *phuein*, meaning “to grow”), studying what is apprehended through sense perception (*aesthèsis*), which means that this level can also be qualified as *aesthetic*, in a broader sense than usually associated with this word nowadays: it is at this level that we find a dialogue on the beautiful, the *Greater Hippias*, and a dialogue on poetry, the *Ion*, along with more specifically “physical” dialogues, the *Theaetetus*, which, starting from Protagoras’ relativism, shows the limits of an understanding of knowledge restricted to “scientific” knowledge of the material world in constant becoming and trusting words to give us an adequate grasp of what they purport to designate, and above all the *Timaeus*, compendium of all the scientific knowledge in Plato’s time presented as a “likely myth” meant to give rulers the order (*kosmos*) of the Universe and the work of the “demiurge”, its (mythical) creator, as a model for their own task of ordering cities through laws produced by reason;

– *ethics*, dealing with choices of life, locus of *krisis* (“sorting, choice, judgment”), the level where Plato invites us successively to choose between Achilles and Ulysses as life model (*Lesser Hippias*), to sit in the place of Socrates’ judges at his trial (*Apology of Socrates*), to make the difference between two ridiculous sophists playing with words and Socrates criticizing their eristic fancies (*Euthydemus*), and more generally speaking between the sophist and the true philosopher (*Sophist*), before using one of his relatives whose name predisposed him to that role, Critias (a name indeed derived from *krisis*) to submit us in a surprising manner (the incompleteness, deliberate in my opinion, of the dialogue, which stops in the middle of a phrase, but not any phrase) to the ultimate test, the “final exam”, at the end of the educational cycle of the dialogues, (to understand why the dialogue abruptly stops at that specific point), in the aptly

named *Critias*, but not before having offered us in the middle of that progression a long discussion on justice properly understood as the idea(1) of Man in this life in the *Republic*, the cornerstone of the whole set of the dialogues;

– *logic*, that is, the “science” of *logos*, not limited to logic in the Aristotelean sense, which Plato criticizes in advance in the *Parmenides*, as we’ll see, but in the sense of what he calls *to dialegesthai*, which ended up being called “dialectic”, that is, the art of properly using *logos* as an access path to what is beyond (one of the possible meanings of *dia*, along with “through”, “by means of”, all of those meanings being simultaneously relevant to properly understand *dialegesthai*) words, without falling into its traps, so we may become during this life, at the end of the program, lawmakers worthy of that name, which unfolds in a critique of Gorgias, teacher of rhetoric pretending to teach the art of *logos* (*Gorgias*); a speech presented by Socrates as coming from the personified laws of Athens explaining why Socrates prefers to submit to the death penalty rather than to accept an escape scheme devised by his friends (*Crito*); an example of empty ready-made political speech (*Menexenus*); a discussion of dialectic applied to politics (*Statesman*) and eventually a set of laws meant to be an example of what needs to be done, but most importantly accompanied by “prologues” explaining the spirit of those laws and their motivations (*Laws*).

### The three waves

In the central books of the *Republic* (books V, VI and VII), Socrates focuses on the selection and education of guardians, among whom the future rulers are to be selected. In this investigation, he propounds some theoretical principles provocative enough to give us food for thought, and he does so knowing perfectly well what he is doing, since he describes those steps in the discussion as three “waves”, each stronger than the previous one, capable of engulfing its promoters under heaps of objections.

The underlying assumption behind all these proposals is that the ability to become a *good* ruler of men is the rarest thing in the world, that it doesn’t result solely from a natural gift even if certain innate dispositions are required to qualify, but that an appropriate education must be given to those having such innate dispositions to avoid that, as was the case with Alcibiades, they be put to the service of evil deeds.

### The first wave: equality between men and women

In this perspective, the first proposal, the first « wave », consists in acknowledging that there is no reason why we should divide by two our chances of finding such gems by *a priori* excluding half the population on the basis of a criterion, sex, which is irrelevant with respect to what we are looking for: women as well as men are endowed with a *logos*, human intelligence, and the specific role they play in reproduction, an activity relating to the body, has nothing to do with the level of intelligence they are capable of displaying and the other qualifications required to become a good ruler (capacity of abstraction, concentration on subject matter under study, good memory, and so on).

### The second wave: community of guardians, male and female

The second “wave” is sometimes described as the “community of women and children”, using a formula found at *Republic* V, 449d4 (*koinônian gunaikôn te kai paidôn*). But Plato doesn’t have Socrates use this formula, but rather Adeimantus asking him to be more specific on a topic he briefly mentioned at the end of book III when he suggested the guardians should live in common without having any personal property (*Republic* III, 416d6-417b8, and more specifically 416e3-4: *phoîtontas de eis sussitia hôsper estratopedemenous koinèi zèn*, “[they should], resorting habitually to common meals, like soldiers in campaign live in common”), before describing the various forms of government. This request is indeed what triggers the

“three waves” business, and it comes before Socrates has mentioned equality between men and women (the first wave). Stated in these terms, which are not those used by Socrates earlier (indeed, at the end of book III, he mentioned nothing about women and children), it is biased by male chauvinism and the fancy of polygamy by young men who haven't yet been exposed to the first wave (equality between men and women) and all its implications. But this is not what Socrates has in mind. What he proposes is a community of all the guardians, male and female, in which all forms of “private property” are banished as a potential source of conflicts. And indeed, the “private property” to be banished is not limited to real estate and materiel goods, but also and more importantly to what looks like a form of “property” in interpersonal relations: no woman should be the exclusive “property” of any man and no man should be the exclusive “property” of any woman. And what's more: no child should be considered the exclusive “property” of their parents. Plato is well aware of the excessive and unrealistic nature of these proposals and indeed, when reaching the stage of practical work at the end of the cycle, in the *Laws*, he will stick to the classical structure of the family, but here, he wants us to spend some time thinking through the ultimate consequences of principles that are quite “reasonable” at first and looking at some of the less desirable consequences of classical organisations. One of the major sources of conflicts between inhabitants of the same city has always been sex affairs! After all, if we consider coolly and objectively Homer's *Iliad*, which was, along with the *Odyssey* of the same Homer, one of the two pillars of Greek education in the time of Socrates and Plato, even without elaborating on the fact that the Trojan War, of which the *Iliad* only tells us a short episode, stems from an adulterous affair, what is it all about? What is that Achilles whom all Greeks of the time viewed as *the* hero to be imitated? The leader of a nation involved in a vast coalition at war who suddenly starts sulking like a kid and withdraws under his tent because the leader of the coalition has reclaimed for himself a woman he, Achilles, had gone wild about after she had been given to him as part of his share of bounty, thus putting at risk not only the soldiers under his command, but the whole coalition and becoming responsible for the death of his best friend; in short, a king who gives precedence to his own petty love affairs over the good of the people he is in charge of as king! In this perspective, Alcibiades was a brilliant follower of the one he was reading about when learning to read! So if, in all societies known to Plato, women, considered as the property of their husband, are also “objects” of dissention, what solution could put an end to such a situation? The solution he suggests may not be *the* solution, or it may be unrealistic, but it has the merit of pointing at real problems and of offering an option which is not materially impossible for *anthrôpoi* as they are; objections stem from culture, not nature.

If we now look at the part of the proposal dealing with children, what is Plato suggesting? That the education of children be *fully* taken care of by the city *from the instant of birth*. In order to do so babies are removed from their mothers at the instant of birth and no parents know their biological offspring, and no children their biological parents. But in fact, Plato doesn't dispose of the language associated with parenthood, quite the contrary, as he enlarges it: children born during the same period would call “Dad” and “Mom” all the adults having had a child during that period and those parents would call “son” and “daughter” all the children of that group, and those children would consider themselves brothers and sisters. What Plato tries to achieve thus is to enlarge family ties, which lead to strong bonds between persons, to the point where all guardians think of themselves as a single large family. Here again, the trick is pushed to its limits, but it points at the cultural dimension of the notions of parenthood beyond purely biological ties, and invites us to address relevant questions, even if we end up with less radical answers.

Another benefit from this approach, which brings us back to the scarcity of good leaders, is the fact that it no longer links the fate of children to the financial situation of their parents, and more specifically in the time of Plato, of their father. The city cannot take the risk that so hard to find a nature be spoiled simply because it was born in a family without sufficient means to give it the proper education, or because of setbacks in its parents' fortune. What's more, love of

parents for their children may lead those who don't have sufficient means to give them the best upbringing to illegal and possibly criminal deeds that are detrimental to the city: theft, default on loan reimbursement, and even possibly homicide.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, what is important for Plato in all of these analyses is not the specifics of the proposed measures but the thoughts they may lead to through the spontaneous and deep-rooted objections that our cultural background more than our nature induces us to raise against them.

### The third wave: philosopher-kings

The third and last wave is the one introduced by the quote I have put ahead of this paper, which suggests that, in order to put an end to the evils of mankind, leaders should be *philosophoi*. Not “philosophers” in the modern sense of the word, tenured professors of philosophy in Ivy League Universities certified by PhD's and the respect of their peers, not even *philosophoi* in the usual sense of that word in Plato's time, as is evidenced by the fact that he spends a large part of the discussion of this proposal to distinguish what *he* means by *philosophos* from what most of his contemporaries had in mind when using this word, but, taking the word in its etymological sense, friends/lovers (*philos*) of *sophia*, that is, of wisdom, of knowledge. Which moves the problem toward the question of the nature of the “wisdom” they must be in love with. And this is precisely the question that the whole cursus of the dialogues as I understand and present them tries to answer. And the first comment that can be made here, from what I have already said about the *limits* of human reason, is that, if Plato, speaking through his Socrates, refers here to *friends/lovers* of *sophia* and not simply to *sophoi*, to “wisemen”, it is indeed because what he has in mind is a wisdom, a knowledge, which is out of reach of *anthrôpoi*, at least under the form of a knowledge that would be rigorously certain, convincingly demonstrable and transmissible to others. This is the main reason why *true philosophoi* are so rare and so hard to identify and educate.

To make us understand this, Socrates uses three images in sequence in some of the most famous pages of Plato, found at the end of book VI and beginning of book VII of the *Republic*: the parallel between good and sun, the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave,<sup>64</sup> three images which complement each other and throw light on one another but have been misunderstood by most scholars. It is in those pages that the second principle of the structuring of the dialogues, the one organizing the sequence of tetralogies, can be found.

### The good and the sun (*Republic* VI, 504e7-509c4)

Before starting a commentary on the first of those three texts, which will then be *illustrated* by the two other ones, here is my translation of it.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Socrates mentions this point as if it was a trivial and mean matter, almost apologizing for bringing it up, at *Republic* V, 465b10-c7, while it is probably for him, and for Plato holding the pen behind him, one of the main motives for this organization. But it is the usual manner of Plato to downplay important issues in the hope of making the reader react.

<sup>64</sup> Respectively: parallel between good and sun: *Republic* VI, 504e7-509c4; analogy of the line: *Republic* VI, 509c5-511e5; allegory of the cave: *Republic* VII, 514a1-517a7, for the allegory proper, plus *Republic* VII, 517a8-519b7 for a partial decoding and commentary of the allegory by Socrates.

<sup>65</sup> In this translation, as well as in those which follow and everywhere else in this paper where I quote Plato, I didn't try to render Plato's text in “elegant” English, but rather to stay as close as possible to Plato's Greek, at the risk of ending up with an awkward English. In Plato's time, punctuation didn't exist and a manuscript was a sequence of capital letters without blanks between words and, in the case of dialogues, without indication of the speaker or even marks for the changes of speaker. So the punctuation has to be guessed from grammar and it turns out that Plato was fond of long phrases. I didn't try to split such phrases in multiple shorter ones, as do most of the translators. Words between brackets in the translation are words which are not in the Greek text but that I have added to make the translation a little more understandable. I include within parentheses after an English word the Greek word it translates when I refer to it in my commentary. I have left a few key words (*logos, ousia, dialegesthai*,

“At any rate,<sup>66</sup> this, [it is] not only a few times [that] you heard [it], but now either you don't have it present in your mind, or else you have in mind [505a] to cause me trouble by taking issue with me. But I think it's rather the latter since, that indeed the idea of the good be the most important object of learning, you heard it many times, [and that it is] that in truth through which what is just and the other [things] we take advantage of become advantageous and beneficial. And now, you probably know that I'm about to say that, and besides, that we don't know it adequately. But if we don't know it, even if we knew all the rest in the best possible way, but without this [idea], you know there would be no benefit for us, as there is none if [505b] we possess something without the good. Or do you think it in any way fulfilling to possess all possessions, but [that they] not [be] good? Or to conceive everything else but the good, and to conceive nothing fine and good?

By Zeus, not me at least, he said.

But of course, this also you certainly know: that, on the one hand, for the many, pleasure seems to be the good, while for more refined ones, [it's] judgment/intelligence.

How [could] not [that be the case]?

And moreover, my friend, that those who so think are unable to indicate judgment/intelligence of what, but are forced in the end to say [it's] that of the good.

And, he said, in a most ridiculous manner.

[505c] How indeed [would] not [that be the case], said I, when, reproaching us indeed that we don't know the good, they talk to us as [persons] knowing [it]? For they say it to be judgment/intelligence of the good, as if this time we understood what they say when they utter the name of the good.

Most true, he said.

But what about those defining the pleasure good? Could it be that they are in a way full of a lesser error than the others?... Or aren't they too forced to agree that there are bad pleasures?

Most certainly!

It thus happens to them, I believe, that they agree that the same things are both good and bad, isn't it?

[505d] Of course!

Isn't it clear then that [there are] huge and numerous disputes about it?

How indeed couldn't it be the case?!

But then, [is] not this obvious: regarding just and fine [things/activities/possessions/attitudes/statements/...] many would choose those which seem so even if they are not to nonetheless do and possess and look like them, while regarding good [things/possessions], nobody would

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*dialektikè*) untranslated because I thought translating them would do more harm than good. They are all words upon which I comment at length in the rest of this paper so that the reader should have enough data from those comments to grasp something of their meaning in context and the problems behind them.

A translation in French of this text, accompanied by abundant notes, can be found at my Internet site “Plato and his dialogues”, at URL [http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra\\_4/republic/soleil.htm](http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra_4/republic/soleil.htm). The English translation presented here has been checked against the original Greek and is not a mere English translation of my French translation.

<sup>66</sup> The *Republic* is the story told by Socrates to an unidentified interlocutor of a conversation he had the previous night with a bunch of youths including Plato's two brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus, in the house of Cephalus at Piraeus the very day the city of Athens was celebrating for the first time a festival in honor of a Thracian goddess named Bendis. Thus, it is a long monologue of Socrates using indirect style to narrate an earlier conversation, hence the “I said”, “Said I”, “He said”, “Said he”, punctuating the text (Plato's Greek uses a variety of formulas built in various ways around two verbs meaning “to say”, *phanai* and *eirein/eipein*, but never uses the verb meaning “to answer” (*apokrinesthai*); it is almost impossible to render differently in English all those variations, thus I've limited myself to the above four formulas, using the formulas with verb first when the Greek had an explicit pronoun after the verb and the formulas with subject first in the other cases). Here, the conversation is between Adeimantus and Socrates (Glaucon will replace Adeimantus starting at 506d2). In this first sentence, it is Socrates who is speaking.

*be satisfied with possessing those that seem so, but they look for those that are [so], for opinion in such cases, everybody holds worthless.*

*Very much so, he said.*

*So, that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which [505e] it does all [things], auguring it to be something, but being at a loss and unable to grasp appropriately what in the world it is nor possess a stable belief about it as about other [things], and for this very reason unable to determine about other [things] if it is something beneficial, about something of such quality and weight [506a], shall we say that they too must in the same manner stay in the dark, those [who are] the best in the city, in the hands of whom we will entrust everything?*

*Not the least indeed, he said.*

*I think at any rate, I said, that just and fine [things] whose manner of being one way or another good is unknown would possess a guardian of not much worth in one ignoring that about them; and I presage that nobody before these will know them adequately.*

*You presage damn well, he said.*

*Would not then our constitution be perfectly put in order if [506b] such a guardian oversees it, the one knowing those [things]?*

*Necessarily, he said. But then you, Socrates, [tell us] whether you say knowledge to be the good, or pleasure, or still something else besides these?*

*What a man! said I. Fair enough, you made long obvious that, as far as you are concerned, you wouldn't be satisfied with what the others think about it!*

*Indeed, he said, Socrates, it doesn't seem right to me either to be willing to state the opinions of the others, but not his own, after so much [506c] time spent laboring on such matters.*

*But then, said I, does it seem to you to be right, on matters one doesn't know, to speak as if knowing?*

*Not the least, of course, he said, as knowing, but at least, as having an opinion, to be willing to say what one believes.*

*But then, I said, have you not perceived opinions without knowledge as all base, the best among them [being] blind? Or do they seem in any way to differ from blind persons walking straight on a road those holding some true opinion without intelligence?*

*Not at all, he said.*

*Then, do you want to contemplate base, blind and crooked [things] when it is possible [506d] to hear from others bright and fine ones?*

*Don't, for Zeus sake, Socrates, said Glaucon, withdraw as if you were at the end! For it will be good enough for us that, in the same way you elaborated on justice and moderation and the others, you elaborate similarly also on the good.*

*For me too indeed, said I, my dear fellow, it would be even better. But as I might not be able [to do it], though displaying zeal, disgracing myself I would bring laughter upon me. But, blessed ones, what on earth [506e] the good itself might be, let it be so for the time being, for it seems to me to require more than the present impulse to come upon my present opinion on it. But of what seems to be the offspring of the good and most similar to it, I'm willing to talk, if it's agreeable to you too, and if not, drop [the whole thing].*

*Then speak, he said. And some other day, you will pay back the tale of the father.*

*[507a] I wish we were able, I said, me to deliver and you to receive it and not merely as now the yield. But for the time being, this yield and offspring of the good itself, receive [it]. Yet beware lest I somehow deceive you by giving you involuntarily a false account of the yield.*

*We'll beware, he said, to the best of our ability. But only speak!*

*Not before coming to a complete agreement [with you], said I, and reminding you of those things that have been said earlier and had been said often on other occasions.*

*[507b] Which ones? Said he.*

*We say of many \*\*\* [things/activities/possessions/attitudes/statements/...] that they are beautiful, said I, and of many \*\*\* [that they are] good and similarly in each case and we distinguish them through speech.*

*We say so indeed.*

*And then, beautiful itself and good itself and similarly for all the \*\*\* we posited earlier as many, positing them anew according to one single idea of each one as being one, we call each one what it is.*

*It is so.*

*And then we say the ones are seen, but not grasped by thought, while ideas on the contrary are grasped by thought, but not seen.*

*Quite so indeed.*

*[507c] Then, with what [part] of ourselves do we see those [that are] seen?*

*With sight, he said.*

*And then, said I, with hearing those [that are] heard and with the other senses all the sensible?*

*Yes indeed.*

*But then, said I, did you give much thought to the extent to which the maker of the senses has put the greatest expenditure in making the power of seeing and being seen?*

*Not much, he said.*

*Then, look at it this way. Is there something else of another kind required by hearing and sound for the one to hear, the other to be heard, such that [507d] if the third one is not present, the one will not hear and the other will not be heard?*

*Nothing, he said.*

*I think anyway, said I, that not most of the others, not to say none of them, do require anything of the kind. Or do you have something to say?*

*Not I, said he.*

*But that of sight and of the visible, aren't you conscious it is in such need?*

*How?*

*Sight being one way or another in the eyes and the one having it being intent on using it, and a colored envelope being present in their neighborhood, if [507e] a third kind doesn't come along, peculiar by nature to this very [situation], you know that sight will see nothing and colors will be invisible.*

*What are you talking about, he said, thus?*

*What you indeed call, said I, light!*

*True, he said, [what] you say!*

*[It is] thus by no small idea [that] the sense [making us able] to see and the power to be seen have been yoked together by a more valued yoke than [the one used for] the other [senses and powers] yoked together, if light is not without value.*

*But for sure, he said, it is far from being without value!*

*Then, which one of the gods in heaven do you hold responsible of this, lord whose light makes sight able to see as best as possible and the visible [things] to be seen?*

*The very [same] one as you, he said, and the others, for the sun [is] obviously what you ask. Is not, then, this by nature the relation between sight and that god?*

*How?*

*The sun is neither sight itself not that in which it occurs, which [508b] indeed we call "eye".*

*No indeed.*

*But it is the most conformed to the sun, I think, among the organs of senses.*

*By far!*

*And then, the power it has, doesn't it possess [it] as dispensed from this one like something overflowing?*

*Of course yes!*

*And isn't it [true] also that the sun is not sight, yet, as responsible for it, it is seen by [sight] itself?*

*So it is, said he.*

*This, then, said I, is what I meant when talking of the offspring of the good, that the good engendered analogous to itself, what indeed itself [508c] [is] in the intelligible domain with regard to intelligence and what is perceived by intelligence, this one [being] in the visible with regard to sight and what is seen.*

*How? He said. Tell me more about it.*

*Eyes, said I, you know that when one no longer turns them toward those [things] the colored envelope of which daylight may reach, but [toward] those under nocturnal light, they see dimly and seem almost blind as if they no longer had clear sight in them.*

*Absolutely, he said.*

*[508d] But when on the other hand, methinks, [it's toward] those the sun lights from above, they see clearly and it appears that those same eyes have it in them.*

*Yes indeed.*

*So now, the [case] of the soul, conceive [it] this way: when what truth lights from above and that which is, it relies upon this, it conceives and gets to know this and appears to have intelligence; but when it's upon what is diluted in darkness, what becomes and perishes, it produces opinions and sees dimly, turning those opinions up and down and then it seems not to have intelligence.*

*Indeed it seems so.*

*[508e] Thus, that which provides the truth to what is capable of being known and, to those who get to know, such power, you must say that it is the idea of the good, and conceive it (the idea of the good, feminine in Greek), as capable of being known, as being responsible of knowledge and truth, but, beautiful as they both may be, knowledge and truth, believing it (the good, neuter in Greek) different and still more beautiful than them, you'll be right in your belief; besides, knowledge [509a] and truth, in the same way as there, to consider light and sight as conformed to the sun [is] right, but to believe [them] the sun cannot be held rightly, similarly too here, to consider both of them (knowledge and truth) conformed to the good [is] right, but to suppose either one of them [to be] the good [is] not right, but we must consider of even greater value the possession of the good.*

*[It is] an extraordinary beauty, he said, you are talking about, if it produces knowledge and truth, and yet is itself more beautiful than them; for you at least, no doubt, don't define it as pleasure!*

*Watch your words! Said I. But examine this resemblance of it still further in this way.*

*[509b] How?*

*The sun, to \*\*\* seen, [it's] not only, I guess, the power to be seen that you'll say it brings, but also generation and growth and nurture, though not being itself generation.*

*Yes indeed.*

*And now, in what's capable of being known, [it's] not only the fact of being known, should we say, [which] is present under the effect of the good, but the fact of being (intelligible) (to einai) and the value of what they are (tèn ousian) are also added to them under its effect, [the effect] of the good not being value (ousia) but still beyond value (ousia), standing above them owing to its seniority and power.*

*[509c] And Glaucon, most laughably: Apollo! He said, what a divine hyperbole!*

*But you, said I, are responsible, forcing me to state my opinions about it."*

### **To agathon: which good are we talking about?**

The section translated above is located at the center of the discussion on the third wave; the one introducing "philosopher" kings. The first part of this discussion has focused only on what Socrates

means by *philosophos*, what he thinks the qualities required to become one are, what such persons can do for the good of their city despite what most people think on that issue, and has warned his interlocutors not to get fooled by counterfeits. The conclusion of this part of the discussion is that, for Socrates, the most important object of study for a *philosophos* intent on leading his fellow human beings is *hè tou agathou idea*,<sup>67</sup> an expression usually translated as “the idea of the good”. The English doesn’t have for this translation the problem the French has with the translation of *agathon* by either “bon” or “bien”, the latter having a strong moral connotation, especially when written with a capital “B” (“le Bien”), as is often the case in that expression when found under the pen of Plato. But it is key to a proper understanding of Plato to be very careful not to limit the sense of “good” in this formula to an idealized moral “Good” simply because Plato uses the word “*idea*”. *Agathos* in Greek, as “good” in English, is, to begin with, an adjective whose meaning covers a huge range of “things”, both in the physical and in the moral realm: material objects, animals, individuals, situations, behaviours, ideas and so on, which can be said to be “good” either physically or morally (this is the reason why, in the above translation, I used three asterisks (“\*\*\*”) rather than a simple “things” or an open list of many words to render what is implied in Greek by an adjective neuter plural preceded by the article, such as *ta kala* (“beautiful”) or *ta agatha* (“good”), or by *polla* (“many”), such as *polla kala* or *polla agatha*, to suggest that what is implied can be *anything*, material or intelligible). Associated with the word *kalos*, meaning “beautiful”, *agathos* leads to the expression *kalos kagathos* in which *kagathos* is the contraction of *kai agathos* (*kai* means “and”), that is “beautiful and good”, which was used in Socrates’ time to designate a “decent person”, a “gentleman”, a man with a beautiful body and a good mind, the two being considered required in the same person for perfection. But one of the features of Ancient Greek is that, as I said already, grammar was not as developed as in our modern languages and distinctions that seem obvious to us between nouns, adjectives, verbs, and so on, were not yet established, despite what modern grammars used to teach Ancient Greek suggest to the contrary.<sup>68</sup> And as the Greek, unlike for instance the Latin, had a definite article (in fact, an old demonstrative whose sense had weakened over time), Greeks wouldn’t hesitate to make substantives of almost everything, adjectives, verbs in various tenses, groups of words, and so on, by simply adding an article in front of it. That was especially the case with what we now consider as adjectives, used in the neuter (singular or plural) with an article, as if they were nouns: thus, *ta agatha* (neuter plural) means “the good [\*\*\*]” (whatever those “\*\*\*” might be, as they are implicit and no specific word follows *agatha* to restrict what is meant), the expression being open to the broadest possible understanding, not limited to material “things”, but including also activities, behaviours, thoughts, ideas and so on, which can be considered “good”, each one in its own kind. And *to agathon* (neuter singular) means “the good”, that is the sum total of all good \*\*\* considered as a whole.

Keeping in mind the broadest possible sense for the expression *to agathon*, “the good” in English (without a capital “G”), is key to avoiding a dualistic understanding of Plato in which the “good” can only be on the side of the soul, nothing “good” can come from the body and reason must, in such a “good” person, not restrain, but kill passions.

## Excellence

Another word, closely linked to *agathos* (of which *agathon* is the neuter), quite frequent in the dialogues, some of them having it as their main theme (for instance, the *Meno*), which poses

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<sup>67</sup> *Republic* VI, 505a2.

<sup>68</sup> The main difference between nouns and adjectives, implicit in Greek, was that names had a gender (masculine, feminine or neuter) while adjectives could be declined as the masculine, feminine and neuter depending on the ending. But we have seen the case of *anthrôpos*, a noun which could be used as both masculine and feminine without change of ending, simply by changing the article in front of it, which could be either *ho* for the masculine or *hè* for the feminine (contrary to the English where the articles “the” and “a” are the same for masculine and feminine).

similar problems depending on how it is translated, is the word *aretè*. In Greek, this word designates what makes something, whatever it may be, best in its kind: a tool, a piece of furniture, a piece of land, an animal, a person, and so on: the *aretè* of a race horse is what makes it capable of running as fast as possible and winning races, that is, to be at the highest possible level a “good” race horse; the *aretè* of a kitchen knife is to do best what it has been designed for; same for anything else. In this perspective, the *aretè* of an *anthrôpos* is what allows this *anthrôpos* to reach the perfection that may be expected from him or her. Which immediately leads to the question of what is this perfection, and brings to mind the *gnôthi sauton* (“Get to know thyself”). Is the “ideal” man Arnold Schwarzenegger or Albert Einstein, or neither one of them? Is it the magnificent and brave Achilles or the shrewd Ulysses? (This question is at the heart of one of Plato’s dialogues, the *Lesser Hippias*). The usual translation of *aretè*, which I have not translated so far without it, I suppose, preventing the reader from understanding what I was talking about, at least in Plato’s dialogues, is “virtue”. But, after two thousand years of Christianity, the word “virtue” used about *anthrôpoi* has an almost exclusively moral bias which reflects upon the text in which it appears and distorts its meaning.

The problem is that Plato, whatever many scholars may have said to the contrary, is never in a dualistic logic; he is never in an “either..., or...” approach but always in an “and..., and...” approach: not “*either* body *or* mind”, but “*both* body *and* mind”, each one at its proper place; not “*either* reason *or* passions”, but “*both* reason *and* passions”, the latter within reasonable limits; not “*either* matter *or* ideas”, but “*both* matter *and* ideas”, as, in this life at least, we are *both* body *and* soul; not “*either* sensible *or* intelligible”, but “*both* sensible *and* intelligible”, as, without the senses and the data they furnish to the mind, our intelligence goes nowhere; and so on... In such conditions, to translate such words so loaded with meaning by words which all but eliminate the “material” dimension to focus exclusively on the moral and spiritual dimensions, evidences a misunderstanding of Plato and contributes in making him harder to understand.

### Everything that’s good

*Ta agatha* includes, among others, such things as a “good” meal, a “good” rest, a “good” behavior and a “good” conduct in adversity. And *to agathon*, at first, includes all of these. I say “at first” to suggest that the intent of Plato in the pedagogical progression which I pretend to uncover in his dialogues, is to take the readers where they are. It is not by focusing from the start on the highest moral values that one will succeed in convincing beginners that they should give up many things they think, rightly or wrongly, are “good” for them, and if one wants to lead them into reflection and have them make progress in an inquiry on what is *really* “good” for them, especially if it is to lead them to a point where they will have to understand that we will never reach absolutely certain answers to this question, one better starts by giving words the meaning those beginners give them.

### Good idea

Now, what Socrates presents as the key *object of study* for the *philosophos* is not *to agathon* (“the good”), but *hè tou agathou idea* (“the idea of the good”). The word *idea*, which has migrated unchanged into English, is derived from the aorist form *idein* of the verb *horan* meaning “to see”. The *idea*, in the primitive sense, is the “appearance”, the “look”, what is offered to sight, with no implied value judgment on the closeness of that look to what it is a look of, before becoming a “view of the mind”. For most scholars, the word *idea* (or the word *eidos*, close in meaning to it and also derived from a root meaning “to see”, whose original meaning is also “appearance/look”<sup>69</sup>) designates what is most real regarding what it is implicitly or explicitly

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<sup>69</sup> For those scholars, the two words, when used in what they see as a « technical » meaning, are almost synonymous. They usually ground this conclusion on the fact that an exhaustive examination of all the occurrences of these two

associated with when used in contexts such as this one: that's the famous "theory of ideas" attributed to Plato. But what these scholars didn't see is that, to make this assumption, one must accept the implied consequence of it, which is that Plato would have used the same words *eidos* and *idea* in two completely opposite senses depending on the context, that at the same time he was trying to make us understand that the *eidos/idea* ("appearance/look") which we see with our eyes is not all there is about what we thus apprehend, but merely an "image" revealing only some of its features, those that are perceptible by sight, at a given point in time, he would have kept the very same words and used the analogy with the visible to talk about the intelligible (*noèton*<sup>70</sup>), that is, what is perceptible by the *nous* ("mind, intelligence"), making this time, in that realm, those "appearances" the ultimate "reality" of what is perceived by our mind. No! Even in the intelligible realm, an *idea* (or an *eidos*) remains a *view* of the mind, a "look" for us human beings whose mind has its own limitations, in the same way that the eyes have their own, so that what we see with our eyes or perceive with our mind gives us a perception which is not the exhaustive and fully adequate apprehension of what solicits our view or mind, and the "appearance", be it visible or intelligible, is not the ultimate reality of that of which it is only an "appearance". The "sight" of the mind obviously is not the same as the sight of the eyes, it doesn't give us access to the same data about what we are considering, but both of them remain perceptions conditioned by our human nature, which doesn't allow us to fully grasp as it is in itself that which solicits our senses and our intelligence, the visible "trace" of which is perceived by our eyes (or the audible by our ears, or the tangible by our hands, and so on) and the intelligible "trace" by our intelligence. Thus, the eyes give us access to the visible envelope of the material body of *anthrôpoi* (and our ears to the words they utter), while our mind allows us to understand them as endowed with an immaterial *psuchè*, but an *anthrôpos*, Socrates for instance, is not limited to the visible look sight catches (or his words grasped by our ears), no more than he is limited to the understanding that a human intelligence, be it that of Plato, may have of him. The "idea of the good", then, is not the good itself (which would be *auto to agathon*, an expression which appears later in this section (in 506d8-e1, 507a3, 507b5), but the perception of it accessible to human nature. And the reason why this "idea" has an objective rather than subjective nature is that it is not the idea formed by you or me, with the specific limitations of our own intelligence and knowledge, but the perception which would be that of the human mind at its best, and not that of this or that individual with a more or less limited intelligence, in much the same way the visible appearance (*horômenon eidos*,<sup>71</sup> an expression found in the analogy of the line, the text following the one we are here commenting) of a person is not the more or less accurate sight that another person, whose eyes may be more or less defective, may catch at a given point in time, but the perception possible to human sight at its best.

So, to come back to the starting point of this analysis, what should be expected of a leader is an understanding which is as clear as possible for human nature of what is *really* good for those *anthrôpoi* over whom he is responsible, along with the modesty suited to one who has understood

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words in the dialogues doesn't evidence the need to assume different meanings for them. The problem with such investigations is that it doesn't take into account the fact that Plato stages multiple interlocutors, in various contexts and that he is a master at putting himself into his characters' shoes and making each one speak *in his own language*, thus giving words the sense the character who uses them would give them. Besides, he stages a Socrates endowed with the same skill and who is a master at criticizing others' doctrines "from the inside", that is, by adopting their own "logic" in order to bring to light their inconsistencies. So, even when a word such as *eidos* or *idea* is used by Plato in a sense which, owing to the context, might be assumed to be "technical" (in the sense of the supposed "theory of forms/ideas"), and even if it is put by Plato in the mouth of Socrates, it may not always have the same meaning! But that doesn't mean that, in specific contexts, Socrates doesn't give them specialized meanings, different for each one, as I think is the case in the texts we are now examining.

<sup>70</sup> The word *noèton* used by Plato to designate what I call in English "intelligible" is the verbal adjective of possibility derived from the verb *noein* ("to think, understand"), itself derived from *nous*, the word which designates the mind, the intelligence (as a faculty), what makes human beings capable of thought and understanding.

<sup>71</sup> *Republic* VI, 510d5.

he could never have an absolutely certain and demonstrable knowledge of all this. His superiority over others is only a matter of degree: he (or she) has spent more time, with a sharper mind, to put to the test the relevance of the various *hypotheses* that he (or she) relies upon and their consistency with one another and with the data from experience, and to submit them to the validation of shared experience through dialogue with others working on the same subjects. But of course, all this is theoretical and the main problem is how people with a lesser understanding of those matters would be able to recognize those who have these qualities and would be willing to trust them! But to have a chance to get somewhere, one needs to have an ideal as a guide.

### **Everybody wants what he/she thinks good for himself/herself**

Having thus identified the “idea of the good” as what the would be philosopher must investigate above all, Socrates states as obvious to all that: “*regarding just and fine [things/activities/possessions/attitudes/statements/...] many would choose those which seem so even if they are not to nonetheless do and possess and look like them, while regarding good [things/possessions], nobody would be satisfied with possessing those that seem so, but they look for those that are [so], for opinion in such cases, everybody holds [as being] worthless*”<sup>72</sup> and notes that the good is “*that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all [things], auguring it to be something, but being at a loss and unable to grasp appropriately what in the world it is nor possess a stable belief about it as about other [things], and for this very reason unable to determine about other [things] if it is something beneficial*”.<sup>73</sup> But when his interlocutors ask him to say more about the good (*peri tou agathou*),<sup>74</sup> Socrates, at the point which marks the exact middle of the discussion on the third wave in number of lines, refuses to say more about the good itself (*auto to agathon*) and prefers to limit himself to an analogy, that of the sun.<sup>75</sup>

### **The good and the sun**

In much the same way, says he, as for our eyes to see what is *visible* around us, for the sight of which they are designed, it is not enough that it be present in front of our open eyes, but it is also necessary that the sun sheds light on it, for our intelligence to perceive and make sense of what is *intelligible* around us, for the understanding of which it is designed, the “light” of the good is required. But it is important not to understand this “light” as limited to some “moral/ethical” good distinguishing what is right from what is wrong. Socrates is not telling us here that *anthrôpoi* are moral/ethical beings by nature looking for what is ethically right and doing what is wrong only by ignorance of what is right, for some ethical “Good”, but that human intelligence is for mankind a considerably more sophisticated equivalent of what instinct is for other animals, intended to guide each *anthrôpos* toward what is good for *himself/herself individually*. Not toward some abstract supreme Good, with a capital “G”, up high in heaven, but, in each specific situation in life, toward what he/she deems, at that point in time, rightly or wrongly,

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<sup>72</sup> Republic VI, 505d5-9.

<sup>73</sup> Republic VI, 505d11-e3.

<sup>74</sup> Republic VI, 506d5.

<sup>75</sup> Republic VI, 506d6-e5. I consider that the discussion of the third wave begins at Republic V, 471c4 and ends at Republic VII, 541b5, the end of book VII. In order to measure the length of this section in a manner close to what a “book” looked like in Plato’s time, I recorded the Greek text of the whole section in a Word document as a continuous sequence of capital Greek letters without blanks between words, accents, breathing and punctuation marks, as was the case in Plato’s time. I ended up with a unique “paragraph” spreading over 1745 lines. Thus the middle is at line number 873, corresponding to 506d8, which reads: *all', ô makarioi, auto ti pot' esti tagathon easômen to nun einai* (“*But, blessed ones, what on earth the good itself might be, let it be so for the time being*”). This is the exact moment when Socrates, after an “ascending” process leading toward the good as the main topic of study for the philosopher, stops short of saying more about the good itself and starts the “descending” process (the return to the cave, in the terms of the allegory of the cave) describing the formation of the philosopher king in the real world, starting with three “images” of that process and what it focuses on.

the best (=most “good”) *for himself/herself*. But in the same way as our eyes may be fooled by optical illusions, our intelligence may come to an erroneous understanding of what is *really* good for us at that point in time. What is often presented as a Socratic paradox, that nobody does evil knowingly, is but a moralizing misunderstanding of what he means. Socrates knows full well that it is not enough to tell a tyrant that it is wrong to kill a man for him to decide not to send one of his henchmen to assassinate his rival. What he means is that nobody does willingly something he/she deems, rightly or wrongly, bad *for oneself*, or at least worse than the other available options. One always acts toward something he/she believes is good *for oneself*.<sup>76</sup> Even a masochist looks for some sort of pleasure in the pains he/she inflicts upon himself/herself. Thus, it is not an abstract “good” or “right”, a pure idea with no clear content, which guides *anthrôpoi* in their choices, small and large, all through the course of their life, but the *idea* each one has of what is good *for him/her*, which brings us back one more time to the *gnôthi sauton*, “get to know thyself”, that is, to know what is good *for anthrôpoi in general and for thyself in particular*. Now, what the second quote in the previous section suggests is that all *anthrôpoi*, regarding to *agathon* (“the good”) are “unable to grasp appropriately what in the world it is nor possess a stable belief about it”. And what *proves* to anyone this uncertainty about the good is that each one of us can experience in one’s own life the fact that “things” (in a broad sense, including behaviours, deeds, and so on) he/she judged good when “acquiring” (in a broad sense including the fact of “harvesting” the fruits of one’s deeds) them may yield *for himself/herself* “fruits” he will judge “bad” *according to his/her own criteria of good and bad*. In other words, it is not enough to think that something is good for it to be so in itself and in all its consequences. The good thus has an “objective” reality which doesn’t depend on what I think about it. To know the good, for *anthrôpoi*, thus implies the sharing of experience made possible by *dialogos*.

The two images which follow this parallel between good and sun, the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave, are meant to illustrate this process, the analogy of the line giving us a static vision of it (the various modes of apprehension of all we are able to know) and the allegory of the cave a dynamic vision (the progress in such knowledge through those various modes of apprehension richer and richer as we proceed from one to the next).

### Being and *ousia*

But before moving to these other two images, there still remains one major point about this parallel to be investigated, which will lead us to the question of “being”. Indeed, Socrates concludes it by adding that, in much the same way as the sun doesn’t only give visible things here on earth the power of being seen, but is also responsible for their “*generation and growth and nurture (tèn genesin kai auxèn kai trophèn)*”,<sup>77</sup> the good doesn’t limit itself to making knowledge of the intelligible beings (as more or less good for us, the only kind of knowledge which should matter to us) possible, but is also responsible for *to einai te kai tèn ousian* of them, further adding that the good is not itself *ousia*, but “still beyond *ousia*”<sup>78</sup> (the usual translation of those words, here again faulty and a source of misunderstanding of what Plato is trying to make us understand, being that “the good is still beyond being”). Here again, a few more semantical analyses of Greek words are in order, and they will lead us to what is at the heart of Plato’s message.

<sup>76</sup> This is what is suggested by the fact that, in the quote from the *Republic* mentioned earlier, Socrates uses about the just and the fine/beautiful (taken as mere examples) several verbs, “do (*prattein*) and possess (*kektèsthai*) and look like (*dokein*) them”, while about the good, he uses only one verb, “possess (*ktasthai*)”, which implies acquisition for one’s own benefit.

<sup>77</sup> This statement must be put in perspective taking into account the level of « scientific » knowledge in the time of Socrates and Plato, but modern science, maybe with slightly different wording, doesn’t contradict, far from it, the major role played by the sun as the ultimate source of energy regarding life on earth.

<sup>78</sup> *Republic* VI, 509b2-10.

Back then to the expression *to einai te kai tèn ousian*. *Einai* is the present infinitive of the Greek verb meaning “to be”. Made a substantive by the addition of the article in the expression *to einai*, it is most often translated into English by “being” which has the grave defect of replacing an infinitive by a present participle, making it impossible in English to distinguish it from the translation of *to on* (literally “the being”), where *on* is the nominative neuter singular of the present participle of *einai*, whereas in Greek *to einai* designates more specifically “the fact of being” while *to on* designates “the one which is”, “the subject being” (“subject” taken in the grammatical sense). *Ousia* (of which *ousian* is the accusative) is even more interesting. It is a substantive formed on the feminine *ousa* of the present participle of that same verb *einai*. An English equivalent from the standpoint of derivation, regardless of meaning, would be “beingness”. But the problem with this rare word, possibly a neologism, especially in the section we are here focusing on, is that it doesn't import the usual meaning the word *ousia* had in Greek in the time of Socrates and Plato, that of “property, substance (in the sense of material possessions, goods, wealth), personal belongings”, a meaning probably originating in the idea that what you are, your “beingness”, is in fact what you own in terms of material property! The English word “substance” has a range of meanings close to that of *ousia* in Greek, but has a completely different origin, with no connection whatsoever with “being”: it derives from a latin word meaning etymologically “what stands under” and thus imports the image of a person's “substance” as being the land under his/her feet that he/she owns, or the pile of gold which he/she sits upon.

If we try to return to the original meaning of *ousia*, as does Plato at *Sophist*, 262c3, where the Stranger from Elea describes one of the kinds of elementary phrases having meaning, those formed around the verb *einai* (“to be”), as designating *ousian ontos [è] mè ontos*, literally “beingness of one being or not being”, that is, “a predicative expression (*ousian* without article) [attributed to or denied of] a [subject] being (*ontos*) or not being (*mè ontos*) [this or that]”, we should see it as designating from a generic standpoint any *a* which might appear in a phrase of the form *x esti a* (“*x* is *a*”) or *x me esti a* (“*x* is not *a*”), that is, what we now call a “predicative expression” in the grammatical sense, for which the Greek of that time didn't have a word.<sup>79</sup> The sense of “property”, usual in Plato's time, could be seen as resulting from a specialization of certain “predicates” considered more relevant to describe what a person “is”. As we shall see, Plato intended to challenge this specialization in introducing another criterion of “value”, *to agathon*, the “good”, in an open-ended approach that avoided eliminating certain “predicates” to keep only certain others, but preferred to hierarchize all of them based on their amount of “good”, and Aristotle after him closed that opening by focusing on an exclusively “ontological” approach, which Plato was precisely trying to get rid of, leading to what I call the “metaphysical” meaning of *ousia*.

For scholars after Aristotle, who made the fortune (without play of word!) of the word *ousia* in the sense I call “metaphysical”, usually translated by “substance” or “essence”, *to einai* and *ten ousian* are almost synonymous and they have a hard time seeing more than mere redundancy on the part of Plato in this association of both expression, which they diversely translate as “being and essence” (Jowett), “existence and essence” (Shorey), “existence and being” (Bloom, Reeve), when they don't merely get rid of what they see as redundancy plain and simple by translating as “being”, as do Grube revised by Reeve.

### Which is the best substance?

Yet, what is interesting and what they have missed, or the implications of which they haven't perceived, is that the first occurrence of the word *ousia* in the *Republic* is at the very beginning of the dialogue, in a conversation between Socrates and the host of the whole meeting related in

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<sup>79</sup> In the same perspective, *to on* (“the being”) is the “subject” in the grammatical sense, the *x* of such a phrase when affirmative (those with *esti*), and *to mè on* (“the not being”) is the “subject”, the *x* of such a phrase when negative (those with *me esti*).

the dialogue, a historical character, metic of Syracusan origin and arms dealer friend of Pericles named Cephalus (*Kephalos* in Greek, meaning “head”), pretty old at the time when the dialogue is supposed to take place, who is otherwise the father of the orator Lysias.<sup>80</sup> Socrates talk with him of the wealth (*ousia*) he has accumulated in his business and eventually asks him the following question: “*What greatest good (megiston agathon) do you think you have enjoyed from the fact of having acquired a great wealth (pollen ousian)?*”<sup>81</sup> Scholars don't spend much time on this question, reading it at face value in the context of the ongoing discussion, considering that the two meanings of *ousia* they admit, the usual sense of “property, wealth, fortune” and the sense I call “metaphysical” of “essence” (they have not seen the protogrammatical meaning of “predicative expression”), are exclusive of one another so that in any given context, it can only mean the one *or* the other, and that, in this question of Socrates, the meaning of *ousia* is obviously the usual sense. Yet, it can be read as asking *the* question which will stay in the background of the whole *Republic*, and eventually of all the dialogues: what *really* gives “beingness”, “value” to an *anthrōpos*? Which “substance (*ousia*)” is *really* good, is really “*the greatest good (to megiston agathon)*” for such a creature? A “wealth” of having/possessing or a “wealth” of “being”? A purely material wealth such as the one accumulated by Cephalus (a “head” which might be missing a “brain”) in selling arms to Pericles to help him subdue neighbouring Greek cities and impose upon them a heavy tribute allowing him to pay for the lush public works he was undertaking in Athens (the Parthenon among others), or something else, and, if so, what?<sup>82</sup>

I am deeply convinced that, here again, Plato is not in an « either... or... » approach, that he doesn't see the different meanings of the word *ousia* as mutually exclusive. This word doesn't have for him *either* its usual meaning only *or* a “technical” meaning (grammatical or metaphysical) only, depending on the context. Quite the contrary! Plato is a master at making the traps of language work to his own advantage, at using the multiple ranges of meaning of a word to advance his project, to take his interlocutors where they are and lead them progressively toward what he tries to have them uncover. More specifically in the case of *ousia*, he certainly doesn't want us to lose sight of the usual meaning when he uses it in contexts where it seems it has a more “technical” meaning: what he is trying to do is not to get rid of all traces of the notion of wealth, of value, when he uses it in contexts such as the one we focus on here (the end of the parallel between good and sun), but on the contrary to build on that idea of the value of purely material things considered as “wealth” to redirect it and invite his reader to think about what has for him/her *real* value, what constitutes *real* wealth, and, as I suggested when introducing the word *ousia*, by investigating the origin of the word, to wonder whether we really are what we have, the *material* goods that we own, or we can be more than that and find value in something else.

Thus, what's common to all the meanings of the word, usual as well as “technical”, is the notion of “value”. Which leads to the question about what serves as a measure of this “value”. And the answer to this question will be no surprise after all I've said already: the measure of

<sup>80</sup> It is through extant speeches of Lysias that we know a few things about the life of Cephalus and his sons, Lysias himself and Polemarchus, who is the second interlocutor of Socrates in book I of the *Republic*.

<sup>81</sup> *Republic* I, 330d2-3.

<sup>82</sup> In other contexts, those same scholars would translate *to megiston agathon* as “the supreme good” or, using the Latin form, “the summum bonum”, but here where money is involve, they don't go that far, incapable of imagining that Plato had *also* that in mind when writing those words, that he was initiating the question of the supreme good by taking his interlocutors where they stood on that question, each with a different understanding of what he/she considered the supreme good for himself/herself.

The fact that Plato uses here the formula *megiston agathon*, “**greatest** good” suggests that, as I hinted at earlier, he is not in a binary approach between good and bad/evil, but in a hierarchical approach in which some things may be good, but not as good as some others. Thus, the fact of possessing a great material wealth (*ousia*), as is the case for Cephalus, may not be “the greatest good” for an *anthrōpos*, but it doesn't necessarily imply that it is bad, but simply that there may be other things that are still better and more important for us to look for in our life.

true value is the “good (*agathon*)”! Anything, whatever it may be, is only worth the amount of good it brings, and more specifically for us, *anthrôpoi*, the amount of good it brings us. The good is the sun which brings to light for our intelligence the true value of all things.

### To be, yes, but what?

What then about *to einai*? Some scholars say that Plato is the first thinker to have clearly distinguished the “existential” sense of the verb *einai* (“to be”) from its role as a mere copula associating a subject and an attribute. I think it is the exact opposite. Plato wants us to understand that *einai* (“to be”) has *no meaning whatsoever* alone and serves *only* as a linguistic tool to introduce an explicit predicative expression, or, when used alone, to suggest an implicit one. To say “it is” has no meaning so long as we don’t say *what* it is. And it is not because we replace “it is” by “it exists” that it changes anything: to say “it exists” means nothing so long as we don’t say what “existence” we are talking about. An “ideal” square, *the* “ideal” square, the one about which theorems of geometry are demonstrated, theorems which are not true, strictly speaking, of any drawn “square” since none of them is a “perfect” square, “exists”, even if it can’t be seen or touched, but can only be conceived in thought, be “abstracted” from the visible approximations of square offered to our sight that we associate with the word “square”! To say that “it doesn’t exist” is to implicitly assume, without explicitly saying so, a specific form of “existence”, of “being”, which alone could be said “to be”. It is to assume without saying so that « to be » alone means to be *visible*, or to be *tangible*, or to be *audible*, or to be *alive*, depending on the context. And that's where the shoe pinches, because, if the predicative expression is implicit, it opens the door to scores of misunderstandings and confusion! This is the whole idea behind the *Parmenides*, where most of the dialogue is a discussion between an old Parmenides and a young man named Aristotle, who is not the student and colleague of Plato at the Academy, the well known philosopher by that name, but another historical character “*who* [so Plato says to introduce him] *became one of the thirty tyrants*”<sup>83</sup> (who held power in Athens for a short time with the help of Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian war, in which Athens was eventually defeated); a dialogue, or rather a monologue of Parmenides, which he himself introduces as a “*tedious game*”<sup>84</sup> only interrupted by approval without reservation of the young Aristotle (chosen as the respondent by Parmenides precisely because, so he says, being the youngest in the assistance, he will be the less likely to cause him trouble<sup>85</sup>) to purely rhetorical questions which are not really questions, but rather pauses to breathe. In this “tedious game”, the Parmenides staged by Plato will in turn demonstrate everything and its opposite with the same logical rigor in front of an astounded interlocutor whose homonymy with the philosopher father of logic is definitely not coincidental, precisely because the discussion deals with “being” without predicative expression, or sometimes with one but no explicit subject, without Parmenides ever taking the trouble to define what he means by this word or what he applies it to, which allows him, from one “demonstration” to the next, to change without saying so the kind of “existence” he has in mind. And the dialogue is indeed an implicit lesson to Aristotle the philosopher, the shortcomings of which Plato, having associated with him on a daily basis for years at the Academy, was well aware, a way of warning him that, if he kept blindly trusting his logic, believing that merely abiding by its rules was enough to guarantee true conclusions in reasoning when those reasonings are built on *words* whose potential relation with what is not them has not previously been properly investigated and it is eventually the test of experience which ascertains whether the reasoning was properly conducted or not, he would end up tyrant of thought in the same way his homonym ended up tyrant of Athens.

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<sup>83</sup> *Parmenides*, 127d2-3.

<sup>84</sup> *Parmenides*, 137b2.

<sup>85</sup> *Parmenides*, 137b6-8.

That to be/being alone, without predicative expression, means nothing, that the word “is” may apply to everything you want so long as *what* it “is” has not been stated, so long as an *ousia* (a “beingness”), a *ti esti* (“what it is”), has not been made explicit, is hinted at by the definition of *to einai* (“the fact of being”) or *to on* (“the being”) which Plato presents as given by the stranger leading the discussion in the *Sophist*, who happens to be from the same city as Parmenides, Elea in Italy, and who accuses himself in this dialogue of committing a “parricide” against his (spiritual) father Parmenides: “is” for him “whatever possesses the least power either to act upon whatever else of any nature or to be affected even in the most trifling way by the slightest one, even if only once”.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the faintest thought passing through my mind, be it only once, « is », as it is affected by the fact of “being” thought by me. It “is” a thought in my mind. Whether there is something outside my mind this thought refers to or not is irrelevant to its “being” a thought.

Why then does Socrates use here the verb *einai* alone? It is because the comparison he is making between the visible and the intelligible implicitly provides an attribute to this verb: “to be”, in the intelligible realm, is, in the absence of explicit predicative expression, “to be intelligible”, in the same way “to be” in the visible realm would be, in the absence of explicit predicative expression, “to be visible” and “to be” in the tangible realm would be “to be tangible”. It is also because, in the parallel he does between the role of the sun in the visible and the role of the good in the intelligible,<sup>87</sup> the *einai* found with respect to the intelligible parallels the expression *tèn genesin* (“generation”) with respect to the visible, which means that *einai* must be understood in an opposition to *gignesthai*, “to come into being, to become”, from which *genesis* is derived: “to be (*einai*)” is to be stable, not subjected to becoming, to change, while to become (*gignesthai*) is to keep changing one way or another. But if Socrates uses *to einai* (« the fact of being ») for the intelligible and *tèn genesin* (“generation”) for the visible, it is not because, for him, the visible/sensible doesn't really “exist” (supposed “existential” meaning of the verb *einai*), but to suggest that it is not the senses themselves which allow us to grasp what sensible “things” in becoming “are”, but already intelligence (*nous*) working on the raw data provided by the senses: the sun reveals to our eyes the continually changing colors of all that it lights, not their “form” (in Greek, *eidos* or *idea*, or *schema*, a word which evolved toward the more specialized meaning of “geometrical shape” and which is à the root of the English words “scheme” and “schema”), which are “abstracted” by the mind from the patches of colors perceived by the eyes,<sup>88</sup> and still less their name. As soon as the word *einai* (« to be ») is used, be it in reference to visible or purely intelligible stuff, in fact, as soon as a *logos* is developed about anything, even a *logos* as simple as “it's so and so”, we are in the realm of the intelligible (*noèton*) and of the mind (*nous*) conducting its task of “abstraction” to a greater or lesser degree. So, properly speaking, « being », even if it is « being subject to change », is only on the side of the intelligible. Yet, we must also talk about the sensible, and Plato tries to do so with words stressing its state of continuous change, avoiding as much as possible those which suggest stability, as is the case with *einai* (“to be”), yet knowing full well that the mere fact of associating it to words is already bringing some level of stability to it. But the reverse approach is also possible, using the same words to talk about the intelligible he chose to talk about the sensible: “to be” intelligible is “to become” object of the attribution of a name (relevant or not, that is not the question), but of a name which, in itself, teaches us nothing whatsoever about what it

<sup>86</sup> *Sophist* 247d8-e3.

<sup>87</sup> For those who can read French, a quite detailed analysis of this parallel is available in note 103 of my translation of this section of the *Republic* under the title “Le bon et le soleil” in the French section of my Internet site “Plato and his dialogues”:

[http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra\\_4/republic/soleil.htm#note103](http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra_4/republic/soleil.htm#note103).

<sup>88</sup> On this question, those who can read French may consult my paper titled “*De la couleur avant toute chose – les schèmes invisibles du Ménon*” published in issue 14, dated February 2010, of the online philosophical journal *Klèsis*, a copy of which is available at my Internet site:

[http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/pdf/de\\_la\\_couleur\\_avant\\_toute\\_chose.pdf](http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/pdf/de_la_couleur_avant_toute_chose.pdf).

names; what “increases”, “feeds”, “enriches” our knowledge of what is thus named, is the *ousia*, the “beingness” our thought process associates with it by multiplying the predicates it ties to it in phrases of the type “it is this or that” and, in the end, in a globalizing sense moving us from a specific *ousia* (“predicate”) to a comprehensive approach, the *ousia* is the sum total of all the relevant predicates, already identified or still to be discovered, for a given subject, be it visible, sensible, material or already an “abstraction” with no visible/sensible features, such as “beautiful”, “just”, and the like.<sup>89</sup> And if our mind does that work of abstraction, it is, as I said already, one way or another, directly or indirectly, in order to figure out what is good for the person whose mind it is, be it to determine what is good to feed the body that hosts it, to clothe it or to find a shelter against rain, or to decide which behavior will give him the most prestige in the eyes of his/her companions in existence if he/she attributes value to such prestige and deems it good for him/her that those companions have a good opinion about him/her based on the criteria of “good” of the city they live in, or will bring upon him/her the less trouble and vindictive jealousy on their part. It is thus the good, as the goal of all our acts, which invites us to treat what solicits our mind as “beings” (*onta*), that is as “subjects” of *logoi* of the kind “it is (this or that)” in order to determine through dialogue and reflexion if it is good for us, and it is the good which gives greater or lesser *ousia* (“value”) to those “beings”. In this perspective, to think that the “being” granted by the good (*to agathon*) to what our intelligence perceives under its “light” might be the tangible and material “existence” within space and time of bodies made visible by the sun is to show a total misunderstanding of what Plato is trying to make us understand.

### Agathology vs ontology

To say it differently, *to einai* and *hè ousia* are for Plato the two opposite ends on the same scale of measurement: at one end, the predicate which has no meaning by itself and can thus be applied to everything without exception, *einai*; at the other end, the predicate which says nothing by itself but refers to the “value” of each “being” measured on the scale of the good, *ousia*. Thus, the *ousia* is for each « thing », visible/sensible/material or purely intelligible outside space and time, what gives it value, what is “good” in it. The thought which flashes through my mind only once “is” (a thought), but if it is a thought of nothing, mere fantasy of my mind, it will do me no “good”.

Now, it becomes easy to understand what Plato means when he has his Socrates say that the good is “*still beyond ousia*”: if the good (*to agathon*) is what the value of all things is measured by, it cannot be one of the things it serves to measure, to value! No more than the sun is what it makes visible, though itself visible, the good is what it makes intelligible, though itself intelligible. If I remove one of the things made visible by the sun, all the others will still be visible, while if I remove the sun, nothing will be visible. Similarly, if I get rid of any one of the concepts my thought evaluates in the light of the good, I could still evaluate all the others, while if I get rid of the idea of the good itself, nothing has meaning any more. It is in that sense that the good can be said analogically “*standing above them owing to its seniority and power*”.<sup>90</sup>

The main endeavor of Plato all through his dialogues is to get philosophy out of the rut of ontology in which it was stuck since Parmenides at least, which leads to sterile discussions on

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<sup>89</sup> Aristotle, who was unable to set aside the ontological approach, as I already suggested, would later specialize the word *ousia* to encompass only certain predicates characteristic of the “essence” of the “subject” and introduce other words to talk about other types of less permanent predicates, such as *to sumbebèkon* (“accident”, etymologically “what comes along with”), *to poion* (“quality”, literally “the how?”), *to poson* (“quantity”, literally “the how much?”), and so on, most often designated by periphrases owing to the lack of preexisting appropriate terms (in the same way *ousia* is sometimes designated by him as *to ti esti*, literally “the what it is” as its use in that specific meaning was still uncommon).

<sup>90</sup> *Republic* VI, 509b9-10. I say “analogically » because the idea of seniority (*persbeia* in Greek) implies time, while the intelligibles are outside time and space. It refers to a logical “seniority”.

what “is” and what “is not” which unavoidably end up having us looking backward, toward the past, in search of our origin, to transform it into an “agathology”,<sup>91</sup> that is, into an investigation of the good, which invites us to look forward, toward the future and may orient our choices for the best, whereas knowing where we come from will never tell us where we should go.

### Visible and intelligible

This parallel between good and sun allowed Socrates to clearly identify two orders of perception which we unfortunately tend to view a little too quickly as two orders of “beings” pertaining to two “worlds”, the sensible world and the “world of ideas/forms” of the supposed “theory of forms/ideas” ascribed by most scholars to Plato. But Plato doesn’t talk about what affects our senses and our mind *as such*, of “beings” in an existential sense devoid of meaning for him, because he has understood, and wants to help us understand, that we don’t have *direct* access to them: to come back to the image he uses in the *Phaedrus* when comparing the human *psuchè* to a winged chariot, which I mentioned earlier,<sup>92</sup> to be able to say something about them (the “things” affecting our senses and/or mind *themselves* as opposed to the “look” of them our senses and/or mind perceive), our soul would have to be able to move “on the other side of heaven”, in that supracelestial “place” (*ton hyperouranion topon, Phaedrus, 247c3*) where only the gods can go and where they alone can see “*the beingness really being without color or figure and impalpable (hè gar achrômatos te kai aschêmatistos kai anaphês ousia ontôs ousa)*” (247c6-7), that is, “*justice itself... self-control [itself]... knowledge [itself] (autèn dikaiosunèn... sôphrosunèn... epistêmèn)*” (247d6-7), and so on, and this is precisely what is impossible for the chariot drawn by the two hard to control and coordinate horses moving that soul. Thus, we must admit that each one of the « organs » which give us access to what affects it, the sense organs on the one hand, and especially sight, the most pregnant of them all, so much so that, in Greek, the verbal form meaning “to know”, *eidēnai*, is in fact the perfect of a verb meaning “to see” (“*I have seen*”, and thus “*I know*”!), the “organ” on the other hand giving us the ability to think and making us creatures capable of intelligence (*nous*), which Plato associates with the *psuchè*, or more specifically with a “function”, a “power (*dunamis*)” of it, whatever bodily organ is implied in it and whichever way it makes this possible, allows us to grasp only a “look”, an “appearance” determined by the specific characteristics of this organ, which allows us only a *partial* grasp of what affects it: its color for sight, the sounds it produces for hearing, its scent for smell, and so on, its intelligibility for intelligence (*nous*), without us ever being able to ascertain that it reveals to us the complete *ousia* of what we are considering, that it completely “unveils” it.<sup>93</sup>

Besides, whatever affects our “organs” of perception doesn’t necessarily affect all of them: there are “things” which affect sight, but not hearing or smell, others which affect hearing, but not sight (wind for instance), but what we must understand is that *everything* affecting our senses, *also* affects our intelligence, our *nous*, if only to give it a name to be able to talk about it. That’s what Plato means when he has the *psuchè* playing a part in the description of the mechanism of all the senses he propounds in the *Timaeus*. On the other hand, experience teaches us that our intelligence may be affected by “concepts”, by “ideas (*ideai*)”, which affect none of our senses and yet aren’t pure creations of our mind without external counterpart outside our mind, starting with “the idea of the good (*hè tou agathou idea*)”, about which he told us in the parallel between good and sun that it is what every soul is seeking even though it doesn’t have a clear understanding of it (which proves its “objective” nature, not depending only on our will). But there is no reason this fact should induce us into thinking that those “ideas” have less “existence” than what affects one or another of our senses, or even that they have no “existence”

<sup>91</sup> See note 7, page 3, for an explanation of this neologism forged by me.

<sup>92</sup> See the section titled “*The winged chariot, the charioteer and the two horses*”, page 22.

<sup>93</sup> The Greek word translated by « truth », *alètheia*, is derived from an adjective, *alèthès* (“true”), whose etymological meaning is “not hidden”.

at all, or on the contrary that they alone “exist”. “Existence” and “exist” are words devoid of meaning; what matters is the impact, direct or indirect, on our quest for the good.

The problem facing Plato, which he tries to solve by multiplying images and varying his vocabulary to avoid getting “trapped” by any single word, is to talk about what is “on the other side of heaven” while still forced by his human nature to stay on this side of it, to talk about what words refer to *with words*, furthermore with words that we cannot univocally and definitely tie to what is behind them, which we can talk about only with words. The allegory of the cave likens us to chained prisoners and indeed we are truly prisoners... of words!

In order to describe those two sets/orders/realms/..., the visible(/sensible) and the intelligible/thinkable, Plato, in a short section (*Republic VI*, 509c5-d5) making a transition between the parallel between good and sun and the two images meant to illustrate it, the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave, my translation of which I provide below, has Socrates offering still another image, that of two “kingdoms”, each having one king, the sun for the one, the good (*to agathon*) for the other, and deliberately varying the words used to talk about them, since none of them are appropriate.

*And no way indeed, he said, you shall stop here but at least, this likeness concerning the sun, expound it again, in case you omit [something] one way or another.*

*But of course, I said, I'm certainly omitting many [things]!*

*Well then, he said, don't leave aside the smallest bit of it.*

*I think, said I, [it will] still [be] a lot. Nevertheless, in so far as [it is] presently possible, I won't willingly omit anything.*

*Don't indeed, he said.*

[509d] *Then conceive them, said I, as we were saying, as being two and reigning, the one over the intelligible (noëton) family (genos) and place (topos), the other in turn over the visible (horaton) [family and place] – [I say “visible (horatou)] so that I don't seem to you, in saying “heaven (ouranou)”, to behave like a sophist about the word. But then, do you grasp those two appearances (eidè),<sup>94</sup> visible, intelligible?*

*I grasp.*

The words *genos* and *topos* may be seen as extending the image of kingdoms introduced by the verb *basileuein* (“to reign”, that is, to be a *basileus*, a “king”): indeed, one of the possible meanings of *genos*, along with “race”, “family”, “offspring”, “kin”, is “tribe/clan”, that is, a group of persons pertaining to the same political entity, and one of the possible meanings of *topos*, whose original meaning is “place”, “location”, is “region”, “district”, that is a geographical or political division of space. And indeed, a king (*basileus*, at the root of the verb *basileuein*) can be characterized by the territory he reigns over and the people under his command. This invites us not to give too much weight to those words, and especially to the word *topos*, so as not to see in its use a proof that Plato viewed the intelligible as a separate “world”, separate from the visible “world”. We may further notice that each one of these two words is more appropriate for one of the two realms, *topos*, understood as “place”, for the visible and *genos*, understood as “kind”, for the intelligible, but that Plato is very careful to use both of them in both realms,<sup>95</sup> inviting us to realize that, even if one of them seems more appropriate for one of the two “kinds” and the other for the other, neither one is completely satisfactory for either one or the other, as, if that were the case, he would have used in each case only the fitting one.

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<sup>94</sup> In the ensuing translation of the analogy of the line, I decided to always translate the word *eidōs* by the same English word, “appearance”, which is one possible translation (along with “form”, “shape” or “figure”) of its original meaning from which all others are derived: thus for instance, the sense of “kind, species”, which might fit here, to designate sets of “things” having the same “look/appearance”.

<sup>95</sup> Explicitly for the first mentioned, the intelligible, implicitly for the second, the visible.

But what is most interesting is that, at the end of his reply, he uses still another word, *eidos* (of which *eidè* is the plural nominative), precisely the word which, for most scholars, would be used in certain contexts as a “technical” word to designate the intelligible “beings”, those “forms/-ideas” of the supposed theory of the same name they ascribe to Plato. And, as a matter of fact, in this phrase, most translators and scholars refuse to give it its “technical” meaning of “forms” and understand it in its usual sense of “kind/type”. Yet, if we take *eidos* in its original meaning of “appearance”, what Socrates is saying is quite obvious, so that we are no longer required to assume that within a few lines, he uses the same word *eidos* in completely different senses (here in its usual sense and several times in the analogy of the line which follows immediately the text we just read in a sense that all scholars agree to consider “technical”): he is asking Glaucon if he has fully understood that our soul is able to grasp two “appearances” of what affects it, the one provided by sight (the visible) and the one provided by thought (the intelligible), both of them, and not only the first one (the visible), being “appearances”, different from one another, but nonetheless “appearances”, neither one fully “unveiling” what produces it, even if one, the intelligible appearance, is “richer” than the other. And it would not be surprising on the part of Plato that he chose this word in full knowledge of its ambiguity, expecting that some readers might understand it in the weaker sense of “kind”. The whole question here is to determine how far we should push the analogy with the visible implied by the use of words derived from roots having to do with sight to talk about the intelligible, words such as *idein* (“to see”) to talk about “views” of the mind,<sup>96</sup> or *eidos* and *idea* to designate what is thus “viewed” by the mind.

### Line fishing and speleology

The two images developed by Plato's Socrates one after the other to complement the parallel between good and sun, the analogy of the line at the end of book VI and the allegory of the cave at the beginning of book VII, are among the most famous texts of Plato. Those two images complement one another, the first one, the analogy of the line, presenting a “static” vision whereas the second one, the allegory of the cave, presents a “dynamic” vision of what human knowledge can reach. A proper understanding of those two texts, central from all standpoints in the educational program developed by Plato through all his dialogues since the allegory of the cave explicitly purports to illustrate “*our nature regarding education and the fact of not being educated*”, requires a detailed examination of the text, which must be done on the Greek text itself, so careful is Plato about the slightest detail and especially the choice of words, when, as we shall see, all the details are meaningful and participate in the overall meaning of these images. This is the reason why it seems to me that the best way of proceeding is to start by reading these two texts one after the other, as well as the commentary of the allegory by Socrates which follows immediately, before providing explanations which will continuously refer to both images. Here is my translation of those two texts.<sup>97</sup>

#### The analogy of the line (*Republic* VI, 509d6-511e5)

*“Well then, taking for instance a line segmented into two unequal segments, segment anew each one of the two segments according to the same ratio(nale) (ana to auton logon), that of the*

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<sup>96</sup> A good example of this is found a few lines later in the *Republic*, in the analogy of the line, at 511a1, where Socrates mentions geometers “*attempting to see what cannot be seen otherwise than by thought*”, that is, in the example he has taken, the square itself as opposed to the images of squares they draw, twice using the aorist form *idein* (“to see”, the second time under the conjugated form *idoi*), from which stems *idea*, and thus “idea” in English.

<sup>97</sup> For those who read French, my translations in French of these texts are accompanied by abundant explanatory notes which they may find of interest. The translation in French of the analogy of the line is a URL [http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra\\_4/republic/ligne.htm](http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra_4/republic/ligne.htm), that of the allegory of the cave at [http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra\\_4/republic/caverne.htm](http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra_4/republic/caverne.htm) and that of the commentary of the allegory at [http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra\\_4/republic/cavernec.htm](http://plato-dialogues.org/fr/tetra_4/republic/cavernec.htm).

*seen (horômenon) family (genous) and that of the thought (nooumenon) one, and you will have, based on the [relative] clearness and lack of clearness of the ones compared to the others, on the one hand in the seen, [509e] on the one hand one of the two segments: images (eikones) –I call indeed images, first [510a] shadows, then reflections (phantasmata) on waters and on [other things] insofar as they are by design at the same time compact, smooth and bright, and everything of that kind, if you understand [what I mean].*

*But [of course] I understand.*

*Then place the other one, to which this one is similar: the living creatures around us, and all that is planted and the whole family of what is fabricated.*

*I place it, he said.*

*Would you then be willing to say about it, said I, that it is divided with regard to truth (alêtheia) and its absence [according to the following ratio(nale)]: as the opined [is] to the known, so what is made similar (to homoiôthên) [to something is] to what it has been made similar to (to hôi hōmoiôthê)?*

*[510b] Yes indeed, he said, absolutely.*

*Consider then also in turn the segmentation of the intelligible, how it is segmented.*

*How?*

*The [first segment] of it [is] where, using the [things] formerly imitated as images, a soul is constrained/constrains itself to investigate from foundations, driven/advancing, not toward a (guiding) principle (archè), but toward an end (teleutè), while the other on the contrary [is] the [one where it is] by going toward a (guiding) principle [which is] not [itself] set to support [something else] (archè anupothetos) from a foundation and without the images [revolving] around that, building with the appearances themselves its own approach (methodos) through them.*

*Those [things] you say, he said, I don't quite understand.*

*[510c] One more time, then! Said I. This way, you'll understand more easily what was said before. I think indeed that you know that those who busy themselves in geometry and computation and the like, setting as foundations the odd and the even and the [various] figures and three appearances of angles and other [things] akin to these according to each one's approach (methodos), those [things] on the one hand, [behaving] as knowledgeable [persons], using them as foundations, they don't think fit to give any further explanation (logon didonai) about them either to themselves or to others, [510d] as if [it were] completely evident, starting from these on the other hand, going through all the rest in great details, they end up in a consistent way on what they had set their investigation in motion upon.*

*Of course indeed, he said, that at least I know!*

*Thus also that besides, they also make use of the seen appearances (horômena eidè) and develop their reasoning (logous poiountai) on them thinking not about them but about those they resemble, developing their reasoning for the sake of the square itself, of the diagonal itself, and not [510e] of the one they draw, and same [thing] in the other cases, those very [things] they draw and mold, of which there are shadows and reflections in waters, using them in turn as images, but attempting [511a] to see (idein) what cannot be seen otherwise than by thought (dianoia).*

*You tell the truth, he said.*

*So I indeed said intelligible this appearance (noèton to eidos), but the soul constrained/constraining itself to make use of foundations in its investigation about it, not going toward a (guiding) principle (archè), as if unable to rise higher than the foundations, but using as images the very [things] that are copied by those below, and the former in comparison with the latter because, [being] dazzling, [they are] held in esteem and honored.*

*[511b] I get it, he said, that you are talking about that [which falls] under the scope of geometry and the arts akin to it.*

Get it then about the other segment of the intelligible, when I talk about what logos itself can reach through the power of to dialegesthai, using foundations not as (first) principles, but really as [mere] foundations, like stepping stones and springboards, so that, going all the way to what [is] not [itself] set to support [something else] (to anupotheton), toward the (leading) principle of the whole (hè tou pantos archè), having grasped it, deriving in return from it all that can be derived, it thus follows a downward path toward an end [511c] without making also use in any way of anything sensible, but with appearances themselves, through them, into them, it ends also into appearances.

I get it, he said, though definitely not sufficiently, for you seem to me to be talking about a long-term work, but at least that you want to distinguish as being clearer what, among what is and [is] intelligible, is examined under the guidance of the science (epistèmè) of to dialegesthai from what [is examined] under that of what is called “arts/techniques” (technai), where foundations [are] (first) principles and those who examine are indeed constrained/indeed constrain themselves to examine these through thought (dianoia) rather than through senses, but because they don't investigate by going back up to a (guiding) principle [511d] but from foundations, they seem to you not to have intelligence (noun ischein) about those [things], despite their being intelligible with the help of a (guiding) principle. And it seems to me that you are calling “thought (dianoia)” the habit of mind of those dealing with geometry and that of those dealing with similar [things] rather than “intelligence” (nous), considering thought as intermediate between opinion (doxa) and intelligence (nous).

You have most sufficiently followed, said I. And now, receive from me over the four segments, those four affections (pathèmata) produced in the soul, intellection (noèsis) first over the highest, thought (dianoia) [511e] then over the second, to the third one then assign belief/faith (pistis) and to the last conjecture/imagination (eikasias), and order them according to this ratio(nale) (ana logon), thinking that as what it is about partakes of truth, so these partake of clearness.

I get it, he said, and I concur and order them as you say.”

#### The allegory of the cave (Republic VII, 514a1-517a7)

“[514a] Now, after that, I said, liken to such an experience our nature regarding education and the fact of not being educated. Picture then men (anthrôpous) as [if they were] in a subterranean dwelling looking like a cave with a long entrance toward light spreading over the whole side of the cave, in which they are since childhood with both their legs and neck in chains, so that they stay put and [514b] see only [what's] in front of them, unable to turn their head because of the chains; and also the light upon them of a fire above [them] and far remote[from them] burning behind them, and between the fire and the chained [prisoners] above [them] a road along which picture that a wall has been built, similar to the fences put in front of men (anthrôpôn) by wonderworkers, above which they display their wonderworks.

I see, he said.

Then see along this wall men (anthrôpous) carrying [514c] implements of all kinds rising above the wall and statues of men (andriantas) [515a] and other living animals made of wood and stone and fashioned in all possible ways, some among the bearers, as is likely, producing sounds, others being silent.

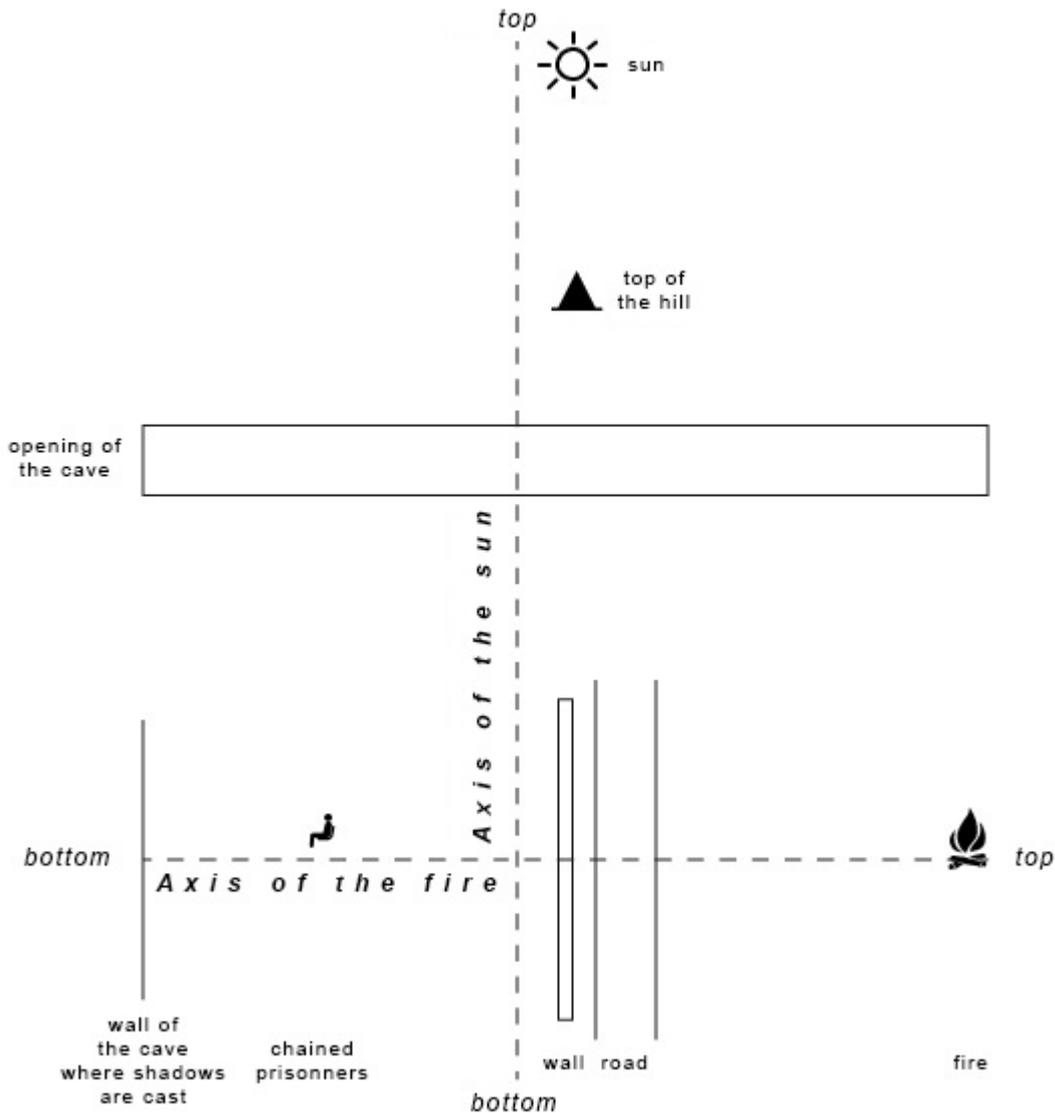
Strange, he said, [is the] image you tell and strange [are the] chained prisoners!

[They are] like us, said I; for those [that are] such as this, in the first place, do you think they could have seen of themselves and the others anything other than the shadows cast under the effect of the fire on the [wall] of the cave facing them?

How indeed, he said, if they have been forced to hold their heads really motionless [515b] all their life?

What now regarding the [objects] carried along? [Would] not [it be] the same for that?

Of course.



Now, if they were able to dialogue (dialegesthai) with one another, don't you think that, the same [things] being around [again], they would take the habit of giving names to those [things] they see?<sup>98</sup> Necessarily.

What then if the prison had an echo from the [wall] facing them? Each time one of those passing by would produce sounds (phthegxaito), do you think they could suppose the one producing [those] sounds (to phtheggomenon) other than the shadow passing by?

By Zeus, certainly not me! He said.

[515c] Undoubtedly then, said I, such [persons] would hold as the true nothing but the shadows of the implements.

Most necessarily, he said.

<sup>98</sup> There are several variants of the Greek text of the second part of this phrase (starting at “the same [things] being around ...”). I translate the following variant: *ou tauta* (stressed as a contraction of *ta auta*) *hègei an ta paronta autous nomizein onomazein haper horôien*, which is the variant given by the manuscript generally considered the best. A detailed justification of this choice can be found in appendix 4.1 page 178.

Consider then, said I, their release and their cure from the[ir] chains and the[ir] senselessness, what it might be like if naturally such things should happen to them: when one of them would be released and compelled to suddenly stand up and turn the neck around and walk and look up toward the light, but while doing all these, would feel pain and, because of the sparklings, would be unable to distinctly see those [things] whose [515d] shadows he formerly used to see, what do you think he would say if someone told him that what he was formerly seeing was nonsense but that now, nearer to that which is and turned toward [things] that are more he should have a more correct sight, and besides, [if,] pointing out to him each of the [things] passing by, he compelled him by asking questions to answer [saying] what it is? Don't you think that he would be at a loss and would deem the [things] he formerly used to see truer than those now pointed at?

Much more so, he said.

[515e] And then, if he were compelled to look at the light itself, [that] his eyes would feel pain and flee away turning [back] toward those [things] he is able to see and [that] he would hold them really clearer than the ones pointed at?

So [it is], he said.

And if, said I, someone should drag him thence by force through the rugged and steep ascent and would not let him go before having dragged him out into the light of the sun, wouldn't he be distressed [516a] and angry to be dragged and, once he had come into the light, having his eyes filled with the light of the sun, unable to see a single one of the [things] now called true?

Probably not indeed, he said, at least not immediately.

Habituation (sunêtheias) then, I think, [is what] he would need if he intended to see the [things] above, and first he would probably observe more easily the shadows and after that the images (eidôla) on waters of men (anthrôpôn) and the other [things], and still later [those things] themselves, and from these, he would probably more easily contemplate those in heaven and heaven itself during the night, looking toward the [516b] light of the stars and the moon, than, during the day, the sun and that of the sun.

How indeed [would] not [that be the case]?

So finally, I suppose, [it is] the sun, not reflections (phantasmata) of it on waters or some other place, but itself by itself in its own space [that] he could see clearly and contemplate as it is.

Necessarily, he said.

And after that, he would by this time conclude by way of reasoning (sullogizoito) about it that it is the one providing the seasons and the years and supervising all [516c] the [things] in the seen place and, of those [things] they themselves used to see, responsible in some way of all [of them].

[It is] clear, he said, that, after these, he would come to those [conclusions].

What then? Remembering his first dwelling and the wisdom there and his fellow-prisoners, don't you think that he would count himself happy for the change, but pity them?

Certainly!

And honors and praises, if some [of those things] were [in use] among them at the time, and the privileges for the one most sharply observing the [things] passing by and best at remembering which ones among them used to be carried before or after [516d] or simultaneously, and as a result of this, most capable indeed of foretelling what would come, do you think he would desire them and be jealous of those among them being honored and holding power or be affected in the way Homer [depicted] and be very much willing to "be a serf bound to the land working at another poor man's place" and suffer anything rather than hold such opinions and live in this way?

[516e] I indeed think so, he said: accept to suffer anything rather than live in this way.

And now, reflect upon this, said I. If such a one were, coming down, to sit down again in his own seat, would not his eyes be full of darkness, having suddenly come out of the sun[light]?

Certainly indeed, he said.

*But now, those shadows, if he had to compete anew with those perpetual prisoners to form judgments [on them], at a time he was dim-sighted, [517a] before his eyes had recovered—and indeed the time for habituation would not at all be short—, would he not be cause of laughter and wouldn't it be said about him that he returns, after having climbed up there, with his eyes completely destroyed and that [it is of] no value whatsoever to attempt to go up there? And the one attempting to free them and lead them upwards, if one way or another they were able to lay hands on him and kill him, wouldn't they kill him?*

*Most certainly, he said."*

Socrates' comment on the allegory (*Republic* VII, 517a8-519d7)

*"Now, this image, said I, my dear Glaucon, [517b] must be applied in full to what has been said earlier, likening on the one hand the place revealed through sight to the dwelling in the prison, the light of the fire in it on the other hand to the power of the sun; now, by holding that the ascent up high and the contemplation of the [things] up there [is] the upward path of the soul (psuchè) towards the intelligible place, you will not be mistaken about the very expectation of mine, since you desire to hear about it. But a god, perhaps, knows whether it chances to be true. But anyway what appears to me appears in this way: in the knowable, the ultimate [thing to be known] is the [517c] idea of the good (hè tou agathou idea), and it is seen with great difficulty, but once seen, it must be apprehended by way of reasoning (sullogistea einai) as [being] indeed in all things responsible for all that is right and beautiful, begetting in the visible light and its lord, and in the intelligible, lord itself providing truth and intelligence, and that whoever is to act sensibly either in private or public [affairs] must see it.*

*I myself am of the same opinion, he said, at least insofar as I am able.*

*Come on, then, said I, and be of the same opinion about this and don't wonder that those who have come there don't wish to occupy themselves with the [affairs] of human beings but that their souls are always eager to spend/waste their time up high. [517d] For [it is] likely, I guess, [that it be] so, if, here again, this happens according to the image previously depicted.*

*Probably indeed, he said.*

*What then? Do you think this something to wonder about if, from divine (theiôn) contemplations, said I, someone returning to the evil human [affairs/behaviors/deeds/thoughts/...] doesn't look good and appears most ridiculous [when] still dim-sighted and before having properly become habituated to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled, in a tribunal or somewhere else, to fight for the shadows of justice or the statues whose shadows they are, and to strive earnestly [517e] for that: how in the world could this be conceived by those who have never seen justice itself?*

*[It is] in no way a cause of wonder, he said.*

*[518a] But someone having a [sensible] mind should remember that two disturbances happen in the eyes from two [causes]: when changing from light to darkness and from darkness to light. Believing therefore that the same happens also to the soul, each time he would see one confused and unable to see something, he would not laugh thoughtlessly, he would examine whether, coming from a brighter life, it has been blinded by the lack of habituation or, coming from greater ignorance to [something] brighter, it has been filled full under [the effect of] more shining sparklings, [518b] and thus indeed he would consider the one happy because of this affection and life and pity the other, and if he wanted to laugh at the latter, his laughter would be less laughable than the [laughter] at the one coming down from the light above.*

*Certainly, he said, you speak with measure.*

*So, we must, I said, hold the following about these [matters], if this is true: education is not such as some [people] making profession of it say it is. They say indeed more or less that [518c] they themselves put knowledge into the soul in which it is not present as if putting sight into blind eyes.*

*They do say [that] indeed, he said.*

*But in fact the current account, said I, signifies that this power is present in the soul of each one and that the organ by which each one learns, in the same way as an eye which would not be able to turn from the dark toward the bright otherwise than with the whole body, must be turned around with the whole soul from the [realm of] becoming until it might, in [the realm of] what is and the brightest part of what is, become able to withstand contemplating [it]. And this, we say, is [518d] the good, isn't it?*

*Yes.*

*Of this, then, said I, there should be an art/technique (technè), of this very turning around, of the way by which it will be turned around most easily and most efficiently, not to produce in it the [ability to] see, but, because of its having it but not turning it properly and not looking at what it ought to, to make it work properly.*

*It seems likely indeed, he said.*

*Then, the other so-called "virtues/perfections" (aretai) of the soul run the risk of being something akin to those of the body, for, in reality, [518e] not being present at first, they are produced later by habit and practice, while that of thinking, it seems, run the risk of being something much more divine, which never loses its power but, depending on its revolution, becomes usefull and beneficial [519a] or on the contrary useless and harmful. Or have you never realized, about those who are said bad, but wise, how sharply their petty soul watches and how acutely it sees through what it turns toward, because of its not having a poor sight, but being forced to serve evil so that the sharper it sees, the more evil [deeds] it performs.*

*Of course I have, he said.*

*Yet, said I, this [petty soul] of such a nature, if, having been trimmed straight from childhood, it had been trimmed all around [to get rid of] the [parts] similar to leaden weights akin to [519b] becoming having become outgrowths due to eating and similar pleasures and gluttony turning the vision of the soul downward; if, having been set free of those, it was turned around toward the true [objects of sight], this [petty soul] itself of the same men would also see those more acutely, like those towards which it is presently turned.*

*Probably indeed, he said.*

*What then? [Is] not this probable, said I, and necessary based on what was said earlier: neither those uneducated and ignorant of truth [519c] would ever adequately manage a city, not those allowed to spend/waste their time in education till the end, the ones for not having a single aim in life aiming at which they must do everything they do privately and publicly, the others because they will not voluntarily do [it], thinking they have already been carried alive into the islands of the blessed?*

*True, he said.*

*Then our task, said I, as founders of the city, is to force the best natures to come to the object of learning which we said before to be the greatest, to see the good [519d] and to undertake this ascent and provided, after having ascended, they have seen adequately, not permit them what is now permitted.*

*What's that, then?*

*To stay around it, said I, and not be willing to go down again among those prisoners and take part in their labors and honors, whether most trivial or most serious."*

#### *The art of dialegesthai (Republic VII, 531c9-535a2)*

The allegory of the cave is followed by a presentation by Socrates of the training program for future philosopher kings including in that order arithmetic, geometry, stereometry (solid geometry), astronomy and harmony, and culminating in what is usually called "dialectic", after the transcription into English of the Greek word *dialektikè*, but which I prefer to call "art of *to dialegesthai*" to avoid pulling with the word "dialectic" more than two thousand years of philosophy and faulty interpretations of Plato's writings. In the conversation taking place toward

the end of book VII to introduce and define this art, Socrates refers to the allegory of the cave and the analogy of the line through summaries of them. Those summaries shed an interesting light on both images both through the selection of what is kept of them and through changes in vocabulary. This is the reason why I add the translation of this section here.

*« Anyway, I do think, said I, that if the path we have followed till the end through them all (the objects of learning) [531d] arrives at the community and kinship [they have] with one another and gathers through reasoning (sullogisthèi) why they all are of the same family, the hard work on them will somehow bring us where we want and it won't have been unprofitable labor, but otherwise [it will be] unprofitable.*

*I too, he said, so presage. But [it is] a huge task you are talking about, Socrates.*

*[Is it] of the prelude, said I, or of something [else that] you are talking about? Or do we not know that all these are preludes to the song/law (nomos) itself that must be learned? For, I suppose, the experts in these [matters] don't seem the least to you [531e] to be dialektikoi?*

*No, by Zeus! he said, except maybe a very small number of those I happened to meet.*

*But then, I said, will those [who are] unable to give and receive a logos ever know something of what we say must be known?*

*No again, he said, to that too.*

*[532a] Thus, I said, Glaucon, is not this now the song/law itself that to dialegesthai executes/fulfills? The one which, despite its being intelligible, the power of sight would mimic, which we described as attempting to look first toward the living [creatures] themselves, then toward the stars themselves and in the very end toward the sun itself. And so, when someone, by means of to dialegesthai, attempts, without all the senses, through logos, to rush toward that itself which each [thing] is and doesn't give up until [532b] he might have grasped by thought itself that itself which is good,\* it reaches the limit of the intelligible itself, like the one earlier that of the visible.*

*Undoubtedly indeed, he said.*

*What then? Don't you call this journey "dialektikèn"?*

*Yes indeed.*

*But then, said I, the release from chains and the turning around from shadows toward the likenesses (eidola) and the light and the ascent out of the subterranean [place] toward the sun, and there, regarding the living [creatures] and plants and the light of the sun, inability to yet [532c] look [at them], but regarding the reflections (phantasmata) on waters, habituation,<sup>99</sup> and also [regarding] the shadows of the [things] that are, but not the shadows of images (eidolon) cast by a light [which is] another such [image] when judging in comparison with the sun, all this hard work on the arts we have gone through has this power of elevation of the best [part] of the soul toward the contemplation of the best among the [things] which are, as, at the time, [the power of elevation of] the clearest [part] in the body toward the [contemplation] of the brightest [thing] in the corporeal and [532d] visible place.*

*I at least, he said, accept [that it is] so. And yet, it seems to me that they are very hard to accept [opinions/propositions/statements/...], but again, from another standpoint, hard not to accept. But nevertheless — for [it is] not only at the present time [that] we have to hear these, but we'll have also to return back [to it] again many times — assuming those [things] to be as*

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<sup>99</sup> The text of all the manuscripts and editions of the *Republic* reads “*phantasmata theia*” (“divine reflections”), which leads to a grammatically faulty phrase and introduces in this summary of the allegory of the cave a word heavy with meaning (*theia*, “divine”) and an idea, the “divine” character of the reflections seen at that stage of the progress of the freed prisoner, which are not in the allegory and are hard to justify in view of its overall symbolism (if something should be called “divine”, it’s certainly not the *phantasmata* (“reflection”). I suggest to emend the text and to replace *phantasmata theia* by *phantasmata ètheia* for reasons that I detail in appendix 4.2, page 182, *ètheia* being a shortened form of *sunètheia*, the word used in the allegory at 516a5, the location corresponding to what Socrates refers to here, with the prefix *sun-* omitted, making it a possible neologism or a rare word no longer in use, as it doesn’t appear in the LSJ Greek-English Lexicon.

\* See “*Justification of the translation* “that itself which is good” at *Rep. VII, 532b1* (09/07/2017)”, page 204.

*is now said, let us move now to the song/law (nomos) itself and go through it as we have gone through the prelude. Tell [us], then, what [is] the manner [of working] of the power of to dialegesthai, and [532e] and also in how many kinds it is divided and, further, what paths [it follows], for, presently, these [paths], it seems, could be those leading to that very [place] where, once reached, it would be sort of a resting place on the path and the end of the journey.*

[533a] *No, said I, my dear Glaucon, you will no longer be able to follow [me], though on my part at least, there would be no lack of good will, and [it would] no longer [be] an image (eikôn) of what we are talking about that you would see, but the truth itself, that's at least what it seems to me, but if [that's] really [the case] or not, [it's] no longer worth exhausting all our strength about this; but at least that it be seeing something of the sort, it must be strongly asserted. Isn't that so?*

*Surely.*

*Then also that the power of to dialegesthai alone could reveal [this] to [someone] being experienced in what we have gone through, but [that] otherwise, [it is] in no way possible.*

*This too, he said, is worth being strongly asserted.*

[533b] *This, at any rate, said I, nobody will argue with us when we say [it]: that, about each [this or that] itself, what each one is, some other approach (methodos) attempts, in a [specific] way (hodô), to grasp [it] about everything. But on the one hand, all the other arts (technai) either are toward opinions and desires of men, or are turned toward creations and assemblies, or toward tending [things] that grow and also all those that have been assembled; on the other hand, the remaining ones, which we described as grasping something of what is, geometry and those following it, we have seen that they dream [533c] about what is, but that it is impossible for them to see [as if] in a waking state so long as, while making use of foundations (hupotheseis), they let them unmoved, unable to give an account of them. For where a principle that one doesn't know, an end [result] and the intermediate [steps] coming from what one didn't know have been twined together, what contrivance could ever transform such an agreement into knowledge?*

*None, said he.*

*Then, said I, the dialektikon pathway (methodos) alone proceeds this way, doing away with foundations (hupotheseis), up to the (leading) principle (archên) itself [533d] in order to secure itself, and the eye of the soul really buried in some sort of barbaric muddy swamp, it gently draws [it] and leads [it] upward, using as coworkers and assistants in the turning around process the arts (technai) we have been reviewing, which we often called "sciences" (epistêmai) out of habit, but would require another name, connoting more clearness than "opinion" (doxa), but more obscurity than "science/knowledge" (epistêmè); "thought" (dianoia), I think, [is how] we defined it earlier, but it is, it seems to me, not [533e] a controversy about the name, on [concepts] as broad as those about which an inquiry is set before us...*

*Certainly not indeed, he said, but saying with clarity what may only be plain in the soul as a consequence of its habit of mind!<sup>100</sup>*

*It is satisfactory then, said I, like before, to call "science" (epistêmè) the first part, the second one "thought" (dianoia), the third [534a] one "belief/faith" (pistis) and "conjecture/imagination" (eikasia) the fourth one, and those two together "opinion" (doxa) and the two other together "intellection" (noësis); and opinion (doxa) one the one hand [is] about becoming (genesis), intellection (noësis) on the other hand about ousian; and what ousia [is] with regard to becoming (genesis), intellection (noësis) [is] with regard to opinion (doxa), and what intellection (noësis) [is] with regard to opinion (doxa), science (epistêmè) [is] with regard to belief/faith (pistis) and thought (dianoia) with regard to conjecture/imagination (eikasia); but the relation of analogy between what those [are] about, and the division into two parts of each one of these*

<sup>100</sup> Manuscripts and editions of the *Republic* offer different readings of the section going from "but it is..." to "it is satisfactory then...", and even different ways of distributing the text between Socrates and Glaucon. I present these various readings and explain in details my choices in appendix 4.3, page 188.

two, *opinable* (doxaston) and *intelligible* (noèton), let us drop [that], so that it doesn't fill us full with discussions many times longer than those having preceded.

[534b] But for sure, for me at least, he said, the rest at least, insofar as I am able to follow, seems good too.

And will you call *dialektikon* too the one grasping the *logon* of the *ousias* of each [being]? And the one not being able [to do this], will you say that, to the extent that he is not able to give a *logon* to himself and others, to that extent he doesn't have *intelligence* (*nous*) about this?

How indeed, said he, could I say [he does]?

Thus also about the good, same thing; [the one] who would not be able to distinguish clearly thru *logos*, by separating [it] from all the other [things], the [534c] idea of the good (*hè tou agathou idea*) and, like in a battle, going all the way through all refutations, eager to refute them not according to opinion (*doxa*), but according to *ousian*, [would not] in all these find its way through with an unfailing *logos*, you will say of the one behaving this way that he knows neither the good itself (*auto to agathon*) nor any other good, but that, if somehow he grasps some image (*eidôlon*) [of it], [it's] to grasp through opinion (*doxa*), not knowledge (*epistèmè*), and, [after] wandering like in a dream and dozing in his present life, arriving in Hades [534d] before waking up here, to fall asleep forever.

Yes, by Zeus, said he, I will indeed say all this most strongly.

But of course, your own children at least, that you rear and educate in the [present] *logos*, if one day you should rear them in deeds, you would not allow them, I think, if they were irrational (*alogoi*) as lines (\*), by leading the city, to be masters of the greatest [things/affairs/...]?

Well, no indeed, he said.

Then you will make a law for them to receive more than anything else this education by virtue of which they will be able to ask and answer questions most knowledgeably?

[534e] I will make this law, he said, with you indeed.

Then, doesn't it seem to you, said I, that, like a capstone for studies, *dialektikè* lies from our standpoint at the top and that no other study could rightly be put higher than it, but that [535a] by now the [matters] of studies have [reached] completion?

I do indeed, he said."

(\*) In Greek, *alogos* means "irrational" in the sense of "deprived of reason, unreasonable" for a person or a behavior as well as "irrational" for numbers (e.g.: square root of two) and "incommensurable" for lines (e.g.: the side of a square and its diagonal), that is, having a ratio between them which is an irrational number (square root of two for the ratio of the diagonal of a square to its side).

## The keywords

The keyword of the analogy of the line is the word *pathèmata*, which occurs only in the last sentence of Socrates, setting forth the gist of the analogy, and the keyword of the allegory of the cave is *anthrôpoi*, occurring four times, always in the plural, noteworthy precisely because of its multiple occurrences and the persistence of the plural.

### *Pathèmata*

*Pathèma*, of which *pathèmata* is the nominative/accusative plural, is a substantive derived from the aorist *pathein* of the verb *paschein* meaning in a very broad sense "to have something done to", that is, "to suffer, endure, be subject of" (suggesting a "passive" attitude), which I translate as "affection" in the sense of "what affects us", that is, what acts upon us and produces a certain result in us, good or bad. Thus, the purpose of the analogy is to identify four "affections" which, according to Socrates, take place "*in the psuchè*", that is, in what is most properly the *anthrôpos*,<sup>101</sup> the human being. The fact of having chosen this word suggests that, for Plato's

<sup>101</sup> In the introductory dialogue, the *Alcibiades*, Socrates leads his young interlocutor into admitting that the *anthrôpos* (man in the sense of human being) is neither the body alone, which is nothing more than a "tool" for

Socrates, this *psuchè* is, in a first stage at least, *passive* with regard to stimuli of the senses as well as the mind coming from the outside. And what interests Socrates is not so much the “sources” of these stimuli *in themselves*, the “things” of the world around us, to say it in everyday language, of which we can indeed know nothing aside from the perceptions we have of them, but the various ways in which what is not the *psuchè* affects it and it reacts to those stimuli. In other words, in segmenting the line he uses as an image of the two “kingdoms” he just mentioned, Socrates doesn't seek so much to describe a partition of “reality”, whatever that may mean, in which each “element” of this reality would be in one and only one of the four segments resulting from his splitting as he seeks to inventory the various ways in which we react to what stimulates our senses and mind, only tools to access what is not us. If nonetheless he mentions, when referring to the visible, sensible “things” (“*the living creatures around us, and all that is planted and the whole family of what is fabricated*”), it is not to isolate those “things” in one of the four segments in which he has split the line, as will be made clear in the allegory of the cave, but to help his listeners picture what he is talking about with everyday language when talking about what is most easy to understand for most people, in his time as in ours, before going into a far more difficult analysis of the “segment” of the intelligible and the subsegments he is splitting it into. And indeed, he asked to segment the visible as well as the intelligible *ana to auton logon* (“*according to the same ratio(nale)*”, I'll soon come back to this expression) and he must attempt to make us understand that *logon* where it's most easy, in the visible/sensible, to have a chance to have it understood later in the intelligible, where, there, he will take examples (which are no more than that, *examples*) from geometry. In short, if we want to have a chance of understanding the analogy of the line, we should definitely not focus on the “things” which might be the source of our perceptions, but on the ways we are affected by these “things” whatever they might be, since it's the only thing that we can “know” because it takes place *within us* and the “organs” which react to those “affections”, senses and mind, are the *unavoidable* screens through which what is not us affects us. Rather than trying to talk about what is on the other side of those “screens” as if those screens did not exist, we'd better try to understand how those screens work by sharing experience with one another.

### *Anthrôpoi*

To understand how these “screens” work is to focus on *anthrôpoi*, that is, to follow the motto engraved on the pediment of the temple at Delphi that Socrates had made his, *gnôthi sauton* (“get to know thyself”), and this is precisely what the allegory of the cave is all about, presenting *anthrôpoi* both as subjects capable of knowing (*gnôthi*, “get to know”) and as objects of knowledge for them (*sauton*, “thyself”, both as an individual and as a species). In the allegory, the word *anthrôpoi*, consistently with Socrates' statement in the *Alcibiades* which I just mentioned in note 101, refers to human “souls” and is used first to describe the prisoners (1<sup>st</sup> occurrence, at 514a3), which picture those *psuchai* as subjects capable of learning and knowledge, likened to spectators of a kind of puppet show (2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence, at 514b5),<sup>102</sup> then, in a second phase, in the description of what is around those prisoners, that is, of what can be apprehended by them as “objects” of knowledge, both inside and outside the cave, that is, both in the “visible/sensible” realm, pictured

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the *psuchè*, nor the assembly of soul (*psuchè*) and body, but that *hè psuchè estin anthrôpos* (“the soul is man”, *Alcibiades*, 130c5-6).

<sup>102</sup> This description of *anthrôpoi* as passive spectators of a show, the “spectacle” of the world, corresponds, in the imagery of the allegory, to the passivity implied in the analogy of the line by the use of the word *pathêmata*. The Greek text of the allegory doesn't explicitly refer to a *puppet* show, as is the case with most translations, but simply to *thaumatopoiôs* (literally “wonderworkers”) and the *thaumatai* (plural of *thauma*, “wonder, marvel, astonishment”, the word on which *thaumatopoiôs* is formed by adjunction of the suffix *-poiôs*, derived from the verb *poiein*, “to make, to produce, to do”) they are exhibiting in their shows. The choice of these words is not indifferent when we notice that *thauma* is the root of the verb *thaumazein*, “to wonder” and that, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates mentions the fact of *thaumazein*, of wondering, as the origin (*archè*) of philosophy (*Theaetetus*, 155d2-4).

by the inside of the cave, and in the intelligible realm, pictured by the outside of the cave, and again *always in the plural*: it is the word used at 514b8 to refer to the invisible bearers behind the wall hiding the road along which they walk, image in the allegory of the human “souls”, the activity of which we perceive but which remain invisible for the senses, and it is reused at 516d7, here again in the plural, to name the *only* kind of “things” explicitly mentioned by their name that the freed prisoner can see at the surface of the earth once outside the cave, first indirectly through shadows and reflections, then directly. In other words, what the prisoner first sees once outside the cave, that is, in the intelligible, is not an « idea » of Man, unique (of which, as a matter of fact, the allegory says nothing), but *multiple* human “souls”, intelligible part of the many *anthrôpoi* whose sensible trace he could perceive inside the cave, in the visible, that is, under the form of statues of men (*andriantas*, 514c1) carried by those “souls” remaining invisible inside the cave, or even, at first, under the form of the shadows of those statues on the wall of the cave (visible trace) and of the sounds produced by the bearers (*phtheggomenous*, at 515a2, their audible trace) of which that same wall returned the echo (audible “reflection”).

Assuredly, there are other things outside the cave of which no traces were perceived inside it, the heavens and the stars in it, and the brightest of them all, the sun, and this is the reason why, in the analogy of the line, Socrates asks Glaucon to split the original segment into two unequal parts,<sup>103</sup> but the allegory is clear about the fact that it is only after a period of habituation (*sunètheia*) starting with the terrestrial (and thus “sensible”) “creatures” envisioned in their intelligible dimension (the *anthrôpoi* and the rest outside the cave) that, at a later time, we might become able to turn toward the heavenly “objects”, that is, toward the *ideai*, principles of intelligibility, being cautious not to ruin our eyes in trying to contemplate at length the brightest of them all, the sun, image in the allegory of the good (*to agathon*).<sup>104</sup>

### Pragmata

Before going back to a more sequential reading of those two images, I'd like to come back to the word *pathèma*, which I presented as key to a proper understanding of the analogy of the line, to relate it to another word, which is not used in the analogy, but which lurks behind *pathèma*, the word *pragma*. Indeed, *pragma* is derived from the verb *prattein* (“to do, make, achieve, effect, accomplish”) in the same way *pathèma* is derived from the verb *paskein* (“to suffer, endure, be subject of”), and these two verbs are in opposition to one another as the active to the passive, like “acting” to “being acted upon”, which suggests that, if there is a *pathèma* (“affection”) incurred

<sup>103</sup> The text of most manuscripts has at 509d6 the word *anisa* (“unequal”, plural) to qualify the two segments resulting from the first split asked by Socrates. Yet, since Antiquity, a debate has been going on about this word and some scholars and editors prefer to read *isa* (“equal”) for the qualification of those two segments, for instance by splitting the sequence of letters of *anisa* and read *an isa* (remember that, in the time of Plato, there was no space between words of a written text and it appeared as a continuous sequence of letters contiguous to one another) or by assuming an error of transcription which they try to correct as best they can. But all of them have a hard time explaining what would be the rationale for either equality or inequality, prisoners as they are of a preconception of Plato's thought in which anything is *either* sensible (within the cave) *or* intelligible (outside the cave), which means *either* in one segment *or* in the other, but not in both at the same time, and of a numerical and quantitative understanding of the analogy of the line induced by its geometrical guise in which they have a hard time describing the relationship between all or part of the sensible “things” and all or part of the intelligible “things” (one to one relation, or one to many, or many to one, and in which cases). It doesn't occur to them that the answer might be in the ensuing allegory, which invites us not to give too much weight to the geometrical guise of the analogy and not to focus on the precise count of the “number” of “things” in each segment, of which Plato's Socrates never attempts to give an exhaustive inventory. It doesn't matter how many stars there are in heaven, they are there and we may see some of them when outside the cave but we will never see any of them from the inside. This is good enough to him to justify the *anisa*.

<sup>104</sup> In fact, Socrates doesn't warn us about this risk, but let us find out by ourselves, suggesting, on the contrary, in a deliberately emphatic wording, a contemplation of the sun at the end of the ascent of the freed prisoner about which everybody should know that it is impossible for any human being without serious, and possibly irreversible, damage to the eyes: “*the sun... itself by itself in its own space he could see clearly and contemplate as it is*”.

by the *psuchè*, as Socrates suggests it's the case in the analogy, there must be a *pragma* acting upon the *psuchè* as the "cause" of this *pathèma*, of this "affection" of the soul, either sensible or intelligible. Now, one of the possible translations of *pragma*, whose prime meaning is "deed, act, affair", is "thing", and this is the usual translation when, in the *Cratylus* for instance, or the *Sophist*, Plato's Socrates uses this word to refer to what a word (*onoma*) refers to. The word *pragma*, thus, is well taken to refer to what is implied as their cause by the *pathèmata* ("affections"), visible as well as intelligible, that Socrates asks us in the analogy of the line to associate with each of the four segments into which he splits the line. But what the allegory of the cave then suggests by using at all stages of the progress from chains to sun the word *anthrôpos* ("man" as species) to designate what is the most important source for us of all these *pathèmata*, is that each one of them doesn't necessarily have a different *pragma* as its cause, if we want to think of this "cause" as "thing" (a man for instance). Or, to say it the other way around, that the same *pragma* may be responsible in us for several distinct *pathèmata*, both in the sensible realm (images, sounds, odors, and so on) and in the intelligible realm, starting with the transformation of these sensible perceptions into "concepts" to which names can be applied. This invites us to understand the word « thing », if we want to use it to translate *pragma*, in a much broader and less exclusively material sense than is customary. A "thing" so understood is not limited to what can be seen and touched, something necessarily material, but anything that can be a "cause" of perceptions on our part, sensible as well as intelligible.

And anyway, we cannot know what those "causes", those *pragmata*, are in themselves, precisely because the only ways we can apprehend them is through these *pathèmata*, the "affections" they elicit in our *psuchè* ("soul"), constrained by the capabilities and limits of our senses and our human intelligence. Associated to each one of those "tools" put at our disposal by nature there is a corresponding "appearance" (*eidos*) constrained by the tool, "visible", "audible", and so on, and intelligible *eidos*. And these *eidè* are not the specific "appearance" taken by this or that *pragma* for the particular organ of a given individual with its own defects and limits (defective sight or hearing, limited intelligence, and so on), but the "appearance" it would take for a man whose corresponding "tool" (sight, hearing, intelligence and so on) would be as perfect as it can be for a human being, each perception by a specific existing individual being no more than a more or less "resembling" approximation of this "objective" *eidos*.

If Plato uses the word *pragma*, whose prime meaning is, as I said earlier, "deed, act, affair" rather than "thing", meaning derived from that of "affair (which we currently busy on)", that is, the "thing (we are now talking about or working on)", it's precisely to avoid giving too material a twist to what we are led to assume behind the *pathèmata* affecting our soul through the many different perceptions we are subject to: what constitutes "facts" is the "fact" that, in each case, we are affected by one or another of these *pathèmata*, which implies a "deed" (*pragmata* in its prime meaning) from something and the only thing we can do is to confront our own *pathèmata* with those of others and with the data gathered from experience to see if they lead to a meaningful *logos* consistent with those data from experience.

With this general framework in mind, we may now read more attentively those two major texts, the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave.

### **Ana ton auton logon**

In the analogy of the line, Socrates asks us to picture the two « kingdoms » he just referred to, the kingdom of the good (*to agathon*), the intelligible (*noèton*), and that of the sun, the visible (*horaton*), as a line that would be split in two, one segment figuring the visible, the other the intelligible, each segment being split again in two *ana ton auton logon* (509d7). This expression, in the geometrical guise given by Socrates to his analogy, is naturally most readily understood as meaning "according to the same ratio", "ratio" being taken in its mathematical sense, one of the many possible senses of the word *logos* in Greek. The first thing that must be noticed

is that this expression, no matter what sense is given to the word *logon*, can be understood in two different ways: either “according to the same ratio *as the one used to divide the line the first time around into visible and intelligible*”, or “*both according to the same ratio*” (the first option implies the second, but not the other way around). But Socrates has given no specific indication on how to split the line the first time around, other than saying it had to be split into two *unequal (anisa)* segments, before adding, but only *after* using the expression *ana ton auton logon*, that one of the segments thus obtained is that *of the seen (horômenon) family (genous)* and the other that *of the thought (nooumenon) one*.<sup>105</sup> But, to make things even worse, some scholars and editors since Antiquity challenge the reading *anisa* (“unequal”) to replace it by a reading implying a split into two *equal (isa)* segments, as I explained in note 103, which would have the advantage of giving a precise *logon* for the second split to those who want to understand *ana ton auton logon* in the sense of “according to the same ratio *as the one used in the first split*”, but this begs for an explanation of why there would be in each case equality between the two resulting segments, which nobody has yet given in a satisfactory manner *for all three splits*, especially when *logon* is understood in its mathematical meaning referring to the number of “elements” in each “set” pictured by one of the segments (as many “subjects” in the “kingdom” of the sun as there are in the “kingdom” of the good, as many “images” as “originals” in the kingdom of the sun, and so on).

But, as I already said, it is a mistake to assume that *logon* must be understood in a numerical sense. If we want to understand the analogy, we'd better wait until the end of the explanations given by Socrates rather than dream up an understanding from that expression interpreted based solely on the geometrical guise he gives his analogy and later try to shoehorn his explanations into this preconceived understanding of the splits derived for these few words introducing the image of the line.

### Images (*eikones*) and originals

Socrates explains next how he wants us to split the segment of the visible, using the notion of *eikôn*, a word usually translated as “image”, but whose meaning is not limited to the visible realm, since this word derives from a verb, *eoikena*, meaning “to be similar, to resemble”, of a resemblance which is not necessarily visual, so that another possible translation of *eikôn* is

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<sup>105</sup> Two comments on the choice of vocabulary here : Plato moves in this phrase from the verbal adjectives *noèton* (« intelligible ») and *horaton* (« visible ») used earlier, which suggest a capability associated with the “things” they qualify (and we must notice that they are not exclusive from one another: nothing precludes *a priori* that something visible be also intelligible), to passive present participles, *horômenon* (« seen ») and *nooumenon* (« perceived by mind/intelligence »), thus moving from an “objective” approach looking at the intrinsic properties of “things” independent of the fact that there is one or several observers to see or understand them, to a “subjective” approach implying that there *actually* is an observer perceiving the visible “things”, which are thus “seen”, and the intelligible “things”, which are thus “perceived by mind/intelligence”. This change of vocabulary anticipates the word *pathêmata* (« affections ») which will be used at the end of the analogy and which puts the “affected” subject rather than the “affecting” object at the center of the picture.

Simultaneously, he reverses the order in which he mentions the two “kingdoms”, that of the good (the intelligible) and that of the sun (the visible), compared to the order he had used in the prelude to the analogy of the line introducing the two “kingdoms”: in an “objective” approach, intelligible comes first, while in the “subjective” approach which is ours and which is that of the analogy of the line as well as the allegory of the cave, it is the visible which is (chronologically) first since intelligence can only begin to work on data provided by the senses. But at the same time, while, in the “objective” perspective, he associated with the two “kingdoms” two words to talk about them, *topos* (“place”) and *genos* (“family, kind”), the first one more appropriate for the visible, the second one more appropriate for the intelligible, here, he retains only one, *genos*, the one more appropriate for the intelligible, making it explicit for the “seen” and only implicit for the “perceived by mind/intelligence”, as if to suggest that with sensible perception, we are already in a way in the intelligible, since it is not sight, which allows us only to perceive colors, but already intelligence, which discern forms behind those colors. As soon as we talk about *genos*, even in its most usual senses of “family, race, kin”, or of *eidos* in the concrete sense of (visual) “appearance” or “form”, we are already, without realizing it, in the intelligible.

“similarity, resemblance”. It is indeed this general notion of similarity which he puts forward a few lines later, in the conclusion of his explanations on the splitting of the segment of the visible, when he uses the verb *homoïoun*, “to make like” or “to become like”, derived from *homoïos* (“like, similar, resembling”) in the formula “*what is made similar (to homoïôthên) with regard to what it has been made similar to (to hôi hômoïôthè)*” to describe in more general terms the contents of each segment of the visible.

But before reaching this point, he explains what he means by *eikôn* through *examples* specifically taken in the visible: shadows and reflections (*phantasmata*<sup>106</sup>). Those examples are key as they appear with the same words, or words close to these, at *all* the steps of the progression of the freed prisoner in the allegory of the cave: inside the cave, where what the prisoners see initially are *shadows* on the wall facing them and what they hear are echoes of sounds produced by the bearers, that is, sound *reflections*; outside, in the first stage of their inquiry, dealing with what is on the ground (as opposed to what is in heaven), that is, “*men (anthrôpôn) and the other [things]*”, of which they only perceive at first the *shadows*, then, with habituation, the *reflections (eidôla*<sup>107</sup>); eventually with regard to heavenly “objects”, where *night* takes the place of shadows and where *reflections (phantasmata*<sup>108</sup>) on waters are again mentioned about the sun, easier to look at than the sun itself.

It is impossible to properly understand the analogy if we don't pay attention to the fact that these examples refer to *natural* images, that is, images resulting from natural phenomena rather than from human activity, and that Socrates leaves this list open, ending it with the formula “*and everything of that kind*” (*kai pan to toiouton*), suggesting that there are other kinds of images that might be added to this list. If Plato had his Socrates choose these examples, it is to invite us to ask ourselves how we are able to make a difference between such images and what they are images of. Indeed, in the case of man-made images, whether they be painted images or statues, it is not hard to see with our eyes that what is pictured on the image doesn't move. In the case of shadows and reflections on the contrary, we are faced with moving “images”, some of which, for instance the reflection of a landscape or a person on the surface of a lake whose water is not ruffled by the wind, may look to our eyes as real as what they reproduce, as the legend of Narcissus falling in love with his reflection in waters shows. And even if complete likeness is lost, as is the case with shadows, the question remains how we can determine that the shadow is only that and not an appendix to what it is the shadow of, in the same way a person's arms or legs are. And to understand where Plato wants to lead us, the question must be more precisely worded: how, *through sight only*, can we make the difference between a *natural*, not man-made, image and an “original”? And we are forced to reach the conclusion that it is impossible. Sight gives us a two-dimensional image of what affects it, made up of

<sup>106</sup> *Phantasma*, of which *phantasmata* is the nominative/accusative plural, is a name derived from the verb *phantazesthai*, “to become visible, appear”, itself derived from *phainein*, “bring to light, cause to appear, make known”. It means “apparition, phantom, vision, dream”. Here the meaning of “reflection” is perfectly clear since Socrates refers to likenesses formed “*in waters and on [other things] insofar as they are by design at the same time compact, smooth and bright*”.

<sup>107</sup> *Eidôlon*, of which *eidôla* is the nominative/accusative plural, is a word close in meaning to both *eikôn* and *phantasma*. It derives from *eidos* (“appearance, form”) with a meaning insisting on the unreal character of what is offered to sight. It is the word from which the English word “idol” derives. But here again, to leave no doubt about its meaning, Socrates takes pains to add that those *eidôla* are formed “*on waters*”, showing us along the way through these examples that what counts is not the word, but the “idea (*idea/eidos*)” behind the word, whose meaning can be deduced from the context: whether he uses the word *phantasma* or the word *eidôlon*, what makes us understand what he has in mind is the added information on where those phenomena take place.

<sup>108</sup> It is probably not mere chance if, when talking about the sun, the most important object of learning, the one whose sight is the ultimate goal of the ascent of the freed prisoner, Plato returns to the word he had used to describe the first segment of the line, the one describing the least “substantial” things in the visible realm. We may as well be misled in our perception of the good by the mind as we may be in our perception of Socrates through a reflection on a distorting mirror or the surface of a lake ruffled by wind.

constantly moving patches of colors and if, as is the case with the prisoners in the cave, we had been chained and motionless since birth, unable to move and deprived of arms allowing us to touch what our eyes see, or merely unable to use them, we never could have been able to become conscious of the three-dimensional nature of the sensible world around us and make a difference between our mother and her reflection in a mirror. It is as he becomes able to move his arms and touch what is within his grasp, and later to move toward what he is looking at to touch it that an infant learns to make a difference between an "original" and a reflection, and, as time passes, not even to have to touch to make that difference.

This being the case, it would be naïve to think that the split Socrates makes in the segment of the visible separates images recognized as such by the observer and isolated from the rest of what he sees from that rest, that is, to quote his own words, "*the living creatures around us, and all that is planted and the whole family of what is fabricated*", which must be understood as including, as part of what is fabricated, man made images, that is, in particular, paintings and sculptures. Here, it is the allegory which can help us understand what Plato's Socrates had in mind when ending his list of what he meant by "images" by the words "*and everything of that kind*" (*kai pan to toiouton*). By picturing as *shadows everything* the chained prisoners see, he wants to help us realize that it is *everything* sight allows us to see which is akin to images. Sight alone doesn't offer us an appropriate and exhaustive grasp of "*the living creatures around us, and all that is planted and the whole family of what is fabricated*", but only an *image* of them, and it is with the help of other senses, and above all of our mind working on data from those manifold senses, that we may understand that the "things" around us are more than what sight alone, or any other sense alone, allows us to grasp: an *anthrôpos* is no more limited to the appearance which sight offers us of him than to the sounds he produces, pictured in the allegory of the cave as a sort of "reflection", the echo of the sounds produced by the bearers returned by the wall facing them, on which the shadows come and go, or to the odor he gives out, or to the tactile sensations that we experience when touching him, or to the taste of his skin when we lick it. Each one of these perceptions reveals to us one aspect of him, but an aspect only and, what's more, an aspect *at a given point in time*, subject to continuous change, more or less perceptible but real, not all of what he is.

It is with this in the back of our mind that we must understand the two *pathêmata* (« affections ») that Socrates associates, at the end of the analogy, with the two segments of the visible, which he names *eikasia* (conjecture/imagination) and *pistis* ("belief/faith"). *Eikasia*, named after a word coming from the same root as *eikôn* ("image/likeness"), is not the state of mind of one looking at an *eikôn*, for instance a shadow or a reflection, and realizing it's only an image, but on the contrary the state of mind of one looking at the "images" provided by sight of *all* there is around him without realizing that they are only images (and in some cases, as with reflections and shadows, images of images). A person is not alternatively in *eikasia* and in *pistis* depending on whether she is looking at reflections or originals of these reflections, but *always* in *eikasia*, no matter what she looks at, so long as she has not realized that *all* that sight allows her to perceive is akin to *eikones*, to images, likenesses, with regard to what their source is. This is definitely confirmed by the allegory, where the move from *eikasia* to *pistis* corresponds to the freeing of the prisoner and his turning around toward the tri-dimensional objects above the wall which are the "originals" of the shadows he used to see when still chained, though they themselves are but "images", since they are *statues* of men (*andrianta*) and other things (but let us not move too fast!) The state of mind corresponding to *eikasia* is that of those who, like the prisoners still chained in the cave, "*hold as the true nothing but the shadows of the implements*" (515c1-2). They are in imagination, they "imagine" the world is as they see it without searching farther than the tip of their nose.

And if Plato's Socrates calls *pistis*, "belief", "faith", the state of mind of one who has realized that sight gives us only an image of what solicits it, it is to stress the fact that such a one, while

knowing that sight, and senses in general, only give us a partial grasp of what activates them, has understood that nonetheless, in most cases, and provided we take a few precautions taught by experience, we can trust them, have “faith” in the fact that they give us not too distorted a grasp, a grasp good enough in most practical situations in life to ensure our survival, or anyway, even if that were not the case, that we have no other choice than to “trust” them since they are the only tools at our disposal as *anthrôpoi* to grasp what is around us. So as to prop this faith, the example of reflections allows us to experience the fact that, in some cases at least, such as that of reflections in the quiet water of a lake, an image may be quite close to its original, or at least of what is perceived of it in the same register (sight in this case). But in the end, it's the daily experience of the fact that we cope as best we can with the world around us with the help of our senses which strengthens over time our confidence in them once we have understood that they only give us an “image” of it.

## Unveiling

Thus, the *logon* presiding over the split of the segment of the visible into two segments is not a numerical ratio, as we might have expected owing to the geometrical guise given his analogy by Socrates, but a logical *rationale*, that of the relation between image and model. But, as we have seen, Socrates has asked us at the beginning of the analogy to split each one of the two segments, that of the visible and that of the intelligible, *ana ton auton logon* (“according to the same *ratio(nale)*”). We now know that this *logon* is the relationship between image and model. We must now figure out what, in the intelligible realm, could play a role of images and with regard to what.

To help us in this inquiry, Socrates introduces, in the conclusion of his comments on the segment of the visible, a parallel whose purpose is to show us how the concept of *eikôn* (image/likeness”), reworded in the language of resemblance in the already quoted expression “*what is made similar* (to *homoiôthên*) *with regard to what it has been made similar to* (to *hôi homoiôthè*)”, can be transposed in the intelligible realm, that is, in the realm of *logos*. He draws a parallel between the *relationship* between what is object of opinion (*to doxaston*, literally “the opinable/opined”<sup>109</sup>) and the knowable/known and the *relationship* between image in the broadest possible sense and “original/model”, from the standpoint of the same criterion, that of *alètheia*. I have already referred to the etymological meaning of this word in note 93, page 41, and it is important to come back to it now. *Alèthès*, the adjective of which *alètheia* is the substantive, means etymologically “not hidden”, which invites us to understand the approach of “truth”, the usual translation of *alètheia*, as an “unveiling”. And this way of understanding it is key for a proper understanding of the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave, for it suggests that, with regard to *alètheia*, we are not in a binary logic where something is either true or false, which we are prompt to assimilate to “is (exists)” or “is not (doesn't exist)”, but in a *progressive* approach in which access to truth is an advance (this is what the allegory of the cave illustrates) where each step, from first to last, may unveil for us something of what is being considered, without necessarily unveiling it completely. Thus, as the freed prisoner moves forward and leaves the cave, he perceives *anthrôpoi* (“men/human beings”), but in a

<sup>109</sup> *Doxaston* is the verbal adjective formed on the verb *doxazein*, “to have/express an opinion” in the same way *gnôston* (“knowable/known”) is derived from the verb *gignôskein* (“get to know, know”), *horaton* from the verb *horan* (“to see”) or *noèton* from the verb *noein* (“to think/grasp”). Most of these verbal adjective may have, depending on the context, either a passive sense, translated into English either by adjectives ending with –able or –ible (“visible”, “thinkable”, “intelligible”, and so on) or by a mere past participle, or an active sense (*gnôstos* in the sense of “able to know”, *noètos* in the sense of “endowed with intelligence”). In order to preserve in English the similarity of structure of those various words, I translate *doxaston* with forms derived from the English verb “to opine”, an apt translation of the Greek verb *doxazein*, even if the word is not usual in English. These forms are probably neologisms in English (except for Plato scholars), but it is not impossible that *doxaston* be also in Greek a neologism forged by Plato, since all examples of its use given in the LSJ are either from Plato or later.

different way at each step: first, so long as he is still chained, he sees them as shadows of statues of men; once freed and able to turn his head, he sees them as statues above the wall; next, once outside the cave, he sees them first as shadows and reflections on reflecting surfaces (bodies of water) outside the cave before becoming able, with habituation to this new environment, to see them directly. Each step allows him to grasp something of the men around him, but something which is only a greater or lesser part of the “truth” about them. The next step doesn't invalidate what was unveiled during the previous steps, but makes it possible to put it at its proper place in a broader context. The external appearance (the shadow on the wall of the cave) of the body (the statue of man above the wall) of an *anthrôpos* is not his/her *psuchè*, not even its “shadow”, since the *psuchè* is not part of the visible realm, but it tells a tiny something about this *anthrôpos*, in the same way the clothes someone wears at a certain point in time may allow us to recognize him/her in the middle of a crowd, even if we don't know much else about him/her. The statue above the wall, when the prisoner can see it, tells him more about the *anthrôpos* than its shadow, which nonetheless doesn't disappear, even though it is not yet his/her soul, hidden behind the wall and visible only once outside the cave (for those capable of going so far), since it is not perceptible by the senses.

The inside of the cave stands for the *visible* realm, the kingdom of the sun (the fire in the allegory) and of light and all that can be perceived there is limited to patches of colors, whether the shadows on the wall of the cave or the statues above the wall hiding the road, and the liberating turning around is needed to understand that the shadows are no more than that, images of something else, the statues, and, after having grasped the notion of image and model, start wondering whether the statues themselves might not also be “images” of something else that the eyes cannot see. The outside of the cave is the kingdom of *logos* and, there, all that can be perceived are words. Indeed, an opinion as well as a knowledge indicating full command of the subject-matter “materialize” under the form of sequences of words (and thus, of sounds in the sensible realm), that is, of *logoi* (“speeches”) which can no more be distinguished from one another than sight alone can distinguish the patches of color of an object from those of its reflection.

Indeed, when I look at the reflection of a landscape on the still surface of a lake, there is no difference for sight between the reflection and the original. It is only when I try to touch what I see that I realize that the reflection has no consistency, no depth, and that, when I try to touch it, it is the water of the lake that I touch and, in so doing, I disturb the image. If, rather than a reflection in a lake, the image I was looking at was formed on the flat and hard surface of a mirror, touching it wouldn't disturb the image, but it wouldn't teach me anything more than what I see about that which the image is an image of. Similarly, both an opinion and a knowledge on the same subject take for me the form of a sequence of words, a *logos*, undistinguishable as such from one another, so much so that, in some cases, the words may be exactly the same, since nothing prevents an opinion to be a true opinion, as Socrates explains at the end of the *Meno*. As is the case with visible images, there is, on the side of opinions, a complete range of expressions going from speeches which are no more than mere “shadows” of what a truly knowledgeable person would say on the same topic, hazy speeches, muddled and hard to understand, giving only in a sketchy way the gross outlines of a tentative argument, without going into details, to a speech identical in all points to that of an expert on the same topic, in the case of a true opinion. But the difference appears, even in the case of true opinion, as soon as we try to « dig », to explore the « depth » behind the speeches delivered by either one: contrary to what is the case with the expert, the one having only an opinion is unable to justify his opinion, to argue it convincingly, even if true, against someone challenging it, and is prone to changes of opinion depending on whom he is talking with and whether they are experts or not. A good example of this is found in the discussion between Socrates and Critias in the second part of the *Charmides*, which stages a Socrates offering us a deliberate show of “bad faith”

arguments<sup>110</sup> to prove that Critias, who presents himself as knowledgeable, has, on the topic under discussion, which is precisely that of knowledge, no more than mere opinions lacking solid grounds in his mind, as is also the case for Socrates, with a tiny difference though, which is that Socrates doesn't pretend he "knows" (in the strongest sense of the word): Critias successively suggests various "opinions" which other dialogues present as those of Socrates and that he submits to a critical examination which quickly drives Critias to backtrack and to offer a different "opinion", which Socrates is prompt to shake as easily as the previous one.

Conversely, the *Meno*, which, as I just said, ends up on the distinction between true opinion and knowledge, offers us, in the experiment with Meno's slave boy which takes place earlier in the dialogue, an "experimental" display of this difference in a domain where "knowledge" is possible, that of geometry. Socrates *knows* the answer to the question he puts to the slave boy, when asking him what should be the length of the side of a square whose area is double that of a given square.<sup>111</sup> At first, the slave boy has an *opinion* on this question and gives a spontaneous and intuitive answer driven by the words (in this case, the word "double") which is wrong (the length of the side of the square *double* in area the original square must be *double* the length of the side of the original square) and which Socrates, who knows the right answer (the length of the square double is the length of the diagonal of the original square, incommensurable with the length of the side of the original square), has no trouble proving him false in a way that is convincing *for the slave boy*. Progressively, Socrates will lead his interlocutor to *understand* what the right answer is with the help of drawn figures. And it doesn't matter whether Socrates has tipped him on the answer or he found it by itself, the key point is that he has *understood* the line of reasoning *proving* that it was the right answer and that, once he will have perfectly assimilated it and will be able to reproduce it by himself, he will no longer change his mind about this answer. Or rather, the key point of this text relating an experiment made up by Plato, which never occurred in real life as told by him, is that the *reader* of the dialogue is able to reproduce *within himself* the supposed progress of the slave boy by mentally going back in time at the point where he was when he started learning geometry and was still ignorant of that theorem and get a hands-on experience *within himself* of the difference between an *opinion* intuitively given, but which is false, and a demonstrable knowledge whose demonstration he has mastered.

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<sup>110</sup> It is not, properly speaking, « bad faith », but rather a « pedagogical » device to test his interlocutor and find out how far he is capable of arguing in favor of his opinions. And because it happens to be opinions shared by Socrates, but which he has spent a lot of time thinking about and shoring up, while knowing full well that, on such matters, they would never be more than opinions impossible to rigorously "demonstrate", he has no trouble rapidly pointing at the "weak points" of an argument in favor of them, those allowing the reader to quickly see how far the interlocutor has delved into them and is ready to defend them.

<sup>111</sup> Socrates « knows » the answer, that is, the theorem of geometry stating that the area of the square built on the diagonal of a given square is double that of the original square, and he probably also knows the theorem of Pythagoras which, applied to the right-angled triangle formed by this diagonal and the two adjacent sides of the square, allows us to compute the length  $d$  of the diagonal of a square whose sides have a length  $a$ , with the formula  $d^2 = a^2 + a^2 = 2a^2$ , leading to  $d = a\sqrt{2}$ ; and Plato, and thus his Socrates (even if that were not the case with the historical Socrates), knew that  $\sqrt{2}$  is what we call an « irrational » number, which means that the diagonal is incommensurable with the side of the square: whatever the unit of measurement chosen, it is impossible to have both the side and the diagonal measured by a round number of times this unit, so that the ratio between the diagonal and the side cannot be expressed under the form  $p/q$  where  $p$  and  $q$  are two integers. Yet, if, despite this "knowledge", Socrates keeps saying that he knows nothing, it is because, for him such a knowledge has no value, or only a very tiny one, with regard to the questions which should concern us as human beings, those relating to what constitutes a "good" life for a human being in general, and for each one of us individually. If such a knowledge has for him any value, it is precisely that of allowing us to get a hands-on experience of the difference between opinion and knowledge, no more. Its practical utility for an architect or a land-surveillor for instance, as is the case for all "scientific" knowledge, is neutral with regard to good and evil: such knowledge tells us *how* to do something, but never whether it is better for us to do this rather than that.

Thus, the words of the speech are not what allows us to distinguish a mere opinion from a true knowledge, but it is something else which happens or happened within the mind of who is talking. And this invites us to consider that, in the same way *all* patches of color perceived by the eyes produce within us only images of what is their cause, *all* words that we utter or hear are only “images” of something we must now uncover.

### Words and *logos*

The first thing that must be noticed in Socrates' explanations about the segment of the intelligible in the analogy of the line is that while, with regard to the segment of the visible he listed « things » perceived by sight (“*the living creatures around us, and all that is planted and the whole family of what is fabricated*”), with regard to the segment of the intelligible, he describes investigative approaches.<sup>112</sup> The reason for this is that the *logos* has meaning only in *combinations* of words, as the Stranger from Elea explains in the *Sophist*, so that the problem is not so much to associate each word to something definite of which we would have a hard time saying what it is (as it could only be done with other words), but to understand more globally how the intertwining of words in *logos* gives us access to something which is not the words it is made up with and power (*dunamis*) to interact efficiently with that.<sup>113</sup> The knowledge that is within our reach as human beings doesn't consist in giving a name to each one of the “things” perceived by our mind, through data provided by the senses as well as without their direct help, because giving a name to something teaches us nothing about it. It is the use and intertwining of words in the *dialegethai*, in the interpersonal dialogue confronting speeches to the data issued from experience which, alone, gives a meaning to resulting *logoi* by putting to the test their relevance.

The first approach described by Socrates, the one associated with the first subsegment of the intelligible, is a short-sighted utilitarian and result oriented approach: we are faced with a problem to solve and a result, a goal, an “end” (*teleutè*, 510b6) to reach; in that perspective, as “foundations” (*hypotheses*<sup>114</sup>) for the *logos* which will allow us to solve the problem, we give names to the elements participating in the problem without wasting time to investigate what hides behind those names, associated most of the time with sensible things which we think of as sort of “images” of their name, in much the same way the geometer thinks of the square he draws on the ground as an “image” of “square”, understanding full well that “square” as such (*to tetragonon auton*, “the square itself”, 510d7) is none of the drawings he could make, but something “[t]hat cannot be seen otherwise than by thought (*dianoia*)” (511a1), but uninterested in investigating further what it is, which is of no practical interest to him since he doesn't need to know that to solve his problem. This approach is not limited to geometers and other mathematicians and is

<sup>112</sup> Twice in this section, at 510b8 (about the second subsegment in his first synthetical description of it) and at 510c5 (about the first subsegment in the more detailed description Socrates gives of it to answer Glaucon's difficulties to understand the synthetical description), Socrates uses the word *methodos*, which is at the root of the English word “method”, but whose etymological meaning is “road/way (*hodos*) in the middle of/in pursuit of (*meta*)”.

<sup>113</sup> This is the reason why those who try to understand the splitting of the line in terms of a « partition » of the whole of reality and the resulting segments as distinct subsets of “things” are on the wrong track.

<sup>114</sup> The etymological meaning of *hypothesis* (of which *hypotheses* is the nominative plural) is “that which has been put under”, that is, “stable base, ground, foundation”. It is only at a later time that it assumed the meaning associated with its transcription into English as “hypothesis”, implying uncertainty (something “hypothetical”, that is, something we are not sure about) which ends up reversing the original meaning: the underlying notion is no longer that of a solid ground to build upon, but on the contrary that of something shaky which may fall apart under the weight of the arguments built upon it. Looking at the examples of *hypothesèon* given by Socrates at 510c4-5 (“*the odd and the even and the [various] figures and three appearances of angles*”) makes it perfectly clear that he doesn't have in mind the modern sense of “hypothesis”, but the original meaning of “ground, foundation”, the one that a geometry teacher has in mind when starting the wording of a problem with the words “let's suppose a right-angled triangle...” (indeed, the verb “to suppose” is derived from the Latin equivalent *supponere* of the Greek verb *hypotithenai*, from which *hypothesis* is derived, but it too evolved toward a sense implying uncertainty in most cases).

not specific to mathematical problems, which are chosen as examples by Socrates only because they are those with which it is most “caricatural” and easiest to describe and, what’s more, to describe on concepts “neutral” from the ethical standpoint and thus not prone to challenge; it is the approach of most people in everyday’s life, who use *logos* to solve their daily problems without asking themselves questions about the relationship between words and what they stand for. It works, that’s all they are interested in. They are, from this standpoint, in the same situation regarding words as are, regarding images perceived by the eyes, those (most of the time the same ones) who don’t care to know what are the “things” they see aside from what they see of them.

The second approach described by Socrates, associated to the second subsegment of the intelligible, is a comprehensive approach, seeking to rise in search of a firm leading principle (*archè*<sup>115</sup>) giving meaning to the *logos* before trying to use it to solve problems one at a time and without overall consistency even if, on a case-by-case basis, it works most of the time. Socrates describes this leading principle as *anupotheton*, using a word which is most likely a neologism forged by him for the occasion, with the end result that scholars and translators, faced with the expression *archèn anupotheton* at 510b6-7, feel free to imitate him and to (almost) transpose the word *anupotheton* into an English neologism, translating the expression under the form “unhypothetical principle”.<sup>116</sup> In so doing, they don’t have to ask themselves if what this English neologism, which put the stress on what has become the most usual meaning of “hypothetical” in English, namely “uncertain”, evokes to English speaking readers is the same as what the Greek neologism *anupotheton*, formed after a Greek word whose original meaning is “put under”,<sup>117</sup> could evoke for a contemporary of Plato, and even less, if that was what Plato was trying to make us understand.

And what Socrates is trying to make us understand in describing this *archè* as *anupotheton*, as part of an approach where each *hupothesis* may be seen as a “stool” on which we climb to rise a little higher after having put it on the previous “stool” (which thus serves as an *hupothesis* for it), is that this *archè* constitutes the top of the pyramid after which there is nothing else, that is, the one on which it is not necessary to put still one more stool so that it serves as an *hupothesis* (“support, ground”) to nothing else. This way of understanding *anupotheton archè* refers us to what Socrates was saying of the good (*to agathon*) in the prelude to the parallel between good and sun,<sup>118</sup> the fact that it is obvious for all that, in matters having to do with the just or the beautiful, most people are willing to compromise for what *looks* so without really being so, when it comes to the good, nobody will be satisfied with what only looks so and everybody

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<sup>115</sup> *Archè* (of which *archèn* is the accusative) is a name derived from the verb *archein*, whose primary meaning is “to walk ahead, show the way”, hence “to lead, initiate, make a beginning”, leading to the meaning “to be a leader, rule”. The various meanings of *archè* stem from the various meaning of this verb: either “beginning, start, principle, origin”, or “power, sovereignty, magistracy”. But the problem with this word is that it evokes two almost opposite images, which end up completely distorting its comprehension. Starting with the image implied by the original meaning of the verb *archein*, that of someone who is ahead, walking in front and showing the way, and that others follow, or of something before us serving as the goal toward which we proceed, we end up, via the idea of beginning taking over that of “first (in front of)”, then that of “principle” and ultimately that of “origin”, with the image of something which is at the start and which we walk away from, and thus eventually, which is behind us. This inversion is particularly noticeable in the realm of « physics » where what is sought is a « principle » of the universe which is most of the time thought of as being at the origin of time, thus far away “behind” us, or in the realm of mathematics, where principles are axioms admitted as starting points for reasonings leading to conclusions. In order to keep in English both ranges of meaning of *archè*, a better translation is “leading principle”: a principle indeed, but a principle which is not behind us, at the start of the reasoning, but also ahead of us as a guide, a goal which we move toward without ever being sure of reaching it.

<sup>116</sup> I say « almost » because the Greek work which would be the exact root for “unhypothetical” would be *anupothetikon* and not *anupotheton*, which is not the same thing and, anyway, not the choice of Plato; the exact transposition of *anupotheton* in English should be “unhypothesized”, which doesn’t make what Plato was trying to say clearer than “unhypothetical”.

<sup>117</sup> See note 114, page 62.

<sup>118</sup> See the section titled “Everybody wants what he/she thinks good for himself/herself”, page 34.

wants what really is so: the reason of this obvious fact is that what is just or beautiful is not sought for itself, but as a means in view of something else, pleasure, wealth, power, and the like, while the good, or happiness, which is nothing more than the good in human life, is sought for itself rather than as a means in view of something else, that is, doesn't serve as an *hypothesis* to something else, hence is *anupotheton*, which doesn't prevent it from being evident to all (in the sense that it is obvious that all want true happiness), of an evidence which each one can feel inside and which doesn't require mathematical demonstration (what is not so obvious for all is what constitutes true happiness for us, human beings). In other words, without saying so explicitly and letting us find it by ourselves, Plato's Socrates suggests here, in a different way than with the parallel between good and sun, that the good (*to agathon*) is the unifying "light" giving meaning to the *logos*, the tool given us by the creator to allow us to live a happy life in the company of our fellow men, and that, without such a leading principle, the *logos* leads nowhere (which doesn't mean "is ineffective").

But this is not the only difference between both approaches. What makes possible this ascent toward a leading principle which is not merely a word<sup>119</sup> (a possible indirect meaning of *anupotheton* if we admit, as I suggested in describing the first approach, that the *hypotheses*, the "supports", Socrates is talking about are nothing more than words) is precisely a different attitude toward words, implying an awareness of the fact that words are not what they are associated with, and moreover that what they refer to are not the "things" whose sight gives us an "image", and more generally speaking senses a perception, but something else, which remains of the nature of "appearance" (*eidōs/idea*), this time in an analogical sense, but which allows us, through *logos*, or more specifically through *to dialegesthai* (interpersonal dialogue), which they make possible, to have a hold on reality. That's what Socrates means when, at the beginning of the rewording of the explanation of this second subsegment, at 511b3-4, he mentions *hè tou dialegesthai dunamis* ("the power of to dialegesthai") and what it allows the *logos* to reach as soon as words are considered only as "supports/foundations" (*hypotheses*) and nothing more, rather than (first) principles ("first", in this approach, which is that of the first subsegment), that is, as means of reaching something which is above them and which is not the material "images", or even the conceptual ones, still tainted by "materialism", as is the case with mathematical terms which we have a hard time dissociating from "figures" and other sensible "images" they serve to name, to which most people associate them. Words are not starting points (*archè* in one of its possible meanings, precisely the one in which materialists and scientists use it) of the *logos*, but mere tools which, by themselves, teach us nothing whatsoever about what they name but which, properly used in a consistent approach, give us a "power" (*dunamis*) to act which can be put to a test in the world around us, an "appearance" (*eidōs/idea*) of which they allow us to grasp together without ever being able to know if it exhausts all that this world is since we have no other tools to apprehend it than senses and *logos*. In short, words are not the *eidè* we associate them with,<sup>120</sup> but *eidè*, whether intelligible or visible/sensible,<sup>121</sup> are not the *auta*, the "things" themselves. And

<sup>119</sup> See *Theaetetus*, 177d4-6, where Socrates, after saying that, for relativists followers of Protagoras, the just for a city is what it decides it to be through its laws and may change along with its laws, adds that "regarding the good [things/deeds/behaviors/laws...] (*peri de tagatha*), nobody would dare to pretend that « those that a city lays down [as laws] thinking them beneficial to itself, are also beneficial so long as they stay in effect, **unless he is only talking about the word** (*ha an ôphelima oiêtheisa polis heautèi thètai, kai esti tosouton chronon hoson an keêtai ôphelima, plên ei tis to onoma legoi*)". Socrates shows here that even Protagoras and the likes of him cannot deny the "objective" nature of the good (here referred to as the "beneficial (*ôphelimon*)") unless they are merely playing with words.

<sup>120</sup> See *Republic X*, 596a6-7: "we are, methinks, in the habit of positing some *eidōs*, unique in each case, for each of the many [things] upon which we impose the same name", which Socrates presents as the starting point of his attempt to explain what imitation (*mimêsis*) might be in a discussion leading, on the example of beds, to a distinction between three kinds of these.

<sup>121</sup> In the analogy of the line, Socrates uses successively the expression *horômena eidè* ("seen appearances") at 510d5 (under the dative form *tois horômenois eidesi*), and the expression *noèton eidōs* ("intelligible appearance")

this is the reason why the same word *eidōs* (“appearance”) can be used in both cases.<sup>122</sup> But those *eidē*, both sensible and intelligible, are not either mere creations of our minds since shared experience through *to dialegesthai* proves, for some of them at least, that they refer to something “external” to our minds.

The most difficult task for human beings is precisely to get to distinguishing *eidē* from the words used to talk about them, in the same way as, in the visible realm, they must distinguish the sensible things which affect their senses from the resulting “images”, that is, not to fall in the “traps” of words and understand that it is possible to talk about the same things with different words and that it is precisely this exercise which, as soon as we move away from the material things of daily life, allows us to free ourselves to some extent from the hold of words, mere tools, to reach as best we can that which is behind them. This is what Socrates means when he concludes his synthetic description of this second approach in the intelligible by saying that we must “*without the images (eikonōn, genitive plural of eikōn) [revolving] around that, build with the appearances (eidesi, dative plural of eidōs) themselves [our] own approach (methodos) through them*” (510b7-9), which he rewords at the end of his more developed explanation by saying that we must “*without making also use in any way of anything sensible, but with appearances themselves, through them, into them, end also into appearances*” (511c1-2). This is the exercise Plato proposes us throughout his dialogues. But “*without also making use in any way of anything sensible*”, working with *eidē* alone, doesn't mean withdrawing in some heaven of pure ideas and abstractions with no relations whatsoever with the world around us, but considering the “things” of our world, starting with *anthrōpoi* (“human beings”), *from the standpoint of their intelligibility* in the light of the good (*to agathon*), without paying attention to their material dimension in perpetual change.

## Tables and beds

A most trivial and non-geometrical example chosen by Socrates toward the end of the *Republic* to make us understand what he means by *mimesis* (“imitation”), the example of beds,<sup>123</sup> which displays the four levels of understanding corresponding to the four segments of the line, may help us better grasp how *eidōs* and *idea* should be understood, of what there may be *eidōs* or *idea* and what difference there might be in the mind of Plato between these two words, in certain contexts at least where he is looking for precision in his wording.

It is at the beginning of this discussion that Socrates utters the words quoted in note 120 above: “*we are, methinks, in the habit of positing some eidōs, unique in each case, for each of the many [things] upon which we impose the same name*” (596a6-7), which establish a link between name and *eidōs*. He then explains that there are three kinds of things to which we give the name “bed”: the “bed itself”, that is, to use a modern wording, the abstract “concept” of bed, the beds manufactured by craftsmen working in the furniture business and images of beds painted or sculpted by artists. What is common to at least the latter two categories of « beds » is a common visible *eidōs* (“appearance”) which justifies that they be named with the same name. But Socrates introduces in the course of the discussion something else, the *idea* of bed which the maker of a bed looks at to do his work. At this point it is worth making, one more time, a detour through the Greek, which will show us

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at 511a3 (in the words *noēton men to eidōs elegon, “I indeed said intelligible this appearance”*). It is interesting to see how most translators and scholars refuse to use the same English word to translate these two occurrences of the same word *eidōs* within a few lines, understanding it differently in each case.

<sup>122</sup> As I said in the introduction, those who attribute to Plato a “theory of forms/ideas” don't seem bothered by the fact that it implies that he would have used the very same words, *eidōs* and *idea*, both derived from roots referring to “sight” and meaning originally “(visible) appearance”, to designate in the visible realm what is least real, the mere “image” or “appearance” of what is seen by our eyes, which he spends much time warning us to be wary of, and, in the intelligible realm what would be most “real”.

<sup>123</sup> *Republic* X, 596a5-598d6.

along the way how attentive to details Plato was when writing, how careful he was in choosing the least example, and how much we lose when we can't read him in the original Greek. At the beginning of this section, Socrates introduces as examples two kinds of pieces of furniture, *klinai* ("beds") and *trapezai* ("tables").<sup>124</sup> And it turns out that *klinè*, of which *klinai* is the plural, is a name derived from the verb *klinein*, meaning "lean, lie down, recline, lie upon (something)": in other words, a *klinè* is what we may lie upon and this was obvious to any Greek of the time. *Trapeza*, of which *trapezai* is the plural, on the other hand, is a contraction of *tetra* ("four") *pezos* ("having feet, walking on one's feet") and mean etymologically "having four feet". In other words, one of the two examples, *klinè*, is named by a word referring to its *function*, as is the case with the English word "seat", the other one, *trapeza*, by a word referring to its *visual appearance*, as is the case with the English word "tripod". But the fact of having four (or three) feet tells us nothing about the intended use of this object. After all, a bed too may have four feet, or a horse, or a dog. Now, the example that Socrates retains for the rest of his explanations is that of the object named after its function! *Klinè* doesn't tell us what a bed looks like, but what its intended use is. And, in my opinion, this choice was not made at random, far from it, no more than the fact of starting with two examples and setting one aside along the way.<sup>125</sup> Quite the contrary, it is a way of giving us a hint about what might be the *idea* of bed that the maker of a bed looks at. It is not the most perfect bed that one could imagine, for, whatever it might be, this bed could only be one kind of bed among the multiplicity of possible beds: would it be a crib, a single or double bed, a bunkbed, a bed for a king or a bed for a hospital room, a bed intended to stay at the same place or a folding camp bed for soldiers in campaign or campers, a bed for living persons or a "bed" for the dead (*klinè* in Greek may have also this meaning), a pallet for a slave or a royal four-poster bed? None of these different kinds of beds have the same external aspect, the same dimensions; they are not made from the same material, and so on. Transposed to the case of *anthrôpos* (for, if there is an idea of bed there is all the more an idea of *anthrôpos*), the idea of *anthrôpos* is neither a woman nor a man, perfect as they might be, if only because this idea is not within space and time and is immaterial. It is even less an "image" of *anthrôpos* that we might form in our mind by assembling the best of what we have seen during our past life of the *anthrôpoi* we've met (as did some of the Greek sculptors in Plato's time to make statues as perfect as possible by using several models), because even in this way, it would still be only one among all the possible *anthrôpoi*. The *idea* of bed is what a bed maker must understand in order to manufacture *good* beds and which allows him, even when varying shape, color, material, and so on, to always build a bed which best answers his customers' needs, that is, to rest as comfortably<sup>126</sup> as possible

<sup>124</sup> *Republic* X, 596b1.

<sup>125</sup> But what is left of all these hints Plato offers to his readers when the slavish translator, as a good Hellenist but a poor philosopher, translates *klinè* as "bed" and *trapeza* as "table", two words which, in English, tell us nothing either on what those objects are used for or what they look like, contrary to the Greek words they translate. In my French translation of this section at my site, I have betrayed the Greek to stay faithful to Plato's intent, (mis)translating *klinè* by "coucher" (a literary word for "bed", become rare in French, but derived from the verb "(se) coucher" ("go to bed, lie down"), root of the English word "couch") and *trapeza* by "trépied". And in an English translation, I would replace (rather than translate) *klinè* by "seat" (a "seat" is what we "sit" upon/are "seated" upon; note that it doesn't matter whichever came first, the noun or the verb, and which one derives from the other, the important thing being that the noun bring to mind the verb of the same family, linking object to action), "spindle" (a tool used to spin wool) or, at the cost of an anachronism, drier (designed to dry, hair or clothes), and *trapeza* by "tripod" (a word referring to various objects having three feet, such as a support for a camera).

<sup>126</sup> "Comfortably", which I use to make it short, may not be the most appropriate word here, because it suggests an idea of comfort and pleasure which may not be the "good" in all cases: too comfortable a bed may lead to idleness and laziness, which are not "good" for man. The goal of an "excellent" bed maker should not be to satisfy blindly the requirements of his customers, who may have a wrong idea of what is "good" for them, but to build, for the context for which he is asked to manufacture a bed, the most appropriate bed for this context based on considerations, not only of mere "comfort", but also of health, of adequation to what is expected of the user in this context, and so on.

in the context for which the bed has been designed. The *idea* of *anthrôpos* is thus the proper understanding of what allows an *anthrôpos*, whatever the conditions, the time and place in which he lives, to be as “excellent” a human being as possible, to display the greatest *aretè* (“excellence/perfection” rather than the more usual “virtue”) compatible with his nature and condition. The *eidos*, on the other hand, is what allows us to give names and we’ll soon see, in the allegory of the cave, that the naming activity starts at the bottom of the cave with the chained prisoners based on the shadows.<sup>127</sup> Thus it is not necessarily a principle of intelligibility, even though it *may* be one, but rather a principle of classification, of categorization, of naming which may rely on visual characteristics as well as on other criteria, and why not, on principles of intelligibility. In other words, the concept of *eidos* is broader than the concept of *idea*, which is only a subset of the former.<sup>128</sup> The approach described by Socrates for the second subsegment of the intelligible, who says it must be done with *eidè* in *eidè* to lead to *eidè* is a two-phase approach: first, an ascent toward the good (*to agathon*) as principle of intelligibility, then a downward process guided by this principle of intelligibility. Since the principle of intelligibility, the *idea*, is not known in advance but is precisely what is being sought, Plato cannot have his Socrates say that it is done with *ideai*. But what distinguishes it from the approach associated with the first subsegment is the fact that it seeks to free itself from the grip of words and reach what is beyond them. And what is beyond words, *all* words, including those that have been assigned by the chained prisoners based on the shadows, that is, without a real knowledge of what they name, is a common *eidos* assumed behind all the instances of what is given the same name (see 596a6-7, quoted at the beginning of this section). The approach thus implies that we begin by moving from the names to the *eidè* they assume, they sustain as *hupotheseis* (“put under”), then from *eidè* to *ideai* by ascending toward the principle of intelligibility which might have been hidden by a defective assignment or use of names.<sup>129</sup> But, since the *ideai* which are the goal of this work are a category of *eidè*, we are indeed, as Socrates says, in *eidè* from start to finish. And, for those who might not have understood based on the explanations given in the analogy of the line, this section about the three *eidè* of beds (597b13-14) behind which a unique *idea* of bed lies (596b3-4) is there to clarify things, regarding both the distinction between name and *idea* in the intelligible realm and the distinction between original and image in the visible

<sup>127</sup> Cf. *Republic* VII, 515b4-5.

<sup>128</sup> At 597b13-14, when listing the three “kinds” of beds (the one, unique, created by the demiurge, those manufactured by craftsmen and those painted by painters), Socrates uses the word *eidè* which, in this context, may be understood as having the non-“technical” sense of “sort” or “kind”. But what I am trying to show here is that there is a continuity of meaning from this usual sense to the supposed “technical” sense. To distinguish these three *eidè* of beds, Socrates has introduced one more criterion, that of the maker/creator. But, in the end, what matters is that the *eidè* are what presides over naming and that the goal is to become able to go beyond names to reach *eidè* and, above all, *ideai*.

I don’t pretend that this distinction between *eidos* and *idea* applies to *all* occurrences of those words in all of Plato’s dialogues, which indeed is not the case, but only that, in certain contexts such as the one we are dealing with here, where Plato is coping with highly complex notions that were new to his contemporaries (and, it seems, to us too twenty-five centuries later) and is particularly attentive to the choice of words (remember what I just said about *klinè* and *trapeza*), this is the difference in meaning he makes between *eidos* and *idea*, which he definitely doesn’t use interchangeably for mere stylistic considerations in so “explosive” a context, dealing with the most problematic words in this context.

<sup>129</sup> It is in that very perspective that we should read all of Plato’s dialogues described as seeking a “definition” without finding it, as for instance the *Lysis* about *philia* (“friendship”), the *Laches* about *andreia* (“courage, manhood”), the *Charmides* about *sôphrosunè* (“soundness of mind, prudence, moderation, self-control”), the *Meno* about *aretè* (“excellence, perfection”), the *Euthyphro* about piety. Plato’s Socrates is not looking for “definitions” in the Aristotelean sense, which would merely replace one word by a few other ones, and thus stay at the level of words, that is, in the first segment of the intelligible, but to free himself from words and their often ambiguous and approximative use and try, by “sampling” in different contexts of use and through multiple examples testing the boundaries of the accepted range of meanings of the investigated word, to try to reach the *idea* freed from any specific word or, if not the *idea*, at least an *eidos* which is intelligible and not only visible.

realm, which Socrates exemplifies at 597e10-598c5 when he shows that sight doesn't grasp the principle of intelligibility, but only an external appearance which depends on the angle under which we look at the object and refers to trompe l'oeil paintings.

If then the *idea* is the principle of intelligibility and intelligibility is unveiled (*alètheia*, "truth, unveiling") under the "light" of the good (*to agathon*), we may understand why Plato always talks about *hè tou agathou idea* ("the *idea* of the good") and never about *hè tou agathou eidos* ("the *eidos* of the good"): the good, being the principle of intelligibility, can only be grasped as an *idea* (even if, after what I said earlier, as an *idea*, it is also an *eidos*).

Having reached this point, the association of each of the three *eidè* of beds to one of the segments of the line should be no problem: the painted bed is an "image" of bed and thus must be associated with the first subsegment of the visible, even if, in the analogy of the line, Socrates was most careful in making it clear that what he had in mind when talking about images were natural images, shadows and reflections, since we saw that, in the end, he wanted us to realize that *all* of what our eyes see are but "images" and the painted picture here serves only to "materialize" what our eyes see; the bed manufactured by the craftsman refers to the second subsegment of the visible of the analogy of the line, the one including the "originals" of the images in the first subsegment; concerning the *idea* of bed, it is what we are trying to reach in the second subsegment of the intelligible, the one in which we can get rid of words and images. The question which immediately comes to mind is then: why is there nothing corresponding to the first subsegment of the intelligible? And the answer is easy: there is indeed also something corresponding to that subsegment, but it is the task expected from the readers to find it by themselves, it is... the word *klinè* itself!

### The four *pathèmata*

Coming back now to the analogy of the line, the exercise Plato's Socrates conducts at the end of it is a good test of the ability of the reader not to get trapped by words: he wants to give a name to each of the four segments he just distinguished, using in this effort preexisting<sup>130</sup> vocabulary to name new and highly abstract notions he is trying to make his young interlocutors of the dialogue understand. We must first notice that neither did he *start* by giving each one of them a name nor did he assign them a name in turn while proceeding from the one to the next, but that he gives all four names simultaneously at the end of the analogy, as he had done with Meno's slave boy, waiting for him to show on the drawing the line whose length (impossible to express with a number<sup>131</sup>) answers the question (the diagonal of the original square) before giving him its name.<sup>132</sup> And indeed, as I already said, it is not the name which makes the thing known, especially when that name is already used with other meanings and besides, in the case we are dealing with here, the four notions introduced by Socrates must be understood through the *relations* of resemblance and difference they have with one another. It was thus important to start by making all four of them understood *before* giving each one of them, for ease of reference in the discussion, a name, which is not intended to teach us anything more about them than what we may have understood earlier.

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<sup>130</sup> Creating for that purpose neologisms, as Platon does in other circumstances, would have served here a single purpose, that of proving that names teach us nothing about what they name and thus, would not have been very productive, while using preexisting words which don't quite fit what he specifically has in mind, but come close enough to justify their use is a way of testing whether the reader will adjust his understanding of what Socrates has introduced to what the proposed name, already known by him, means to him so far, or will on the contrary modify his understanding of the word used by Socrates to adjust its meaning to what he has understood of his explanations if they seem relevant to him.

<sup>131</sup> See note 111, page 61.

<sup>132</sup> See *Meno*, 85b4: "*Indeed, those who know call it "diagonal" (kalousin de ge tautèn diametron hoi sophistai)*". The Greek word I translate by "those who know" is *sophistai* (plural of *sophistès*), at the root of the English word "sophist". Another possible translation would be "those whose profession it is to know", since the ending *-tès* added to *sophos* ("wise") to form *sophistès* implies the profession or state of a person.

This is so true that Socrates, in the summary of the analogy of the line he makes toward the end of book VII (533e7-534a8), whose translation follows that of the allegory of the cave above, changes the name he associates with the second segment of the intelligible.

Before looking at those names, let us notice first that Socrates starts by giving a name to the common type of what he is talking about, using the word *pathèma* (*pathèmata* in the plural), of which I made one of the keywords of the analogy, translating it as “affection”.<sup>133</sup> What he is about to name is not the segments themselves, not even their content, but the different “affections” affecting human beings under the effect of what acts on their senses and mind/intelligence (*nous*). Each reader should, as a result, examine the effect this choice might have on their prior understanding of the explanations given by Socrates earlier.

The name he suggests for each one of these four “affections” are:

- *eikasia*, a word from the same family as *eikôn* (“image/likeness”) whose usual meaning is “representation”, “estimate” or “conjecture”,<sup>134</sup> for the affection associated with the first subsegment of the visible, the one consisting in “being affected by” sight without realizing that what it allows us to perceive is always only “images” (*eikones*) of what produces them and thus to live in a “world” that we may call “**imaginary**”;

- *pistis*, whose usual meaning is “confidence, faith”, for the affection associated with the second subsegment of the visible, the one in which, though having understood that our senses give us only “images” of what solicit them, we have, due to our past experience accumulated since childhood, enough “confidence” in those images to find our way in the world around us;

- *dianoia*, substantive derived from the verb *dianoein*, formed by the adjunction of the prefix *dia-* (“through”, “here and there”, “from beginning to end/all the way through”, “until the end”) to the verb *noein* which designates the activity of the *nous* (“mind, intelligence”), usually translated in its usual sense by “thought, reflexion”, for the affection associated with the first subsegment of the intelligible, the one in which words are taken for granted and used, owing to their efficiency, without bothering investigating what might hide behind them, but rather considering that they refer to the “images” of the world around us produced by sight and the other senses;

- *noèsis*, another word derived from *nous* (“mind, intelligence”) via *noein* (“to think, conceive in the mind”) whose substantive of action it is, which it is hard (and dangerous) to translate into English by a word different from that used to translate *dianoia*, and which could also be translated by “thought”, for the affection associated with the second subsegment of the intelligible, the one affecting who has understood that words are but mere tools to refer as best we can to the elements of intelligibility (*noèta eidè*) that the human mind is capable of “extracting” from sense data through his thought process, the adequacy of which must be validated through *to dialegesthai* (the practice of interpersonal dialogue”).

We may note that Plato chose in both cases, visible and intelligible, for the affection associated with the first subsegment a name ending with the suffix *-ia*, used to derive names of states or qualities from verbs, while for the affection associated with the second subsegment he chose a name ending with the suffix *-(s)is*, used to derive substantives of action: in the first case, the idea is that of a somehow passive attitude where things (visual images and words) are taken as they come while in the second case, the idea is that of an active attitude where passively enduring is

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<sup>133</sup> See section “(\*) In Greek, *alogos* means “irrational” in the sense of “deprived of reason, unreasonable” for a person or a behavior as well as “irrational” for numbers (e.g.: square root of two) and “incommensurable” for lines (e.g.: the side of a square and its diagonal), that is, having a ratio between them which is an irrational number (square root of two for the ratio of the diagonal of a square to its side). The keywords”, page 52.

<sup>134</sup> If all I said earlier has been properly understood, the choice of a word to translate those names is somehow unimportant since, for us as was the case for Greek readers in Plato’s time, the notions here introduced by him are new and that what matters is to properly understand the prior analysis, not to count on the name to help us in this understanding, just hoping that the name doesn’t disturb our prior understanding!

not enough. In this light, a possible translation of *dianoia* might be “wandering thought/intelligence”<sup>135</sup> and of *noësis* “active thought/intelligence”. But what should definitely discourage us to spend/waste time trying to find at all costs the “right” English translation of those words chosen by Plato, and invite us to attempt to understand what he wants to make us understand behind words, that is, to position ourselves in the second subsegment of the intelligible rather than in the first, is that, as I said already, when, a few pages later in the *Republic*, toward the end of book VII, Socrates recalls this division of the line,<sup>136</sup> he calls *epistèmè* (“science, knowledge”) what he called *noësis* here and uses *noësis* to globally designate the two affections associated with the segment of the intelligible, reverting to the usual sense of *noësis* as “thought/intelligence” without further qualifications, thus showing his lack of steadfastness toward words themselves. This new choice illustrates another aspect of the affection associated with the second subsegment of the intelligible, the idea of “domination” (in the sense of “overlooking from above”) introduced by the prefix *epi-* (“above”), opposed to the *hupo-* (“under”) of *hypothesis*, found in *epistèmè*, a word derived from the verb *ep(h)istasthai* meaning etymologically “to stand above”, that is, to “dominate” one’s subject matter, that on which one “knows”. This “domination” is what is made possible by the ascent up to the good (*to agathon*), the leading principle above which there is nothing else since it is put under nothing (*anupotheton archè*).

### From line fishing to speleology

In order to help us understand the analogy of the line, I anticipated on the analysis of the allegory of the cave which, as I already said, follows it and illustrates it and thus sheds light on its interpretation in taking a dynamic approach and in describing somehow “graphically” the progress of man through the four segments. I intend now to return to the allegory for a sequential reading which will complement, especially regarding the intelligible realm, what we have learned so far from the analogy. This will also confirm the great consistency there is between the two images.

To begin with, I gather hereafter some of the interpretive keys of the allegory already mentioned earlier. Socrates himself tells us, in the short “decoding” of the allegory he does immediately after it,<sup>137</sup> that we must “*liken[] on the one hand the place revealed through sight to the dwelling in the prison, the light of the fire in it on the other hand to the power of the sun*” and that “*by holding that the ascent up high and the contemplation of the [things] up there [is] the upward path of the soul (psuchè) towards the intelligible place, [we] will not be mistaken*” on his intent; in other words, the inside of the cave pictures the visible and the outside the intelligible. The chained prisoners, twice referred to with the word *anthrôpoi* (men as “human beings”), at 514a3 to present them and at 514b5 to liken them to the spectators of a “wonder-maker”,<sup>138</sup> picture human beings, or rather their *psuchai* (“souls”),<sup>139</sup> which constitute their most inner self, their principle of intelligibility, “dressed” with a material body in perpetual change and destined to death, as subjects capable of learning and knowledge. In line with the *gnôthi sauton* (“get to know thyself”) which was the motto of Plato’s Socrates, the main object of knowledge on which the allegory focuses, the *only one* mentioned at *all* four stages of the freed prisoner’s progress inside and outside the cave, is also *anthrôpoi*, always mentioned in the plural, the first time at 514b8, as invisible bearers inside the cave, walking along a road (the path

<sup>135</sup> One of the possible meaning of *dia-* used in composition is “in different directions, here and there”, as in *diaphorein*, meaning “to disperse” (literally “to carry here and there”).

<sup>136</sup> *Republic* VII, 533e7-534a8. See my translation of this section starting page 49 above.

<sup>137</sup> See *Republic* VII, 517a8-b6.

<sup>138</sup> This is the etymological meaning of the word *thaumatopoi* used by Plato at 514b5 to refer to them (on this word, see note 102, page 53. The show these prisoners are spectators of is the spectacle of the world.

<sup>139</sup> See. *Alcibiadse*, 130c5-6: “*the soul is man (hè psuchè estin anthrôpos)*”, already quoted in note 101, page 52.

of life), but hidden by a wall from the sight of the prisoners, even after they are freed,<sup>140</sup> bearing objects which rise above the wall and produce shadows visible by the chained prisoners, then at 516a7, as part of what the freed prisoner might see outside the cave, first through shadows and reflections, then directly. Among the objects carried inside the cave by the men-souls invisible to the prisoners, Plato mentions *andriantas*, using a word formed on the root *anèr*, *andros* (“man” as opposed to “woman”, that is, man having a sex, and thus a body) meaning “statue of man”. These material and visible “statues of men” picture in the allegory the bodies of men and women and the shadows they shed on the wall of the cave facing the prisoners represent the visual images of these bodies captured by sight. Thus, there are four levels of apprehension of human beings by human beings, all of them relating to the many individual persons, two in the sensible realm, the shadows of statues, figuring what sight can perceive of their bodies, and the statues themselves, figuring all that can be known about the material part of human beings aside from their mere visual appearance through our multiple senses,<sup>141</sup> and two in the intelligible realm, the shadows and reflections of the men-souls outside the cave and those men-souls themselves, whose interpretation is somehow trickier and on which I’ll come back in what follows. But we should right away remark that the plural used by Plato precludes an interpretation of those men outside the cave as being a « form/idea of Man » in the sense of the supposed « theory of forms/ideas », which would necessarily be unique. Thus, the intelligible realm, pictured in the allegory as the outside of the cave, is not limited to “ideas”, at least not in this sense. *Each* prisoner is *also* a bearer behind the wall *and* one of the *anthrôpoi* visible once out of the cave, whether (s)he is aware of this or not. Each human being has a *psuchè* (“soul”), that is, an intelligible part, whether (s)he is conscious of it or not as subject of knowledge, that is as “prisoner” having been able to free himself of his chains and walk outside the cave or not through a process (education, see 514a2) described by Socrates as “natural” (*phusei* at 515c5) in that it implies only capabilities which are part of human nature (*phusis*), even if it implies, as Socrates describes it, one (or more) other person and dialogue (this is the only place in the allegory where Socrates describes a specific dialogue by contents: “*if someone told him...*”, at 515d1ff.).

But there are two kinds of “objects” of knowledge outside the cave, what is on the ground, described at 516a7 as “*men (anthrôpôn) and the other [things]*”, with no further details, that is, “things” which have their sensible counterpart inside the cave, and what is in heaven, “*the stars and the moon*” on the one hand (516a9-b1), whose light is visible at night, and the sun on the other hand, whose light, and also reflections in waters, are visible during the day, “objects” which don’t have a sensible counterpart inside the cave and which may be thought of as picturing the

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<sup>140</sup> When the freed prisoner turns around, he can see the statues above the wall, but he still cannot see the bearers, and at no time does Socrates suggest that he goes past the wall hiding them. In fact, there is no reason for him to walk toward the fire, since, contrary to the way the cave is most often pictured, the exit from the cave is not behind the fire but on the side (see 514a3-5 and the picture page 46). It is not by walking toward the sun (pictured by the fire) that one moves from the visible to the intelligible! The only hint which might suggest to the man still in the cave that he doesn’t see all that constitutes human beings when he looks at the statues is the fact that they move (in the same way the shadows on the wall facing the prisoners are also moving). Thus, he is led to assume there is “something” moving them. And indeed, for ancient thinkers, including Plato, the *psuchè* is primarily what “animates” (from *anima*, the Latin equivalent of *psuchè*) a body and allows it to move (see *Phaedrus*, 245c2-246a2; *Laws* X, 895e10-896b3). So, even though the men/souls-objects of knowledge are present inside the cave (the bearers), the men/souls-subjects (the prisoners) cannot see them so long as they stay inside the cave. To see them, they must get out of the cave, in other words search them in the intelligible realm.

<sup>141</sup> Shadows are two-dimensional, without depth, as is the case with what sight alone offers us. Statues are three-dimensional, as is the case with our bodies and the “things” of the sensible world they stand for in the allegory, and thus open to “internal” exploration allowing us to uncover what cannot be seen spontaneously with the eyes alone (it is not possible to dissect a cadaver with the eyes alone, hands are required to do it).

intelligibility principles (*ideai*) of sensible beings including abstract ideas without sensible counterpart such as the beautiful, the just and the good (pictured by the sun<sup>142</sup>). And, for each of these two kinds, two modes of perception are mentioned, an indirect perception (shadows and reflections) and a direct perception.

### Images and sounds

In order to better understand what these different modes of apprehension refer to in the intelligible realm, let us stay for a little while inside the cave and examine in more detail how Socrates illustrates in the allegory the various modes of perception described in the analogy of the line for the segment of the “visible”. In the analogy, regarding the first subsegment of the visible, he has mentioned shadows and reflections. It’s quite easy to find the shadows in the allegory, those which the prisoners see on the wall of the cave facing them, since the same word (*skias*, 515a7) is used in both cases. It is less obvious to retrieve the “reflections” mentioned in the analogy regarding the visible, for they are no longer, in the allegory, visible reflections, but sound “reflections”: the echo (515b7) of the sounds produced by the bearers hidden by the wall.<sup>143</sup> I deliberately use the word “sounds” and not « words » or « speeches », since Plato took care (let us admire his care for details) of using, to refer to those sounds produced by the bearers, the verb *phtheggesthai*, whose original meaning is “produce a sound or a noise” and can be used for animals as well as mere objects, and not only for human beings, even if, in some contexts, it may be translated by “talk”. As sense data perceptible by human beings in nature, speech takes for us the form of sequences of sounds, mere noise. It is only for the prisoners, that is, for « souls » as subjects capable of knowledge, that he uses, not the verb *legein* (“to talk”), but the verb *diagegesthai* (“to hold a conversation, dialogue, discuss”), and he does it regarding the first stage. Indeed, one of the first thing Socrates says about the prisoners is: “*if they were able to dialogue (diagegesthai) with one another, don't you think that, the same [things] being around [again], they would take the habit of giving names to those [things] they see?*”<sup>144</sup> Even when chained at the bottom of the cave and seeing only the shadows, *anthrôpoi* are characterized by their ability to give names to what they see in order to be able to *dialogue* with one another. In other words, the *logos* is in the first place *dialogos*. And it is important to note that words, at least the first being used, are not devised by ex-prisoners who would have climbed earlier outside the cave before returning to their former place, but by chained prisoners based on shadows, that is, by persons having only a very limited knowledge of what they name. The expression “*the same [things] being around [again]*” is meant to suggest that this power of assigning names which even the prisoners who never left the cave have, requires the ability to detect similarities and recurrences in what one sees suggesting that they are the same “things”, or similar “things” of which there are multiple instances, that reappear in our visual field over time, and it is to these similarities rather than to the “things” themselves that we assign names.

What must be retained from this is that, in the allegory, Socrates doesn't limit himself to the visible and extends the notion of “reflection” to the audible realm. And precisely, when moving from the visible realm to the intelligible realm, there is nothing sensible left, no sight, no hearing, and what takes the place of visible and audible “images” is words, both in oral speech and in thought (*dianoia*), which, as the stranger in the *Sophist* says, is but a “*inner dialogue (dialogos) of the soul with itself without the production of sound*”.<sup>145</sup> Words are not only the tool

<sup>142</sup> The explanation given by Socrates at 517b7-c5 leaves no doubts about the fact that the sun of the allegory pictures *hè tou agathou idea* (“the idea of the good”, 517b8-c1) or the good itself.

<sup>143</sup> The mention of echo takes place between that of the shadows and the moment where the prisoner is freed, that is, where the analogy of the line invites us to expect reflections.

<sup>144</sup> *Republic* VII, 515b4-5.

<sup>145</sup> See *Sophist*, 263e3-8: “*Thus thought (dianoia) and logos [are] the same: except that the inner dialogue (dialogos) of the soul with itself without the production of sound, this very [thing] has been called by us "thought"*”

of *logos* spoken or written (that is, « materialized »), but also that of thought itself to which they impose their law.<sup>146</sup> Thus it is through words and *logoi* that we may know the *anthrôpoi* (“human beings”) around us upon and above what senses unveil about them, especially sight. Regarding individuals, words which unveil them for us are of two kinds: those they utter themselves whose trace in our mind can be seen as their intelligible “shadows”, and those we hear from other people talking about them, which we may consider as their “reflection” in the mind and opinion of these other persons. All these perceptions are always the result of a *dialogos*, but this *dialogos* is not described by Socrates in the allegory as taking place outside the cave; he only refers to their intelligible trace in the mind of the freed prisoner, the dialogue itself, implying sound and hearing (or sight if it unfolds through written documents), being possible only inside the cave, in the visible/audible/sensible realm. And indeed, Socrates mentions *dialogoi* only inside the cave: at the beginning to describe the chained prisoners as capable of *dialegethai* and naming the shadows they see, and when the freed prisoner turns around toward the fire and gets dazzled. The only thing that might suggest, very dimly, some sort of cooperation outside the cave is found in the first word of the phrase in which Socrates describes the behavior of the freed prisoner which has been forced to leave the cave, the word *sunètheia*, which I have translated as “habituation”, a translation which doesn’t preserve the import of the prefix *sun-* (“with, together”) at the beginning of the Greek word.<sup>147</sup> In its original meaning, *sunètheia* refers to the habitual intercourse (including in the sexual sense) or intimacy with another person or group of persons, so that the word suggests that this habituation needed for the prisoner suddenly discovering the daylight outside the cave is not something he could acquire alone, even if he is in the end alone with himself to find a meaning to which he subscribes to the data provided by his senses and dialogue.

In any case, to perceive that human beings are more than the shadows on the wall of the cave and the statues producing them, and even than the noises whose echo they hear, implies a reflection on the meaning of the heard words, a synthesis of the words possibly heard from the person we are interested in or read in the writings of this person and of all the “reflections” of this person found in the opinions on him/her of other persons with whom we may have talked or that we may have heard or read here or there. This is exactly what Socrates, in the *Apology*, expects from the five hundred jurors who will have to decide his case, for whom he does half the work by reminding them regarding all the sources of information about him they had at their disposal and warning them about the distortions to which these “reflections” of him were subjected.

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(dianoia)... *On the other hand, the flux coming from it through the mouth accompanied by noise is called logos (oukoun dianoia men kai logos tauton: plên ho men entos tês psuchês pros hautên dialogos aneu phônês gignomenos tout' auto hêmîn epônomasthê "dianoia"... To de g' ap' ekeinês rheuma dia tou stomatos ion meta phthoggou keklêtai "logos";)*

<sup>146</sup> This is what Socrates wants to suggest in the *Cratylus* by using the word *nomothetês*, etymologically “law-maker”, to talk about the one or ones at the origin of words. He doesn’t mean to say that lawmakers, besides making laws, *also* create language, but that those creating it are *de facto* “law makers”, makers of the law which words impose not only upon our speeches, but even upon our thought.

<sup>147</sup> The Greek word *sunètheia* is made up of the prefix *sun-* (“with”) and a substantive formed on the word *êthos* meaning “custom, usage, habit” (at the root of the English words “ethic” and “ethics”), *ètheia*, which is not listed in the LSJ as a word by itself (*ètheia* exists as the feminine of an adjective, *ètheios*, term of address used to express respect and meaning “trusty”, and the word *aètheia*, formed by adjunction of a privative alpha in front of *ètheia* is found at 518a7, in the comment of the allegory by Socrates, with the meaning “lack of habit, inexperience”; yet, for a possible use by Plato of the word *ètheia*, which might be either an old word having become obsolete early and absent from extant works or a neologism forged by him for the occasion with about the same meaning as *sunètheia*, at 532c1, in a phrase whose received text poses problems despite unanimity throughout the manuscripts, and which is an obvious reminder of this section of the allegory describing the arrival of the prisoner outside the cave in the broader context of a summary of the allegory of the cave, see Appendix 4.2: choice of textual variant for *Republic* VII, 532c1, page 182). Thus, *sunètheia* combines the idea of community (and thus of *dialogos*), of association, induced by the prefix *sun-*, and that of habit.

But if we stick to *words*, we still are only dealing with shadows and reflections and thus in the first subsegment of the intelligible, that of *dianoia*. To reach the end of the investigation and hope to grasp human beings “themselves (*auta*, 516a8)”, we must be able to reach what is behind those words, to free ourselves from specific words (for instance “Socrates is a sophist”, or “Protagoras is a philosopher”) to attempt to catch something of the truth of the person, keeping in mind that we will never be him and thus, that we will never have of him an exhaustive and perfectly adequate knowledge, but at best as true as possible an “idea”. But this work can only be an inner work since any help coming from others would necessarily come through words and thus would move us back to *dianoia*.<sup>148</sup>

As can be seen, the four *pathèmata* (“affections”) corresponding to the four segments of the line are pictured in the allegory in the case of *anthrôpoi* (“human beings”). The consistency between the two images is perfect.

### Sun, moon and stars

But, in the allegory of the cave, the sight of the *anthrôpoi* themselves is not the last step in the progress of the freed prisoner. It is true that he sees those *anthrôpoi* in the light of the sun, but did he pay attention to the sun itself? And if the progress continues, does that mean that the splitting of the line in four segments was incomplete?

The last phase of the progress of the prisoner focuses, after terrestrial beings, and the most important of them, *anthrôpoi*, the only one mentioned by name by Socrates, on celestial “objects”: the stars and the moon, more easily seen during the night than during the day, and eventually the sun, first through “reflections of it upon waters or some other place” and finally, “itself by itself in its own space [that] he could see clearly and contemplate as it is”.<sup>149</sup>

This new phase, which takes place also outside the cave, and thus in what represents the intelligible realm, doesn't constitute new modes of perception, but rather involves the two modes of perception associated with the intelligible in the analogy of the line activated by other kinds of « things », “celestial” objects, about which I said earlier that they picture “things” that have no sensible counterpart inside the cave. And the fact that, regarding the sun, Socrates takes the trouble to introduce the distinction between reflections and original shows clearly that, about those « things » too, there are two modes of apprehension, *dianoia* and *noësis*, that is, based on what we have seen in the case of *anthrôpoi* (“human beings”), the apprehension through words and the attempt to go beyond words to grasp something of what is behind them.

We have no trouble identifying the sun with the good (*to agathon*) after the parallel between good and sun developed earlier by Socrates and, as I already mentioned, the confirmation by Socrates himself of this identification in the “decoding” of the allegory that he does as soon as he is finished with it.<sup>150</sup> But what do the other celestial bodies represent? Plato and his Socrates leave it to us to find out by ourselves.

### Man in the moon

I have already suggested that the moon and stars play in the allegory the part of *ideai*, that is, as we have seen earlier, of the principles of intelligibility of the world *around us*, of what allows us to find our way in this world in much the same way stars allow a sailor to find his way at sea. These principles of intelligibility obviously include purely abstract notions without sensible counterpart such as the just, the beautiful, and so on (the good is a special case, pictured

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<sup>148</sup> This is the reason why Plato, in his dialogues, doesn't attempt to give us *answers*, which would be only *his* answers, his “theories”, and could only take the form of *words*, but only writes *dialogues* inviting the readers to a “dialogue” with them to accompany them in their *personal* task of seeking a “knowledge” which can only be beyond words.

<sup>149</sup> *Republic* VII, 516a8-b2.

<sup>150</sup> See note 142, page 72.

in the allegory by the sun), but it is unsure whether we should limit the stars to picturing *only* those abstract ideas in the allegory. We have seen above<sup>151</sup> that Plato's Socrates doesn't hesitate to assume an *idea* of such a mundane and material thing as bed and, if there is for him an *idea* of "bed", he cannot consider there is not also one of *anthrôpos* ('human being'). Socrates doesn't mention in the allegory an *Anthrôpos* in heaven, but if we absolutely want to find in it a unique « idea of Man » (*hè to anthrôpou idea*), I suggest that, by analogy with the case of terrestrial "objects" found outside the cave, where the only one explicitly referred to by name by Socrates is *anthrôpoi*, the moon, the only celestial body mentioned by name by Socrates, plays this part, the part of the idea which should be the most familiar to us and occupy the greatest place in our mind (in much the same way the moon is the greatest of the celestial bodies visible at night) to allow us to be, each one at our place, an *anthrôpos* worthy of that name. Or, to say it differently, taking into account the message that Plato's Socrates tries to send us in the *Republic* as a whole, which is that justice properly understood as inner harmony of a soul whose unity is not given in advance as foundation for outer/social harmony in the city/state is in the end the *ideal/ideal* of Man in this life, that the moon plays the role of the idea of justice, which, in these conditions, would amount to the same. But the mere fact that this choice is not obvious and that Plato didn't bother giving us the slightest hint in that direction (aside from the one I mentioned, if it may be considered a hint), invites us to understand that this information would have taught us nothing, contrary to all that has preceded, and would have remained an image without meaning because teaching us nothing and being of no help to make us progress toward an understanding of what the idea of Man is, this idea that each one of us must try to grasp by himself/herself as it is beyond words and images.

This being said, the fact that the moon and stars play in the allegory the part of *ideai* may nonetheless teach us something. The moon, unique in the sky, if we assume it to be this idea of Man, doesn't look at all like a human being, which is consistent with what I said earlier of the idea of *anthrôpos*, which is no more the image of a perfect man or woman than the idea of bed is any bed. In fact, in the heavens, if we set aside the sun and the moon, all stars look alike when we manage to see them: all are but tiny bright spots and, taken individually, nothing really differentiate them from one another. This is probably the reason why Socrates insists on the fact that what the prisoner contemplates at this point is "*th[e objects] in the heaven and heaven itself*".<sup>152</sup> It is only by looking at the sky *as a whole* that we may find meaning to the stars moving in it and have a chance to recognize at least some of them or certain clusters of them. In the same way, the words we use, which, let's remember it, are the « objects » on which *dianoia* works, have meaning, especially when they don't refer to visible "things", only through their relations with one another in phrases which are somehow "constellations" of words. And in the end, those stars/ideas, most of which, by the way, disappear from our sight as soon as the sun appears (we could "*more easily contemplate those in the heaven and heaven itself during the night*", says Socrates about them), are not what allows us to best see *anthrôpoi* outside the cave; we see them much more clearly in the light of the sun, which makes all the stars disappear in its light. This is probably why Socrates doesn't spend much time on their case and doesn't tell us what their meaning is in the allegory. For sure, stars allow us to take our bearings and find our way, as all sailors in Plato's time knew, but their light is grossly insufficient to light us at night. That of the moon alone, at least at full moon, allows us to dimly see something in the night (one more reason to make it the idea of Man for those who definitely want such a thing in the allegory).

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<sup>151</sup> See section "Tables and beds", page 65.

<sup>152</sup> *Republic* VII, 516a8-9.

### What's the use of staring at the sun?

What about the sun, then? About it, Socrates returns to the distinction between vision through images (“*reflections of it on waters or some other place*”) and direct vision. Reflections of the sun must be interpreted in the same way as reflections of *anthrôpoi* (“human beings”) outside the cave: they are all the *logoi* (“speeches”) which may be heard about it (the sun/good) from people in the city, and especially the “reflections” of the good produced by the city through its usages, customs and laws.

Regarding direct vision, Plato's Socrates uses a wording, « *itself by itself in its own space* [that] *he could see clearly and contemplate as it is*”,<sup>153</sup> full of hyperbole and redundancy which is somewhat suspect. For in the end, he knows as well as everybody, and even says it explicitly in another dialogue, the *Phaedo*,<sup>154</sup> that contemplating the sun directly otherwise than swiftly or through clouds or at sunrise or sunset is the best way of damaging the eyes and ruining sight! In the *Phaedo*, he warns about the danger there is in attempting to look at it during an eclipse, even though it is hidden by the moon. The grandiloquence of the expression and the obviously impossible character of what it describes suggest that Plato's Socrates is ironic at this point of his allegory. At the end of the allegory, in the short “decoding” he presents, he indeed says that the idea of the good “*is seen with great difficulty*” and that, once seen, “*it must be apprehended by way of reasoning*”,<sup>155</sup> using the verbal adjective of obligation formed after the verb *sullogizesthai*, meaning “collect/gather in a *logon*, a reasoning” and from which the word *sullogismos* (“syllogism”), promised to a great future with Aristotle, stems.<sup>156</sup> But, as we have seen above, grasping by way of reasoning is rather within the range of *dianoia*, not of *noësis*, it works with words and is not direct vision.<sup>157</sup> So, even if the freed prisoner reaches the point where he is in a situation to attempt to look at the sun, it would be better for him not to try to contemplate it at length, as Socrates' wording suggests he should.

But is this so grave? After all, there is no need to look at the sun to see its light everywhere, and above all, to see that whose sight is important for us, *anthrôpoi* around us! To look at the sun itself, aside from the fact that it might blind us, would teach us nothing about *anthrôpoi*, while looking at them in its light is what will allow us to make progress in the knowledge of ourselves which ought to be the business of our life.

When Socrates' interlocutors, in the middle of the discussion about the third wave, ask him to tell them what, in his opinion, the good itself is and he declines, saying that he doesn't know, his listeners don't believe him and think he is trying to skirt the issue. Along with Plato scholars over the centuries, they are not willing to accept the idea that such a knowledge is almost impossible for us by nature, or at least that it is not transmissible with words. The acme of the allegory of the cave, the image of the freed prisoner contemplating at last the sun from the top of a hill, is so nice that they can't imagine that it might be a trap put there by Socrates to test the understanding of his interlocutors (and readers) and see how many of them will realize that what he suggests is impossible, at least the way he proposes it.

<sup>153</sup> *Republic* VII, 516b5-7.

<sup>154</sup> *Phaedo*, 99d-e.

<sup>155</sup> *Republic* VII, 517b7-c5.

<sup>156</sup> It is this verb, *sullogizesthai*, that Socrates had used in the allegory, at 516b9, in his remark following immediately the phrase about contemplating the sun at length, to suggest that the freed prisoner “*after that, would by this time conclude by way of reasoning (sullogizoito) about it that it is the one providing the seasons and the years and supervising all* [516c] *the [things] in the seen place and, of those [things] they themselves used to see, responsible in some way of all [of them]*” (*Republic* VII, 516b9-c2).

The prefix *sun-* (“with, together”) found in *sullogizesthai* doesn't add to the verb *logizesthai* (“to compute, reason”) what it adds to *ètheia* in *sunètheia* (see note 147, page 74, and the text this note comments), namely, an idea of cooperation. It rather import here the idea of gathering distinct propositions into a single reasoning which stays mainly an individual *logos* (*logizesthai* is a verb derived from *logos*).

<sup>157</sup> As indicated in the previous note, *sullogizesthai* is formed after *logizesthai*, a word derived from *logos*.

And indeed, nowhere in his dialogues does Plato develop what might be the good itself, for the simple reason that it is impossible to express it with words and that, even if it were possible to express it with words, it would teach us nothing so abstract and far from our concerns it would be! When he reaches the end of the journey, in the introductory dialogue to the last tetralogy, the *Philebus*, what Socrates talks about is the good *for human beings*, the only one which is relevant for us and should interest us! What he is looking for is the recipe for a happy life, for a « good » life *for the anthrôpoi*. And he doesn't find it in an endless contemplation of ideas lost in heavens, but in an appropriate mix of material pleasures and intellectual satisfaction away from tumultuous passions.

Rather than the lasting contemplation of the sun, which would make the prisoner one of those Socrates criticizes in his commentary of the allegory, saying of them “*think[] they have already been carried alive in the islands of the blessed*” (519c5-6), what matters is the return to the cave mentioned by him at the end of the allegory, and this for two reasons: first, because human beings are made to live in communities so that what is good for each one of them individually includes what is good for the others and allows a life together free from conflict where each one gets one's due share of satisfactions and everybody does one's fair share of the work for the common good, and second because all the *sullogizesthai*, all the syllogisms, all the reasonings in the world conducted alone in one's head outside the cave without discussions with others are worth nothing so long as they have not been submitted to the test of shared experience through *to dialegesthai* (“the [fact of] dialoguing”), that can only take place inside the cave, as it implies vocal (or graphic) exchange, and thus hearing (or sight). Now, that this return may involve risks, including for one's life, as Plato's Socrates suggests at the end of the allegory in what is an obvious allusion to the trial of the historical Socrates, should not discourage us if we have really seen the sun, that is, understood what is *really* good for us.<sup>158</sup>

### The four segments of the line in the structure of the tetralogies

All this long detour via the *Republic* allowed us to bring to light the second structuring principle of the dialogues as a whole after the tripartition of the *psuchè* which presides over the arrangement of the dialogues in each trilogy, namely the quadripartition of the line, that is, of the modes of perception of this *psuchè*, which presides over the succession of tetralogies.

The whole program unfolds between an introductory tetralogy, composed of the *Alcibiades* as an introduction and the trilogy *Lysis*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, which poses the problem to be solved, “What qualifies an *anthrôpos* to lead his/her fellows human beings?”, in the introductory dialogue, the *Alcibiades*, and a conclusive tetralogy, made up of the *Philebus* as introduction to the trilogy *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Laws*, ending with a dialogue, the *Laws*, giving us an *example* of the work awaiting a lawmaker in a city or state, on either side of a central tetralogy made up of the *Symposium* as introduction and the trilogy *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Phaedo*, focusing on the *psuchè*, bridge between the sensible and the intelligible in that it partakes of both, to the sensible as hosted and “fed” by a body and to the intelligible as being endowed with *logos*. On either part of this central backbone, two tetralogies on each side investigate, the first two ones, tetralogies 2 and 3, each one of the two segments of the visible, the last two ones, tetralogies 5 and 6, each one of the two segments of the intelligible.

In the visible/sensible realm, the second tetralogy, dealing with the segment of visible images and *eikasia* (“conjecture”), made up of the *Protagoras* as introductory dialogue and the trilogy

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<sup>158</sup> In actual life, human life is not limited to a single journey outside the cave, but is made up of a multiplicity of trips back and forth in which we may hope that each new trip outside will allow us to go a little further on than the previous trips, precisely because each progress we make outside the cave must be submitted to the test of dialogue, to the “power of *to dialegesthai*” mentioned by Socrates in the analogy of the line as a criterion of the approach associated with the second subsegment of the intelligible, *noësis*.

*Hippias Major* (also called *Greater Hippias*), *Hippias Minor* (also called *Lesser Hippias*), *Gorgias*, shows us sophists, traders of illusions, at work, while the third tetralogy, dealing with the segment of visible/sensible beings and *pistis* (“confidence”), made up of the *Meno* as introductory dialogue and the trilogy *Euthyphro*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Crito*, invites us to relive the event which gives meaning to the whole of Socrates’ life and proves his “confidence” in the result of the investigations that he has conducted during his whole life, his trial and condemnation to death.

In the intelligible realm, the fourth tetralogy, dealing with the segment of intelligible images and *dianoia* (“wandering thought”), made up of the *Cratylus* as introductory dialogue and the trilogy *Ion*, *Euthydemus*, *Menexenus*, focuses on words and the different kinds of speeches (*logoi*), while the sixth tetralogy, dealing with the second segment of the intelligible and *noësis* (“active thought”), made up of the *Parmenides* as introductory dialogue and the trilogy *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, displays the rules, power and limits of *logos* to allow us, by mastering it, not to stay its prisoner but rather to properly make use of its power and give us a chance to reach something of what is beyond words and *logos* through the proper use of *hè tou dialegesthai dunamis* (“the power resulting from the practice of dialogue”).

The two trilogies which, each one in its own realm, visible or intelligible, deal with originals as opposed to images, the third one and the sixth one, are both centered on a defining act that is a death sentence: in the visible, the quite *real* condemnation to death of Socrates by a *multiplicity* of his fellow citizens in the trial related in the *Apology of Socrates*, in the intelligible, the *virtual* “parricide”<sup>159</sup> committed in thought by *a single one* of his fellow citizens on the person, or rather, on the doctrines<sup>160</sup> of Parmenides in the *Sophist*, which is at the same place in its trilogy as the *Apology* in its own, the central position.

This parallel evidences the key role Parmenides played in Plato’s thought and the difficulty there was to escape his grasp. There remains only a few fragments of Parmenides’ writings, who was old, and possibly even dead, when Socrates was still young.<sup>161</sup> And what little remains of his writings, those few fragments, is hard to interpret because marked with mysticism and dealing with abstract concepts such as “being” and “one” without defining them or making clear in what sense(s) he uses them. What is certain is that Plato saw in his doctrine that to be and to think are the same thing and thus that it is not possible to think, and thus to say, what “is not”, the source of many an evil of his time and in the end the remote cause of Socrates’ death. Starting from the idea that it is not possible to say what is not, it is easy to quickly arrive at the conclusion that there is no such thing as a false discourse (*pseudès logos*) and this opens the door to all the abuses of rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias and his kin, influenced by the paradoxes of Zeno, disciple of Parmenides, all of whom were more interested in likelihood than in truth, leading to the contempt of philosophy confused with sophistic by the likes of Callicles, a character imagined by Plato who stages him in the *Gorgias*, responsible for the condemnation of Socrates by a majority who saw him as a sophist among others, as is evidenced by the comedy of Aristophanes, the *Clouds*, which stages this sophist named Socrates, become for his contemporaries the archetype of the parasite teaching to others how to make the unjust cause triumph in court over the just cause and ruining the beliefs of his honest fellow citizens by observing a

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<sup>159</sup> It is the Stranger from Elea himself, master of ceremonies in the *Sophist*, who uses the word “parricide” at *Sophist*, 241d3, when he is about to ruin one of the major dogmas of Parmenides’ thought, the impossibility of thinking, and thus saying, what is not.

<sup>160</sup> That is, his intelligible “image/shadow”, in the same way the body of Socrates put to death was only his material “image”.

<sup>161</sup> It is indeed possible that the *Parmenides*, which stages a meeting between an old Parmenides and a still young Socrates, a fiction imagined by Plato, took some liberties with historical accuracy. The dates of birth and death of Parmenides are not known to us with certainty and the fiction devised by Plato contributed to even more cloud the issue in that some of the sources we rely upon to establish Parmenides’ chronology may have been influenced by Plato’s dialogue.

desecrated heaven and stars and making fun of their gods. Plato's answer is found in the *Sophist* and I outlined it in the section called "Why did Plato write dialogues?", pages 7ff.

Without going into as much details as I did with the *Republic*, which is the keystone of the whole work, I will now go through a quick overview of each one of these dialogues. These overviews are not sustained commentaries of the dialogues, but, for each one, a few remarks pointing at interesting aspects of the dialogue, outlining in particular the extraordinary mastery of Plato, who doesn't limit himself to unfolding reasonings, but makes use of all that is available to him, staging, name of characters, historical context, and so on, to contribute to the progress of thought.

### First tetralogy: stating the problem and hinting at the solution

I have already said, and I repeated it above, that the prelude of the first tetralogy, the *Alcibiades*, was introducing from the start the problem which will occupy the whole program: which education and which skills anyone should have who ever wants to enter into politics and lead his/her city, staging Socrates grappling with the one who would become the most gifted politician of his time, but also the one having done the most harm to his city, and to himself, because of his inability to refrain his passions. The ensuing trilogy, without explicitly saying so, goes through a first round of investigations, with teenagers (the “freshmen” of our leaders’ factory), on the meaning of the building blocks of the expression *philosophos anèr* (“philosophic man”),<sup>162</sup> which applies to what the *Republic* will present in what I have described earlier as the “third wave” of objections Socrates has to face, as the answer to the initial question, provided *anèr* (“man” in the sense of “male” as opposed to “female”) is replaced by *anthrôpos* (“human being”, either male or female). It does it through an analysis of each part of this expression in turn: *philia* (“friendship”), at the root of the “*philo-*” of “*philo-sophos*”, which originates in the desiring part of the soul, the *epitumiai*, in the first dialogue of the trilogy, the *Lysis*; *sophia* (“wisdom”), which originates in the *logos*, in the last dialogue, the *Charmides*, through a more “juvenile” version of it, *sôphrosunè* (“soundness of mind, prudence, moderation, self-control”), better suited to the teenagers who are the interlocutors of the dialogue; and in between, in the middle dialogue, *andreia*, a word usually translated as “courage”, but which should be understood here from its root, *anèr*, *andros* (“man” as opposed to “woman”, as I already said) as what makes a person to “be a man”, as in such expressions as “Be a man, my son!” A better translation in that perspective would be “manhood”, which is formed in English on the same model as the word *andreia* in Greek.

#### *Alcibiades*

I won't comment further on this dialogue as I have already talked about it at length.

#### *Lysis*

This first dialogue of the first trilogy, which relates discussions of Socrates with teenagers in Athenian palaestras (public places for training and practice of wrestling and other athletics which played an important social role at Athens as meeting places for youth and adults of all ages), takes place not far from the Academy, which, in the time of Socrates, was still only a public garden and temple dedicated to an Athenian hero named Akademos, until Plato, after Socrates' death, decided to install his school there, so that it took the name of the garden. This is the only place in all the dialogues where the Academy is mentioned, and this is most likely not mere chance. The program that I see developed all through the dialogues was probably intended for the students at the Academy and this first trilogy targets freshmen and stages Socrates coming from the Academy.

Another point is worth noticing and will show us how Plato was capable of using the slightest details of the work he was composing to stimulate our thought. The character who gives his name to the dialogue is a teenager introduced as “Lysis, son of Demokratès”. Nothing much exciting there for an English speaking reader with no knowledge of Ancient Greek, but, if we translate those names (Greek names are most often meaningful), it becomes “Liberation, son of Democrat” and, all of a sudden, it raises some questions. Indeed, in the allegory of the cave, the word *luisis* (“liberation, deliverance”) and the verb from which it derives, *luein* (“to unbind, release, deliver, set free”), are used to refer to the unbinding of the chained prisoner. And later in the *Republic*, Socrates describes democracy, in a text often circulated in schools and wrongly attributed to Socrates, as a regime of utmost freedom:

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<sup>162</sup> At the beginning of the *Sophist*, Theodorus introduces the Stranger from Elea, who will replace Socrates as leader of the discussion in this dialogue and the following one, the *Statesman*, by saying about him that he is *mala andra philosophon* (“a man very much philosopher”, *Sophist*, 216a4). And indeed, he is the one who will help us make the difference between a sophist and a philosopher and draw for us the portrait of a good leader.

“But then (Socrates is talking), what democracy defines as good, doesn't an insatiate desire of it also destroy it?

But tell me what it so defines.

Freedom, I said. This indeed, methinks, you would hear in a city living in democracy: that it is the most beautiful [thing] and that, for this reason, only in such a [city] whoever [is] by nature free [finds it] worth dwelling.”<sup>163</sup>

The question which comes to mind when reading this statement of identity is the following: does the “liberation” which gives its name to the lead character of the dialogue come from the fact that he is son of “democracy” or is it the conversation with Socrates, straight out of the Academy, which might free him from chains he doesn't even suspect exist?

Some will probably think: “But if this Liberation is a historical character, then it is not Plato who invented his name, nor the name of his father.” That's true and it is indeed possible that this Liberation, son of Democrates did actually exist. But as soon as we admit that Plato's dialogues are literary creations of their author and not “journalistic” reports on actual episodes of Socrates' life, we must recognize that Plato was free to choose whom he wanted as characters in his dialogues, and nothing prevented him to use their names as choice criteria when those names could contribute to deliver a message to those who took notice of their meaning. We'll see other examples of this and I have already mentioned the fact that the name of Critias, formed on a word, *krisis*, importing the idea of choice, of judgment, probably played a major role in the choice of Plato to make this relative of him the “hero” of the dialogue bearing his name in the last trilogy.

### *Laches*

The context of the *Laches* is interesting, for it stages two sons of famous political leaders much respected in Socrates' time complaining that their fathers didn't find time, being too busy handling the affairs of the city, to give them a proper education which might have allowed each one of them both to walk in the footsteps of his father, and intent on avoiding the same fate for their children, which leads them to ask Socrates and two famous generals, Laches, who gives his name to the dialogue, and Nicias, their advice on this question. I mentioned Nicias when summarizing the life of Alcibiades: he is the one who was opposed to Alcibiades' projects regarding Sicily, who was chosen by the Athenians to lead the Sicilian expedition along with him and who was responsible, after the flight of Alcibiades to Sparta, for the defeat and destruction of the Athenian army due to his having refused to engage in a decisive battle because the seer attached to the army saw a bad omen in a moon eclipse (there is in the dialogue an hardly veiled allusion to this episode when Socrates asks Nicias if he agrees with the law stating that the seer must obey the general, not the general the seer<sup>164</sup>).

The complaint of the two sons of political leaders on the fact that their respective fathers were not able to give them a proper education anticipates, without the reader being yet able to realize it, what Socrates will say in the *Meno* to show that human excellence (*aretè*), of which the political art is the highest degree, is not a “science” which could be taught: of what is properly called a “science”, there are teachers and those who possess it are capable of teaching it to others; but experience shows that none of the most admired leaders of Athens was able to make of his children, that is, of those to whom they most likely wished to transmit their skills more than to anybody else, more than spoiled children and good-for-nothings, at least in politics; this shows that they didn't have a “knowledge”, a “science”, but were merely favoured by the gods.

The initial question of these two fathers interested in the education of their children is about the worth of training them in the art of fighting with heavy arms under the direction of a renowned teacher who turns out, as the dialogue proceeds, to be no more than a make-believe soldier far from successful in the rare occasions he had to practice in real life the art he pretends

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<sup>163</sup> *Republic*VIII, 562b9-c2.

<sup>164</sup> *Laches*, 199a1-3.

to teach. The whole dialogue displays a macho bias well summarized by the fact that the word meaning “courage” in Greek is *andreia*, which implies that courage is exclusively a male’s affair. This is indeed one of the problems Socrates and Plato will face and attempt to solve in the *Republic* in what constitutes what I called the “first wave” (equality between men and women for access to guardianship and possibly leadership). For Socrates interlocutors, the ideal of a good citizen remains Achilles and his level of excellence best shows only in fighting. Plato’s Socrates doesn’t approve of this way of thinking, but Plato has to take his listeners and readers where they stand if he wants to have a chance of progressively bringing them to challenge the “prejudices” inherited from the city they live in.

One more remark on this dialogue. It is the central dialogue of the trilogy, thus the one at the intermediate level of the *psuchè*, that of the *thumos*, a word which may mean “spirit, temper”, and also “heart”, in particular as the seat of courage, or even “courage”. I said that this intermediate level was also the level of choices in that this middle part of the *psuchè* is the one which is torn between passions and reason. To give a “visual” image of this, in this dialogue, all characters, except Socrates, come in pairs: two sons of political leader worrying about the education of two teenagers (one each) talking to two generals, one, Laches, rather impulsive (jumping in action, even when facing danger, without giving it much thought, not at all the intellectual kind), and the other, Nicias, who would like to see himself as an intellectual but is in fact quite sententious (and pays too much attention to seers!)

### *Charmides*

The *Charmides*, final dialogue of this first trilogy, which focuses on *sophia* (“wisdom”), in its teenagers’ version, *sôphosunè* (the quality of who is *sôphrôn*, a word meaning etymologically “someone having a sound mind”), that is, the quality primarily associated with the reasoning part of the *psuchè*, stages, aside from teenagers as in all dialogues of this first tetralogy, a character who plays an important role in the dialogues, whom we will meet again in later dialogues and who even gives his name to one of the dialogues of the last tetralogy, Critias. It turns out that this man is probably, with Alcibiades, the political leader who brought the greatest evils on Athens in Socrates’ time. Indeed, he was one of the leaders, if not *the* leader of the Thirty Tyrants who governed Athens with the support of Sparta after its defeat in the Peloponnesian War. And this government was so cruel and bloodthirsty that it didn’t last long and was soon overthrown by a democratic revolution. And, to make things worse, this Critias was a close relative of Plato and tried to associate him in this government, as he did with Charmides, whose name becomes the name of the dialogue and who was also a relatives of both Plato and Critias. Charmides associated with Critias in this bloody regime and both were killed in the battle which allowed democrats to regain power. Plato on his part refused to join this government, whose deeds disgusted him of being involved in active politics, as he tells us in his autobiography at the beginning of the VIIth Letter, the only one, out of the thirteen letters attributed to Plato which are found since Antiquity in his complete works along with the dialogues, which is most likely from him, in the following terms: “*In the time of my youth, I experienced indeed the same affection as many others; I thought that, as soon as I should have become my own master, I would go straight [work] on public affairs of the city. And such [were] the (mis)fortunes in the affairs of the city [that] befell on me. For in the political organization of the time, rebuked by many, a revolution occurred and fifty-one men took the lead of the revolution as rulers, eleven in the city proper and ten in the Piraeus—each one of these had to manage the agora and all affairs of these cities—while thirty of them were established with absolute power on everything. Now, some of these happened to be relatives [of mine] and well known by me and thus they immediately called me also to their side as [if this was] about activities befitting me. And I felt nothing surprising [in that], owing to my youth, for I thought that they would indeed manage the city so as to lead it from a somehow unjust life toward a just way of life, so*

*I turned all my attention toward the manner they would act. And for sure I saw these men in a short time render the former way of government a golden age. And among other, my friend Socrates, [who was] older than me, of whom I would not the least be ashamed to say he was the most just of those then [living], they sent [him] with others after a certain one of the citizens to bring him by force to be put to death, to force him to actually take part in their business, whether he wanted to or not; but he didn't obey, taking all risks rather than becoming an associate in their impious work. Seeing all this, then, and other similar [affairs] of no less importance, I couldn't bear it and withdrew from the evils of the time.”<sup>165</sup>*

The discussion between Socrates and Critias, which occupies the second half of the dialogue, is interesting because Critias, asked by Socrates to give a definition of *sôphrosunè*, offers several ones in turn, which Socrates criticizes sharply each time even though they should please him since he himself uses them in the same or very similar terms in other dialogues. The first definition of *sôphrosunè* given by Critias is “*to mind one's own business (to ta heautou prattein)*”,<sup>166</sup> which is but the definition of justice given by Socrates in book IV of the *Republic*;<sup>167</sup> next he accepts a definition suggested by Socrates which is “*the practice of good [things/behaviours/activities/...] (ten tôn agathôn praxin)*”;<sup>168</sup> then, he suggests “*the fact of getting to know oneself (to gignôskein heautou)*”.<sup>169</sup> which is but a reformulation of the Delphic precept *gnôthi sauton* (“get to know thyself”) which I have already mentioned several times and which Socrates had already discussed with Alcibiades in the introductory *Alcibiades*; this leads to a discussion on a science (*epistèmè*) which would be “*science of itself and all the other sciences*”,<sup>170</sup> eventually identified as the science whose object would be “*the good and the bad (to agathon kai to kakon)*”.<sup>171</sup> Why then does Socrates take pains to dismiss those definitions one after the other?

There are several explanations for this. The first one is that Socrates is testing Critias to see how deeply he is convinced of what he says and is willing and able to stand by his words and argue them. The experience shows that this is not the case, that Critias (who is sometimes mentioned as a sophist and whose few extant fragments of writings are preserved in works gathering Sophists' works) is only trying to show off before his nephew Charmides and impress him, and that he loses ground as soon as Socrates submits each one of his definitions to a close critical examination, preferring to offer a new one rather than to argue the one he just gave, probably pulled out of his hat thinking it should please Socrates for having heard it from him earlier. Another reason is that, if all the dialogues in which Socrates seems to be looking for a definition end on what looks like a failure, it is because Socrates, and Plato behind him, is convinced that such “definitions”, taking the form of a few words as problematic as the one they attempt to define, for such complex notions as the ones under examination (*sôphrosunè* here, *philia* in the *Lysis*, *andreia* in the *Laches*, and so on) are uninteresting and even rather harmful, in that they suggest that the ones offering or accepting them know what they are talking about when it is not the case. I, in his opinion, we learn more from the lengthy discussion hesitating between several tentative definitions, each one bringing something that the others complement, and none of them being able alone to comprehensively “define” what is being discussed, than from the kind of formula made up of a few words which will soon satisfy an Aristotle intent on ruling over language in order to provide a firm ground for his logic. The Greek word translated by “to define” is *horizein*, whose original meaning is “to delimit, bound” and from which comes the English word “horizon”. The horizon is the limit of the visible field and, for Socrates, to define, or rather

<sup>165</sup> *Letter VII*, 324b8-325a5.

<sup>166</sup> *Charmides*, 161b6.

<sup>167</sup> *Republic IV*, 433a8.

<sup>168</sup> *Charmides*, 163e10.

<sup>169</sup> *Charmides*, 165b4.

<sup>170</sup> *Charmides*, 166c2-3 ; 166e6.

<sup>171</sup> *Charmides*, 174c2-3.

to delimit, is not a simplifying operation which reduces a large “field” of meanings to a terse formula, but on the contrary a lengthy process going through that whole “field” in order to mark as we proceed the separating boundaries and the overlaps with neighbouring “fields”, the knowledge of that “field” growing as we explore its most remote parts rather than shrinking if we attempt to make it fit within three or four well chosen words. And above all, this way of proceeding is the only one which offers us a chance to reach what is beyond words, that is, to move from *dianoia*, the approach associated by Socrates to the first subsegment of the intelligible, to *noësis*, the approach associated with the second subsegment, to reuse the words used in the analogy of the line commented at length in the first part of this paper.<sup>172</sup>

The *Charmides* thus invites the reader, still a beginner at the end of this first tetralogy, to take the place of Critias to argue in favor of formulas having everything going for them against assaults by a Socrates they might find dishonest, which is precisely the intended goal for Plato to provoke them to take part in the discussion. And, regarding Critias, all readers of Plato's time knew, when reading his dialogues, how Critias had ended and had no trouble understanding that, for him, those nice definitions were mere words and that *sôphrosunè* was the least of his concerns and he was more a practitioner of cynicism than a lover of wisdom, as we will see when he returns in the ending tetralogy.

### Second tetralogy: the sophists, illusion makers

This tetralogy, corresponding to the segment of *eikasia* (“conjecture”), stages Socrates in conversation with some of the most famous sophists of the time: Protagoras in the introductory dialogue, Hippias (whose name evokes horses, *hippos* in Greek, and reminds of the winged chariot used by Socrates as an image of the *psuchè* in the *Phaedrus*) in the first two dialogues of the trilogy and Gorgias in the third dialogue of the trilogy, and gives us a taste of their methods. We should note that all these sophists were “foreigners”<sup>173</sup> in Athens who were travelling through all Greek cities and asked huge amounts of money to give lectures or teach lessons to the sons of wealthy families.

#### *Protagoras*

The *Protagoras* opens on a dazzling staging of three sophists, Protagoras, Hippias and Prodicus, in the house of the wealthiest Athenian of the time, Callias, brother-in-law of Alcibiades, in which even the slightest details are meaningful. These three sophists can be seen as playing together in the dialogue the part of the tripartite « soul » of Sophistic, in the sense that each one exhibits features which relate him more specifically to one or another of the three parts of the *psuchè* distinguished by Socrates in the *Republic*. Protagoras, heir of Heraclitean mobilism, interested in *phusis* (« nature »), a relativist for whom man is the measure of all things and who denies any form of transcendence, is at the level of the part of the soul linked to the corporeal nature of man, the multiform part of desires and passions (*epithumiai*). Hippias wants to play referee, but will be presented in the *Hippias Minor* as the universal man with an encyclopedic knowledge, capable of doing anything, boasting that he doesn't wear a thing that he didn't craft by himself, which makes him the archetype of the perfectly unjust man for a Socrates who sees the sharing of tasks as the foundation of social life and the fact for each one to stick to his/her one task as social justice, is, for better and mostly for worse, at the level of the intermediate part, *thumos*. Finally, Prodicus, is most interested in *logos*, which puts him at the level of the reasoning part of the *psuchè*, but in a very peculiar way, his specialty being the accuracy of

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<sup>172</sup> See section “Words and logos”, pages 62ff., and also note 129, page 67.

<sup>173</sup> Protagoras was from Abdera, a Greek city of Thrace, north of the Egean Sea; Hippias was from Elis, a city of North-Western Peloponnese; Gorgias was from Leontini in Sicily; and Prodicus, staged in the *Protagoras*, came from Ceos, a Greek island in the Cyclades archipelago.

words: using in each case the most appropriate term for what we want to say.<sup>174</sup> So, to physically depict this, Plato describes Protagoras in perpetual motion (the mobilism he adopts as a doctrine) in the hall where the scene takes place, followed by a court of admirers, Hippias, seating on a kind of throne at mid-height and Prodicus buried under blankets in a sort of mezzanine, thus giving each one the spatial position corresponding to that of the organs of the body associated with each part of the *psuchè*: the desiring part is associated with guts and sex, the lower part of the body, the intermediate *thumos* with the heart and the reasoning part with the head.

Socrates arrives in this house dragged by a youth named Hippocrates, a namesake of the famed physician contemporary of Socrates, who came at his place at dawn to ask him to accompany him listen to Protagoras, who is the talk of the city, and, along the way, Socrates warns Hippocrates about the risk there is to listen to people whose qualifications have not been put to the test for, contrary to goods bought for the care of the body whose proper condition can be tested before eating them, if the words they utter are nonsense, they nonetheless enter the soul and there is no way to get rid of them.

Aside from the sophists, their host, Socrates and Hippocrates, the house of Callias is swarming with people, gathered around each one of the three sophists and among those present are Alcibiades and Critias, come as observers, and a few other people who will reappear in the *Symposium*.

A first part of the dialogue has Socrates brilliantly demonstrating how it is possible to make the words of a poet say anything and its contrary so long as the author is not there to defend his work with an irony which is easily confused (once more) with bad faith short of understanding that he is only caricaturing to the extreme a technique commonly used by his interlocutors.

In the second part of the dialogue, Socrates tries to have Protagoras admit that **if** he were consistent with his own theory of man-measure, he should teach his students the art of measuring as accurately as possible in a quasi-scientific way, the respective intensity of pleasures and pains present and future resulting for the sensations induced by their potential choices of behavior and action, so they could, as a result, choose in each case the course of action which would maximize *over time* the pleasures they experience, that is, happiness as he understands it, allowing these persons, **in the logic of his own system of thought**, to reach the excellence that is possible for them (their *aretè*), a conclusion that Protagoras refuses to accept, so trivial it makes his theories look, which shows that he stays in the realm of imagination and refuses the test of measurable facts!

Plato was an expert in the art of understanding the “systems” of thought of his predecessors and contemporaries *from the inside*, that is, on the basis of *their own* assumptions, explicit or implicit, and to criticize and blow them up *from the inside* by exposing the inconsistencies and absurdities resulting from these assumptions “logically” exploited, which implies, among other things, using words in the sense given them, here again explicitly or implicitly, by the holder of the examined system. Many of the assumed contradictions between dialogues disappear once this has been understood. Thus, in the present case, the supposed contradiction between the *Protagoras*, understood as a defense by Socrates of the tenet that “excellence (*aretè*)” can be taught, and the *Meno*, where he argues to the contrary, disappears as soon as it is understood that, in the *Protagoras*, he reasons *based on the hypotheses of Protagoras*, in order to, so to speak, “take him from the rear”.

This implies that what Plato's Socrates says in the dialogues should not always be taken at face value for the simple reason that it is Socrates who is talking and that, Socrates being assumed to be the mouthpiece of Plato, what he says must be true. The *Protagoras* is a dialogue where Socrates reveals himself better than the sophists he faces *at their own game*, which doesn't mean that we should ignore what he says as being worthless for, in so doing, he exhibits for us the traps of Sophistic and the inconsistencies of their systems.

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<sup>174</sup> He thus does the exact opposite of what Socrates suggests in the analogy of the line; rather than trying to free himself from the hold of words to move from *dianoia* to *noèsis*, he tries to rule over vocabulary and stays at the level of words, thus becoming their prisoner.

### *Hippias Major*

At the level of the desiring soul, with Hippias, in the *Hippias Major*, the focus is on the beautiful (*to kalon*), which may be seen as the “sensible” counterpart of the good, and thus the way in which it becomes perceptible by the *epithumiai*, only to discover a Hippias who, in spite of his encyclopedic knowledge, both theoretical and practical, is incapable of what we would call nowadays “abstraction”, and incapable as well to discuss without getting upset with an absent and anonymous interlocutor, thus making it clear that he doesn’t care for investigations in common based on the sharing of experience and the search for the truth but only wants to ridicule an interlocutor whose rout he must witness (indeed, Socrates interrogates Hippias as if he were asking him questions he was asked earlier by a person with whom he has discussed such things earlier but who is not there presently and whose name he doesn’t want to reveal). Hippias cannot see the difference Socrates makes between the question *ti esti kalon* (“what is beautiful?”) and the question *ti estin to kalon* (“what is *the* beautiful?”): for him, as his answers show, “what is *the* beautiful?” means “what is *the* [most] beautiful [**thing** you may think of]?”, “what is *the* beautiful [**thing** par excellence]?”, and not, as Socrates tries to make him understand, “what is common to all the beautiful things, whatever they may be, which explains why they are all said to be beautiful?”

### *Hippias Minor*

At the level of the intermediate part of the soul, seat of conflicts and free will, with Hippias once again, the discussion focuses on whether Achilles who always says what he has on his mind but is continually changing his mind due to his not knowing what he really wants in the end or Ulysses who has only one goal in life (return home and retrieve his wife and son) and is ready to use all possible tricks and deceits to reach it despite blows of fate is the best choice to serve as a “role model” for us in our search for excellence as human beings, and this gives Socrates an opportunity to show that it is not “science”, any science for that matter, that teaches us the goal toward which we should use it nor whether it is good or bad, and that it is thus the most knowledgeable in a given area who is most capable of reaching in all cases a good goal he sets to himself, if such is his choice, or a bad goal if such is his choice (it is only the mathematician who knows the result of a computation who is in a position to *never* give the right answer since, knowing it, he can make sure he *never* gives it if such is his choice, while the one who doesn’t know the right answer might give it by chance; it is the best physician who is most capable of curing *or killing* for sure his patient according to a choice which depends only on him, not on medical science as such).

This question of a choice between Achilles and Ulysses invites us to see in the cycle of Plato’s dialogues both a new *Iliad* (the work of Homer whose hero is Achilles) and a new *Odyssey* (the work of Homer whose hero is Ulysses) whose two heroes are Alcibiades as the new Achilles (as I already suggested earlier) and Socrates as the new Ulysses, trying to find his way through life to reach his own Ithaca, the Islands of the Blessed, mythical home of the “wise” after death, mentioned in several dialogues, and particularly in the *Republic*, immediately after the allegory of the cave, when Socrates criticizes those who, after having left the cave and seen the sun, refuse to return to the cave to assume their social role in the city and have their fellow citizens benefit from the acquired experience resulting from this ascent, thinking they have been carried alive to these famous islands.<sup>175</sup> In Plato’s mind, this new epic made up of his twenty-eight dialogues would be a much better tool than the works of Homer, the poet, to serve as a reference for the education of the Greeks.

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<sup>175</sup> *Republic* VII, 519c5, already quoted in the first part of this paper. These “Islands of the Blessed (*makarôn nêsois*)” are seen as the place of eternal rest for the just according to some traditions (see Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 171; Pindar, *Olympics*, II, 75-86) reused by Plato in the final myth of the *Gorgias* (*Gorgias*, 523b1) and alluded to in several other dialogues (*Symposium*, 179e2, 180b5; *Phaedo*, 115d4; *Menexenus*, 235c4).

*Gorgias*

This dialogue stages Socrates facing one of the Sicilian founders of rhetoric, Gorgias, during one of his stays in Athens, in a conversation where two of his disciples, Polus and Callicles (probably characters created by Plato, the second one at least), try in turn to give him assistance and monopolize the conversation (the dialogue with Polus is longer than the one with Gorgias and the dialogues with Callicles alone occupies more than half the whole dialogue). In the first part of the dialogue, the conversation between Socrates and Gorgias, the latter describes his art, rhetoric, as the art of *logos*. He claims he teaches his students to compose beautiful speeches (*logoi*) but doesn't seem to care as to whether they make a good or bad, just or unjust use of the art he teaches them. He definitely doesn't want to get involved in teaching them morals or anything of that kind. Besides, he adds that what matters is not to say the truth, but to be convincing (even if it means lying).

In the ensuing conversation, between Socrates and Polus, Socrates develops, speaking primarily to Gorgias, a theory of flattery identifying four arts, meant to care (preventively) or heal (curatively), either the body or the *psuchè*: the care of the body is the business of gymnastics and its healing that of medicine; the care of the soul is the business of law making and its healing that of justice (in the judicial sense of the word, justice as enforced by tribunals), the latter two arts, law making and justice together making up politics. Of each of these arts, there exists a parody meant on flattering and being pleasing rather than teaching and healing; the flattery regarding the care (or rather the appearance) of the body, which competes with gymnastics, is "cosmetics", that is, the art of makeup; that regarding healing, competing with medicine, is cooking, at least when it is the cook who pretends to prescribe what is "good" to eat and drink; and then regarding the soul, that is, in the political realm, sophistic is to law making what cosmetics is to gymnastics and rhetoric is to justice what cooking is to medicine (and indeed most of the extant works of Greek rhetoricians are speeches written for the defense of clients).

When Callicles takes over from Polus as interlocutor to Socrates, he explains that philosophy is acceptable when one is young, but once mature, and even more so when growing old, as is the case for Socrates, it's time to move to more serious activities, and he warns Socrates, at the point which constitutes the middle of the dialogue, that, despite all his nice reasoning, if he were some day unjustly dragged before a tribunal he would most likely be condemned to death. For him, the only thing that counts is to give free rein to his passions and to try to maximize pleasures in sating them. And when eventually Socrates exposes his contradictions, he becomes silent and let him end the conversation in a monologue.

This dialogue uses the same staging device as the one I described when commenting on the *Protagoras*, in that each one of the three successive interlocutors of Socrates instantiates one part of the *psuchè* of rhetoric or, to say it differently, represents an advocate of rhetoric whose *psuchè* is led by one or another of its parts, and the movement proceeds from "top" to "bottom" of this *psuchè*: Gorgias, the first interlocutor of Socrates, is at the level of *logos*, or at least of what he understands as *logos*, limited to *logoi* ("speeches") whose art he claims to teach; Polus, whose name means "colt" and brings to mind the vision of a young wild horse, and whose fiery temper shows in the dialogue, is under the leadership of the intermediate part of his *psuchè*, *thumos*, and it is with him that Socrates focuses upon choices in action, explaining to him that it is not because you do what pleases you that you do what you really want, that the tyrant who has one of his opponents killed at his command may well do what pleases him because he has the power to do so, but not necessarily what he wants, because what he wants like anybody else, is what is truly good *for him*, for his *psuchè*, and to have someone unjustly killed is to commit injustice, which is a disease of the soul. Indeed, Socrates upholds before him that it is worse to commit an injustice than to suffer one, and that, if you commit one, it is worse to escape trial and punishment (which are for the *psuchè*, as he explained a moment ago, what medicine is for the body) than to suffer the punishment prescribed by the laws. Lastly, Callicles instantiates a

*psuchè* under the unchecked rule of corporeal passions, unable to stand very long against reason to justify its choices.

What Plato stages here is the degenerative process induced by rhetoric as practiced and taught by Gorgias when it is put into the hands of more and more cynical and unscrupulous people, which is part of the more global degeneration which I already mentioned leading from Parmenides to Zeno (the man who explained, among other paradoxes, that Achilles would never catch up on a turtle because, each time he would have run the distance that separated him from the turtle at a given point in time, the turtle, during this time, would have walked a certain distance that Achilles now must run through while the turtle keeps moving again, and so ad infinitum), from Zeno to Gorgias (of whom one of the few extant writings develops a series of paradoxes on “being”), from Gorgias to Polus, then to Callicles and the death sentence on Socrates supposed to be one of those dangerous sophists by the man in the street always wary of smooth-tongued people after having been mocked as such by Aristophanes in one of his comedies.<sup>176</sup>

### The third tetralogy: Socrates' trial

To this relativism of the sophists, who stay at the level of speech (except when their wallet is at stake!), the third tetralogy opposes facts and activities through dialogues which all have as a background what can be seen as the triggering *act* of Plato's thought: the trial and death of Socrates.

The introductory dialogue, the *Meno*, has us witnesses, in an insert into the main discussion between Socrates and Meno, of an encounter between Socrates and the one who will become his main accuser in the trial leading to his death, Anytus, one of the leaders and money purveyors of the democratic party in Athens. The dramatic unity of the three dialogues of the ensuing trilogy is obvious. The fact that they respect the organizing principle of the trilogies that I uphold is not too difficult to demonstrate either. On each part of a dialogue which is not really a dialogue, the *Apology*, which shows justice in action through a text which is at the same time the most objective, since it puts the reader in the position of one of the judges in presenting him with the words of the accused himself and nothing more, and the most subjective, since it shows him only the image Socrates gives of himself through his words, or rather, to be accurate, the reconstruction of those words by Plato, and thus the image Plato wants to give of Socrates as he understood him, we find, on the side of “guts” and passions, a dialogue, the *Euthyphro*, which, before the trial, confronts Socrates with a “theologian” of the time who knows only the *letter* of the law (as can be seen from the nature of the case which brings him there) and is unable to define what “piety” is in front of a man who will be put to death as a result of an accusation of impiety, that is, who uses words without even knowing what they mean, in a distressing literalism, and, on the side of *logos*, a dialogue, the *Crito*, which, after the trial, shows us Socrates impersonating the *spirit* of the law to explain why it is better for him to accept a death which he knows is unjust but which is imposed upon him in full accordance with the existing laws of his city, laws that he accepted up to now, rather than violate those laws in accepting the escape scheme devised by Crito, his friend since childhood, thus putting his acts in conformity with his *logos*.

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<sup>176</sup> If, in *The Clouds*, Aristophanes chose to mock Socrates rather than one of the sophists Plato stages besides him, it is no doubt simply because, writing for Athenians, he preferred to stage a genuine Athenian well known by all inhabitants of the city for spending hours haunting Athens' public square and engaging in conversations with whomever he happened to meet there, to end up most of the time making fun of his interlocutor in front of those who were around, rather than one of those foreigners who only came to Athens occasionally and spent most of their time there invited by rich citizens and giving lectures of the kind of the one stage by Plato in the *Protagoras*, so that the public at large didn't know much about them.

*Meno*

The introductory dialogue, the *Meno*, makes a transition with the previous dialogue, the *Gorgias*, by staging a character, Meno, about whom we will learn as the dialogue proceeds, that he met Gorgias and attended some of his lectures or lessons.

In opposition with the *Protagoras*, at the same position of introductory dialogue in the previous tetralogy, in which Plato had taken the time to make Socrates brilliantly describe at length the context of his conversation with Protagoras (the dialogue presents itself as the narrative of this conversation made by Socrates to a friend he happens to meet), the *Meno* plunges us without warning into an ongoing conversation between Socrates and Meno, at a point where the latter asks Socrates if, in his opinion, human excellence (*aretè*) can be taught or is the result of experience and training, or a gift of nature or still something else, and it is only through what each interlocutor says that we progressively learn who they are, what other persons join the conversation and in which environment this all takes place.

Meno is a historical character known to us, aside from what Plato tells us about him in the dialogue, through Xenophon *Anabasis*, and it may be interesting to learn a little more about him, if only to better appreciate the extraordinary talent with which Plato composes his dialogues and uses everything at his disposal to contribute to the educational goals he pursues.

So, Meno, who was still a very young man at the time Plato's dialogue is supposed to take place, was an ambitious person, ready to do anything to grab power, who only believed what he could see and touch, and uninterested in highly metaphysical speculations, as will be seen all through his conversation with Socrates. Thanks to his charms, he had become the favorite of Aristippe, prince of the city of Larissa in Thessaly, who, in spite of his youth, appointed him commander in chief of a contingent of Thessalian soldiers that were to be part of the army several Greek cities had decided to send to Asia Minor to support Cyrus the Younger, Persian prince, son of Darius, in his attempt to oust his brother Artaxerxes from the throne of Persia. Xenophon took part in this expedition, invited by the general commanding the Athenian contingent. The army of Cyrus moved from Sardis into Asia Minor toward Babylon and fought a battle against the army of Artaxerxes not far from the capital city, at Cunaxa. It is possible that the troops of Cyrus, with the help of the Greek soldiers, took the advantage in the battle, but Cyrus was killed and the final victory was for Artaxerxes. So, the Greek soldiers found themselves lost in a hostile country several thousand miles away from their home country. The Greek generals, lured into a trap by the general commanding Artaxerxes troops, possibly with the help of Meno, under the pretense of negotiating the fate of the Greek army, were killed, except, oddly enough, Meno, leaving the Greek soldiers without leaders. It is Xenophon who then took charge and managed to have them find their way home through unknown and hostile territory in a long journey, known as the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, which he relates in the *Anabasis*. The portrait of Meno by Xenophon is not flattering and obviously, Xenophon didn't hold him dear to his heart. According to him, Meno betrayed and tried to seduce the general commanding Artaxerxes army, but failed and soon afterwards was jailed and died in jail within the year.

Thus, the dialogue devised by Plato necessarily takes place before Meno's departure for Persia, but the story of this expedition was public knowledge — especially because of Xenophon's work — when Plato wrote his dialogue. Meno is staying in Athens at the time, possibly to prepare the expedition that will soon depart, coming from Larissa in Thessaly where he lives, full of preconceived ideas about a Socrates supposed to be a giver of advice and a teacher of "excellence" (*aretè*) and expecting to ridicule him with the help of a few tricks learned from Gorgias and his ilk. The fact that, in the course of the conversation, Anytus joins in, and is presented by Socrates as Meno's host suggests that Meno was perhaps staying at his home and that it is in his house that the whole dialogue takes place.

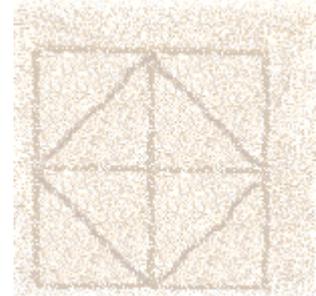
First, before answering Meno's question opening the dialogue, about the way *aretè* ("excellence" rather than the more traditional "virtue"<sup>177</sup>) can be acquired, Socrates explains him that, before answering his question, it might be a good idea to first agree on what he means by *aretè*. Meno reluctantly agrees to play the game for a while and eventually comes up with a paradox which he thinks might silence Socrates: it is impossible to learn anything since, if we don't know what we are in the process of learning, we'll be unable to recognize it if we happen to come across it, and if we already know it, we don't need to learn it! It is to counter this paradox *through facts* rather than theoretically that Socrates conducts an experiment with one of the young slaves accompanying Meno and has him discover a theorem of geometry.<sup>178</sup>

The experiment conducted by Socrates before Meno unfolds in three stages, separated from each other by brief exchanges between Socrates and Meno commenting on the progress of the experiment.

First, Socrates sets the stage by drawing on the ground a square, which he assumes, for the sake of the demonstration, to have sides two feet long, making sure that the slave, who is still almost a child, knows what a square is, then he verifies that he knows how to count by having him compute the area of the square. He then asks him what should be the length of the side of a square whose area would be double that of the square he just drew, that is, as he has him compute by himself, eight (square) feet. The boy gives without hesitation an intuitive but wrong answer: "[it's] *quite obvious that [it should be] double*", made easier by the fact that in Greek at the time, the word "square" (as in "square feet") was not used to distinguish measures of areas from measures of length, so that "feet", without modifier, was used for the measure of both lengths and areas (hence the parentheses around "square" above). Socrates then has Meno acknowledge that his young slave thinks he knows, as the fact that he answered without hesitation shows, but is in fact wrong.

In a second phase, Socrates leads the boy into acknowledging that he doesn't know. He first shows him, again with the help of diagrams drawn on the ground, that the square whose sides are four feet long is made up of four squares identical to the original square and thus that its area is sixteen (square) feet, not eight. He then suggests that he finds a length greater than two feet, but smaller than four feet, which leads the boy to propose a length of three feet. Socrates has no trouble having him acknowledge that he is wrong again, as three times three is nine, not eight. At this point, the young slave admits that he doesn't know the answer and Socrates tells Meno that he is in a better situation now than earlier, since he no longer believes that he knows what he doesn't know.

The third stage consists in having the boy find the right answer. In order to do so, Socrates draws on the ground three more squares identical to the first one composing a square of sixteen (square) feet and then cuts each one of these squares in two by drawing one of its diagonals (see figure), thus drawing in the middle still another square whose area he asks the slave to determine and which turns out to be eight (square) feet, since it is made of four halves of four (square) feet squares, thus answering the question asked by Socrates in the first place. In the commentary of this last stage made by Socrates for Meno, he doesn't pretend that the slave now « knows », but only that, if someone keeps working with him on those issues, he will end up knowing as well as any geometer.



It is important to properly understand in what manner this experiment is convincing *for us readers*, who are not bound to take Plato on his word, especially if, as is most likely, the whole story was made up by him from beginning to end. The experiment which is convincing *for us* is the one *each one of us* can reproduce *within him/herself* by moving back in time in thought

<sup>177</sup> On this word and the problems posed by its translation, see section titled "Excellence", page 31.

<sup>178</sup> I have already mentioned this lesson page 61.

to a time when he or she had not yet learned geometry and, as a child, could have given the same false answer to Socrates' question as the young slave, that the square double (in area) of a square whose sides are two feet long must have sides double in length. The salient point is not whether Socrates suggested the answer to the boy in the course of their exchange or if he found it by himself, but to understand the difference there is, in the mind of *each one of us*, between a mere opinion with no firm grounding in reason (the first intuitive answer) and thus easy to prove wrong when indeed it is, and a firm knowledge grounded in an understood demonstration, which will never again be questioned. And this difference does exist in the mind of each one of us: neither the young slave of the dialogue at the end of the experiment nor we the readers think that the square built on the diagonal has an area double that of the original square because we trust Socrates, rather because we have understood the demonstration of this "truth". This is indeed the reason why Plato can speed up toward the end of the demonstration with the young slave and cut short some steps of the complete demonstration that *we* will be able to supplement,<sup>179</sup> for what interests him is not the slave boy of the fiction, but we the real audience.

And this truth which *we* acknowledge as such is not the product of a human mind, whose it might be, that would have "invented" it by being the first to conduct this reasoning, but really a "transcendent" truth, which was true even before any human mind discovered it and stays true at all times, forcing itself upon any reasonable human mind having been taught by this demonstration.

Plato highlights full well the key role played by language in this experiment: the first question asked by Socrates, not to the boy, but to Meno, his master, is: "*Is he Greek and does he speak Greek?*" For the experiment to be possible, both Socrates and the slave must speak the same language. After having verified with his master that the slave speaks Greek, Socrates makes sure, with the help of a drawing, that he understands the word "square". But the most interesting point is when he is about to have the boy find the solution: he has him find it on the drawing *before* teaching him the technical name given to the line which answers the question! Indeed, when he draws the diagonals of the four squares, he simply draws them on the figure, talking of "*that line from angle to angle*" which "*cut in two each one of these spaces*",<sup>180</sup> and it is only after he had the boy *show* the line which is the side of the square answering the question ("*this one*", says the boy showing the line) and has double-checked the answer by asking further "*the one stretching from angle to angle in the four feet [square]?*" and getting a "Yes" answer from the boy that he adds "*Now, those knowledgeable [in such matters] indeed call it "diagonal" so that, if "diagonal" is its name, it would be on the diagonal, as you say, slave of Meno, that the space double would be formed.*"<sup>181</sup> In other words, the sought answer is not the word, but something that the word, *diametron* in Greek or "diagonal" in English, designates, something that is prior to the word and which we may talk about by circumlocution, and even see without even talking about it and designate by a mere demonstrative pronoun ("*this one*").

But we may go still further exploring the underlying implications of this experiment! For not only is it unnecessary to give a name to the line answering the question to be absolutely sure it is the right answer, but it is also impossible to express the proportion between its length and that of the side of the square under the form of a whole number or even a fraction. Indeed, this proportion is  $\sqrt{2}$  and this "number" is an irrational number, that is, it cannot be expressed as a ratio between two integers, which means that it is impossible to find a unit of measurement such that both the side and the diagonal have a length expressed as an integer in this unit. In other words, Socrates might have chosen any integer greater than two as the length of the side of the initial square, the young slave, or anybody else, would never have been able to express the length of the square double in area as a whole number. And Plato knew this and, for the

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<sup>179</sup> For instance to demonstrate rigorously that the figure made up by the four diagonals is indeed a square.

<sup>180</sup> *Meno*, 84e4-85a1.

<sup>181</sup> *Meno*, 85b4-6.

mathematicians of his time, it was indeed a problem, even possibly a scandal, challenging the concept of number itself. Indeed, for the Greeks of that time, only integers greater than one were properly speaking numbers (*arithmoi*) since, for them, numbers were the result of counting a plurality of similar units (there are four apples on this tree, or six horses in this corral). Undoubtedly, the Greeks of Plato's time knew fractions, but for them, they were not properly speaking numbers, but "ratios" between magnitudes measured by numbers that were necessarily *integers*, and these ratios were designated by the word *logos* (another of the multiple meanings of that word). And it is precisely because they used to call *alogon*, meaning both "without reason" and "without ratio", the relation between magnitudes impossible to express by a ratio between two integers that still nowadays we call "irrational" a number expressing such a relation and more generally speaking those which cannot be put under the form of fractions.

The problem posed by Socrates to Meno's slave hinted at the fact that relations between magnitudes perfectly identifiable on a drawing could not be expressed by ratios between (whole) numbers. There could thus exist, in a sense, an absolutely certain knowledge about something which was nonetheless "deprived of *logos*" (*alogos*)! Knowledge could thus concern something which transcended both words and numbers.

After this *experimental* rebuttal of his paradox by Socrates, Meno, vexed, returns to his initial question and Socrates will keep giving him answers grounded in experience. He gets Meno to agree that what can be taught is part of "knowledge" (*epistèmè*) and conversely that what can be known, in the strongest possible sense of the word implying certain and demonstrable knowledge, is part of what can be taught. But Meno must admit that the opinions about human excellence vary from one person to another and that those who pretend to teach "virtue", for instance some of the sophists, are far from being recognized as such by everyone. It is at this point that Anytus joins in the conversation, precisely to challenge this claim of the sophists, though he admits that he himself never met one and thus knows them only by hearsay, and retorts that, in his opinion, the teachers of "virtue" are all the decent people of Athens.<sup>182</sup> To answer him, Socrates takes the example (once again facts) of the sons of some of the most famous and most admired politicians of the time, Themistocles, Aristides (the father of one of the two interlocutors of Socrates in the *Laches*), Thucydides (the father of the other one, who is not the famous historian, but a politician opposed to Pericles), Pericles, to whom their fathers were unable to teach their political skills, the "excellence" which was theirs according to most Athenians, even though their own children were most likely those to whom they would be most eager to transmit this "excellence".

In order to disconcert Meno still further, Socrates concludes the discussion by introducing, aside from knowledge, right opinion and asserting that, *from the standpoint of results*, both are equivalent. To prove it, he takes an example that, directed at Meno, takes a very special flavor: he compares a guide leading travellers to Larissa knowing the way to get there to one who, without knowing the way, nonetheless manages to get them there. For the travellers, the end result would be the same in both cases and they would have reached their destination. The example may seem rather far-fetched, but what should be realized is that finding the way to Larissa without knowing it is precisely what Meno should have done after the battle of Cunaxa, rather than (unsuccessfully) trying to save his skin by betraying and abandoning to a dire fate the Thessalian soldiers he had been put in charge of by Aristides of Larissa. And that it was possible is *factually* proven by the exploit of Xenophon who did so in his place! The road to Larissa is in a way for Meno what his trial and condemnation to death are for Socrates, the test of the value of a whole life. And facing this test, subtly suggested here by Plato, the least we can say is that Meno, unlike Socrates in the face of his, didn't shine in "excellence"!

In the end, the success of the politicians taken as examples by Socrates in his discussion with Anytus, if success there was, owes nothing to some sort of knowledge, but is due at best to a

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<sup>182</sup> The expression used by Anytus is *kaloï kagathoi*, literally "beautiful and good". On this expression, see the section "To agathon: *which good are we talking about?*", page 30.

“divine share” (*theia moira*), a blessing of the gods. But if we remember that, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates challenged the admiration of his contemporaries for these great men, thinking they were not truly good leaders, even if they had won brilliant military victories or brought material prosperity on their city, because they were unable to better their fellow citizens, which should be the only objective of a *good* leader, we must conclude that this divine blessing might not be such a good thing after all! And indeed, the word *moira* used by Socrates, which I translated as “share”, which is its primary meaning, refers in such a context to the “lot” given each one by fate, to each one’s “destiny”, whether it be for better or worse.

### *Euthyphro*

The personage of Euthyphro, a kind of soothsayer and official interpreter of divine signs, is most likely a creation of Plato. But whether he invented this character or used as the interlocutor of Socrates in this dialogue a person who actually existed, his name is worth our further attention: *Euthuphrôn* is indeed derived from *euthus* (meaning both “straight” in the geometrical sense and “straightforward” in the moral sense) and *phrên*, a word designating initially the “midriff”, and, as a result in poetry, especially in Homer’s works, the “heart” as seat of the passions and eventually the “mind” as seat of mental faculties and thought, which is at the root of a verb, *phronein*, and the derived noun, *phronêsis*, which designates thought, practical intelligence and a form of reason. Euthyphro, if we decode his name, is a guy with a very materialistic and “visceral” mind having more to do with guts than with reason, but who is straightforward and absolutely sure of being right!

The dialogue takes place at the door of what may be seen as the tribunal where Socrates has been summoned for the first time following the action brought against him and where Euthyphro comes to file a murder suit against his own father in a quite far-fetched affair.<sup>183</sup> Socrates, being accused of impiety is prompt to take this occasion to consult a specialist of religious affairs about what piety is. And, as might be expected, Euthyphro is unable to give a definition of it that withstands the critical examination of Socrates, who has an easy play exploiting the multiplicity of Greek gods who are said to be constantly fighting against one another, as can be seen in Homer’s tales, or to bring forward the mercantile nature, unworthy of gods worthy of that name, of religious rites meant to buy the favors of one or another of them.

This dialogue is a perfect example of the so-called “Socratic”, or “aporetic”,<sup>184</sup> dialogues where Socrates is supposed to have failed in what is seen as a search for a dictionary type definition of the concept under examination, here piety. During the course of the dialogue, we come close to such a definition, which might be the following: “justice in our relations with gods”, which might even be acceptable to Socrates. The problem with such a definition is that it has meaning only if we are previously agreed upon what “justice” is (and it takes the whole *Republic* in ten books for Socrates to try to make us understand that) and, of course, we know what gods are! On the other hand, the criticism by Socrates of the several tentative definitions of piety in a few words put forward in the course of the dialogue increase our understanding of what piety

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<sup>183</sup> His father had let die of hunger and cold in the island of Naxos, an Athenian colony where he owned land, one of his farm labourers, who was not even an Athenian citizen and who had strangled to death a neighbor during a drunken brawl, who was thus himself a murderer, and after having locked him up in a cell where he had forgotten him while awaiting the return of a messenger sent by him to consult a seer about the way to act in such a case who had been delayed: thus the case was about an involuntary homicide committed far away from Athens by his own father on the person of a foreigner guilty of murder, something that would have stayed unknown in Athens had not Euthyphro filed his suit.

<sup>184</sup> “Aporetic” is the name given to dialogues ending on what seems to be a failure in the undertaken inquiry (usually assumed to be the search for a definition of the concept under consideration), a name derived from the Geek word *aporia* used to qualify such a situation, which means “dead end”, “situation with no way out”, from the root *poros* (“pathway, way”), from which the English word “pore” (of the skin) is derived, and the adjunction of an initial privative alpha.

might be (and not be) and of the problems posed by this concept, much more than any of those criticized “definitions” taken alone, so that, at the end of the dialogue, the one who has understood the thrust of the whole dialogue should be able to come up with such a definition, provided that he still needs such a dictionary “definition” of this word, and so, there is no need for Plato to provide it through his Socrates, since it is the dialogue which would make the definition and the concept understandable by investigating its boundaries, not the definition which would clarify the concept; and the one who still needs Socrates to dot the i's and cross the t's by giving a definition and regrets he didn't come up with one by the end of the discussion, thinking the dialogue was a failure for Socrates, shows us that he didn't understand what he was intent on doing and what was under examination in the dialogue, and thus that giving him/her such a “definition” as the crowning of the dialogue would do him/her no good and would only satisfy his/her laziness of mind! In other words, the failure, if failure there is, is not that of Socrates (and behind him, of Plato) unable to come up with the definition he is supposed to look for, but that of the reader who has understood nothing of Plato's purpose through his Socrates and would like each word to have a clear cut definition and only one meaning, the same for all.

### *Apology of Socrates*

This work is not really a dialogue, but a compilation of three speeches supposed to have been delivered by Socrates at the various phases of his trial (plea, proposal of a penalty after the verdict, speech to the judges after the death sentence). It thus puts us, without any circumstantial data, in the position of the judges at Socrates' trial, or at least at a replay in thought of it as reconstructed by Plato, for it is most unlikely that the speeches presented by Plato be a transcript true to the letter to what Socrates actually said at his trial. Plato tries to capture the *spirit* of what Socrates might have said in his defense rather than the letter and the rigorous structure of the work<sup>185</sup> behind the apparent fluidity of the speeches suggests that it is a literary work of Plato himself.

At the exact middle of the *Apology*, Socrates summarizes in this way his mission as he understands it, with a wording where we find two of the three occurrences of the word *psuchè* in the *Apology* (the last one being toward the end): it is only once dead that he will cease questioning his fellow citizens, telling whomever of them he chance meets: “*O best of men, being an Athenian, from the greatest city, most famous for wisdom and power, aren't you ashamed that you take care of material goods and the way to make them more abundant for you in the future, as well as reputation and honor, but of thought and truth and the way to make your psuchè better in the future, you don't care and don't give it a thought.*” *And if one of you disagrees and says he does care, I won't let him go at once nor will I go away, but I'll question and scrutinize him and look for proofs, and if he doesn't seem to me to possess excellence (aretèn), whatever he might say, I'll reproach him for considering most valuable what is least and least what is most. I'll do this whether the one I chance meet is young or old, foreigner or from the city, but more so with those from the city, as you are closer to me by birth. For this is what the god orders me [to do], know it well, and, as far as I am concerned, I think that never anything better happened in this city than my service to the god. For I go around you doing nothing else but convincing you, young and old alike, not to care for your body or your material goods more intensely than for the way to make your psuchè the best possible in the future, telling you that excellence (aretè) doesn't result from material goods, but [that] from excellence [result] material goods and all other good [things] for antrhòpois, both in private and public [life].”*<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> A plan of this “dialogue” can be found at page [http://plato-dialogues.org/tetra\\_3/apology/plan.htm](http://plato-dialogues.org/tetra_3/apology/plan.htm) of my Internet site “*Plato and his dialogues*”. The perfect symmetry of this plan built on the same principles as the splitting of the line of *Republic VI* and ignoring the outer splitting in three distinct speeches makes it impossible to think that the dialogue records the verbatim transcript, or even a rough transcript, of the speeches delivered by the historical Socrates at his trial.

<sup>186</sup> *Apology of Socrates*, 29d7-30b4.

And it is probably this care he was taking of trying to better his fellow citizens that led him to say in the *Gorgias* that he considered himself “one of the few, not to say the only one, in Athens to attempt to truly grasp political art and the only one among contemporaries to practice politics”,<sup>187</sup> though he knew full well that, if he happened to be called to court, he would risk death, but that it could only result from somebody committing an injustice in accusing him and that his trial would resemble that of a physician being tried by a tribunal of children on a charge brought by a cook.<sup>188</sup>

In the *Apology*, Socrates says that he never engaged in public life and that, had he done so, he would long be dead.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, his understanding of politics is that the goal of governing is not constructing bulwarks or other public buildings, enriching the city and corrupting its inhabitants, but trying to better them and doing, and inviting them to do, what is *really* best for them, that is, for their *psuchè*, even if it means dealing with them one at a time in a painstaking job that might bring upon him more animosity than gratitude on the part of his fellow citizens.

### *Crito*

At the time Socrates was condemned to death, so Phaedo tells us in the introduction to the dialogue which bears his name,<sup>190</sup> a mission had just left for the island of Delos, site of one of the most famous temples of Apollo, as each year, as a result of a vow made by Theseus as an offering of thanks for his victory over the Minotaur, and, for the duration of this travel, no execution could take place in Athens, in order for the city to stay pure. So Socrates, rather than being put to death immediately after the sentencing, as would have been the case otherwise, stayed in jail until the boat had returned from Delos.

The *Crito* takes place in Socrates' cell when his childhood friend Crito comes to tell him that the boat returning from Delos has been sighted offshore from Cape Sounion, at the tip of Attica,<sup>191</sup> and thus, should be back to Athens before dusk, which means that his execution is for the next day. He offers him one last time, before it is too late, to help him escape by bribing his jailers with the help of a few other friends, which, he says, should not be too hard and in view of which he has already made approaches.

To answer Crito, through a dialogue as usual, Socrates tries to have him understand why he refuses to flee, ending with a speech presented by him as given by the personified Laws of Athens. Thus, it is the meaning, the *logos*, of the ultimate act of Socrates, giving meaning to his whole life by putting his deeds in full coherence with his words (*logoi*) up to death, which this dialogue gives us as food for thoughts: there are no laws possible, and thus no trace of reason in social life of the *anthrôpoi*, if each one decides whether to abide by the laws or not based on the (supposed) benefit or harm they bring him/her when he/she is personally concerned by the enforcement of one or another of these laws, especially when he/she has accepted them without objecting, whether they really be just or unjust, so long as he/she is not concerned but starts objecting to them only when he/she becomes a victim of them. To violate a law is an injustice and Socrates has been condemned in the legal forms, even if unjustly, and to commit an injustice degrades and worsens the *psuchè* while suffering one can only harm the body, promised to death anyway, but does no harm whatsoever to the *psuchè*.

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<sup>187</sup> *Gorgias*, 521d6-8.

<sup>188</sup> *Gorgias*, 521e.

<sup>189</sup> *Apology of Socrates*, 32 e.

<sup>190</sup> *Phaedo*, 58a-c.

<sup>191</sup> A discreet allusion to the legend according to which it was from this cape that Aegeus, Theseus' father, had jumped to his death into the sea which now bears his name in despair after sighting the black sails of the fleet with whom his son had left for Crete to fight the Minotaur, a sign supposed to mean that his son had perished. This allusion invites us to oppose the despair of Aegeus and Crito confronted with the death of a relative or close friend to the calm of Socrates.

#### Fourth tetralogy: *psuchè*

Thus it is in the « suspended » time between the « logical » death of Socrates, become certain at the end of the *Crito* after Socrates' refusal to flee during the few remaining hours before his execution, and his “physical” death at the end of the *Phaedo*, that the central tetralogy on *psuchè*, bridge between the visible realm in which our body lives and the intelligible realm in which our mind works, takes place.

It opens, with the *Symposium*, on the story of a night in the life of Socrates, spent in the house of a character named Agathon (the word meaning “good” of which I talked at length before) making speeches on *Eros*, the power moving the *psuchè* and thus the *anthrôpos*, expanded to his whole public life through the account of it made by a drunken Alcibiades still in love with him, and ends on the story of one day in the death of Socrates, spent discussing the fate of the *psuchè* at death, enlarged to his whole inner life through his intellectual autobiography told by him in the presence, among other, of a character whose name serves as the name of the dialogue and calls to mind the idea of a dazzling light, of something shining and glorious. The trilogy *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Phaedo* investigates in turn the nature of *psuchè* (*Phaedrus*), what should guide its activity and choices of life (*Republic*) and its destiny (*Phaedo*).

##### *The Symposium*

The *Symposium* presents us with seven successive speeches made by guests at a party taking place at the home of Agathon (Mr “Good”) to celebrate his first victory in a tragedy contest, on a theme suggested by one of them, Phaedrus, namely the praise of the god *Eros*, in a staging reminiscent of nesting dolls, where what Plato relates is the story told by a certain Apollodorus (Mr “Gift from Apollo”) to someone he is walking along with, come to ask him about this past event he heard about, of the story of this party Apollodorus heard from a certain Aristodemus, who, though uninvited, had come along with Socrates to it and whose name mixes the two extreme principles of government, *aristos* (“the best”, superlative of *agathos*), found in the word *aristokratia* (“aristocracy” as the government by the best qualified), and *demos* (“people”), found in the word *dèмократia* (“democracy” as the government by the people).

The successive speakers, most of whom are mentioned in the *Protagoras* as gathered around one or another of the three sophists present in Callias' house, are Phaedrus, the father of the subject, who was among those gathered around Hippias, Pausanias, listed in the *Protagoras* as listening to Prodicus and accompanied there by a youth he seems to be in love with, who is none other than Agathon, Eryximachus, a physician having Phaedrus as one of his patients, also listed as a Hippias' listener, Aristophanes, the well known comic poet, Agathon, Socrates and finally Alcibiades, who was not invited to the party but bursts in, drunken and accompanied by a band of revelers as drunken as him, at the time Socrates is ending his speech and who will, in the speech he is asked to make by the other guests, praise, not *Eros*, but Socrates.

Without going into the details of each of the seven speeches, about which I could show that they proceed in an order similar to the order of succession of the tetralogies, I'll limit myself to a few comments on Socrates' speech, which takes the form of the story of a dialogue he says he had in his youth with a priestess from Mantinea<sup>192</sup> named Diotima (“Honor of Zeus”), whom he introduces as the one who taught him what there is to know about *Eros*. This dialogue between Diotima and Socrates describes the dialectical ascent of the *psuchè* moving step by step from purely physical love of a single beautiful body all the way to the contemplation of the beautiful itself. This progression shows how, starting from strictly corporeal drives activated by the beautiful, which is the sensible dimension of the good, experienced in beautiful things/persons taken individually, those desires can progressively be “sublimated” to reach an expression of them purely intellectual, free of any material ties, which constitutes the prelude to an intellectual

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<sup>192</sup> The name of this city, derived from *mantis*, meaning “diviner, seer, prophet”, calls to mind the art of divination.

apprehension of the good. This “ascent” toward the beautiful is more or less similar, on this abstract concept, to the ascent described in the allegory of the cave about *anthrôpoi*.

*Phaedrus* (Note of 12/19/2016: a more developed version of this section is available page 199)

The *Phaedrus*, which focuses on the nature (*phusis*) of the *psuchè*, is the only dialogue of Plato staging Socrates which takes place in the countryside rather than inside the buzzing city.<sup>193</sup> The dialogue focuses on the relation between *eros* and *logos*, that is, on the means by which *eros* may produce *logoi* and thus put to work the intellectual activity of *anthrôpoi*, that is, of the noblest part of human *psuchè*.

The starting point of the dialogue is a *logos* (“speech”) that Phaedrus just heard Lysias deliver, a *written* copy (that is, a purely material version) of which he hides under his coat, which Socrates, who is not fooled when Phaedrus starts talking enthusiastically about the speech he just heard, asks him to stop hiding and read. This speech, which is indeed a parody of Lysias’ speeches so true to its models that scholars still debate on whether it is from Plato or Lysias himself, argues the thesis that it is better to grant favors to one who doesn’t love you rather than to one who loves you, in order to avoid all the annoyances of an irrational, obsessive and jealous behavior of one who loves toward the object of his love (such a paradoxical speech could serve as a good example for the teaching of oratory art by Lysias by showing how it was possible to brilliantly defend a case which seems absurd on its face).

In order to counter Lysias’ speech, Socrates improvises successively two opposed speeches: one describing *eros* as a kind of unreasonable (*alogos*) immoderation (*hubris*) where it is the purely physical desire caused by the sight of a beautiful body and seeking only pleasure which gains control of the *psuchè* and details all its devastating consequences on the lover himself and above all on the loved one and his friends and relatives; the other looking at love as a species of *mania* (an ambiguous Greek word referring to madness or delirium as well as trance, prophetic inspiration or amorous transports) along with divination or poetic inspiration and acknowledges that not all forms of *mania* are evil and the best things come to us through *mania* when it is a divine gift, and describing through a myth in which the image of the *psuchè* as a winged chariot hitched to two horses, which I already mentioned, is found, the potentially beneficial effects of love on the *psuchè*.

From these three examples of speeches, Socrates conducts a comprehensive critic of rhetoric as understood and practiced by the most brilliant orators of the time and expounds at the same time his own understanding of what an art of speeches worthy of that name should be, describing it as a *psuchagôgia* (“psychagogy”), that is, literally, a “conduct of the soul” by means of *logos* to lead it toward what is truly best for it.

### *Republic*

I’ve already talked a lot about the *Republic* and I said that it was sort of an answer in deeds to the charges brought against Socrates at his trial replayed in the dialogue occupying the same central position in the previous trilogy, the *Apology of Socrates*: indeed, it shows us Socrates, who will someday be accused of corrupting the youth and introducing new deities in the city, keeping a bunch of youth away from a night of orgy at a festival organized by Athens to officially introduce in the city the cult of a new goddess worshipped mostly by slaves, by accompanying them at the house of a character named “Head” (*Kephalos/Cephalus*) at the request of one of his sons to spend the night discussing justice in man and in the city.

Another way of decoding the dramatic structure of the dialogue is to see it, along the same lines of what I said earlier about the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, as a confrontation between the aristocratic and the democratic “souls” of Athens, each “soul” being made up of three characters

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<sup>193</sup> In the *Laws*, the discussion takes place on the slopes of Mount Ida, but Socrates is completely absent from this dialogue.

representing each one of its parts. The democratic soul of Athens has as its *logos* a metic of Syracusan origin, an arms dealer and friend of Pericles, Cephalos, whose name means “head” and evokes the part of the human body which, as is said in the *Timaeus*,<sup>194</sup> hosts the organ of thought seat of intelligence, who lives in Piraeus, the trading harbor of Athens, and not even in the upper part of the city proper, and hosts the conversation narrated in the dialogue; it has as middle part, as *thumos*, one of Cephalus’ sons, not Lysias (mentioned in the *Phaedrus*) who is only a silent listener to the discussion taking place at his home, but Polemarchus, whose name means “War lord”, a fitting name for the “aggressive” part of the soul, and as lower, desiring part, a Thracian foreigner (coming from the same country as the goddess whose festival takes place in parallel), teacher of rhetoric like Lysias, Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, whose name means “bold, rash or arrogant fighter”, depending on the meaning chosen for *thrasus*, the origin of the first part of his name. The beginning of the *Republic* replays the scenario of the *Gorgias*, a descent from top to bottom of the *psuchè*, with Cephalus taking over the role of Gorgias, Polemarchus that of Polus and Thrasymachus that of Callicles, as Socrates successively talks, briefly, with Cephalus, who soon excuses himself to leave in order to perform some rite, asking his son to take his place in the conversation on justice with Socrates, then with Polemarchus before Thrasymachus takes over to defend a doctrine according to which justice is only good for the weak, leaders administer their flock (he indeed uses the image of a shepherd) for their own advantage and not for that of their flock, that is, a still more cynical doctrine than that of Callicles. And indeed, scholars have long noticed the great similarity between the *Gorgias* and book I of the *Republic*.

Facing this « soul » of Athenian democracy, cosmopolitan and trade-prone, taking advantage of recurrent conflicts to get richer and richer, and relying on masters of likely and convincing speech coming from all parts of the Greek world to maintain their leadership, is the aristocratic soul of Athens, instantiated, in the roles of the two horses drawing the winged chariot, by two brothers coming from one of the noblest families of Athens, Glaucon in the role of the desiring part and Adeimantus in the role of the intermediate part, the *thumos*, the two brothers of Plato, wisely controlled by a *logos* played by Socrates, an Athenian citizen son of a craftsman, that these two “aristocrats” (in the usual sense) didn’t hesitate to take as a teacher on the mere basis of the value they recognized in him, without regard to birth or family origins. At the end of this descent into the depths of the *psuchè* where we have been dragged by the unbridled desires and thirst for power of the democratic soul instantiated by Thrasymachus, the ascent toward a *logos* less vacuous than the one instantiated by a half-senile elder who is a “head” only by name, takes place at the beginning of book II through the successive speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus, expounding the notion of justice which is that of most people, who see it only as a “social” virtue seeking a balance between the wishes of anyone to satisfy one’s desires and the fear that, all other people wishing the same thing, they harm us or seek revenge of the harm we might have done to them, before asking Socrates to show them the reasons why justice should be sought for in itself even if it causes trouble or worse for us, and why the just person should be happy even if persecuted and the unjust one unhappy even if successful in life by having deceived other people.

At both ends of the long train of thought developed by Socrates, which may be read as the theatricalization of the dialogue between reason and the two other parts of the *psuchè* in its efforts to convince them of their common interest in following its recommendations, two fables answer one another: in the introductory speech of Glaucon, at the beginning of book II, the story of Gyges’ ring, which shows man trying to evade his responsibilities, and at the end of the discussion, in book X, the myth of Er, told by Socrates as a conclusion, which faces *anthrôpoi* with their responsibilities and freedom.

The story of Gyges’ ring is used by Glaucon to suggest that, if *anthrôpoi* had the power to commit injustice without being caught, all would do it. The story is short, here it goes: “*He* (the

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<sup>194</sup> See *Timaeus*, 44d; 69c-d; for the localization of each part of the *psuchè* in a distinct part of the body, see *Timaeus*, 69c-72d.

ancestor of Gyges the Lydian named in the previous phrase) was a shepherd laboring for the then ruler of Lydia and some part of the earth was shattered by a violent thunderstorm developing along with an earthquake and a chasm appeared at the place where he was pasturing. Seeing this and wondering, he went down and the fable says that he saw, among other wonders, a hollow bronze horse having openings, through which, peeping in, he saw that there was a corpse inside, as it seemed, greater than is usual for men, and wearing nothing else but a golden ring upon his hand, that he took off before leaving. When time came for the shepherds to hold their customary assembly in order to prepare their monthly report to the king about the state of the flocks, he came too, wearing this ring. While he was sitting with the others, it chanced that he moved the collet of the ring around toward himself into the inside of his hand; having done this, he disappeared from the sight of those who were sitting beside him, and they discussed him as if of someone who had left. And he wondered and once again feeling for the ring, he turned the collet outwards and, by turning it, reappeared. Reflecting upon this, he put the ring to the test to see if it indeed had such power, and he came to this conclusion that, by turning the collet inwards, he became invisible, outwards, visible. Having perceived this, he at once managed for himself to become one of the envoys to the king; upon arrival, having seduced his wife, with her help, he laid a hand on the king, murdered him and took hold of the leadership.”<sup>195</sup>

There is in this story a lot of symbolism better deciphered by comparing it to the allegory of the cave: to the freeing of the prisoner chained deep down below the surface of the earth through a natural process eased by a mentor, followed by an ascent in the direction of the sun answers the contrary movement of the shepherd led by the chance occurrence of meteorologic phenomena to descend deep down below the surface of the earth to find there the chain/ring he slips upon his own finger thinking it will free him. This descent inside the earth stands for the attempt of science to understand man based only on physical processes associated with his corporeal nature. The *anthrôpos* to which science gives us access has no *psuchè* and the bronze horse full of holes which stands for it (taking the place of the two horses of the myth of the *Phaedrus*) is motionless and unable to move the seemingly dead body he envelops, and the ring the shepherd finds on this dead body, which makes its bearer invisible, is the image of materialistic science which, in trying to explain all activities of men by physico-chemical processes, clears them of any responsibility whatsoever in their deeds.

Contrary to this, the myth of Er tells us the story of a warrior killed in a battle and returning to life a few days later, at the very time of his funeral, to tell his parents and friends what his *psuchè* has seen during these few days passed in the afterlife of death. Without going into all the details of this story much longer than that of Gyges, I will only focus on the important point, which is the moment when Er witnesses the choices of lives of souls about to reincarnate. These choices are made in the presence of the goddess Lachesis (“Destiny”), daughter of Anagkè (“Necessity”) and starts with the following announcement made by a spokesman for the goddess to the souls assembled to choose their next life: “*Proclamation (logos) of Lachesis, the virgin daughter of Anagke. Short-lived souls! This is the beginning for the mortal race of another death-bringing cycle. No daimôn will draw a lot for you but you will choose yourself a daimôn. Let the first one designated by lot choose a life to which he shall be united by necessity. But excellence (aretè) has no master; depending on whether you will value it or hold it of no value, each one will have more or less of it. The responsibility [is] in he who chooses, god [is] not responsible.*”<sup>196</sup> I leave the word *daimôn* untranslated in this text even though it has been imported into English under the variants “daimon”, “demon” or “daemon”, to make sure that the word is not tinted by twenty centuries of Christianity which have associated demons with evil and hell, an association that doesn't exist in Greek. *Daimon* is the word used by Diotoma

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<sup>195</sup> Republic II, 359d2-360b2.

<sup>196</sup> Republic X, 617d6-e5.

in the speech Socrates attributes to her in the *Symposium* to talk about *Eros*, a creature intermediate between men and gods, when she describes his genealogy and this word has no negative bias as is the case with the demons of Christianity. A better analogy in Christian imagery with that which Socrates has in mind with the *daimones* he talks about here, if we absolutely want to refer to such an imagery, would be guardian angels, but then the bias might be excessive toward the good, unless we remember that Satan is a fallen angel. Leaving aside these problems of translation, what Plato wants to suggest here is that each *anthrôpos* has, associated with him/herself in this mortal life, something “divine” which may help him/her to conduct his/her life, but without encroaching upon his/her freedom. Concerning the final part of the proclamation, it is perfectly clear in its concision, even greater in Greek than in English (four words: *aitia helomenou, theos anaitos*, literally “responsibility of [the one] choosing, god non-responsible”): even if there is a part of any human life coming from necessity, each *psuchè* has the possibility of doing either something good or something bad with what falls upon it through a combination of drawing of lots that determine the order in which souls choose their future life and free choice, since there are more “lives” to choose from than *psuchai* having to choose, so that even the last one having to choose still has a choice, even if it is more limited than for the first one.

### *Phaedo*

If the *Republic* is the *logical* center of the whole set of the 28 dialogues and encases at its center the answer to the question asked at the beginning: “who is fit to rule?” (the philosopher, according to the text quoted as epigraph to this paper), the death of Socrates at the end of the *Phaedo* takes place at its *physical* center.<sup>197</sup>

I have already referred to this dialogue<sup>198</sup> and the multiplicity of converging arguments (not “proofs”) it presents in favor of the immortality of the *psuchè*. Here, I will only focus on one section located at the center of the dialogue which is a sort of testament of Socrates to the living. This section is highlighted in several ways, aside from being at the center of the dialogue, to better show its importance. In this dialogue which is an account made by Phaedo (“Shining”) to Echecrates (“Holding power”) and a few other inhabitants of the city of Phlius of the death of Socrates,<sup>199</sup> of which he himself was a witness, the section I’m referring to is preceded by an interruption of Phaedo’s story by Echecrates, the only such interruption by a listener in the whole story, and it takes place inside the only direct dialogue between Socrates and Phaedo. It is a warning by Socrates against the risk of what he calls *misologia*, that is, hatred of *logos* that could result from the discovery of the fact that it cannot give us absolute certainty about the answers to the most vital questions concerning the way to lead a good life, refusal of any form of reasoning, of reasoned behavior, simply because reason cannot give us *all* the answers, which would be the most extreme form of misanthropy, if it is true that what specifies *anthrôpoi* as such is precisely the fact of being endowed with *logos*. This parenthesis in the development of his arguments clearly shows that Socrates is not fooled by them, that he knows they are not fool-proof and binding, but that, strengthening one another, they make up the least wobbly scaffolding he managed to assemble to “support” his life and give it meaning. And the whole dialogue is but

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<sup>197</sup> When all the dialogues are put one after the other in the order I suggest, there are as many pages of text from the *Alcibiades* to the end of the *Phaedo* as there are in all the dialogues following the *Phaedo*.

<sup>198</sup> See page 12.

<sup>199</sup> The city of Phlius is located in North-East Peloponnese near Corinth. According to a tradition mentioned by Cicero (*Tusculanes*, V, 8-9), who ascribes it to a disciple of Plato, Heraclides Ponticus, it is in the city of Phlius that Pythagoras was supposed to have coined the new word *philosophos* to describe himself to the local tyrant Leo. This same anecdote is found in the life of Pythagoras by Diogenes Laertius (*Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, VIII, 8), who, in the prologue of his work (12), tells us that Pythagoras was the first to use this word and the word *philosophia* “for no one [human being] is sophon (“wise”), but only god”. It is possible that this anecdote, if it was known to Plato, played a role in his choice of this city as the place where his dialogue about the death of Socrates takes place.

the ultimate example he gives of the way in which *logos* should be used on issues which go beyond its power, even in situations where it is no longer the moment to treat oneself with fine talk having no grip on the real world: Socrates is talking about death moments before dying, that is, at a time when this topic is the most burning issue for him!

### The fifth tetralogy: words and speeches

It is thus the death of Socrates which opens for us the gates of the intelligible, investigated in the next two tetralogies, which will guide us through the last two segments of the line of the *Republic* and lead us to what is the counterpart in the intelligible realm of the condemnation to death and execution of Socrates by the multitude of his fellow citizens accomplished *in deeds* in the visible realm: the parricide of Parmenides committed *in words* by a single one of his fellow citizens in the *Sophist*, the dialogues which occupies in this group of two tetralogies the position occupied by the *Apology of Socrates* in the group of two tetralogies going through the first two segments, those of the visible: central dialogue of the second tetralogy.

The fifth tetralogy deals with words and their relations with what they are images of in the introductory dialogue, the *Cratylus*, then of speeches (*logoi*) by focusing on three kinds of speeches: the speech of the poet talking to the “guts” (*Ion*), the eristic speech used in oratory contests where the goal is only to ridicule the opponent, submitted to Socrates’ criticism (*Euthydemus*), the conventional political speech (*Menexenus*).

#### *Cratylus*

The *Cratylus* is a dialogue which may discourage at first reading and look minor insofar as the greatest part of it develops fanciful etymologies suggested by Socrates for a whole bunch of proper names (of gods and heroes) and of common names whose relevance is not obvious and it’s only toward the end, in the discussion with Cratylus, the character giving his name to the dialogue, that, for the reader who was patient enough to follow through till that point, things seem to become a little more serious. Yet, it’s a fundamental dialogue insofar as it invites us to investigate the elementary building blocks of *logos*, words, and thus lays the groundwork for a proper understanding of it. And for those who manage to go beyond the first impression of boredom produced by the first reading of most of the dialogue, it poses major questions and offers food for thought and elements of answers well worth our consideration. This is the reason why I’ll spend a little more time on this dialogue.

The *Cratylus* stages Socrates called for advice in a discussion between Cratylus and Hermocrates on the question whether names are mere conventions or there is for each thing one and only one name fitting for it. Cratylus, a philosopher of the Heraclitean school, who, according to tradition, was one of the masters of Plato before he met Socrates, asserts that each person or thing has a right name (in a given tongue<sup>200</sup>) which is the same for all and that, short of using this name to talk about it, the speaker only produces noises devoid of any meaning.<sup>201</sup> Facing him, Hermogenes, the younger brother of Callias, one of the richest men in Athens<sup>202</sup>, upholds that names are merely arbitrary conventions that may be changed at will.

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<sup>200</sup> The clause “for both Greeks and barbarians” (*kai Hellèsi kai barbarois*) at 383b1 is ambiguous: it may as well mean that the right name is unique for both Greeks and barbarians (which should be understood without disparaging meaning, as merely designating those who don’t speak Greek) as that there is, in each tongue, a unique name which is the right name for each thing, but that it may be different from one tongue to another.

<sup>201</sup> He is said to have pushed this way of thinking so far that he came to the conclusion that the only thing one could do with words was to name things one sees, any attribution of something else than its right name to that thing being impossible since the attribute is not its name and thus is not fitting to it, and eventually that it was not even necessary to talk, that pointing a finger was enough, so that he ended his life in silence. Thus, Plato could not find a better interlocutor for Socrates to examine the issue of the possibility of *logos*.

<sup>202</sup> Socrates mentions Callias and his wealth during the course of the conversation, alluding in particular to the outrageous amount of money he spent to listen to the lessons of the most famous sophists (391d9-c5), lessons

At the start of the discussion, Cratylus objects to the fact that Hermogenes, meaning “from the race of Hermes”, would be the right name of his interlocutor, without deigning to explain why, probably, as Socrates will soon suggest, because he thinks Hermogenes is not “from the race of Hermes” as the etymology of his name suggests, and as the concerned person will end up admitting, acknowledging he is not a good crafter of speeches (*logoi*), when, later in the conversation, Socrates tries to explain the name of Hermes by its proximity with the word *hermèneus* (“interpreter, one who explains, makes understand”, root of the English word “hermeneutics”), seeing his name as a name *peri logon* (“having to do with *logos*”) fit for a god whose function is to be messenger (*aggelos*) of Zeus, his father, toward men, which requires that he master the power of *logos* (of both words and speech).

Socrates successively criticizes these two extreme theses, starting with the one held by Hermocrates, the purely arbitrary nature of names. In order to do that, he first has him acknowledge that language implies a minimum of agreement between persons so they can understand one another and that, if indeed nothing prevents him from calling “man” what everybody else calls “horse” and conversely, he would, in so doing, have a hard time making himself understood by those who do the contrary, that is, everybody else. In a second time, which occupies the greatest part of the dialogue, in order to show Hermocrates what makes “*the natural rightness of names*”,<sup>203</sup> he pushes the game of Cratylus to the limits of absurdity through a series of fanciful etymologies, pretending to justify the rightness of each name thus analyzed, proper name of hero or god as well as common name, by deriving it from other names whose rightness remains to be ascertained<sup>204</sup> or, for “primitive” names (those which are not derived from earlier names), by the similitude between the sound produced by certain letters and the phenomena to be named. But, in this long survey of etymologies, he is careful to periodically arouse doubts in the mind of the reader about the seriousness of this “knowledge” which seems to suddenly fall upon him as heaven-sent against his will (396c3-d1): he begins by saying, as he does in other dialogues, that he doesn’t know where this rightness comes from and is only seeking it with his interlocutor (391a5-6), but all that follows shows us an unusual Socrates, claiming wisdom and relying on sources that he does not usually consider sources of wisdom and knowledge: he mentions sophists (391b9-c5) but, lacking means which would have allowed him to pay for their outrageously expensive lessons, contents himself with quoting Homer and other poets (391c10-d1); next, he attributes his sudden outburst of wisdom to the influence of Euthyphro, a kind of seer and interpreter of divine signs who makes the assembly laugh at him when he practices his craft there, the very one who, in the dialogue bearing his name, is unable to tell Socrates, accused of impiety, what piety is at the very time he is suing his own father for murder in the name of piety (396d4-8, and also 399a1, 400a1, 407d6-9, 409d1-3);<sup>205</sup> he suggests that this inspiration has made him still wiser than usual, qualifying his thoughts with an adverb, *kompôsôs*, whose meaning is often deprecative, suggesting excessive subtlety, a cleverness which may be deceptive (399a3-5); he doesn’t hide that some of his explanations are pulled out of a hat and some others are improvised for the occasion (399d10); he multiplies the claims of wisdom contrary to his usual claim of ignorance (401e5); he admits that he is at times joking (406b8-c3) and does all this only to please Hermocrates (408e2-4); he calls some of his commentaries contrivances (409d3-4, 416a4, 421c9-d2); and at the end, when Cratylus joins the conversation, he says he is amazed by his own wisdom and find it hard to beleive (428d1-2). In a word,

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that he himself, with his small means, couldn’t afford (384b2-c2). It is in Callias’ house that the dialogue imagined by Plato in the *Protagoras* takes place.

<sup>203</sup> *Tên phusei orthotèta onomatôn*, 391a3.

<sup>204</sup> See 425d1-426b3.

<sup>205</sup> See *Euthyphro*, 3b9-c2. If, as I suggest in the comment of this dialogue, Euthyphro is a character invented by Plato, there would be a good deal of humor on his part in mentioning in the *Cratylus* as added guarantor of Socrates’ words, after invoking the most famous poets, Homer and Hesiod (mentioned a few lines earlier, at 396c4), a fictitious character!

we should not take too seriously all these etymologies, even if, with Plato, a game may hide unexpected teachings, not necessarily where we might expect them at first glance.

After having delivered a speech which should be dear to Cratylus' heart, Socrates moves to the critical examination of his thesis in an infinitely more serious discussion which, starting from an agreement on the fact that words are imitations (*mimèmata*, 423b6, ...), kinds of "images/likenesses" (*eikones*, 430c3, ...) of what they refer to, not the "things" (*ta pragmata*) referred to themselves, investigates all the implications of this notion of "image/likeness", especially the fact that an image/likeness is not a "clone" of the original and thus may be more or less similar to it in a way that is not "all or nothing" as Cratylus would like to have it for names. In the background of this whole discussion is the problem of the possibility of false discourse (*pseudès logos*), which cannot boil down to a binary choice between using the right names and producing only meaningless sounds. There is also the problem of the role of language in knowledge, clearly stated by Socrates when he asks how those who assigned the first names knew what they were about to name if they didn't yet have names at their disposal (438a11-b3; b4-b7), which forces us to admit that it is possible to know things otherwise than through names<sup>206</sup> and leads Socrates to ask Cratylus whether, in those conditions, it is better to start from the image to examine simultaneously if it is a resembling image and the truth about what it is an image of, or to start from the truth to simultaneously investigate it and examine to what extent the image found in its name resembles it. In other words, should we start from the names to learn the truth about things, or from the truth about things to evaluate the adequacy of the words and the speeches we make with them?

What should we retain of this conversation and how should we understand the position of Plato's Socrates in this debate? The first thing worth noticing is that Plato, who holds the pen, if we set aside the most often deliberately extravagant nature of the *examples* he gives, shows a quite remarkable understanding of the *principles* of linguistics. He perfectly understood that languages don't fall ready to use from heaven,<sup>207</sup> that some identifiable processes explain the evolution of spelling and pronunciation and the changes they induce over time on words,<sup>208</sup> that all words are not of the same kind, some being "primitive" and others "compound", resulting from the combination of more primitive words (see 433d4-5), that it is easy, with the help of simple associative processes, to create new words easily understood by those who first hear or read them (something Plato is familiar with in his dialogues).<sup>209</sup> In short, he perfectly masters the principles of the *evolution* of languages, without at all being able to explain their *origin*.

In fact, if we think about it, once we admit that languages are in perpetual evolution, nothing forces us to choose between these two extreme approaches and we may perfectly admit that the origin of some primitive words is not the same as that of derived or compound words which came in use later, as does Socrates, who deals with primitive names in a specific way toward the end of his etymological delirium, since most of the explanation given so far don't work with them. But this doesn't invalidate some of the explanations, or at least some of the processes, described earlier. Thus for instance, the explanation Socrates gives at 399a9-b3 on how the expression (*rhèma*) *Dii philos* ("friend of Zeus") became the name (*onoma*) *diphilos* is quite acceptable, as would be a similar explanation of the formation of the words *philosophos* and *philosophia* from *philos* ("friend") and *sophos* ("wise")/*sophia* ("wisdom").

<sup>206</sup> This refers us to the *Meno* and its young slave, who finds the line on which the square double is built without knowing its name (see above, page 61).

<sup>207</sup> At 425d3-8, Socrates refuses to call upon gods, like at the theater with a *deus ex machina*, to hold them responsible for the rightness of primitive names from which all others derive.

<sup>208</sup> Referring several times to the "contrivance" consisting in attributing a "barbaric" origin to a name he can't explain, he shows that he is quite conscious of such heritages and contaminations.

<sup>209</sup> The *Sophist*, and to a lesser extent the *Statesman*, in the application of the method of division, give multiple examples of neologisms perfectly understandable, built to give names to domains of activity which have first been clearly bounded before a name is given them.

But in the end, for Plato's Socrates, and thus for Plato behind him, the problem as posed by Hermocrates and Cratylus is badly worded and the question is not to figure out what the origin of names is, as if knowing this origin might help us understand those words and, more importantly, understand what they refer to, but to realize that words as mere words can teach us nothing by themselves on what they try to refer to. It is not enough to understand that words are not what they refer to, which is not too hard to understand as soon as we think about it, we must also realize that words are not « images » in the classical sense of the word and that, as words, that is, when spoken, sequences of sounds, and, when written, sequences of elementary graphic signs called letters, they have absolutely *nothing* in common with what they pretend to refer to. A man has absolutely nothing in common with the sequence of sounds produced by a Greek uttering the word *anthrôpos* or an American uttering the word "man", or with the sequence of graphic signs corresponding to the Greek letters alpha, nu, theta, rho, omega, pi, omicron, sigma or to the letters m, a, n. And if Plato has his Socrates talking to Cratylus use the word *eikôn* ("image/likeness")<sup>210</sup> in reference to names, it is to better put to rest the idea that a word might be an "image", or could have any "likeness" whatsoever, with what it refers to: to overcome the enemy, one has to meet him face to face. To kill the idea that words are *eikones*, there is no use beating around the bush and you better dare use the word to better evidence the ridicule of such a way of thinking. In fact, Plato goes to great lengths to vary his vocabulary when talking of the relation between words and what they "refer to". If the verb *sêmeinein* ("show by a sign, signify") is frequent in the *Cratylus*, since it includes 40 of the 96 occurrences of this verb in all the dialogues, that is, about half, Plato seems to deliberately avoid the word *sêmeion* ("sign"), which is found only 4 times in the *Cratylus*,<sup>211</sup> to designate the relation of a word to its referent. He rather does it by alternating three registers:

- the register of exhibition, manifestation, showing, with the word *dêlôma*, "means of making known", rare in the dialogues (11 occurrences in all, 8 of whom in the *Cratylus*, between 423a8 and 435b2<sup>212</sup>), derived from the verb *dêloun*, "to make known, disclose, reveal", itself derived from the adjective *dêlos* meaning "visible, manifest, clear, plain"; it is the word used by the Stranger from Elea in the *Sophist* to talk about the two ways of making the "what it is (*ousia*)" clear through sounds, nouns and verbs;

- the register of imitation, mime, with the word *mimêma* (11 occurrences, all between 423b6 et 437b7<sup>213</sup>) and, to a lesser extent, the word *mimesis* (4 occurrences, between 423c and 427b<sup>214</sup>);

- the register of likeness, of image, with the word *eikôn* already mentioned (19 occurrences between 430c3 and 439b1<sup>215</sup>), generally in comparison with the work of painters.

<sup>210</sup> It occurs 19 times between 430c3 and 439b1 in the discussion on the status of words with regard to what they refer to (430c3, 430e5, 431c11, 431c12, 431d5, 431d6, 432b2, 432b4, 432b6, 432c4, 432c7, 432d1, 432d2 (2 fois), 433c5, 439a3, 439a7, 439a8, 439b1). Before this, the word has been used at 400c7, in the explanation of the word *sôma* ("body") and at 424e3 in relation with pictures made by painters.

<sup>211</sup> *Sêmeion* occurs 42 times in the dialogues, and of these 42 occurrences, only 4 are found in the *Cratylus*: 395a7, in the explanation of the name of Agamemnon, in the sense of "proof"; 415a5, in the explanation of the word *mêchanê* ("contrivance"), in which Socrates suggests an explanation of what the word "is a sign of (*sêmeion einai*)"; 427c5, where Socrates, talking about the symbolism of letters in the creation of primitive words, refers to the need the maker of names had of "the sign o (*tou ou semeiou*)" to name the "round (*goggulon*)", and similarly of an appropriate "sign" to give a name to each being (427c8). In those last two occurrences, the letters themselves are "signs" of notions in the names of which they occur.

<sup>212</sup> 423a8, 423b5, 433b3, 433d2, 433d7, 433d8, 435a2, 435b2. The other occurrences in the dialogues are at *Sophist*, 261e5 and 262a3 (when the Stranger from Elea defines *logos* as a combination of nouns and verbs) and *Laws* VII, 792a3 (in reference to the way in which infants make their feelings clear through cries and tears).

<sup>213</sup> 423b6, 423b9, 430a10, 430b4, 430b8, 430b10, 430d4, 430e10, 431a3, 437a9, 437b7.

<sup>214</sup> 423c9, 423d8, 424b9, 427b1. *Mimêma* refers to a specific instance of imitation while *mimesis* refers to the act of imitating as such, with no reference to any particular instance of imitation.

<sup>215</sup> See note 210.

This whole discussion on the relationship between names and what they purport to designate starts with Hermogenes when Socrates reaches a point where he wonders what might be the origin of the oldest and most primitive names (*ta prôta tôn onomatôn*, “the first among names”), which cannot be searched in composition between still older names. So, implicitly starting from the primitive role of words which is to make *dialogos*, that is, communication between people, possible, he asks Hermogenes how people unable to talk could do to “*make things clear to one another*” (*dèloun allèlois ta pragmata*, 422e3), taking the example of dumb persons, who are able to “*make signs with their hands and their head and the rest of their body*” (*sèmainein tais chersì kai tèi kephalèi kai tòì allòì sòmati*, 422e4-5), thus making their body a “*means of making known*” (*dèlôma*, 423a8, first occurrence of this word) what they “*mimic*” (*mimèsamenou*, 423b1, announcing *mimèma*, whose first occurrence is at 423b6).<sup>216</sup> He attempts next to adapt this « mimicking » in the register of voice and sound, which is the prime medium of *logos*, keeping the idea of imitation, to quickly come to the conclusion that, if it were through a voiced imitation that animals had to be named, then it is those who mimic the sounds produced by these animals, for instance the bleat of a sheep or the crowing of a rooster, who would be naming these animals. In other words, it is not by the imitation of sensible properties, produced sounds or visible shapes, that we name those they are properties of and naming should not be confused with singing (voiced imitation) or painting (imitation of visible shapes, colors and so on). But, despite what his search for similarities between the sound and/or the shape of some letters and phenomena for which names are needed might suggest, this approach is as ridiculous as the previous ones, as he ends up showing himself through counter examples going in the direction opposite to that of earlier examples.

Eventually, we must get used to the idea that names cannot teach us anything about what they are names of, that they are only arbitrary, but agreed upon, means of referring to what we are talking about to make dialogue and mutual understanding possible between us in view of action. It is false to pretend with Cratylus that “*he who would know the names would also know the things*” (*hos an ta onomata epistètai, epistasthai kai ta pragmata*, 435d5-6) and to think that a sequence of uttered sounds or of elementary signs drawn on an appropriate surface could teach us anything about what we associate those sounds or letters with by shared convention is quite laughable (see 425d1-3, 433b2-3<sup>217</sup>), as is laughable the thought that names force what they name to resemble them in every way (432d5-9).<sup>218</sup> And indeed, no farther than the first lines of the dialogue, Plato throws a few lines to prepare us to the idea that we should abandon this way of thinking. It is probably not mere chance if the dialogue opens on a dispute over a *proper* name, that of Hermogenes questioned by Cratylus. Indeed, investigating why any man is called “man” or any horse “horse” (385a6-10) is a completely different question from that of seeking to know why Cratylus is called “Cratylus”, Socrates “Socrates” or Hermogenes “Hermogenes” (383b2-7)! For if there is a case where we know perfectly well who chooses the name

<sup>216</sup> *Dèloun* (“make known”) and *dèlôma* (“means of making known”) imply, more than the other registers of words used by Socrates, that of image or even that of mime, one or more interlocutors to which a speaker is trying to “make known” something. It is indeed the *dialegesthai* (“the fact of talking to one another”) which is first with regard to *logos*, and thus for the words it is made of.

<sup>217</sup> Socrates tells Cratylus: “*Don't agree that the name is a means of making known a thing through syllables and letters (mè homologei dèlôma sullabais kai grammasi pragmatos onoma einai)*”, adding that it is not possible to maintain at the same time this proposition and that according to which the only name that is right is the one reproducing exactly all the features of the thing, since it would imply that the whole universe boils down to syllables and letters. In fact, the problem is to understand in which sense we may say that a word is a *dèlôma*, a “means of making known” what it refers to.

<sup>218</sup> This way of thinking which Socrates ridicules here is, in passing, an implicit answer to Cratylus about the name of Hermogenes: because his parents, neither of whom is Hermes or a descendant of Hermes, decided to call one of their sons “Hermogenes”, does that choice force the person so named to conform in all points to what his name implies? That the name of a child may more or less influence his development and character is more than likely, but experience shows that children bearing the same (first) name are not all clones of one another.

and how arbitrary is this choice, it is indeed the case of the choice of name for a child by his parents at birth. For if in most cases the parents don't create the name of their child from scratch, they choose it at a time when it is impossible to know whether or not the underlying meaning of the chosen name will turn out to be relevant once the child has grown up, when, as is the case for most Greek names,<sup>219</sup> the name is formed on roots having a meaning in usual language. And anyway, it could at most stress one character trait of the person bearing it. What would we know of Socrates if we only knew his name? What does the sequence of letters pi, lambda, alpha, tau, omega, nu, or, in English, the sequence p, l, a, t, o teach us about Plato? What's more, Hermogenes stresses the arbitrariness that exists in this matter by taking the even more telling example of slaves whom each successive master calls by a different name to adapt to his own habit of using the same name for all the successive slaves he owns (384d5-7).<sup>220</sup>

The second line thrown by Plato is the (probably deliberately) ambiguous mention “for both Greeks and barbarians” (*kai Hellèsi kai barbarois*) at 383b1, which poses from the start the problem of the multiplicity of languages, a fact which complicates the task, not only of those who, like Cratylus, think that each thing has one and only one right name, but also of whoever thinks that the name teaches us something about what it is the name of, since the same thing may have as many names as there are languages spoken by men, which implies, if the name is supposed to teach us something about what it is the name of, that each name teaches us something different about what it is only one of the many possible names used to name it.<sup>221</sup>

And what is true for the « primitive » names, the fact that they teach us nothing on what they are associated with, stays true, despite appearances, for “compound” names whose composition may be analyzed. So, for instance, with the names *philosophos* and *philosophia*: one way of reading the section of the *Republic* corresponding to what Socrates calls the “third wave”, from 473c6 toward the end of book V till the end of book VII, is to look at it as a long analysis of the fact that it is not enough to know that *philosophos* means “friend (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*)” to reach an agreement on what a philosopher is!<sup>222</sup> The meaning given to this word by most people has indeed nothing in common with the meaning given to it by Plato's Socrates. The word *philosophos* itself teaches us nothing about what Plato has in mind when using this word, and only redirects us toward notions, *philia* and *sophia*, as problematic as the notion of *philosophos* and on which their names teach us nothing.

It is not through their intrinsic meaning, if ever such a thing exists, that words “talk” to us, but through the way we use and combine them in *dialogue* geared toward action. The choice made by Plato of the word he uses most often to refer to the “makers” of names is, from this standpoint, particularly telling: this word is *nomothetès*, whose etymological meaning is “setter (*thetès*) of laws (*nomoi*)”, that is, “lawmaker”. There are indeed 20 occurrences of it in the *Cratylus*,<sup>223</sup> aside from words or combinations of words more specific, used only once or twice

<sup>219</sup> I have already mentioned the fact that “*Hermogenès*” means “of the race of Hermes”; “*Sòkratès*” means “sure/infallible/dependable (*saos/sòs*) power (*kratos*)” and “*Kratulos*” is derived from *kratos* (“power”) with the adjunction of a hypocoristic suffix, that is, a suffix adding an idea of endearment (as for instance in English to go from “dad” to “daddy”).

<sup>220</sup> The problem of proper names in the *Cratylus* is not limited to questions about the relevance of the name of the interlocutors in the dialogue, initiated in the first few lines of the dialogue, since Socrates, in the etymological section, starts with proper names, those of Homeric gods and heroes.

<sup>221</sup> Socrates returns to this problem of the multiplicity of languages when he asks the question on the nature of the “name-makers” at 388d6ff., by admitting that there may be good name-makers among the Greeks as well as among the barbarians (389d8-390a9, and 390c2-4).

<sup>222</sup> It is already the role of the *Lysis*, no later than the first tetralogy, to investigate the possible meanings of *philos* (“friend”) and that of the *Charmides* to reflect on what might be *sophia* (“wisdom”), in its juvenile version, *sòphrosunè* (“soundness of mind, prudence, moderation, self-control”). And these two dialogues show that, in both cases, the answer is far from being evident and an agreement between interlocutors hard to arrive at.

<sup>223</sup> 388e1, 388e4, 389a2, 389a5, 389d5, 389d9, 390a4, 390a7, 390c2, 390d4, 393e7, 404b3, 404c2, 408b1, 427c8, 429a1, 429b1, 431e4, 431e7, 438b6

each, such as *onomatourgos* (“name-maker”, 389a1), probable neologism forged by Plato for the occasion and used only once, there, in all the dialogues,<sup>224</sup> *onomatôn thetês* (“setter of names”, 389d8),<sup>225</sup> *dèmiourgos onomatôn* (“craftsman of names”, 390e2, 431e1-2), or else *ho themenis prôtos ta onomata* (“the first one to have set the names”, 436b5), *ton tithemenon ta onomata* (“the one who sets the names”, 436c1, where it is Cratylus who is talking, and 438a4-5, where Socrates reuses this expression), to end up at 438c4 with the expression *ho theis* (“the one who set”, implied “the names”),<sup>226</sup> to talk about the one Cratylus considered to be a *theos* (“god”), the one who would have made the first names without having yet any names at his disposal to know things, Socrates bringing close to one another these two quite similar words (*theis* and *theos*) in the same phrase to play with this similarity at the very time he accuses this divine maker of contradiction.

This variety in wording going so far as neologism (*onomatourgos*) is meant to help us understand that, if Plato prefers the word *nomothetês*, to which he always returns,<sup>227</sup> it is not because he lacks another word, but as a result of a deliberate choice the reason of which it is our task to uncover. And this reason is not only that language is part of the “custom” (one of the possible meanings of *nomos*. For sure, in order to justify the use of the word *nomothetês*, introduced at 388e1, Socrates has Hermocrates admit that it is *ho nomos* which provides us with the words we use (388d12), playing with the multiplicity of meanings of the word *nomos*, which means “usage, custom” as well as “law”. But if he chose the word *nomos* to talk about “usage” at that point, rather than for instance the word *ethos*, more limited to the sense of “custom, usage”, used by Hermocrates at the beginning of the dialogue, at 384d7, as a matter of fact in association with *nomos*, and reused by Cratylus toward the end of the dialogue, at 434e4, where Socrates explains what it means in the case of words, it is precisely to lead to the word *nomothetês*, which he uses immediately after, taken in its usual meaning of “lawmaker” when he says that it is “of the craftsmen, the one which most rarely occurs among human beings” (*hos dè tôn dèmiourgôn spaniôtatos en anthropous gignetai*, 389a2-3). In fact, by strongly insisting on the word *nomothetês*, Plato wants us to take this word in its usual sense, and thus *nomos* in the sense of “law” in order to understand that language, more than a mere “usage”, is the first “law” by which we are bound to abide from early childhood, the one which sets a frame for all other laws, which are all formulated with words whose meaning is “imposed” upon us by our native tongue. Language, and thus words it is made of, shape our ways of thinking and our

<sup>224</sup> It is somewhat spicy to see Plato's Socrates, at the very time he tells Hermogenes that creating names is not within reach of just anybody, create a word, easily understandable by his interlocutor for that matter since it is built after the model of *dèmiourgos* (“worker for the benefit of the people (*dèmos*)”, that is, “craftsman”, which he uses in the next line of the same statement), *xulourgos* (“wood (*xulon*)-worker”), *cheiourgos* (“one who works with his hands (*cheir*)”), *panourgos* (“one who can do everything (*pan*)”, that is, “wicked, knavish” or “clever, smart, cunning”), and so on, that is, by addition of the suffix *-ourgos*, derived from *ergon* (“work”), to a word naming what the work is about!

<sup>225</sup> Even if it is not a neologism, *thetês*, a substantive derived from the verb *tithenai* meaning “to set, put, place, lay down”, is nonetheless a rare word of which this is the only occurrence in all of Plato's dialogues. The only other reference found in the corpus available on the Perseus site is in a work of Isaeus, with a probably technical/judicial meaning referring to the one entrusting one of his belongings as a deposit or security to someone else. When he doesn't invent a word, Socrates seems to purportedly use rare words whose meaning he adapts for the needs of this discussion on “makers” of words.

<sup>226</sup> *Theis* is the active present participle of the verb *tithenai* (“to put”) at the masculine singular nominative, here used as a substantive by the addition of the article: literally, *ho theis* means “the [one] setting”. At 397d, Socrates didn't use this similarity to explain the origin of the word *theos*, but the proximity with the verb *thein* (“to run”), in a fanciful etymology made to please the holder of universal mobilism that Cratylus was, as a follower of Heraclitus. But if Cratylus remembers this etymology it is one more example of what Socrates just showed him, the fact that the same letters may suggest completely contrary things, since *theis*, a form of the verb *tithenai* meaning “to set”, suggests an idea of stability while *thein*, “to run”, suggests an idea of movement.

<sup>227</sup> So, at 431e1-5, in the discussion with Cratylus, Socrates, immediately after using the words *dèmiourgos onomatôn*, is quick to add: “now, of this one, *nomothetês* was the name” (*oukoun toutôi ho nomothetês èn onoma*).

understanding of the world; they convey the habits and customs of the city where we live, and all the other laws it imposes upon us. For sure, Plato doesn't assume that language was invented by a lawmaker such as Cleisthenes or Solon, not even by a mythical king such as Minos, and what he is interested in is not the origin of language, which is a matter of history turning us toward the past and whose discovery would teach us nothing of value to live our life in trying to become as good as possible a human being, but the understanding of the fundamental role played for us by language, *logos*, a prerequisite to its proper use. So long as we are not conscious of the constraints put upon us by language, even stronger than that of laws, which we can disobey, so long as we don't understand that language is at the same time the tool which gives us access to the outside world and the screen which hides it from us, so long as we don't realize how tightly we are « prisoners » of language and that we cannot proceed as if it were transparent between us and things, it is impossible for us to use it properly and to avoid its traps and constraints that are stronger than those of all other laws.

Another facet of language that Plato wants us to become conscious of by attributing its pater-nity to a *nomothetès* is its “social” dimension. To say that it is a lawmaker who sets up language is to say that language assumes a social life already established, and thus that man is an animal endowed with *logos* only so long as he is *first* already a “political” animal living in society. And thus, it is to say that *logos* has its source in *dialogos*, or rather in *to dialegesthai*, in the interactions it makes possible between “fellow citizens” in view of action and life in community. For the language to appear and develop, what is needed is a social organization broad and enduring enough over several generations, even more than a “maker” of names, since it is the *shared* and lasting use of words which fixes their meaning. If Plato calls *nomothetès*, “lawmaker”, the one who molds names, he subjects his activity of mere maker of tools, similar to the activity of the shuttle maker for the weaver, of the lyre maker for the musician or of the shipbuilder for the ship captain, to the control of the one he calls *dialektikon* (390b1-d8) after having described him as the one capable of using words in mastering the art of asking and answering questions (*ton de erôtan kai apokrinesthai epistamenon*, 390b10). He is not talking here of a specific technique which would constitute “dialectic”, but simply of the proper use of *to dialegesthai*, the *activity* of “dialoguing”, which implies questions and answers. *Logos* is not intended for monologues, for nice speeches which impress and move the crowds, nor even for inner “monologues” conducted by a wise person with oneself in the isolation of an ivory tower, but to exchange questions and answers, the only way for us to validate the meaning of words by submitting them to the test of shared experience. To be *dialektikon* is not to be a “dialectician”, neither really knowing what that word means nor what might be a “technique” called “dialectic” in which he would be a specialist, it is more simply to master the art of dialogue. But Plato's dialogues show us that it is not that simple if we want to go beyond elementary questions and answers good enough for everyday life, precisely because it is not a specific technique, but an attitude toward words and language and the right way of using them without unconsciously falling into their traps, so as to reach an agreement between interlocutors on the meaning of their words, that is, on the convergence of their thoughts, which they try to make clear (*dèloun*) through words (see 434e1-435b3, where Socrates uses the word *dèlôma* to describe the effect of words on interlocutors).

### *Ion*

This dialogue stages Socrates facing a rhapsode named Ion. Rhapsodes were itinerant singers-actors who publicly declaimed verses of famed poets, dressed in a specific attire and acting on occasion based on what they were declaiming. These performances were quite popular and contests of rhapsodes were periodically organized during religious festivals. Ion, a smug character full of a sense of his own importance and considering himself as the greatest among rhapsodes, specializes in the verses of Homer, the greatest among poets, of whom he claims not only to be able to proclaim the verses better than anybody else, but also to explain their meaning, to do

their “exegesis”, here again better than anybody else, and confesses to Socrates that he is in-exhaustive when talking about Homer, but mute and deeply bored as soon as the conversation is about anything else besides Homer.

Most scholars see this dialogue as nothing more than a reflection of Plato on poetical inspiration and remember only the comparison between this inspiration coming from a divine source, one of the Muses or some other god, and the attractive force of a magnet that is transmitted through the successive rings attracted by it, which suggests that the trance provoked by the inspiring god, which owes nothing to human reason, is transmitted to the poet and, from him, to the rhapsode and eventually to the public listening to him. In so doing, they completely miss the more *political* message of the dialogue.

Socrates shrinks when Ion tells him he is able to explain the meaning of verses of Homer better than anybody else but has nothing to say about those of other poets. For Socrates indeed, to explain Homer is to point at what is true and what is false in what he says, and the truth doesn't depend upon who is talking so that he who is able to recognize, on any given subject, what is true and what false in what Homer says about it should be able to do the same on the verses of any other poet talking on the same subject. And the one who possesses this ability to the highest degree is the one who is knowledgeable on the subject in question, the good chariot driver when it comes to giving advice on chariot races, the good physician when it comes to healing someone who is sick, and so on. But the rhapsode as such is neither a chariot driver, nor a physician and it is not his art of rhapsode which could allow him to determine, on any subject whatsoever, when the poet, whoever he is, is telling the truth or is wrong.

So, when Ion claims that he can appraise better than anybody else the relevance of Homer's words ascribed to one of his heroes giving advice on the best way to drive horses in a chariot race, or depicting the treatment to be applied to a wounded warrior, while he is neither chariot driver nor physician, but that he is able to appraise the relevance of what other poets say only by reference to what Homer says on the same topics, it proves that the power he claims he has has nothing to do with human reason but can only result, if it is real, from some sort of divine inspiration, not even direct, but derived from the one that had inspired the poet when he was writing his verses.

But, and here is the point where the dialogue takes a political twist, if Ion is willing to agree that the chariot driver is the best person to judge the relevance of the advice on the art of driving a chariot, the physician the best person to judge the validity of a medical treatment for a wound, and, generally speaking, for each “art” (*technè* in a most general sense including all activities requiring a specific skill), the one whose specific job it is, he no longer agrees with Socrates when he mentions the art of the general (*stratègos*)<sup>228</sup> and even claims that he is the best general of the whole of Greece, probably, in his mind, because he is, in his own eyes, best capable of moving the crowds through his oratory art and his ability to elicit in the listeners the most varied feelings, as required by the verses he is proclaiming, and thus to send soldiers to their death for the greatest good of the city (or of its leaders) if it so pleases him!

Ion is thus among those who consider that in all domains *except politics*, we should trust the specialists and that politics boils down to the art of talking to the crowds. And this is all the more worrying in his case that he is the caricatured archetype of those people who don't see the world as it is but see it only through the prism of supposedly “inspired” writings. Ion lives in a world of words “created” by a *poietès*,<sup>229</sup> Homer, and not in the real world. In this respect, he is

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<sup>228</sup> In Athens at the time of Socrates, a *stratègos* was a general having both military and civilian responsibilities, especially in the domain that we would nowadays call “foreign affairs”. Pericles ruled Athens for many years having the sole function of *stratègos*, to which he was reelected year after year.

<sup>229</sup> The word *poietès*, at the root of the English word « poet », is derived from the verb *poiein*, meaning “to make, produce”, and means originally “maker” in a general sense before specializing to designate what is called in English “poets”, that is, makers of a specific type of creation, *logoi*.

for Plato the most extreme case of what most of the Greeks of his time were for having learned to read from childhood mainly on Homer works, ending up memorizing full sections of them so they had quotes of Homer at hand (or, should we say, at mouth) for all circumstances of life and taking some of his heroes as role models to reach excellence.<sup>230</sup>

The character of Ion and the theme of the dialogue are thus not that far from today's concerns, since the way of thinking of Ion is that of all the extreme fundamentalists who explain the world and lead their life based on a reading of the Bible, or the Koran, or any other supposedly sacred text taken to the (their) letter. Ion was not that dangerous since he limited himself to declaiming the verses of his "Bible" and mimicking on occasion the fights described in them in theatrical performances, and was content to think he was the best general in all of Greece without feeling the need to put this pretense to the test in deeds by offering his help to Athens, but when his likes, such as today's extreme fundamentalists, start to enter the political arena and take action, it's another story!

At the end of the dialogue, Socrates offers Ion the following choice: either he is skilled in an "art" (*technikos*, that is, mastering a *technè*) and in this case he is unjust (*adikos*), or he is not skilled in an "art", but only beneficiary of a "divine share" (*theia moira*) and, in this case, he is "divine" (*theios*). Unjust if he is skilled in a *technè* because in that case, on his own admission, it is not one, but all the arts at once that he claims mastery of, in words at least, which would make him, if his claim is justified, the most unjust of men according to the understanding of justice developed by Plato's Socrates in the *Republic*, which implies that each one must only try to do well the one task assigned to him (chariot driver *or* physician *or* general *or*...) and not interfere with the task of others, in the same way Hippias is, in the realm of action, the most unjust of men according to this same understanding of justice, he who claims in the *Hippias Minor* to have made himself all the clothes and artifacts he wears to better suggest that he masters all the arts;<sup>231</sup> the most unjust of men also if, as Socrates thinks, his claim is unfounded, for then he lies and is but a protean usurper (indeed Socrates mentions Proteus, the god who kept changing shape, at this point in the conversation<sup>232</sup>) when claiming he is skilled in all domains when it is not the case. Regarding the other option to being skilled in an art, Socrates describes it using the same expression, *theia moira* ("divine share"), he had used at the end of the *Meno* to explain what was at the origin of the success (or at least what most people considered a success) of the most admired politicians of Athens, Themistocles, Pericles and the likes of them.<sup>233</sup>

As could be expected, Ion prefers to think he himself is divine rather than unjust, which is an implicit admission that he possesses no specific "art", or at least not those he claims to master, and that he does what he does, not by using his reason as a human being, but guided by some sort of "inspiration" derived from Homer.

### *Euthydemus*

This dialogue stages the most adulterated form of sophistical discourse through the example of two showcase disputers, Euthydemus and his brother Dionysodorus, whose only purpose in discussions, preferably held in front of a large public, is to ridicule their interlocutor, considered as an opponent who must be defeated at all costs<sup>234</sup> rather than a partner in a common search for truth, and who don't hesitate, to reach this goal, to use the most despicable plays of words, thus showing that, for them, words are no more than tools to shine in social gatherings, without

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<sup>230</sup> This is the theme of the discussion between Socrates and Hippias in the *Hippias Minos*, where they debate on the respective merits of Achilles and Ulysses to deserve our admiration and serve as model to us.

<sup>231</sup> See *Hippias Minor*, 369b1-e1.

<sup>232</sup> *Ion*, 541e7.

<sup>233</sup> See *Meno*, 99b5-100b4. The expression *theia moira* is at 99e6 and again at 100b2-3.

<sup>234</sup> Hence the name *eristikè* (« eristic »), a word derived from *eris* meaning "strife, quarrel, disputation", given to this kind of sophistic disputation

outer referent, words that may be twisted in all manners so long as it allows them to overcome the opponent and win applause from the public.

The dialogue stages three pairs of characters: Socrates and his childhood friend Crito, the two brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and a teenager named Clinias, who is a cousin of Alcibiades, and his lover of the time, Ctesippus, and proceeds on two planes: a conversation between Socrates and Crito in which the latter asks Socrates to narrate to him the conversation he had the day before at the Lyceum (one of the gymnasia of Athens), which he too attended, but was prevented from seeing and hearing due to the crowd assembled around the speakers, so he couldn't identify those who seemed to be the "heros" of the day, and the narration of this conversation by Socrates, interrupted at its center and completed at the end by comments of Socrates to Crito. The conversation narrated by Socrates exemplifies two types of dialogues, two sorts of *dialegethai* ("to dialogue, hold a conversation"), and the distinct effects these two ways of dialoguing may produce: the manner of the two sophists, who talk alternatively with Clinias, Socrates and Ctesippus, and the manner of Socrates, who gives, in the course of the discussion, two examples of his approach to dialogue in dialoguing with Clinias. The dialogue shows the progress made by Clinias through his dialogues with Socrates and how Ctesippus is quick, as far as he is concerned, to learn the trick of the two sophists and imitate them to shine in front of his beloved.

But if the type of dialogue conducted by the two sophists is depicted by Plato in a caricatured form, the themes of these discussions are most serious and the underlying questions are serious questions, for Plato is a master in the art of making his readers think at the same time he makes them laugh. The starting point of the whole discussion is the claim of the two sophists that they are teachers of *aretè*.

A short parenthesis is in order about this word, for we have here a good example of the problems posed by reading Plato in translation: as I said already earlier in my comments on the *Meno*, which precisely deals with the question of whether *aretè* can be taught, the usual translation of *aretè* is "virtue". The problem is that this translation makes the two sophists look even more ridiculous than they are as soon as they start practicing their trickery and we understand that their plays of words have nothing to do with what is usually associated with the word "virtue", so that we don't take seriously their initial claim and completely miss a general problem which is in the background of all of Plato's dialogues and which has to do with another word having multiple meanings, the word *logos*. Indeed if, rather than talking of teachers of virtue, we talk of teachers of excellence, my preferred translation of *aretè*, the claim of the two brothers is no longer as absurd as it appears at first look. If what distinguishes human beings from other animals is the fact of being endowed with *logos*, persons who pretend to teach their students how to master one form at least of *logos* and to always be right, or at least to always triumph over their opponents in discussions, whether in private, in the assembly of the people or in court, teach indeed a form of "excellence" for animals endowed with *logos*. We are once again facing the question about the sort of *logos* which contributes to the "excellence" of *anthrôpoi*. And if it is easy to see in the dialogue the difference between the way of conducting discussions of the two clowns and that of Socrates, we must remember that Socrates too was held as being a sophist by most of his fellow citizens who didn't make a difference between those two ways of discussing and that it cost him his life. And this is probably the reason why Plato depicts Socrates insisting several times on the potentially laughable character of *his* own way of leading a discussion, to better invite us to think about the reasons why it is less laughable and more commendable than that of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

As the dialogue proceeds, various topics are touched upon, such as the possibility of saying something false, the nature of the knowledge which might make us happy by itself alone, once we have understood that the other specialized sciences teach us how to produce something, a flute for the flute-maker, health for the physician, and so on, but not how to use what they

produce, for better or worse. And to show that Plato has not lost the thread running all through his dialogues, his Socrates concludes the dialogue on a discussion with Crito about political art and philosophy where he recommends to him, in order to decide whether either one or both might be useful for the education of his children, not to judge based on those who claim to practice them since, in these domains as in all those requiring a specific knowledge, many are those who are bad at them and rare those who excell.

### *Menexenus*

The *Menexenus* is a wonderful parody of the most brilliant speeches of Pericles and his likes offered to our reason “raw”, without commentaries except for a short introduction setting the stage, leaving it to us to criticize it. This introduction stages Socrates encountering Menexenus who just left a meeting of the assembly of the people which was supposed to choose the one who would be in charge of making an oration at the soon to be held funeral of Athenian soldiers killed in a recent battle, but postponed the final choice till the following day. Menexenus feels sorry in advance for the one who will be chosen for he won't have much time to prepare the oration and will probably have to improvise. Socrates explains to him that this is not the case and that political leaders have ready-made speeches for all occasions and that, anyway, praising Athenians in front of Athenians is not very difficult. Answering a question of Menexenus, he admits that it would be quite easy for him to make such an oration for he has had as a teacher of eloquence Aspasia,<sup>235</sup> the partner of Pericles, who, no later than the previous day, delivered before him a speech on this topic made up of bits and pieces of previous speeches she had written for Pericle. Urged by Menexenus, Socrates repeats this speech for him.

Scholars are laudatory about this oration, many of them considering it the best funeral oration still extant, and try to understand why Plato thus tried to compete with Lysias and other orators of the time. And indeed, if each dialogue is seen as an independent work, the *Menexenus* is just that, a funeral oration most artfully crafted, that is, a particularly successful example of the oratory art that Plato keeps criticizing all through his other dialogues. For them, the two or three pages of introduction are but a way for Plato to set the stage and what counts is the oration itself, while, when the dialogue is read as a step in a broader program, as I suggest we should do, it is the prologue which is important, as an acerbic criticism of the oratory art in politics, and the oration is only the text of the assignment given the reader, expected to submit it to sharp criticism, not its style, but its contents full of platitudes and clichés, the style being precisely there, in the conception of politics of those who practice this kind of “P.R.”, to sweeten the pill!

This speech is the example par excellence of the kind of politics Plato disapproves and criticizes all through his dialogues, and that the following tetralogy will teach us to surpass by setting aside rhetoric as practiced at the time to engage in *to dialegesthai*, the art of dialogue as practiced by Socrates, focusing on the search for truth rather than mere appearance, on what is really good rather than what is pleasing. It exhibits what his contemporary Isocrates, who had opened in Athens a school rivaling the Academy, viewed as the fulfilment of *his* program of formation for leaders, he who precisely despised Plato's “dialectic”, deeming it useless and a loss of time for success in politics, and who was not far from confusing it with the buffooneries of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, but called his own teaching “philosophy”.

In other words, if we limit the program Plato develops in his dialogues to the first five tetralogies, which, for him, are only the prelude to the more serious matters which come in the sixth tetralogy, we end up with a program which might satisfy Isocrates and would produce politicians similar to those Plato knew all too well and considered incompetent. The problem is that, in so doing, we move the logical center of the work from the *Republic* to... the *Apology of Socrates*, that is, his trial and condemnation to death!

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<sup>235</sup> Aspasia is a historical character, who was indeed the partner of Pericles and is said to have composed speeches for him.

To deserve to move to the next grade (next tetralogy), we must first understand that *true* politics is not that which produces speeches similar to the one found in the *Menexenus*, which relies more on P.R. specialists and speechwriters than on knowledge and truth, which doesn't care for what is *really* good for citizens and doesn't hesitate to send them to their death to defend the privileges and power of the leaders who manipulate them.

But as usual, Plato doesn't say all this openly. He gives us food for thought and lets us exert our own judgment. It is his way of testing us and measuring our progress.

### Sixth tetralogy: *to dialegesthai*

The sixth tetralogy focuses on « dialectic », or rather, as I already said above, on *to dialegesthai*, that is to say, on the way of making good use of the *logos* to reach *dia-logos* what is beyond (one of the possible meaning of the preposition *dia*) *logos* through (another possible meaning of *dia*) this *logos*, without falling into its traps. It starts with an introductory dialogue, the *Parmenides*, already mentioned, which indeed warns us about these traps by staging the erring ways of pure logic, and continues with a trilogy, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, which is the most obviously identifiable as such since the same characters recur from one dialogue to the next, exchanging roles and announcing in a dialogue what will happen in the next.

But this trilogy is not only the one that investigates the proper use of *logos*; as the theoretical “heart” of the program as a whole, it is sort of a synthesis of the complete set of the dialogues, whose structure in seven stages it reuses. Indeed, the *Theaetetus* leads us one more time through the path of the first five tetralogies (I'll come back to it when presenting this dialogue), the *Sophist* holds the key of the central message delivered by the sixth tetralogy and, for who can read between the lines, shows us how the “philosopher” (implicitly present in the dialogue as the antithesis of the sophist) should use his “critical” reason, and the *Statesman* presents the principles which will be put to work in the seventh tetralogy, which shows us the philosopher king at work and leads to the *Laws*.

At the beginning of the *Sophist*, Socrates introduces three terms he would like to investigate with the Stranger from Elea who takes his place as leader of the discussion, “sophist” (*sophistès*), “politician/statesman” (*politikos*) and “philosopher” (*philosophos*). Scholars have deduced from this that Plato intended to write three dialogues, one on each of these terms, but that he had finally written only two of them or that the third one, which would have been called the *Philosopher*, had been lost. But here again, we are facing people who need to be told something explicitly to understand it, which is decidedly not the way Plato works. I don't think Plato ever had the intention to write a dialogue called the *Philosopher*, even if hints given in the *Sophist* and *Statesman* vaguely suggest that, after a dialogue between Socrates and Theaetetus (*Theaetetus*), another one between the Stranger from Elea and Theaetetus (*Sophist*), a third one between the Stranger from Elea and the younger Socrates, comrade of Theaetetus and a mute listener in the first two dialogues (*Statesman*), a fourth one would be held between both Socrates, the older and the younger,<sup>236</sup> which might have been precisely the supposed missing *Philosopher*. The first reason why I think this *Philosopher* was not part of Plato's scheme is that there is no room for it in the structure of the dialogues I uphold!<sup>237</sup> Another reason is that the inquiry about the philosopher

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<sup>236</sup> See *Statesman*, 258a3-6.

<sup>237</sup> It might be said that this precisely ruins my thesis. But if, on the one hand, it works everywhere else and, on the other hand, we have no trace of a dialogue named the *Philosopher* while tradition has preserved all his other dialogues, plus a few spurious ones and even apocrypha, the argument relying on an hypothetical dialogue with no proof that it was ever written by Plato would not be very strong in the face of the counter arguments I produce. And, to begin with, why would it be precisely this dialogue, whose title suggests that he should have held a major place in the works of his author, which would have been lost by the successors of Plato at the Academy, when all we know about them suggests that they religiously preserved the works of the master over centuries, which explains why they have come down to us in (almost?) full?

might well be hidden behind that of the sophist. It is in any case what a remark of the Stranger from Elea in the *Sophist* suggests. It occurs toward the end of the dialogue, when the stranger is in the process of committing his “parricide” in trying to figure out what “to say the not being (*to mè on*)” or “the not to be (*to mè einai*)” might mean. For that purpose, he introduces what I called the principle of selective associations, explaining in as general and open a wording as possible<sup>238</sup> that there are three options: (1) everything associates with everything else (with no restrictions on what is behind this “everything”, which includes the sensible as well as the intelligible or the words, which are, so the stranger says, “beings” (*onta*) among others, and giving to “associate” as broad a meaning as possible, without limiting the envisioned kinds of “association”); (2) nothing associates with anything else; (3) some associations are possible and some are not. As options 1 and 2 are obviously untenable, we are left with option 3 and, this being the case, all our efforts should be oriented toward determining which « associations » (attributions) are possible, especially with words in *logos*. To talk about what may or may not associate in this general presentation of the principle, which he applies to the special case of words only in a second time, the stranger uses at times the word *genos* (“kind, class”) and before proceeding to a practical application of the principle on five very general “kinds”<sup>239</sup> which were at the heart of the philosophical debates discussed earlier, being, same, other, rest and movement, the stranger has the following dialogue with Theaetetus:

“Stranger – *What then? Since we are agreed that kinds (gene) too have [a share] in mingling with one another along those same [principles], is it not necessarily through a certain science (epistèmè) that will work his way through speeches (dia tôn logôn) he who intends to show which among the kinds harmonize with which and which don't accept which, and then also if there are, among them all, some of them holding them together so that they be able to commingle and conversely in the separations, if, among them all, other ones [are] responsible for the separation?*”<sup>240</sup>

Theaetetus – *How indeed a science could not be needed, and most probably about the greatest!*

Stranger – *Then again, how shall we call it, Theaetetus? Or by Zeus have we unwittingly stumbled upon the science befitting free [men] and chanced to find the philosopher while looking for the sophist?*

Theaetetus – *What do you mean?*

Stranger – *The fact of distinguishing according to kinds (genè) and of thinking neither the same sort (eidos) [to be] another nor another to be the same, shall we not say that it is [the task] of dialectical science (tès dialektikès epistèmès)?*

Theaetetus – *Yes, we shall say it.*

Stranger – *Then the [one] indeed capable of this has a clear enough perception of one [unique] idea (idean) spreading entirely through many [things], each [being] one, laid apart, and many [ideas] different from one another embraced from the outside under one, and again one [unique idea] joining together in unity [things taken] among many wholes, and many [ideas] completely separated; this indeed is to know how to discern according to kind (genos) in which way each one can associate and how not.*

Theaetetus – *Absolutely indeed.*

<sup>238</sup> In this presentation, the stranger deliberately keeps varying his vocabulary with respect to both the names he uses to designate what he is talking about and the verbs with which he refers to the relations which might exist between these “subjects” (*onta*) (see Appendix 3.1: *The principle of selective associations*, page 172).

<sup>239</sup> Here again, the word *genos* (« kind, class ») is not the only one he uses in his developments and he keeps changing vocabulary, at times within the same phrase, to better make us perceive the general character of his argument.

<sup>240</sup> The second part of this phrase of the stranger, about some « kinds » which would make mingling possible and others which would be responsible for the separations, aims, in the specific case of language, at what is called “function words”, such as conjunctions (“and”, for instance, to link) and negatives (to dissociate), and a large part of the stranger’s analyses in the *Sophist* are meant to show that the verb *einai* (“to be”) is indeed only that, a function word intended to associate a subject and a predicative expression, or dissociate them when used with a negative.

Stranger – *But then, the [qualification of] "dialectic" (to "dialektikon"), you will give it, I guess, to none other than to the one philosophizing genuinely and righteously.*"<sup>241</sup>

This short dialogue suggests, in the interrogative form, that the philosopher has been found while searching for the sophist and that his specific science would be “dialectic”. This question invites us to reread the whole *Sophist*, which takes the form of a search for a definition of the sophist through successive applications of the method of division leading to seven definitions, trying to figure out where, in each case, it might be possible to change something to arrive at the philosopher rather than the sophist. And once again, we are in the presence of an exercise merely suggested, Plato leaving it to us to identify it and do it. And this leads to another reason why he probably didn't write the *Philosopher*: if the purpose of the whole set of the dialogues is to form philosophers and that, having reached this point, the reader still needs someone to tell him what a philosopher dear to the heart of Socrates and Plato is, it means that he didn't understand a thing of what has taken place so far, especially in the *Republic*, which devotes pages after pages to that question, and it would be of little or no use to him at this point in the program to read a *Philosopher*.<sup>242</sup> And in the end, in this perspective, the *Philosopher*, if *Philosopher* there is, is the whole set of the seven tetralogies, not a dialogue among others. And the dialogue between both Socrateses is the dialogue between the Socrates of the dialogues and the reader, expected to become a “younger Socrates”.

I might add that the *Sophist* is the middle dialogue of the trilogy of which it is a part, that is, the one located at the intermediate level of *krisis* (“sorting, choice, judgment”), of the choices between two options to be made by the *thumos*, the intermediate part of the soul, and that I have previously shown that, in these dialogues, characters usually go by pairs. Here, it suggests that the *Sophist* is the *Philosopher* as well in the sense that both of these types are in the background of the dialogue and that it is up to the reader to sort out (*krinein*), in the words of the stranger, what leads to the portrait of the philosopher behind that of the sophist which he puts in the foreground.

On account of the major role of these dialogues for a proper understanding of Plato's words, I will spend a little more time on some of them than I did so far on previous dialogues except the *Republic*.

### *Parmenides*

The prelude to this sixth tetralogy is the *Parmenides*, already mentioned, which gives us a brilliant example of the risks of extreme “abstraction” having lost any grip upon reality, which becomes able to demonstrate anything and its contrary with the same logical rigor, teaching in passing a lesson by anticipation to Aristotle the philosopher and his dear logic.<sup>243</sup> After the “test” of the *Menexenus*, meant to eliminate those who have been seduced by the oratorical skills displayed by Plato

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<sup>241</sup> *Sophist*, 253b9-e5.

<sup>242</sup> If the dialogues are independent works written over a period of about fifty years by a Plato whose opinions “evolved” over time, then it would be understandable that, after the (assumed, according to this hypothesis) challenge of the *Parmenides*, he might have felt the need to write a new book on his understanding of the philosopher, which might have evolved in parallel since the *Republic*. But if the dialogues form a single work, as I suggest, there is no reason to change from what has been developed at length in books VI and VII of the *Republic*, but at best to complete it by a few touches such as the one we just read.

<sup>243</sup> It is in my opinion purposely that Plato chose as the pale interlocutor of Parmenides in this dialogue a namesake of the Aristotle who was his student and colleague for about thirty years at the Academy, another Aristotle, also a historical character about whom he tells us only one thing in the dialogue (confirmed by Xenophon at *Hellenica* II, 3, 1) which is that he was to become one of the Thirty Tyrants who would govern Athens for a short time at the end of the Peloponnesian war in a regime of terror which I already talked about and in which Critias played a major role. I think that the two only things that interested Plato in this character to have him play a role in a conversation which probably never occurred except in his imagination are his name, identical to that of the “father” of logic, and the fact that he ended up a tyrant: it was his manner of saying between the lines to the other Aristotle, the “philosopher”: “With your logic, you will end up a tyrant of thought if you are not able to figure out what goes wrong in the *Parmenides*.”

in this dialogue, which proves that he could have outdone a Pericles, a Lysias or an Isocrates, comes the “test” of the *Parmenides*, meant to eliminate those who stay dazzled by the virtuosity of Parmenides and cannot understand what the trick is, which makes it possible to reach completely opposite conclusions with the same logical rigor when working on such abstract concepts as “being” and “one” without defining them, which allows giving them a different meaning from one demonstration to the next (are we talking about “being” in an exclusively material sense implying space and time or of an abstract concept of “being” outside space and time, or of still something else, compatible with both?), and what’s more in incomplete sentences,<sup>244</sup> without verifying that what is deduced is consistent with the data from experience, since opposite conclusions are equally accepted from successive demonstrations. What Plato is trying to make us understand through an example is that *any* discourse on “being”, a substantive devoid of meaning as a substantive since it is derived from a verb which is not really a verb and has no meaning in itself, can *only* be sophistical and can teach us nothing whatsoever about anything. And in the same way he does it with the *Menexenus* regarding political speech, he gives us in the *Parmenides* a lesson of sophistical virtuosity and purely formal logic running wild and ending in idle talk,<sup>245</sup> which compares advantageously to the works of Melissus, Parmenides, Zeno, Gorgias and their ilk.

In order to expose the emptiness of the successive hypotheses formulated by Parmenides, we may reformulate them in mathematical form as if they were problems:

- Problem 1

Let 1 be<sup>246</sup>

- 1) what can you say about 1 itself?
- 2) what can you say about 1 compared to the rest?
- 3) what can you say about the rest compared to 1
- 4) what can you say about the rest itself?

- Problem 2

Let 1 not be

- 1) what can you say about 1 itself?
- 2) what can you say about 1 compared to the rest?
- 3) what can you say about the rest compared to 1
- 4) what can you say about the rest itself?

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<sup>244</sup> The hypotheses successively put forward by Parmenides use only a substantive (« one (*hen*)” and a verb (“is (*esti*)”, plus at times the negative *mè* (“not”) without taking into consideration the fact that the verb *einai* (“to be”) is not a verb like the others and doesn’t have meaning by itself but serves only to link a predicative expression to a subject, without specifying whether he takes *hen* as a subject or a predicate, either option leading anyway to an incomplete sentence lacking an attribute if *hen* is subject or a subject if *hen* is predicate, and without realizing (or pretending to ignore) that *hen* is the least meaningful predicate of all since it is the property assumed of anything which is used as the subject of a sentence and thus is isolated by thought to consider it, rightly or wrongly, as “one”.

<sup>245</sup> This reading of the dialogue suggests that, if Plato didn’t « invent » logic by formalizing its rules in writing but left this “honor” to his pupil Aristotle, it is not because he was unable to do it or had not yet grasped these rules, but simply because he didn’t deem formalizing it the way Aristotle later did necessary, not because he didn’t care for rigor in reasoning (he gives proofs of the contrary in his dialogues and shows, precisely in the *Parmenides*, that he could have been a match for Aristotle in the area of logic), but because he had been able to perceive the dangers of this rigor put in the hands of people not having taken the time to investigate the principles of *logos* and thinking that this logical rigor in reasoning was enough to guarantee their validity. Plato had fully understood what logic was and what its dangers were, Aristotle didn’t understand what *to dialegesthai* as understood by Plato was and what its “power” was (*hè tou dialegesthai dunamis*, see *Republic* VI, 511b4 and what I say about it above in the discussion of the analogy of the line, and also *Republic*, VII, 532d8-533a11).

<sup>246</sup> Parmenides states it as *hen ei esti* (literally “one if is”). To give is a more “mathematical” twist, he could have said *estô hen*, in which *esto* is the present imperative of *einai* (“to be”) at the third person of the singular (the equivalent of the French “soit” which is used in formulating math problems), of which *esti* is the indicative present. Thus, *esto hen* would translate in English “let one be”.

If we now consider the two words *hen esti* (“one is”) together, which make up his first hypothesis and which are reused in all others, forgetting the incompleteness of the sentence they form, and we nonetheless attempt to give meaning to this combination of words, assuming that, for Parmenides at least, it applies to *to pan* (“the whole”) (see *Sophist*, 244bff.), the hypothesis turns out to be self-defeating since it includes *two* words (244c8-9) and, no matter whether we assume words as distinct from what they are supposed to refer to (*tounoma tou pragmatos heteron*, 244d3) or identical to it (*tauton autōi tounoma*, 244d6), there is no escape from this plurality at the very time we affirm that only *hen esti* (“one is”)!

Besides, everything in the staging of the dialogue is meant to make us doubt of the seriousness of the conversation: strangers originating from Clazomenae in Asia Minor come to Athens, led by a certain Cephalus (not the one staged in the *Republic*, another one) to try to meet, with the help of Adeimantus and Glaucon, Plato's brothers who are the interlocutors of Socrates in the *Republic*, their half-brother Antiphon (“sounding in return, replying”), of whom they have been told that he could recite by rote the content of a conversation held long ago between Socrates, Parmenides and Zeno, for having heard it many times in his youth from a certain Pythodorus (“gift from the Pythia”, the priestess of Delphi who transmitted the oracles of Apollo supposed to talk to her from the depths of the earth), who had witnessed in person the conversation since it took place at his house. And Adeimantus is prompt to add that Antiphon ceased to take interest in philosophia when no longer a teenager to turn toward horse-breeding! In other words, Plato stages a head (Cephalus) reminiscent of the one staged in the *Republic*, of whom we saw that it was rather void, who comes to meet the two brothers of Socrates, not to ask them to give an account, to himself and his companions, of one or another of their conversations with Socrates, for instance that related in the *Republic*, but to lead them to a kind of “tape-recorder” on which a particularly abstract conversation, which this “tape-recorder” didn't hear in person but knows only by hearsay, had been recorded long ago, despite the fact that he has lost interest in these matters for years (which shows in passing the lack of effect this conversation had upon him) and is only capable of reciting by rote, without distancing himself the least from what he recites, this conversation he probably didn't even understand, using a doubly indirect style which makes explicit in several occasion the fact that Antiphon recites what Pythodorus (mentioned by name) told that Socrates, Zeno or Parmenides had said!...

### *Theaetetus*

The *Theaetetus* opens with a prologue, a direct dialogue between Euclides of Megara (whose name means “of good repute, famous”) and a character named Terpsion<sup>247</sup> (“enjoyment, joy, delight”), which sets the stage for a dialogue between Socrates and Theaetetus having taken place long ago, whose written narration, made at the time by Euclides and read by one of his slaves, they will listen to, and which is the perfect counterpoint of the prologue of the *Parmenides*. Where everything is done in the *Parmenides* to make us suspicious about the accuracy of the recitation regurgitated by Antiphon and the seriousness of the listeners, everything in the prologue of the *Theaetetus* is on the contrary done to convince us of the seriousness of the listeners and the reliability of the report they will hear.

The scene takes place in Megara, a harbor not far from Athens on the Isthmus of Corinth, where Euclides lives. He meets Terpsion and tells him he just met Theaetetus, wounded and sick and on the point of death, who was brought back home in Athens from a military camp in front of Corinth. Euclides adds that this encounter reminded him of words of Socrates praising

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<sup>247</sup> Euclides of Megara, a philosopher not to be confused with the geometer who wrote the *Elements*, was one of the « disciples » of Socrates. He is mentioned in the *Phaedo*, along with Terpsion, another citizen of Megara, among the “strangers” (that is, non-Athenians) present in jail at the death of Socrates (*Phaedo*, 59c2). Some traditions suggest that Plato might have stayed at Euclides' place in Megara after the death of Socrates.

Theaetetus whom he had met not long before his own death,<sup>248</sup> when he was still a teenager, to whom Socrates foretold a great future. Euclides further adds that Socrates had narrated this conversation to him and Terpsion asks if he could in turn narrate it to him. Euclides explains that he would be unable to do so from memory but that, fortunately, as soon as he had returned home after Socrates' narration, he had put it in writing and that, in the following days, each time he went to Athens and met Socrates, he asked him details on this or that point of the discussion and, once back home, used this information to improve his writing.<sup>249</sup> And he takes time to explain that, to make the reading easier, he transcribed the dialogue in direct style, to avoid the "he said", "he answered", and other such formulas of the indirect style which only make the writing unwieldy. Finally, Euclides invites Terpsion home and asks a slave to read the writing he had done at the time. The rest of the dialogue, in direct style, is this narration.

The immense majority of scholars, who are more interested in the argumentative contents of the dialogues than in their staging, don't see how closely the prologue of the *Parmenides* and that of the *Theaetetus* answer one another and invite us to look at the two dialogues in parallel, so they don't try to explain this.

The related dialogue involves Socrates, Theodorus ("gift from god") of Cyrene, a famous geometer and, more broadly, "scientist" (probably a historical character otherwise known by Plato), presented as a disciple of Protagoras, and two students of Theodorus attending one of his classes, where the dialogue takes place, Theaetetus and a teenager also named Socrates, who stays mute during the *Theaetetus* (and *Sophist*), but who takes the place of Theaetetus in the conversation related in the *Statesman*. We learn in the course of the dialogue that Theaetetus physically resembles Socrates while the younger Socrates resembles him by name, a detail which is probably not insignificant when we realize that the two dialogues in which Theaetetus is the interlocutor of either Socrates or the Stranger from Elea (*Theaetetus* and *Sophist*) are those located in the trilogy at the levels corresponding to parts of the *psychè* dealing with the physical word, while the younger Socrates plays this role in the dialogue located at the level of the *logos*.

The question dealt with in the dialogue is that of *epistèmè* (a word which can be translated as either "science" or "knowledge"). The dialogue successively examines three definitions of it, which are rejected in turn. The last one, defining knowledge as a true opinion accompanied with *logos*, attempts to have *logos* play a part in the definition, which leads the interlocutors to investigate the possible meanings of *logos* in their definition, without Theaetetus remembering that, earlier in the discussion, he had defined opinion (*doxa*) as a *logos* (190a5), which implies that the definition under investigation becomes "a *logos* accompanied by *logos*"! But Socrates, who pretends at the beginning of the dialogue that he is intent on "delivering" (in the sense of "helping to give birth") Theaetetus of a *logos* on the question at issue to which he himself doesn't have an answer, doesn't stress this flaw in the reasoning and limits himself to giving three possible understandings of *logos*, none of which being satisfactory. Thus, the dialogue ends in apparent failure but, through it, Plato wants us to understand that Theaetetus has handled the problem the wrong way: it is not at the end that he should have wondered what *logos* is when the whole discussion is a *logos*, but at the start, before delivering a *logos* on what knowledge is not knowing

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<sup>248</sup> Through the last words of the *Theaetetus*, we learn that Socrates is on his way to court following the case brought against him.

<sup>249</sup> Indeed, all is done to suggest the seriousness of Euclides and the probable accuracy of the story which follows, but a careful reader may nonetheless ask himself a few questions: if the encounter between Socrates and Theaetetus took place the day when Socrates was summoned to court to hear about the case brought against him by Anytus and Meletus, how much time passed from then to the trial and death of Socrates? Was it enough to allow for multiple encounters between Socrates and Euclid? For sure, we are told in the *Phaedo* that Socrates "disciples" came to see him each day in his jail where, according to Xenophon, he stayed for one month between is condemnation and his execution, but Terpsion is listed among those faithful disciples and, in the prologue, he seems to know nothing about the encounter between Socrates and Theaetetus. I'll come back later on the reasons which might explain this ambiguity.

yet what *logos* is, what it allows us to know and how we may know that we know. This failure after the tricks of the *Parmenides* opens the way for the *Sophist*, which presents the principles and rules of *logos*.

The structure of the *Theaetetus* is quite elaborate, with several plans overlaying one another, as outlined hereafter:<sup>250</sup>

I. Prologue	142a1-151d3 (249)
Preamble	
1. Introduction to the dialogue by Euclides and Terpsion	142a1-143c8 (34)
Prologue	
2. The <i>opinion</i> of Theodorus on Theaetetus	143d1-144d7 (34)
3. What is <i>epistèmè</i> (knowledge)? Socrates judges Theaetetus on <i>deeds</i>	144d8-148e6 (105)
4. Socrates “midwife” of <i>souls</i>	148e7-151d3 (76)
5. The <i>logos</i> “delivered” by Theaetetus (151d-210d: the rest of the dialogue)	
A. <i>Epistèmè</i> (knowledge) on the side of sensation	
First definition : knowledge = sensation	
II. 1st part (with Theaetetus): fluctuating nature of sensation	151d3-165e7(401)
Protagoras’ relativism plunges its roots in Heraclitus’ mobilism	151d3-15c10 (109)
Sensation as agent-patient interaction	155d1-160e5 (152)
Which patient (human being, animal, god)? In which situation (current sensation, memory, dream)?	160e6-165e7 (139)
Transition : plea for Protagoras	
Some representations are “ <i>better than the others</i> ” (167b) (The unescapable objectivity of the “good ( <i>agathon</i> )”)	165e8-168c7 (75)
III. 2nd part (with Theodorus): relativism and social link	168c8-184b2 (444)
From intellectual self-sufficiency ( <i>autarkè eis phronèsin</i> ) to relativity of just/unjust via the destruction of the notion of truth ( <i>alètheia</i> )	168c8-172b8 (111)
<b>At the center of the dialogue:</b> two erroneous understandings of the just: Perpetual litigant (justice by the vote) vs. asocial “philosopher” (just in isolation) (in the background: Socrates’ trial)	
From relativity of the just/unjust to the destruction of <i>logos</i> by mobilism via the problem of prediction of the future (knowledge and time)	172b8-177c5 (147)
From relativity of the just/unjust to the destruction of <i>logos</i> by mobilism via the problem of prediction of the future (knowledge and time)	177c6-184b2 (188)
Transition: role of the soul ( <i>psuchè</i> ) in knowledge	
A unifying principle of data from the different senses (sight, hearing, and so on) is needed	184b3-187a8 (78)
B. <i>Epistèmè</i> (knowledge) on the side of <i>logos</i> ( <i>doxa</i> (opinion) = <i>logos</i> : 190a5)	
Second definition: knowledge = true opinion ( <i>alèthès doxa</i> )	
IV. <i>Epistèmè</i> (knowledge) = true opinion (in the soul ( <i>psuchè</i> ))	187a9-200d4 (387)
How is false opinion possible?	187a9-191c7 (114)
The soul ( <i>psuchè</i> ) as a block of wax	191c8-196c3 (136)

<sup>250</sup> In this presentation of the plans of the *Theaetetus*, the figures between parentheses after the start and end reference of a section represent numbers of lines obtained from a Word file including the complete text of the *Theaetetus* obtained from the Perseus CD (without the name of the interlocutors before their words) arranged as a continuous sequence of capital Greek letters (font Sgreek) without spaces between words, spirits, stresses and punctuation signs, as in the time of Plato. The text so obtained includes 107 428 letters spread over 43 pages of 43 lines plus 25 lines on the 44th page, leading to a total of 1 873 lines of about fifty five letters each (overall means: 57 letters per line). These figures have no meaning by themselves and serve only to make comparisons.

The soul ( <i>psuchè</i> ) as an aviary	196c4-200d4 (115)
The (assumed) true opinion of the judges obtained by persuasion without <i>epistèmè</i>	200d5-201c6 (22)

Third definition: knowledge = true opinion + *logos*

V. <i>Epistèmè</i> (knowledge) = true opinion (= <i>logos</i> ) + <i>logos</i>	201c7-210d4 (240)
Three meanings of the word <i>logos</i> :	
Vocal expression, enumeration, definition by difference	

VI. The “critical” moment: *Sophist*

VII Consequences from the standpoint of action: *Statesman*

The most obvious and immediately perceptible division of the *Theaetetus* is the one resulting from the three successively proposed “definitions” of *epistèmè* (“knowledge”): sensation, true opinion, true opinion accompanied with *logos*. It is the one I outline with the titles in light grey: a preamble between Euclides and Terpsion, followed by a prologue which sets the context of the discussion between Theaetetus and Socrates in three parts, one per proposed definition.

The first definition leads to longer developments than the two other together,<sup>251</sup> but these developments are conducted by Socrates with two different interlocutors and are separated by an interlude in which Socrates proposes, in the absence of Protagoras, long dead at the time, and in view of the refusal of his friend Theodorus to talk in his defense, to deliver on his behalf a speech he might have delivered in answer to the earlier criticism of his theses by Socrates. The second definition (knowledge = true opinion) marks a complete change of perspective from the first one (knowledge = sensation) while the third one (knowledge = true opinion with *logos*) is a continuation of the second one. We now have a dialogue in four parts preceded by a double prologue, in which parts come in pairs: two parts on knowledge as sensation (with Theaetetus, then with Theodorus) and two parts on knowledge as opinion (true opinion, then true opinion with *logos*). What leads from the first group (knowledge as sensation) to the second group (knowledge as opinion) is the apparition, in a section I described as a transition, of the soul (*psuchè*), introduced by Socrates as the unifying principle of the data from the various senses and probable seat of knowledge (184d, sq.). In the vocabulary of the *Republic*, we are moving from the visible (*horaton*)/sensible to the intelligible (*noèton*) realm and the soul is the bridge between both. This way of segmenting the dialogue displays a progression reminiscent of that of the first five tetralogies:

- the prologue between Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus reminds us of the prologues of the dialogues of the *first tetralogy*, especially of the *Lysis* and *Charmides*, which stage discussions of Socrates with teenagers in palaestras, a setting close to that of the *Theaetetus*;
- the first part of the discussion (knowledge = sensation), with Theaetetus, has Socrates link this definition to Protagoras, staged in the introductory dialogue of the *second tetralogy*, centered on the sophists, masters of appearance and illusion, slaves of opinion, and it allows him to go all the way back to the origin of Sophistic, Heraclitean mobilism and the relativism it leads to;
- the second part of the discussion of this first definition, with Theodorus, focuses, when analyzed in depth as I will soon do, on the question of the relationship between knowledge and social

<sup>251</sup> Including what I describe as a transition between the two successive discussions of this definition, first with Theaetetus, then with Theodorus, the section dealing with the first definition totals 920 lines (401+75+444), that is, almost half the 1873 lines of the dialogue as a whole, and exactly half of the dialogue read by Euclides' slave, that is, the dialogue without the preamble between Euclides and Terpsion, totaling 1873-34=1839 lines. Using the count of letters rather than that of lines in the statistics provided by Word leads to 52.749 letters for the discussion of the first definition, starting at 151d3 with the words of Socrates *palin dè oun ex archès* (“Well then, back from the start...”) and ending at 184b2 on Theaetetus' words *outô poiein* (“to do so”) and 52.743 letters for the rest, preamble with Euclides excluded (12.386 letters for the prologue with Theodorus and 40.357 for the discussion of the last two definitions, starting at 184b3 till the end of the dialogue: a difference of 6 letters over more than fifty thousands, taking into account the margin of uncertainty on those numbers due to the problems of transmission of a text dating back more than twenty-three centuries ago and the possible textual variants, even minor ones, induced by this process, amounts to a perfect equality.

links, stressing justice, but also the objectivity of the good which even the relativists cannot deny when faced with facts, and offers, in the central “digression”, a hardly veiled allusion to Socrates’ trial, the theme of the *third tetralogy*, stumbling in the end on the fact that mobilism cannot account for the *fact* of experience that the *logos* is;

Together, these two parts of the discussion cover the segment of the « visible/sensible » of the analogy of the line, from sophistical illusions to political facts;

- the next step introduces the soul (*psuchè*), theme of the *fourth tetralogy*, and the second definition (knowledge = true opinion) gives Socrates an opportunity to investigate its structure and working processes in order to try to figure out how a false opinion is possible, through two analogies, the first, likening the soul to a block of wax, still turned toward the sensible (the soul as a recorder of sensible “imprints”), which fails because, *in the sensible*, Heraclitus is indeed right, everything flows and thus there is nothing in what acts upon our senses having the stability of engravings on a seal ring used to imprint a seal on the wax, the other, likening the soul to an aviary, turned toward the intelligible, but failing because it likens the birds that we catch from birth, an image — this time in motion — of what enters our mind, directly to items of knowledge when they are but mere words and that the whole question is precisely to understand how those words, which are at first only sounds caught by our ears, thus still sensible impressions, can carry a meaning and give access to a knowledge of something else other than themselves;

- the fifth part of this plan, dealing with the third definition (knowledge = true opinion with *logos*) is, like the *fifth tetralogy*, centered on *logos* and attempts (unsuccessfully) to figure out in which sense this word should be taken to point at what constitutes the source of knowledge when accompanying opinion (which was earlier described as a *logos*).

If we now take a global look at the trilogy of which the *Theaetetus* is the first dialogue rather than limiting ourselves to this sole dialogue, the parallel keeps holding: the *Sophist*, central dialogue of the trilogy, the sixth step of the plan I’m developing, holds the core message of the *sixth tetralogy*, the one dedicated to *to dialegesthai* (“the [fact of] practicing dialogue”), and the *Statesman*, seventh and last step of this plan, focuses on the move from theory to action and develops the theoretical principles of the legislative activity of the Athenian of the *Laws*, conclusion of the *seventh tetralogy*, and thus of the whole program of the dialogues.

In other words, as I already suggested in the introduction to the sixth tetralogy, the trilogy *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* is a sort of summary and concentrate of the program of the dialogues as a whole, using the same overall structure in seven steps along the following lines:

1. preamble introducing the problem to be dealt with and the context of the discussions
2. display and exposure of misleading illusions, of appearances potentially confused with their originals of which they at best unveil only one aspect
3. the test of facts
4. the role of *psuchè* (“soul”), bridge between sensible and intelligible
5. focus on *logos*
6. the “critical” moment of judgment (*krisis*)
7. the time of action and practical application

In much the same way the first five tetralogies played a propaedeutic role preparing to the phase of critical judgment required by the sixth tetralogy, and more specifically by the central dialogue of the sixth trilogy, the *Sophist*, the *Theaetetus* offers a five step program summarizing this propaedeutic to prepare for the discussion of the *Sophist* leading to the analyses of the *Statesman*, theoretical preparation to the practical application developed in the seventh tetralogy.

But there is still another way of retrieving this scheme, or at least its first five steps, in the *Theaetetus*: it implies looking more closely to the prologue, as shown in the divisions of the above plan:

- the first step, introductory, is now limited to the preamble with Euclides and Terpsion;
- next, in the first part of the prologue, between Socrates and Theodorus, a section develops the *image* of Theaetetus through the opinion of Theodorus on him, his “reflection” (to use the

graphic language of the analogy of the line and allegory of the cave), so to speak, in the words of his geometry teacher;

- with the arrival of Theaetetus next to Socrates, we are moving from the image to the original and Socrates wastes no time to put the teenager's capabilities to the test through an "experimental" verification, submitting him to the test of facts;

- following this preliminary test which led to the introduction of the topic of the ensuing discussion (what is *epistēmè* ("knowledge")?) and evidenced the ignorance of Theaetetus on that issue, Socrates presents himself as "midwife" of *souls*;

- the rest of the dialogue is the *logos* Socrates delivers Theaetetus of.

None of these divisions give a structuring role to the material center of the dialogue, despite the fact that it often plays an important role in the structure of Plato's dialogues, stressing a key articulation or major idea. In the *Theaetetus*, the center of the dialogue falls toward the end of the central section of part III (the center of a five part dialogue), without marking the beginning or end of a section. This central section (172b8-177c5) is a long monologue of Socrates interrupting his dialogue with Theodorus, which he describes at the end as a kind of digression,<sup>252</sup> all scholars concurring with him on this qualification without batting an eyelid. In the first part of this monologue, the longest one, he contrasts a portrait of one dedicating one's life to *philosophia*,<sup>253</sup> a portrait in which most scholars see the portrait of the philosopher as conceived by Plato, to the portrait of one haunting courts and practicing a rhetoric fit to such a context, describing the attitudes and behavior of both, particularly in their relations (or absence of relations) with their fellow citizens, that is to say, their *political* behavior, their life as *politai* ("citizens"). In the second part, he develops more general and theoretical considerations on good and bad which no longer oppose the "philosopher" and the perpetual litigant, but a good way of life grounded in justice moving us closer to the divine and a pitiful way of life resulting from ignorance of what is good and divine, made of injustice and impiety, leaving it to us to associate, if it seems appropriate to *us* and doesn't shock *us*, the one to the "philosopher" whose portrait he just drew and the second to the perpetual litigant. The problem with this description, which purports to link knowledge (the theme of the dialogue) to choices and ways of life (which should be the prime concern of our quest for knowledge), is that the portrait of philosopher Socrates draws there is, to say the least, ambiguous and doesn't fit the image of Socrates given by the dialogues (his withdrawal from the world, for instance, or his interest for astronomical phenomena): we have a hard time accepting that Socrates is here drawing a self-portrait of himself and we may rather wonder whether he is not simply redrawing for Theodorus his caricature as drawn by Aristophanes in the *Clouds*! We may indeed say the same thing about the portrait of the perpetual litigant spending his whole life in court, which is also pushed to the point of caricature and, anyway, doesn't fit as it stands the rhetoricians and sophists staged in the dialogues, such as Protagoras or Hippias, who can't be recognized in either portrait drawn by Socrates in this long monologue.

If we attempt to locate more precisely the exact middle of the dialogue, we can do it in two ways, remembering what I said in note 251 about the fact that the discussion of the first definition taken as a whole represented exactly one half of the dialogue limited to the text read by Euclides' slave, that is, without taking into account the preamble between Euclides and Terpsion, which suggests that Plato, in structuring the *Theaetetus*, might have at times taken into account this preamble, staging characters different from those of the main dialogue in a different time and at

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<sup>252</sup> At 77b8, Socrates uses, to qualify the words he just spoke, the word *parerga*, plural of *parergon*, meaning etymologically "action (*ergon*) on the side (*para*)", that is, "subordinate, secondary business" with the idea that it is less important than what constitutes the main *ergon*, "business" (here the words).

<sup>253</sup> Socrates doesn't call him a *philosophos* right away, but only toward the end, and only once, at 175e1, with a wording I'll come back to. It is important to emphasize this because it is not always obvious in translations, some translators feeling the need to clarify what Plato is careful not to explicit, adding "the philosopher" as subject of verbs which don't have one in the original Greek.

another place, at times not. Taking into account only the “inner” dialogue (the text written by Euclides and read by his slave), the middle falls in the second part of the “digression”, between the following two sentences, which present a summary of what Socrates calls “the true (*to alèthes*)”: “*a god, nowhere in no way [is] unjust, but most perfectly just and nothing is more like him as the one among us who would become in turn as perfectly just as possible. || In respect of this [is measured] both the true power worthy of awe of a man and its worthlessness and lack of manhood, for [it is] indeed the knowledge of this [which is] wisdom and true excellence, but the lack of such knowledge stupidity and manifest badness (Theos oudamèi oudamôs adikos, all' hôs hoion te dikaiotatos, kai ouk estin autôi homoioteron ouden è hos an hêmôn au genètai hoti dikaiotatos. || Peri touto kai hè hôs alèthôs deinotès andros kai oudenia te kai anandria, hè men gar toutou gnôsis sophia kai aretè alèthinè, hè de agnoia amathia kai kakia enargès)*” (176b8-c5): based on the counts provided by Word, the middle (marked by the sign “||”) falls at the end of the second occurrence of the word *dikaiotatos* within a margin of two letters, that is, at the end of the first of these two sentences (52.748 letters until *dikaiotatos* included, 52.744 after). If we take into account the whole dialogue, including the preamble, the middle falls toward the end of the first part of the “digression”, one line after the only occurrence of the word *philosophos* in the whole “digression”, in those words addressed by Socrates to Theodorus: “*the one you call philosopher (hon dè philosophos kaleis)*” (175e1): 53.675 letters till *kaleis* included, 53.753 after, that is, a difference of 39 letters if we assume that these few words are the middle and that Plato wanted to highlight them in this way in order to call our attention to the fact that the portrait he just drew of one dedicated to *philosophia* pleases the geometer Theodorus, who indeed accepts it as a portrait of a philosopher as he conceives such a person, but doesn't necessarily please Socrates and that it is up to us to correct it in light of all that we learned from earlier dialogues and especially the *Republic*, where the end of book V and all book VI are focused on drawing a portrait of the true philosopher contrasted with the idea most people have of those they call “philosophers”.

Aside from the question of where the *exact* middle of the dialogue falls within this monologue, its central position in the dialogue should be sufficient to call our attention to it and suggest that it might not be the “secondary business” that Socrates suggests in calling it *parerga*. It indeed allows him to show that he doesn't lose sight of the link between knowledge and social life, that is, of the “political” dimension of knowledge. And if we read again in this light the portrait of the one he only half-heartedly calls “philosopher”, it doesn't take much time to realize that he is not the philosopher as conceived by Plato, especially in the *Republic*, but the philosopher as imagined by Theodorus (and, beside him, most Athenians): he has little in common with the portrait of Socrates drawn from the dialogues, aside from his described behavior when summoned to court by a perpetual litigant spending his life there; indeed, to think that Socrates, who is clearly the best example found by Plato of a true *philosophos*,<sup>254</sup> is someone who “*since childhood, doesn't know the way to the public square (agora)*” (173c9-d1), who “*neither sees nor hears the laws and decrees proclaimed or published*” (173d3-4), who “*not even in dream would come close to participating in meals and festivals with girls playing flute*” (173d5-6), is never to have read the *Apology*, *Crito* and *Symposium*, to mention only these dialogues! This disembodied character of whom « *only the body really lies and has a home in the city*” (173e2-3) and whose thought measures the width of the earth (*geômetrousa*,<sup>255</sup> 173e5-6) and heavens and studies the stars (*astronomousa*, 173e6), is one of those Socrates condemns in

<sup>254</sup> See the last words of the *Phaedo*, at *Phaedo*, 118a16-17, where Plato says about Socrates, after telling us how he died, that he was “*the man, so we might say, among those of his time we had experience of, the best, in other words, the wisest and most just*”.

<sup>255</sup> *Geômetrein*, the verb of which *geômetrousa* is the active present participle at the nominative feminine singular (in agreement with *dianoia* (“thought”), feminine, which is the subject), means in its primary sense “to measure (*metrein*) the earth (*gè*)”, before taking the meaning of “practicing geometry” in the modern sense.

the *Republic* for “*thinking they have already been carried alive to the islands of the blessed*” (*Republic*, VII, 519c5-6) and refusing to get back down into the cave after getting out of it, to participate in the administration of the city.

This monologue of Socrates is surrounded by two exchanges in which he says almost the same things, the first time in conclusion of the previous section, the second time as opening of the ensuing section: according to Protagoras and his ilk, regarding just or unjust deeds/behaviors/decisions/... (*dikaia kai adika*, 172a2; *peri ta dikaia*, 177c9), each city decides at will what is the case, especially through laws it can change as it pleases it over time; but on the question of knowing what is beneficial (*sumpheron*, 172a5, ..., before the monologue; *ôphelimon*, 177d4, ..., after the monologue<sup>256</sup>), nobody would be dumb enough to claim that each city can decide it alone and that, simply because it decrees that something or other will be beneficial to it, that will be the case so long as the decree holds (see 177d4-5). In other words, according to those whose theses are examined, it is within the power of a city to decide what is just and what is unjust, *not* to decide what is good and what is not. The “transcendancy” of the good (*to agathon*), that is to say the fact that it doesn't depend on what we think about it, imposes itself even on Protagoras (if only to justify his huge fees by the fact that, on this question, some are “wiser” than others, see 172a5-b2, which only replicates what Socrates had Protagoras say at 167c2-4) and on the most radical relativists. Thus, it is between similar considerations on justice that Socrates' monologue, *in which he also talks about justice* in sentences *which correspond exactly to the middle of the dialogue limited to the discussion between Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus*, takes place. Thus, it is the idea of justice which establishes a link between the monologue and the rest of the conversation with Theodorus.

If we now take a global look at the discussion with Theodorus, we may notice that it starts with a summary given by Socrates of Protagoras' thesis of man being the measure according to which “*he made each one self-sufficient for intelligence/wisdom (autarkè hekaston eis phronèsin epoiei)*” (169d5-6) and ends on the conclusion that universal mobilism pushed to its utmost limits annihilates *logos* by making any speech impossible since nothing can become “fixed” by a word. If Plato chose the word *autarkè* (“self-sufficient”), rare in the dialogues,<sup>257</sup> in this rewording of Protagoras' thesis, it is to echo its use at *Republic* II, 369b5-8, where it is

<sup>256</sup> *Sumpherein*, the verb of which *sumpherôn* is the present participle used as an adjective by Socrates, means etymologically “to bear together”, and from there, “to help to bear, assist”, and further “to be useful/profitable”, which leads, for the use of the present participle as an adjective, to the meaning “useful, advantageous, profitable”. It is probably not mere chance if Plato chooses this word for what he has Socrates say at this point: the presence of the prefix *sun-* (become here *sum-* for euphony before a phi) in this word, meaning “with, together”, suggests the “social” dimension of the concept here brought forward at the very time the theses of Protagoras under scrutiny lead to an unrestrained individualism and undermine the foundations of social life. In the third section, Socrates uses the adjective *ôphelimon*, derived from a root, *ophelos*, meaning “furtherance”, through the verb *ôphelein* meaning “to be of service, render a service, help”. The meaning of *ôphelimon* is “helping, aiding, useful, beneficial”, again with a “social” overtone induced by the idea of “help” or service rendered. But we may also remember here that, in the *Hippias Major*, Socrates defines *ôphelimon* as “*what is profitable and capable of doing something in vue of the good (to chrèsimon te kai to dunaton epi to agathon ti poièsai)*” (*Hippias Major*, 296d8-9), or else, “*what produces [something] good (to poioun agathon)*” (296e7). Behind all these words, it is always the good (*to agathon*) which is sought.

<sup>257</sup> There are six occurrences of it in all the dialogues, three of which don't apply to human beings: aside from *Theaetetus*, 169d5 mentioned here, the word occurs at *Republic* II, 369b6 (where Socrates explains that it is precisely because man is not *autarkès* that he lives in groups and founds cities), at *Republic* III, 387d12 (in the criticism of tales representing death as a great tragedy, about the “fitting (*epieikès*)” man, who doesn't lament on the death of his friends and is the one who least needs others to live a happy life), at *Statesman*, 271d7 (about gods) and at *Timaeus*, 33d2 and 68e3 (in both cases about the Universe as a perfect creature which encompassing everything needs nothing else). Without using the word, it is this feeling of self-sufficiency on the part of Alcibiades that Socrates reproaches him in the first page of the eponymous dialogue when he tells him: “*you say you need nobody among human beings for anything (oudenos phèis anthrôpôn endeès einai eis ouden)*” (*Alcibiade*, 104a1-2).

precisely in the fact that man is not *autarkès* (“self-sufficient”) that Socrates finds the origin of *polis* (“city/state”), that is, of life in society. Thus, to pretend that man is *autarkès* is to ruin the foundation of life in society for human beings, their fundamentally “political” dimension. And even if Plato limits this self-sufficiency by associating it to *phronèsis* (“intelligence, wisdom, prudence”), he assigns it to the very activity which distinguishes man from all other animals, that which, among human beings, is expressed through *logos*, which has meaning only in *di-alogos* and makes the sharing of experience possible, which allows us to become wiser and to enrich, to “assist” (*sumpherein, ôphelein*) one another.

Starting from the denial of the social and “political” dimension of man, the thesis held by Protagoras leads, if taken seriously to the very end, as shown by the conclusion of the conversation between Socrates and Theodorus, to the denial of *logos* itself. A first step toward this conclusion is made when Socrates resumes the dialogue with Theodorus after his long monologue and says that, according to Protagoras, “*regarding just* [things/deeds/laws/...], *more than anything else those that a city lays down* [as laws] *because they seem* [so] *to it, those are also just for the* [city] *which lays* [them] *down so long as they stay in effect* (*peri ta dikaia, hôs pantos mallon ha an thêtai polis doxanta hautèi, tauta kai esti dikaia tèi themenèi, heôsper an keêtai*)” (177c9-d2), but that “*regarding good* [things/deeds/laws/...] (*peri de tagatha*)”, nobody would dare pretend that “*those that a city lays down* [as laws] *thinking them beneficial to itself, are also beneficial so long as they stay in effect, unless he is only talking about the word* (*ha an ôphelima oiètheisa polis heautèi thêtai, kai esti tosouton chronon hoson an keêtai ôphelima, plèn ei tis to onoma legoi*)” (177d4-6), adding in the next sentence: “*let him not talk about the word, but consider the thing being given a name* (*mè gar legetô to onoma, alla to pragma to onomazomenon theôreitô*)” (177e1-2). As soon as Protagoras admits a form of transcendency of the good, be it under the name “useful”, “profitable”, “beneficial” or any other name, he must concede that it is no longer possible to say anything we want about it unless only playing with words with no concern for what might hide behind those words (what Socrates refers to with the word *pragma*, derived from the verb *prattein*, “to do/make/act”, see section *Pragmata*, page 54). But to say that this is the case for the good, but not for the just, when the just, even without going as far as the idea of it Socrates develops in the *Republic*, is nothing more, for most people, than the good in social relations, in interactions between people, is ludicrous! It is indeed, in the case of the word “just (*dikaion*)”, caring only for the word.

We can see that the leading thread of the whole discussion between Socrates and Theodorus is the investigation of the consequences of mobilism, and the relativism it induces, for social life, whose foundations it destroys. With Theaetetus, a teenager, Socrates merely brings to light the innuendoes of a definition of knowledge as sensation and describes the general scheme of all sensations as interaction between an “acting” party (what is at the origin of the sensation) and a “patient” (the one being affected by the sensation). With Theodorus, a geometer who, as those taken as examples by Socrates in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, think he doesn't have to *logon didonai* (“give an explanation/account”, see *Republic* VI, 510c1-d3) of his “hypotheses”,<sup>258</sup> and who has a responsibility toward those kids he claims to educate through his teaching, and thus toward the city they are citizens of, Socrates goes farther by displaying the social and political implications of the theses of the one Theodorus claims to be a friend of and showing their inconsistencies and disagreements with the data from experience. To claim that each human being is self-sufficient in terms of intelligence is to accept that anybody may say anything without being contradicted since each one is master of one's own “truth”, which amounts to emptying the concept of “truth (*alètheia*)” of any substance. But shared experience shows that most people accept the idea that, at least when it comes to the

<sup>258</sup> See 165a1-3, where Theodorus, refusing to take the defense of Protagoras' theses, tells Socrates: “*as far as we are concerned, we somehow more quickly turned away from bare logôn toward geometry* (*hèmeis de pôs thaton ek tôn psilôn logôn pros tèn geômetrian apeneusamen*).”

good of their body, their own “truth” is no longer sufficient and they don't consider they are “self-sufficient” when it comes to healing themselves from disease. On the contrary, when it comes to “politics” (*peri politikôn*, 172a1), most people are willing to accept relativism and the fact that each city is master of its own laws and thus, of what it considers just and unjust, though they don't go as far as extending this relativism all the way to the good and bad. But they don't realize that just and unjust (or beautiful and ugly, or pious and impious, see 172a1-2) are no longer *sensations*, but abstractions, concepts out of reach of the senses, regarding which reasonings on the perpetual flow of sensations no longer hold, and that the city is not man, but a group of men and women who don't necessarily agree on the laws fit for the city. Most of them being unable to conceive the just in the light of the good, which, for the Socrates of the *Republic*, is to intelligence what light is to sight, and to understand that the just is nothing more than the good in the way of solving internal (between the different “parts” of the soul) and external (between individuals) conflicts which each one encounters in one's life, they stay, without being aware of it, at the level of words and try to use them to convince rather than understand, adapting them to their own bias, individually or collectively.

In this perspective, Socrates' monologue in the middle of the *Theaetetus* is not a digression, but rather an *example* meant to illustrate two extreme opposite approaches, both of which may be linked to the principle of self-sufficiency stated by Protagoras. On the one hand, the one Theodorus has no problem calling “philosopher” is the one going to the utmost consequences of the principle of self-sufficiency and thus thinking that he can reach knowledge alone, by his sole “intelligence/wisdom (*phronêsis*)”, a knowledge which is for himself alone and his individual satisfaction, avoiding as much as possible the company of other persons and implication in politics, interested not in just behaviors (*ta dikaia*) toward his fellow citizens, whom he doesn't associate with, but only in “justice itself and injustice (*autês dikaiosunês te kai adikias*)” (175c2) in the abstract; on the other hand, the one for whom “truth” and justice are determined by the vote (of the jurors), who cares only about his own petty affairs (*tên peri autou*, 172e7) and goes to court each time a question of justice or injustice arises between him and someone else, who, on the face of it at least, seems to admit that justice is what the city decides it to be through its laws. On the face of it only, since, as Socrates will soon point out at the end of the discussion of knowledge as true opinion (200d5-201c6), judges are required to make their own opinion and judge on facts they haven't been witnesses of and do it under the influence of the more or less persuasive speeches of the litigants, with no guarantee that they speak the truth. The one thinks he can ignore his body and his fellow citizens and counts on luck (*tuchè*) to find out by himself what “is” (see 165a1-3), not realizing that what matters is not what “is”, but what is “good”, and cares only for ideas, not people and material possessions; the other is a slave of his body and material possessions which bring him pleasure, and counts on oratory art (*technè*) to convince a majority of his fellow citizens selected as jurors of what is plausible to make him win his case against his opponents, not caring in the least for truth and ignoring what is *really* good for him. The one can't fix the meaning of words since he refuses the dialogue; the other adapts the meaning of words to his needs of the time. The one came out of the cave but couldn't get used to the light of the sun or ruined his eyes by looking too long at it and stays in the night or blindness, refusing to return to the cave; the other never left it and doesn't want to get out.

In short, neither one is just (*dikaios*), the one because he thinks he is not concerned by justice *in deeds*, and cares only for the *idea* of justice from a mere intellectual standpoint, the other because he knows only judicial *practice* before courts and manipulates it for his sole material short term benefit. And to these two extreme forms of injustice are associated two erroneous understandings of *logos*: the one who completely loses sight of the grounding of *logos* in *social* life, in interactions between persons which gave birth to it and make it live, that is, in *to dialegesthai* (“the (fact of) dialoguing” as an activity being practiced) and thinks that *logos* is only meant to allow the one who works hard on it to grasp “what is”, the only worthy goal for him; the other

who, on the contrary, only sees the social role of *logos*, but sees it shortsightedly, considering it only as a means of solving interpersonal problems and spending all the time left between these problems, which end up in court if not solved otherwise, to improve the oratory technique that will allow him to win his cases more easily. To these two opposed portraits presenting two extreme forms of injustice, neither one more commendable than the other, Socrates opposes, in the second part of his monologue two types of behaviors, one good, the other bad, in which it is precisely justice or the lack of it which makes the difference, neither one referring back to one or another of the prior two portraits, the good to the “philosopher”, the bad to the litigant. Starting from the idea of the good (the “sun” of intelligence according to what he says in the *Republic*) and from the fact that for human beings, unlike what is the case for gods, there will always be a contrary of the good showing up under the form of a multiplicity of bad “things”, he suggests that, to attempt to avoid as much as possible what is bad, man must look for “resemblance with god (*homoiōsis theōi*)” (176b1), which he presents as a form of “flight/escape (*phugè*)” “from here to there (*enthende ekeise*)” (176a9),<sup>259</sup> this resemblance consisting in “becom[ing] just and pious by means of intelligence (*dikaion kai hosion meta phronèseōs genesthai*)” (176b1-2). And “becoming just and pious by means of intelligence” doesn’t mean thinking in isolation that your own intelligence (*phronēsis*) makes you self-sufficient (*autarkès*) and allows you to do without the others, but understanding that it is the need for *dialogue* which gave birth to *logos* and that it is in the sharing of experience made possible by life in society and the practice of *dialogos* that we can advance *together* toward a better world *for all*.<sup>260</sup> And if these thoughts find their way in

<sup>259</sup> The primary meaning of *enthende* and *ekaise* is “here” and “there” respectively and may, in specific contexts mean “here” in the sense of “down here on earth” and “there” in the sense “up there in heavens (close to the gods)”. But it is not because Socrates is here speaking of gods and “escape” that we should necessarily understand that it implies on the part of man an escape from the material world and a flight away from his fellow human beings in the hope of “[being] carried alive in the islands of the blessed” (*Republic*, VII, 519c5-6, already quoted). *Homoiōsis* (“the act of becoming like (something else)”) is derived from *homoios* (“like, similar”) and similar doesn’t mean identical: man must not try to become a god, but to resemble a god as much as possible while remaining a human being, at least during this life on earth and he must do so caring for the other human beings, accepting his place in the city and being just toward them, and toward the gods, that is, displaying piety, which implies in particular that we don’t think we have become their equals. What we must “flee” away from are the evils both of unjust deeds (*ta adika*) and *hubris* (“excessive pride”), the latter occurring when, being only a man, we think we are a god. We must flee away from *behaviors*, not places. Fleeing away from mortal nature (*tèn thnètèn phusin*, 176a7) doesn’t mean trying to become a god by withdrawing from the world, but living in the world without giving material things more value than they have; it doesn’t mean living as if we had no body (which amounts to being “unjust” toward the body and the desiring part of the soul), but keeping the body and passions it produces under control at their “right” place by staying master of oneself at all times. This is what Plato’s Socrates tries to have us understand throughout all the dialogues and of which he gives us an example, and, in this respect, he is clearly different from the supposed “philosopher” Socrates pictures here.

<sup>260</sup> The words “to become just and pious by means of intelligence (*dikaion kai hosion meta phronèseōs genesthai*)” including the word *phronēsis* (« intelligence »), echoes the words used by Socrates to summarize the thesis of Protagoras at the start of the discussion with Theodorus: “he made each one self-sufficient for intelligence/wisdom (*autarkè hekaston eis phronēsin epoiei*)” (169d5-6) and gives Socrates’ answer to them. A word per word comparison of both phrases shows how careful Plato was in composing them so that they answer one another : - *dikaion kai hosion* (just and pious) answers *autarkè* (self-sufficient), self-sufficiency being for him the denial of what founds the city and implies justice in it as the fact for each one to play one’s social role at the service of one’s fellow citizens and in due respect of the gods, acknowledging that one is but a creature subjected to laws resulting from one’s nature that one doesn’t control, and which imply indeed that one is not self-sufficient, unless living the life of a beast without *logos* (each human being doesn’t create one’s own language, but learns it from others, shares it with one’s fellow citizens and is subjected to its “laws”, so that self-sufficiency regarding intelligence is an illusion); - *meta phronèseōs* (by means of intelligence)/*eis phronēsin* (regarding/for intelligence): for Socrates, *phronēsis* (“intelligence/wisdom/prudence”) and the knowledge it allows (the *epistèmè* that the dialogue tries to define) are *means*, not ends. The end is a life as good as possible as a human being, excellence (*aretè*) and, since human beings are made to live in society, this excellence includes the fact of fulfilling as best we can the

the middle of a discussion about knowledge (*epistèmè*), it is in order to put the problem of knowledge in the appropriate context, that of the good life for human beings: we are not seeking knowledge, assuming it can be reached by human beings, for the pleasure of knowing, but to live as excellent a human life as possible, to reach “true excellence (*aretè alèthinè*)” (176c4), the power and skills which alone truly deserve wondering and admiration, possibly even fear or awe, on the part of a human being worthy of that name (*hè hós alèthós deinotès andros*, 176c2-3).<sup>261</sup> And what makes this good life is justice in the sense Socrates gives this word in the *Republic*, a dialogue dedicated to redefining this “virtue” (*aretè*), understood in a non strictly “social” and judicial sense as governing proper relations between individuals, but as inner harmony of a composite soul torn between reason, self-esteem and passions as a prerequisite for social harmony between citizens in a city, considering it as the “idea(l)” of Man in this life. In short, Socrates is warning us: we are talking about knowledge, « science » (one possible translation of *epistèmè*), with “scientists” proud of their knowledge and who prefer staying in their figures rather than making long speeches on the meaning of life, but watch out! It is not this knowledge which matters to lead a good life as a human being, it is not it which can lead us to the *sophia* (“wisdom”) we should be *philo*i of (in love with). It is not enough to proclaim oneself *philosophos* or *sophistès* or even to be so called by an ignorant crowd who never left the cave or by self-proclaimed “wise-men” who ruined their eyes after getting out by staring at the sun at high noon to be that in truth. It is not the word which makes the “thing” (*pragma*), but the acts (*pragmata*) which call for the name, provided it is attributed by one who properly understands it.

In the section following the long monologue of Socrates and which takes up exactly where he left off before the monologue, as we have seen, Socrates, to definitely do away with the idea that the good (or the profitable (*sumpheron*), or the beneficial (*ôphelimon*), which are more “concrete” versions of it) might be relative and defined by decrees of the city, introduces the dimension of time, already mentioned with Theaetetus when talking about the past and memories at 163dff., this time regarding the future, which leads to the conclusion that the assumption that knowledge (*epistèmè*) is sensation (*aisthèsis*) is meaningful only in the present instant. Of the past, we no longer have sensation, but only memories, more or less reliable, and only of the “facts (*pragmata*) we have witnessed since, for the rest, as is the case for judges in a trial, we must rely on the memory of those who witnessed them; and of the future, we don’t have sensations yet and can only anticipate it. But it is precisely this anticipation of the future which we are most interested in, individually, regarding, among other, our health (reference to the physician

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*social* role for which our nature and education have prepared us. To consider, as Protagoras seems to do, intelligence and knowledge as an end, as suggested by the preposition *eis*, and moreover as an end which we might reach alone, is having understood nothing of human nature and thus shows a lack of real “intelligence”.

- *genesthai* (“to become”)/*epoiei* (“he/it made”): Socrates answer to Protagoras takes into account the fact that a human being is not, in this life at least, a completed creature at birth, but a being in perpetual evolution in a world in perpetual change, and that justice and piety are never definitely acquired, but are a goal we keep making progress toward or moving away from all life long. On the contrary, Protagoras is shown as “having made” (something) in the past, as a “maker”, in Greek a *poiètès* (substantive derived from the verb *poiein* at the root of the English word “poet”) as Homer and Hesiod, whose theories are but constructions of his mind not that different from those of Homer and other *poiètai* of the past, which, as a matter of fact, he has joined in death (the tense of the verb is imperfect). Socrates sets a program for any human being of good will, while Protagoras, who claims that each man is measure of his own “truth”, imposes (or rather “imposed”) *his* own understanding of man to all without giving them a choice, but does so in a world of his, a creation of his mind with no relations to the real world (see on this point the remark of Socrates at 179b2-5, where he complains that Protagoras wants to force him to be “measure (*metron*)” on issues on which he, Socrates, knows that he is “without knowledge (*anepistèmôn*)”).

<sup>261</sup> All these ideas, power, skill, cause of wonder, fear, awe or admiration, are found in the word *deinotès*, substantive derived from the adjective *deinos*, which refers in particular to the fear inspired by gods. To talk about *andros deinotès* soon after talking about gods who can only be good and the way for human beings to resemble them is to continue along the path of deification for human beings: a man or woman who is truly *deinos* is a man or a woman become almost equal to gods.

at 178c4) and the pleasures we are expecting (reference to wine at 178c9, to the musician at 178d5, to the cook at 178d10, the three pillars of a successful party (*sumposion*)), and collectively when it comes to anticipating the future of the city and to set its laws hoping them as beneficial as possible (*ôphelimôtatous*, 179a7) for it. And it is about this anticipation that experience proves that some are wiser (*sophôteron*, 179b1) than others in that they are more capable of successfully anticipating what will happen,<sup>262</sup> and thus should serve as a “reference (*metron*, 179b2)” to all. But this wisdom is not absolutely certain “knowledge (*epistêmè*)”, only a greater or lesser ability to foretell the future.

If the only possible knowledge concerns the present sensation, always changing, individual to each and potentially different from the one to the other, the question remains to know how the sharing and comparison of those individual “knowledges” on sensations in perpetual evolution is possible.<sup>263</sup> To answer this question, Socrates returns to the mobilist hypothesis of a “borne along beingness (*pheromenèn ousian*, 179d3)”, that is, of attributes carried away, before getting fixed, by time flowing and plunging them into the past, pushed by other sensations, each time different, taking their place, to see if, examined under this new light (knowledge is the present sensation), “it produces either a sound or cracked noise (*eite hugies eite sathron phthegetai*, 179d4)”. Before showing that, when taking seriously this doctrine of universal mobilism all the way, it leads to the impossibility of *logos*, Socrates points at the ‘cracked noise’, the cacophony produced by the holders of mobilism, those who make speeches (and thus take *logos* as a fact without wondering how it is compatible with their theories) in opposition to one another, without even listening to one another, and takes this opportunity to sow the germ of what will become the *Sophist* through a reference to Parmenides and the Eleatic philosophers, repeated at the end of the section. He does it by means of a mention of their doctrines as the antithesis of the mobilist doctrines of Heraclitus, suggesting that both be examined in turn and saying that “if both of them seems to say nothing fitting, we would be ridiculous thinking that we, who are of low condition, have something to say after having rejected as unfitting very old and wise men (*amphoterôi d' an phanôsi mêden metrion legontes, geloiôi esometha hêgoumenoi hêmas men ti legein phaulous ontas, pampalaious de kai passophous andras apodedokimakotes*)” (181b1-4), thus anticipating the conclusion of the *Sophist* dismissing both those the stranger calls “sons of the earth” (*tous gègeneis*, *Sophiste*, 248c1-2) and those he calls “friends of forms/ideas” (*tous tôn eidôn philous*, *Sophiste*, 248a4-5) by suggesting a third approach, taking as starting point, not a doctrine about some kind of hard to conceive “being”, but the fact that *logos* exists and somehow works in many cases. This reference to Parmenides (180d7-e4) centers on what scholars present as a quotation of him located at the exact center of the section (92 lines before, 92 lines after) whose wording poses problems to translators, chosen (or adapted) by Plato, deliberately in my opinion, precisely because of its ambiguity. The Greek text is as follows: *akinèton telethei tôi panti onom' einai* (180e1), which may be understood as

<sup>262</sup> This idea was already mentioned in the allegory of the cave, when Socrates describes, toward the end, the life of those who stayed in the cave saying: “and honors and praises, if some [of those things] were [in use] among them at the time, and the privileges for the one most sharply observing the [things] passing by and best at remembering which ones among them used to be carried before or after [516d] or simultaneously, and as a result of this, **most capable indeed of foretelling what would come**, do you think he (the prisoner having gotten out of the cave) would desire them and be jealous of those among them being honored and holding power?” (*Republic*, VII, 516c8-d4). Socrates suggests a direct link between real or assumed ability to predict the future and access to positions of leadership (power).

<sup>263</sup> This is the problem already mentioned by Socrates to Callicles in the *Gorgias* when, at the time the latter bursts into the discussion with Polus, he says: “if something of what human beings feel, different for the ones, different for the others, was not the same, but one of us felt something peculiar to himself different from the others, it would not be easy [for him] to make plain to others his own feeling (*ei mê ti èn tois anthrôpois pathos, tois men allo ti, tois de allo ti, to auto, alla tis hêmôn idion ti epaschen pathos è hoi alloi, ouk an èn rhaidion endeixasthai tôi heterôi to heautou pathèma*)” (*Gorgias*, 481c5-d1).

meaning either “*motionless happens to be the name of the whole*”, where *akineton* (“motionless”) is understood as the name given to the Whole, that is, the Universe, to identify it by its most characteristic feature, or “*motionless happens to be the name for all [things]*” where the fact of being without movement/change (*akineton*), of being to a certain extent immutable, is now a property common to all names. The first way of understanding it the one we may assume to be that of Parmenides, if the quotation as transcribed by Platon is indeed from him in this exact form, the second that which Plato's Socrates might accept and which suggests a possible answer to the holders of mobilism: “Yes, you are right, everything keeps changing in our material world, but it is the distinctive feature of human *logos* to be able to “abstract”<sup>264</sup> from continually changing sensations more or less stable over time “constants” to which he gives names which are stable enough over time to allow us to have a hold over the world around us and to communicate between us in an often efficient way, this effectiveness which can be observed in some cases at least being a proof of the “reality” of those “constants” being given names, abstracted from our sensible impressions by our intelligence as human beings (*nous*). By placing those few words reminiscent of the problem of names (*onoma*) mentioned at the beginning of the section about the good/profitable/beneficial exactly at its center, Plato's Socrates suggests that this is indeed the central problem of this whole discussion. Words are there, work rather efficiently and allow us to understand each other and to conduct this discussion on mobilism. Thus, the question is not to figure out whether there is something stable in a reality in perpetual becoming, but to *acknowledge* that there is at least one category of things having a certain degree of stability, names, and that the fact that they work at least in some cases proves that some of them at least refer to something which is other than themselves as mere words, and to try to understand how they work. In other words, we must start by investigating *logos* before trying to figure out what « to know » means and whether any knowledge is possible, which can only rely upon *logos*.<sup>265</sup> Before doing this in the *Sophist*, after first showing that the Eleatic thinkers, like the mobilists, but by another road, also lead to the annihilation of *logos*, Plato wants us to witness till the end the failure of Theaetetus' approach, who will try to make do by pulling *logos* from the hat at the end, which is the reason why, at the end of this section, he has Socrates postpone the examination of Parmenides' theses (183c8-184b2).<sup>266</sup>

As we can see, *logos* plays a central role in this third section of the third part of the dialogue, so that, even though it is still part of the discussion of the definition of knowledge as sensation, which has not yet been replaced by another, it constitutes a transition toward the second and third definitions, both on the side of *logos* (under the guise of opinion or directly under its own name) as opposed to sensation. This way of looking at the dialogue better balances it by making its material center (Socrates' monologue) its logical center as well, the one making a transition between sensation and *logos*.

<sup>264</sup> On this topic, see section “*Abstraction*”, page 9.

<sup>265</sup> This problem of the relationship between knowledge and *logos* is quietly staged no later than in the prologue of the dialogue, in an apparently trifling remark by Socrates, at 144c5-8. Theodorus just drew a laudatory portrait of Theaetetus without naming him, pointing at his physical resemblance with Socrates. The latter then asks him the name of his father (it was usual in Athens in the time of Socrates to refer to a person, especially a child, by the expression “the [son] of”) and Theodorus says he doesn't remember it. But at this very moment, Theaetetus and a few of his comrades enter the room where Socrates and Theodorus stand and the latter points at the child he just talked about for Socrates. It is the answer of Socrates to Theodorus which is interesting: it starts with “*I know [him] (gignōskō)*” and ends on “*but the name of the boy I don't know (to d' onoma ouk oida tou meirakiou)*”. In between, Socrates tells Theodorus what he knows about the father of the boy. It is sight which allows Socrates to identify the one he just heard about and this knowledge doesn't require the knowledge of his name. Conversely, hearing the name of someone we never met and whom we never heard anything about before doesn't teach us anything about that person. What is in the background of these words of Socrates is indeed the relationship between names and knowledge and the role of sight (and senses in general) in knowledge.

<sup>266</sup> In so doing, Socrates alludes to a meeting he had while still young with an old Parmenides, which is none other than the one narrated in the *Parmenides*.

If Plato's Socrates wants us to understand that knowledge (*epistèmè*), or wisdom (*sophia*), or the part of it which is within our reach as human beings, cannot be acquired alone but requires the cooperation made possible by *to dialegesthai* ("the practice of dialoguing") to allow us to progress *together*, and not each one for oneself, as Protagoras or the so called "philosopher" of the "digression" would like to have it, *eis phronèsin* ("toward intelligence/wisdom", see 169d5-6), Plato who holds the pen also wants us to understand that it is not either something which could "flow from the one of us [who is] fuller into the emptier if by chance we touched one another, as in cups water flowing through wool from the fuller one into the emptier" (*Symposium*, 175d4-7). We are not "*self-sufficient for intelligence/wisdom (autarkè eis phronèsin)*" (169d5-6) and we need to confront our experiences to make progress, but it doesn't exempt us from the appropriation work required for that knowledge to become more than mere words repeated without understanding them. So, we must keep a critical eye especially on those who pretend to know and to be wise, or even only friends of wisdom (*philosophoi*) and this is what Plato invites us to do in the *Theaetetus* not only vis-à-vis Protagoras and other thinkers whose doctrines are subject to examination in the course of the discussion and for whom Socrates shows us how to proceed, but also... vis-à-vis Socrates himself who conducts this inquiry, and he does this more than in other earlier dialogues and in several ways. He starts by having his Socrates theorize in the prologue the manner in which he "delivers" his interlocutors without himself knowing anything, which is a manner of saying that what matters is not what he, Socrates, says or doesn't, knows or doesn't know, but what his interlocutor is able to make *his own*, to (re-)produce as coming from him, not as a tape-recorder,<sup>267</sup> but showing that he understood and agreed on what he says. He then stages him (openly) playing advocate for Protagoras, long dead, that is, expounding ideas he doesn't necessarily agree with, showing us along the way that criticizing opinions that you condemn requires that you understand them<sup>268</sup> and thus that we should be able to expound them to their best advantage before pointing out their weaknesses and inconsistencies. Then, at the center of the dialogue, he puts us to the test by having his Socrates draw a portrait of one about whom he says only toward the end in a four words statement at the turn of a sentence that it is the portrait of the one *Theodorus*, geometer friend and more or less follower of Protagoras, calls "philosopher", leaving it to us to wonder whether Socrates himself agrees with this name and whether this portrait is consistent with all that he said in the *Republic* about philosophers and the false images most people have of them due to those who usurp this qualification without deserving it. It is the responsibility of the reader to decide if, simply because it's Socrates who is talking and he didn't warn us beforehand he was joking, he will swallow everything Socrates dishes him up, which is in complete contradiction with everything he said on the same topic in other dialogues.

But there is more! We, readers, tend to forget that what we read in Plato's dialogues as words spoken by Socrates are in fact nothing more than words put by Plato into the mouth of a Socrates of literature, years after the death of the historical Socrates and that were probably never spoken, in this form at least, by him. It is to remind us of this that Plato uses in the *Theaetetus* the device of a writing in a writing. Assuredly, he doesn't stage himself writing a dialogue but, what amounts

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<sup>267</sup> Or an Antiphon in the *Parmenides*, reproducing by rote a highly abstract conversation he would have heard in his youth second hand on topics he has no longer taken interest in for years, now that he dedicates himself to horse breeding, and whose name, by its etymology, suggests a resonance chamber.

<sup>268</sup> Understanding the opinions of a thinker is not limited to understanding the logical links between propositions but requires first that we understand the words used by him in the sense he gives them (something Aristotle had a hard time doing). Thus it is a complex task since the meaning of words results from the manner in which the thinker uses them in his speeches, in a way which may or may not be consistent, understanding the meaning of speeches requires understanding the meaning of the words it is made of, and, on top of all this, the meaning of a word is expressed with other words as problematic as the one we are trying to define, and most words, especially those referring to abstract notions, don't have a unique meaning, but several ones depending on the context in which they are used!

to about the same, he presents us with a dialogue in direct style, what's more, as is the case for most of his dialogues, which he introduces in a preamble as a *writing* produced, not by Socrates himself, who never wrote anything, but by a certain Euclides who pretends to have written down narrations made to him by Socrates toward the end of his life. It's sort of a way for Plato to tell his readers: "When you read my dialogues, you tend to forget that it is me who is putting words into the mouth of Socrates and not him whom you directly hear, so, for once, I will make it plain for you, try not to forget that you don't hear Socrates, but Euclides writing down Socrates' words, even if, because I assume you are big boys now, I don't do as this idiot named Antiphon slavishly reciting by rote the narration he heard from Pythodorus of a conversation between Socrates and Parmenides and I spare you the indirect style!" To allow us to keep the distance necessary to focus on the words spoken and not on the speaker and to try to understand them and make them ours rather than admiring or rejecting them depending on the opinion we have on who is supposedly speaking, Plato incorporates in his dialogue the distance which should be the one we have toward *all* of his dialogues. He forces us to realize that we don't hear Socrates himself, but a slave reading a writing of Euclides transcribing words claimed to be those spoken by Socrates.<sup>269</sup> Indeed, he takes pains to suggest that this transcript is true but, at the same time, as I mentioned at the beginning of the comment on the *Theaetetus*, he spreads in his work hints that might be interpreted in the opposite way: Euclides himself tells us at the beginning of the dialogue (142c5-6) that the related conversation took place not long before Socrates' death and we learn at the end of the dialogue (210d2-4) that Socrates' trial is imminent; he himself adds that he was not present at that meeting and that he knows it from a relation of it made to him by Socrates (142c8-d3) enriched later on the occasion of travels to Athens and further meetings with Socrates where he questioned him about aspects of this conversation he was not sure about (143a2-4), but the context of the trial leaves little room for multiple encounters between Euclides, who didn't live in Athens, but in Megara, and Socrates over a period of time the greatest part, or maybe all, of which he spent in jail after being condemned to death, where he might have stayed one month before drinking the hemlock. But, even if we admit that Euclides' transcript is accurate (which would require that the dialogue related by... Plato actually took place with the historical Socrates, which is most likely not the case), or at least that the Socrates here staged by Plato is consistent with the Socrates of the other dialogues and true to the *spirit* of the historical Socrates as understood by Plato, this shouldn't dispense us from exhibiting the same critical acumen toward his words as toward those of his interlocutors and the theses under examination.

Plato inscribed this message not only in the *text* of his dialogue, but also in its *form*, through the trick of the double center I pointed at earlier: the displacement of the center of the dialogue when adding the preamble between Euclides and Terpsion, that is, when including the section which highlights the fact that the dialogue is but a narration by a third party putting words in the mouth of Socrates, compared to the center of the dialogue limited to the conversation involving Socrates, which moves from the summary of the "central" (in all the senses of the word) message of Plato's Socrates about justice properly understood as the "idea(l)" of Man in this life, which was already that of the *Republic*, central dialogue of the central trilogy, to the four words which put in perspective the portrait of the "philosopher" he just drew, making it the portrait of a philosopher *according to the geometer Theodorus*, is still another manner for Plato to invite us to stay awake even concerning the words of (his) Socrates, who doesn't always take the trouble of warning us loud and clear when he says what he thinks and when he uses some trick to better evidence the inconsistencies and contradictions of his interlocutors or of the theses under examination, and to always keep a critical eye even toward his words, which may themselves be open to criticism either because of his avowed ignorance (Plato's Socrates may

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<sup>269</sup> To be perfectly accurate, we read a text written by Platon claiming to have been written by Euclides and "introduced" by Plato in a way which makes us believe that we are listening to a slave of Euclides reading this text to his master and one of his friends.

not be always right, even when he says what he thinks), or by methodological choice (as for instance when he tries to blow up from the inside the thesis of his interlocutor by slipping into it to better expose its weaknesses<sup>270</sup>).

### *The Sophist*

The *Sophist* and *Statesman* are dialogues relating the continuation, the following day, of the conversation related in the *Theaetetus*, in accordance with what is said in the last words of this dialogue when Socrates, summoned to the Porch of the King as a result of the suit Meletos brought against him, invites his interlocutors to meet again the next day at the same place. This sequel involves a new character, introduced by Theodorus at the beginning of the *Sophist*<sup>271</sup> as a stranger come from Elea, the city of Parmenides and Zeno, but whom he says “different (heteron) from the companions [staying] around [them]”.<sup>272</sup> Theodorus doesn't give his name and he stays anonymous till the end, but introduces him as *mala andra philosophon* (“to the highest degree a philosophic man”), an expression in which the words *philosophos anèr*, which, as I said earlier, are in the background of the first tetralogy (*philia* for the *Lysis*, *andreia* for the *Lachès*, *sophia/sôphrosunè* for the *Charmides*), are found in the reverse order and at the accusative (*andra philosophon*). Socrates answers him that, if this is true, Theodorus brings them, not a stranger, but a god (a discreet allusion to the name of Theodorus, meaning “gift from god”), to which Theodorus retorts that he probably is not a god (*theos*), but godlike (*theios*), as all philosophers are in his opinion.<sup>273</sup>

Socrates then asks the stranger his opinion and that of his fellow citizens on three kinds of persons, the sophist, the politician/statesman and the philosopher, whether they are the same, or two or three different types.<sup>274</sup> The stranger gladly accepts to give his opinion on these issues in dialogue form and, asked by Socrates to choose an interlocutor among the teenagers there present, asks Theaetetus, with whom he already discussed along the way to the meeting with Socrates, to play this role, at least for the time being. An allusion of Socrates during this conversation to the meeting narrated in the *Parmenides* invites us to compare the way Parmenides chose his interlocutor, young Aristotle (the one who, being the youngest, would cause least trouble to him<sup>275</sup>), and the manner in which his fellow citizen chooses his (someone about whom he knows from earlier experience that he will actively contribute to the progress of the reasoning<sup>276</sup>).

It is worth taking the time to analyse more deeply the staging of the dialogue to see how perfectly it fits the theme of the dialogue, the elucidation of the principles and rules of *logos*. To help us investigate the “essence” of *logos*, Plato imagined a *dialogue* which places us as close to its birth as possible. He couldn't stage a hypothetical “inventor” of names and language (“the one who sets the names (*ton tithemenon ta onomata*)”, see *Cratylus*, 436c1; 438a4), or an infant learning to talk, or even two persons speaking different tongues and trying to understand one another, so he imagined a dialogue between a teenager, that is, a person whose language

<sup>270</sup> As I explained in presenting this dialogue, this is precisely what he does in the *Protagoras*.

<sup>271</sup> *Sophist*, 216a1-4.

<sup>272</sup> I agree with Cordero (translator in French of the *Sophist* for the GF Flammarion edition) on his argument in favor of the reading *heteron* (“other/different”) at 216a3 rather than *hetairon* (“companion”) found in some manuscripts.

<sup>273</sup> But we saw in the *Theaetetus* the conception Theodorus had of philosophers, he who swallowed without blinking an eye the portrait drawn by Socrates in his central monologue in that dialogue of a “philosopher” withdrawing from the world and despising the rest of mankind.

<sup>274</sup> These three words and the possible confusions between them sort of summarize the life of Plato's Socrates: he suggests in the *Republic*, as a cure from the evils of mankind, that the philosophers become statesmen and take the lead in cities/states (see the quotation opening this paper) and he died because his fellow citizens could not make a difference between “philosopher” and “sophist” in a city where politicians were under the influence of sophists.

<sup>275</sup> *Parmenides*, 137b6-8.

<sup>276</sup> *Sophist*, 218a1-3.

learning is not yet completed, especially regarding the words which will be discussed, and a “stranger” who is only half a stranger, since he speaks the same language as his interlocutors, Greek, in order to make the dialogue possible. But, by presenting him as a stranger and, what's more, an anonymous one, and coming from a city far away from Athens (Elea, the city he comes from, is in Italy), and by having Theaetetus periodically remind us of his status as a stranger (*xenos*) because, not knowing his name, which Theodorus didn't reveal when presenting him, he only addresses him with the words *ô xene* (“Stranger”), he implies that<sup>277</sup> talking the same language doesn't guarantee that they give the same meaning to the word they use, for instance due to dialectal peculiarities different in the two cities that might be misunderstood by the one coming from the other city. And indeed it is this problem of local specificities which is brought forward by Socrates to start the discussion, when he asks this stranger, introduced by Theodorus as “to the highest degree a philosophic man (*mala andra philosophon*)”, how the people of his city understand the words *sophistês* (“sophist”), *politikos* (“political (man)”) and *philosophos* (“philosopher”) and whether they think they designate the same kind of persons or different ones.<sup>278</sup> And the stranger goes even further at the very start of the discussion, noticing that the fact for two persons to use the same word (in the present case, *sophistês*) doesn't guarantee they give it the same meaning. (218c1-3).

By not giving us the name of the stranger, Plato wants us to realize that his *name* would teach us nothing about him (as is the case for any proper or common name whatsoever) and that it is the *logos* he utters which can give us an idea of his personality. Or, if it could teach us something about him, assuming it was the name of someone known or supposed to be known, if not by us modern readers, at least by Plato's contemporaries, it would be worse as it could only be hearsay knowledge (what the allegory of the cave calls a “reflection” in the intelligible realm) which might distort our understanding of what he says by instilling in us prejudice and preconceptions which we might have trouble getting rid of when listening to him in person.<sup>279</sup>

If Plato nonetheless chooses to specify that the stranger comes from Elea, the home city of Parmenides and Zeno, the only bit of information he gives about him, it is to bring into his work just enough circumstantial data to stage in this dialogue the question of prejudice in a fully mastered way in relation with its subject matter, since the purpose of the dialogue is to show the weaknesses of the doctrines of Parmenides and of those who followed him in developing speeches on “being” and he intends to stage a “putting to death” (the “parricide”) which will be, in the intelligible realm, the counterpart of the all too real putting to death of Socrates, and he wanted it to be the work of a *single one* of the *fellow citizens* of Parmenides, a strong holder of the one in the intelligible realm, as that of Socrates in the material world of multiplicity had been the work of a multiplicity of his fellow citizens. Prejudice since the origin of the stranger may indeed induce us to intuitively think that the understanding of the language and doctrines of his famous fellow citizens we may have through their writings might help us understand his words, even though,

<sup>277</sup> These two words occur 13 times in the dialogue: at 217a10, c1, 218a4, 222c1, 229d1, 233a4, 235a5, 240a7, 244c3, 249a3, 250e3, 258e4, 261a4.

<sup>278</sup> Without going so far as Italy, we may remember that all book VI of the *Republic*, and before that the end of book V starting at 474b3, is devoted to pointing at the differences in the understanding of the word *philosophos* even when staying in Athens, and that Socrates was seen by Aristophanes as a sophist (see his comedy called *The Clouds*), followed in that by a majority of their fellow citizens, which resulted in Socrates' condemnation to death by a majority of them

<sup>279</sup> When Plato stages in dialogues well known characters, such as Alcibiades, Protagoras, Gorgias or Parmenides, it is to conduct a critical examination of their behavior or doctrines, which their name is enough to bring to mind. When he stages Socrates as the leader of a discussion, it is because his whole life, completed at the time he was writing, including the last act of it, his trial and death, which he stages in some of his dialogues, shows that he exhibited in it consistency between words and deeds even at the cost of his life. When he needs another character to lead the discussion, here the Stranger from Elea, in the *Laws*, the Athenian, he chooses an anonymous one so we may judge him only on the words he puts in his mouth, that is, to focus only on the *logos*, not on the person.

when presenting him, Theodorus, in the first sentence of the dialogue, warns us that he is “*different (heteron) from the companions [staying] around Parmenides and Zeno*” but that, nonetheless, he is “*to the highest degree a philosophic man (mala andra philosophon)*”. Different, but, as one of their fellow citizens, in a good position to be aware first hand of their doctrines, thus probably knowing them better than Theaetetus and maybe also Socrates.

The method of division, in which it would be a mistake to see the last word of what might be “*platonician dialectic*”, is another device devised by Plato to put us in the situation of word makers and make us experience the fact that it is possible to talk about something before giving it a specific name, a fact that Theaetetus and the stranger experience several times during their divisions, when they reach dichotomies distinguishing categories that don't yet have a name and for which they invent, at least in some cases, an appropriate name, showing in this way that it is not the name which allows us to know what it is the name of, but the always imperfect knowledge we have of “*things*” which allows us to give them names. From this standpoint, even if nothing can be certain after twenty-five centuries, it is more than likely that Plato took pleasure in multiplying neologisms in the *Sophist* and inventing names all along these divisions, thus showing that creating names, what's more, names quite easily understandable, is child's play in which even a teenager such as Theaetetus can participate. In the example of angling alone, the candidates to the status of neologisms, that is, words found only in this section of the *Sophist* among all the Greek classics available at Perseus are:<sup>280</sup> *cheirôtikon* (acquisition by conquest rather than exchange,<sup>281</sup> 219d8), *zôiothèrikon* (hunting of living things, 220a4), *pezothèrikon* (hunting of walking animals, as opposed to swimming and flying animals, 220a8), *neustikon* (a general qualification for all animals moving in a fluid, air or water, 220a8), *enugrothèrikon* (hunting of animals living in such “*fluids*”, air as well as water, 220a9), *ornitheutikè* (hunting of birds, 220b5), *erkothèrikon* (fishing with “*enclosures*” such as wicker baskets, seines, nets, and so on, 220c7), *plèktikon* (fishing by means of “*blows*”, striking for instance with a harpoon or fishhook, 220d1), *pureutikon* (fishing at night by the light of fires, 220d7), *agkistreutikon* (fishing with a fishhook, 220d10). And this flood of neologisms doesn't prevent Theaetetus and the stranger to understand one another and to come up with an explanatory *logon* (221b1) of what an angler is, *that we too understand*, despite the often artificial and arbitrary character of the divisions being used. Indeed, the goal of Plato in this *game*<sup>282</sup> was not the divisions themselves, but the exercise of name making it allowed and the exemplification of the fact that it is the prior understanding of the “*thing*” we are talking about which helps us make a word to name it, not the word which makes us understand what it is pointing at.

The whole dialogue, through the repeated use of this method of division, shows how the understanding of what a word points at, the *pragma*,<sup>283</sup> must be carried out *dia logôn* (218c4),

<sup>280</sup> Some of these words occur several times in the *Sophist*. I only mention the first occurrence.

<sup>281</sup> Since these words are neologisms, rather than translating them by a neologism in English, I summarize between parentheses the explanation leading to the creation of the word.

<sup>282</sup> I don't mean to say that this way of proceeding by successive divisions is *always* a game and cannot, *in other contexts* and conducted with a little more rigor, be of interest to help us apprehend the world around us and classify what it contains but that, in the context of the *Sophist*, and in the hands of the stranger, especially in the example of the angler, it is not meant to help Theaetetus and the other persons around to understand something they all know already, but to give us a hands on experience of the mechanics of *logos*. And when he applies it to the case of the sophist, the element of game is far from having disappeared, which doesn't mean that, in this case as in the case of the angler, one or another of the proposed divisions are wrong. To play doesn't mean to lie or being wrong and humor may be a good way of getting through very serious things.

<sup>283</sup> On the meaning of the word *pragma*, substantive derived from the verb *prattein*, meaning “*to do/make/act*”, especially in opposition to “*suffer, endure, be subject of (paschein)*”, and the problems posed by its translation into English (most often by “*thing*”), see section *Pragmata*, page 54, and Appendix 2.3 “*pragma, praxis*”, page 164. In the present case, namely, the sophist, the translation of *pragma* by “*activity*” or “*deed*” rather than “*thing*” is much better. What we want to know is the *activity* specific of the angler or sophist *in general*, not this or that specific angler or sophist as a “*thing*”.

that is, both through *logos* as a tool and through the sharing of experience the dialogue allows, multiplying the angles of approach and the viewpoints rather than seeking a dictionary type “definition” necessarily simplistic, which is nowhere found in the dialogue. The method makes use, this time in a productive way, of both the technique of enumeration in the description of some intermediate sets, and also in the multiplication of the possible “definitions” of the sophist, which each give a partial view of him, and the method of differences<sup>284</sup> in the successive divisions, and also in what is in the background of the whole exercise and shows through only once or twice in the discussion, the distinction between sophist and philosopher, suggested right from the start in the opposition between “*the companions [staying] around Parmenides and Zeno*”, which will be assimilated to sophists in the ensuing discussion to the point of seeing in Parmenides the father of them all, and the stranger who is “*to the highest degree a philosophic man (mala andra philosophon)*”.

Indeed, if the stranger says that he will start his inquiry with the sophist, he does it in a context in which the goal is to *distinguish* him from other types, and especially from the *philosophos*, whose name has as a characteristic the fact that it shares a common root with *sophistès*, the word *sophos* (“wise”). A simple etymological analysis similar to those conducted by Socrates in the *Cratylus* might have shed light on the issue by taking into account the fact that the suffix *-tès, -tou* found in *sophistès* refers to a profession or a status while the prefix *philo-* of *philosophos* refers only to an inclination, but this is not the approach Plato has the stranger take, after having started the program of the dialogues as a whole with a trilogy, *Lysis, Laches, Charmides*, which precisely deals, in discussions conducted with teenagers, with the possible meaning of the elementary components of the expression *philosophos anèr* (“philosophic man”), *philia* (“friendship”) in the *Lysis*, *sophia* (“wisdom”), in its “embryonic” version better suited for teenagers, *sôphrosunè* (“soundness of mind, prudence, moderation, self-control”), in the *Charmides*, and in between, *andreia* (“courage, manhood”) in the *Laches*, where he made readers realize from the start how difficult it is to grasp the whole range and complexity of these concepts. And the discussion between Socrates and Theodorus in the *Theaetetus* reminded us how far from the truth is the idea most people, including “scientists” such as Theodorus, have of the *philosophos*, when Socrates drew for Theodorus a portrait of “*the one you call philosopher (hon dè philosophos kaleis)*” (*Theaetetus*, 175e1) which, as I explained in the commentary on the *Theaetetus*, doesn’t match the image of the *philosophos* staged by Plato throughout his dialogues in the person of Socrates,<sup>285</sup> contrary to what the stranger does at *Sophist*, 230b4-d4 when pretending to describe the “purgative” method of the sophists when he is in fact describing the usual practice of Socrates illustrated in most of the dialogues. What the stranger keeps doing all through the *Sophist* is to try to lay a finger on what distinguishes the sophist from the philosopher, almost without using the word *philosophos*, leaving it to the reader, in each lead successively followed, that is, with each of the seven “definitions” successively given, to figure out where we should have taken a different path to reach the philosopher rather than the sophist, giving him a hint only with the last definition by suggesting at 253b9-254b7 that the search for the sophist may have led to the philosopher, in a conversation about “the science of dialogue (*hè dialektikè epistèmè*)” (253d2-3) in the middle of the exposition of what I called the principle of selective associations and as a prelude to the examination of the example of the five *megista gene* (“broadest kinds”).

<sup>284</sup> What I have in mind in mentioning the “technique of enumeration” and the “method of differences” are the two possible definitions of *logos* suggested by Socrates at the end of the *Theaetetus*: the one consisting in enumerating all the parts (*Theaetetus*, 206e7-207a1) and the one consisting in looking for the specific difference distinguishing what is under examination from everything else (*Theaetetus*, 208c7-8).

<sup>285</sup> This invites us not to take at face value the words of Theodorus introducing the stranger as *mala andra philosophon* (“a man very much philosopher”) and to stay on guard: he comes from Elea, but does that mean that he is an “Eleatic” philosopher? Theodorus says he is *philosophos*, but can we trust him on that matter when we saw him accept without blinking an eye the caricature of philosopher Socrates served him in the *Theaetetus* and he admitted he was, if not a follower, at least an admirer of Protagoras?

The reason is that both use *logos* as their prime tool (unlike the *politikos*, who moves from speeches (*logoi*) to action (*erga*)) and that the difference between them is in their manner of using this “tool” and thus in the way each understands it. Thus, everything points at the need for a proper understanding of the power and limits of *logos*, which boils down to the possibility of “false speech” (*pseudès logos*), a prerequisite to determining which usages of it are right and which are wrong. Before trying to figure out whether what this or that thinker said about *to on* (“being”) and *to mè on* (“not being”) is relevant or not, we must first figure out whether such a speech, whatever it says, is possible and may have a meaning, and more importantly, be of value for us, human beings trying to live as happy lives as possible in society. And obviously, it must be done without relying on prior assumptions on the meaning of this or that word, *einai* (“to be”), *hen* (“one”) or any other, since the purpose is precisely to figure out if and how words may have meaning and be *signs* of something other than themselves.

As I did for the *Theaetetus*, I now present the plan of this major dialogue, which will help us understand how it is organized:<sup>286</sup>

Prologue	216a1-221c5 (157,5)
a. Introduction: presentation of the interlocutors	216a1-218d7 (78,5)
b. Preliminary exercise: the angler	218d8-221c5 (79 )
<i>The seven definitions of the sophist (except “parricide”)</i>	221c6-237a2+264b11-268d5 (587,5)
I. The sophist as “acquirer” (his <i>telos</i> (goal): money)	221c6-226a7 (135 )
(1) Hunter for the money of rich young men	221c6-223b7 (55 )
Trader of learning matters ( <i>mathèmata</i> ) for the soul ( <i>psuchè</i> ) :	223c1-224e5 (45,5)
(2) travelling,	
(3) retailer in his own city,	
(4) manufacturer-seller	
(5) Athlete practicing the art of fighting with <i>logos</i> as a weapon (eristic)	224e6-226a5 (34,5)
II. (6) The sophist as “critic” purifier of souls?	226a6-231c8 (158,5)
Transition : reminder of the first six definitions	231c9-232b12 (23 )
III. (7) The sophist as “producer” of phantasms	232b12-268d5 (270,5)
7.1. The imitative arts	232b12-237a2 (136,5)
<i>The parricide: the possibility of false speech</i>	237a3-264b10 (838)
7.2. The sophist as manufacturer of phantasms	264b11-268d5 (134 )

In the presentation of the multiple plans of the *Theaetetus*, I argued that this dialogue could be seen as reproducing in brief the first five stages of the program of the tetralogies and that the prologue itself can be analysed along the same pattern, whose first four steps it reproduces, the rest of the dialogue being the *logos* Socrates “delivers” Theaetetus from, that is, the fifth step, and that, if we take into account the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, it is the sixth tetralogy as a whole that reproduces in brief the overall plan of the set of seven tetralogies made up by the dialogues, according to the following general pattern:

1. introduction: stage setting and position of the problem,
2. warning against appearances, images, illusions,
3. the test of facts, deeds, concrete experience in space and time,

<sup>286</sup> For the meaning of the figures between parentheses on the right, see note 250, page 119. The *Sophist* (Greek text of the Loeb rearranged in Word) includes 76.852 letters spread over 33 pages of 47 lines plus 32 lines on the 34th page, leading to a total of 1.583 lines of about fifty five letters each (overall means: 48,5 letters per line).

4. coming into play of the *psuchè* (“soul”),
5. focus on *logos*
6. the moment of discernment (*krisis*),
- 7 consequences for action (the return to the cave)

In this pattern, the *Sophist* corresponds to the sixth stage, the “critical” phase putting our judgment to the test, in this case to be able to make the difference between the sophist and the philosopher, which the Athenians who condemned Socrates to death couldn't make.

But it is also possible to find this same pattern behind the seven successive definitions of the sophist developed by the stranger. Setting aside for the time being definitions 2, 3 and 4, the sophist is successively described as:

1. hunter for money of rich young men, which reminds us of the first tetralogy, where Socrates is presented “hunting” for teenagers with whom he might enter in dialogue (Alcibiades, Lysis, Charmides, and so on);

2. (*see below*)

3. (*see below*)

4. (*see below*)

5. fighter whose arms are *logos*, which places us in the theme of the fifth tetralogy, whose central dialogue of the trilogy, the *Euthydemus*, displays an example of such a fight opposing the sophisticated methods of the two brothers to that of Socrates;

6. practitioner of *diakritikè* (« critical judgment »), which leads the stranger, not without reservation, to describe in 240b3-d4, a purgative method which is clearly the one used by Socrates all through the dialogues and thus, the method, not of the sophist, but of the philosopher, and invites us to exercise our own critical judgment on the reservations of the stranger;

7. producer (*poiètikos*), whose productions in the form of *logoi* are subjected to a close analysis to show that they are but *phantasmata* without value, contrary to the *logoi* of the *Laws* which conclude the seventh tetralogy.

For definitions 2, 3 and 4, the parallelism seems not to hold. The reason is that, in the overall scheme of the tetralogies, these steps correspond to the opposition, in the visible realm, between images and reality and the coming into play of the *psuchè* (“soul”) but, as far as the sophist is concerned, he is *always* in illusion and *psuchè* is for him but a mere word pointing at nothing specific. The world of the sophist is a world in which he fosters confusion and approximation without offering anything stable upon which we might rely. This confusion is rendered by Plato by the fact that these three definitions are dealt with together under the general heading of trade (*agorastikon*) and with much less details and rigor than the others, at least in their differences. But in the three, the stranger simultaneously makes use of three criteria which may be linked to those used to organize the progression from tetralogy to tetralogy: in those three definitions, and only in those three, the *psuchè* is mentioned as recipient of the merchandise sold by the sophist and the criteria used to distinguish each definition from the others are (1) the origin of the merchandise being sold and (2) the location of the sale: is he himself the producer of the “merchandise” he sells, of the doctrines he teaches or does he merely peddle doctrines that are not his own, that is, “images”, “reflections”, of *logoi* produced by others, and does he sell them in his own city, where he is known also by his deeds, or in other cities where he is judged mostly by his words, not his deeds? In the second definition, which parallels the tetralogy of illusions in the material world, the one precisely focusing on sophists, introduced by the *Protagoras* and developed with Hippias (*Hippias Major* and *Hippias Minor*) and Gorgias (*Gorgias*) as main interlocutors of Socrates, we are at the height of illusion since he sells far away from home “reflections” of *logoi* which he did not produce by himself; in the third definition, which parallels the tetralogy centered on facts, *pragmata*, of Socrates' trial, where he is judged by his fellow citizens, we are in the case where the sophist can be subjected to the judgment of his fellow citizens, since he sells in his own city those “images” of *logoi* he “imports” for them; and in the

fourth definition, which parallels the tetralogy of the soul, the sophist reveals his own soul, even if unconsciously, since he is described as seller of his own productions, that is, of what comes out of his own soul to enter that of his “customers”.<sup>287</sup>

The complete pattern is thus the following:

*Acquisition*

1. hunter for money of rich young men, which reminds us of the first tetralogy, where Socrates is presented “hunting” for teenagers with whom he might enter in dialogue (Alcibiades, Lysis, Charmides, and so on);

2. trader of **illusions** (merchandise for the soul “**reflection**” of speeches of others sold far away from home);

3. trader “**on probation**” (merchandise for the soul sold **in his own city** where he is known by his **deeds**);

4. trader of the products of his **soul**;

5. fighter whose arms are *logos*, which places us in the theme of the fifth tetralogy, whose central dialogue of the trilogy, the *Euthydemus*, shows us an example of such a fight opposing the sophistical methods of the two brothers to that of Socrates;

*Sorting*

6. practitioner of *diakritikè* (« critical judgment »), which leads the stranger, not without reservations, to describe in 240b3-d4, a purgative method which is clearly the one used by Socrates throughout all the dialogues and thus, the method, not of the sophist, but of the philosopher, and invites us to exercise our own critical judgment on the reservations of the stranger;

*Production*

7. producer (*poiètikos*), whose productions in the form of *logoi* are subjected to a close analysis to show that they are but *phantasmata* without value, contrary to the *logoi* of the *Laws* which conclude the seventh tetralogy.

As can be seen in the above complete list of the seven definitions, the stranger arranges them in a 5 + 1 + 1 scheme which may shed light in return on the organization of the tetralogies: the first five definitions are all on the side of techniques of acquisition, the sixth on the side of techniques of sorting/judgment and the last on the side of techniques of production. Transposed at the level of the tetralogies as a whole, this scheme invites us to look at the first five tetralogies as stages of “acquisition” (of “knowledge” and experience), that is, of learning feeding our intelligence to develop discernment, a prerequisite to the exercise of sound judgment (*krisis*) that is expected from us in the sixth tetralogy in order to provide grounding for the kind of action envisioned in the seventh stage. The main goal of the whole program, set in the first pages of the introductory dialogue of the first tetralogy, the *Alcibiades*, is the production of a *logos*, but not any *logos*, a **political logos** capable of organizing life in the city,<sup>288</sup> which is what the *Laws*, the last dialogue of the cycle, exemplifies. In the same way the five definitions of the sophist as “acquirer” end up with the one depicting him as a fighter using *logos* as “weapon” for acquisition (of wealth), the acquisitive, propaedeutic, phase of the whole program, made up of the first five tetralogies, ends up in a tetralogy centered on *logos* whose final dialogue, the *Menexenus*, is a wonderful example of the kind of political speeches by one who has not yet gone through the “critical” phase of discernment that would allow him to understand how *logos*

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<sup>287</sup> See *Protagoras*, 313a-314b where Socrates warns Hippocrates about the fact that, when listening to the sophists, there is no way to prevent the “merchandise” they trade from entering the soul before checking their condition and value.

<sup>288</sup> See *Alcibiades*, 105a7-b4, where Socrates explains his intervention toward young Alcibiades by the fact that he is about to speak in the Assembly of the people of Athens for the first time. Socrates wants to know which topics he wants to speak about and what entitles him to give advice on such issues.

works and what the relation between words and what is not them is, thus making him able to produce a sound political *logos* “good (*agathon*)” for the city to which it is addressed because it is good for *all* its citizens, an example of which is given in the *Laws*. And, along the same lines, the *Theaetetus*, comprising the first five propaedeutic stages of the critical tetralogy as a preparation for the sixth, that of the *Sophist*, ends up in an attempt, failed for reasons it is our task to uncover, precisely in making good use of our critical judgment, to define “knowledge (*epistēmè*)” in a *logos* referring to *logos* in the definition it suggests, before having taken the time to investigate *logos* to find out if it can give us access to something other than words that can be bent at will, as do those who think that the city can define at will the just and the unjust through laws and change their definition when it pleases to.<sup>289</sup> If we try to summarize this five step propaedeutic process, we may do it in this way:

1. clearly state the problem
2. reveal through dialogue the illusions which impair our judgment
3. lean on concrete shared experience
4. keep in mind that man is more than his material body and has, or rather *is*, a *psuchè* (“soul”)...
5. ...and that what makes this *psuchè* human is *logos*.

Thus *logos* is indeed key for *human beings* and it is only after they have uncovered, in the “critical” step, its workings, rules *and limits* that they may hope to have a chance to succeed in producing a political *logos* beneficial for all.

What constitutes the critical step (**sixth** definition) of the critical dialogue (**sixth** step in the trilogy *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* in which the *Theaetetus* develops the first five, preparatory, steps) of the critical trilogy (the trilogy of the **sixth** tetralogy), is the definition, offered not without reservations, of the sophist as a purifier of souls through a teaching grounded in refutation (*elegchos*, 230d1) that the stranger describes in a manner which leaves no doubt on the fact that what he has in mind is the method used by Socrates and not that of the sophists (230b4-d4), even though both methods, that of Socrates and that of the sophists, some of them at least, may look very similar to the uninitiated, “*like a dog and a wolf*” (231a6), as Socrates himself says in the *Euthydemus*.

The seventh definition, the one looking at the sophist as producer, takes up more than half the dialogue (the tree is known by its fruit). It includes a huge “parenthesis” (237a3-264b10) on the possibility of false speech, which is the main course of the dialogue and gives the stranger the opportunity to commit the “parricide” against his fellow citizen Parmenides, between two sections of about equal length (232b12-237a2 and 264b11-268d5: respectively 136,5 lines and 134 lines) which, put together after setting aside the “parenthesis”, make up the seventh definition of the sophist as producer of phantasms properly speaking. In so doing, we end up with two approximately equal parts: the seven definitions on the one hand (743,5 lines), the “parenthesis” on the other hand (839,5 lines), main purpose of the dialogue, inserted at the center of the seventh definition.

Following is a detailed plan of the seventh definition alone, which shows how rigorously it is built and how its structure helps better grasping its main message.

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<sup>289</sup> See *Theaetetus*, 172a and 177c6-d7.

A1	The sophist as practitioner of mimetic art	232b12-237a2 (136,5)
B1	Relation between error and <i>mè on</i> (not being)	237a3-241d4 (137,5)
C1	Review of past and present “ontologies”	241d5-245e8 (130 )
D1	Sons of the earth and... (at the center: definition of <i>einai/to on</i> (247d8-e3)) ...friends of forms ( <i>eidè</i> )	245e8-249d5 (117 ) (lines 58 et 59)
E1	<i>To on</i> (being): neither movement nor rest	249d6-250d4 (27,5)
F	Same difficulty with <i>to on</i> and <i>to mè on</i>	250d5-251a4 (10,5)
E2	Several names for the same thing	251a5-251e7 (29 )
D2	Principle of selective associations and... (at the center: definition of “dialectic” (253d1-3)) ...application to 4 <i>megista genè</i> (broadest kinds)	251e8-255c8 (112 ) (lines 55 et 56)
C2	5th <i>genos</i> (kind) : the “other” and <i>to mè on</i> (not being)	255c9-259d8 (135,5)
B2	The possibility of false speech	259d9-264b10 (138,5)
A2	Return to the seventh definition of the sophist	264b11-268d5 (134 )

This plan brings out the embedded structure of this part of the dialogue: section A2 answers section A1 and, as I said already, together they make up the seventh definition of the sophist as maker of illusions. The long parenthesis which opens at 237a3 poses the problem of the possibility of *pseudès logos* (“false speech”) and its relationship with *to mè on* (“not being”); the question is raised in section B1 and answered in section B2, here again of almost equal size. The question about *mè on* (« not being ») opens, with C1, a new parenthesis on the multiple doctrines about *to on* (“being”) proposed so far, starting at 241d5, immediately after the mention by the stranger of the parricide (*patroloian*, 241d3) he will have to commit against his fellow citizen Parmenides, parricide which is completed after the clarification of the meaning of the words *mè on* (“not being”), at the end of section C2 where the stranger mentions it once again at 258c7 at the beginning of the conclusion of this parenthesis within the parenthesis. At the center of this group (274,5 lines before, 276,5 lines after), in a short section, F in the above plan, the stranger recognizes that the *aporia* (“difficulty, dead end”) is the same about *to on* (“being”) and *to mè on* (“not being”) and that, if this is the case, clarifying the meaning of either one will also clarify the meaning of the other. As the clarification will bear on the meaning of *mè on* (“not being”), we are left with the task of drawing the consequences regarding the meaning of *on* (“being”). But before reaching this point in the second part of the enactment of the parricide, he introduces it as an attempt to “clear a path to *logon* (*ton logon... diòsometha*, 251a2-3)” most appropriately for both at once (*to on* and *to mè on*), showing that his purpose is indeed to figure out which *logos* is appropriate (*euprepès*, 251a1) regarding both *to on* (“being”) and *to mè on* (“not being”). The first part of the parricide (sections C1, D1 and E1) paves the way by offering a review of the previous doctrines on this issue, grouped in two broad categories, those of the “sons of the earth” and those of the “friends of *eidè* (“forms, ideas”)” (among which it would be a mistake to count Plato, whose sympathy goes to the words of the stranger, who doesn’t take sides in the dispute and finds fault with both groups). It is this inventory which leads to the conclusion that both groups, regarding *to on* (“being”) as well as *to mè on* (“not being”) end up in absurdities. The path that the stranger clears for *logos* is the one which relies no longer on any sort of “ontology”, but on what I call the principle of selective associations, which states that we are neither in an undifferentiated “whole” in which everything get mixed up with everything (what Eleatism pushed to its limit might lead to), nor in the realm of complete inability to “communicate” between “monads” having no relations whatsoever with one another (what Heraclitean mobilism pushed to its utmost limits might lead to), but in a “world”

somehow in between those two extremes where some relations/associations/interactions/... are possible between elements/components/entities/...,<sup>290</sup> but not any ones, stated at first under its most general form, then applied to the *megista genè* (“broadest kinds”)<sup>291</sup> to lead to the understanding of *mè on* not as a substantive designating a “subject”, as its use in the expression *to mè on* might suggest, but as a mere verbal expression meaning “not being (this or that)”, that is, “being other”, being something else than the predicative expression called for by the clause, since “other”, as the stranger indicated earlier, is a relative implying an “other” with regard to which the subject is “other”, which means, in the case of the expression *mè on* (“not being”), that it assumes another *on* (“being”) identified by the predicate, compared to which the *on* (“being”) which *mè esti* (“is not”), that is, the subject of the sentence *mè esti* is a part of, “is not” that. In other words, the Greek words *to mè on* must not be understood as “the not-being” in which “not-being” is thought of as the two words name of “something”, but as meaning “the (fact of) not being (this or that)” implying a predicative expression left unspoken, the fact that something (a “predicative expression” in the grammatical sense) is denied from a subject (again, in the grammatical sense), in short “negation” in the grammatical sense (remember that, in the time of Plato, there was no “metalanguage” to express grammatical concepts and functions, such as subject, predicate, complement, and, in the present case, negation as a grammatical category). But if *mè einai* implies a predicative expression, then *einai* too imposes one, even if, in this case, it may be the subject itself, in the case of a tautological statement of identity which teaches us nothing about it.

I have isolated in the above plan two short sections which answer one another symmetrically on either side of the center of this part of the dialogue, on account of their importance: the definition of *einai* (“to be”) at 247d8-e3,<sup>292</sup> which separates the criticism of the sons of the earth and

<sup>290</sup> It is on purpose that, doing the same as Plato does in those pages of the *Sophist*, I use open lists of words (Plato does it by deliberately changing names and verbs from one sentence to the next, as I show in appendix 3.1, “*The Principle of Selective Associations*”, page 172) to refer to what is discussed here, for indeed, this principle is fully open and doesn’t depend on specific words pointing only at “subsets” of the whole offered to our grasp. It is the major strength of this argument that it doesn’t depend on a specific meaning of specific words so long as the mechanics of *logos* haven’t been clarified even though it must be used to develop the argument and it is the reason why it avoids the sophistical traps which ruin all ontologies. The starting point is no longer a *logos* on « being » under various forms (*einai* (“to be”), *to on* (“being”)/*ta onta* (“the beings”), *ousia* (“beingness”)) as a verb or a substantive, which cannot found *logos* without falling into a *petitio principii* (it is impossible to talk about it, either to define it or to deny it, without using it both as subject of the discussion and as a linguistic tool unavoidable to talk about anything, see *Sophist*, 252c2-9), but a call to common experience: it is not possible to say anything that goes through your mind, pace Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and there are cases where, except with interlocutors in bad faith, it is possible to agree on the fact that a certain group of words is “true” or “false” (see the two elementary examples taken by the stranger at 263a), which implies that there exists “referents” behind words, perceptible by us, but external to all, which dictate their law to sound *logos*. The question for us is thus to determine in each case the most acceptable agreement (*homologia*) (an easy task when what is being talked about are concrete “things” perceptible by the senses, but becoming harder and harder as the object of *logos* becomes more and more abstract) with the help of *to dialegesthai* (« dialogue ») grounded in shared experience.

<sup>291</sup> I pick the word *genos* (translated by « kind » in English) to name what the stranger is talking about, because it is the first word he uses at 254b8 to refer to what he has in mind, and the one he uses most often. But this word is only one of the many words he uses interchangeably during that discussion, as a result of a deliberate choice not to specialize his vocabulary in order to give his reasoning as general a scope as possible (see previous note).

<sup>292</sup> “I declare then that whatever possesses the least power either to act upon whatever else of any nature or to suffer even in the most trifling way under the slightest one, even if only once, all this [I declare] really to be (*legô dê to kai hopoianoun tina kektêmenon dunamin eit’ eis to poiein heteron hotioun pephukos eit’ eis to pathein kai smikrotaton hupo tou phaulotaton, kan ei monon eis hapax, pan touto ontôs einai*)”, which the stranger summarizes under the form “for I set up as a definition to define *ta onta* (neuter plural, that is, the “subjects” of sentences having the general form “x is a”) that it is nothing else but potentiality (*tithemai gar horon horizein ta onta hôs estin ouk allo ti plên dunamis*).”

In the above translation, “suffer”, which I use to translate *pathein*, infinitive aorist of *paschein*, must be understood in its most general sense of “being affected by (something)”. The reason why I prefer it to “be affected” is that Plat was most careful in his definition not to use the verb *einai* in a definition of *einai*, and I want to do

that of the friends of *eidè* (“kinds”), and that of *dialektikè epistèmè* (“knowledge of the art of dialogue”) at 253d1-3, which may be extended to 253b9-254b2, a section where the stranger links this *epistèmè* to the *philosophein* (253e4-5) and warns us, this time explicitly, that we might have laid a hand on the philosopher while looking for the sophist (we came close earlier with the description of the Socratic *elegchos* (“refutation”) in the description of the sophist as *diakritikos*).

The examination of this plan allows us to grasp in its globality the argument of the stranger and to bring its articulations to light. It shows that everything before section F deals with the critique of the conflicting theses so far propounded, a critique ending in the acknowledgement of the *aporia* (“difficulty, dead end”) regarding *to on* (“being”) as well as *to mè on* (“not being”) in this section F, and it doesn't try to give answers, not even partial ones, to this *aporia*; that the answer given by the stranger unfolds in sections numbered 2 in this plan, starting with section F at the center and that it implies no prior “ontology”, not even a potential “theory of forms/ideas”, but only a minimal understanding of very general terms that all the holders of the doctrines examined in the first part are bound to use to argue their theses against opponents, short of renouncing to use *logos* altogether (see 252c2-9): the starting point of his argument, addressed to *all* the interlocutors mentioned in the first part, whatever their doctrines (cf. 251c8-d3), is indeed that the mere discussion of these doctrines assumes a minimal agreement on *logos* allowing to distinguish *onta* (“beings”) from one another in speech and accepting the principle of selective associations (251d5-e2). And it doesn't matter at this point whether these *onta* (« beings ») are abstract ideas or material things, or words themselves. Once this principle has been accepted, its application to the case of the *megista genè/eidè/phusei/ideai/ousiai* (broadest kinds/forms/natures/ideas/beingnesses”) implies nothing about the nature of the *onta* (“beings”) the stranger will work on, which he indeed designates under many different names, precisely to accommodate all the potential interlocutors, but only that a minimal meaning be accepted for *stasis* (“rest”), *kinesis* (“motion”), *einai* (“to be”), *tauton* (“same”), *thateron* (“other”), whichever it may be, and that we agree that, whatever meaning we give to *stasis* (“rest”) and *kinesis* (“motion”), the one is different from the other (“*not mingling with one another (ameiktò pros allèlò)*”, 254d7-8), and thus that we assume a meaning for *esti* (“is”) and *mè* (“not”) in the sentence *stasis mè esti kinesis* (“rest is not motion”), which implies the notions of (*t*)*auton* (“(the) same”) and *heteron* (“other”). Similarly, when, at the end of the exercise, the stranger uses the words *mega* (“great”, 257b6), *kalon* (“beautiful”, 257d7), *dikaion* (“just”, 258a4), he doesn't care what specific meaning each one of us may give to those words and what is the “ontological” nature of what they point at, all that is needed on the part of the interlocutor for his argument to hold is that it be admitted that not everything is great or beautiful or just, whatever that may mean, and that it is possible to say that some *onta* (“beings”) are *mè mega* (“not great”), or *mè kalon* (“not beautiful”), or *mè dikaion* (“not just”), whatever it may mean to him. In short, the *only* two prerequisites of the reasoning are (1) that *dialogue (to dialegesthai)* be possible through a common language, even if both interlocutors are “strangers” to one another and don't share the same education, the same values, the same customs, the same traditions, the same cultural references and are not even sure they give the same meaning to the words they use, and (2) that they agree that some combinations of words are acceptable to both while others are not, even if they are not sure they understand those they agree upon exactly the same way.

It is this same possibility of an agreement in the exchange of opinions involved in *to dialegesthai* which is at the root of the discussion on *logos* itself: if the examples chosen by the stranger, *Theaitètos kathètai* (“*Theaetetus sits*”, 263a2) and *Theaitètos, hòi nun ego dialegomai, petetai* (“*Theaetetus, with whom I myself am now dialoguing, flies*”, 263a9), both have Theaetetus as subject, and if the second explicitly mentions the *dialegesthai*, it is to evidence the fact that the agreement between the two interlocutors in the process of *dialoguing* is made possible in the

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the same in the translation and “be affected”, a passive form, is built on the auxiliary “be”. So I had to find a verb expressing passivity in an active grammatical form without auxiliary.

present case by the fact that Theaetetus is best able to know whether what the stranger says about him is true or false, regarding facts (*pragmata*) of daily life, deprived of egotistic, ethical or metaphysical implications which might interfere with the honesty of the answer, which would have been the case, had for instance the stranger taken as example “Theaetetus is ugly”, or “Theaetetus is dumb”, or “Theaetetus is unjust”, or “Theaetetus is an Eleatic thinker”. For what is key is not that an agreement *always* be possible, but that it be *sometimes* possible, without ambiguity and on facts whose experimental verification is possible. In the present case, Theaetetus knows that he sits, and Theodorus and both Socrates can ascertain it with their own eyes, even though we, readers, have no proof of it and learn it on the occasion. But, for us, the fact that he might be seated when the stranger talks is not impossible, while we all know without having been witnesses of the discussion that it was impossible for him to fly physically. And anyway, since this conversation never took place but in Plato's imagination, for us, what is convincing is our ability to understand what Plato wrote and to agree that one of these two propositions *might* be true while the other *cannot* be true.

### *The Statesman*

The *Statesman* is clearly the sequel of the *Sophist*, as can be seen in its prologue, which involves the same characters, Socrates, Theodorus, the Stranger from Elea, Theaetetus and the younger Socrates and multiplies reminders of and references to the context of the *Sophist*. The first words being exchanged suggest that there are still two words to deal with, politician/statesman (*politikos*) and philosopher (*philosophos*); the stranger asks if he should continue with Theaetetus as his interlocutor or take someone else as interlocutor; Socrates recalls his physical resemblance with Theaetetus, already mentioned at the beginning of the *Theaetetus*, and his homonymy with the younger Socrates, and it is eventually the latter who is asked to replace Theaetetus as interlocutor to the stranger in order to afford some rest for his friend, which gives Socrates the opportunity to declare that his turn will come to dialogue with his namesake. And the choice is made to deal next with the statesman, leaving the philosopher for later on.<sup>293</sup>

The *Statesman* is, along with the *Republic* and *Laws*, one of the three dialogues explicitly rather than incidentally dealing with politics and political matters. But each one does it in a different perspective. The *Republic*, at the logical center of the program focuses, as we have seen already, on the perfection of the human *psuchè* and brings out the fact that man being by nature an animal destined to live in society, and being to a certain extent the product of the city/society he is brought up in, it is impossible to deal with the idea(l) of justice which constitutes the perfection of *anthrôpos* in this life (inner harmony of the *psuchè* (“soul”) under the direction of its *logikon* (endowed with *logos*) part as a prerequisite for social harmony in the city) without taking into account the political environment in which he lives and examining which political context would, at least theoretically, allow a *psuchè* which has the required potentialities to reach the highest excellence. The *Laws*, at the end of the program, offers an example, located in space and time, of the task awaiting a statesman worthy of that name, even if it remains mostly theoretical. In between, at the end of the critical trilogy, the *Statesman* deals with the specific qualities required for a good leader as a man, or woman, of action, and no longer only a theoretician possessing a specific knowledge about the *anthrôpoi* he is expected to rule.

The fact that Socrates suggested in the *Republic* that philosophers should become rulers, or rulers philosophers, doesn't imply that these two qualifications are synonymous. Even if they happen to be united at a certain time in the same person, they qualify that person from two different standpoints, which justifies that they be investigated separately. The fact of being a philosopher reflects a type of knowledge and ways of apprehending reality while the fact of

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<sup>293</sup> For those who, at this stage of the program, haven't yet become “younger Socrates” and couldn't find the philosopher in the *Sophist*, and thus might need still more dialogues with Plato's Socrates! But what they need is a rereading of the dialogues they already went through, not more dialogues.

being a *politikos* (political leader/ruler/statesman) reflects qualities in action at the service of the city. It is indeed what the beginning of the dialogue suggests when the stranger goes back to the method of division to attempt to give a definition of the *politikos*, this time starting with a division of sciences (*epistèmè*, and no longer *technè* (“art, craft, technique”), as was the case in the *Sophist*) in practical (*praktikai*) sciences, geared toward concrete productions, and *gnôstikai* (“turned toward knowledge, cognitive”) sciences, geared toward pure knowledge.<sup>294</sup> And, if the stranger seeks the statesman on the side of cognitive sciences, he immediately distinguishes those which are limited to forming judgments (*kritikè*) without seeking practical applications of them and those which derive rules of action from them and translate them into orders (*epitaktikè*)<sup>295</sup> and he seeks the statesman on the side of those who give orders, that is, who use their knowledge to drive action.

But, unlike the *Sophist*, the *Statesman* soon does away with the method of division, after having reached a first definition of the statesman as shepherd of human beings following a somehow convoluted path not deprived of humor, a definition which he immediately subjects to criticism noticing that the case of human beings is not the same as that of all other animals, in that, in the case of other animals, the shepherd indeed cares about everything relating to his flock while, in the case of human beings, the many tasks required to care for them are shared among a multitude of specialized functions, each of which could pretend to the qualification of “shepherd of men”. Underlying this criticism is the fact that the shepherd is a member of the flock, of the same species as the animals of a flock in which each one assumes a share of the “pastoral” task, which changes everything. In any event, the problem is now to distinguish the true shepherd from all those competing with him for this qualification.

To move forward in the critical reflection, the stranger suggests then a kind of educational recreation<sup>296</sup> by way of a myth, which he makes up for that purpose through the assembly of bits and pieces of otherwise known preexisting myths:<sup>297</sup> the myth of Atreus and Thyestes, the two feuding twin brothers involving the gods in their quarrel, the myth of the golden age of Cronus, and the myth of men born from the earth. In other dialogues, when Socrates uses a myth, it is usually at the end of the dialogue, in order to get a message through that reason alone cannot adequately formulate, especially when it has to convince not only reason, but also the other two parts of the *psuchè*. Here the myth comes in the first part of the dialogue and the way it works suggests that it is at the same time a criticism of an abusive use of myths, which give us a false image of gods worse than men or make us dream of a lost paradise where gods were taking care of men. The stranger, talking about the golden age of Cronus, where men had everything at their disposal without having anything to do, points out that, if these men didn't take advantage of this situation to philosophize, that is, to make good use of their reason, they were not different from all other animals. And the whole myth aims at making us understand that we shouldn't count on gods, who, in their case, would be for men in the same situation as human shepherds for animal flocks, that is, from another species than the animals of the flock, to take care of human affairs, but that we should count only upon ourselves and the “divine” gift that our reason is.

Once the recreation through myth is completed, *logos* is back with the paradigm of weaving, making the statesman a royal weaver in charge of combining as harmoniously as possible and in view of the greatest good for all the complementary characters and skills of his “subjects” in the same way the weaver intertwines the warp and woof threads. This paradigm also illustrates the

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<sup>294</sup> *Statesman*, 258e4-5.

<sup>295</sup> *Statesman*, 260b3-5.

<sup>296</sup> “Recreation”: in Greek, *paidia*, a word differing from the word *paideia*, meaning “education”, only by an epsilon! Both words derive from the root *pais* meaning “child”. *Paidia* refers originally to child's play while *paideia* refers to the activity allowing a child to become an adult through education.

<sup>297</sup> The manner is not without similarities with the way in which Aspasia says in the *Menexenus* she composed her funeral oration.

difference between the weaver and all auxiliaries contributing to his task, sheep breeders, shearers, spinners, dyers, manufacturers of the various tools required for weaving, and so on, and to transpose it to the case of the statesman.

The center of the dialogue is, once again, occupied by a kind of parenthesis which is nonetheless central, in all senses of the word, to the investigation, revolving around the notion of “mean” or “appropriate measure” pointing at the art of finding a happy medium between deficiency and excessiveness.

The stranger then defines the ideal constitution as that in which a wise and good person governs directly the city with the goal of bettering its inhabitants. Short of finding such a person, we must make do with a constitution based on laws. At this point, the stranger distinguishes three types of government, based on the number of rulers, further splitting the first two in two depending on whether the constitution is based on laws or does without laws (or despises them and doesn't abide by them): if a single one rules, it's a kingship if the ruler abides by laws and tyranny in the other case, if a small number of persons govern, it's aristocracy if they abide by laws and oligarchy in the other case, and if many share in government, whether with or without laws, it's a democracy. The stranger adds that the constitution with only one ruler with laws (kingship) is the best, but the worst if the ruler doesn't abide by laws (tyranny), that the constitutions with a small number of rulers are intermediate in terms of good (aristocracy) as well as of evil (oligarchy) and that the government of the many (democracy) is powerless to do much good or bad owing to the fact that power is parcelled out and shared among many, which makes it the worst constitution of those abiding by laws, but the best (or rather least bad) of those without laws.<sup>298</sup>

### Seventh tetralogy: return to the cave

We move now to the seventh and last tetralogy, which details the mission in the world of the “philosopher king” which Alcibiades might have become, had he been able to benefit from his encounters with Socrates.

#### *Philebus*

The prelude of this tetralogy is the *Philebus*, which invites us to think about what makes the good *of man*, the good life *for man*, which should be the goal of any government, and of each one of us at his/her own level, and suggests, as might be expected after reading the *Republic*, that this life cannot be the triumph of one or another of the parts of the soul, be it *logos*, over the other two, but requires a mix affording each part of the soul, each constituent of man its fair/”just” share of satisfaction.

#### *Timaeus*

The *Timaeus* stages four people meeting again as agreed the previous day at the end of a conversation which we, readers, didn't witness. Those characters are, aside from Socrates:

- Timaeus (“Esteem, Honor”), a citizen of the city of Locri, in southern Italy where, as a man of noble birth and great wealth, who happens, on top of all this, to be most versed in all branches of philosophy, he held the highest positions, as Socrates says in the prologue;

- Critias (“Judgment/Discernment”), a relative of Plato, the very one who became one of the leaders of the bloody government of the Thirty Tyrants at the end of the Peloponnesian war, who is also counted as one of the Sophists, of whom only a few fragments are extant, among them one in which he explains that it is an astute man who invented gods as capable of seeing everything that happens to force men to abide by the laws even when nobody sees them, for fear of their punishment;

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<sup>298</sup> *Statesman*, 302c-303b.

- Hermocrates (“Power of Hermes”), the Syracusan general who defeated the Sicilian expedition devised by Alcibiades and left under the command of Nicias when Alcibiades, condemned to death in absentia, fled to Sparta.

We learn at the beginning of the dialogue that a fourth interlocutor of Socrates in the conversation of the previous day, whose name is not mentioned, is now absent because of *astheneia* (etymologically “lack of strength”, that is, “weakness, illness”). In the context of the dialogue, it is not absurd to think that this absentee might well be Alcibiades, whom we saw in the *Protagoras* precisely in the company of Critias and whom Plato, as I said, stages as the antihero of the dialogues: he is the one opening the program but he himself admits, while drunk, in his speech in the *Symposium* that, despite having great admiration for Socrates, he was not able to follow his advice and overcome his own evil demons.

Anyway, we learn in the prologue that the conversation of the previous day took place during the feast of Panathenaea and was the occasion for Socrates to develop propositions similar to those developed in the *Republic*, which Timaeus summarizes. Socrates then suggests that it is now his interlocutors' turn to offer him in return a feast of speeches, giving life to the citizens imagined the day before in showing them in action in a just war. Hermocrates answers that, while they were returning to Critias' place the day before, where he and Timaeus were staying while in Athens, their host suggested they use a story he had heard from his grandfather, who had told him when he was only ten and his grandfather very old, a story that his grandfather had heard from his own father, who was a friend of Solon, and which the latter had brought back from Egypt after one of his travels there during which he had heard it from Egyptian priests. If I take time to detail the source of this story, it is because they are finally more important to understand the objective of Plato in this last trilogy than the story itself, which is none other than the story of Atlantis, made up by Plato to fit the needs of his project.

Indeed, Critias explains that this story, which relates a war between Athens and the people of the island of Atlantis, eventually swallowed up by the sea, in a remote past which even the Athenians no longer remember and which only Egyptian priests kept a record of, will offer the picture, not in the present or the future, but in a remote past, of a city such as the one Socrates dreams of in action and allow us to see that it didn't prevent the world from falling back into its errors. In other words, Critias is trying to defuse the « revolutionary » ideas of Socrates by suggesting that he invented nothing new, that what he proposes has already been tried and that it led to disaster! Critias even goes so far as to accuse Solon, one of the most respected law-makers of Athens, of having wasted time in managing the city's affairs when he could have become even more famous than Homer had he used his gifts as poet to transcribe this story he heard from Egyptian priests in an epic of the kind of those of Homer.

In short, Plato goes to great lengths to present us a Critias in the process of making up from scratch a new origin myth to better exploit his fellow citizens, depicting a supposed victory of Athens over an imaginary Atlantis whose description as given by him recalls a sort of Persia relocated toward Sicily under an assumed name reminiscent of Atlas, the man who thought he was strong enough to hold the earth on his shoulders without the help of gods, who precisely was its first king in the myth invented by Critias. And the wealth of details he gives about the transmission of this story reminds us, though still more complicated and incredible, of the transmission of the story of the meeting between Socrates and Parmenides at the beginning of the *Parmenides*.

The party finally agrees that Timaeus will speak first to describe the origin of the Universe and the nature of Man, that Critias will then take over with his story, presenting the citizens of the remote past as if they were today's Athenians, before Hermocrates in turn speaks, no indications being given on what he would talk about.

All this introduction shows how closely related the *Timaeus* and *Critias* are, the latter being the continuation of the former in an anticipated trilogy *Timaeus, Critias, Hermocrates*. But, if

the *Timaeus* is a complete dialogue, the *Critias* as we know it stops in the middle of a sentence before the story ends and we have no trace of a dialogue called *Hermocrates*. After a few more words about the *Timaeus* itself (so far I have only talked about its prologue), I will explain, when commenting the *Critias*, the meaning of all this in the overall architecture of the cycle of Plato's dialogues and we'll see that there is nothing missing in his writings.

The rest of the *Timaeus* is a long monologue developing all the physics of the time under the form of what Timaeus himself calls at the beginning "a likely *myth*" invoking the limitations of human nature (*phusin anthrôpinèn*) to explain why we should be content with it. Timaeus, unlike Critias, makes no mystery of the fact that his story is but a "myth" and his only goal is to make it as coherent as possible with the data from experience (this is what "likely" means): we all can see that the Universe obeys laws (dogs don't beget cats, human beings aren't born adults and in arms from the earth, the stars in heaven follow regular courses, and so on) and he tries to "imagine" how all this is possible and how and by whom this well ordered universe and all it contains might have been "created", with the idea that this "myth" might inspire us for the task which awaits us, bring order through laws in cities in order to allow us to live as happy lives as possible, since this is our fate.

Nonetheless, this myth includes what may be considered the first mathematical model of the universe, a model which builds all matter, and thus all the sensible world, from elementary triangles. This model makes us laugh today and its contents no longer have any "scientific" relevance, but at least its author, Plato, contrary to many modern scientists who take seriously their "models", was quite conscious of the fact that it was no more than a "myth", and not a perfectly adequate representation of reality. Besides, Plato, in constructing this model, didn't have the same objectives as modern scientists: they want to act on matter, build atom bombs, recode the genes of plants and animals, or even human beings, explore, or even invade the universe, while Plato was looking for ways of improving human *psuchè* and allow human beings to be happier. His myth was not intended to help us act, for good or evil, on the world and matter, but to present us with a model of order (*kosmos*) intended to serve as an example in our work of bringing order in our cities. We may simply note that, in this model, what comes first are *forms*, not matter, triangles, the most elementary plane figure that can be assembled (circles cannot be assembled with one another without leaving empty space between them), and he is careful to choose two types of elementary triangles (half equilateral triangle and half square), which are both right-angled triangles having one side incommensurable with the two others, that is, include an *alogon* length, as we saw with the experience with the slave in the *Meno*,  $\sqrt{3}$  in one case,  $\sqrt{2}$  in the other, as if to warn us that, from the origin, there is a dose of irrationality in nature, but that it is not totally incompatible with harmony: all the volumes Timaeus builds from the assembly of those triangles to make them "atoms" of the four elements, earth (solid state), water (liquid state), air (gaseous state) and fire (energy), are regular solids.

In this myth, Plato develops four understandings of *anthrôpos*, four "ideas" of Man, which I introduce here in the reverse order of that in which Timaeus introduces them, proceeding from the most material to the most abstract.

The most material understanding is that of the physicist, for whom man is nothing more than a specific assembly of matter, this matter whose ultimate "form" is that of the elementary triangles, and this "form" is the same for all elements of the sensible world; this "form" of Man which he has in common with everything else, is akin to the material cause of Aristotle.

Next comes the understanding of the biologist, which is introduced in the myth of Timaeus through the description of the making of the "pattern" of Man by subordinate gods to which the demiurge, solely responsible for the creation of the whole sensible universe, hands out human *psuchè* previously manufactured by him; the tale explains how those subordinate gods conceive the *anthropos* with a round head to host this *psuchè* and what is required next for the rest of the human body: sense organs to feed it with data to allow this soul to play its part, a digestive

system to feed the body, legs to allow it to move, and so on; what these gods do is not individual human beings, but the organic “pattern”, “form”, of Man in a perspective coming close to the formal cause of Aristotle (man is here described as the receptacle for a *psuchè* (here only the rational part of the tripartite soul of *Republic*, the part endowed with *logos*, the only part of divine origin) in a body whose visible form is defined by subordinate gods based on the specific role that each part plays at the service of a *psuchè* capable of thought and endowed with reason).

A third understanding of *anthrôpos* is that of the psychologist, interested only in the *psuchè*, and it is introduced by Timaeus in his description of the making of this human *psuchè* by the demiurge creator of the universe from residues of the making of a *psuchè* of the Universe, from three components, same (identity), other (alterity) and a mix of them (composition); we are now at the level of the moving cause of Aristotle, since the soul is what moves a body (and indeed this is the way Socrates defines *psuchè* in the myth of the *Phaedrus*).

Where it gets interesting is with the fourth understanding of the notion of « form » of *anthrôpos*, which is introduced, not within Timaeus' myth, but *before*, in the prologue of the dialogue, in the reminder of a conversation held the previous day in which ideas which are obviously those debated in the *Republic* have been discussed. But, as can be seen through the presentation I made of it, everything is done to make us understand that the discussion of the previous day is *not* that reported in the *Republic*: the interlocutors are not the same, nor the location (we are in Athens, not in Piraeus), the dates don't match, for the *Timaeus* takes place during a festival different from that which was the occasion of the discussions reported in the *Republic*. In short, the same *ideas* are discussed in both cases, but not in the same spatio-temporal context. And this is precisely what Plato wants us to perceive: what this reminder should bring to mind is indeed the idea(l) of justice suggested by Socrates in the *Republic* as the idea(l) of *anthrôpos* in this life, but *only* as an *idea(l)*, free of any specific context. It is the *end* (*telos* in Greek) of *anthrôpos*, what Aristotle calls the final cause, and as such, it is outside space and time. It is there from the origine (the beginning of the dialogue), before creation of time, described within the myth of Timaeus, who makes it a moving image of eternity (what comes first is eternity, which is not time indefinitely continued; it is time which is defined by reference to eternity, not eternity in terms of time). This understanding of *anthrôpos* is that of the dialectical philosopher as understood by Socrates and it is required from who is called to rule over his fellow men, since the main function of a ruler is to allow them to reach their *telos* (“end”).

### *Critias*

The *Critias* is the unfinished continuation of the *Timaeus*, in which Critias returns with full details to the story referred to in the prologue of the *Timaeus*, the story of Atlantis. It should be noted that the *Critias* is at the origin of this myth, no traces of which are found in extant texts prior to Plato. It is obviously a creation of Plato's mind even if he may have adapted here and there bits and pieces of tales or legends known in his time.

Thus Critias, contrary to Timaeus, tries hard to have his interlocutors and we, readers, to take as a true story this myth he is composing to suit his needs, the truth of which cannot be verified since he was careful to tell us in the prologue of the *Timaeus* that the island of Atlantis had been swallowed up by the sea in one day. And, to give us a better feel of who we will be listening to, in the prologue of the *Critias* making a transition between both stories, Plato shows us Critias, commenting the story just completed by Timaeus and asking leniency from his listeners for the one they will now hear from him, telling in short that Timaeus had an easy play, for talking of gods in front of men who can't see them is not too hard, while talking of men in front of other men is a wholly different game and ending with this ambiguous sentence: “*for indeed, regarding gods, we know where we stand!*”<sup>299</sup>, that is probably in his mind, “As far as

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<sup>299</sup> *Critias*, 107b4.

we are concerned, we, knowledgeable fellows and experienced politicians, know full well that gods don't exist (but that they are quite convenient to control our fellow citizens)!"

The important thing with this dialogue is not so much the bit of Atlantis' story told by Critias as it is the name of the dialogue and the fact that it is unfinished, a fact which I think was deliberate on the part of Plato and whose meaning we must now uncover.

As I said already, Critias is not a character imagined by Plato, but one of his relatives, quite real indeed. But if it is not him who invented his name, derived from *krisis*, meaning "sorting, choice, judgment, discernment", he is the one who chose to use the one who probably played the most important part in the formation of his feeling of rejection toward political leaders of his time as the main character of a dialogue which, as I will show, intends to test the judgment of the reader at the end of the educational program developed by the whole set of the dialogues.

What Plato shows us Critias doing is the making up of a new origin myth of Athens intended to take the place of Homeric epics, no longer adapted to the Greek world of the time, and of the (historical) event at the origin of Athenian imperialism at the time, the victory of Athens and its allies over the Persian army at Marathon, embroidered at will to present Athens as the savior of all Greece and thus justify its domination over the other Greek cities, somewhat tarnished by the defeat of Athens by Sparta in the Peloponnesian war (of which Hermocrates, one of the interlocutors of the dialogue was largely responsible through the destruction of the Athenian expedition in Sicily), a myth he probably intends to use to regain power in Athens with the help of Sparta and give once again Athens (with him at its head) the first place in the Greek world. This is the reason why his tale includes allusions to both Persia (the description he makes of the capital city of Atlantis recalls that of Babylon by Herodotus in his *Histories*) and Sicily (Atlantis is an island located in the western part of the Mediterranean Sea, possibly even beyond the Pillars of Hercules, probably the Strait of Gibraltar), in other words to recent history embellished.

The part of the tale written by Plato focuses on the description and origin of Atlantis, domain of Poseidon, after a short description of Athens, domain of Athena and Hephaestus, destined to take the lead in a coalition against Atlantis. The first king of Atlantis was Atlas, eldest child of Poseidon and a mortal and, without going into the details of the story, let us only say that the succession of heirs of the sons of Poseidon over generations goes along with a degradation of the customs of the inhabitants of the island, so much so that one day, "*Zeus, the god of gods who reigns by laws*"<sup>300</sup> decides to intervene to discipline those responsible for this degradation and convenes the assembly of the gods to decide the suitable punishment. The last sentence of the unfinished dialogue starts with the words I just quoted: "*Zeus, the god of gods who reigns by laws...*" and ends on these words: "*and having assembled them (all the other gods), he said...*"<sup>301</sup>

To me, the meaning of this sudden breaking off of the dialogue is perfectly clear: it is out of the question for Plato to let his cynical cousin go further and let us hear what he intends to have gods he doesn't believe in say to make us think they get involved in human affairs and punish men's misconduct in this life! The comedy lasted long enough! And, in so doing, he faces his readers with a choice: will they, despite the journey through the dialogues till this point, regret that the tale which fascinates them and which they don't see the real purpose of, bewitched by the neatly turned speech of Critias, doesn't reach its completion and embark on a search for this mythical Atlantis, or will they understand why Plato doesn't want to let Critias end his tale, and even less make Hermocrates, a character depicted by his name as "endowed with the power of Hermes", the messenger of Zeus toward men, otherwise a general enemy of Athens and responsible for one of its worst defeats, speak, and prefers to replace the speech of Hermocrates announced by Critias by the *Laws* which show men "deifying themselves by drawing good laws for a future colony to be settled soon during their ascent toward the cave which was the birthplace of Zeus?"

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<sup>300</sup> Critias, 121b7-8.

<sup>301</sup> Critias, 121c4-5.

Critias possibly was capable of “discernment”, thus deserving his name, when presenting (to a small group of educated political leaders and through ambiguous wording) the Olympian gods as the invention of cynical men, but the reader must be capable of discernment about him, as his name suggests, in order to understand what game he plays with the same cynicism with the intent to take advantage of it for his own profit.

### *Laws*

Thus, the *Laws* are indeed the continuation of the *Critias* and the last dialogue of this last trilogy, as conceived by Plato despite indications to the contrary announcing a *Hermocrates*, but which are part of the wording of the final test at the end of the cycle!

This is indeed confirmed by the first words of the dialogue, which pose the very question underlying this whole staging: do the laws governing cities of men come from gods or must men themselves draw them? As an echo of the last sentence of the *Critias* I just quoted, which, in Greek, starts with the word *theos* (“god”) in the formulation *theos de ho theôn Zeus en nomois basileuôn...* (word for word: “god then the of gods through laws governing...”), the first sentence of the *Laws* also starts with the word *theos* in the sentence *theos è tis anthrôpôn humin, Ô xenoï, eilèphe tèn aitian tès tôn nomôn diatheseôs*; (“(a) god or some man, in your opinion, strangers, took responsibility for the arrangement of the laws?”) But while the god mentioned at the end of the *Critias* stays in the middle of gods, the god at the beginning of the *Laws* compete with men.

This last dialogue, in twelve books, is the longest of all of Plato’s dialogues and was possibly left unfinished at his death. But this is not too serious a problem since it was intended only as an *example* located within space and time and thus less and less relevant as time passes.

I have already presented the framework of this dialogue and the meaning of its staging,<sup>302</sup> which I just recalled by describing the choice given us by the unfinished *Critias*. Despite its dated character, the dialogue can still make us think, especially since it spends more time explaining the reasons for the rules it dictates and the institutions it establishes than detailing the rules themselves. There is one more point I’d like to insist on before finishing: Plato doesn’t consider the city (the State in our modern vocabulary) as a kind of superstructure at the service of which *anthrôpoi* would be placed, more important than any of them taken individually. If, in the *Timaeus*, he mentions a *psuchè* (“soul”) of the Universe, nowhere in the *Laws*, or in any other dialogue for that matter, does he speak of a *psuchè* of the City! The *polis*, city or state, is but a human construct without a *psuchè* of its own, it is at the service of the citizens, the *politai*, and not the other way around, citizens being like slaves of it over whom it would have a power of life and death. When performing their task at the service of the city, men don’t work for the city, but for themselves as a group. The goal of each one of them, and especially of the leaders, must be the care of the *psuchai* of them all, as Socrates says at the center of the *Apology*, the concern for allowing the greatest possible number of them to be as happy as they can with what nature has given them.

When Plato has Socrates say that each *anthrôpos* always act in view of what he/she deems best for himself/herself, he shows that he doesn’t delude himself on human nature and doesn’t believe in disinterested altruism. Even regarding philosophers, he is perfectly aware of the fact that, if they are left to follow their natural inclination, they will be reluctant to return to the cave to put their knowledge at the service of prisoners still in chains and would much prefer to stay in the sun to continue their investigations and theoretical reflections.<sup>303</sup> At the beginning of the *Republic*, in the dialogue with Thrasymachus, Socrates suggests a motivation which should drive philosophers (which he doesn’t yet call by that name) to govern: the fear of what might happen to them if they had to be governed by individuals less qualified than they are for this

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<sup>302</sup> See section *Moving closer to the gods*, page 18.

<sup>303</sup> The word “theory” comes from the Greek *theôria*, derived from the verb *theôrein* meaning “to contemplate”.

task.<sup>304</sup> That says it all: Plato, rather than trying to go against human nature by inspiring a few scarce visionaries with a fake altruism, attempts to make *anthrôpoi* understand that they cannot do without one another, that they must behave as if they were all brethren and sisters, or relatives (the second wave of the *Republic*), that they are all in the same boat and that it would be better *for all* if the helm is left to the one(s) best knowledgeable in matters of navigation.<sup>305</sup> It is the properly understood interest of each one, and thus what is good *for him/her*, to accept the rules of life in society (provided they are properly designed, or else to work, within the limits of his/her capabilities, to try to adapt them or invite those who have such capabilities to better them) in order to maximize *his/her* chances of reaching as perfect a happiness as possible. An *anthrôpos* cannot live alone, as if he/she were self-sufficient, or he/she would live like an animal so busy getting what he/she needs for survival that he/she would be left with no time to make use of his/her *logos*...

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<sup>304</sup> *Republic* I, 347b5-d2.

<sup>305</sup> Plato uses with his usual talent the analogy of navigation in the *Republic* to present a critical image of democracy at *Republic* VI, 487b1-489d9.

## Appendix 1: the structure of Plato's dialogues

The array below synthesizes the tetralogical structure which I contend Plato had in mind while composing his dialogues.

	<i>Prelude</i>	<b>Trilogy</b>		
		<i>epithumiai</i> (desires) <i>phusis</i> (nature) “physics”	<i>thumos</i> (self-esteem) <i>krisis</i> (judgment) “ethics”	<i>logos</i> (reason) <i>kosmos</i> (order) “logic”
<b>Tetralogy 1</b> Setting off <i>who should govern?</i>	<b>ALCIBIADES</b> exposition of the problem	<b>LYSIS</b> friendship ( <i>philo-</i> )	<b>LACHES</b> manhood/being a man ( <i>andreia</i> )	<b>CHARMIDES</b> wisdom ( <i>-sophos</i> )
<b>Tetralogy 2</b> The sophists <i>eikasia</i> (conjecture)	<b>PROTAGORAS</b> relativism	<b>HIPPIAS Major</b> illusion of beauty	<b>HIPPIAS Minor</b> illusion of “hero”	<b>GORGIAS</b> illusion of <i>logos</i>
<b>Tetralogy 3</b> Socrates' trial <i>pistis</i> (belief/faith)	<b>MENO</b> pragmatism	<b>EUTHYPHRO</b> letter of the law	<b>APOLOGY</b> law in action	<b>CRITO</b> spirit of the law
<b>Tetralogy 4</b> the soul <i>psuchè</i>	<b>SYMPOSIUM</b> the driving force : <i>eros</i>	<b>PHAEDRUS</b> nature of the soul: <i>eros</i> ↔ <i>logos</i>	<b>REPUBLIC</b> behavior of the soul: justice	<b>PHAEDO</b> destiny of the soul: <i>ousia</i>
<b>Tetralogy 5</b> speech ( <i>logos</i> ) <i>dianoia</i> (reflexion)	<b>CRATYLUS</b> Words	<b>IO</b> <i>logos</i> of the poet	<b>EUTHYDEMUS</b> <i>logos</i> of the sophist	<b>MENEXENUS</b> <i>logos</i> of the politician
<b>Tetralogy 6</b> <i>to dialegesthai</i> <i>epistèmè</i> (knowledge)	<b>PARMENIDES</b> the traps of logic	<b>THEAETETUS</b> the limits of “scientific” knowledge	<b>SOPHIST</b> the laws of <i>logos</i>	<b>STATESMAN</b> the goal of reason
<b>Tetralogy 7</b> man in the world <i>kosmos</i> (order)	<b>PHILEBUS</b> the good <i>for Man</i>	<b>TIMAEUS</b> the model ( <i>paradeigma</i> )	<b>CRITIAS</b> the choice ( <i>krisis</i> )	<b>LAWS</b> action ( <i>erga</i> )

## Appendix 2: problems of vocabulary and translation

I propose in this appendix a few more detailed studies of some words or groups of words that are key to a proper understanding of Plato and of the translation problems they pose. These studies sometimes reformulate in greater details and in a more sustained way points that have been made in different parts of this paper.

### Appendix 2.1: *einai, ousia*

Strange things happen with the translation of the various forms of the verb *einai* (“to be”) in Plato’s writings, which are telling about the confusion arising from the use of this word in metaphysical reflections and don’t help understand what Plato is trying to make us understand. No Hellenist would dare translate in the same way *legein* (“to tell/speak/say”), *to legein* (“the [fact of] telling/speaking/saying”, or sometimes “the " tell/speak/say"” as a word previously used I refer to<sup>306</sup>), *ho legôn* (“the [one] telling/speaking/saying”) and *to legomenon* (“the [story/-words/things] being told/said”). What these examples show is that, by the adjunction of the article in front of different forms of the same verb, the ancient Greek were able to refer to either the *activity* (in the broadest possible sense including action verbs as well as state verbs) implied by the verb (*to* followed by the present or aorist infinitive), or the *acting subject* accomplishing or being subjected to the action, that is, the *subject* (in the grammatical sense) of the verb (*to* followed by the active or middle present participle), or else the *product* of the activity, sort of the implied complements of the verb (*to* followed by the passive present participle). In the case of the verb *einai* (“to be”), which has no passive, the first two forms, *to einai* (the “activity” implied by the verb) and *to on* or, in the plural, *ta onta* (the *subject* of the verb), are found, but not the third one. The form which refers to what is called in this case “predicative expression” is the form *ousia*, derived from the feminine of the present participle *ousa* by the adjunction of the suffix *-ia* found in other Greek words such as *alêtheia* (“truth”), *sunêtheia* (“intimacy, habitual frequentation”), *paideia* (“education”), and so on. The *ousia* in its most general sense is indeed what is told about the subject (*to on*) in a clause of the form *x esti a* (“x is a”), the “what it is” (*to ti esti*), before being used in the abstract, without reference to any specific predicative expression, to refer to what the subject being talked about is in absolute terms, that is, the sum total of all that could be predicated of this subject, of all the possible answers to the question *ti esti*; (“what is it?”). In the eyes of most people in Socrates and Plato’s time, the attributes “defining” a person were in most cases his “property” in the most materialistic sense, his wealth, especially real estate, that is, what he “had” rather than what he “was”, which explains the usual meaning of *ousia* (“property, wealth, belongings”), found in Plato’s dialogues along with a more abstract and “metaphysical” meaning. In this perspective, the *Republic* may be read as an effort by Plato to move the reader from a purely materialistic understanding of *ousia* which is that of the word in the introductory discussion between Socrates and Cephalus, where Socrates relates it to *to megiston agathon* (“the greatest good”) at *Republic* I, 330d2-3 when he asks Cephalus “*What greatest good do you think you have enjoyed from the fact of having acquired a great wealth? (ti megiston oiei agathon apolelaukenai tou pollèn ousian kektèsthai;)*”, to an understanding where *ousia* is what makes the real *value* and perfection of each human being and is measured in reference to *to agathon* (“the good”), which, as the “reference” setting the value

<sup>306</sup> A good example of this use of substantivation by means of the article *to* as a substitute to the quotation marks which would be used in English to isolate the words referred to as words is found at *Theaetetus*, 185c5-6, precisely in the case of the verb *einai*: *hôi to estin eponomazeis kai to ouk estin*, where both Duke & al. in the new OCT edition and Diès in the Budé edition add quotation marks around *estin* and *ouk estin* since there, the conjugated forms of the verb leave no doubt. The meaning is clearly: “what you apply the words “is” and “is not” to”.

of everything else, is itself *epekeina tès ousias* (“beyond beingness/value”, *Republic* VI, 509b9), that is, cannot be measured by itself.

This understanding of *ousia* is most general and inclusive: it considers as participating in the *ousia* of a “being” (an *ôn* (masculine), *ousa* (feminine) or *on* (neuter)) *x* any *a* which may properly be predicated of *x* in a clause of the form “*x esti a*” (“*x is a*”) whether this *ôn*, *ousa* or *on* is something visible and material/corporeal or purely intelligible and whether this predicate is temporary or lasting. It is Aristotle with his categories who restricted this maximal understanding to one leading to the translation of *ousia* by “essence” (implying an idea of “distillation”,<sup>307</sup> that is, of reduction to the most... who knows what), limiting *ousia* to encompass only predicates that were perennial and supposedly characteristic of the “kind” or individual under consideration, relegating all other predicates to other “categories”.

This being the case, I find it prejudicial to translate *ousia* by “essence”, or worse, by “being” and I prefer to do in English what Cicero did in Latin and coin the neologism “beingness” (if indeed it is a neologism), which at least has the advantage of not importing 25 centuries of commentaries of Plato and allows us to look at Plato’s writings with a fresh eye.

Now that we have distinguished the three expressions derived from *einai* and the different grammatical roles of what they refer to, *to on* (“(the) being” for the subject, *to einai* (“being”, mostly undistinguishable in English from the translation of the present participle *to on*) for the verb as such, and *hè ousia* (“beingness”) for the predicative expression introduced by the verb serving *only* as a copula, we may wonder why Hellenists, including the most respected among them, as if they were hypnotized 25 centuries later by the incantations of the sophists, especially when they are reformulated by Plato, grow wild and don’t hesitate to translate these three forms interchangeably in the same manner, most often by “being”, ignoring the distinction between subject, verb and predicative expression and focusing in all cases on a supposed meaning of the verb itself, which it doesn’t have since its *only* function is to serve as a copula linking a subject and what is predicated about it and thus, has meaning only through the predicative expression it introduces. The problems Plato addresses in the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* are complex enough due to their high degree of abstraction that they be not clouded by mistranslations looking at times as betrayals. Plato never leaves anything to chance when writing and displays a mastery of language which forces admiration, and besides, he is capable of distancing himself from *logos* and analyzing it, which is precisely what he does in the *Sophist*. The least one can do when translating or analyzing his writings, especially writings such as those being mentioned here, is to admit that, if in one sentence he wrote *to on* and in another *hè ousia*, it is because he was not talking about the same thing, or at least not from the same standpoint, and to try to understand, based on the good old rules we would use regarding any other verb, what he meant by choosing the specific wording he chose in each case.

The problem is even worse when negative is introduced and *to mè on* is translated by “not-being” with a hyphen creating a single compound word which is not in the original Greek. Nobody in his right mind would translate *hò mè manthanôn* by “the not-understanding”, but by “the one who doesn’t understand” (literally “the (one) not understanding” without hyphen). The negative *mè* or *ou*, whatever the verb, *never* applies to the subject, but denies the action implied by the verb with regard to a subject which is part of the clause. In the case of the verb *einai*, (“to be”) which doesn’t have a meaning by itself, but is used only to introduce a predicative expression, the negation shifts toward this expression; it negates the link established by *einai*

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<sup>307</sup> I am not taking the consequence for the cause and I know full well that the word *essentia* was specifically coined by Cicero to translate in Latin the word *ousia* that he was reading in Plato’s dialogues in particular, imitating in Latin the derivation of *ousia* from *ousa* in Greek, and that “essence” is the transposition in English of the Latin word *essentia*, but the way “essence” evolved in English toward non metaphysical meanings is a good illustration of the understanding people, especially those not versed in metaphysics, had of the word in its metaphysical sense.

between the subject and the predicative expression, not the subject itself. Thus, *to mè on* means “the (one) not being”, that is, “the one which is not (this or that)”: these words assert positively an *on*, a “being”, about which we want to say, not **that** it is not (that is, that it doesn't “exists”), but **what** it is not, or at least, something, specified by the predicative expression, that it is not.

The fact that *einai* is not a verb like any other verb<sup>308</sup> is evidenced by the description of the types of meaningful *logoi* given by the stranger at *Sophist*, 262c3, when he says that a mere succession of *onomata*, in the technical sense of “nouns” he just defined, is not a meaningful *logos* since it doesn't state “*action or inaction (praxin oud' apraxian) oude ousian ontos oude mè ontos*”. Jowett translates these words as “*of action or inaction, or of the existence of existence or non-existence*”, translating both *ousia* and *on* by the same word, “existence”, without bothering the least to search why Plato used different words, and *mè ontos* by “non-existence” with hyphen, giving the words a strong existential twist, and ending in the absurdity of talking of existence of non-existence! Fowler (Loeb) translation is “*action or inaction or existence of anything that exists or does not exist*”, translating differently *ousia* and *on*, but both by words referring also to “existence” and he too doesn't seem bothered by the absurdity of talking about the existence of something that doesn't exist. Cornford (Bollingen) translates: “*any action performed or not performed or nature of anything that exists or does not exist*”: if at least he doesn't translate *ousia* by the same word as *on*, he stays in the existential register and doesn't avoid the absurdity of talking of the nature of something that doesn't exist. White (Hackett) translates: “*either an action or an inaction or the being of something that is or of something that is not*”: he too translates *ousia* as “being”, with strong existential overtones, as if he was reading *to on* rather than *hè ousia*, and ends up with the same absurdity of talking of the being of something that is not. How then should we understand these words? Most simply by understanding that the stranger isolates as a special case the sentences built around the verb *einai*, which, as Cordero saw without drawing all the conclusions it implies, is not properly speaking a verb and describes neither *praxis* (“action”) nor *apraxia* (“inaction”), and certainly not that of “existing”, a word as devoid of meaning as “being” so long as we don't say what kind of “existence” we are talking about (a word “exists” in its own way, as a horse, a star or an idea do exist, each in their own way)! As far as sentences built around verbs are concerned, the stranger says here that a sentence denying a *praxis* (“action”), that is, describing an *apraxia*, (“inaction”), is still a meaningful sentence: meaningful sentences are not limited to affirmative ones and a meaningful sentence may as well describe a relation of inclusion (association between a subject and a *praxis* (“action”)) as a relation of exclusion (dissociation of a subject and a *praxis* (“action”) indicated by the privative alpha of *apraxia* (“inaction”)). When he reaches the case of sentences built around *einai*, that is, of sentences of the form “*x esti a*” (“*x is a*”) or “*x mè esti a*” (“*x is not a*”), he says that they describe “*the beingness of a being or a not being*”, that is, the association through *einai* (“to be”) of a predicative expression *a* (*ousia*) to the subject (in the grammatical sense) either of a phrase of the form “*x esti a*” (“*x is a*”), subject then referred to as *on*, as “being” (implied: *a*, the *ousia* the sentence is supposed to talk about to attribute it to the subject), or of a phrase of the form “*x mè esti a*” (“*x is not a*”), subject then referred to as *mè on*, as “not being” (implied: *a*, the *ousia* the sentence is supposed to talk about to deny it to the subject), “being” and “not being” having, not an existential meaning, but an attributive one, indicating, not identity between subject and what is predicated about it, but suitability: each predicate, each *ousia* which can be attributed to the subject, to the *on*, doesn't exhaust what that subject “is”,

<sup>308</sup> Cordero, in his translation in French of the *Sophist* (GF Flammarion), has an intuition of this when he writes in note 361 on the definition of *rhèma* (“verb”) by the stranger at 262a3-4 as being “*about action (epi tais praxessin)*” that “*selon cette définition, "être" ne serait pas un verbe* (according to this definition, “to be” would not be a verb)”, opening a alley without exploring it by adding “*faut-il en tirer des conclusions ?... (should we draw conclusions from this?...)*”.

but describes it under a specific aspect which may even be temporary; and similarly, a disjunction by negation doesn't exhaust all of what the subject is not either permanently or temporarily, and doesn't allow, by complementarity, to say what the subject is. Thus, in this phrase, in the same way *praxis* is a generic term to refer to *any* action or affection which might be relevant regarding *any* possible subject, *ousia* is a generic term to refer to *any* attribute which might be predicated or denied of *any* subject. For a *logos* built around *einai* ("to be") on any subject to be meaningful, it doesn't have to say *all* that is relevant about the subject (*ousia* in a globalizing sense), not even all that is sufficient to identify the subject (*ousia* in the Aristotelean sense), but, whatever it attributes to or denies from the subject using *einai* ("to be"), becomes an *ousia* (a "beingness") for the mere reason that *einai* ("to be") is used and the sentence establishes the subject as an *on* ("being") or a *mè on* ("not being") (what this *ousia* refers to).

When *einai* ("to be"), under one or another form, is used without *explicit* predicative expression, there are *always* one or more of them which are *implied*, whether we are conscious of it or not. This is in particular the case with the successive hypotheses of the *Parmenides* and the problem is precisely that we must in each case *assume* a different meaning to *einai* ("to be") for the "deductions" developed by Plato's *Parmenides* to become understandable. The problem is that, if this is the case, whichever hypothesis *Parmenides* chooses as a starting point in any one of his developments, the continuation of the reasoning is not, despite appearances, a *deduction*, but a build up, a construction: *Parmenides* never deduces anything from the hypothesis he chooses each time as a starting point since this hypothesis, if we stick to what it *explicitly* says rather than to what it *might* imply, not as a result of the meaning of the words it is made of, but based on the attributes the one talking *adds* to them in thought, which are not implied by the words, doesn't teach us anything about anything, being an incomplete sentence, made up either of a subject (*hen*, "one") and the verb *einai* ("to be") **without predicative expression** (*ei hen esti* understood as "if one is") or of the verb *einai* ("to be") completed by a predicative expression (*hen*, "one"), but **without subject** (*ei hen esti* understood as "if [it] is one"). And adding the negative *mè* in some of these hypotheses doesn't change the least the situation for, in one case, it bears upon a predicative expression which is not stated explicitly, and in the other, it denies the attribute made explicit but doesn't tell us what the subject it is denied of is. And, to make things worse, the subject or predicative expression which is made explicit, *hen* ("one"), has no more *explicit* meaning than *einai*, since it only points at the real or only methodological "isolation" from everything else of the subject of a *logos*, whatever it is, which is assumed by the mere fact of giving it a name in order to talk about it or think of it. Thus, it doesn't matter which way we try to remove the ambiguity since, in both cases, we end up with an incomplete sentence which says nothing by itself. Starting with a statement which says nothing whichever way we understand it, *Parmenides* *builds up* in each case his "subject" by *adding* as he proceeds properties which are in no way implied by the hypothesis, but only have to be consistent *with one another*, which allows him to give a semblance of logical rigor to his deductions, which nonetheless keep hanging upon nothing since not necessarily implied by the initial hypothesis, which is but an empty sentence devoid of any meaning. But Plato, when writing each one of the arguments he attributes to *Parmenides*, was careful to *assume* a meaning to each one of these hypotheses by giving in each case a specific meaning to *einai* ("to be") and *hen* ("one"), different for each hypothesis, without having them explicitly stated by *Parmenides*, and then to develop with the utmost logical rigor what could be deduced from the *implicit* hypotheses he had assumed in each case; and what is true of *einai* (« to be ») and *hen* ("one"), is also true of most of the abstract words he subsequently uses, words he never cares to have *Parmenides* define and which must be understood based on the way he has him use them and the deductions in which they participate. This logical rigor perfectly mastered by Plato makes it possible for anyone who wants to give it a try to guess what he didn't want his *Parmenides* to say explicitly

and *which is different in each case*. And this is indeed the reason why, from one line of reasoning to another he can reach different, sometimes even opposite, conclusions since, despite the fact that the words he uses are the same, he doesn't talk about the same things in each one of them and nothing is really *deduced* from the starting hypothesis chosen in each case.

It doesn't matter then what meaning each one of these lines of reasoning may have, which he masterfully instilled in them, since, for him, they are *all* sophistic due to the fact that they don't make explicit what is needed to understand what they are trying to say, starting with the meaning which must be assumed in each case for *einai* ("to be"), or rather, the *implied* attributes hidden behind this word, and thus they are *all* conjuring tricks where rabbits are pulled from a hat. And even if some of them say important things, it is not this way, or at least not *only* this way, that Plato wants to make them understood by his readers since they are nothing but false deductions having only the *appearance* of logical rigor. If he puts them side by side in the same dialogue, it is to better evidence the contradictions they lead to and thus invite us to figure out what they all have in common which explain why they are all described as "sophistic".

Plato's answer to these ways of proceeding is the one he gives through the words of the stranger in the *Sophist*, which implies to begin with a reflection on *tèn orthologian peri to mè on* (*Sophist*, 239b4), which we may translate as "*the right way of making use of logos about the "not being"*", that is, to correctly use and understand the words *mè esti* ("is not") or variations on these words resulting from the different forms the verb *einai* ("to be") may assume. In order to describe this activity, he doesn't hesitate to create what is most likely a neologism coined for the occasion, *orthologia*, since this is the only occurrence of this word in all the dialogues, and even in the whole Greek corpus available at Perseus, and the only example of its use given by both the LSJ Greek-English Lexicon and the Bailly Greek-French Lexicon. Since the stranger says a few pages later, at 250e5-251a3, that the difficulty (*aporia*) is the same regarding *to te on kai to mè on* ("*both the "being" and the "not being"*"), investigating the right way of talking about *to mè on* ("*the "not being"*") is at the same time investigating the right way of talking about *to on* ("*the "being"*"). Indeed, the use of the negative doesn't change the meaning of the verb to which it is applied and it should be possible to determine this meaning before adding a negative to the verb. It is the same understanding of *einai* ("to be") which should allow us to understand what *einai* ("to be") means and what *mè einai* ("not to be") means. If Plato makes *to on* et *to mè on* (the "being" and the "not being") rather than *einai* ("to be") and *mè einai* ("not to be") the object of a search for *orthologia*, it is precisely because, since this verb doesn't have a specific meaning *by itself* and it is impossible to talk about a *mè ousia*, it is by focusing on the *subject, to on*, that it becomes possible to show that *mè* doesn't negate the subject, but only its association with the predicative expression. It is the lack of such a preliminary investigation by the sophists which makes all their dazzling speeches which contradict one another sophistic even if a careful investigation of them can find something true in all of them when considered under the light of this preliminary investigation, as does Plato to demystify them.

Indeed, there are two ways of understanding *mè on*: either the negative *mè* concerns *on*, or it doesn't. The first case amounts to considering *mè on* as a group of words designating a unique subject (the "not-being" with hyphen in English), in the same way the group of words *hôi nun egô dialegomai* ("*with whom I'm currently dialoguing*") used by the stranger in his second example at *Sophist*, 263a9 designates the unique "subject" Theaetetus, and, in this case, we may reason in the same way the stranger does at 244d: either *mè on* refers to a *pragma* different from the words "*mè on*", which implies a contradiction since this *mè on* ("not being") **is** (this *pragma*), or it is only a compound word (made up of two words) and nothing else, not pointing to any *pragma*, and in this case, all what can be said about it is nothing more than useless and uninteresting idle talk having only words without meaning as subject, not to mention the fact that, since *logos* "*is one kind of beings (tôn ontôn hen ti genôn einia)*", as the stranger says at *Sophist*, 260a5-6, even adding that it is a precondition for philosophy to be possible, which

amounts to saying that words themselves are *onta* (“beings”), *mè on* (“not being”) as an object of speech, whatever may be said to the contrary, **is** at least an assembly of words and we are again facing a contradiction; if on the other hand, second case, *mè* (“not”) doesn’t concern *on* (“being”), that is, the subject, the *x* of a potential sentence of the form *x mè esti a* (“*x* is not *a*”), but on the predicative expression called for by *on* (“being”), the *a*, then we are considering as an incomplete sentence, which has no meaning alone, but calls for a continuation to which the *mè* refers. This is the only option not leading to a contradiction and it is the one developed by the stranger. The idea of an absolute “not-being” doesn’t fall within the scope of *logos*. If it is nonetheless possible to develop a speech on *to mè on* (“the not being”), it is because, as *onta* (“beings”), the words the *logos* is made up of are “objects” as is everything else, which need not be permanently and irrevocably “tied” to something other than themselves to which they are supposed to refer, that it is even possible to create words just as we can create paintings or sculptures or anything else, which don’t necessarily refer to any *pragma* (“fact, thing”) and that it is possible to assemble words in sentences without previously making sure that these sentences reflect actual relations between potential *pragmata* they are supposed to refer to. This is what sophists don’t shy from doing and which allows them to reach whichever conclusions they want since they can assume the “meaning” they want to words which have none, being only words. And this is what the stranger shows in a more constructive manner with his second example, *Theaithètos, hòi nun egò dialegomai, petetai* (“*Theaetetus, with whom I’m currently dialoguing, flies*”): when uttering these words, the stranger knows full well that they say something wrong, that the Theaetetus with whom he is talking is neither Icarus nor Bellerophon mounting Pegasus, that he doesn’t fly and will never be able to fly. And yet, he is able to utter them, showing that assembling words in a sentence doesn’t require considering that what it says is true and that, in the same way a painter or a sculptor may picture through his art a Gorgon or a Chimera without this proving that there exists a living creature whose picture or sculpture it would be an image of, an orator may assemble words to “create”, deliberately or involuntarily (that is, due to ignorance), “chimeras”. And, as a matter of fact, it is precisely through *words* that Gorgons, Chimeras and other monsters appearing in myths may be “created”, and it is with the help of descriptions originally made with words by *poiètai* (a word whose original meaning is “maker, creator”, before becoming specialized to refer more specifically to “poets”) that painters and sculptors become capable of giving substance to these creatures in picturing them. Such a work of “creation” may even be used to create words, as Plato shows at *Republic VI*, 488a6, with the word *tragelaphos*, build as the assembly of the words *tragos* (“he-goat”) and *elaphos* (“stag”) in the same way the word *philosophos* has been created as the assembly of *philos* and *sophos*.<sup>309</sup> All contemporaries of Plato could understand the word *tragelaphos* (as indeed the word *philosophos*) and even form in their mind a mental image of what it might point at, even though the word itself doesn’t specify which part of the body of each animal implied by the word *tragelaphos* contributes to the body of the resulting “creature”, but they all would have recognized such a creature when seeing an image of it in a picture or sculpture. If, on the other hand, they expected to meet such an animal living and frolicking, or even only the corpse of such a dead animal, somewhere on earth, they could only be disappointed!

The use of the words *to mè on* (“the not being”) by Plato in a section of the *Republic* where he doesn’t seem to mimic the sophists, at the end of book V, in a discussion about *epistèmè* (“knowledge, science”) and *doxa* (“opinion”), doesn’t contradict what I said above, quite the contrary, provided it is properly understood in the light of the explanations given in the *Sophist*. The understanding of this text by most scholars is that Plato depicts his Socrates trying to unearth what might be the object of opinion as something intermediate between “being”, which would be the

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<sup>309</sup> It is precisely in the course of a discussion on the meaning of the word *philosophos* that Socrates takes the example of *tragelaphos*, in the introduction of the analogy of the ship without helmsman, at *Republic VI*, 488a6.

object of “knowledge (*epistèmè*), and “not being”, which would be the object of ignorance. They can only be disappointed by what Socrates comes up with, which should all the same question them, since it doesn't fall within the register where they expected it, that of ontology! Indeed, what Socrates presents as the object of opinion is *nomima* (*Republic* V, 479d4), that is, “usages”, “received ideas” almost having the force of law (*nomos* at the root of *nomimos*), or else, “ideas” (which the multitude entertain) for Jowett, that is, not “ideas” in the “platonian” sense, but mere opinions of the many, “conventions” for Shorey and Grube, Reeve, “beliefs” for Bloom, “conventional norms” for Reeve (2004), that is, something which is not of the nature of being, but of the nature of *logos*. And it is precisely from there that we must start if we want to properly understand all that has preceded and get rid of the “ontological” understanding of this whole section, noticing, to begin with, that this question of *logos* was there from the start of the discussion. Indeed, at 476d5-6, before starting to mention *on* and *mè on*, Socrates says: “*couldn't we, then, rightly say that the thought of this one as knowing is the expression of something known, and that of the other as opining, an opinion? (oukoun toutou men tèn dianoian hōs gignōskontos gnōmèn an orthōs phaimen einai, tou de doxan hōs doxazontos;)*”. Two words should hold our attention in this sentence: *dianoian* and *gnōmèn*. *Dianoian* indicates that what Socrates is interested in is what takes place in the « thought, reflection » of the ones he is talking about. Since the stranger, in the *Sophist*, defines *dianoia* as an inner *logos* of the soul, that is, something which is *always* made up of words (*Sophist*, 263e3-5), we are indeed in the register of *logos*, **not** of “being”. And for a very good reason! It is only through *logos* that the human *nous*, human “intelligence”, can reach what is not words. And the word *gnōmèn* confirms that we are indeed in the register of *logos*, for *gnōmè* is not synonym of *gnosis* and doesn't designate “knowledge” in the abstract, despite what the translations of Jowett, Shorey, Bloom, Grube and Reeve, and Reeve alone (2004) suggest, but the *expression* of a *specific* item of knowledge, something known *formulated* through a *logos*, that is, once again, words (there is no single English word corresponding specifically to *gnōmè* as opposed to *gnosis* (“knowledge”), that is, to the expression in words or thought of something known, to the manifestation of knowledge in a specific instance, on a specific item, as opposed to knowledge in general, as a faculty or a state). To know is to know a specific *ti* (“something”) (476e7) and to be able to answer, in thought or through spoken words (*logos* in the usual sense), the question *ti esti*; (“what is it?”), stating what it is (*ho ti esti pantelōs* (“exhaustively”, 477a3) and *eilikrinōs* (“discriminatingly”, 477a7). Thus, it is to know an *on* (476e10), a « being », that is, the “subject” of a sentence of the form “*x esti a*” (“to know how the (one) “being” is (*gnōnai hōs esti to on*)”, 477b10-11; “to know the (one) “being” as it is (*to on gnōnai hōs echei*)”, 478a6). And the two adverbs, *pantelōs*, derived from *pan* (“all, whole, everything”), and *eilikrinōs*, derived from the root *krinein* (“to discriminate, sort”), announce the two attempts at a definition of *logos* at the end of the *Theaetetus*: the first one, the attempt to define *logos* as the *exhaustive* enumeration of all the parts of a whole (*pan*) (*Theaetetus*, 206e7-207a1), the second one, the attempt to define *logos* as the identification of the *distinctive* (*eilikrinēs*) difference which distinguishes what is under consideration from *everything else* without exception (*Theaetetus*, 208c7-8).

When Socrates then associates *mè on* (« not being ») to *agnōsia* (477a9), a word which should be translated as “lack of knowledge” rather than as “ignorance” to keep in English the negative character of the Greek word, in which the privative alpha (*a-gnōsia*) points at the lack of something, whereas “ignorance” positively describes a state, he means that not to know is, about any *x*, not (*mè*) to be able to formulate sentences of the form “*x esti a*” (“*x is a*”), that is, not to be able to use *x* as an *on* (“being”), as the subject of any sentence. It is not “not-being” in the ontological sense, but quite simply silence! And anyway, what might the statement that a lack of knowledge, not-knowing, is about not-being mean?

Opinion then is somewhere between the « it is (this or that) » exhaustive and absolutely discriminating of the one who knows (what is under consideration), assuming it to be possible (see

476e6, “[we would be] *glad if we could see someone knowing (hasmenoi an idoimen eidota ti)*”), and the total absence of “it is (this or that)”, the silence of the one not knowing. And this intermediate state takes the form of a mix of statements of the form “it is (this or that)” (*einai*) and statements of the form “it is not (this or that)” (*mè einai*) (478e2), somewhere between *ousia*, that is, the exhaustive enumeration of *all* the attributes, expressed as predicative expressions (“beingness”), pertaining to what we are talking about and the *mè einai* (not “being (this or that)”) evidenced by the silence of the one not knowing (479c7).

That “being” (*on*) should be understood here in a most general and open-ended sense, and not limited to “ideas” in the assumed “platonic” sense is shown by the way Socrates introduces the parenthesis on *dunameis* (“power, capacity, aptitude”), describing them as “*a certain kind of beings*” (“*we say that powers/aptitudes are a certain kind of beings (phèsomen dunameis einai genos ti tôn ontôn)*” (477c1). Now, as soon as the parenthesis has ended, Socrates gets Glaucon to acknowledge that knowledge (*epistèmè*) and opinion (*doxa*) are *dunameis* (“power, capacity, aptitude”), which implies that they are among *ontôn* (“beings”). Knowledge, since it is about *to on* (“being”), which must be taken in a collective sense, is about something it is an element of, and thus could have itself as object. And indeed, this is what the *Theaetetus* does, with no great success. We are here touching on a fundamental problem: how can we know that we know? How, if all we can grasp of what is around us depends upon *logos*, can we know that this *logos* is relevant and adequately describes what it is supposed to describe? If we can’t answer this question, there is no way to distinguish opinion from knowledge.

Socrates, in the discussion with Glaucon, gives him a hint that he is unable to recognize, even though he applies it in practice without even being conscious of it. Indeed, Socrates, when defining what he calls *dunamis* (“power, capacity, aptitude”), identifies two criteria: “*that about which it is and what it accomplishes (eph' hôi te esti kai ho apergazetai)*” (477d1). But when, soon after, they come to the point where they attempt to distinguish *epistèmè* (“knowledge”) from *doxa* (“opinion”), he and Glaucon focus exclusively on “*that about which it is (eph' hôi esti)*”. The problem is that whether we focus on *logos* or on what *logos* points at, assuming this to be within our reach, which is not the case since we can only reach it through *logos*, knowledge and opinion are about the same things and take the same form, *logoi*. The *only* way we may distinguish knowledge from opinion is precisely the second criterion, “*what it accomplishes (ho apergazetai)*”, as Glaucon himself says to confirm that they are indeed two distinct *dunameis* (“power, capacity, aptitude”): “*how indeed someone in his right mind could hold as identical what is unfailing and what is not unfailing? (pôs gar an to ge anamartèton tôi mè anamartètôi tauton tis noun echôn titheîè;)*” (477e6-7). There is nothing more to say ! It is the test of *experience* which, alone, allows us to differentiate knowledge and opinion. The problem is that this criterion is all the less easy to apply as what we are considering is more abstract and that the “never” implied by *anamartèton* would require that we live from the origin of the Universe till the end of time to be sure of this infallibility. And this is indeed the reason of the “I **know** nothing” of Socrates. If, in the *Apology*, Socrates says that he found some form of knowledge only among manual workers (*cheirotechnas*) (*Apology*, 22c9-d4), it is precisely because, in their case, the *experimental* verification of their *dunamis* (“power, capacity, aptitude”) based on what they *apergazontai* (“accomplish, produce” by their work) is easy.

No more than the visible « beings » are the “*that about which it is (eph' hôi esti)*” of sight, the “beings” assumed to be behind *logos*, whether material or intelligible, are the “*that about which it is (eph' hôi esti)*” of knowledge, or of opinion. The “*that about which it is*” of sight, what Aristotle calls the proper object of sight, is color and nothing else, and the “*that about which it is*” of knowledge and opinion is *logos*. That there be something at the origin of the colors perceived by sight as well as at the origin of the words we use (most of them at least), is quite sure, but it is impossible for us to “know” what it is since precisely sight can only perceive colors and *dianoia* can only think words. In both cases, we only deal with “images”, « representations »,

which are not the *auta* (the “things” themselves”). And, in the case of *einai* (“to be”), the word itself is only a linguistic tool and nothing more, something that “creates” *onta* (“beings”) each time it is used in a *logos* in which its use creates a relation between a subject and predicative expression, an *on* (“being”) and an *ousia* (“beingness”). But to be sure that these relations expressed in *logos* are an adequate representation within *logos* of relations outside *logos* is out of reach for us, except through *experimental* verification. But there is no experimental verification possible for *einai*, or rather, it proves nothing, since as soon as I think of a subject, an *on* (“being”), or, more generally, that I utter or think of a word, it is at least that, a word!... The verification cannot concern *einai* (“to be”), but only the *specific relations* that I describe through *logos*, a tool working on those *onta* (“beings”) which the words are (see *Sophist*, 260a5-6: “*logos... is a certain kind of beings (ton logon... tôn ontôn hen ti genôn einia)*”).

#### Appendix 2.2: *onoma, rhèma*

At *Sophist*, 262a1-7, the stranger, to explain what is the minimal requirement for a *logos* to have meaning, defines the “technical” (that is, “grammatical”) meaning he gives to the words *rhèma* and *onoma* in what is to follow, namely, for *rhèma*, “*the [one] being a revealer<sup>310</sup> regarding actions (to men epi tais praxesin on dèlôma)*”, that is, “verb”, and for *onoma*, “*the vocal sign regarding those who act in these [actions] (to de g' ep' autois tois ekeinas prattousi semeion tès phônès)*”, that is, roughly, “noun”. Some scholars want to extend the scope of these quite clear definitions of *onoma* as “noun” and *rhèma* as “verb” to other dialogues, as for instance the *Theaetetus*. But we should keep in mind that grammar was still in an embryonic stage in Greece in the time of Plato and that the distinction between nouns, pronouns, adjectives and the like were not yet clearly made, and that the very flexible use of the definite article, especially neuter, was making it possible to turn into a substantive almost anything and not only adjectives, but also pronouns, verbs at the infinitive and even groups of words, which suggests that, in most cases, *onoma* should be understood in a non “grammatical” sense closer to “name”, or even “word”, than to “noun”. An example of this, already mentioned in the presentation of the *Cratylus* and interesting for the current discussion since it implies also the word *rhèma*, is *Cratylus*, 399a9-b4, where Socrates takes the example of the expression *Dii philos* (“dear to Zeus”), which he calls a *rhèma*, to show how it was transformed into an *onoma* with the word *Diphilos*. It is clear that here, *rhèma* means “vocal expression”, “group of words”, in opposition to *onoma*, designating one of the building blocks that words taken individually are. This duality of meaning should not surprise us if we notice that, in English, many grammatical terms are words having a more general meaning specialized for their grammatical use. This is for instance the case with words such as “subject”, “complement”, “attribute”, which aside from their specialized grammatical meaning, have a non grammatical meaning.

I think that it is this more general, non specialized meaning, that *rhèmatôn* and *onomatôn* have in the first definition of *logos* given by Socrates at *Theaetetus*, 206d1-5, which is not an anticipation of the definition of the stranger at *Sophist*, 261d-262e. This definition must be read keeping in mind both *Theaetetus*, 189e4-190a7 (definition of *dianoesthai* (“to think”) by Socrates) and *Sophist*, 263e3-8 (comparison of *logos* and *dianoia* (“thought”) by the stranger), so as to see how Socrates and the stranger define, not only *logos*, but also *dianoia* (“thought”). The primary meaning of *rhèma*, which P. Chantraine, in his *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, presents as derived from the verb *eirein*, “to say, declare”, is in French, according to him, “parole, mot d'ordre, formule, phrase”, all words referring to groups of words rather than individual words, and, in English, the LSJ lists in first position the meanings “that

<sup>310</sup> « Revealer » translates the Greek word *dèlôma*, substantive of action derived from the verb *dèlouin*, meaning “to make visible, manifest, show”, itself derived from *dèlos*, meaning “visible, clear, manifest”. On this rare word, used several times by Plato in the *Cratylus*, see the introduction to this dialogue page 104 and note 212, same page.

which is said or spoken, word, saying”, then “phrase”, and, in last position, as a specialized grammatical meaning, “verb”, opposed to *onoma*, the first example given of this meaning being precisely *Sophist*, 262a sq.. If we examine the six other occurrences of *rhèma* in the *Theaetetus* (165a6, 166e1, 168b8, 183b4, 184c1, 190c8), the meaning is always that of “word” or “verbal expression” (sequence of words), the choice between these meanings, all in the register of “that which is said”, being hard to make in most cases, including in the two instances where the word is used along with *onoma* (168b8: *ek sunètheias rhèmatôn te kai onomatôn* (“from the acquaintance with **phrases and words**”; 184c1: *to de eucherês tôn onomatôn te kai rhèmatôn* (“the easy use of **words and phrases**”). The reason for this is that, in this dialogue, Socrates doesn't speak as a grammarian and, not having first made a technical and specialized meaning he might have in mind when using the words *rhèma* and *onoma* clear (respectively “verb” and “noun”), unlike the stranger in the section of the *Sophist* where he analyzes the formal structure of *logos*, he can only use these words in the usual sense in which they have a chance to be understood by Theaetetus (to which the stranger will precisely have to explain that he uses these words in a non usual sense which he specifies). The first “definition” of *logos* Socrates gives is not at all in the same context as the one given by the stranger: where the latter is conducting a structural analysis of *logos* grounded in a (still embryonic) typology of the various kinds of words and their function in a sentence, Socrates, in the *Theaetetus*, is only trying to figure out how we might understand the word *logos* to make sense of a definition of knowledge (*epistèmè*) as true opinion with *logos*. But he conducts this inquiry in a context where *epistèmè* is envisioned as knowledge of *the things themselves*, without this being explicitly stated. And it is precisely this implicit presupposition, whether it be a bias of Socrates or more likely a deliberate choice on his part to let Theaetetus follow his own trends, which prevents the dialogue from reaching an understanding of *epistèmè*, since, as the stranger will show in the *Sophist*, *logos* gives us access only to *relations* between *onta* (“beings”), not to a knowledge of the *auta*, the “things (*pragmata*)” themselves.

The first description of the *logos* given by Socrates is merely a description of the physical phenomenon of *logos* as “noise”, of what distinguishes it from others kinds of sounds, where it comes from and what its goals are: communicate to other people our own thoughts (*dianoia*) by means of sounds, but not any kind of sounds, sounds which, contrary to music, for instance or cries of animals, are modulated so as to make it possible to analyse them as “phrases” (*rhèmata*) made up of “words” (*onomata*). But the analysis stops there and Socrates is not at this point trying to categorize these words. It is so true that the two ensuing definitions may be understood without resorting to the difference between nouns and verbs: they both have in common the fact of taking an approach by whole and parts, conducted in two opposite directions. The first one, *logos* as enumeration of the parts (*Theaetetus*, 206e7-207a1), considers what we are interested in as a whole made up of parts and searches *logos* in the inventory of all these parts. But such an inventory, like the *Inventory* of Jacques Prévert, can take the form of a mere list of names put one after the other without a single verb. On the contrary, the definition of *logos* by the differentiating characteristic (*Theaetetus*, 208c7-8), which is aimed at Aristotle, considers what we are interested in as *one* element in a larger whole (potentially the whole Universe) and looks for what distinguishes it from all other elements of that whole, by successive categorizations (living, mortal, animal, *logikos* (“endowed with *logos*”), Greek, Athenian, Antiochis tribe, Alopeke deme, pug-nosed, and so on<sup>311</sup>), which, here again, may be expressed through a list of juxtaposed names without interspersed verbs. The problem with such approaches is that they end up in loops since one thing is “defined” by reference to other ones which are defined by other ones, and this goes on endlessly since the knowledge of anything depends on the knowledge of everything else. Socrates himself indeed implicitly gives a minimal example of such a loop when he defines at 189e4-190a7 *dianoeisthai* (“to think”) as an inner *logos* of the

<sup>311</sup> All these properties apply to Socrates.

soul with itself and at 206d1-5 *logos* as the vocal expression of *dianoia* (“thought”): the loop is quite short! On the contrary, the stranger, in the *Sophist*, starts with an analysis of the *structure* of *logos* as a mix of verbs and noun allowing to describe *facts* (*pragmata*) rather than “things” by *relations* between words trying to reflect the supposed relations between what the words attempt to designate, “things” and *actions/affections* (*praxeis/pathèmata*), and it is only once this has been done that, at 263e3-8, he distinguishes *dianoia* (“thought”) and *logos* in the usual sense by introducing the voiced or silent characteristic of the same phenomenon, *logos* in a broader sense, as an assembly of words, whether in thought or uttered. There is no loop there. The reason why the *Theaetetus* fails is not a wrong understanding of *logos*, for, after all, the definition given at *Theaetetus*, 206d1-5, is not wrong and the two ensuing definitions are indeed means of better understanding what we are thus analyzing, but a misunderstanding of the power and limits of *logos*, of the kind of “knowledge” it can give us access to, a knowledge which can only be partial and relation oriented (concerning relations between “objects/things”), not total and object oriented (allowing a knowledge of “things (another possible translation of *pragmata*)” themselves, material or immaterial, visible or intelligible).

### Appendix 2.3: *pragma, praxis*

*Pragma* is the word used by Plato to designate what is not the words (*onomata*).<sup>312</sup> It appears 7 times in the *Sophist*, always translated by « things » in the four English translations I had at my disposal (that of Jowett online, that of Fowler for the Loeb Classical Library and at Perseus, that of Cornford for the Bollingen Series LXXI and that of White for Hackett) except when otherwise specified between parentheses in the list of these occurrences below: 218c4, where the stranger explains that it is always “*better to agree on the pragma itself by means of speech rather than on the word only without speech (peri to pragma auto mallon dia logôn è tounoma monon sunômologèsthai chôris logou)*”; 233d10, about the painter pretending to be able through his art to “*make and do all pragmata (poiein kai dran sunapanta pragmata)*”; 234c4, about an art using words to bewitch the young still far away from “*the truth about pragmatôn (tôn pragmatôn tès alêtheias)*” using “*images told about everything (eidôla legomena peri pantôn)*” presented as true (Jowett translates as “*the truth of facts*”; Fowler “*translates*”, or, should we say, rewords as “*the realities of truth*”); 244d3, in the criticism by the stranger of the thesis that “*one only is (hen monon einai)*” based on the fact that using two different words to express it contradicts it and that, whether we consider “*the name different from the pragmatos (tounoma tou pragmatos heteron)*” or not, we end up in contradictions; 257c2, about the negatives *mè* and *ou* concerning, not so much the *onomata* (“words”), but the *pragmata* the *onomata* being used after the negative refer to; 262d8, where the stranger says that, in the same way some *pragmata* harmonize with one another, other don’t, “*among signs produced by means of sound (peri ta tès phônès semeia)*”, some harmonize with one another to produce a *logos*, others don’t; 262e13, when the stranger says that he will utter as a basic example a *logon suntheis pragma praxei di’ onomatos kai rhêmatos*<sup>313</sup> (Fowler translates as “*a sentence in which an action and the result of action are combined by means of a noun and a verb*”: since, in the definition of “verb” given a few lines earlier, he translated *praxis* as “action”, we are left to suppose that, here, what translates *pragma* is “the result of action”; yet, if we assume he follows in his translation the order of the Greek words, it would be the other way around).

As can be seen, the word *pragma* is used either to oppose it to *onoma* or to designate what a *logos* is about. It is indeed the same word *pragma* which is used for the same purpose in the *Cratylus*, where the discussion is about the rightness of names with regard to what they are supposed to refer to, and it occurs no less than 72 times, 37 of these occurrences being in the final

<sup>312</sup> This appendix expands and backs up what I wrote in section “*Pragmata*”, page 54.

<sup>313</sup> I set aside for the time being the analysis and translation of this phrase in which almost all words pose problems of translation, and will come back to it below to deal with it as a whole.

discussion between Cratylus and Socrates (427e5-440e7), which asks in particular the question how, if, as Cratylus holds, it is only through names that we can know things, those who created the names in the first place could know what they were naming. In the *Theaetetus*, on the contrary, where the word is used 7 times, it assumes a greater diversity of meanings, as can be seen in the inventory below of these occurrences and their translation in the editions I had at my disposal (that of Jowett online, that of Fowler for the Loeb collection and at Perseus, that of Cornford for the Bollingen Series LXXI and that of Levett & Burnyeat for Hackett):

- 143c1: “Now, so that, in the written [account], the explanations about him when Socrates would talk, such as “and I said” or “and I added”, [added] between the words [spoken] may not cause us **trouble**... (hina oun en tèi graphèi mè parechoien **pragmata** hai metaxu tôn logôn diègèseis peri hautou te hopote legoi ho Sôkratès, hoion “kai egô ephèn” è “kai egô eipon,”...); where *pragma* is used in the expression *pragmata parechein*, meaning “to cause trouble”; Jowett rewords the whole explanation given by Euclides and these words are loosely rendered by “lest the repetition of them should be **troublesome**”; Fowler translates the expression as a whole as “might not be annoying”; Cornford refers to “the **tiresome effect**” and Levett & Burnyeat to “the **bother** (of having...)”;

- 168b1: Socrates describes two manners of debating, one of which will turn over time those with whom it is practiced into people which will be “against philosophers, hating this **activity/business/thing** (*anti philosophôn misountas touto to pragma*)”; Cornford translates *pragma* as “**business**” while the three others interpret *pragma* based on the context when translating *touto to pragma* as “philosophy”;

- 170e2: Theodorus says that those who have contrary opinions to his “cause [him all] the **trouble** [which can be expected] from men (*moi ta ex anthrôpôn pragmata parechousin*)”, using the same expression, *pragmata parechein*, as Socrates at 143c1; here, all four translators translate *pragmata* as “**trouble**” even though they vary in their manner of rendering the whole expression;

- 174b6: taking the example of Thales falling into a pit while looking at the stars, Socrates explains that he who spends his life in philosophy investigates the nature of man and “has [much] **business/trouble** exploring it thoroughly (*pragmat' echei diereunômenos*)”, using a variant of the expression *pragmata parechein* he had used at 143c1, *pragmat' echein*, having almost the same sense; Jowett translates the whole expression as “busy (in inquiring)”, same thing with Fowler, translating “exerts himself (to find out)”, with Cornford, translating “he spends all his **pains**” and with Levett & Burnyeat, translating “concerns himself (to investigate)”;

- 177e1: I've already mentioned this sentence of Socrates in the analysis of the plan of the *Theaetetus*; it reads “let him not talk about the word, but consider the **thing** being given a name (*mè gar legetô to onoma, alla to pragma to onomazomenon theôreitô*)”; *pragma* is translated by “**thing**” by all four translators;

- 186c4: human beings and animals have the capability to perceive by senses (*aisthanesthai*) “through affections of the body on the soul (*dia tou sômatos pathêmata epi tèn psuchèn*)”, but “the relations of analogy about them regarding [their] value and benefit (*ta de peri toutôn analogismata pros te ousian kai ôpheleian*)” can only be acquired over time and “through much **business/activity/trouble** and education (*dia pollôn pragmatôn kai paideias*)”; *pragmatôn* is translated as “**experience**” by Jowett, “**troubles**” by Fowler and Levett & Burnyeat, reworded as “troublesome process (of education)” by Cornford;

- 197e5: at the beginning of the image of the aviary, Socrates explains that “the acquired knowledge one might shut in the enclosure, [must be] said to have been learned and to result from having found the **thing** of which it is the knowledge, and this is “to know” (*hèn d' an epistêmèn ktêsamenos katheirxèi eis ton peribolon, phanai auton memathêkenai è hêurêkenai to pragma hou èn hautè hè epistêmè, kai to epistasthai tout' einai*)”; *pragma* is translated by “**thing**” by all four translators.

As can be seen, the range of meanings of *pragma* is rather wide and “thing” is only one of its possible translations in certain contexts.

I think that the translation of *pragma* by “thing” in a context of opposition between *onoma* and *pragma* is simplistic to the extent that it hides the fact that the word is derived from the verb *prattein* (“to act”), as is also the case for *praxis*, close in meaning, and thus refers in its primary sense more to a “deed”, an “act” (the first meanings listed by the LSJ) than to a “thing”, with the strong reifying connotation of this word. This problem is particularly acute with the last occurrence of *pragma* in the *Sophist* (in the phrase which I left untranslated above), where this word is juxtaposed to *praxis*, most probably intentionally on the part of Plato. The group of words including *pragma*, used by the stranger to describe the *logon* he is about to give as an example, is (*logon*) *suntheis pragma praxei di' onomatos kai rhèmatos* (262e13-14), translated by Jowett as “(a sentence) in which a thing and an action are combined, by the help of a noun and a verb”, by Fowler as “(a sentence) in which an action and the result of action are combined by means of a noun and a verb” (he is the only one trying to render into English the community of root between *pragma* and *praxis*), by Cornford as “putting together a thing and an action by means of a name and a verb”, and by White as “putting a thing together with an action by means of a name and a verb”. A few lines earlier (262a1-7), the stranger has specified the « technical » (that is, “grammatical”) meaning in which he is about to use *rhèma* and *onoma*, respectively “the [one] being a revealer regarding actions (to men epi tais praxessin on dèlôma)” and “the vocal sign regarding those who act in these [actions] (to de g' ep' autois tois ekeinas prattousi semeion tès phônès)”. Since, in his definition of *rhèma*, he has used the word *praxis*, most scholars assume that, when he reuses this word in the phrase we are analyzing, this word must be related to the *rhèmatos* which follows and that, as a result, the word associated with *praxei*, *pragma*, must be related to *onomatos*. If that were what the stranger had in mind, it would mean that, knowing already what he will give as an example immediately after (*Theaitètos kathètai*, “*Theaetetus sits*”) and the name he will use as subject in it, he considers *Theaetetus* as a *pragma*. This is not impossible since, at 233e5-6, when *Theaetetus* asks him what he means by *panta* (“all”) when he refers to someone who could “make and do **all** *pragmata* (*poiein kai dran suna-panta pragmata*)”, he answers: “I mean **you and me** as part of “all” and, beside us, all the other animals and trees (*legô toinun se kai eme tôn pantôn kai pros hêmîn talla zôia kai dendra*)”, but it doesn’t explain why Plato felt the need to juxtapose *pragma* and *praxis*, two words having the same root, while, when defining *onoma* (“noun”), he was careful not to use *pragma*, preferring a circumlocution formed around the verb *prattein* (“act”). Now, the LSJ, Bailly’s *Dictionnaire Grec Français* and Chantraine’s *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* all agree that *pragma* is the concrete of *praxis*. What can we deduce from this? That *praxis* refers to activity as such, in the abstract, as does any verb at the infinitive for a specific activity, while *pragma* refers to a *specific occurrence* of an activity, to a specific “deed” situated within space and time, an “act”. If, this being the case, we want to translate *pragma praxei* with words having the same root, as is the case with the Greek (what Fowler awkwardly tried to do with “an action and the result of action”, in which it is hard to decide which word or words translate *pragma* and which translate *praxis*), I might suggest “an act in a [specific] activity”, but if we accept to set aside this community of root to come up with a translation making more explicit what Plato had in mind, “an occurrence of activity” or “a fact (one possible translation of *pragma* listed by the LSJ) relating to an activity” might do the trick. In other words, in *pragma praxei*, there is not one word referring to the noun and the other to the verb, but a word, *pragma*, referring to the *fact* described by the *whole* sentence, and a word relating to the activity implied by the verb being used, which shows that the important part of the sentence is the verb, which describes the kind of activity talked about, rather than the subject.

*Pragma* plays still another role in this expression. In the examples of would be sentences given earlier, which are mere lists of nouns or verbs, words are used in isolation, with no reference to

any specific *fact* in the context of which they would acquire meaning. What the stranger suggests through the use of the word *pragma* is that a meaningful sentence must refer to a specific “fact” open to the possibility of validation through experience, if only by the reactions of the interlocutors to the way the one speaking seems to understand it. Besides, if the stranger (and Plato behind him) wanted merely to refer to a « subject » (in the grammatical sense), he should have used the form *to pratton* (“the (one) acting”), in the same way he does with the verb *einai* (“to be”) when using the form *to on* (“the (one) being (this or that)”) to refer to the subject which is associated to a predicative expression (*ousia*) by a sentence using the verb *einai* (“to be”).

In short, *praxis* refers to the specific activity implied by the verb *as such*, with no reference to any instance of this activity (which may as well be an “inactivity/passivity” as is the case with the verb “to sit”), while *pragma* refers to a fact in which a specific instance of such an activity/passivity can be recognized.

All of this is lost when *pragma* in the expression of the stranger here under consideration is translated by “thing”. The exclusive association of *pragma* to the *subject* of the phrase “reifies” what Plato has in mind and puts the stress on the *onta* (“the beings”) when what he is trying to make us understand through the words of the stranger is that *logos*, because it requires the association of verbs and nouns to produce meaningful phrases, allows us to know only *relations* between subjects and activities, not the *onta* (“beings”) themselves. We can know “things” only through their activities, their interactions with other “things”, their analysis in parts bringing to light only *relations* between parts and “whole”. Indeed, if we compare the two examples successively given by the stranger, *Theaitètos kathètai* (“*Theaetetus sits*”) and *Theaitètos, hōi nun egō dialegomai, petetai* (“*Theaetetus, with whom I myself am now dialoguing, flies*”), we must recognize that the name Theaetetus by itself teaches us nothing on the one whose name it is, while it becomes almost superfluous in the second example, where the clause *ōi nun egō dialegomai* (“*with whom I myself am now dialoguing*”) describes him in a way which locates him within space and time through a *relation* with the one talking.

I should add that the word “activity” that I used above must be understood, as I already suggested, in a broader sense than the one implied by the distinction between action verbs and state verbs, as can be seen with the first example given by the stranger, where he refers to a state and not to an activity implying movement on the part of the subject. Indeed the verb *kathèsthai* he uses may mean, aside from “sit”, “sit still, sit quiet, lie idle”, with the stress put on the lack of movement of the one “sitting”, which means that Plato chose, to give an example of *praxis*, a verb implying an absence of activity, a motionless state on the part of the subject. And yet, this motionless state is a *pragma*, a “fact”.

#### Appendix 2.4: *homologeîn*

Among the verbs derived from *legeîn* (“to talk, speak”), the verb from which *logos* is derived, aside from *dialegesthai* (“to dialogue”) which, as we have seen, plays a major role in Plato’s thought, another verb, even more frequent than *dialegesthai* in the dialogues and complementary to it, also plays a major role in his thought: it is the verb *homologeîn* (etymologically: “to say (*legeîn*) the same (*homos*) thing”, that is, “to agree, concur”), which gives the substantive *homologia* (“agreement, assent”).

For Plato’s Socrates, one of the goals of a good political leader is to elicit and maintain *homologia* (“agreement”) between all citizens on what is best through *dialegesthai*. This goal is clearly stated in a remark of Socrates in book V of the *Republic*, introducing an examination of the relevance of the proposals making up the second among the three “waves” he fears might engulf the interlocutors of the dialogue, the one dealing with the organization of the community (*koinônia*) of men, women and children among guardians. Plato has Socrates say there: “*Is not then this the archè* (“*leading principle*”) *of our agreement: to ask ourselves what we have to designate as the greatest good in the organization of a city, that in view of which the lawmaker*

*makes the laws, and what [is] the greatest evil and then examine whether what we have just gone through in details fits in our opinion in the footprints of the good and doesn't fit in those of the evil (ar' oun ouch hède archè tè̄s **homologias**, eresthai hēmas autous ti pote **to megiston agathon** echomen eipein eis poleōs kataskeuēn, hou dei stochazomenon **ton nomothetēn tithēnai tous nomous**, kai ti megiston kakon, eita episkepsasthai ara ha nundè diēlthomen eis men to tou agathou ichnos hēmin harmottei, tōi de tou kakou anarmostei;) (Republic V, 462a2-7).* This statement identifies *to megiston agathon* (“the greatest good” in the most general sense, not limited to moral good) as *archè*, in the sense this word has in the analogy of the line, that is, both as foundation, as starting point, and as leading principle, goal toward which we advance (*archein* in the sense of “walking ahead”), for the making of laws for the city, thus requiring *homologia*, that is, community of *logos*. And it does so with a reference to both *to agathon* (“the good”) and *to kakon* (“the bad/evil”) to make it clear that you cannot have one without the other: we can say that some things/actions/... are “good”, or at least seem so to us, only because others are bad/evil, or at least seem so to us, and it is this distinction, at least as each one perceives it, which orient all our actions. This is why it is so important, since we are bound to live in society, to make every possible efforts to distinguish good from bad/evil as best we can in all things and to choose as leaders those who are best able to do it properly.

If the substantive *homologia* (« agreement, community of *logos*”) found in the quote above is not frequent in Plato's dialogues (41 occurrences in all), the verb *homologeîn* (“to agree”), on the other hand, is one of the most frequent verbs in the dialogues:<sup>314</sup> 529 occurrences in all, plus 68 occurrences of derivatives formed on *homologeîn* by addition of a prefix, having almost the same meaning, the prefix stressing one or another aspect of the agreement implied by *homologeîn*, its collective, complete or lasting aspect (*sunomologeîn*, 31 occurrences ; *dio-mologeisthai*, 25 occurrences ; *anomologeisthai*, 6 occurrences ; *prosomologeîn*, 4 occurrences ; *kathomologeîn*, 2 occurrences). The fact of *homologeîn*, of « saying (*legeîn*) the same (*homos*) thing” is the basis of knowledge through *to dialegesthai*, the only way for us to free ourselves from the prison of words which shape our speeches as well as our thoughts (*dianoia*). Not that saying the same thing guarantees the truth of what you say, but because conversely, if an agreement is not reached, it doesn't imply that what any of the interlocutors say is wrong, but it proves that none of them *knows*, for when someone has real “knowledge” of something, he must be able to transmit that knowledge to others in a way which is convincing and beyond doubt, as for instance Socrates does with the slave of Meno for a theorem of geometry. The first step on the path toward knowledge is as large as possible a verbal agreement as the result of as exhaustive as possible an investigation of the matter at hand. And this *homologia* starts with an agreement with oneself over time: always say the same things on each subject on which we claim to have knowledge. This is the meaning of the introductory dialogue between Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias* (*Gorgias*, 481b6-488b1). In this dialogue, which follows immediately the sudden break of Callicles in the discussion between Socrates and Polus, Socrates first states the condition of possibility of an agreement: “*if something of what affects human beings, differs for the ones, different for the others, [was] not the same, but if one of us was affected by an affection peculiar to oneself, different from [those of] the others, it would not be easy to indicate one's own affection to the others (ei mē ti èn tois anthrōpois pathos, tois men allo ti, tois de allo ti, to auto, alla tis hēmōn idion ti epaschen pathos è hoi alloi, ouk an èn rhaidion endeixasthai tōi heterōi to heautou pathēma)*”: for a *dialegesthai* having a chance to lead to *homologeîn* to be possible, the prerequisite condition is that something be “the same (*to auton*)” among the many “affections (*pathēmata*)” which we, the ones as well as the others (“*differs for the ones, different for the others (tois men allo ti, tois de allo ti)*”), are all subjected to so that we may agree between ourselves on names to be given to those similarities, allowing us to

<sup>314</sup> It ranks 22nd in the list of the most frequently used verbs in the dialogues. For the sake of comparison, *dialegesthai* occurs 219 times in the dialogues.

develop a *logos* making it possible to understand one another. Socrates speaks here at a most general level and the words *pathos* (“what affects one, what one is subjected to”, considered from the standpoint of the *cause* of the “affection”) and “*pathèma*” (“affection” in the most general sense of “what affects one”, considered from the standpoint of *effect* on the person or animal being affected) must be taken in their most general sense, referring to anything that we can be subjected to, even if what follows and the examples he chooses suggest a narrower understanding limited to the range of “feelings” and “affection” as “fondness”. He even has in mind something broader than mere *logos* as can be seen from his use of the verb *endeixasthai*, which says nothing of the means used to “indicate”, “make plain” to someone else what one feels, which might be gesture as well as words. And the examples he takes refer to the *pathèma* which is the prime engine of all moves toward others, *erôs* (“love”), here again in its most general sense as illustrated by Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*. Naming *two* objects of love for him and for Callicles, he suggests that similarity among different occurrences must be sought both within oneself and between one another: to think that there may be similarity between what I experience and what others experience, though these “affections” are different in each case, I must first realize *within myself* that there may be similarities between successive distinct “affections” I am subject to. And the two objects of love he mentions regarding both Callicles and himself can be seen as the two extremes, for each one of them, of what he regards as capable of eliciting this specific feeling named “love” on the scale of value described by Diotima: in both cases, one of the extremes is one single individual, Alcibiades for Socrates, the son of Pylilampes for Callicles, but the other extreme is at a different level of abstraction and height for each one of them: where Socrates raised to the pure abstraction which *philosophia* is, Callicles could only raise to the collection of the many human beings which the *dèmos* (“people”) constitutes, which incidentally, in his case, has the same name as the individual he is more specifically in love with (*Dèmos*, son of Pylilampes). If, in both cases, the love for the first object, a specific person, may be manifested, “indicated (*endeixasthai*)” by other means than words, in both cases too, love for the second object is primarily a matter of words: for Callicles, seducing the *dèmos* (“people”) of Athens through nice speeches in the manner of Gorgias; for Socrates, philosophizing through sincere *dialegesthai* looking for an agreement between the interlocutors which doesn’t stay at the surface of things rather than for the victory of one over the others at any cost. The framework of a possible agreement being thus set, Socrates suggests that it is in each case the « object » of love which elicits speeches on the part of the lover and that, alone among the four “objects” of love he just listed, philosophy is not inconstant and makes it possible to always say the same things and be in harmony with oneself. For him, what matters more than being in agreement with most people (*pleistous anthrôpous homologeîn moi*, 482c1), who keep changing opinions, as Callicles attempts to do in his relation with the Athenian *dèmos*, is to avoid, “*me being one, being in disagreement with myself and saying contradictory [things] (hena onta eme emautôi asumphônôn einai kai enantia legeîn)*” (*Gorgias*, 482c2-3). In other words, *homologeîn* with other people should not be searched at any cost but on the basis of a prior agreement with oneself (*soi sumphônein*), for there is no way one could convince others of the truth of one’s own views while being in disagreement with oneself. This inner harmony as a prerequisite of harmony with the others to be reached in opinions is the counterpart in speeches of justice as depicted by Socrates in the *Republic*. But it is not enough to stay at the level of harmony with oneself since human beings are bound to live in society in cities, we must also seek agreement with one another. And for this purpose, Socrates sees Callicles as the “touchstone” (*Gorgias*, 486d2-7) allowing him to put to the test the agreement philosophy has induced within himself: since he seems most at odds with Socrates’ theses, if they manage to *homologeîn* on a given point, this point will be considered firmly settled (“*I know full well that those [things] about which my soul has an opinion on which you agree with me, this will be the truth from there on (eu oid’ hoti, han moi su homologèsèis peri hôn hèn emè psuchè doxazei, taut’ èdè estin auta talèthè)*”,

*Gorgias*, 486e5-6). This concern for *homologeîn* is the backdrop of the whole *Gorgias*, the dialogue in which this verb is most often used after the *Republic* (72 occurrences in the *Gorgias*, 78 in the *Republic*, which is much longer than the *Gorgias*), mostly in the discussion with Polus (26 occurrences) and that with Callicles (45 occurrences, 6 often in section 486d2-488b1, which is Socrates' answer to the long introductory speech of Callicles and explains why the latter can play for Socrates' speeches inspired by philosophy the role of touchstone<sup>315</sup>). This dialogue between Socrates and Callicles, in love with *Dêmos* ("people"), son of Pylilampes ("shining like a fire"), whose most radical mouthpiece he becomes in his discussion with Socrates, illustrates in anticipation<sup>316</sup> the return to the cave of the freed prisoner of the allegory of the cave, who uses *hè tou dialegesthai dunamis* ("the power of the activity of dialoguing"), the tool giving access to the last segment of the line (see *Republic* VI, 511b4) to put to the test of others the result of his inner reflection (*dianoia*) when he was outside the cave. The *demos tou Pylilampous* ("People, son of Shining-Fire", *Gorgias*, 481d5) evokes the prisoners who never left the cave, whose "knowledge" is "daughter" of the light of the fire (*pur*) which produces the shadows to which they give names owing to their ability to *dialegesthai* (*Republic* VII, 515b4).<sup>317</sup>

For it is indeed at all four levels, that is, in the visible/sensible realm as well as in the intelligible realm, which both elicit *logos* made up of words, that the *dialegesthai* makes it possible to put to the test, not the existence, but the *objectivity* of what we are talking about. By "objectivity", I mean the fact that "something" outside our mind would be at the origin of the *pathèma* ("affection")<sup>318</sup> experienced by our soul to which we associate a specific name, or more generally speaking, a verbal expression made up of one or more words, be this "something" "visible/sensible", and thus perceived by one or another of our senses, and possibly by several ones under different modes of perception (for instance as simultaneously visible, audible and tangible), or "intelligible", and thus perceived by the *nous* ("mind"). And if, for sensible perceptions, the fact that we have several senses may help us become aware of the probable objectivity of what is at the origin of some of our perceptions, for instance by a combination of visible and tactile perceptions, for intelligible perceptions, the *only* way we have of testing the potential objectivity of what is at the origin of these perceptions is the *dialegesthai*, the comparison of our experiences and of the product of our thoughts by means of the exchange of words with others, and it can only be done by testing their "operative" character, the "grip" these "concepts" give us on what surrounds us and the greater or lesser efficiency they have in helping us live in view of the good.

But when I say that the *only* way we can test the potential objectivity of what is at the origin of our intelligible perceptions is the *dialegesthai*, this is true *with one exception*, and this exception is... *to agathon*, the good. I mean the "good" in the most general sense, not limited to

<sup>315</sup> The remaining occurrence, which is indeed the first one in the dialogue, comes in Socrates' words at the end of his discussion with Gorgias, at 431a5, and the agreement it suggests between Gorgias and Socrates is precisely what provokes Polus' intervention in the discussion to challenge the depth of this *homologia* (461b8) between Gorgias and Socrates, which Polus attributes to a feeling of shame (*èischunthè*, 461b5) that Gorgias would have experienced, had he not agreed (*prosomologèsai*, id.) with Socrates that a rhetorician cannot ignore what is just and what is not and thus cannot commit injustice.

<sup>316</sup> In anticipation according to the order of the dialogues I present: the *Gorgias*, last dialogue of the second tetralogy, comes before the *Republic*, central dialogue of the fourth tetralogy, and, in between, the third tetralogy focuses on Socrates' trial, "prophesied" by Callicles at the center of the *Gorgias* (486a7-b4), toward the end of his lengthy introductory speech.

<sup>317</sup> Plato didn't invent a character named *Dêmos* (often transcribed à Demus in English) having a father named *Pylilampès* (often transcribed Pylilampes in English), since they are historical characters quite close to him. Pylilampes was his stepfather and Demus the son he had with his first wife before marrying Plato's mother. But he is the one who chose to stage these characters in the context of the *Gorgias* and to depict Demus as the darling of a Callicles who is most likely a creation of Plato. And this choice may very well have been inspired to him by their names and the "symbolic" role these names could play in his literary project.

<sup>318</sup> *Pathèma* is the word used by Socrates in the conclusion of the analogy of the line to talk about what he associates with each of the four segments (see *Republic* VI, 511d7).

moral good. Not because we would intuitively know from birth what it is, and obviously not because we would all have the same understanding of it, which is contradicted by everyday experience, but because we all have, from the instant of birth, as I said earlier, an ability to differentiate perceptions that we find, at least firstly, pleasing from others that we find unpleasant, even before we can put words on these experiences, at a time we can only express our feelings through such signs as smiles and cries or tears. What the development of our *psuchè* from birth on allows is to refine these feelings of pleasure and pain, to make them conscious and to develop a language about them, and most of all to take into account the dimension of time and the relations between what we call “causes” and what we call “consequences”, allowing us to understand that things which may seem pleasant at the time we do or incur them may have consequences that we find unpleasant according to our own notions of pleasure and pain, of “good” and “bad/evil”, which is sufficient to prove that these notions are not the product of our imagination since, if that were the case, we would only perceive pleasant sensations since nobody wishes *for oneself* what one deems bad. This is the meaning of Socrates' remarks at the beginning of the parallel between good and sun at *Republic VI*, 505d5-506a2, which I have already mentioned several times. This is the reason why, for Plato, “*the idea of the good (hè tou agathou idea)*” is the “light” which makes all knowledge possible: of the sensible in perpetual movement, there is no possible knowledge except by way of “abstracting” from it *eidè/ideai* which no longer take into account space and time, and the ultimate criterion to test the objectivity of such *eidè/ideai* is that of the “good”, which is innate in all, at least under the embryonic form of the “pleasant”, which is already present in all animals.

### Appendix 3: the two base principles

This appendix presents a more in depth analysis of the two principles I've introduced as the basis of Plato's philosophy, the principle I called "principle of selective associations", and the principle of validation through *to dialegesthai*.

#### Appendix 3.1: the principle of selective associations

The analysis of the *logos* made by the stranger in the *Sophist* without the prerequisite of an ontology which would already be a *logos*, but conducted before the power and limits of *logos* have been investigated, relies upon two very simple principles: on the one hand what I have called the "principle of selective associations", and on the other hand the experimental validation made possible by the *dialegesthai*. The word "associations" that I have chosen to name the first principle should not be pressed too hard since the stranger himself, when introducing this principle at the beginning of the section dealing with what Cornford calls "the combination of forms", at *Sophist*, 251d5-e2, deliberately multiplies within a few lines the verbs and terms he uses to positively or negatively talk about what he has in mind: *prosaptein* ("to attach to"), *ameikta* ("unmingled, that will not mingle"), *metalambanein* ("to have or get a share of, partake of"), *sunagein* ("to bring together"), *epikoinōnein* ("to communicate with, share in"), and, in the ensuing lines, *dunamin echein koinōnias* (251e9)/*epikoinōnias* (252d2-3) ("to have a power of association"), *metechein* ("to participate in": *methexeton*, 251e10), *proskoinōnein* ("to share in": *proskoinōnoun*, 252a2), *suntithenai* ("to put together, combine": *suntitheasi*, 252b1), *di-airein* ("to take apart": *diarousin*, 252b2), *summeixis* ("commingling, commixture", 252b6), *koinōnia pathēmatos* ("community of affection", 252b10), *epigignesthai* ("to be added to": *epigignosthēn*, 252d7), *summeignusthai* ("mix together, commingle", 252e2).<sup>319</sup> What he wants to show in the most general and open-ended way, trying to avoid loaded words and varying his vocabulary on purpose precisely to make sure that no single word among those he uses is specialized at the exclusion of all others, is that, since the two extreme options, universal confusion in a huge whole in which everything get confused with everything else (what Parmenides and Eleaticism pushed to their most extreme consequences lead to) and absolute incommunicability where nothing has any relation whatsoever with anything else (what Heraclitus and his followers tend toward), are both obviously untenable, we are left with the intermediate option that relations may exist between... he doesn't specify what, but not anyones. Thus, all our efforts should be geared toward determining which ones are valid and which ones are not. And, in the same way he doesn't decide on one single word to describe these relations, sharing, mingling, participation, communication or you name it, he doesn't decide, here again deliberately, on a specific word to talk about what is involved in these "relations", precisely because it doesn't matter and it is because it doesn't matter that his reasoning is relevant: it assumes nothing beforehand about the potential "subjects" of these relation and their nature and, no matter what they are, the principle holds: not all mixes are possible.

It is most important to note that the stranger formulates his principle without limiting it either to what might be behind words and our thoughts (a possible "objective reality") or on the contrary to words, and this is what gives the argument its full strength. It presupposes nothing, not even some prior « ontology », being only common sense reasoning. And indeed, the stranger successively develops it in two different registers: the first one (*Sophist*, 253b9-258c6), very

<sup>319</sup> What matters here is not the specific, more or less approximative, translation of each one of these terms having close meanings, but their multiplicity, sometimes obtained by the mere addition or change of a prefix to the same root: for instance, the root *koinos* ("common") is found in *koinōnia* ("association, partnership") and the verb *koinōnein* ("to share, take part in") with various prefixes (*epikoinōnein* and *proskoinōnein*); the root *mignunai/meignunai* ("to join, bring together, mix") is found in *summeignusthai* (a verb formed with the adjunction of the prefix *sun-* ("together, with"), the substantive *summeixis* and *ameiktos* (privative alpha in front of the verbal adjective)).

broad, in which he selects a few examples in what he calls, here again, deliberately varying his vocabulary, at times *genè* (“offspring, family, class, sort, kind”,<sup>320</sup> 13 times: 253b9, 12, d1, e2, 254b8, d4, e3, 255c10, d4, 256b9, d12, 257a9, e2), at times *eidè* (“form, figure, appearance, kind, class”, 7 times: 253d1, 254c3, 255c6, d4, e1, 256e6, 258c4), at times *ideai* (“shape, semblance, kind, form, idea”, 3 times: 253d5, 254a9, 255e5), at times *phusei* (“nature, constitution, appearance”, 12 times: 255b1, d9, e5, 256c2, e1, 257a9 (*hè tôn genôn phusis*, “the nature of kinds”), c7, d4, 13, 258a8, 11, b11), at times, but only toward the end, *ousiai* (“substance, property, beingness”, 2 times: 258b2, 10); the second one (*Sophist*, 261d1-263d4) on the specific case of *logos*. In the first investigation, the one sometimes said to deal with what is referred to as the most important kinds/forms (of being), the stranger keeps varying his vocabulary, sometimes within a single sentence, to make us understand that his purpose is most general. If he chooses words, some of which, *eidos* and *idea* referring to the visible and, through it, by analogy, to what is customarily called, in a Platonic context, the “theory of forms/ideas”, that is, to the intelligible realm, others, *genos*, derived from the verb *gignesthai* (“to be born, become”), and *phusis*, to the material realm of becoming, avoiding as much as possible the vocabulary of “being”, it is not because, for him, all these terms might be synonymous, but because, *in this specific context and with regard to what he wants to show*, they are *interchangeable*, since realizing that all the relations between instances of these \*\*\* are not possible and that our main concern should be to find out which ones are and which ones are not doesn’t depend on the name we give to the “sets” from which these examples are taken, whether they are thought of as “ideas”, visible and material things, specific instances or “kinds”, or even mere words (whose case is dealt with later), but only on the meaning which we agree on for the words he takes as examples, so that his “demonstration” is acceptable for both the friends of *eidè* (“forms/ideas”) and those who only believe in *phusis* (“nature, physical reality”)! These so-called « greatest/most important kinds/forms » that he takes as examples are nothing more than the most general (*megista* understood, not as “most important”, but as “having the broadest *extension*”) terms (in the end, if we think about it, properly speaking, they are mere words so long as we have not investigated the relationship between words and what they might refer to, which is precisely what the stranger is in the process of doing) which, in so limited a number (5), make it possible to produce a meaningful *logos* having the broadest scope: to conduct his “demonstration”, he needs at least two “subjects” and he chooses *kinèsis* (“motion”) and *stasis* (“rest”), which are key words in the opposition between the various trends of thoughts he criticizes and which, in the most general sense they have in Greek, where *kinesis* is not limited to spatial motion, permit a partition, in the mathematical sense, of all “beings”, visible as well as intelligible, whatever the extension given to this “set”; in order to produce a meaningful phrase, as he will soon say, a verb is needed and thus, he chooses the verb *einai* (“to be”), the most general verb which can be thought of, the one about which he said earlier, at 252c2-9, that even the holders of the most extreme theories cannot do without to expound their theories; and eventually, showing, as soon as he starts making phrases with these three words, that, in order to distinguish the combinations that are possible from those that are not, he needs “predicative expressions” to be introduced by the verb *einai* (“to be”), he comes up with the predicative expressions *tauton* (“same”) and *thateron* (“other”), that is, “function words” corresponding to the most universal predicates which can be used to complete a sentence whose verb is *einai*. Now, for what the stranger wants to show, it doesn’t matter whether we want to consider *kinesis* (“motion”) and *stasis* (“rest”) as *genè*, *eidè*, *ideai*, *phusei*, (in English, kinds, forms, ideas, natures), or as concepts, collections of instances, mere words or who knows what, and what is the precise meaning of these words for the listener or reader, since, in all cases, the reasoning he is conducting holds: *kinesis* (“motion”) and *stasis* (“rest”) are not the same thing; each one of

<sup>320</sup> Here again, there is no need to look for the most exact translation of each of these words in this context: each one of the listed words has a plurality of possible meanings, somewhat overlapping with one another.

them is itself (*auto*), that is, “same” with regard to itself (*heautôi tauton*) and *thateron* (“other”) with regard to the other<sup>321</sup> and the sentence *stasis esti kinesis* (“rest is motion”) is unacceptable, *whomever the opponent we are talking to is*, whether a son of the Earth, a friend of forms or...

### Appendix 3.2: validation through *to dialegesthai*

The second “principle” mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, the one which renders the first one operative, is the test of shared experience, which explains the importance Plato gives to the *dialegesthai*, understood in its most basic sense of exchange of words between people, and eventually why he wrote *dialogues* rather than dogmatic treatises. The first way we, as human beings, can determine which combinations might be possible and which are unlikely, that without which none other would work, is the confrontation of experience. The second, which implies the first one and only complements it, is the test of consistency: different paths must not lead us, the ones, to admit the validity of an association, and the others, to reject it. Let me explain now what I mean by “sharing of experience”. As the stranger says at *Sophist*, 263e, even our thoughts (*dianoia*) can only be formulated with words, but words, and spoken *logos* which moulds them, exist only in view of dialogue between distinct persons: if there had ever been only one human being on earth, there would be no *logos*. But the words making this *logos* possible don't have a meaning by themselves, as is evidenced by the fact that they differ from one language to another in naming the same thing; they have meaning only through conventions shared between users of the same language. Learning a tongue, for an infant, always starts with a “dialogue” with the parents and the persons close to the baby, in which the first words being learned always refer to persons and objects the baby has a daily experience of, in exchanges where gestures most often accompany words, generally limited to the name of what is being pointed at. But the fact that an infant, or a grown-up person learning a foreign language, repeats a word doesn't ascertain that the meaning of this word has been understood. An infant doesn't know what “horse” means simply because he is capable of correctly uttering the sounds corresponding to the word “horse” (in doing this, what he does for Plato is only *phtheggesthai* (“utter sounds”)), but only after multiple experiences of dialogue with other persons show that the infant always uses the word “horse” about what more experienced persons speaking the same tongue also call “horse” and nothing else. But what must be understood is that these naming « experiences » tell us nothing about either what « horse » is in itself or what the visual and mental appearances forming in the mind of those participating in these experiences are. They only make it possible to ascertain that each time the one says “horse”, the other also says “horse”, and that the one never says “horse” when the other says “donkey” or “zebra” or “elephant” or “book” or “photograph”, or any other word.

Let us take an example with colors which should clarify things. It is impossible to a person P1 to know what another person P2 experiences when looking at a red object, which makes this person say it is red. The only thing P1 may know, through successive experiences, is that he or she makes about the same distinctions as P2 between red, blue, green, yellow and so on in that

<sup>321</sup> If the stranger mentions only about *thateron* (“other”) that it requires another term of comparison (*Sophist*, 255c14-d7; see *pros alla* (“in relation to others”) as opposed to *auta kath' hauta* (“themselves in relation to themselves”)), and not about *tauton* (“same”), it is not because he doesn't recognize a relative meaning for *tauton* (“same [as...]”), but only because *tauton* doesn't require something else to be used, since precisely it is possible to say that something is “same as itself” (*heautôi tauton* at 254d15), whereas it is impossible to use *thateron* (“other”) without assuming at least two distinct things, this distinction being at the root of the meaning of “other”. This is the reason why he wonders whether, since we can say “x is same as itself”, *tauton* adds something to *esti* (“is”) or if in the end the two words say the same thing (see 255b11-c2). And it is the existence of this *relative* meaning which makes it possible to distinguish *tauton* (“same”) from *on* (being): to say that two things, for instance *kinesis* (“motion”) and *stasis* (“rest”) are *tauton* (“the same”) is not the same thing as merely saying that they “are”, so that *tauton*, in its whole range of meanings, is not the same thing as *on* (“being”).

he or she almost always says “red” when P2 says “red” and almost never says “red” when P2 mentions a color other than red, that is, that they agree on the classification by colors made possible by their common language (the “almost always” points at the fact that the frontiers between colors are not clearly set since colors are the product of a continuous phenomenon in which frontiers are somewhat arbitrary, as can be seen when looking at a rainbow). Language doesn't tell me what “red” is but only allows me to share with others an experience which remains for each one personal and unspeakable, associating a totally arbitrary voiced “tag” to it, which only allows two or more persons to know that, when they agree to use the word “red” to designate the color of an object, each one experiences at that time the same sensation as he or she experienced earlier each time he or she used the word “red”, whatever this sensation may be in itself, nothing guaranteeing that it is the same for all.

But this capability of sharing experience « proves », at least in the cases where words refer to data issued from sensible experience, mostly visual, that these experiences have an “objective” substrate, which cannot originate in the thought of the one or the other, access to the thought of another one being precisely possible only by way of language. What can be shared is the perceived similarities and differences, and more generally *relations* between perceptions (sensible or intelligible), not things in themselves. In short, *logos* and thought, which is but an inner *logos*, give us access only to *relations*, not to “beings”. And it is the *dialegethai* alone which allows us to validate the relevance of the relations we assume regarding what is behind the words we use.

The fact that not all share one or another of these experiences, for instance that a color-blind person doesn't perceive colors the same way as most people do, or that a blind person doesn't see at all, doesn't challenge the “objectivity” of the origin of the phenomena which are at the source of our use of this or that word. For instance, the fact that a blind person next to two other people looking in the same direction, when asked “What do you see in front of you?” doesn't answer as do the two others, uttering sounds which, in their respective tongue, mean “I see a yellow brick road” doesn't mean that the phenomenon<sup>322</sup> causing this answer on the part of the two others doesn't have as its origin something outside their thought and words, but merely that the phenomenon which occurs for the two others doesn't occur for the blind person or, if we assume a color-blind person rather than a totally blind one, that this phenomenon doesn't induce in him/her the distinctions the two others have learned to make more or less similarly.<sup>323</sup> What is important is not that some people don't react in the same way as others, but on the contrary that two or more persons may react in almost the same way in most cases. The fact that there may be exceptions, abnormalities, “disabilities”, doesn't challenge the essential fact, which is that there may be agreement and that, as experience shows, in many cases, at least so long as we don't deal with abstractions, this agreement is widely shared and makes *logos* possible.

Thus, what makes *logos* possible is the *dia-legesthai*, in which *dia-* must be understood in several ways: in the sense of the *separation* it allows between our perceptions (sensible as well as intelligible) by the use of different words; in the sense of the *interaction* it allows between persons to put these perceptions to the test;<sup>324</sup> and eventually in the sense of a *crossing* which,

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<sup>322</sup> By “phenomenon”, I mean, not the aggregate of atoms making up the yellow brick road, but the interaction between the road and each of the two non blind persons leading them to answer as they do, interaction which involves the seen “object”, the eyes of one or another of these persons and their “mind” to produce a sensation and a *logos*.

<sup>323</sup> I've been careful not to use the verb « to be » in this phrase.

<sup>324</sup> From this standpoint, Parmenides disqualifies himself even before starting his “tedious game” when he admits at 137b6-8 that he chooses as respondent the one who will be less inclined to *polupragmonein* (“etymologically “act in all directions”, that is, in the end “to nitpick” and disorganize his nicely groomed arguments), only to give him occasions to breathe, showing that, as the stranger reproaches him from afar at *Sophist*, 243a6-b1, he doesn't care to check if his interlocutors and audience can follow him in his argument. This attitude is contrary to that of the stranger in the *Sophist*, which accepts Theaetetus as respondent knowingly after having had the opportunity to discuss with him earlier (see *Sophist*, 218a1-3) and is careful to check all along that he understands what he

by means of words, opens for us a window on what takes place *beyond* words thanks to this validation by shared experience. We may thus understand why the dialogue form is inseparable for Plato of any attempt to express his thoughts in writing, so as to give his writings, which present by nature a fixed *logos*, as close to what gives meaning to a *logos* a form as possible and make us feel and “touch” this constitutive aspect of *logos*.

It is the recognition of the key role played by the exchange of words between persons in the origin and development of *logos* which allows Plato to avoid the absolute relativism of Protagoras and his ilk: the fact that language is possible and works in the *dialegethai* **proves** that at least some of our perceptions translated into words have an “objective” character implying that their origin is outside the realm of words and our inner thoughts. This doesn't mean that *all* the words we use, even when they are understood by others, represent adequately what they attempt to point at, but that if *not a single word* was referring to a *shared* experience outside words, language would not be possible, for the sharing of purely subjective experiences cannot lead to a common language. More! It is the *repetitive* character of some of these perceptions which alone makes the birth of language possible. But this repetition is not total identity, if only because time flows. For names to be established and to allow understanding between one another, some of these shared experiences must have enough in common despite differences to be recognized across multiple occurrences as having something in common. And these common features which justify the attribution of the same name may be called *eidos* (“appearance, form, kind”) or *idea* (“appearance, form, idea”) or *phusis* (“nature”) or *genos* (“family, kind”) or *ousia* (“beingness”), it doesn't matter, but they must be part of our experience for *logos* to be possible. Of course, there are in language, besides common nouns, proper nouns referring to a single “individual” and we might wonder if language might be possible with proper nouns only, but, aside from the fact that a proper noun also refers to a *succession* of shared experiences and points at some level of permanence in the identity of what this proper noun is attributed to, if there are proper *nouns*, there are no proper *verbs* and without verbs, *logos* is not possible, as the stranger shows in the *Sophist*. In order to be able to say with Heraclitus that “everything flows”, it is necessary to have at least shared over time the experience of what “to flow” means.

The problem is that *logos* once initiated, lives its own life and that it becomes possible to create names which don't necessarily refer to a shared experience outside the realm of words, but to other words. It is for instance the case with the word *tragelaphos* which Plato puts in the mouth of Socrates at *Republic* VI, 488a6. If the word may be understood by his readers, it is because scores of experiences shared between many people have made it possible to give a meaning to the words *tragos* (“he-goat”) and *elaphos* (“stag”) which were used to create the word *tragelaphos*. For people to understand what is meant by centaur or Chimera or griffin, it has to be possible to explain with words on which the agreement resulting from shared experience has been possible, words such as “man”, “horse”, “eagle”, “lion”, “snake”, “head”, “body”, “tail”, and so on, what is assumed behind these words, which allows at a later time painters and sculptors to “materialize” what they are supposed to refer to in paintings and sculpture, without this proving that such creatures exist otherwise than as words and images.

And if *logos* is not possible without a large enough shared experience on data furnished by our sensible perceptions to lead to an agreement on a large enough number of words allowing an efficient use of them, language is not limited to words referring to sensible beings. And, as soon as we start using words supposed to refer to abstract notions, the sharing of experiences becomes harder. But, for Plato, there is no more reason to challenge the “objective” character of what some at least of these abstract words attempt to refer to than there is reasons to challenge it for some of those which pretend to refer to sensible “beings”. In both cases, all that is needed is to put to the test of shared experience the relations and distinctions supposed to be expressed

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says, even stressing from the start that using the same words (as for instance *sophistès*) is no guarantee that both are talking of the same things and understand one another (*Sophist*, 218c1-5).

with these words, whether that sharing of experience would be easy or not. For once we have understood that *logos* would be impossible if some at least of the words we use didn't refer to something behind them and outside our mind which gives them meaning and makes them efficient, our main concern should be, not to seek what "is" and what "is not", but to determine which words refer only to other words and which ones refer to something outside the realm of words, and, among the latter, which ones refer to man made productions, especially when these productions are no more than images, and which ones refer to productions which are not the product of man's activity. But above all, this investigation must have as guiding thread the worry that we all have to live a good life and be happy, since *logos* is meant to help human being in their social life (which is a prerequisite for its appearance and development) in allowing them to talk with one another to better organize their life together in cities for the good of all.

#### Appendix 4: a few issues of textual criticism

I present in this appendix a justification for three choices of textual variants of sentences of the *Republic* which are part of the sections I have translated for this “User’s guide”, insofar as they are not neutral regarding the interpretation of these texts.

The editions and translations of the *Republic* I refer to hereafter are:

- Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett, M.A. in Five Volumes*. 3rd edition revised and corrected, Oxford University Press, 1892 (*The Republic* is in volume III)
- *The Republic of Plato, edited with critical notes and an introduction of the text* by James Adam, Cambridge at the University Press (CUP), Cambridge, 1899, reprinted 1900
- *Platonis Opera*, edited by John Burnet, Oxford Classical Texts (OCT), Oxford, 1902 (*The Republic* is in volume IV)
- Platon, *La République, texte grec établi et traduit (en français) by Émile Chambry, in Platon, œuvres complètes de Platon* published in the Budé edition, volumes VI (livres I-III), VII-1 (livres IV-VII) et VII-2 (livres VIII-X), Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1933
- Plato, *The Republic*, Volume I, Books I-V and Volume II, Books VI-X, with an English translation by Paul Shorey, in *Plato Works in twelve volumes*, Loeb Classical Library (n° 237 et 276), Harvard University Press, London, 1935
- *The Republic of Plato*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis M. Cornford, Oxford at the Clarendon Presse, London, 1941
- *The Republic of Plato*, translated into English with notes, an interpretive essay and a new introduction by Allan Bloom, Basic Books, 1968
- *The Republic*, translated into English by G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato Complete Works*, Edited by John M. Cooper, Hackett, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997
- *Platonis Rempulicam*, edited with notes by S. R. Slings, Oxford Classical Texts (OCT), Oxford, 2003
- Plato, *Republic*, translated from the new standard Greek text, with introduction, by C. D. C. Reeve, Hackett, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2004

This appendix has been partly rewritten in the English version to drop the references to translations in French and replace them by references to translations in English (some of them were already mentioned in the French version). I also added references to the edition of Plato’s works by J. Adams, which is now available online, at various places listed at the following URL: <https://archive.org/search.php?query=plato%20republic%20adam> (some in the two volumes edition with notes and appendixes, other in one volume with the Greek text only).

##### Appendix 4.1: choice of variant for *Republic* VII, 515b4-5

The text of the second half of this sentence, starting at “*the same* [things]...”, comes in several variants depending on the manuscript, the editor or translator. I translate the following text: “***ou tauta*** [stressed as a crasis of *ta auta*] *hègei an ta paronta autous nomizein onomazein haper horôien*” (“*Now, if they were able to dialogue (dialegesthai) with one another, don’t you think that, the same [things] being around [again], they would take the habit of giving names to those [things] they see?*”), which is the text given by manuscript A (Parisinus graecus 1807), usually considered the best by editors.

The variants concern three words or sequences of words (those in bold above):

- should we read the first words *ou tauta* with *tauta* stressed as a crasis of *ta auta* (“the same [things]”), along with manuscripts A, F and M, or as the neuter plural of *houtos* (“these”, referring to the carried objects mentioned in the previous sentence of Socrates), along with manuscript D and Jamblicus, or else *ouk auta* (suggestion of Vermehren), *ouk* being a variant of the negative *ou* before a vowel, which avoids the duplication of the article *ta* when *auta* is viewed as relating to *ta paronta*: “*the [shadows] being present themselves?*”

- is Socrates talking of *ta paronta* (“*the [things] being around*”), as can be read in manuscripts A, F, D and M, or, according to some recensions, probably influenced by the *tis tôn pariontôn* (“*one of those passing by*”) in Socrates’ next sentence, of *ta parionta* (“*the [shadows] passing by*”), or else, according to Iamblicus and Proclus followed by recent editors such as Burnet (OCT), Chambry (Budé) and more recently Slings (OCT 2003), of *ta onta* (“*the beings*”)?

- should we read *nomizein onomazein* (“*take the habit of giving names*”), as can be read in manuscripts A, D and M, *nomizein* alone (“*hold*”, another possible meaning of *nomizein*, derived from the root *nomos*, “*usage, custom, law*”), as can be read in manuscript F and in Proclus, or, along with Iamblicus, *onomazein* alone (“*name*”, as a verb)?

Jowett gives the following translation: “*would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?*”, with a note saying “*Reading paronta*”, which suggests that he translated the following Greek: *ou tauta* [stressed as a crasis of *ta auta*] *hègei an ta paronta autous onomazein haper horôien*

Adam (CUP) and Shorey (Loeb) give the following text: “*ou tauta* [stressed as neuter plural of *houtos*] *hègèi an ta parionta autous nomizein onomazein, haper horôien*”, which Shorey translates “*do you not think that they would suppose that in naming the things that they saw they were naming the passing objects?*” He adds in a note that “*the text and the precise turn of expression are doubtful*” but that “*the general meaning, which is quite certain, is that they would suppose the shadows to be the realities*”. This is the text translated by Cornford (who says in a note on that sentence that he translates the text of Adams) as “*would they not suppose that their words referred only to those passing shadows which they saw?*”, by Grube & Reeve (Hackett) as “*don't you think they'd suppose that the names they used applied to the things they see passing before them?*”, by Bloom (Basic Books) as “*don't you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by before them that they see?*”, with a note reading “*It is not certain whether the Greek was "these things going by..." or "these things present..." An alternative manuscript reading would make the sentence "...they would hold that these things that they see are the beings."*” (this last reading is the one given by Burnet).

Burnet (OCT) gives the following text: “*ou tauta* [stressed as neuter plural of *houtos*] *hègèi an ta onta autous nomizein haper horôien*”, which may be translated as “*don't you think they would hold for the beings these [things] that indeed they see?*”

Chambry (Budé) still adds to the richest text to come up with “*ouk auta hègei an ta onta autous nomizein onomazein, onomazontas haper horôien*”, which he translates in French as “*ne penses-tu pas qu'ils croiraient nommer les objets réels eux-mêmes, en nommant les ombres qu'ils verraient?*”, adding in a note that “*le sens exigé par le contexte est: "En nommant les ombres qu'ils voient, les prisonniers ne croient-ils pas nommer les objets mêmes ?"*” and explaining how he did “*pour obtenir ce sens*”.

Slings, in the new OCT edition (2003), modifies the text of Burnet, replacing *nomizein* alone by *onomazein* alone, which gives “*ou tauta* [stressed as neuter plural of *houtos*] *hègèi an ta onta autous onomazein haper horôien*” which might be translated as “*don't you think that they would call these [things] they see the beings themselves?*”.

Reeve (Hackett 2004), who presents his translation as based on Slings’ text, paraphrases these words more than he translates them as “*don't you think they would assume that the words they used applied to the things they see passing in front of them?*”: he “*translates*” as if he were reading *parionta* in place of *onta* and his rendering of *onomazein*, which simply means “*to give a name*”, by “*the words they used applied to...*” is not translation but rich embroidery to get to the meaning he wants to read there!

If it is indeed certain that the general meaning of the allegory presented by Socrates is that the prisoners who have spent all their life chained at the bottom of the cave take the shadows for reality, I don't think that this is the meaning of this specific sentence. It is what is said two sentences of Socrates later, at 515c1-2 (“*Undoubtedly then, said I, such [persons] would hold*

as the true nothing but the shadows of the implements”). And it seems to me that trying to read it already in this sentence, following the Neoplatonists Iamblicus and Proclus (who are the first witnesses of the reading *onta* in place of *paronta*, that is, of the introduction of an “ontological” vocabulary in this sentence), and skip over the naming process implied by the verb *onomazein* is going too fast, reducing Socrates’ sentence at 515c1-2 to mere redundancy and ignoring important aspects of Plato’s text which, though only alluded to, draw our attention toward other aspects of our situation in this world.

I contend that, in this sentence referring for the first time in the allegory to the ability of the chained prisoners to talk to one another (“if they were able to dialogue (*dialegesthai*) with one another”), that is, to make use of the *logos* which differentiates the chained prisoners as *anthrôpous* (“human beings”) from all other animals (the *alla zôia* mentioned at 515a1), what this sentence is all about is the development of language, of what leads from the “sounds” produced by the bearers (a *phtheggesthai*) to an understandable and meaningful *logos* (a *dialegesthai*). Language, *logos*, and more specifically *dialogos*, exchange of words between persons capable of understanding one another, of which thought is but an inner version (see *Theaetetus*, 189e6-190a2), requires first that the mind be capable of recognizing sameness (*ta auta*) in what is “present” to our senses (*ta paronta*) despite the flux in perpetual motion (*ta parionta*) which causes our perceptions, and then that we agree on “names” (*onomazein*, the verb derived from *onoma*, “name”) for what is the same in multiple successive perceptions, whether it is the same object which passes by time and again or different objects having a similar look. For the *dialegesthai* to be possible, a “law” (*nomos*, at the root of the verb *nomizein*) of language is required (see at *Cratylus*, 388e7ff. the discussion about the making of language and the fact that the “maker of names”, the *onomatourgos*, must be a *nomothetês onomata*, a “lawmaker about names”, wording found at 389a5-6), resulting from common usage (*nomizein*). In this task of defining language, the senses, activated by what is in contact with us or close to us don’t give us the notion of “being”, but of “being there” and it is the mind which introduces in the perpetual flux of changing sensations the recognition of identity and difference required for thought and language to develop. Man is presented here not only as a *logikos* animal, an animal endowed with *logos*, but as a *dialogikos* animal, endowed with *hè tou dialegesthai dunamis* (“the power to engage in dialogue” as well as “the power resulting from the practice of dialoguing”): for him/her to really become a human being and be able to undertake his/her education, he/she must be able to dialogue with fellow prisoners, be capable of practicing *logos*/speech, which might lead him/her to *logos*/reason.

In this perspective, the choice between the reading *paronta* given by most manuscripts and the reading *parionta*, rarer in the manuscripts, becomes secondary once the reading *onta* of the Neoplatonists has been discarded and the reading *nomizein onomazein*, alluding to the process of language creation, is selected. *Paronta* puts the stress on the fact that what acts upon our senses only when close enough must be “present” around us while *parionta* puts the stress on the fugitive nature of sensible perceptions which keep changing. But these two aspects are complementary and what is most important is the repetitive (*t(a) auta*) characteristics the mind may discern in these sensations which keep changing, which makes it possible to give them names and thus to give birth to *logos*. If I have retained the reading *paronta*, it is both because it is that of most of the manuscripts and because the proximity of the *pariontôn* in the next sentence of Socrates doesn’t appear to me strong enough a reason to correct the manuscripts: the expression *tis tôn pariontôn* at 515b8 is masculine, as *tis* makes clear (“somebody”, not “something”, which would be *ti*) and thus refers to the bearers and not the the objects they hold, while here, *ta parionta* would be neuter, referring to the objects held above the wall and casting shadows. Thus, the supposition that Plato chose a different verb in each case is not implausible: when talking of the bearers, that is, the *anthrôpoi* who stand for the human souls, source of movement, he uses a verb describing movement, *parienai* (of which *parionta* is the present participle),

while when talking of the held objects, which indeed move, but are not responsible for their movement, and more so with their cast shadows, he puts the stress on their being present to become perceptible, using the verb *pareinai* (of which *paronta* is the present participle).

Read this way, the text suggests that the development of language (*logos* in its most basic meaning) is a prerequisite for “metaphysical” reflection on what is “true”, “real”, and what is not, and besides, that the names themselves are only “vocal” images of “sensible” images: names are given to the shadows, not to the held objects, and even less to what is outside the cave. We may also notice, to strengthen my interpretation, that the next sentence of Socrates introduces another condition of this reflection: mentioning the fact that some of these shadows may also seem to produce sounds, it introduces the problem of the multiplicity of senses (sight, hearing and so on) and of what Aristotle calls the “common sense”, that is, what allows us to perceive, behind the multiplicity of sensible impressions from the various senses, the unity of what is at their origin. And it is not necessary, to state the problem, to make an inventory of all our senses: two are enough, here sight and hearing (the two senses precisely chosen by Socrates in one of his attempts to define the beautiful with Hippias at *Hippias Major*, 297e-303d).

It is only once we have made sure that, in the “analogy”, those who “picture” us are, as is the case for us, endowed with *logos*, root of the *dialegethai*, and of more than one sense, which makes it possible to realize that what is at the source of what we perceive with one or another of our senses is not limited to what this sense allows us to grasp of it, and thus opens a space between sensible perceptions and what causes them, which may make the start of an ascent toward “ideas” possible, that we reach a point where we may benefit from the identification of “ground zero” of knowledge for the prisoners, that which consists in supposing that the shadows are the “truth”.

(*The following paragraph is new to the English translation.*) The handling of this dubious text by various scholars is a good example of what happens when people, rather than trying to understand what Plato wrote, want to find in what they read what they would like Plato to have written to fit in their preconceived notion of what Plato said. Shorey, who precisely wrote a book called “*What Plato said*”, even justifies such an approach on his part in notes to his translation: the one I quoted above about the dubious text here analyzed, where he writes “*the general meaning, which is quite certain, is that they would suppose the shadows to be the realities*”, which is not false, but doesn’t apply to *this specific sentence*, and a note on 516a8-b2, further on in the allegory (“*he would probably more easily contemplate those in heaven and heaven itself during the night, looking toward the light of the stars and the moon, than, during the day, the sun and that of the sun*”) in which he writes: “*It is probably a mistake to look for a definite symbolism in all the details of this description. There are more stages of progress than the proportion of four things calls for. All that Plato's thought requires is the general contrast between an unreal and a real world, and the goal of the rise from one to the other in the contemplation of the sun, or the idea of good, Cf. 517 B-C.*”, which should be “translated” as “*I could not find a definite symbolism in all the details of this description and fit it with the analogy of the line. But all that my understanding of Plato's thought requires is the general contrast between an unreal and a real world, and the goal of the rise from one to the other in the contemplation of the sun, or the idea of good, so trust me and don't nitpick on the details of the allegory, just enjoy the show!*” I hope I have made clear in my analysis of the allegory how careful Plato was in writing, selecting his terms and making sure that the tiniest details of his image had meaning and contributed to the overall “message” of the allegory so that the reader may now see how wrong Shorey was in not taking the time to look for “*a definite symbolism in all the details of this description*”. He was right in defending “*The unity of Plato's thought*” (the title of one of his works), but he was wrong in his way of understanding “*What Plato said*” (the title of another of his works) because he preferred to ignore the details in Plato’s text which

didn't fit into his overall understanding rather than spend ("waste" for him) time on the details of Plato's text and adjust his understanding to accommodate *all* the details that Plato put in his text with an extraordinary mastery.

Appendix 4.2: choice of variant for *Republic* VII, 532c1

The Greek text of the whole sentence where the problematic word (bold below) is found (*Republic* VII, 532b6-c7) is: "*hè de ge, èn d' egô, lusia te apo tôn desmôn kai metastrophè apo tôn skiôn epi ta eidôla kai to phôs kai ek tou katageiou eis ton hêlion epanodos, kai ekei pros men ta zôia te kai phuta kai to tou hêliou phôs eti adunamia blepein, pros de ta en hudasi phantasmata **theia** kai skias tôn ontôn, all' ouk eidôlôn skias di' heterou toioutou phôtos hôs pros hêlion krinein aposkiazomenas--pasa hautè hê pragmateia tôn technôn has diêlthomen tautèn echei tèn dunamin kai epanagôgèn tou beltistou en psuchèi pros tèn tou aristou en tois ousi thean, hôsper tote tou saphestatou en sômati pros tèn tou phanotatou en tôi sômatoeidei te kai horatôi topôi*", which I have translated (after correcting it in the way I explain below) as "*But then, said I, the release from chains and the turning around from shadows toward the likenesses (eidola) and the light and the ascent out of the subterranean [place] toward the sun, and there, regarding the living [creatures] and plants and the light of the sun, inability to yet look [at them], but regarding the reflections (phantasmata) on waters, habituation, and also [regarding] the shadows of the [things] that are, but not the shadows of images (eidolon) cast by a light [which is] another such [image] when judging in comparison with the sun, all this hard work on the arts we have gone through has this power of elevation of the best [part] of the soul toward the contemplation of the best among the [things] which are, as, at the time, [the power of elevation of] the clearest [part] in the body toward the [contemplation] of the brightest [thing] in the corporeal and visible place.*"

All manuscripts (followed by most modern editors: Adam for CUP, Burnet for OCT, Shorey for Loeb, Chambry for Budé, Slings for the new OCT edition of 2003) unanimously give the text *ta en hudasi phantasmata theia*, where *theia* is the accusative neuter plural of the adjective *theios*, "divine", applied to the *phantasmata* ("reflections, images") formed "on waters" (*en hudasi*). As can easily be seen, the first part of the long sentence in which these words are found is a reminder of the allegory of the cave and the mention of reflections/images on waters refers to 516a7 where Socrates talks about *en tois hudasi ta te tôn anthrôpôn kai ta tôn allôn eidôla* ("the images on waters of men and the other [things]") in a sentence reminiscent of his description of the subsegments of the visible in the analogy of the line which immediately precedes the allegory, where he explains what he means by *eikones* ("images") in his description of the first subsegment, saying that he has in mind "*first shadows, then reflections in waters... (prôton men tas skias, epeita ta en tois hudasi phantasmata...)*" (509e1-510a1), and also of 516b4-5 where he mentions, about the sun, *en hudasi... phantasmata autou* ("reflections of it on waters"). But the "divine" character of these reflections on waters is not mentioned in the allegory. It is only in his commentary that Socrates uses the word *theiôn* ("divine") about the "contemplations (*theôriôn*)" of the freed prisoner at the end of his ascent, just before returning to the cave (517d4-5), but what he then qualifies as "divine" is the direct contemplation of the sun, the ultimate step in the progress in the intelligible, assuming it to be possible, while here, he is referring to the first step in the investigation of the intelligible, that in which the prisoner is not yet able to look, not even at what is in the heavens, but at the creatures themselves (human beings and the other things) populating the surface of the earth, but only at their shadows and reflections in waters, and besides, the word *theios* doesn't apply to "images", whatever the word used to name them, *eikôn*, *eidolon* or *phantasma*, but to "contemplations (*theôria*)". To find the word *theios* associated with a word meaning "image", several translators refer to *Sophist*, 266b-d, where the stranger opposes images (*eidôla*, *phantasmata*, *skiai*) produced by natural phenomena to man

made images such as paintings, qualifying at 266c5 the former, those produced by nature, as *theias* in the same way that of which they are images is, precisely because they are not made by human beings. But the context is not the same in both cases and here, what is at stake is the difference between images and that of which they are images, concerning things which are themselves images of something else since we are in an allegory.

If the word, though ill fitted here, is nonetheless not impossible under the pen of Plato, there remains that the sentence as found in the manuscripts poses a problem of global construction which led some editors (Ast and Apelt, see note *ad loc.* in Shorey's edition of the *Republic* in the Loeb Classical Library, where he argues for the reading of the manuscripts, reproduced below) to suggest replacing *theia* ("divine") by *thea* ("contemplation", nominative feminine singular), a word which no longer qualifies the *phantasmata*, but plays a role in the sentence which can be illustrated by the parallel between the two parts of the clause including the words *ta en hudasi phantasmata theia* organized around *men... de...* ("on the one hand..., on the other hand..."):

	Reading of the manuscripts	Emended reading
<i>kai ekei</i> and there		
<i>pros men</i> regarding on the one hand	<i>pros de</i> regarding on the other hand	<i>pros de</i> regarding on the other hand
<i>ta zōia te kai phuta</i> the living [creatures] and plants	<i>ta en hudasi phantasmata theia</i> the divine reflections on waters	<i>ta en hudasi phantasmata</i> the reflections on waters
<i>kai to tou hēliou phōs</i> and the light of the sun		
<i>eti adunamia blepein</i> inability to yet look [at them]		<i>thea</i> contemplation
	<i>kai skias tōn ontōn...</i> and shadows of the beings...	<i>kai skias tōn ontōn...</i> and [regarding] shadows of the beings...

What this arrangement in columns of the first part and of the two versions of the second part shows is that, with the reading of the manuscripts, nothing answers *adunamia blepein*, so that a translation respecting the text would look like this: "and there, regarding on the one hand the living [creatures] and plants and the light of the sun, inability to yet look [at them], regarding on the other hand the divine reflections on waters and shadows of the beings, but not the shadows of images cast by a light [which is] another such [image] when judging in comparison with the sun..." that is, a phrase which is incomplete on the side of the "on the other hand", nothing answering the "inability to look" on the side of the "on the one hand", which the reader is expected to supply from memory of the allegory. This is not absolutely impossible to accept, since the whole reminder of the allegory, occupying the first part of the long sentence we are analyzing till *hōs pros hēlion krinein aposkiazomenas* ("cast... when judging in comparison with the sun") is but a sequence of juxtaposed nominals ("the release (*hē lysis*)", "the turning around (*[hē] metastrophē*)", "the ascent (*[hē] epanodos*)", "[the] inability to look (*[hē] adunamia blepein*)" detailing in advance what is referred to synthetically later as "**this** power of elevation (*tautēn tēn dunamin kai epanagōgēn...*)" and pointed at by the demonstrative *tautēn* ("this"), these nominals being meant to evoke summarily the various steps of the progress of the prisoner with a leading noun in each case taking the place of a verb, rather than to retell in detail each one of these steps, leaving it to our memory to reconstruct the whole image. There remains that the reading of the manuscripts increases the missing parts in the sentence that have to be supplemented by the reader in an unnatural way from a grammatical standpoint: if we may assume that *blepein* ("look at") is implied in the second part, this is no longer possible for *adunamia* since what should be implied is precisely its opposite. In fact, all the translators who adopt the reading *theia* I had access to except Reeve in his 2004 translation add in their translation words

in English which have no counterpart in Greek to answer the clause *adunamia blepein* (“inability to look”) by something which is no longer an “inability”, as can be seen below (the added words are underscored):

- Jowett: “*But the release of the prisoners from chains, and their translation from the shadows to the images and to the light, and the ascent from the underground den to the sun, while in his presence they are vainly trying to look on animals and plants and the light of the sun, but are able to perceive even with their weak eyes the images in the water [which are divine], and are the shadows of true existence (not shadows of images cast by a light of fire, which compared with the sun is only an image)—this power of elevating the highest principle in the soul to the contemplation of that which is best in existence, with which we may compare the raising of that faculty which is the very light of the body to the sight of that which is brightest in the material and visible world—this power is given, as I was saying, by all that study and pursuit of the arts which has been described.*” Jowett seems to have doubts on *theia*, which he puts within brackets, but doesn't hesitate to supplement much more than is required as the counterpart of *adunamia blepein*, which he “translates” “*they are vainly trying to look on*”.

- Shorey (Loeb): “*And the release from bonds, I said, and the conversion from the shadows to the images that cast them and to the light and the ascent from the subterranean cavern to the world above, and there the persisting inability to look directly at animals and plants and the light of the sun, but the ability to see the phantasms **created by God** in water and shadows of objects that are real and not merely, as before, the shadows of images cast through a light which, compared with the sun, is as unreal as they—all this procedure of the arts and sciences that we have described indicates their power to lead the best part of the soul up to the contemplation of what is best among realities, as in our parable the clearest organ in the body was turned to the contemplation of what is brightest [532d] in the corporeal and visible region.*”, with a note on “*created by God*” reading: “*“theia” because produced by God or nature and not by man with a mirror or a paintbrush. See crit. note and Class. Review, iv. p. 480. I quoted Sophist 266 B-D, and Adam with rare candor withdrew his emendation in his Appendix XIII. to this book. Apelt still misunderstands and emends, p.296 and note.*” Shorey argues for the reading *theia*, but is forced to supplement the words “*the ability to see*”, which don't exist in the Greek text, as the counterpart of “*eti adunamia blepein*” which he translates as “*the persisting inability to look directly at*” (“*persisting*” rendering *eti* in an unusual way).

- Cornford (Oxford UP): “*There was also that earlier stage when the prisoner, set free from his chains, turned from the shadows to the images which cast them and to the fire-light, and climbed up out of the cavern into the sunshine. When there, he was still unable to look-at the animals and plants and the sunlight; he could only see the shadows of things and their reflections in water, though these, it is true, are **works of divine creation** and come from real things, not mere shadows of images thrown by the light of the fire, which was itself only an image as compared with the Sun. Now the whole course of study in the arts we have reviewed has the corresponding effect of leading up the noblest faculty of the soul towards the contemplation of the highest of all realities, just as in our allegory the bodily organ which has the clearest perceptions was led up towards the brightest of visible things in the material world.*” Cornford doesn't translate, but rewrites to break up the long phrase written by Plato and replaces the sequence of nominals by separate sentences with verbs. He keeps the *theia* of the manuscripts and must supply “*he could only see*” which is not in the Greek to answer “*he was still unable to look-at*”.

- Bloom (BasicBooks): “*Then, I said, the release from the bonds and the turning around from the shadows to the phantoms and the light, the way up from the cave to the sun; and, once there, the persisting inability to look at the animals and the plants and the sun's light, and looking instead at the **divine** appearances in water and at shadows of the things that are, rather than as before at shadows of phantoms cast by a light that, when judged in comparison with the sun, also has the quality of a shadow of a phantom—all this activity of the arts, which we*

went through, has the power to release and leads what is best in the soul up to the contemplation of what is best in the things that are, just as previously what is clearest in the body was led to the contemplation of what is brightest in the region of the bodily and the visible.” Reading *theia* and “looking instead” added.

- Grube & Reeve (Hackett): “Then the release from bonds and the turning around from shadows to statues and the light of the fire and, then, the way up out of the cave to the sunlight and, there, the continuing inability to look at the animals, the plants, and the light of the sun, but the newly acquired ability to look at **divine** images in water and shadows of the things that are, rather than, as before, merely at shadows of statues thrown by another source of light that is itself a shadow in relation to the sun—all this business of the crafts we’ve mentioned has the power to awaken the best part of the soul and lead it upward to the study of the best among the things that are, just as, before, the clearest thing in the body was led to the brightest thing in the bodily and visible realm.” Grube and Reeve not only add “the ability to look” which is not in the Greek, but further add “newly acquired” which is even less in the Greek.

- Reeve (Hackett 2004): “Then the release from bonds and the turning around from shadows to statues and the light; and then the ascent out of the cave to the sun; and there the continuing inability to look directly at the animals, the plants, and the light of the sun, but instead at **divine** reflections in water and shadows of the things that are, and not, as before, merely at shadows of statues thrown by another source of light that, when judged in relation to the sun, is as shadowy as they—all this practice of the crafts we mentioned has the power to lead the best part of the soul upward until it sees the best among the things that are, just as before the clearest thing in the body was led to the brightest thing in the bodily and visible world.” Here Reeve still keeps the *theia*, but doesn’t supply a counterpart to “the continuing inability”, leaving it to the reader to understand the mere “but” as implying the opposite of the whole clause “the continuing inability to look”, helped in this more by remembrance of the allegory than by grammar.

From a grammatical standpoint, the leading word of the sequence starting with *pros men*, is the noun *adunamia* (“inability”), which continues the series of nouns *lisis* (“release”), *metastrophè* (“turning around”), *epanodos* (“ascent”), and *blepein* (“look at”), verb at the infinitive, is subordinate to it. So, the reading of the manuscript has two defects: it breaks the series of names corresponding each to a step of the ascent and it requires assuming that what is implied after *pros de* is the opposite of what is explicit after *pros men*, which is bad grammar, to say the least.

My take is that the sentence requires a counterpart to *adunamia blepein*, that this counterpart was there in Plato’s original text and that a copying mistake dating back from a long time ago corrupted the word used by Plato to give birth to the reading *theia*. Aside from the grammatical reason, another reason pushes me to challenge the reading *theia*: the first part of this long sentence follows closely the allegory, reusing many terms used there, or, if not the terms themselves, terms of the same family (the noun derived from the verb, for instance) or close in meaning, and, in this perspective, *theia* would be the only “foreign body” in this summary, and not an insignificant one! For Plato to casually introduce in a mere summary such an attribute for *images* when, in the *Sophist*, it is highlighted by the stranger, puzzles his interlocutor and leads to an explanation, seems surprising to me on his part, especially in a sentence where attention is distracted by an awkward construction and the fact that what is called for by *adunamia blepein* never comes.

But the emendation *thea* (« contemplation »), which indeed provides a counterpart to *adunamia blepein*, doesn’t seem acceptable to me. For sure, this word may be related to *theasaito* at 516a9 and to *theasasthai* at 516b6 in the allegory (conjugated forms of the verb *theasthai*, “to contemplate”, built on the root *thea*), but, in the allegory, *theasthai* is used, not about the first step of the prisoner outside the cave when he can only look at shadows and reflections on waters, but about the last step, the one where he has become capable of “contemplating” celestial bodies, the stars and the moon at night, and eventually the sun itself, which stand in the

allegory for abstract “beings” having no “image” inside the cave, that is, in the visible realm, and the most important of them all, the idea of the good, pictured by the sun. But what would be “contemplated” here would be, on the contrary, what represents in the allegory the very first access to intelligible beings, even before the prisoner becomes able to look at “*the living* [creatures] *and plants and the light of the sun* (*ta zôia te kai phuta kai to tou hêliou phôs*)”, that is, their shadows (*skias*) and reflections (*phantasmata*). At this stage of the educational process, contemplation is not yet in order, and the prisoner is rather tediously making efforts to try to “see clearly (*kathoran*)” what is only so far principles of intelligibility of “beings” in becoming (“*living* [creatures] *and plants*”). Besides, from a paleographic standpoint, it implies that a copyist would have *added* a letter, the iota needed to transform *thea* into *theia*, with the result that a sentence formerly grammatically correct was now incomprehensible. Such a “mistake” might be possible on the part of a pious but hardly scrupulous monk prone to seeing the hand of God everywhere, but if that were the case, it would date back at most from the Early Middle Ages, which makes it unlikely that it could have propagated to all the manuscripts that have come down to us.

To help us find a more acceptable word than *thea* as counterpart of *adunamia blepein*, I suggest to go back to the vocabulary of the allegory, and more specifically to the first word of the sentence this part of the summary refers to, the one describing the stage where the prisoner can only look at shadows and reflections on waters of men and other creatures outside the cave, which is *sunêtheia* (516a5), which I have translated as “*habituation*”. *Sunêtheia* is the substantive formed with an ending in *-ia*, frequent in Greek, after the adjective *sunêthês*, “living together, habituated, accustomed”, itself derived from *êthos*, “custom, usage”, by addition of the prefix *sun-* introducing an idea of relations with something else or community between persons, and it is used by Socrates to refer to a process rather than to the result of this process (hence my translation by “habituation” rather than “habit”). As I said already, in the summary of the allegory here made by Socrates, he uses nouns which are for the most part nouns of action referring to the various stages in the allegory where these actions were then described by verbs (let us not forget that the allegory describes a *process* of education rather than states resulting from this process), *lusion* (“liberation”) echoing *lusin* (noun at the accusative singular) at 515c4 and *lutheia* (a form of the verb *luein*, from which *lusion* is derived) at 515c6, *metastrophê* (“turning around”) echoing *periagein ton auchena* (“turn the neck around”) at 515c7, *epanodos* (“ascent”) echoing *anabaseôs* (“ascent”) at 515e7, *adunamia* (“inability”) echoing *horan oud' an hên dunasthai tôn...* (“unable to see a single one of the [things]...”) at 516a2, all feminine and sharing the *hê* at the beginning of the sentence. To continue this list, the word which would perfectly fit to describe the stage being reminded here is simply *sunêtheia* (“habituation”) used in the allegory itself, which is also a feminine noun of action, as are all the other nouns of the list. But it seems that here, Plato’s Socrates wanted to clearly recall the allegory, but without staying prisoner of the very words he had used in it, even at the cost of using rare words, possibly neologisms coined by him, as if to show by way of example that a *dialektikê* process requires precisely not to be a slave of words, but to be able to see beyond words and images what they point to. Thus, he returns to the word *phantasmata* to refer to the reflections on waters, used in the analogy of the line, at 510a1 in the explanation of what he means by *eikones* (“images”) when talking of the first subsegment of the visible, but replaced in the allegory of the cave at 516a7 by the word *eidola* (plural of *eidolon*), a word he uses in our sentence, at 532c6, to refer to the sculpted statues whose shadows the chained prisoners see; and one half of the nouns of action in the above list are rare words, possibly even words coined by Plato: *metastrophê* (“turning around”) occurs only twice in the dialogues, once a few pages earlier, at 525c5, and once here, and these are the only two examples given in the Bailly Greek-French Lexicon, while the LSJ adds a third example, in the sense of “turn of events”, taken from the Septuagint, the translation in Greek of the Holy Bible made by Jews of Alexandria in the third century B.C., that is, about one century after Plato); *epanodos* (“ascent”) occurs only three times

in the dialogues, at *Phaedrus*, 267d4, a few pages before in the *Republic*, at 521c7, and here, and the LSJ gives no examples of use of this word earlier than Plato, except possibly one taken from the Hippocratic Corpus (an example is taken from a letter of Euripides, but these letters are probably apocryphal). Of the word *epanagôgè* (“elevation”), found in the second part of the sentence, which occurs only there in all the dialogues, the LSJ gives only two examples, this one and one in Thucydides (VII,34,6) in the sense of “naval attack”. In this perspective, it might be quite possible that Plato, to echo in this new context the *sunètheia* mentioned in the allegory without reusing the same word, decided to discard the prefix *sun-* and merely keep the root *ètheia*, whose intuitive meaning, almost identical to that of *sunètheia*, was probably clear to all Greeks of the time, be it a neologism coined by Plato or an ancient word no longer in use having left no traces in the extant Greek literature, since, as I said, the ending *-ia* is common in Greek and besides, in the present case, they could find help in the derivatives *sunètheia*, used in the allegory at the point Socrates was echoing there, and *aètheia* (“lack of habituation, inexperience”), its opposite, used at 518a7 in the commentary of the allegory.<sup>325</sup>

There might even be a more profound reason, having to do with what the allegory is about, inviting Plato to drop the prefix *sun-*: this prefix introduces the idea of some activity (in our case, getting used to something) conducted in cooperation between several persons; but, strictly speaking, in the intelligible realm, there is no possibility of cooperation so long as we are there, since such cooperation implies dialogue (in the intelligible realm there are only words and the *eidè/ideai* some of these words point at) and dialogue between persons requires sound, which is available only inside the cave (in the visible/sensible realm)! Indeed, as I mentioned in my commentary of the allegory, the only dialogues mentioned in it, the *dialegesthai* between the prisoners to name what they see and the short dialogue when the prisoner is freed and forced to turn toward the fire, take place *inside* the cave. Once outside, the only *sun-* something which is possible, is the *sullogizesthai* (516b9) mentioned about the sun as cause of everything at the end of the ascent, and it is a gathering of *ideas* inside one single “head”, not of people. True, there are other *anthrôpoi* outside the cave (in fact the same as those inside, only seen from a different standpoint), but they are there *only* as *objects* of study and, as such they are capable of producing sounds (*phtheggesthai*) only when they are inside the cave as bearers. Thus, Plato's rationale might have been the following: the first time around, in the allegory, he uses the word *sunètheia*, know to everybody (especially since one of its meanings has sexual connotations), to be sure to be understood, but when summarizing the allegory at the end of an ascent toward *hè dialektikè* as the highest science to be learned and practiced, assuming that his interlocutors and listeners will remember the allegory, to be more accurate, he drops the prefix *sun-* to face them with their individual responsibilities: in the realm of the intelligible, you are alone and nobody can do your homework for you, which is one good reason to return to the cave if you need help... But “help” doesn't mean thinking in your place.

Thus I suggest to read *ètheia* in place of *theia*, that is, taking into account the elision of the ending alpha of *phantasmata* before the initial eta of *ètheia*, the sequence *phantasmat' ètheia* in place of *phantasmata theia*. To explain the corruption of the text, probably ancient, we must remember that, in the time of Plato, words were written in capital letters only, without stresses, breathings and punctuation signs (thus without a mark of elision), and without spaces between words, as a continuous sequence of letters, so that the sequence *phantasmat' ètheia* looked like this: ΦΑΝΤΑΣΜΑΤΗΘΕΙΑ, while the sequence *phantasmata theia* would have looked like this: ΦΑΝΤΑΣΜΑΤΑΘΕΙΑ. The only difference is the replacement of an eta (written in Greek capital letters as our “H”), the initial eta of *ètheia*, tenth letter from the left in the sequence of Greek letters reproduced above, by an alpha (written in Greek capital letter as our “A”), the ending alpha of *phantasmata*, which no longer needs to be elided if the ensuing word is supposed to

<sup>325</sup> A close example of this in English would be someone who, after using the words “benevolence” and “malevolence”, would use the neologism “volence”, which doesn't exist alone, to refer to a “disposition”, either good or bad.

be *theia*, starting with a consonant, the consonant theta. As we can see, all that was needed for the current reading to appear was that the two vertical lines of the eta (“H”) be somewhat inclined toward one another rather than strictly parallel for a copist having to choose between an unknown word and a deformed letter to opt for an alpha (“A”) with lines slightly disjoined rather than an eta (“H”) with inclined lines.

If we accept this emendation, we have a counterpart of *adunamia* (“inability”), but not of *blepein* (“to look at”). But this is not a problem since the complement of *ètheia*, which precedes it in the sentence, is introduced by the preposition *pros* (“regarding”) and the sequence of words *pros ta en hudasi phantasmata' ètheia* (“regarding the reflections on water, habituation”) is grammatically correct and perfectly understandable as such, without having to add that this “habituation” is an habituation to looking at (*blepein*) these reflections, which should be quite obvious, especially for those who heard the allegory moments ago and with the reminder in the first part of the opposition (the *pros men* clause) that what we are talking about “regarding (*pros*)” what is listed in each clause is *blepein* (“look at”). And if Plato organized these two clauses the way he did, starting each one by the preposition *pros* and rejecting what *pros* was complementing, *adunamia blepein* (“inability to look at”) in the first case, *ètheia* (“habituation”) in the second case, at the end of the clause (or of its first part for the second one), it is to invite the listeners and readers to understand *pros* in a general sense, the same in each case, even though what it complements might suggest a slightly different understanding in each clause: to transpose the problem into English, a more natural way of organizing these clause would be “inability on the one hand to look at the living [creatures] and plants and the light of the sun, habituation on the other hand to the reflections on waters...” and, with this arrangement, the prepositions are not the same (“at” in the first case, “to” in the second). In Greek, *pros* with accusative (which is the case here) is perfectly correct with *blepein* (“look [at]”), but somehow awkward with *ètheia* (“habituation”), but in the order chosen by Plato it becomes perfectly understandable, as is the translation I adopted with “regarding” in both cases and keeping in English the order of the Greek. In the end, the balance of the emended phrase looks like this:

Reading suggested by me

*kai ekei*  
and there

*pros men*  
regarding on the one hand

*ta zôia te kai phuta*  
the living [creatures] and plants

*kai to tou hêliou phôs*  
and the light of the sun

*eti adunamia blepein*  
inability to yet look [at them]

*pros de*  
regarding on the other hand

*ta en hudasi phantasmata*  
the reflections on waters

*ètheia*  
habituation

*kai skias tôn ontôn, all' ouk eidôlôn skias...*  
and also [regarding] the shadows of the [things] that are,  
but not the shadows of images...

The parallelism is strict, each side of the opposition listing two series of “things”, terrestrial (living creatures and plants) and heavenly (sun) “things” on one side, reflections and shadows on the other side, the only difference being that on the side where the prisoner cannot look immediately at what is offered to his sight, all these “things” are listed together before the inability to look at them is mentioned while on the side of what the prisoner gets used to the list is split into two parts by the word *ètheia* (“habituation”), which allows the word *skias* (“shadows”) to introduce a long comment without rejecting *ètheia* too far, a comment which is a sort of return to the cave with the comparison between what the shadows outside are shadows of, namely, “beings”, and what the shadows inside the cave are shadows of, namely, “images” (*eidolon*, the statues).

Appendix 4.3: choice of variant for *Republic* VII, 533e1-2

The words following *ephè* (“he said”) in Glaucon’s line at 533e3 pose a problem. Editors and translators differ on whether they should be attributed to Glaucon or Socrates, and consider them incomprehensible as they stand, whichever variant is retained. Most of them consider them a late interpolation, probably of Stoic origin and some translators don’t even translate them. Let us see, to begin with, what the Greek text and its variants are and how they are translated by various translators before examining the pros and cons of the various options and offering my contribution to this debate.

In order to do this, it is necessary to put these dubious words in their context, starting toward the end of Socrates previous lines, at 533d7.

- **The manuscripts** (identified by the letters A, D, F and M) give the following text, which I reproduce without punctuation or attribution to either Socrates or Glaucon (we must remember that, in the time of Plato, a written text was a sequence of capital letters without stresses, breathings and punctuation signs and without spaces between words) underscoring the dubious words: *esti d' hōs emoi dokei ou peri onomatos [hè (F)] amphibêtêsîs hois [tosoutôn (A F M)/tosouton (D)] peri skepsîs [hosôn (A F M)/hoson (D)] hêmîn prokeitai ou gar oun ephè [all' ho (A M)/allo(F D)] an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai [legein(F M)/legei(A D)] en psuchèi areskei [oun(F D)/goun (A M)] èn d' egô hōsper...*

that is (words differing from one manuscript to the other are in bold):

- **manuscript A:** *esti d' hōs emoi dokei ou peri onomatos amphibêtêsîs hois **tosoutôn** peri skepsîs **hosôn** hêmîn prokeitai ou gar oun ephè **all' ho** an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai **legei** en psuchèi areskei **goun** èn d' egô hōsper...*

- **manuscript D:** *esti d' hōs emoi dokei ou peri onomatos amphibêtêsîs hois **tosouton** peri skepsîs **hoson** hêmîn prokeitai ou gar oun ephè **allo** an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai **legei** en psuchèi areskei **oun** èn d' egô hōsper...*

- **manuscript F:** *esti d' hōs emoi dokei ou peri onomatos **hè** amphibêtêsîs hois **tosoutôn** peri skepsîs **hosôn** hêmîn prokeitai ou gar oun ephè **allo** an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai **legein** en psuchèi areskei **oun** èn d' egô hōsper...*

- **manuscript M:** *esti d' hōs emoi dokei ou peri onomatos amphibêtêsîs hois **tosoutôn** peri skepsîs **hosôn** hêmîn prokeitai ou gar oun ephè **all' ho** an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai **legein** en psuchèi areskei **goun** èn d' egô hōsper...*

The variants outside the underscored section, use of the article (*hè*) in manuscript F before *amphibêtêsîs* absent in the other manuscripts, accusative singular *tosouton...* *hoson* in manuscript D when the other manuscripts read *tosoutôn...* *hosôn*, genitive plural, and hesitation between *oun* and *goun* toward the end don’t change the overall meaning and have no bearing on the problem here considered.

- **Adam (CUP)** gives the following text (in this quotation as in all the following ones, in Greek or in English translation, I reproduce the punctuation and typographical disposition of the quoted text, which indicate the changes of interlocutor (the first line is always Socrates talking); besides, in the quotations of the Greek text, I use bold characters for words different from those read in one or another of the four manuscripts quoted above, that is, words not found in any one of them):

*Esti d', hōs emoi dokei, ou peri onomatos amphibêtêsîs, hois tosoutôn peri skepsîs hosôn hêmîn prokeitai. Ou gar oun, ephè. Areskei oun, èn d' egô, hōsper...*

Adam drops the dubious words, rejecting in the critical apparatus the reading of manuscript A (*all' ho an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai legei en psuchèi*), adding “*ineptum gloss-ema damnavit Schneider* (Schneider rejected this improper/unsuitable gloss).” In the appendix on this section, after reviewing various emendations of his predecessors, he examines the reasons why Schneider considered them an interpolation, giving weight to one based on the fact that Plato never uses the preposition *alla* to positively add arguments to the statement which preceded after an answer starting with *ou gar oun*, and he concludes: “*The sentence is evidently an attempt to say that we should be content if the words we use express our meaning clearly.*”

*In legei (and still more legeis) en psuchè, we may detect an allusion to the Platonic theory of thought as the conversation of the soul and perhaps also to the logos endiathetos of the Stoics. On this account and also because of hexin, I am inclined to attribute the interpolation to some adherent of the Stoic school, of which, in point of style, it is not unworthy."*

- **Burnet** (OCT) gives the following text:

*Esti d', hōs emoi dokei, ou peri onomatos amphisbêtêsîs, hois tosoutôn peri skepsis hosôn hêmîn prokeitai.*

*Ou gar oun, ephè.*

*All' ho an monon dêloi pôs tèn hexin saphêneiai legein en psuchèi < arkesei;*

*Nai. >*

*Arkesei oun, èn d' egô, hōsper...*

As can be seen, Burnet attributes the dubious words to Socrates, adding a verb at the end which is not in the manuscripts. To do this, he must also add a line attributed to Glaucon for reasons I will explain later (the presence of the words *èn d' egô*, "said I", in the next sentence of Socrates). Besides, he modifies the verb at the beginning of this sentence of Socrates, replacing *areskei* (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of present active indicative of the verb *areskein* ("it pleases, is satisfactory")) by *arkesei*, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of future active indicative of the verb *arkein* ("it will suffice"), which he assumes both at the end of the dubious line, attributed by him to Socrates, and at the beginning of his next line, after the added *nai* ("yes") of Glaucon (which could explain, in his perspective, the omission of Glaucon's *nai*, a copyist having skipped it between two identical words in the text he was copying), and which he finds better adapted to the dubious line as the main verb in a sentence which, as read in the manuscripts, has none. Lastly, he transforms the *pros* of the manuscripts into a *pôs* ("in a certain way"). The OCT edition doesn't include a translation, but the meaning assumed by Burnet is probably something like this: "*but it will suffice only to say clearly what the possession/condition/state/habit within the soul might in a certain way disclose*".

- **Shorey** (Loeb) gives the following text:

*Esti d', hōs emoi dokei, ou peri onomatos amphisbêtêsîs, hois tosoutôn peri skepsis hosôn hêmîn prokeitai. Ou gar oun, ephè [all' ho an monon dêloi pros tèn exô saphêneian, ha legei en psuchèi, arkesei.] Areskei goun, èn d' egô, hōsper...*

The point above the line after *ephè* implies that he attributes the dubious words to Glaucon as part of his answer. He adds a note in the critical apparatus saying: "*The text as printed is that of Hermann, brackets by Adam*" and doesn't translate the words between brackets, with a note on the translation saying: "*The next sentence is hopelessly corrupt and is often considered an interpolation. The translation omits it.*" His translation of the text surrounding them is:

*"But I presume we shall not dispute about the name when things of such moment lie before us for consideration." "No, indeed," he said. \* \* \* "Are you satisfied, then," said I..."*

- **Chambry** (Budé) gives the following text:

*Esti d', hōs emoi dokei, ou peri onomatos amphisbêtêsîs, hois tosoutôn peri skepsis hosôn hêmîn prokeitai.*

*Ou gar oun, ephè †all' ho an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai legei en psuchèi†.*

*Areskei oun, èn d' egô, hōsper...*

He writes in the critical apparatus that he considers the section between the two †, which he assigns to Glaucon, as a corrupted interpolation and he gives the following translation in French:

*"Mais ce n'est pas, je pense, le moment de contester sur le nom, quand on a des questions aussi importantes à débattre que celles que nous nous sommes proposées.*

*Non, en effet, dit-il [; il nous suffit d'un nom qui fasse voir clairement notre pensée].*

*Je suis donc d'avis, repris-je, de faire comme..."*

A note on the text between brackets reads: “*J'ai donné du texte mis entre deux croix la traduction que demande le passage et que semble indiquer les mots de cette phrase dont la construction est impossible (I gave for the text printed between two crosses the translation required by this section and which the words of this sentence, whose construction is impossible, seem to point at.)*”

- **Slings** (OCT 2003) modifies Burnet's text and gives the following text:

*Esti d', hōs emoi dokei, ou peri onomatos amphisbêtêsîs, hois tosoutôn peri skepsîs hosôn hêmîn prokeitai.*

*Ou gar oun, ephê, all' ho an monon dêloi †pros tèn hexîn saphêneiai legei en psuchèi†  
Areskei oun, èn d' egô, hōsper...*

He returns to the attribution of these words to Glaucon, but puts part of them between two crosses, and calls it in the critical apparatus *locus desperatus*.

If we now look at the translations:

- **Jowett** translates: “*But why should we dispute about names when we have realities of such importance to consider?*”

*Why indeed, he said, when any name will do which expresses the thought of the mind with clearness?*

*At any rate, we are satisfied, as before...*”

He considers the dubious words part of Glaucon's line, but his loose translation doesn't permit to determine what exact Greek text he adopted. According to Adams in his commentary on these lines, in his edition of the *Republic* with Campbell, he gives the text of manuscript A, except that they insert *ho* before *legei*.

- **Cornford** translates, ignoring the dubious words with no explanatory note: “*But in considering matters of such high importance we shall not quarrel about a name.*”

*Certainly not.*

*We shall be satisfied, then,...*”

- **Bloom** (Basic Books) translates: “*But, in my opinion, there is no place for dispute about a name when a consideration is about things so great as those lying before us.*”

*No, there isn't, he said.*

*Then it will be acceptable, I said, just as before...*”

Adding in a note on “*he said*”: “*in all but one of the manuscripts there follows a sentence of which there are several versions, none wholly intelligible. Hence I have left it out of the translation. Its point is apparently that if the clarity of the name mirrors the clarity of the soul in the particular faculty, Glaucon will be content.*”

- **Grube/Reeve** (Hackett) translate, he too ignoring the dubious words with no explanatory note: “*But I presume that we won't dispute about a name when we have so many more important matters to investigate.*”

*Of course not.*

*It will therefore be enough to call...*”

- **Reeve** (Hackett 2004)<sup>326</sup> : “**SOCRATES**: ...*But don't suppose we will dispute about names, with matters as important as those before us to investigate.*”

**GLAUCON**: *Of course not, just as long as they express the state of clarity the soul possesses.*

**SOCRATES**: *It will be satisfactory, then...*”

Contrary to what he did in his revision of Grube's translation, here he keeps the dubious words and attributes them to Glaucon.

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<sup>326</sup> Reeve has chosen, in this recent translation, to transform the indirect dialogue which the whole *Republic* is into a direct dialogue, skipping the “*he said*”, “*I replied*”, and so on, and printing the name of who is talking in front of what that person says.

To complete this review, let me add a few words on what might have led Adams and others to consider these words as an interpolation of Stoic origin. Diogenes Laertius, in this *Lives and Doctrines of Eminent Philosophers*, includes at the end of his life of Zeno of Cithium, the founder of the Stoic school, a summary of the doctrines of this school. And the section of this summary dealing with dialectic includes a definition of *epistèmè* (“science, knowledge”) which reads: “*tèn epistèmèn phasin [...] hexin en phantasiòn prosdexei ametaptôtôn hupo logou* (“they say *epistèmè* [to be][...] a state of mind in the acceptance of representations unchangeable under [the effect of] logos)” (DL VII, 47); the exact same definition appears at VII, 165, where it is attributed to Herillus of Carthage. Now, the words of Plato we are examining come immediately after Socrates has challenged the relevance of the word *epistèmè* to refer to what he previously talked about and uses the word *hexis*, which is key to the definition of *epistèmè* by the Stoics, according to Diogenes Laertius. That was probably enough for some scholars to make the connection between both texts and see the Stoics behind a sequence of words they couldn't make sense of!

Yet, the word *hexis* is not rare in the dialogues, where it is used 63 times, two of these occurrences being close to our section, one at 509a5, in the parallel between good and sun, and the other at 511d4, in the analogy of the line. This later occurrence is particularly interesting since it appears in a reply of Glaucon reformulating what he has understood of what Socrates just said, at a point of his answer where he explains how he has understood the word... *dianoia!*... And he explains it as *tèn tôn geometrikôn te kai tèn tôn toioutôn hexin*, “the habit of mind of those dealing with geometry and that of those dealing with similar [things]”. Now, it is precisely when Socrates reintroduces the word *dianoia* to substitute it to *epistèmè* that the word *hexis* shows up again. So, before claiming that *hexis* has here the « technical » meaning it had for the Stoics in the above quoted definition of *epistèmè*, it might be on order to first wonder if its use here is consistent with the meaning it has elsewhere in Plato's dialogues, and particularly in the analogy of the line, to which the context of the words here examined refers.

This implies that we answer two questions: who, between Socrates and Glaucon, is speaking the dubious words, and which reading should we adopt to arrive at a grammatically acceptable construction giving meaning to them?

The main grammatical problem posed by this member of phrase is the absence of a main verb if we adopt the reading *legein* of manuscripts F and M, and the difficulty of accepting a main verb in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular whose subject is not obvious, if we adopt the reading *legei* of A and D. To solve this problem, I suggest to accept the reading *legein* and to consider that this member of phrase is not a complete sentence by itself, but the continuation of the sentence initiated by Socrates with the words *esti d'*, and constitutes the second branch of an alternative, introduced by *all'* (“but”) (which implies to retain the reading *all' ho* of A and M rather than the reading *allo* of F and D, and thus for the whole group of words, the reading of M, the only manuscript giving both the reading *all' ho* and the reading *legein*) answering the *ou* (“not”) of *ou peri onomatos amphisbêtèsis* (“not [a disagreement about the name]”) in the following structure:

<i>esti d'</i>	But it is
<i>(hôs emoi dokei)</i>	(it seems to me)
<i>ou peri onomatos amphisbêtèsis</i>	not a controversy about the name
<i>hois tosoutôn peri skepsis hosôn hêmin prokeitai</i>	on [concepts] as broad as those about which an inquiry is set before us
<i>all' ho an monon dêloi pros tèn hexin saphêneiai legein en psuchèi</i>	but saying with clarity what may only be plain in the soul as a consequence of its habit of mind

This way of looking at it is, from a grammatical standpoint, consistent with the position of the *ou* in the first part of the sentence. The normal position of the negative *ou(k)* is in front of the word or words it concerns, so that *ouk esti peri onomatos amphisbêtèsis...* is not in Greek

the same thing as *esti ou peri onomatos amphisbêtêsis...*: in the first case, the sentence is a *negative* sentence which says what something *is not* (“it is not a controversy about names”), while in the second case, it is a *positive* sentence which says what something *is*, but only after first saying, in a preliminary member of phrase, what it is not, so that, with the second form, an *alla* (“but”) is expected from the start (“it is, not a controversy about names, but...”). And to make sure that the difference would be clearly perceived, Plato inserted between *esti* and *ou* a parenthetical *hôs emoi dokei* (“as it seems to me”). For indeed, if the construction with the negative *ou* after *esti* might be acceptable owing to the great freedom in Greek regarding the order of words in a sentence, the negative version of the sentence, without an *alla* (“but”) part, would have been *esti d' ou, hôs emoi dokei, peri onomatos amphisbêtêsis* and not the way Plato wrote it, where the negative is too disconnected from *esti* to be understood as applying to it. Yet, all translators quoted above translate (or “interpret”) as if Plato had written *ouk esti d'*, because they don't find the *alla* called for by Plato's construction in Socrates' sentence before Glaucon interrupts him with his *ou gar oun* (“certainly not indeed”).

So constructed, the complete sentence opposes, from a grammatical standpoint, a negative part formed around a noun, *amphisbêtêsis* (“controversy”) to a positive part formed as an infinitive proposition built around the verb *legein*, but nothing forbids such a grammatical asymmetry, even if the result may not be of the purest style, especially if, as we will see is the case, the two parts of the alternative are stated by two different persons, one, a bullish youngster, interrupting the other. But with this construction, *amphisbêtêsis* (“controversy”) cannot be the subject of *esti*, so that we must assume an implied subject for it. But this subject is easy to deduce from the context: Socrates, in the previous sentence, is questioning the appropriateness of the word *epistêmè* (“knowledge, science”) for the “arts (*technai*)” they have been reviewing (arithmetic, geometry and so on), saying he would prefer another term, “connoting more clearness than “opinion” (*doxa*), but more obscurity than “science/knowledge” (*epistêmè*)” and reminds his interlocutors that earlier (in the analogy of the line) he suggested the use of *dianoia*. At this point comes the sentence we are analyzing. Its implied subject is obviously “what we are now doing, discussing about choices of words”. It is this type of discussion on the appropriateness of specific words regarding which he wants to say what it is after having said what it is *not*, namely, nitpicking on words in the manner of Prodicus (*peri onomatos amphisbêtêsis*).

Regarding the second part of the alternative, the positive one, I understand *monon* (“only”) as relating to *en psuchè* (“in the soul”), highlighted by its position at the end of the sentence, locative adjunct to the verb *an dêloi*, subjunctive with *an* expressing a possibility (“may be plain”): whoever speaks these words talks about something which *may* be plain, but *only* in the soul, provided it has acquired the appropriate “state of mind” (*pros tèn hêxin*, where *hêxin* may refer to the acquisition of an habit as well as to the acquired habit as a “possession”, the resulting “state”), which may not be the case for all (possibility). And it is what can only be plain in the soul that we must try to express through a *legein* as “clearly” as possible. The verb *dêloun* is derived from the root *dêlos* and the adjective *saphêneiai* from the root *saphês* (“clear, plain, manifest, distinct”), whose meaning is very close to that of *dêlos* (“visible, clear, manifest, plain”), both referring to the idea of clarity, of evidence. Since the Greek uses words derived from two different roots, I did the same in English, translating *saphêneia* as “clarity” and *dêloun* as “be plain”.

Eventually, the opposition, whose grammatical asymmetry I mentioned earlier, is between *words* (*onomata*) which we might be tempted to confuse with what they simply point at and which would become objects of controversy in themselves, and an *activity*, the practice of *logos* (*legein*), which can only attempt to express as best as possible the result of a *hexis* which may or may not occur in the soul under the effect of the work of our mind. What is expressed with words is what the mind is able to understand of what it grasps directly (intelligible) or through the senses (“visible”) through reflection and thought. But this expression cannot get enclosed in words each of which taken individually would describe exactly and in the same way for all

what it refers to. It is in the activity of talking, in the *dialegesthai* understood in its most ordinary meaning, in the confrontation of viewpoints, that what we are trying to understand may become progressively clearer and an *hexis*, a “possession”, a “habit”, a “state of mind” may develop over time and make us able to understand and communicate more and more clearly. And this is probably the reason why Plato's Socrates prefers the expression *to dialegesthai*, that is, a substantivized infinitive pointing at an activity, to the expression *hè dialektikè*, a substantivized adjective pointing at an intrinsic quality associated with this activity, hard to describe, and which, stopping, freezing this activity in the atemporality of a qualifier that deprives it of dynamics, voids it of all power.

These ideas are quite in line with what might be expected of Plato's Socrates and their formulation at this point of the discussion has nothing to surprise us. But a problem remains. Indeed, all this would be quite satisfactory if we could admit that Socrates utters both parts of the sentence, only interrupted between its two parts by an exclamative *ou gar oun* (“certainly not indeed”) of Glaucon unable to wait till the end of the sentence to express his approbation. Unfortunately, the *en d' egô* (« said I ») which immediately follows *areskei oun* (“*It is satisfactory then*”) forces us to see *areskei oun* as the beginning of a line of Socrates, while the *ephè* (“he said”) forces us to see *ou gar oun* as the beginning of a line of Glaucon. So, unless we do what Burnet did and insert an extra line attributed to Glaucon between *psuchèi* and *areskei*, having left no trace extant manuscripts, we must resolve to attribute the dubious words, that is, the second part of the alternative opened by Socrates, to Glaucon. Is this acceptable?

To answer this question, we may first notice that Glaucon's answers are not limited to short ready-made formulas of assent or dissent (as is the case with Aristotle in the *Parmenides*), which means that it is not implausible for him to say more than a few words here. Thus, the problem is rather to figure out if it makes sense, dramatically and psychologically, that he complete a sentence initiated by Socrates expressing an idea that is not obvious and even poses problem to most scholars. So, to begin with, we should remember the long speech of Glaucon toward the end of the analogy of the line, at 511c3-d5, where he summarizes what he understood of Socrates explanations, and more specifically (511d2-5), of the end of it, already mentioned above, where he uses the word *hexis* to explain the word *dianoia*. In it, he also mentions *hè tou dialegesthai epistèmè* (“*the science of to dialegesthai*” 511c5), which makes what is observed (*theôroumenon*) appear *saphesteron* (“clearer”) than when using the so-called *technai* (“arts, crafts, techniques”), using the adjective *saphès* which is at the root of the word *saphèneia* used here. But it is precisely this discussion that Socrates is referring to here and the text we are considering serves as an introduction to a summary of it he gives in the sentence starting by *areskei oun*. So, it becomes easy to imagine a Glaucon, still proud of the way Socrates complimented him at the time (*hikanôtata apedexô*, “*You have followed most sufficiently*”, 511d6), seeing him return to the same topic and burning with impatience to show off in front of the audience that he is able to reformulate himself what the “teacher” is about to say to confirm that he has properly understood. And for Plato, from a dramatic, and even pedagogical, standpoint, having the end of the sentence, which constitutes an important contribution to the understanding of the role of language and *dialegesthai*, uttered by Glaucon rather than Socrates, with no formal approbation on his part other than his lack of commentary or criticism, is a way of highlighting this part of the sentence and of inviting the reader to wonder whether Socrates would have ended it the same way, had Glaucon let him finish it, a also a discreet illustration of the fact that, in a discussion properly conducted, there is not on the one hand a teacher who knows and on the other hand students who listen, even when the age difference is huge between the interlocutors, as is the case here, but people seeking together to better grasp a truth which transcends them and that all participants, even the oldest ones, must accept that truth may even come out of the mouth of babes.

And let us remember that Plato didn't have at his disposal ellipsis, or any punctuation signs for that matter, and couldn't indicate in the written text the changes of speaker (hence the importance in the *Republic* of the "he said", "I replied", and so on, as means of indicating such changes which were not apparent in the typography).

A few words now on the interpolated clause that Socrates adds between the two parts of the alternative, which gives Glaucon time to take a breath before bursting in to finish Socrates' sentence: *hois tosoutôn peri skepsis hosôn hêmîn prokeitai* (which I have translated: "*on [concepts] as broad as those about which an inquiry is set before us*", a translation I will now justify). These words are included in the first part of Socrates' sentence and their meaning is biased by the way what precedes them is understood: if, as do all the translators quoted above, the sentence is analyzed as a *negative* sentence (*ou* negating *esti*) where Socrates only says what he is doing regarding the words *epistêmè* and *dianoia* is *not*, the meaning is more or less something like "a controversy over names is not in order when we have such serious matters awaiting us" (Jowett: "*But why should we dispute about names when we have realities of such importance to consider?*"; Cornford: "*But in considering matters of such high importance we shall not quarrel about a name*"; Bloom: "*But, in my opinion, there is no place for dispute about a name when a consideration is about things so great as those lying before us*"; Grube/Reeve: "*But I presume that we won't dispute about a name when we have so many more important matters to investigate*"; Reeve 2004: "*But don't suppose we will dispute about names, with matters as important as those before us to investigate*"). This reading amounts to saying that words don't matter on subjects so important/great/serious/... (no explicit adjective is used in the Greek) as those Socrates and his companions are talking about! But this is nearly the contrary of what he is doing! Indeed, if we replace this sentence in its broader context, Socrates is commenting on the word *epistêmè* as opposed to *technè*, *doxa* ("opinion") and *dianoia*, that he is about to substitute to *noësis* in the list of *pathèmata* he introduced at the end of the analogy of the line which he repeats, with this modification, immediately after the section we are examining. In other words, he is trying to become more specific on the names of various concepts related to the general idea of "knowledge". He may not be "disputing" about words if that means arguing with others on different names for the same thing, but he is not suggesting that names don't matter either, since he is about to change names for things he has already talked about earlier. In fact, what he is *showing*, if not saying loud and clear, is that words *do* matter and that bad habits in their use ("*the arts (technai)... which we often called "sciences" (epistèmai) out of habit*", 533d3-5) may become a hindrance to proper understanding and progress toward knowledge, and that, if we want to properly understand what "knowledge (*epistêmè*)" is (what the *Theaetetus* will not be able to do), we had better be careful in our use of this and related words. But for a discussion on the appropriateness of words to be fruitful, we must first be clear *in our mind/psuchè* on what we are talking about and more specifically on the *relations* between the concepts we are handling (the arts (*technai*) improperly called "sciences" (*epistèmai*) "*would require another name, connoting more clearness than "opinion" (doxa), but more obscurity than "science/knowledge" (epistêmè)*", 533d5-6). This is what the second part of the sentence, read as a *positive* sentence only interrupted and continued by Glaucon, was intent on saying: when criticizing our earlier vocabulary, we are not arguing on names, **but**... But trying to say clearly what is (perhaps) clear in our mind but will never be perfectly clear when put in words, so as to be capable of better understanding one another. It is in this *positive* context that the interpolated words must be understood.

The difficulty in understanding them comes from the fact that most of these words are relative pronouns (*hois*, *tosoutôn*, *hosôn*) for which we must guess what they refer to and that some of these pronouns imply quantity (*tosoutôn... hosôn*) without specifying what they quantify and from which standpoint (what \*\*\* would be so what? so great? so numerous? so important? so broad?...) Each translator has to supply words which are not in the Greek text to make this clause understandable (the words in bold characters in what follows): "*But why should we dispute about*

names when we have **realities** of such **importance** to consider?" (Jowett); "But in considering **matters** of such **high importance** we shall not quarrel about a name" (Cornford); "But, in my opinion, there is no place for dispute about a name when a consideration is about **things** so **great** as those lying before us" (Bloom); "But I presume that we won't dispute about a name when we have so many **more important matters** to investigate" (Grube/Reeve); "But don't suppose we will dispute about names, with **matters** as **important** as those before us to investigate" (Reeve 2004). To properly understand it, we should start the grammatical analysis with what is most obvious and easily understandable, the words *skepsis... hêmîn prokeitai* ("an inquiry... is set before us") where *skepsis* ("inquiry"), nominative, is obviously the subject of the verb *prokeitai* ("is set before"), 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular indicative present passive. Obvious too is the fact that the preposition *peri* ("about") introduces the genitive plural *tosoutôn* which immediately precedes it, its position after it being usual in Greek, itself calling for the *hosôn* which complements it ("so numerous/great/important/broad/... as...") and refers to what is the object of the *skepsis* ("inquiry"). But if we take these words as object of *skepsis* (*skepsis peri tosoutôn hosôn hêmîn prokeitai...*, "an inquiry about \*\*\* so \*\*\* as... is set before us"), even without deciding what the inquiry is about and under which quantitative viewpoint we evaluate it, number, depth, importance, broadness, or otherwise, there is nothing left in the clause to complement *hosôn* ("as") which nonetheless requires a second member of comparison. And we don't know what to do with the only remaining word, the relative *hois*, dative plural ("to which"), which may either be masculine, thus referring to *hemin* ("us"), that is, to the interlocutors of the discussion, or neutral, probably referring in this case to the object of the inquiry "set before us", as do *tosoutôn... hosôn...* I suggest to understand this clause as if words were in the following English order: *peri tosoutôn hosôn hois skepsis prokeitai hêmîn* ("on [concepts] as broad as those about which an inquiry is set before us", and to see it as complementing the verb *esti*, understood positively (not affected by the negative *ou*), to make explicit what the alternative *ou... alla...* ("not... but...") which follows is about. And I interpret the quantitative aspect of *tosoutôn... hosôn...* as regarding, not the importance of the subject under investigation, but the broadness of meanings of the words used, here *epistêmè*, *dianoia*, *technè*. In other words, the meaning of Socrates' remark is not, as the quoted translators understand it, that arguing on names would be inappropriate in a discussion on such momentous matters as those they are talking about, when words are all we have at our disposal to try to understand one another and that it is on the most important matters that it would be most detrimental for us to stay in ambiguity as a result of the polysemy of the words being used, but that, on concepts as far-ranging as those under discussion, it would be useless to fight *only* about words, since no single word will make it possible for us to understand one another, and it is only through speech, through *legein*, which explains and clarifies them based on a "clearness" which must preexist in the soul, that we have a chance to verify whether we understand one another and thus have solid grounds to make progress toward a better understanding of the matter at hand. Thus, the quantitative import of *tosoutôn... hosôn...* refers, as I understand it, to the fact that the more abstract and general the concepts under investigation, the greater the danger of misunderstanding: there are no good reasons to fight about the exact meaning of the word "horse" unless we are naturalists looking for a precise delimitation of the animal species "horse", or a paleontologist trying to determine precisely when in the past this specific species appeared, while it is almost certain that no two people put the same thing (or things) behind the word "science", or in Greek *epistêmè*, not to mention words such as "good", or "beautiful", or "just", or "right", setting aside the fact that these words may assume different meanings in different contexts.

The requirement of speech, of a *legein*, grounded in a *hexis* of the soul rather than on a mere agreement on names, even relying on the kind of terse definitions Aristotle accustomed us to, is what explains the so called "aporetic" character of those of Plato's dialogues called "Socratic", supposed to fail because they don't end up on a "definition" of the concept under investigation.

The reason is that, for Plato, such “definitions” are deceptive and useless. What helps making progress in the understanding and contributes to “bound (*horizein*)” a concept, is not a “definition (*horismos*, from the same root *horos*, “boundary”, as *horizein*) as can be found in a dictionary, but rather the long conversation taking place in a “Socratic” dialogue, at the end of which, either a “definition” is no longer needed because we have understood what we were talking about, or, if we have not yet understood after exchanging hundreds or thousands of words, a definition given in a few words would be useless!...

Why then, because we have a hard time understanding a sentence, reject it as a Stoic interpolation, when, properly understood, it merely theorizes what Plato's Socrates practiced at length in earlier dialogues? The suspicious words include *epistèmè* and *hexis* and it happens that the word *hexis* is used in a definition of *epistèmè* ascribed to Stoics by Diogenes Laertius. But these words are not trying to give a definition of *epistèmè*, but to describe an attitude toward words and discussion in common, to bring to light what makes it possible for us to understand one another through words and the priority of the grasp by the mind over the expression through words. In what sense could Plato use the word *hexis* in this context and how should we understand it? We should first note that *hexis* is a name of action derived from the verb *echein*, a verb whose primary meaning is “to hold, possess”, from which comes the meaning “to have”. Thus, the primary meaning of *hexis* is “possession” and, from there, “state (of body or of mind)”, that is, a set of tendencies, aptitudes or qualities that we “own/possess” as part of our personal identity, and eventually “habit” (as a matter of fact, “habit” comes from the latin *habitus*, derived from the verb *habere*, “to have”, which is the latin equivalent of *echein*, so that *habitus* is the latin equivalent of *hexis*). What Plato is trying to make us understand through the words of Glaucon ending a sentence started by Socrates is that steadfastness in speeches, that is, not changing all the time what we say on a given topic, can only result from prior clearness of “ideas” in our mind (*nous*, where *dianoia* takes place), in our *psuchè* (“soul”, and more specifically in its *logikon* part, the part endowed with *logos*), a clearness which can only result from the “state” of our mind resulting from a “habit” in the way of looking at these “ideas”, of thinking and talking about them, to make them “ours” so they become a “possession” (the prime meaning of *hexis*) of our soul. Isn't this what Socrates suggests when, in the *Meno*, at the end of the experiment with the slave, he tells Meno, talking about the boy who just found the answer to the geometry problem posed to him, that the opinions (*doxai*) which “in him, like a dream, have just been awakened”, “if he were interrogated many times on these same things in many different ways, he would in the end have a knowledge (*episthèsetai*) of them no less accurate than anybody else” (85c9-d1)? And if we think that Plato's Socrates expresses here his conviction that “habit” is what may move us from mere opinion (*doxa*) to “knowledge (*epistèmè*)”, a conviction reformulated in the words we are analyzing, we may wonder whether these words, far from being a Stoic interpolation, might not on the contrary be one of the sources from which the Stoics got their definition of *epistèmè*!

But when these words are read the way I do, they may also, from another standpoint, reflect a conflict between Plato and Antisthenes and through him, the Stoics, who consider him as one of their forerunners. Indeed, Epictetus reports in his *Discourses* an opinion of Antisthenes, which he makes his, according to which *archè paideuseôs hè tôn onomatôn episkepsis* (“the beginning/foundation/principle of education [is] the inquiry about names” (*Discourses*, I, 17, 12), an opinion corroborated by the fact that the longest work of Antisthenes, according to the list given by Diogenes Laertius, was titled *peri paideias è peri onomatôn* (“on education or on names”, in five books; *DL*, VI, 17). And it seems indeed that Antisthenes, one of the followers of Socrates (Plato mentions him at *Phaedo*, 59b8 as one of those present in Socrates' jail the day of his death), attached great importance to a clear definition of each sense of each word and to utmost rigor in their use. So, if in this section of the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates is trying to suggest, as I think it is the case, that rigor in the use of words reaches its limits when dealing with abstract concepts and that it is more efficient to look for agreement through dialogue and

accept a dose of arbitrariness in the choice of words, so long as an agreement is reached on the meaning they are given within the ongoing discussion, rather than assuming that we have made progress simply by defining once and for all the meaning(s) each word must have for all at all times, then, we may read this section as a way for Plato to distance himself from Antisthenes in their understanding of Socrates' search for "definitions" of moral concepts. This difference is the one there is between, for instance, a definition of *andreia* ("courage") in a dictionary or in Aristotle's works (*mesotès esti peri phobous kai tharrè* ("it is the mean with regard to fear and boldness"), *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 1115a7) and the *Laches*!...

## Appendix 5: addenda later than 12/06/2016

In order not to keep changing the page and note numbering of this paper, I group here additions to and rewritings of sections of the original document later than its publication (in French) on December 6, 2013.

### *Phaedrus* (12/19/2016)

The *Phaedrus*, dealing with the nature (*phusis*) of the *psuchè*, is the only dialogue of Plato staging Socrates which takes place in nature, where plants and trees grow,<sup>327</sup> rather than in the bustling city.<sup>328</sup> The specific feature of the human *psuchè* (« soul »), which distinguishes *anthrôpoi* from all other “animate” beings (that is, beings endowed with an *anima*, the Latin equivalent of the Greek *psuchè*), is its having a *logikon* part, that is, being endowed with *logos*. And the *Symposium*, prelude to the trilogy opening with the *Phaedrus*, made us understand that *eros*, understood in its broadest sense, not limited to the sexual domain, is what moves the *psuchè*, at all levels from purely corporeal drives to the highest summits of the mind in the intelligible realm, and that what arouses *eros* is the beautiful, the most sensible trace of the good. Thus, the dialogue naturally focuses on the relationship between *eros* and *logos*, that is, on the way, or rather ways, *eros* may elicit *logoi* and thus arouse the intellectual activity of *anthrôpoi*, that is, of the noblest part of the *psuchè*.

From a strictly narrative standpoint, the starting point of the dialogue is a *logos* (“speech”) Phaedrus just heard from Lysias, a *written* copy, that is, a purely material version, that he hides beneath his cloak, which Socrates, not fooled by this maneuver when Phaedrus starts enthusiastically talking about the speech he just heard, asks him to pull out and read. This speech, which is indeed a pastiche by Plato in the style of Lysias so true to its model that scholars are still wondering today whether it is from Plato or from Lysias himself, advocates the thesis that it is better to give somebody who doesn't love you rather than somebody who loves you your (sexual) favors, to avoid the inconvenience of an irrational, obsessive and jealous behavior of a lover toward the object of his love (such a paradoxical speech could serve as a good example in the teaching of oratory art by Lysias, showing how to defend with style a cause which seemed lost in the first place).

In order to counter Lysias' speech, Socrates successively produces two contrary speeches: a first one describing *eros* as a form of excess, of immoderation (*hubris*) devoid of reason (*alogos*) where a purely physical drive aroused by the sight of a beautiful body and seeking only pleasure takes hold of the *psuchè*, and detailing all its devastating effects on the lover and above all on the loved one and his family and friends; a second one looking at love as a form of *mania* (ambiguous Greek word meaning madness as well as enthusiasm, inspired frenzy or passion) along with divination or poetical inspiration and recognizing that not all forms of *mania* are necessarily evil and that the best things come to us through *mania* when it is a divine gift, and further describing, through a myth in which the image of the *psuchè* as a winged chariot drawn by two horses which I mentioned earlier is found, the potentially beneficial effects of love on the *psuchè*.

Starting from these three examples of speeches, Socrates conducts a thorough criticism of rhetoric as understood and practiced by the most brilliant orators of the time and presents at the same time his own understanding of what an art of speech worthy of that name should be, describing it as a *psuchagôgia* (“psychagogy”), that is, literally, a “conduct of the soul” by means of *logos* to lead it toward the best for it. He also stresses toward the end, since the occasion of the whole discussion was a *written logos*, the limits of written *logos* with the help of a supposedly Egyptian myth about the invention of writing (improvised for the occasion, as Phaedrus implicitly suggests in a remark showing he is not fooled<sup>329</sup>).

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<sup>327</sup> “Grow” is the primary meaning of the Greek verb *phuein*, of which *phusis*, the word often translated by “nature”, is the derived substantive of action.

<sup>328</sup> In the *Laws*, the discussion takes place on the slopes of Mount Ida, but Socrates isn't staged in this dialogue.

<sup>329</sup> *Phaedrus*, 275b3-4.

We may use the image of the winged chariot, introduced toward the center of the dialogue in Socrates' second speech, to "decode" this staging along the same lines as those I used toward the staging of the *Protagoras* or the *Gorgias*, that is, in associating characters to the various "parts" of the *psuchè* (here, of the winged chariot), the one which, in each case, has taken the lead and dominates this *psuchè*. But, before doing this, it may be worth reviewing the tripartition of the soul through a parallel between the image presented in the *Phaedrus* and the more "rational" analysis conducted in the *Republic*, which enlighten and complement one another. This review should in particular allow us to clarify the role of what the *Republic* calls the *thumos*, which corresponds to the white horse of the horse team in the image of the *Phaedrus*, the most problematic part of the tripartite soul as described by Plato, though it is the one which allows him to avoid the simplistic dualism of a conflict between reason and passions, obvious to all.

What the image of the chariot makes us understand, is that, for Plato, the *logos*, or more precisely the *logistikon*<sup>330</sup> part of the soul, as such, pictured by the charioteer, the only human part of the whole, *cannot move the chariot*, that is to say, the body of the *anthrôpos*. Only the two horses, animals both lacking *logos* (here in the sense of "reason"), can move it. A word as such, doesn't produce bodily responses: the word "cuckoo" for instance, as a sound perceived by my ears, doesn't elicit reactions on my part if someone tells me: "look at the cuckoo in the tree", while, if he tells me: "you're a cuckoo", I may react violently; similarly, if someone uses the word "stupid" to describe somebody else to me, this word might make me laugh, while if the word is applied to me, I will not laugh but possibly become violent against whoever did this. This shows that it is not the *words* themselves, as mere acoustic phenomena among others, which induce reactions, but the *meaning* they take in context and the "symbolic" representations we associate with them. The white horse is the relay between the *logistikon*, which is only thought, reflection, reasoning, even when it "materializes" in a spoken or written speech, and the movements of the body. In other words, there are two kinds of solicitations capable of inducing reactions from the body and having it move: on the one hand, solicitations originating in the various *corporeal* needs (hunger, thirst, sexual drive...) pictured by the black horse, and on the other hand, reactions, irrational as such, to immaterial representations conveyed by language and the "values" it has inculcated in us, pictured by the white horse.<sup>331</sup>

The first kind is by nature plural, and Plato often talks about *epithumiai* ("desires, appetites"), plural, even if he calls this "part" as a whole *epithumêtikon* (the "desiring [part]", singular). It is an aggregate of many desires/appetites/drives all of which have in common two important characteristics. The first one, which explains why they are considered a part of the *psuchè*, is the fact that their potential satisfaction is not automatic, instinctive, as is the case for instance with respiration or digestion, but requires a voluntary action to move the body in order to appease them. The second one is that, strictly speaking, they are not conflicting with one another, which is the reason why they can be considered one single part to simplify the analysis: there is no conflict between, say, thirst and hunger, or between hunger and the urge to make love, but at most a problem of priority in a case by case basis if both urges are felt at the same time.

<sup>330</sup> See *Republic* IV, 439d5. What follows will show why this precision is important.

<sup>331</sup> See *Phaedrus*, 253d7-e1, where Socrates describes the white horse: *aplèktos, keleusmati monon kai logôî hènï-okeitai* ("which doesn't need to be struck (by a whip or spur, that is, which doesn't react to painful physical sensations), driven only by command and **word**"), immediately after saying about it that it was *timès erastès* ("fond of honour", 253d6) and *alèthinès doxès hetairos* ("companion of trustworthy opinion", 253d7). We should note that Socrates talks here of *alèthinè* opinion (*doxa*), that is, of "trustworthy" opinion, not of "true" opinion, which would be *alèthès doxa*, as he does for instance with *Meno* (see *Meno*, 97b9, sq.). This choice of word, as far as we may guess based on the nuances of meaning of these two words very close in meaning, may be a means of reminding us that the *thumos*/white horse, being deprived of reason, doesn't have access to truth through reasoning, but only by intuition, feeling: it is responsive to sincerity, real or simulated, of the one talking, short of being able to use reasoning to test the truth of what is said.

The second kind is, in the end, everything which may move the body without being part of the first kind, that is, not to satisfy a corporeal need but to react to intelligible representations carried by words. This explains why the white horse is presented as naturally allied to the charioteer/*logistikon*. But we must not lose sight of the fact that, by itself, it is deprived of reason<sup>332</sup> and incapable of reasoning, this role being reserved for the *logistikon* part, the charioteer, which explains why it may be subject to the influence of desires/passions, or rather, by a charioteer subdued by them. It obeys the charioteer but, by definition, it is unable to determine whether the charioteer is right or wrong in what he asks it to do. When *thumos* is understood this way, if we must choose a unique name in English to translate it, the least bad I could think of so far is “self-esteem”, understood as a feeling that induces reactions, both positive, such a physical manifestations of enthusiasm when flattered, or courageous behavior out of pride, and negative, such as despair possibly leading to suicide when wounded by mere words, when it is affected; it has a broader range than mere “anger” (one of the usual translations of *thumos*), which is only one of the possible reactions to a blow to self-esteem, and a more restricted one than “spirit” (another possible translation of *thumos*), which may be understood in many senses, not limited to the one it has when talking of a “spirited” person (the sense in which it would fit here).

What we should now keep in mind is that human *psuchè* always includes these three parts, and thus always a *logistikon*, but that it is the balance between these three parts and the nature of the one taking over the lead which makes the difference between individuals. A “healthy” *psuchè*, that is, a “just” one in the sense Socrates gives this word in the *Republic*, is one in which it is the *logistikon* that leads, one in which the charioteer imposes its will over the two horses, managing to have both of them go in the same direction, chosen by him, and preventing the shies and kicks of the black horse. But the charioteer may relinquish his role of leader and give free rein to the two horses, possibly up to a point where it is the black horses which imposes its will upon the white horse and the charioteer, a charioteer who no longer finds the words to provoke reactions by the white horse. Besides, all charioteers are not good ones, some are better than others, so that, even if the charioteer manages to keep a tight rein on the two horses, it is no guarantee that the chariot will go in the right direction and win the race.

This being said, the image of the charioteer and horses should not be pressed too hard, to the point where only the charioteer could talk, that is, produce a *logos*. All three parts are parts of the *psuchè* and Plato distinguishes them from one another, especially in the *Republic* on the basis of their being able to have conflicts with one another. A conflict within the *psuchè*, even though it remains internal and not vocally expressed, remains nonetheless a form of inner dialogue<sup>333</sup> expressed through words thought, if not uttered, as is the case for thought (*dianoia*) in general.<sup>334</sup>

<sup>332</sup> See *Republic* IV, 441c2, where the *thumos* is said to act *alogistôs* (“in an unreasoned way”). And immediately before, at 441a7-b1, Glaucon, to justify the distinction between *logistikon* and *thumos*, took the example of infants who, even before having reached the age of reason, are capable of instant reactions to words and outburst of temper in the same way as adults.

<sup>333</sup> The oldest known uses of the verb *dialegesthai* (“to dialogue”), rare before Plato (the Perseus site lists only 38 occurrences of *dialegesthai* in authors prior to Socrates or contemporaries: 5 in the *Iliad*, 10 in Herodotus, 3 in Thucydides, 7 in Aristophanes, 6 in Antiphon and 7 in Lysias, while the count is 216 occurrences in Plato, 100 in Xenophon and 76 in Isocrates) are found in Homer’s *Iliad*, always in the same formula, “*alla ti è moi tauta philos dielexato thumos;*” (“but why does this heart dear to me (=my heart) dispute this way?”; *Iliad*, XI, 407; XVII, 97; XXI, 562; XXII, 122; XXII, 385), describing an inner dialogue within the soul (called by Homer *thumos*) of the hero. This formula is uttered each time by a different character (Ulysses, Menelaus, Aeneas, Hector and Achilles, respectively), always as part of an inner conflict introduced by another ready-made formula, always the same, “*Ochthêsas d' ara eipe pros hon megalêtora thumon : "Ô moi egô(n)..."*” (“Afflicted, he then said to his great-hearted soul: Woe on me...”).

<sup>334</sup> See *Sophist*, 263e3-5, where the stranger defines *dianoia* as an “inner dialogue (dialogos) of the soul with itself without the production of sound” and *Theaetetus*, 189e6-7, where Socrates defines the activity of thinking (*to dianoeisthai*), as “a speech (logon) that the soul itself conducts from beginning to end with itself on what it examines”.

What distinguishes the charioteer, that is, the *logistikon* part of the *psuchè*, from the other parts is not the fact that it is the only one “talking”, but the fact that it is the only one capable of reasoning in a structured way, the only one endowed with “reason”.<sup>335</sup> But the inner conflicts between parts of the *psuchè* do take the form of *logoi* which can be “materialized” by “speeches” or “dialogues” spoken or written, and this is what Plato does in some of his dialogues in having different characters “play” the role of the various “parts” of the *psuchè*, to bring out the various ways in which a charioteer may be “reasoned” and then, alone or with the help of another charioteer helping him in a vocal dialogue, “convince” the other parts, *thumos* and *epithumiai*, that is, “tame” the two horses, which are not sensitive to “rational” dialogue. Indeed, the inability of the charioteer to move the chariot illustrates the distance there is between *logoi* (“words, speeches”) and *erga* (“deeds”), a distance often highlighted by Plato’s Socrates: it is one thing to be intellectually convinced of one or another rule of action (for instance that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice, even at the cost of one’s own life), it is another thing to actually act in conformity with this rule *in all cases*, including when one’s life is at stake. This is the reason why it is of the utmost importance for Plato not to stay at the level of logical and abstract reasoning, but to also show his readers how to “talk” to “guts” and find forms of “speeches” that are convincing for them too, forms relying on feelings, aesthetics, emotions and the like rather than reason. And, among these forms, myth plays a major role.<sup>336</sup> This explains in particular the multiplicity of “arguments” brought forth in the *Phaedo* regarding the immortality of the *psuchè*: in a context where the *logistikon* part of Socrates’ *psuchè* doesn’t have a foolproof rational “demonstration” of this assumption since such a “knowledge” is out of reach of the embodied human *psuchè*, but has taken the “beautiful risk”<sup>337</sup> of betting its life on this undemonstrated “hypothesis”, it seeks all the means of, not convincing, but appeasing the two other parts of itself (“played” by Simmias/*epithumiai* and Cebes/*thumos*) at the moment of truth.

In the case of the *Phaedrus* which we are focusing on here, Plato stages a Phaedrus-chariot whose charioteer remains in the background and is easily swayed by the *logoi* he hears, whose relevance he doesn’t take time to appraise, giving free rein to a white horse-*thumos* which gets carried away by each speech he hears: it is as easily enthusiastic about Lysias’ speeches when it is with Lysias as it is about Socrates’ speeches when it is with Socrates’ speeches, even when these speeches are deliberately (on the part of Socrates) perverse, so long as they have style, or about his physician Eryximachus’ speeches, whose recommendations it follows scrupulously; In short, it most often agrees with the last one who (“nicely”) spoke but, not being itself *logistikon*, it can only judge these *logoi* by their outer, material, appearance, on the emotions they induce in it. We are thus in the presence of a *psuchè* dominated by its *thumos*<sup>338</sup> and having an atrophied *logistikon* part, which Socrates will try to awaken.

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<sup>335</sup> This is the reason why it is important to distinguish *logos* from *logistikon* when naming this part of the *psuchè* and to stick to Plato’s vocabulary.

<sup>336</sup> This is why those who are only interested in the logical rigor of Socrates (or another character)’s arguments in Plato dialogues miss the essential. Logical rigor is important *in some cases*, but it is not all there is to it. Besides, Plato was quite conscious of the fact that the limits of human nature, and of intelligence in particular, are such that, on the subjects which alone should matter for *anthrôpoi*, the immortality of the *psuchè*, for instance, or what constitutes *true* happiness, absolute and rigorously demonstrable certainty is impossible (“I know nothing”). Besides, as the image of the winged chariot as I just “decoded” it shows, reasoning alone will not suffice to change the world since, to get *anthrôpoi* to *act*, to move the chariots, it is necessary to get the horses to move and they are not receptive to logical reasoning but require other kinds of speeches. Reasoning, rigorous and convincing as it may be, are of no use if they are not accompanied by *logoi* capable of getting the horses to move together in the same direction.

<sup>337</sup> See *Phaedo*, 114d6.

<sup>338</sup> In the prologue of the *Protagoras* where, as I explained, Plato, in the description of the house of Callias at the arrival of Socrates and Hippocrates, stages the “soul of Sophistic” made up of Protagoras-*epithumèton* (“de-

At the beginning of the dialogue, Phaedrus is under the influence of the external and exclusively material *logos* of Lysias, a *psuchè* led by its black horse, whose charioteer is even more subdued than that of Phaedrus, producer of a *logos* whose only merit is to provoke astonishment about the paradoxes it develops and admiration for its external appearance (bombastic words, neatly turned expressions and the like). No *dialogos* here, no “reason” open to argument and challenge, and it doesn't matter whether the “father” of this *logos* is present or not since it doesn't call for an answer and is made only to be admired, to talk to the “guts”. Phaedrus, whose soul is dominated by the white horse driven by a charioteer who borrows the words of others for this task, doesn't even attempt to understand it but only to learn it off by rote so as to be able to regurgitate it as faithfully as possible, for the greatest pleasure of the white horse of his *psuchè*, without looking for its meaning, for which the white horse has no need to move his body according to the prescriptions of his physician since it doesn't react to reasoning (resembling in that Antiphon in the *Parmenides* regurgitating the story of the highly abstract dialogue between Socrates, Parmenides and a few others whose sole effect on him, after having heard that story when still a child, was to turn him from philosophy to... horse breeding! But probably not those of his *psuchè*!)

To try to awaken his *logistikon*, Socrates successively offers him the speech which might have been made by a “good” charioteer become accomplice (due to bad education) of the black horse of his team, bringing “reason” in this speech and thus making it open to criticism, not by the white horse, but by the awakened *logistikon* of Phaedrus hearing this speech, then the speech which might be made (again to the white horse) by a really “good” charioteer, not spoiled by a bad education, speech thus using myth (since it is primarily geared toward the white horse) and playing with emotions rather than reason. It is only when the white horse has been satiated with emotions that Socrates can at last, in the second part of the dialogue, start a dialogue with Phaedrus' *logistikon*, the charioteer of his *psuchè*, to explain to him what kind of *logoi* must be addressed to the horses to manage to “lead” (*agein*) one's *psuchè*, that is, to practice *psuchagôgia* (“conduct of soul”), to use the word used twice by Socrates to describe what, in his opinion, would be a good “rhetoric”.

That the topic of these speeches (addressed to the horses) be *eros* is normal since *eros* is the “engine” which allows them to move and move the body and thus that whose energy should be controlled. That the discussion with the charioteer be about *logos*, and especially about the kind of *logos* which, so far, had the most power over Phaedrus' *psuchè* is quite normal since *logos* (in the sense of “reason”) is what distinguishes the charioteer from the horses and Socrates was precisely intent on awakening the charioteer of Phaedrus' *psuchè* so it become capable of properly playing his role of charioteer rather than giving free rein to the white horse of emotions, that is, become, no longer friend of nice speeches, spoken or written (which amounts to the same for him since they are monologues and his goal is not to argue them with their “father”, but to admire them and learn them off by rote, but *philosophos* (“friend of wisdom”), taming *eros* to convert it into *philia*.

We thus see how the two parts of the dialogue, apparently foreign to one another, that of the speeches on *eros* and that of the discussion over rhetoric, are in fact the successive steps of the same analysis, that of the composite nature of the *psuchè*, each taking the form best fitted for what it talks about in a presentation which works *by example* and practices what it preaches while preaching it

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sires”, the black horse), Hippias-*thumoeidès* (“self-esteem”, the white horse) and Prodicus-*logistikon* (the charioteer, which is only interested, as far a *logos* is concerned, in correctness in the use of words), Phaedrus is introduced teaming with Eryximachus among the auditors of Hippias, that is, at the level of the white horse.

*Justification of the translation “that itself which is good” at Rep. VII, 532b1 (09/07/2017)*

The Greek text which I translate as “*that itself which is good*” is *auto ho estin agathon*, which echoes the *auto ho estin hekaston* of the previous line, which I translate as “*that itself which each [thing] is*”. What is the reason for breaking the parallelism between the two Greek expressions and not translate the second expression as “that itself which the good is” or an equivalent expression, that is, read both *hekaston* (“each [thing]”) and *agathon* (“good”) as subjects of *esti* (“is”)?

The answer to this question is simple: it is the absence of the article in front of *agathon*. For *agathon* to be understood as subject, Plato should have written *auto ho esti to agathon*. Yet, all the translators I referred to, except possibly Bloom, translate as if it is what Plato had written: Jowett paraphrases as “*the absolute good*”; Cornford expands as “*the very nature of Goodness itself*”; Shorey (Loeb) translates “*the nature of the good in itself*”; Gube and Reeve interpret as “*the good itself*”; Reeve 2004 translates as “*what good itself is*.” Bloom translates as “*that which is good itself*”, leaving in doubt how we should understand these words: they can be understood as equivalent to “that which good itself is” (“good” subject) or as “that which is good in itself” (“good” predicate), so that his wording is more a stylistic device to give the impression that he stays close to the Greek than the mark of a proper understanding of the Greek of Plato. It seems that all these translators, anxious to read what they expect to read rather than what is actually written, either forgot or never read the *Hippias Major*, whose dramatic motivation is the difference between *ti est kalon* (“what is beautiful?”) and *ti esti to kalon* (“what is **the** beautiful?”) (see *Hippias majeure*, 287d2-e1).

Indeed, in Greek, both the subject and the adjective used as predicative expression are in the nominative but, except in very specific cases, the adjective used as predicative expression, as opposed to subject, must not be preceded by the article. In our expressions, *ho* is the neuter singular nominative or accusative of the relative *hos* (“who”) and similarly, *ti* is the neuter singular nominative or accusative of the interrogative *tis* (“who?”). In an expression with the verb « to be », which is the case here, it can only be a nominative, but may as well be subject as predicative expression. Thus, the question is: what is the function of *agathon* (and of *hekaston*) in the expression from the *Republic*, of *kalon* in the expressions from the *Hippias Major*? The *only* way of deciding in the case of the adjectives *agathon* and *kalon* is, as in English, the presence or absence of the article, which determines whether the word is subject or predicative expression, that is, whether the adjective remains an adjective and is used as a predicative expression, or is used as a substantive with the article and thus becomes the subject. This is what Socrates shows in the *Hippias Major*, explicitly making a difference between *ti esti kalon* (“what is good?”, “good” adjective”) and *ti esti to kalon* (“what is **the** good?”, “good” substantive with article), a difference which Hippias doesn’t understand, allowing Socrates to stress the fact that, for him (and thus for Plato holding the pen), each one has a different meaning. When we move from the *Hippias Major* to the *Republic*, what was in the form of a question in the *Hippias Major*, introduced by *ti*, becomes an affirmative clause in a relative proposition in the *Republic*, introduced by *ho*, and then, aside from the presence or absence of the article, the order of the words changes in English: *ho estin agathon* is translated “[grasp] what is good” and *ho esti to agathon* is translated as “[grasp] what the good is”. This being so, it would be quite surprising on the part of Plato, so careful about what he writes and who, in the *Hippias Major*, showed us that he was fully aware of the difference between the two expressions, that, in the *Republic*, he suddenly decided not to abide by the rule requiring the article before the subject but not before the predicative expression, and wrote *ho esti agathon* rather than *ho esti to agathon* with the idea in mind that *agathon* was subject rather than predicative expression. The comparison with the parallel expression of the line before, *ho estin hekaston* (“that which each [thing] is”), doesn’t challenge this analysis since *hekaston* (“each [thing]”) is a pronoun and not an adjective, which doesn’t call for an article and can only be subject.

And the presence of *auto* (« itself ») in the expression (*auto ho estin agathon*) doesn't change the analysis. When Plato wants to talk about "the good itself", he uses the expression *auto t(o a)gathon*, potentially elided as *auto tagathon*, as can be seen at 506d8-e1 (*auto men ti pot' esti tagathon*, "what on earth the good itself might be") and 507a3 (*ton tokon te kai ekgonon autou tou agathou*, "this yield and offspring of the good itself"). And the fact that, a few lines later, he uses the expressions *auto kalon* and *auto agathon* without article (507b5) cannot be used as a counterexample to those I just mentioned since the context is quite different and there, Socrates is not really talking about "the beautiful itself" or "the good itself", but is recalling the genesis of these notions through the move from multiple beautiful [things] (*polla kalla*, 507b2), for instance a beautiful picture, a beautiful horse, a beautiful summer evening, and multiple good [things] (*polla agatha*, id.), for instance a good meal, a good movie, a good argument, to the unique *idea* (507b6) corresponding to each one of these notions by asking ourselves the question : "in all these expressions where we use the words "beautiful" or "good", what is "beautiful" itself (*auto kalon*), or "good" itself (*auto agathon*)?" At this point, he is only referring to the words *kalon* and *agathon*, not yet to what they (might) refer to. But Plato had no quotation marks at his disposal, as I have here in English. The context is not the same in the expression from the *Republic* we are focusing on, where we are definitely in the intelligible *only* from beginning to end, both with *auto ho estin hekaston* ("that itself which each [thing] is") and with *auto ho estin agathon* ("that itself which is good"), as can be seen from the context, which talks about "attempt[ing], without all the senses, through logos, to rush toward that itself which each [thing] is", "not giv[ing] up until grasp[ing] by thought itself that itself which is good" and "reach[ing] the limit of the intelligible itself".

This properly understood wording, in a sentence recalling the allegory of the cave, is an implicit confirmation of my remarks on the sight of the sun at the end of the ascent of the freed prisoner: to contemplate the sun itself, that is, "grasp by thought itself that itself which the good is/what the good itself is" (the decoding of the allegory which would be provided here, had Plato written *to agathon*), is not "the limit of the intelligible itself" for it is not possible for human beings, *logos* allowing them only to describe *relations*, not to reach the "[things] themselves (*auta*)"; what is possible for them, and recommended, is to "grasp by thought itself that itself which is good", that is, to look at "human beings (*anthrōpoi*) themselves and the other things themselves" *in the light of the sun*, that is, in the "light" of the good (*agathon*). The « limit of the intelligible itself" is the relation of each "thing" to the good, the understanding of the way each "thing" is good for us, not the understanding of the good itself in the abstract, which would teach us nothing so long as we don't consider practical situations, in the same way looking at the sun itself would teach us nothing about what it lights.

But it is normal that scholars and translators fascinated by the magnificent image of the freed prisoner at last contemplating the sun after a long and painful ascent from the depths of the cave expect to retrieve here the contemplation of the sun and "read" what they hope to find rather than what Plato actually wrote, which is not open to doubt since textual criticism offers no alternante reading of these words.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> I must admit that I did it myself even in the first inline version of this paper, even though I was already challenging the contemplation of the sun proposed by the allegory, because I was not careful enough reworking a translation of this section of the *Republic* I had made some years ago when deciding to include it in this paper.