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Logos and Forms in *Phaedo* 96a-102a

I

A few hours before his death, Socrates is visited in his prison cell by his companions and engages in a discussion on pleasure and death, on the soul and its immortal nature, on philosophy and the Forms. In *Phaedo*, Plato's unique ›staging‹ abilities reach their apogee. From the very beginning, the dialogue unfolds in a solemn atmosphere that reaches its climax at the end, when the doomed Socrates narrates the famous myth, a short while before he receives the hemlock.

The characterization of philosophy as a ›study of death‹ (μελέτημα θανάτου, 67d-e) is predominant in most interpretations of the text. Nonetheless, Plato does not have the slightest intention to present Socrates as a ›thanatophile‹ philosopher, as a ›lover of death‹ who denies the mundane and looks forward to passing away as a means of reaching salvation from the sufferings of everyday reality and the shackles of the body. Surely, the main subject of the dialogue is ›death‹, and Socrates admits that the Thebans are not wrong in mocking philosophers that they are »indeed verging on death« (τῶ ὄντι θανατῶσι, 64b).¹ The Thebans, however, miss a slight detail: »*in what sense* genuine philosophers are verging on death, *in what sense* they are deserving it, and *what kind* of death they deserve«.

»Λέληθεν γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἧ τε θανατῶσι καὶ ἧ ἄξιοί εἰσιν θανάτου καὶ οἴου θανάτου οἷ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφοι« (64b): In this phrase, »in what sense« and »what kind« explicitly indicate that Socrates has two different senses of ›death‹ in mind. This ambiguity constitutes the central theme around which the entire dialogue revolves. Both senses

¹ Our translations are based on: PLATO, *Phaedo*, transl. with notes by D. Gallop, Oxford 1975. Alterations to Gallop's translation are not indicated.

refer to death as the »separation of the soul from the body« (64c), and it is this common denominator that allows Socrates to engage in a dialogue with his interlocutors. In fact, however, the two sides refer to two different concepts of death. Simmias and Cebes perceive ›death‹ as the termination of life. This perception is shared by the Orpheans and the Pythagoreans (σῶμα-σῆμα), as well as by so-called public opinion and by the »genuine philosophers« (66b-67b). Socrates, in contrast, by asking »in what sense?« and »what kind?«, takes some distance from the common and ultimately confusing, simple-minded view of everyday language and points out another ›death‹: the emancipation of the soul from its domination by the body and the senses, the philosophical vocation and knowledge through Forms.

Socrates is not concerned with the first sense of death, even though this is the death he currently faces himself. It is precisely the first sense, however, about which his interlocutors are anxious. Their attitude differs from that of the »lamenting« Xanthippe (60b) only in the degree of forcefulness in which it is expressed. Socrates' companions are worried about the imminent termination of his life. By contrast, he himself is only concerned with the matter that has always preoccupied him, namely philosophy. Since, however, philosophy for him cannot but be dialectical, he is obliged – if he wishes to converse with his beloved and loyal companions – to make a concession: Let the philosopher be called somebody who is »releasing his soul, as far as possible, from its communion with the body« (64e-65a), i. e. let philosophy be considered as a form of ›death‹. In this way, Socrates can initiate a philosophical discussion, precisely by answering his companions' questions about death.

The balanced suspension of the dialogue between these two levels is the most significant cause of its incomparable hermeneutic charm. This suspension is only interrupted at two points: towards the end of the dialogue, when Socrates considers ›death‹ exclusively as termination of life and narrates the famous myth, and at an earlier point, when he entirely dissociates himself for a while from this kind of ›death‹ and turns his attention *expressis verbis* to the only matter that constitutes for him a real ›matter of life and death‹: the philosophy of Forms. Hence, the dying Socrates leaves two legacies behind. One is intended for his friends, who are beginners in philosophy and will seek consolation for his death in the ›proofs‹ of the immortality of the soul and the ›consolation‹ of the myth. The other is intended for those who recognize that the rigor of philosophical investigation cannot be interrupted even by the

agony of death. This second legacy is the theme of Socrates' ›autobiography‹ in *Phaedo* (96a-102a).

After Socrates' first so-called ›proof‹ of the soul's immortality (70c-81a), Simmias and Cebes had raised two objections. Is the soul nothing but the harmony of corporeal elements, vanishing at the moment they cease to exist (85e-86d)? Should the soul perhaps be likened to a weaver, who outlives some of his works, but without being immortal (86e-88b)? While for Simmias the soul is a product of the body, in the objection raised by Cebes the soul appears as the cause of the body, but, however, is »worn out« in its effort to »weave afresh« the »garments« or bodies (87d-e). Having opposed the first objection by providing three arguments (91c-95a), Socrates turns his attention to the second objection. Cebes had raised the issue of the origin (γένεσις) of the body and the perishing (φθορά) of the soul, and Socrates considers it now necessary to open up the scope of the dialogue: the interlocutors have to face »the causes of coming-to-be and perishing in general« (ὅλως γὰρ δεῖ περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς τὴν αἰτίαν διαπραγματεύσασθαι, 95e-96a). Here begins the digression which the Platonic Socrates had in mind from the very beginning of the dialogue. He can now consider the issue that has always been his vital concern, namely Forms as »causes of coming-to-be and perishing«, and through his ›autobiography‹ he will describe how he was led to the philosophy of Forms.

Many interpreters have raised the question whether this part of the dialogue (96a-102a) relates to real events in Socrates' life.² My answer to this question is negative. However, I shall not present any arguments in support of this view, since I believe that the issue is completely irrelevant to a philosophical interpretation of the text. Rather than dealing with an analysis of alleged ›facts‹, such an interpretation should focus on the description of the arising of philosophy in general and on the necessity by which the »natural science« (περὶ φύσεως ἱστορία; see II below) of the Pre-Socratics paves the way for Anaxagoras' philosophy of νοῦς (see III below), which is then succeeded by the Socratic/Platonic ›second sailing‹ of the ὑπόθεσις of Forms (see IV-VI below). Plato presents these three historical forms of philosophy as stages in the intellectual development of the figure of Socrates because in this way he can divest them of the external elements of their historical manifestation and present their philosophically significant substance as part of a cohesive scheme. In this scheme,

² For an overview, see R. HACKFORTH, »Commentary« in: Plato, *Phaedo*, transl. with an introduction and commentary by R. Hackforth, Cambridge 1972, pp. 127-132.

similar to the Hegelian *Aufhebung* which is »at once a *negating* and a *preserving*«, the quest for truth leads every time to a new form, by both abolishing and preserving the older one.³

II

The first ›passion‹ Socrates experiences in his desire to know »the causes of everything, why each thing comes to be and why it perishes and why it is« (96a), is his pre-occupation, from his youth, with the study of »natural science« (96a-97b). However, his expectations did not come true, since they clashed with the contradictory claims of the Pre-Socratic natural philosophers. Is the mere decay of non-organic elements capable of producing life? Can the senses, opinion, memory and – above all – knowledge be reduced to bodily functions such as blood or the brain? The viewpoints presented here by Socrates as the first attempts of the natural philosophers constitute the elaborated version of widely held ›common views‹. Every ›natural‹ system is succeeded by another, but they all fail to explain what a cause is; they only try to explain phenomena by establishing evidently untenable relations between them and other phenomena. Considering blood as the cause of knowledge signals nothing but an inability to grasp the true source of knowledge.

When ›common sense‹ transforms itself into natural philosophy, it loses many of its certainties and is left hovering between the various, irreconcilable philosophical systems. As a result, Socrates is disappointed, »blinded«,⁴ worried that he is philosophi-

³ G. W. F. HEGEL, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by A. V. Miller, Oxford 1977, p. 68 (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by W. Bonsiepen and R. Heede, Gesammelte Werke 9, Hamburg 1980, p. 72). From this point of view, Socrates' philosophical autobiography can be seen as an early *analogon* to the great course run by »Consciousness« in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: The stages of Socrates' philosophical investigation, like the forms of the *Bewußtsein* in the *Phenomenology*, do not represent individual or personal experiences but moments of the course of the philosophy emerging, until it reaches its own substance in the theory of the Forms. — My own position on *Phaedo*'s philosophical itinerary was initially stated in P. THANASSAS, »*Phaedo* 96a-102a. A Philosophical Autobiography«, in: *Deucalion* 17 (1999), pp. 5-22 (in Greek). Meanwhile, A. GRAESER – »Parmenides in Plato's *Parmenides*«, in: *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 5/2000 (2001), pp. 1-15 – described in a similar way the Parmenides of the *Parmenides* as a *Bewußtseinsgestalt*.

⁴ The expression anticipates the ›simile of the eclipse‹ (PLATON, *Phaed.* 99d-e); see IV below.

cally untalented and starts to »unlearn« (96c) everything he knew with certainty in the past. He cannot even locate the cause of man's growth, since his views on growing have been completely undermined. How does man grow, what is the meaning of ›growing‹ and becoming ›larger‹? Is it correct to say that ›A is larger than B by a head‹ or that »ten is greater than eight by two«? Can we claim, in other words, that ›head‹ and ›two‹ are causes of being ›larger‹ or ›greater‹ respectively? Moreover, can ›two‹ emerge both by partition of a unit *and* by addition or approximation of two units? Could thus two opposites (σύνοδος and σχίσσις) cause one and the same thing?⁵

Obviously enough, questions of this kind reflect the eristic discourse of the Sophists; it is exactly this discourse that gives the final blow to the certainties of ›common sense‹. A potential result of such a destruction could be the mistake of ›misology‹ described earlier (89c), which Socrates is determined to avoid. He rather »blames ... himself and his own lack of skill« (90d). Above all, he realizes that λόγος will confront the attacks of eristics only if it ceases to consider the ›head‹ as the cause of ›larger‹, the ›unit‹, ›approximation‹ or ›partition‹ as the causes of ›two‹.

III

Socrates takes a second step, turning now to the philosophy of Anaxagoras (97b-99c). The philosopher from Klazomenai considered Mind (νοῦς) to be the cause of everything – a view that to the eyes of the young Socrates seemed to signify a considerable progress as compared with the preceding natural philosophers. Accordingly, he expected that Mind would ›decorate‹ everything in the best way possible, by pointing out the ›best‹ condition of each being. Socrates' reference to the ἄριστον and the βέλτιστον as necessary features of a cause initiates philosophy to the stage of *teleology*. While ›physiology‹ principally sought to identify the reasons for the generation

⁵ Socrates focuses on attempts to explain ›becoming larger‹ as growth of a living creature as well as numerical increase of a sum of things. As R. BOLTON – »Plato's Discovery of Metaphysics. The New *Methodos* of the *Phaedo*«, in: J. Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, Oxford 1998, pp. 91-111 – rightly points out, this »mix of examples ... confirms that he does not think that there is any special class of *natural* comings to be to focus on, as opposed to non-natural ones« (p. 101). This is an important step in Bolton's argumentation that Plato in the *Phaedo* is not concerned with physics, but rather rejects the very possibility of a coherent physics in favor of the only science possible: metaphysics (see pp. 93 sq. and passim).

of things (διὰ τί γίνεταί), the teleological investigation focuses on the reasons for their Being (διὰ τί ἔστι) and considers the τί ἔστιν (the εἶδος, in the Aristotelian terminology) as intimately bound to the οὐ ἔνεκα, the *causa finalis*. The »best« condition of beings does not only relate to their essence but also determines their further development and τέλος.

»In my own Mind all these seemed right at first« (97d), Socrates adds in one of his characteristic puns, and then he proceeds to describe how he had expected his new teacher Anaxagoras to make use of Mind as the new, almighty cause. The shape and position of the earth and the sun, the direction and speed of the stars would all find their cause if we were to show that they constitute the perfect condition for each of these beings. Two points are worthy of note here. First, the questions to which the Anaxagorean Mind is expected to provide an answer are the traditional questions of natural philosophy, focusing on natural phenomena. The second stage of philosophy's development still carries the traits of the first: it does not reject the first position but rather overcomes it, preserving the experiences made through it. Secondly, we cannot help being puzzled by the constant appeal to Mind as a source of situations to be characterized as βέλτισται – as a kind of a *passe-partout*, a »cause of each thing, and of all of them in general« (98b). Could this one, omnipotent single cause truly provide an explanation for the infinite multiplicity of natural and moral phenomena?⁶

The inadequacy of Anaxagoras' approach is already indicated at this stage. Socrates, however, prefers to emphasize a different, probably more important aspect. Eager for truth as he is, he takes the teacher's book in his hands, only to reach the conclusion that he does not make any concrete use of Mind; he explains, instead, natural phenomena by resorting to mechanistic causes given by »wind, air and water«. This inconsistency is conceptually clarified by Socrates through the distinction between *necessary condition* and *true cause*.⁷ Socrates provides an example from the field of

⁶ A similar reservation is expressed by H. WAGNER, »Platos *Phaedo* und der Beginn der Metaphysik als Wissenschaft (*Phaedo* 99d-107b)«, in: F. Kaulbach and J. Ritter (eds.), *Kritik und Metaphysik. Studien. Heinz Heimsoeth zum achtzigsten Geburtstag*, Berlin 1966, pp. 363-382. Wagner emphasizes that Anaxagoras' abstract appeal to νοῦς was *per definitionem* and in itself incompetent of accounting for the specific determinations of the manifold of beings (see pp. 366-368).

⁷ As D. SEDLEY – »Platonic Causes«, in: *Phronesis* 43 (1998), pp. 114-132 – points out, this distinction is not identical with the modern distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions (see p. 121). Less unproblematic is Sedley's further statement that Forms »cannot be ›conditions‹ at all«, since they »are essentially things« (*ibid.*); the assertion that Forms as causes »constitute

praxis, namely his decision to remain in prison and accept death. The necessary condition (ἐκεῖνο ἄνευ οὗ τὸ αἴτιον οὐκ ἂν ποτ' εἶη αἴτιον; 99b) refers to the ›natural‹ and ›material‹ conditions of this action, i. e. his bones, nerves and muscles as »causes« of his staying in prison. In contrast, the true cause (ἀληθῆς αἰτία) lies in his judgment that staying in prison is better, »more just and honorable« than escaping (99a).

The *sine qua non* condition is not a real cause but rather a mere prerequisite of the true cause, a necessary external component which allows the true cause to act. When the appeal to the Mind is accompanied by a mere enumeration of this sort of conditions (98c), this appeal remains essentially inactive, merely a verbal confirmation, or empty words, a »loose talking« (ῥαθυμία ... τοῦ λόγου, 99b). A divine, holy and venerable Mind cannot guarantee the validity of philosophical activity unless we cease to regard it as an ›abstract‹ principle and consider it as part of our search for the Concrete – in other words, unless we perceive it in its individual manifestations as the state of βέλτιστον on each occasion. *Hoi polloi*, in contrast, overlook the fact that the true cause of each being is that which reveals it as ἀγαθόν and δέον on each occasion. Unable to distinguish between the necessary condition and the true cause, they are constantly »in the dark« (99b) – perhaps because they search for truth only through the eyes and the senses.

IV

Despite the fact that Socrates has grown »weary of studying beings« (99d), he does not reject the course he has followed nor does he disregard the positive results of his (negative) experiences. His third and finally successful attempt to approach the true cause will be guided by the search for the ἀγαθόν and the δέον. In this attempt he will exclusively rely on his own powers. Taking the form of a »second sailing« (δεύτερος πλοῦς, 99c-102a), philosophy now comes of age and develops into an endeavor dealing with Forms.

But what is the object and the field of the philosophy of Forms? What exactly does it aim to describe and interpret? Does this third stage move away from beings and

less an epistemological than an ontological category« (p. 122) would certainly require a more elaborate account of the notion of ›ontology‹ as ›λόγος on Being‹. In my own view, the ontological status of Forms does not contradict their epistemological function.

phenomena, turning its attention to a ὑπεουράνιος τόπος, a new area somehow ›pure‹, ›immaculate‹ and ›unspoiled‹ by any contact with the world of phenomena? Let us turn to the well-known *simile of the sun in eclipse*:

»Well, then, it seemed to me next, since I'd wearied of studying beings, that I must be careful not to incur what happens to those who observe and study the sun during an eclipse; for some of them ruin their eyes, unless they study its image in water or something like that. I had a similar thought: I was afraid I might be completely blinded in my soul, by looking at things with my eyes and trying to lay hold of them with each of my senses. So I thought I should take refuge in λόγοι, and study in them the truth of beings.« (99d-e)

This simile by which Socrates describes the new stage of his quest for truth is *a simile of knowledge*; it comprises four elements corresponding to four elements in the procedure of knowledge: the sun (more specifically, the phenomenon of the eclipse) corresponds to beings,⁸ the eyes correspond to the senses in general, blindness corresponds to ignorance (›blindness of the soul‹) and the reflecting water as mirror corresponds to λόγοι. Socrates draws our attention to the dangers that lurk in the use of certain means: it is the eyes within the simile and senses in general within knowledge. He proposes that these means be replaced by others that are safer and more effective: in the simile, the mirror replaces the direct exposure of the eyes to the sun, while in the field of knowledge λόγοι are contrasted to the senses and substituted for them. However, as in the simile both the eyes and the mirror aim at the same target, namely the view of the phenomenon of eclipse, so in the field of knowledge the senses and λόγοι have a *common aim*: to grasp the truth of beings.

This last consideration is of major significance for an understanding of Plato's conception of Forms: the philosophy of Forms does not seek to focus on a new, exceptional object, on ›transcendent‹ beings and new ›sublime‹ realities. It only seeks to conceptualize *the same subject matter as the senses*, namely the reality of this world and its natural and moral phenomena. The dangers of looking at the sun in eclipse through the naked eye do not lead to abandoning the attempt itself. Similarly, the inability to understand phenomena through the senses should not lead to dismissing

⁸ W. J. GOODRICH – »On *Phaedo* 96a-102a and on the δεύτερος πλοῦς 99d«, in: *Classical Review* 17 (1903), pp. 381-384 – already stressed and clearly demonstrated that there is no connection between the sun in eclipse here and the image of the sun in *Res publ.* VI, and that »to explain the former by the latter only leads to confusion« (p. 381).

these phenomena and turning to a different set of beings which the philosopher would himself produce and explore. What the philosopher ought to do is reformulate his tactics and revise his approach. He ought to replace the senses with λόγοι and with the Forms ›sup-posed‹ by the latter. Therefore, even though Socrates has grown »weary of studying beings« through the methods followed by natural philosophers and Anaxagoras, he does not even think of dismissing beings from his field of study. On the contrary, his new philosophical project focuses emphatically on these beings (ὄντα), entities in general (πράγματα) and the truth of beings (ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων).⁹

»Perhaps my comparison is, in a certain way, inept; as I don't at all admit that one who studies beings in λόγοι is any more studying them in images than one who studies them in ἔργα«, adds Socrates (99e-100a). Here, the old contrast between λόγοι and ἔργα is not used in its traditional sense, suggesting a distinction between theory and practice and a superiority of the latter. The ἔργα do not point to the field of πρᾶξις but proclaim, instead, the same object as the eyes in the simile, namely the perception of beings through the senses. Here, Socrates tries to forestall a seemingly justifiable objection. The image of beings is usually presented as inferior to beings themselves, just as the mirror is, in principle, a substitute for eyes and direct sight. Does this mean that the λόγοι as images perceiving the truth of beings are as a means inferior to the directness of the senses? Do they present a solution arising out of mere necessity, a necessary evil? Socrates' answer to this is emphatically negative. The λόγοι are no more images than the senses. Therefore, they are neither inferior to ἔργα nor something we can abandon at the first chance, returning to the alleged ›directness‹ of ἔργα.

The judgment that λόγοι are no more images than the senses could mean that ἔργα or senses are images at least to the same extent as λόγοι.¹⁰ This is not true: in the

⁹ These terms are chosen to express the sum of phenomena in their wider sense, i. e. the world in general, without excluding, for instance, ›material beings‹. Just as the mirror is not used for something other than the eclipse, λόγοι do not turn away from beings as a whole, but rather approach them in a different way than the senses do.

¹⁰ This, I think, is the consequence of Y. KANAYAMA's interpretation – »The Methodology of the Second Voyage and the Proof of the Soul's Indestructibility in Plato's *Phaedo*«, in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 18 (2000), pp. 41-100 – who concludes from Socrates' reservation simply that λόγοι are free of distortions like those of the sun's image reflected in water (see p. 47). Moreover, Kanayama's assertion that »an enquirer who studies his objects in *logoi* studies them as directly and clearly as those who study in concrete« (*ibid.*) effectively misses the true import of the simile.

case of knowledge, ἔργα simply do not exist! There is no other way of approaching beings but through λόγοι, so that their nature as images does not signify imperfection, inferiority or demerit. This understanding fully confirms the validity of the simile, while Socrates' relevant reservation (›inept comparison‹) appears rather as a case of ironic modesty. The simile is entirely correct; within it, the mirror is no ›more image‹ than the eyes and is not inferior to them, but rather the *only means* available for observing the phenomenon of the eclipse without putting our eyesight at risk.

Certainly, beings exist irrespectively of λόγοι,¹¹ thus the crucial meaning of the simile of eclipse is this: *without beings there are no λόγοι, without λόγοι there is no truth of beings.*¹² The ›images of λόγοι‹ are the only means at our disposal for approaching the truth of beings. Effectively, these images are not images in the sense of a solution arising out of necessity, nor do they substitute for another way of approaching beings – for there is no such way. Socrates' experiences with respect to the ›natural science‹ have taught him that the senses are unable to provide such access to the world. Just as the truth of the eclipse is only revealed through the water mirror, so the truth of beings is revealed through the λόγοι and through the Forms that these λόγοι ›sup-pose‹. Therefore, the λόγοι are not common ›reflections-of-something‹: the beings they reflect appear only in them and through them. It is only through λόγοι that beings achieve their identity and determination; it is only through λόγοι that the τί ἔστιν and the αἰτία of each being can be conceived and defined.

In his ›second sailing‹ Socrates insists *on the same destination* as the previous ›first sailings‹, namely on conceiving the entirety of natural and moral phenomena (e. g. the position and shape of the earth, or his own decision to conform to the death sentence) and on identifying their causes. We should not forget that Socrates' continuous aim is the overall treatment of the »cause of coming-to-be and perishing« (95e-96a) and that all three landmarks of his intellectual course indicate his attempt to fulfill this mission. The ›second sailing‹ does not abandon the goal of understanding the »causes of everything, why it comes-to-be and why it perishes and why it is« (96a),

¹¹ In this sense, Plato could be considered as a ›realist‹: Although he was never preoccupied with the issue of the *realitas* of beings, this *realitas* was never questioned by him, and he never tried to ›prove‹ their existence. Probably throughout Greek philosophy, this existence was always considered as given and the issue at stake for philosophy was, from the very beginning, the issue of grasping their truth.

¹² Likewise, within the simile, without the eclipse there is no image of the eclipse, while without the mirror image there is no perception of the eclipse.

but employs a different means in order to achieve it. This is precisely the literal meaning of every ›second sailing‹: When the first attempt to set sail ends up in failure (because the wind is still or unfavorable), the crew does not follow Aeolos' whims. It rather returns to port, takes the oars and sets out again.¹³ Of course, such a ›second sailing‹ is more laborious, but it guarantees arrival at our destination. Socrates' ›second sailing‹, in particular, is not an inferior, ›second-best sailing‹.¹⁴ As we have seen, in fact the oars of λόγοι are not a substitute for sails, because in philosophy there are no sails at all; the senses do not lead us to our destination but to blindness. The course of philosophical λόγος, arduous and laborious, is not a ›second-best‹ but simply the ›best‹ – because it is the only one.

¹³ For the meaning of the proverbial phrase δεύτερος πλοῦς, see the detailed and persuasive analysis of KANAYAMA, »The Methodology«, pp. 87-95. His conjecture on the meaning of the implicitly indicated πρῶτος πλοῦς seems, however, too cautious: »it must be an investigation carried out by some easy and unreliable method comparable to a fair wind« (p. 95); but if »the second voyage is never inferior to the first«, this is only because the first voyage of natural science *cannot possibly arrive at port*, and no »fair wind« could ever prevent it from sinking (*ibid.*), i. e. from blindness. Kanayama has also recognized that »the difference between first voyage and second voyage does not lie in their destinations but in their methods« (p. 89), although he seems hesitant to locate this common destination and acknowledge the significance of this identity for the status of the ὑπόθεσις made within the second sailing.

¹⁴ Pace D. FREDE – Platons »Phaidon«. *Der Traum von der Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, Darmstadt 1999, p. 120 –, who calls δεύτερος πλοῦς a »merely second-best method« (»bloß eine zweitbeste Methode«). See in contrast already GOODRICH, »On *Phaedo*«, p. 382: »the δεύτερος πλοῦς is ›second best‹ only to that ›wonderful hope‹ which Anaxagoras had inspired, and to nothing else«. Of course, this hope has proven definitely and indubitably vain. K. M. W. SHIPTON – »A good second-best: *Phaedo* 99b ff.«, in: *Phronesis* 24 (1979), pp. 33-53 – described the δεύτερος πλοῦς as a »second-best course«, denoting »a cognitive state inferior to the [unattainable] ideal of knowledge, but nevertheless approaching it« (p. 40) and resulting »in the highest degree of probability which men can indeed attain« (p. 48). The exact contrary of my own position could be seen in the statement of N. R. MURPHY – »The Δεύτερος Πλοῦς in the *Phaedo*«, in: *Classical Quarterly* 30 (1936), pp. 40-47 – that the »indirectness« of the ›second sailing‹ is, »as such, a feature of inferiority« (p. 42). Moreover, Murphy insists on discarding the simile, which he finds »unfortunate« and »obscur[ing]«, and tries to somehow ›correct‹ it: The ›refuge in λόγοι‹ is »not really a question of turning ›from things to thoughts‹, but from thought about one kind of thing to thought about another« (p. 43). Evidently, this approach leads directly to the assumption of a ›two-worlds doctrine«.

V

The content of the ›second sailing‹ concerns the *ὑπόθεσις* of Forms. This *ὑπόθεσις* is not a hypothetical assumption.¹⁵ It is also not a subjective claim, a thought or a ›working hypothesis‹ arbitrarily chosen, nor a conjecture that must be tested through a process of ›trial-and-error‹. The Socratic *ὑπόθεσις* is something *sup-posed*, placed as the foundation and ground of every kind of further knowledge, thought or statement – and definitely not in need of any verification. In Socrates' own words, »supposing on each occasion the *logos* I judge strongest, I consider as true whatever things seem to me to accord with it, both about causes and about everything else. And whatever do not, I consider as not true.« (100a). This *ὑπόθεσις*, the ›strongest *λόγος*‹ that Socrates places as the foundation each time he engages in a discussion, cannot be disputed, challenged or negotiated. It is rather itself a *μέτρον* of every judgment, a principal *λόγος* guiding every other discourse. If this ›strongest *λόγος*‹ comes into opposition with other propositions, it is the latter that will be questioned. Socrates will never accept negotiating his ›strongest *λόγος*‹, even if the other interlocutors demand; it is more likely that he will cease to participate in the discussion, uttering his famous »let it be« (*χαίρειν ἕως ἄν*). The wellknown Socratic *ἔλεγχος* faces its limits here and has to be interrupted. What is the reason for this dogmatic persistence?

Evidently, the most passionate advocate of dialogue in the history of philosophy does not seek dialogue at any cost – for he knows that every dialogue presupposes the acceptance of a set of common assumptions by the interlocutors, the existence of a common ground upon which they will be able to converse. From this point of view, Socrates' persistence on the non-negotiable nature of the ›strongest *λόγος*‹ is reasonable and well justified:

»But I'd like to explain more clearly what I mean, because I do not think you understand it as yet ... What I say is nothing new, but what I've spoken of incessantly, always in the past as well as in our earlier discussion. I am going to set about displaying to you the kind of cause I've been dealing with, and I will go back to those much harped-on things, and start from them, sup-posing that there is something Beautiful in itself, and something Good and Large, and all the rest.« (100a-b)

¹⁵ Pace FREDE, *Platons »Phaidon«*, who insists once more on Forms as a »hypothetical procedure« (»hypothetisches Verfahren«, p. 122) or a »mere hypothesis« (»bloße Hypothese«, p. 123).

Socrates' persistence on the non-negotiable and unquestionable nature of his ›strongest λόγος‹ is imperative. Indicating the ›sup-position‹ of Forms, this λόγος is not a dogmatic adherence to an accidental proposition but the *conditio sine qua non* of every discourse, debate, agreement or disagreement. The existence of a ›Beautiful itself‹, for example, constitutes the focal point of meaning around which every identification of individuals as ›beautiful‹ revolves. What else could ›give account‹ (λόγον δίδοναι) of the τί ἔστιν of this or that beautiful object, if not the Form of the Beautiful as the cause of its beauty?

»If anything else is beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no reason at all other than that it participates in that Beautiful ... Then I no longer understand nor can I recognize those other wise causes; but if anyone tells me that something is beautiful because of its blooming color, or its shape, or something else like that, I dismiss those other things, because they all confuse me. And in a plain, artless and probably simpleminded way, I hold this close to myself: nothing else makes it beautiful except that Beautiful itself, whether by its presence or communion or whatever the manner and nature of the relation may be; I do not go so far as to affirm the manner, but only that it is by the Beautiful that all beautiful things are beautiful. This seems to be the safest answer to give both to myself and to another.« (100c-d)

The fundamental function of Forms becomes particularly manifest in the above passage. A Form as cause (αἰτία) is not a transcendent, separate substance in a »place beyond the heavens«,¹⁶ but rather a *postulate of λόγος* which undermines the opposition between epistemological explanations and transcendent entities and ›gives account‹ of the τί ἔστιν of beings.¹⁷ In their function as focal points of ›participation‹ (μέθεξις) of beings, Forms assign essence to beings. The famous ›separation‹ (χωρισμός) is nothing else but a step that ensures the self-identity of these *loci*, so as to allow them to fulfill their participatory mission. Plato never developed a ›two-worlds doctrine‹: Forms could never constitute an isolated ›second world‹, because this would contradict their incompatibility with any notion of time and space whatsoever. They do not exist »in nature« (ἐν τῇ φύσει), nor are they some kind of »meaning in the souls« (νόημα ... ἐν ψυχαῖς). In *Parmenides*, Socrates was gifted enough to

¹⁶ The reference to a ὑπερουράνιος τόπος in PLATON, *Phaedr.* 247c has undoubtedly a mythical character and function.

¹⁷ For Forms as epistemological or logical αἰτία, see G. VLASTOS, »Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*«, in: *Philosophical Review* 78 (1969), pp. 291-325, esp. pp. 304 sq. For Forms as ontological entities or »things« see SEDLEY, »Platonic Causes«, pp. 121 sq. and *passim*.

realize the dead-end of both versions of this dilemma,¹⁸ but too young to find the correct answer to the question concerning the ›place‹ of Forms. Now, in the philosophical legacy of his autobiography, a short while before his death, he can clearly reveal the answer to this question: Forms are located neither in the souls nor in nature, but ἐν τοῖς λόγοις. The distinct ontological region they belong to is the mediating region of λόγος.¹⁹

Needless to say, this does not suggest any sort of deficiency. The λόγοι are not inferior to a reality beyond and outside them, but rather the only way for conceptualizing reality and beings. Λόγοι cannot be substituted by ›nature‹ or by the search for direct access to phenomena, but exist as the ›image‹ of a world revealed only through them. It would be equally erroneous, however, to think that the λόγος that ›sup-poses‹ Forms is the particular and private enterprise of an individual consciousness which produces meanings, Forms and their binding force ›within the soul‹ by itself. The ›sup-posing‹ λόγοι are ontological commitments that point to Being, while the Forms function as the true beings *par excellence*. Being is revealed only through λόγος and λόγος focuses exclusively on Being. It is this dialectical relationship of mutual reference and inter-dependence that throughout guides the Platonic dialectical perception of Forms as located in the λόγοι.

With ironic modesty, Socrates characterizes his ›strongest λόγος‹ as »the safest«, but at the same time as »plain« and »simple-minded«. Indeed, other »wise« thinkers would regard the monotonous statement ›x is y because of Y‹ as an unnecessary, vain and useless employment of empty words. They would possibly search for the cause of a rose's beauty in its red color or the shape of its petals. If, however, the cause of beauty is the red color, why not see the red blood running from the wounds of a dying person as beautiful? The failure of all attempts to prescribe rules for defining the beautiful throughout the ages²⁰ seems, in its part, to also justify Plato's insistence that

¹⁸ See PLATON, *Parm.* 132b-133a.

¹⁹ Unexpectedly enough, WAGNER's profound and thoughtful study, »Platos *Phaedo*«, also results in the assumption of a ›two-worlds doctrine‹ (see p. 381). The author begins his analysis with a reference to the distinction between ›transcendent‹ and ›transcendental‹, both situated »beyond experience« (p. 363). But if a metaphysics of the transcendental presents »ultimate grounds (principles) founding *experience* according to its concept and its truth« (*ibid.*), why should we reject this as an appropriate description of the Platonic philosophy of Forms, thus avoiding identifying it as a metaphysics of transcendent beings?

²⁰ For a clear demonstration of this impossibility, see Kant's assertion in § 17 of his third *Critique*:

the only cause of beauty is participation in the Beautiful itself.²¹ — Taking distance from the »subtleties« of wise men and their »wise causes«,²² the Socratic λόγος proceeds beyond them. Plato's Socrates has never claimed that philosophy is restricted to propositions of the type ›x is y because of Y‹, and his own ›wisdom‹ usually goes far beyond this monotonous statement.²³ Through the present ἐπίδειξις, however, he does not intend to show off his intellectual capacities. He looks back, leaving as a legacy to his friends an enterprise that took place many years before, and to which he has »always, both then and now« remained faithful. In fact, this fundamental ὑπόθεσις of Forms *does not constitute a part of Platonic philosophy, but rather its foundational condition*.²⁴ Λόγος bounds itself through this ›sup-position‹; it promises that, whenever it speaks, it speaks of something and not of nothing, referring to the Forms as self-existing entities that assign meaning to our speech and to language in general.

In reaching Forms, Socrates' ›second sailing‹ arrives at its final destination – certainly not in order to remain in port, but to ensure and protect the region within which λόγος will be able to develop into philosophy *par excellence*, i. e. into *ideo-logy*. Since then, any philosophy that is not reduced to a naïve sensualism or does not destroy itself in the manner of post-modern Sophistics aiming at a destruction and disruption of meaning, implicitly or explicitly validates that very first self-binding of λόγος to Forms. In Hegel's words: »Every philosophy is essentially Idealism, or at least has Idealism as its principle«. ²⁵

»there can be no objective rule of taste by which what is beautiful may be defined by means of concepts«, and »the highest model, the archetype of taste, is a mere idea« (I. KANT, *The Critique of Judgement*, transl. by J. C. Meredith, Oxford 1952, p. 75; *Gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie-Ausgabe 5, Berlin 1913, pp. 231, 232).

²¹ For a forceful defense of Plato on this matter, see SEDLEY, »Platonic Causes«: »There is an enormous value in knowing that the sunset is beautiful because of the beautiful and not because of, say, its colour« (p. 127). Sedley points at definitions as a necessary prolongation of this initial understanding of formal causes; true teleological causation, in its part, is nothing but »a special application of the formal causation to which Socrates turns in his famous ›Second Voyage‹ (*Phd.* 99c-102a)« (pp. 126 sq.).

²² See PLATON, *Phaed.* 100c, 101c.

²³ See PLATON, *Phaed.* 105 b-c: the more »subtle« causes.

²⁴ I am following here a line of thought initiated by H.-G. GADAMER: see id., *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 6, Tübingen 1985, p. 16; vol. 7, Tübingen 1991, pp. 344 sq.

²⁵ G. W. F. HEGEL, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Erster Teil: Die objektive Logik. Erster Band: Die Lehre vom Sein* (1832), ed. by F. Hogemann and W. Jaeschke, *Gesammelte Werke* 21, Hamburg 1985, p. 142.

VI

Socrates can now return to the questions concerning the causes of ›larger‹ and ›two‹ which had been left unanswered in the ›first sailing‹ of the ›natural science‹. It is for two reasons that we cannot consider ›head‹ as the cause of ›larger‹ (100e-101b). Firstly, because the proposition ›A is larger than B by a head‹ is always homologous to the proposition ›B is smaller than A by a head‹. Therefore, if the head constituted the cause of A's physical superiority, it would at the same time constitute the cause of B's physical deficiency. How can one and the same thing be the cause of two contradictory features?²⁶ Here, it is evident that Socrates does not content himself with accidental and secondary causes but searches for the proper cause that substantially defines the essence of x and allows it to be what it is: he searches for its »proper essence« (ἰδία οὐσία, 101c). There has to be an inherent, necessary relationship between such a cause and its effects/beings – a function that can only be accomplished by a Form.²⁷ By ›giving account‹ of the τί ἔστιν of each being, a Form defines its essence and determines it decisively and distinctly. Socrates answers the other questions in a similar way (101b-c). ›Ten‹ is not greater than ›eight‹ because of the ›two‹, but because it participates in the Form of Multitude (πλήθος). And one should not search for the cause of ›two‹ in divisions and additions, but rather in its participation in the Form of the ›Dyad‹.

Socrates' second objection against regarding the head as the cause of ›larger‹ concerns the contradiction inherent in characterizing something small (e. g. a head) as the cause of something large. What is implied here is the famous issue of ›self-predication‹²⁸: The cause of ›largeness‹ has to be large itself, thus the Form of Largeness is also large. Earlier, this view had been once more expressed: »If anything else is beautiful besides the Beautiful itself ...« (100c). By introducing Forms in this way, Socra-

²⁶ This would violate the third of the Platonic »Laws of Causation«, as formulated by SEDLEY, »Platonic Causes«, p. 121.

²⁷ For an account of the close, tight connection between Forms as »causes« and »caused« individuals, based on the principle that causation is always a matter of »like causing like«, see SEDLEY, »Platonic Causes«, *passim*.

²⁸ This term was established by G. VLASTOS, »The Third Man Argument in *Parmenides*«, in: *Philosophical Review* 63 (1954), pp. 319-349, esp. pp. 319-334. See also his further investigations on this matter in ID., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton (N. J.) 1973, pp. 335-365, and in ID., *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, ed. by D. W. Graham, Princeton (N. J.) 1995, vol. 2, pp. 166-219.

tes appeared uncertain about the existence of individual beautiful objects, but he was certain beyond any doubt that the Form of the Beauty itself is indeed beautiful.

We can only avoid regarding such expressions as empty words or nonsense, if we refuse to consider them as conventional predications. When Socrates claims that ›the Beauty is beautiful‹, he does not wish to literally assign the trait of beauty to the Form of Beauty. This would only be possible through the participation of the Form of Beauty in another second-order Form of Beauty – something that would indeed give rise to the issue of the ›Third Man‹ and to an infinite regression.²⁹ The proposition ›the Form of Beauty is beautiful‹ is the answer to the question ›what is the Form of Beauty after all?‹ – a question that is expected to arise after the first reference to the Form of Beauty in Socrates' claim that ›beautiful beings are beautiful only because they participate in the Form of Beauty‹. The ›self-predication‹ does not answer this question but points out the dangers of a search for a second-order Beauty. Forms cannot become subjects of a conventional predication and be assigned any predicate; rather they constitute ultimate, self-sustained ontological and meaningful *loci* grounding reality and knowledge. The Beauty itself can be nothing but beautiful: any question within the framework of the philosophy of Forms ends at this point.

Platonic philosophy, however, is not restricted to the philosophy of Forms. This is what Socrates suggests in the last excerpt of his autobiography. He initially emphasizes once more the fundamental nature of the ›naïve‹ ὑπόθεσις of Forms:

[A] »But you, scared of your own shadow, as the saying is, and of your inexperience, would hold firmly on to that safety of the sup-position, and answer accordingly. But if anyone attacked the sup-position itself,³⁰ you would dismiss him, and you wouldn't

²⁹ Plato was, of course, aware of this issue (see *Parm.* 132a-b), which was probably first noted by ARISTOTLE (see, among else, *Metaph.* VII 13, 1038b30-1039a3; *Soph. El.* 22, 178b36-39) and still leads to derogatory statements about the philosophy of Forms.

³⁰ The phrase εἰ δέ τις αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἔχοιτο is ambiguous, since it could also mean »if anyone hung on to the sup-position itself« (as in the previous sentence: see also PLATON, *Phaed.* 100d-e). Yet, this reading would require a less emphatic and quite strange understanding of the following χαίρειν ἐφῆς ἄν: »you would finish with that [and continue the discussion]«. For a recent plea for the opposite view, see C. ROWE, »Explanation in *Phaedo* 99c6-102a8«, in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1993), pp. 49-69, esp. p. 63 n. 25. A forceful opting for the meaning ›attack‹ is offered by J. VAN ECK, »Resailing Socrates' Δεύτερος Πλοῦς: A Criticism of Rowe's ›Explanation in *Phaedo* 99c6-102a8«, in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 14 (1996), pp. 211-226, esp. p. 221 n. 10. Ingenious but, in my view, untenable is Kanayama's argument in favor of ›clinging‹; KANAYAMA, »The Methodology«, p. 78: »Socrates advises his friends to dismiss some-

answer till you should have examined its consequences, to see if, in your own view, they are in accord or discord with each other.« (101d)

Whoever does not share the ›safe ὑπόθεσις‹ is thus not worthy of engaging in dialogue and discussion;³¹ any further exploration is necessarily transformed into a monologue (›if, in *your own view*‹). Socrates' concluding remarks, however, give a decisively new turn to his approach:

[B] ›And if you had to give an account of the sup-position itself, you would give it in the same way, once again sup-posing another sup-position, which would seem better than the others above, until you reach something adequate.« (101d-e)

What are these new ›sup-positions‹ that seem to be ›better‹ than the previous ones and which guarantee that we shall reach ›something adequate‹ (ἰκανόν)? Does Socrates, through these last words, undermine and reverse the fundamental character of Forms, pointing to other, stronger, more powerful and valid λόγοι?

In my view, the fundamental character of Forms is not questioned here in any way. The λόγοι which ›sup-pose‹ Forms retain their indisputable validity in the Platonic system, as emphasized in passage [A] above. These λόγοι are the point of departure for every attempt to understand and interpret the world; they are the foundation and test-bed of every position, they resolve every dispute and contradiction. Nonetheless, while [A] describes a passage from Forms to phenomena, text [B] indicates the possibility of another passage, from the Forms to the ›first principles‹.³² The ἰκανόν mentioned here is nothing else but the ἀνυπόθετον of the *Republic* (VI 511b): it is the conclusion of a dialectical course leading to the principles of the One and the Indefinite Dyad, which function as causes of Forms. The precise content of this teaching does not form part of the dialogues. In order to approach it, we have to turn to the ἄγραφα δόγματα, Plato's famous ›unwritten doctrines‹, which can only be recon-

one's clinging to the hypothesis ..., [because] the enquiry is disrupted by clinging to it so tightly as to prevent its progress towards the target« .

³¹ Moreover, accepting a discussion of the validity of the initial ›sup-position‹ would amount to ἀντιλογικοί λόγοι (PLATON, *Phaed.* 90c; see VAN ECK, ›Resailing‹, pp. 221 sq.).

³² ROWE, ›Explanation‹, pp. 54-58, tries to avoid the notion of a hierarchy of ὑποθέσεις by interpreting ἄνωθεν (›above‹) as referring to the different possibilities of describing the μέθεξις mentioned in Platon, *Phaed.* 100d. For a justified critical review of this position, see VAN ECK, ›Resailing‹, pp. 211-218; van Eck's statement that ›the Form-hypothesis‹ is just one among many hypotheses, one of which ›may be judged strongest, according to the specific question at issue in the respective phase of the enquiry‹ (p. 222) is, however, misleading.

structured through indirect testimonies.³³ Anyone who is not satisfied with the ›safe sup-position‹ (i. e. who is not »scared of« his »own shadow«, 101d), but is experienced in dialectics and acts as a true philosopher (101e), is expected to turn in this direction.

Abstract

Socrates' autobiography in *Phaedo* signifies an attempt to incorporate earlier philosophical thinking in a progressive evolution culminating in the Platonic theory of Forms. In the ›second sailing‹, the ›*hypothesis* of Forms‹ is not a hypothetical assumption, an arbitrary claim or conjecture, but something to be ›sup-posed‹ prior to any further knowledge or statement. The careful reading and reconstruction of the famous simile of the ›sun in eclipse‹ leads to crucial consequences concerning the attempt to ›take refuge in the *logoi*‹. The Forms ›sup-posed‹ in the *logoi* do not indicate a new ›transcendent‹ object, but aim at the same target as that of the senses: at the truth of beings of our world. The ›second sailing‹ follows a different route, but has the same direction as the ›first sailing‹ of the *physiologoi*.

³³ The most important step in this direction was taken by the so-called Tübingen School, in the works of H. J. KRÄMER, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles. Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie*, Amsterdam ²1967, and K. GAISER, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre. Studien zur systematischen und geschichtlichen Begründung der Wissenschaften in der Platonischen Schule*, Stuttgart ²1968. See also H. J. KRÄMER, *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics. A work on the theory of the principles and unwritten doctrines of Plato with a collection of the fundamental documents*, ed. and transl. by J. R. Catan, Albany 1990.