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# The Dialectical Method in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

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## **Abstract**

*This paper will investigate Aristotle's methodology in the Nicomachean Ethics [EN]. It is widely agreed that Aristotle's explicit account of his methodology in EN is the method of dialectic. However, it has been argued that Aristotle does not consistently practice this method and often appeals to metaphysical principles in his other texts to construct his moral theory. As a result, it has been claimed that Aristotle not only diverges from his dialectical method, but also contradicts his doctrine of the autonomy of distinct branches of philosophical enquiry.*

*In this paper, I will investigate what it would mean for Aristotle's account to be dialectical and will show that, although Aristotle's explicit methodology is dialectical he nonetheless diverges from this method in presenting his *ergon* argument. However, though he diverges from his dialectical method, I will argue that we can understand this divergence as a response to the definitive problem of EN; namely, how can we actually achieve the highest good in our actions. Thus, I will conclude that although Aristotle does in fact diverge from his dialectical method, we can understand this divergence as consistent with the claim that EN is an autonomous enquiry.*

## **1.**

According to Terence Irwin's highly influential series of articles, Aristotle often appeals to his metaphysical and psychological theories, outlined in his previous texts, as premises or principles for his ethics. In particular, Irwin suggests that Aristotle's infamous human function (*ergon*) argument in Book 1, Chapter 7 [1.7] of the *Nicomachean Ethics* [EN] is actually a consequence of Aristotle's general theories of soul, form and essence as presented in *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*.<sup>2</sup> Timothy Roche calls Irwin's view the 'metaphysical foundation hypothesis'. In opposition to this view, Roche argues that Aristotle proposes only one method in the EN - the method of dialectic. The aim of *Phronimon*, Vol 7 (2) 2006

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this methodology, Roche tells us, is the establishment of the first principles in ethics. Moreover, according to Roche, Aristotle constantly reiterates in his writings the doctrine of the autonomy of distinct branches of philosophical knowledge, in such a way that each rational 'discipline', or science, has its own special principles that function as explanations or 'reasons' for the *phainomena* 'appropriate' to that discipline.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Roche argues, if Aristotle were to incorporate his metaphysical and psychological doctrines into the defence of his moral principles, as Irwin suggests, he would contradict the doctrine of the autonomy of the sciences. However, according to Roche, Aristotle, in fact, "practices what he seems to preach, viz., that dialectic, and a purely autonomous dialectic, is the only method to establish his ultimate moral principles."<sup>4</sup>

The debate between Irwin and Roche turns on the common assumption that Aristotle's explicit method is dialectical and that Aristotle's *ergon* argument, as presented in EN 1.7, is a point of contention for this method. However, it is unclear precisely what a 'dialectical method' would actually consist of and, thus, what would constitute a divergence from this method. In the following, I will investigate the ways in which Aristotle's method may be considered dialectical and I will consider what possible positive outcomes may result from such a method. Given this investigation, I will thereby consider whether Aristotle's *ergon* argument actually does diverge from this method. I will argue, in opposition to Roche, that Aristotle's *ergon* argument does, in fact, diverge from a dialectical method. However, I will contend that this divergence need not be understood as an attempt by Aristotle to provide a metaphysical foundation for his ethical doctrines. Rather, I will argue that Aristotle's divergence can be understood as a response to one of the motivating problems of EN. I will contend that insofar as the motivation for this divergence is internal to the concerns of EN, Aristotle's enquiry in this text can be considered autonomous. Thus, I will demonstrate that although Aristotle does in fact diverge from his dialectical method in presenting his *ergon* argument, this divergence is actually consistent with his doctrine of the autonomy of the sciences.

## 2.

According to Roche, it is a widely held belief that the explicit methodology Aristotle claims to employ in EN is dialectical. However, at no time in EN does Aristotle explicitly define his methodology in this way. For a definition of dialectics, we must turn to Aristotle's *Topics* and *Posterior Analytics* [Apo]. In these texts, Aristotle defines dialectical reasoning in opposition to demonstrative reasoning. Moreover, in these texts Aristotle discusses both types of reasoning in terms of deductive arguments or inferences

(*sullogismos*). A deduction, Aristotle tells us in *Topics*, “is an argument in which, certain things being laid down, something other than these necessarily comes about through them”.<sup>5</sup> A demonstrative deduction, on the one hand, is when the premises from which the deduction starts are true and primitive. Aristotle calls such true and primitive premises first ‘principles’ (*archai*).<sup>6</sup> A dialectical deduction, on the other hand, reasons from “reputable opinions”.<sup>7</sup> These principles require no further explanation for their acceptance. *Topics* defines ‘reputable opinions’ (*endoxa*) as those opinions which are “acceptable by everyone or by the majority or by the wise - i.e. by all, or by the majority, or by the most notorious and reputable of them.”<sup>8</sup>

Setting aside for the moment the question of how such reasoning is performed, Aristotle makes clear in a number of places in EN that the subject matter of his investigations are opinions and not necessary truths or first principles. Aristotle most evidently makes this distinction in EN 1.4 wherein he identifies the difference between “arguments from principles and arguments toward principles.” Here, Aristotle tells us:

For we should certainly begin from things known, but things are known in two ways; for some are known (or familiar) to us, some known without qualification. Presumably, we ought to begin from things known to us. [EN 1095b1-5]

It seems that, in the above passage, Aristotle is affirming that his method is dialectical insofar as the *endoxa* under consideration are the reputable opinions known to us, rather than necessary first principles. Aristotle makes this more explicit in his discussion of *akrasia* in EN 7.1, wherein he tells us “we must set out the appearances” and we “must prove the common beliefs.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in the *Eudemian Ethics* [EE] Aristotle tells us “about all these matters we must try to get conviction by arguments, using phenomena [*phainestai*] as evidence and illustration.”<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean that any opinion or belief counts as *endoxa* for dialectical reasoning. Rather, Aristotle tells us in *Topics*, the *endoxa* must be relevant to a dialectical problem.<sup>11</sup> The subject matter or dialectical problem under investigation in EN is: “what is the highest of all goods achievable in action?”<sup>12</sup> This problem or question defines, or is the condition for, the set of dialectical propositions which are the relevant *endoxa*. These dialectical propositions are the *endoxa* about which we dialectically reason.

Aristotle further qualifies the set of *endoxa* or dialectical propositions considered relevant to the problems in EN by telling us “it is enough to examine those that are most current or seem to have some argument for them”.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle does not provide a clear reason for limiting the set of relevant *endoxa* in this way other than claiming that it would be “futile to examine all these beliefs” about the dialectical problems under investigation

in EN.<sup>14</sup> Stated in this way, it may appear that the limitation is due to purely pragmatic reasons. However, EE suggests something slightly different when it tells us that “to examine then all the views...is superfluous, for children, sick people, and the insane all have views, but no sane person would dispute over them... for such persons need not argument but years in which they may change.”<sup>15</sup> The suggestion here seems to be that limitation on the set of relevant *endoxa* is not guided by pragmatic considerations regarding how many *endoxa* one can reasonably attempt to consider in one investigation of a dialectical problem. Nor is it limited merely to a certain kind of *endoxa* (i.e. those which are reputable). Rather, EE suggests that the relevant set of *endoxa* is to be further limited to those *endoxa* which are accepted by a certain type of person; i.e. a person who may come to some kind of understanding as a result of the argumentation. This seems to be consistent with Aristotle’s claim in EN that “a youth is not a suitable student of political science [i.e. the proper science of the good]; for he lacks experience of the actions in life, which are the subject and premises of our arguments.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, it seems clear that Aristotle is employing a dialectical method in EN insofar as the propositions he is investigating are reputable opinions. Now, *that* Aristotle is employing a dialectical method in order to investigate and answer certain questions in EN is accepted by both Irwin and Roche. However, what is less clear is precisely *how* Aristotle answers these questions based on a dialectical method. It is only in view of an account of how Aristotle dialectically *reasons* that we will be able to ascertain whether he actually diverges from this method in presenting his *ergon* argument.

### 3.

By investigating these reputable opinions dialectically, Aristotle seems to want to answer the question of ‘what is the highest of all goods achievable in action?’ Aristotle provides a clue as to how his dialectical reasoning proceeds in his discussion of *akrasia* in EN 7, wherein he tells us “we must set out the appearances, and first of all go through the puzzles (*aporiai*)”.<sup>17</sup> In *Topics*, Aristotle also talks about dialectics as a way to “puzzle on both sides of a subject [to] make us detect more easily the truth or error about the several points that arise.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Aristotle provides the following crucial definition: “dialectics is a process of criticism wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries.”<sup>19</sup>

Based on this definition of dialectics (what I call the ‘broad’ definition of dialectics), it seems that dialectical reasoning is a critical examination of the relevant *endoxa* of a problem. Such investigation will show puzzles (*aporiai*) that arise from inconsistencies in the *endoxa*. Presumably, such

inconsistencies will lie in the *endoxa* themselves. For instance, in EN 1.6 Aristotle examines Plato's conception of the good and demonstrates what he sees as various inconsistencies in this account.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle concludes from this examination that Plato's conception of the good cannot be the highest good for human action. Moreover, in EN 1.5, Aristotle investigates what he calls the conceptions of the good held by "the many, the most vulgar" (admittedly, only those conceptions which "have some argument for their defence"), "the cultivated people" and the "money-lenders."<sup>21</sup> In each case, Aristotle shows inconsistencies in their accounts and concludes that they cannot be considered the highest end of good actions and, as a result, Aristotle recommends that we "dismiss" them.<sup>22</sup>

Given this broad definition of dialectics, what possible positive outcomes may follow? In his critical examination of *endoxa*, it seems that Aristotle is rejecting those which are internally inconsistent. Now, if this were a complete description of Aristotle's method, then presumably the positive outcome of this investigation would either be a single *endoxon* (the sole survivor of the dialectical examination) or a set of *endoxa* which are all consistent within themselves. This seems to be what Aristotle is suggesting when he writes "if there is some end of everything achievable in action, the good achievable in action will be this end; if there are more ends than one (the good achievable in action) will be these ends."<sup>23</sup> Thus, it seems that the highest good for human action may be an inclusive view which accommodates the relevant *endoxa* that survive the dialectical examination. Alternatively, it may be a single, definitive account if there is only a sole surviving *endoxon*.

However, it seems clear that Aristotle is not merely examining these various *endoxa* concerning their internal consistency. Rather, he is examining them as to whether they can actually provide an answer to the dialectical problem regarding the highest good or final end (*teleion*) of human action. Thus, Aristotle does not merely dismiss *endoxa* which are inconsistent *per se*. Rather, Aristotle dismisses *endoxa* which do not provide an adequate solution to his dialectical problem (I call this Aristotle's 'narrow' dialectical method). That Aristotle proceeds in accordance with this narrow dialectical method is clear, for example, when he rejects the money-maker's life for not being "the end" which he is looking for.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it is also evident when Aristotle argues that the conception of the good held by the cultivated people (i.e. that the good is honour) "appears to be too superficial to be what we are seeking."<sup>25</sup> In EN 1.7, Aristotle tells us that the good that he is looking for is "that for the sake of which the other things are done... in every action and decision it is the end, since it is for the sake of the end that everyone does the other actions."<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in EN 7.8, Aristotle tells us "the end we act for is the principle."<sup>27</sup>

It seems that Aristotle is looking for the first principle/s for human action. These first principles are primitive propositions or premises which require no further proof or reason. They are self-evidently true. That there *are* such first principles is a central component of Aristotle's entire philosophical enterprise. The idea seems to be that if there are no first principles, which require no further proof or reasoning, then there will be either an infinite regress or circularity in reasoning.<sup>28</sup> When applied to action, the idea is that if every action is performed for some end (and this end is the reason why or that for the sake of which we perform the action), then the first principle will be the final reason that we provide in this reasoning process, beyond which no further reasoning is required. Moreover, that Aristotle is looking for a first principle for human action is clear when he claims that the highest good must be "something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of the things achievable in action".<sup>29</sup> Completeness and self-sufficiency are two qualities of the first principles.

Given that Aristotle is aiming for the first principles of human action, in EN 1.4 he tells us that the highest of all goods achievable in action is actually happiness [*eudaimonia*]. We are told that "happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of the things achievable in action."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, "happiness is a principle; for (the principle) is what we all aim at in all our other actions."<sup>31</sup> How does Aristotle arrive at this principle from his dialectical method? Aristotle introduces the idea that *eudaimonia* is the first principle by claiming that "as far as its name goes, most people virtually agree; for both the many and the cultivated call it happiness, and they suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy."<sup>32</sup> Stated in this way, it would seem that this view is actually an *endoxon* that is being examined dialectically. This suggestion seems to be supported when Aristotle tells us "presumably the remark that the best good is happiness is apparently something [generally] agreed, and we still need a clearer statement of what the best good is."<sup>33</sup> Thus, it seems that Aristotle is beginning with an accepted belief or *endoxon*, i.e. that *eudaimonia* is the highest good, and then proposes to investigate the implications of this view. This would be consistent with his dialectical method.

However, if this is what Aristotle has in mind, it is unclear how *eudaimonia* makes the transition from being one *endoxon* in the set of relevant *endoxa* to becoming the first principle for human action. How does *eudaimonia* achieve such a privileged position? Examining the consistency of an *endoxon* itself does not show that it is the first principle. We seem to need something more.<sup>34</sup>

In order to see how Aristotle arrives at *eudaimonia* as the first principle for the highest good, it is useful to consider the way in which Aristotle

proceeds to define *eudaimonia*. As Aristotle tells us, most people agree *that* the best good is *eudaimonia*. However, this does not yet tell us *what* *eudaimonia* is. "We still need a clearer statement of what the best good is."<sup>35</sup>

It is at this point in EN that Aristotle introduces his infamous human function [*ergon*] argument. Aristotle introduces this argument by claiming, "perhaps, then, we shall find this [definition of the best good] if we first grasp the function of a human being."<sup>36</sup> Aristotle argues as follows: just as the good for a flautist or sculptor and every craftsmen or "whatever has a function and (characteristic) action" depends on their function, the same is true for human beings if they have some function.<sup>37</sup> The definitive function for a human being, Aristotle goes on to tell us, is a certain form of life, or activity of the soul, in accord with reason.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, such a life, or function, is good (*eudaimon*) when this activity of the soul is performed in accordance with virtue.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the human good (*eudaimonia*) is activity of the soul in accord with virtue.

Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia*, as activity of the soul in accord with virtue, seems to be the conclusion of an inference based on the following premises: a) the good for whatever performs a characteristic function depends on their function, b) human beings have a characteristic function, c) the characteristic function of human beings is activity of the soul in accord with reason. According to Roche, these premises are simply additional opinions or *endoxa* being considered as part of Aristotle's dialectical investigation. Thus, Roche argues, Aristotle's *ergon* argument is consistent with his dialectical method insofar as the propositions being considered as premises are opinions and not first principles or unqualified truths. Now, as we have previously discussed, the relevant *endoxa* for dialectical reasoning are those opinions which are relevant to a given dialectical problem. In this case, the dialectical problem is the question 'what is the highest good for human activity?' Thus, the relevant *endoxa* for this dialectical problem are dialectical propositions or beliefs about what the highest good for human activity actually consists in. However, in the case of Aristotle's *ergon* argument, the premises of this inference are not dialectical propositions or beliefs relevant to this dialectical problem. For example, the proposition that human beings have a function is not a belief about the highest good for human activity. Nor can this be said about the proposition that the human function is activity of the soul in accord with reason. Thus, Roche cannot be correct in claiming that Aristotle is consistent with his dialectical method insofar as the premises in Aristotle's *ergon* argument are merely additional opinions or *endoxa*. Even if Roche is correct in his claim that the premises in Aristotle's *ergon* argument are merely reputable opinions (rather than established first principles or truths) and therefore

*endoxa* as such, they are not *relevant endoxa* to the dialectical problem under investigation in EN. In defining *eudaimonia* as activity of the soul in accord with virtue, Aristotle is defining it by a conclusion of an inference based on premises that are not dialectical propositions of the dialectical problem under investigation in EN. This seems to suggest that Aristotle diverges from his dialectical method in presenting his *ergon* argument.

Against Roche, Irwin argues that the premises that Aristotle employs in his *ergon* argument are the conclusions or summaries of inferences carried out in his *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*.<sup>40</sup> Given that his definition of *eudaimonia* is the conclusion of an inference from these premises, Irwin argues that Aristotle thereby has a metaphysical foundation for his ethical doctrines.<sup>41</sup> Now, I will not here attempt to resolve the question of whether Aristotle does or does not have such a foundation. On the one hand, it is clear that Aristotle does not explicitly identify premises in EN as being conclusions of inferences performed in his other texts. On the other hand, it is undeniable that the premises he employs in his *ergon* argument parallel views that he argues for in other texts. However, I think that it would be a very difficult task to prove that the reason why Aristotle chooses these particular premises in EN is because he insisted upon a metaphysical foundation for his ethical account. Moreover, as Roche convincingly points out, such an account would be additionally problematic given Aristotle's clear emphasis in EN and his other writings on the distinction between separate domains of enquiry.<sup>42</sup>

In what follows I will argue that, unlike Irwin who seems to interpret Aristotle as attempting to provide a metaphysical foundation for his ethical theory, Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia* may have been introduced in response to a second problem motivating EN: how can we actually achieve *eudaimonia*?<sup>43</sup> I shall conclude that although Aristotle does in fact diverge from his dialectical method in presenting his *ergon* argument, the insights he introduces via this divergence are essential to the problems and aims of EN itself. Thus, though Aristotle diverges from this dialectical method he may still be thought to be consistent with his claim that EN is an autonomous enquiry.

#### 4.

In EN 1.4, Aristotle identifies the subject matter or dialectical problem under investigation in EN as: "What is the highest of all the goods achievable in action?"<sup>44</sup> However, it seems that EN is also concerned with the problem of how this highest good is actually acquired. As Aristotle stresses throughout this entire treatise, "the end is action, not *knowledge*"<sup>45</sup> and "the aim of studies about action, as we say is surely not to study and know about a

given thing, but rather to act on our knowledge."<sup>46</sup> Thus, Aristotle tells us, "the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us."<sup>47</sup> These comments suggest that, although Aristotle is certainly concerned with the former problem, the latter problem is also central, if not definitive of, Aristotle's moral theory in EN. That this problem is, in fact, definitive and unique to Aristotle becomes clear when we consider Aristotle's critique of the moral theories of Plato and Socrates. For instance, according to Aristotle, Plato explained 'the good' by predicating a substantive entity or property (Plato's Idea or Form of the Good) to every instance in which we speak of 'good'.<sup>48</sup> This property was thought to be separable from, and the explanatory essence of, all 'good' things or activities. However, Aristotle rejects this account of 'the good', arguing that "clearly it is not the sort of good a human being *can achieve* in action or possess; but that is the sort we are looking for now".<sup>49</sup> Moreover, according to Aristotle, Socrates held the view that knowledge of excellence or the good was actually the highest good. Thus, for instance, to know justice and to be just came simultaneously.<sup>50</sup> However, in EN, Aristotle clearly distinguishes himself from this view insofar as he innovatively separates knowledge from action and problematises their relationship. Thus, the question of how to "*become good*" is unique to EN and distinguishes Aristotle from his contemporaries.

While it seems clear that an account of how we can achieve the highest good will be closely related to that which we identify *as* the highest good, or the "goal" we identify as that towards which we attend or "aim" our actions,<sup>51</sup> it is unclear whether dialectical reasoning itself can provide an answer to the problem of how this highest good is achieved or practised.<sup>52</sup> If we consider the 'broad' account of Aristotle's dialectical method, it seems that this method can only critically evaluate the *endoxa* held by the majority or the wise concerning this problem. Moreover, if we consider the 'narrow' account of Aristotle's method, this same set of *endoxa* would be examined with regards to whether or not they can solve the problem of how we can achieve *eudaimonia* in action. However, given that this problem is definitive and unique to Aristotle, there do not seem to be any relevant *endoxa* that would function as dialectical propositions for a dialectical examination to thereby provide an explanation or solution.

It is in light of this problem that Aristotle can be understood to introduce his *ergon* argument. Now, as we have previously discussed, Aristotle's *ergon* argument is based on the claim that the definitive function of human beings is an activity of the soul in accord with reason. Moreover, the highest good, *eudaimonia*, is thought to consist in the performance of this function in accordance with virtue. *Prima facie*, this seems to be a merely descriptive account of the nature of an ultimately good way of life.

However, Aristotle seems to be after an account of how we can *come to act* in a good way, how we can actually *achieve* eudaimonia or come to *realise* this way of life. In what follows, I will argue that Aristotle attempts to account for how we can achieve eudaimonia through his account of practical wisdom [*phronēsis*] in EN 6. However, I will show that this discussion of *phronēsis* is essentially informed by Aristotle's *ergon* argument and, thus, provides an insight into how Aristotle can be thought to introduce his *ergon* argument in a way which is consistent with the doctrine of autonomous domains of enquiry.

Richard Sorabji's study of *phronēsis* indicates most clearly a way of thinking about Aristotle's response to the question of how knowledge of the highest good can "make us better able, like archers who have a target to aim at, to hit the right mark" in our actions.<sup>53</sup> According to Sorabji, "practical wisdom involves the ability to deliberate [EN 1140a25-b6; 1141b8-14; 1142b13]. The man of practical wisdom deliberates with a view not merely to particular goals but to the good life in general (*pros to eu zēn holōs*) [EN 1140a25-31], with a view to the best (*to ariston*) [EN 1141b13; 1144a32-33]...At the same time he is concerned not only with universals, such as the good life in general, but also with particular actions [EN 1141b15; 1142a14; 20-22; 1143a29; 32-34]".<sup>54</sup> Given this account of the person of practical wisdom (*ho phronimos*), Sorabji suggests that *phronēsis* enables a person of practical wisdom, in the light of their conception of the good life in general, to perceive what is required of them, with regards to a particular virtue in a particular case, and it instructs that person to act accordingly. Thus, it is in the light of a general notion of what the good life consists in that the person of practical wisdom deliberates about what a particular virtuous action might consist in given a particular context. C.D.C. Reeve seems to agree and elaborate on this point when he claims that we acquire a "more filled out conception of eudaimonia, our knowledge of the universal eudaimonia, by doing actions of types that we think will exemplify (our more schematised conception of) eudaimonia."<sup>55</sup>

Thus, it is in this discussion of *phronēsis* that we can see Aristotle attempting to resolve the problem of how knowledge of the highest good can help us 'hit the mark' in our actions. According to the above understanding of *phronēsis*, Aristotle's response to this problem seems to be that our conception of the 'highest good' is somewhat like a rough schemata in the light of which we deliberate and which we attempt to make manifest through our actions in a given situation. Moreover, the general suggestion seems to be that there is no absolute 'knowledge' of this highest good which can function as a prescriptive rule for all ethical actions in all circumstances; rather, the idea seems to be that it is by doing actions which we think are cases of acting well in a particular context that we will gradually

learn or come to understand what acting well actually is or consists in. Thus, it seems that our conception of the highest good informs our actions, in a quite general and schematised way, and the outcomes of our actions subsequently inform our conception of the highest good, and this is a continuously circular process.

Whether or not this brief account of *phronēsis*, thus presented, adequately responds to the problem of the relationship of knowledge of the highest good to action, I will not here decide.<sup>56</sup> However, what is significant about this account, for the concerns of this paper, is that it is through this account of *phronēsis* that Aristotle actually addresses this problem, and, crucially, this account develops out of Aristotle's *ergon* argument. Aristotle tells us in EN 6, "*phronēsis*... is about human concerns, about things open to deliberation. For we say that deliberating well is the function of the prudent person more than anyone else."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, "we fulfil our function insofar as we have *phronēsis* and virtue of character."<sup>58</sup> It seems clear that *phronēsis* essentially involves the crux of Aristotle's *ergon* argument; namely, that human beings have a function and this function is an activity of the soul that involves reason.

Insofar as Aristotle's account of *phronēsis* depends upon his *ergon* argument, and insofar as *phronēsis* is a response to the problem of how knowledge of the ultimate good can help us 'hit the mark' in our actions, we can also think of Aristotle as introducing his *ergon* argument in response to this problem. Thus, we need not follow Irwin in concluding that Aristotle introduces his *ergon* argument to provide a metaphysical foundation for this ethical theory. Rather, given that Aristotle's account of *phronēsis* sheds light on the relationship between knowledge of the highest good and ethical action, and that this account depends upon *eudaimonia* as defined by the *ergon* argument, it seems to follow that Aristotle diverges from his dialectical method in order to respond to this central problem of EN. In this way, Aristotle's divergence is internal to the concerns of EN. Thus, Aristotle is consistent with his claim that EN is an autonomous enquiry.

## 5.

This paper set out to investigate the debate between Irwin and Roche concerning Aristotle's explicit account of his methodology in EN and the question of whether Aristotle consistently practices this method. As I have shown, there are good reasons to think that Aristotle's explicit method is dialectical. However, I have also shown that Aristotle diverges from this account in presenting his '*ergon* argument' in EN 1.7. Thus, I have demonstrated the ways in which this divergence is inconsistent with his dialectical method.

However, rather than construing this as an attempt by Aristotle to provide a metaphysical foundation for his ethical theory in EN, I have shown a way to understand Aristotle's *ergon* argument as a response to the question of how knowledge of the highest good can assist us in achieving this highest good. I have demonstrated that Aristotle addresses this question through his idea of *phronēsis*, as presented in EN 6, and I have also shown that this account depends on his *ergon* argument. As a result, I have demonstrated that, although Aristotle does diverge from his dialectical method in presenting his *ergon* argument and account of *phronēsis*, it is only by this divergence that he can actually answer the fundamental questions that motivate EN. Thus, though Aristotle diverges from his dialectical method in EN, he remains consistent with his doctrine of the autonomous domains of enquiry.

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## Endnotes

1. I would like to thank Associate Professor Eugenio Benitez of the University of Sydney and Professor Rosalind Hursthouse of the University of Auckland for their comments on previous drafts of this paper.
2. Terence Irwin, 'The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Methods', in Rorty ed. *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles: 1980), p36
3. See Timothy Roche, 'On the Alleged Metaphysical Foundation of Aristotle's *Ethics*', in *Ancient Philosophy*, 8 (1988), pp53-54
4. Roche, p49

5. Topics 100a25-26
6. Apo 72a
7. Topics 100a30
8. Topics 100b21-22
9. EN 1145b4-5
10. EE 1216b27-28
11. See Topics 1.4, 1.10
12. EN 1095a16. EN is also concerned with the problem of how we can actually attain or achieve this highest good in action (see EN 1099b9). However, as I will show, answers to this latter problem cannot be arrived at via dialectical reasoning.
13. EN 1095a29-30
14. EN 1095a29-30
15. EE 1214b29-32
16. EN 1095a1-3
17. EN 1145b5
18. Topics 101a35-36
19. Topics 101b3-4
20. It is arguable whether Plato actually propounds the view that Aristotle rejects in this chapter of EN. However, the aim of our discussion is to expose Aristotle's views rather than to assess whether or not he adequately represents those of others.
21. EN 1.5
22. EN 1.5
23. EN 1097a23
24. EN 1.5
25. EN 1095b24-25
26. EN 1097a19-20, 21-23
27. EN 1151a15-16
28. See Apo 1.2
29. EN 1097b21
30. EN 1097b21-22
31. EN 1102a38-40
32. EN 1095a14
33. EN 1097b23-25
34. One suggestion of how Aristotle arrives at *eudaimonia* as the first principle *might* be that he arrives at this account via induction (*epagôgê*). Inductions, Aristotle tells us in EN 6.3, "[lead to] the principle, i.e., the universal, whereas deduction proceeds from the universal." [EN 1139b29]. Thus, it might be suggested that, rather than merely being one

*endoxon* among the set of *endoxa*, *eudaimonia* is actually a general account that is induced from the set of particular *endoxa* that Aristotle identifies as consistent. Now, such reasoning would seem to be consistent with a dialectical method as such. For instance, in *Topics* Aristotle identifies both deduction and induction as forms of dialectical arguments [Topics 105a10-11]. Thus, it would be consistent with Aristotle's dialectical method that one view may be privileged in the sense that it may be induced or abstracted from the *endoxa* under consideration. However, if we reflect upon the few examinations Aristotle actually conducts in EN 1 prior to asserting that *eudaimonia* is the highest good, the *endoxa* that Aristotle considers do not actually suggest *eudaimonia* as a common feature. Thus, *eudaimonia* couldn't be the induced first principle from consistent *endoxa*.

35. EN 1097b23-24

36. EN 1097b25

37. EN 1097b25-29

38. EN 1098a14

39. EN 1098a17

40. See Irwin, p49. It must be admitted that Irwin's argument is not literally against Roche, as the latter challenges Irwin rather than the other way around. However, it can be seen that Irwin's interpretation of Aristotle's method in EN is *conceptually* against that of Roche.

41. See Irwin, p49

42. See Roche, pp53-54. See also EN 1098a26-33, 1095a5, 1103b27, EE 1216b11-25; Met 1064b17-23

43. The first dialectical problem is: 'what is the highest of all goods achievable in action?'

44. EN 1095a16

45. EN 1095a5

46. EN 1179a35

47. EN 1103b27

48. See EN 1.6

49. EN 1096b34-35

50. See EE 1216b1

51. EN 1099b30

52. Aristotle specifically writes that the problem is how this highest good is to be achieved. I think that this way of phrasing the problem is slightly misleading as it suggests that *eudaimonia* is a substance or state to be achieved. Given that Aristotle defines *eudaimonia* as a *way* in which human beings perform their definitive activities (i.e. an excellent way) it seems to be more correct to present the question in terms of how we are to practise or perform our definitive activities. Of course, answers to how we are to perform our definitive human actions in a good way will *involve* the development of certain virtuous states. However it does not follow that *eudaimonia* itself is such a state. The alternative way of presenting the question, i.e. how *eudaimonia* can be practiced, also seems problematic as it suggests that '*eudaimonia*' is something that we actually do

when, in fact, eudaimonia seems to be merely a description of a certain way (an excellent or good way) in which these actions are performed. Further clarification of whether eudaimonia is actually achieved or practised would extend beyond the immediate concerns of this paper. For our purposes, it is enough to note the ambivalence.

53. EN 1094a23-25

54. Richard Sorabji, 'Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue', in Rorty ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: 1980), p206

55. C.D.C Reeve, *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992), p59

56. It must be acknowledged that this brief discussion overlooks many crucial subtleties in Aristotle's account of *phronesis*, most notably the central role of virtue and the indivisible relationship between desire and understanding in good actions. However, what is important for the concerns of this paper is the fact that it is in this account that we can see Aristotle attempting to resolve the problem of how knowledge can help us achieve the highest good.

57. EN 1141b10-11

58. EN 1144a8-9



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# Was Plato's Socrates Convicted by A Biased Jury?<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

*It is a matter of scholarly controversy how much of Socrates' conviction for impiety and for corrupting the youth could be blamed on Socrates' own defence, on the strength of the prosecution's argument, which has not survived, and on prejudicial pre-trial slanders against Socrates. At a point in his trial Socrates was convinced, and he effectively told the jury this, that he has ably disposed of the charges brought against him and that if he is convicted, it would be the result of judicial bias, namely, of the enduring prejudicial pre-trial slanders against him. The burden of this paper is to examine the verifiability of Socrates' claim that he was convicted by a biased jury.*

That I have not committed the crime alleged in the indictment does not require much defence, gentlemen of the jury. And I think I have already said enough. However, you know well that a statement I made earlier remains true: that many are the enemies I have incurred, and this is what will lead to my conviction, if I am convicted, not the [prosecution] but the malicious slander and jealousy of the many (*Apology* 28b3-b1).<sup>2</sup>

A good number of Socratic scholars believe that Socrates was convicted because he prevaricated in his defence. Socrates himself did not believe that he lost the case because he lacked argument or words (28a2-b2; 38d);<sup>3</sup> rather, he believed that he lost because the pre-trial slanders against him were so great that he needed more time to convince the jury (37b; 28a3-8; cf. 19a). Granting, therefore, that Socrates did not lack argument or words in his defence, my aim in this paper is to examine the verifiability of his prediction in the epigraph that his conviction would be due to pre-trial prejudices against him. To achieve my aim I shall address three specific questions: (1) Were the pre-trial slanders against Socrates prejudicial to the determination of the matter before the court? (2) What was the extent of the slanderous publicity, namely, to what extent did the 501 or so jurors have knowledge of the slanders? (3) If the slanders were prejudicial, did they influence the jury? In other words, was Socrates a victim of judicial bias?

## Were the pre-trial slanders prejudicial to Socrates' case?

To determine this question we need to set out the pre-trial slanders alongside the official charges (hereafter, 'indictment') to see how or whether they relate. Socrates precedes his defence of the indictment by addressing the slanders against him, claiming that he is more afraid of the slanderers than the official accusers, because the former, mostly nameless and very many, are responsible for widespread malicious falsehoods against him<sup>4</sup> since the childhood of most jurors (18a6-c); and also because these slanders are the very grounds of the indictment. Three times in his defence Socrates states these slanders in the form of a sworn indictment (*hōsper...tēn antamōsian*, 19b3-4). Though each statement of the slanders is only a shade different from the others, the differences deserve attention. I reproduce them here, each labelled for ease of retrospective reference:

S<sub>1</sub>: [1] There is a clever man (*sophos anēr*), Socrates, who [a] contemplates meteorological phenomena and investigates everything below the earth and [b] makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger (18b6-c1).

S<sub>2</sub>: [1] Socrates is a wrongdoing busybody (*adikei kai periergazetai*),<sup>5</sup> in that he [a] inquires into things below the earth and in the sky, [b] makes the worse argument defeat the better, and [c] teaches others the same (19b4-c1).

Socrates states these slanders even more fully at 23c-d, where he claims that a number of young men, sons of the leisure class, have voluntarily attached themselves to him because they enjoy seeing other people cross-examined. Taking Socrates as their model, they try to question other people, whom they usually find pretentious. These victims of the *elenchus* become angry, not with themselves, but with Socrates, and they complain:

S<sub>3</sub>: [1] Socrates is the most polluted person (*miarōtatos*) and [c] he corrupts the youth. But if someone asks them what Socrates practices (*poiōn*) and teaches (*didaskōn*), they cannot tell; but in order that they may not appear to be at a loss, they repeat the ready-made accusations that are used against all philosophers, that he [a] [investigates and [c] teaches]] things up in the clouds and under the earth, [a\*] he does not believe in gods, and [b] he makes the worse appear the better reason.

Each of these slanders, S<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>2</sub>, S<sub>3</sub>, reveals a tripartite structure. First, each begins with an introductory clause of criminal designation [1]: Socrates is 'a clever man' (*sophos anēr*), 'a wrongdoing busybody' (*adikei kai periergazetai*), and 'a most polluted person' (*miarōtatos*). It is clear that, in context, 'sophos' has a pejorative connotation; hence, the gloss 'clever' rather than the literal 'wise'. This gloss is confirmed both at *Apology* 23a1-2 where Socrates links 'sophos' to the many slanders (*pollas diabolas*), which

are the result of popular misperception of his elenctic philosophy, and at *Euthyphro* 3c7-9 where Socrates tells Euthyphro that Athenians do not worry much about anyone being clever (*deinon*), provided he does not teach his cleverness (*sophias*). Socrates thus understands his nickname 'sophos' to connote 'a socially dangerous man'. The designation 'adikei kai periergazetai' implies that Socrates is a social pest, while 'miarōtatos' suggests that Socrates is a social pollutant. These last two designations are largely variants of the first designation, or so I shall take them to be.

The second structural part of the slanders, namely, the statement immediately following the introductory clause, imputes to Socrates certain potentially offensive or dangerous beliefs and/or practices: that [a\*] Socrates does not believe in gods, and that [a] he practices natural science and [b] eristicism.<sup>6</sup> Natural science was potentially dangerous for society because of the popular belief that natural scientists were atheistic (18b7-c4). So [a] collapses into [a\*]. And eristicism, the stock in trade of the Sophists' education, was potentially dangerous for society because it is an argumentative method for producing antilogies of every belief. When applied to traditional religious and moral beliefs, eristicism entails scepticism about these beliefs. Besides, it has a shaming effect on those whose beliefs are subjected to its application.<sup>7</sup> Because eristicism can be employed as a tool for refuting opposing theses, and because in this respect it resembles the Socratic elenchus, whose application typically results in the logical refutation of respondents' moral theses, the practice of elenchus at the hands of insensitive youths could become a sport for shaming elders by showing the inconsistency, falsity or, indeed, the absurdity of their beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

In the third structural part of the slanders, the potentially offensive beliefs and practices of the second part are shown to have [c] actually caused some social damage: Socrates is perceived to have actually corrupted the youth by teaching (*didaskōn*) them atheistic natural science and eristicism. The second and third structural parts of the slanders together give rise to, or explain the first structural part, that is, the introductory criminal designation or the various nicknames Socrates has earned. From the foregoing, we can reconstruct the slanders ( $S_1, S_2, S_3$ ) by putting them together as follows:

$S_4$ : [1] Socrates is a socially dangerous man, in that he believes in and practices [a\*] atheism and [b] eristicism,<sup>9</sup> and he [c] corrupts the youth by teaching them to follow his example.

Let us now look at the indictment (official charges) against Socrates. Allegedly preserved in its original form in the work of the third century AD writer Diogenes Laertius, it reads as follows:

[1] Socrates does wrong (*adikei*), in that [a\*](i) he does not acknowledge

the gods of the state but (de) (ii) other new divine things he has introduced; and [c] he also does wrong by corrupting the youth.<sup>10</sup>

It is controversial whether or not the conjunction 'de' introduces another charge.<sup>11</sup> Which way one reads it makes no difference to my argument. Note, however, that the tripartite structure of the slanders is present in the indictment too. First is the introductory clause [1], which here describes Socrates simply as a 'wrongdoer': 'Socrates adikei'. This contrasts sharply with the strongly condemnatory introductory clauses of the slanders. The second part of the indictment, the clause immediately following the introductory clause, is a statement imputing socially dangerous beliefs to Socrates, namely, [a\*] (i) and (ii). These beliefs are interpreted by the prosecution to mean that Socrates is an atheist (26b-c).<sup>12</sup> The effect of the prosecution's interpretation is that the second structural part of the indictment is substantially the same as one half of the second structural part of the slanders, namely, [a\*] of S<sub>4</sub>, with the other half, (b) of S<sub>4</sub>, to spare.

Finally, the third part of the indictment, [c], is a statement alleging that Socrates has actually caused social damage: that he corrupts the youth. The means by which Socrates causes this damage – teaching – is not specified in the indictment, as it is in the slanders. But during Socrates' defence against the indictment, he asks the prosecution (26c): 'Do you say that I corrupt the youth by teaching them not to believe in the gods of the state but in other new divine things?' The prosecution emphatically answers in the affirmative.<sup>13</sup> Altogether, then, the slanders are, in form and substance, similar to the indictment, the former imputing greater reprehensible conduct to Socrates on account of (b).

Consequently, because the indictment more or less reproduces the slanders in form and substance, and because the slanders are chronologically prior to the indictment, Socrates was absolutely right in saying that the slanders were the very grounds of the indictment against him, and that the slanders were highly prejudicial to his case and could lead to his conviction. Our next task is to determine the extent of the slanderous publicity.

## **The extent of the slanderous publicity against Socrates**

Socrates refers to the slanders against him as having been perpetrated by 'a great many people for a great many years' (18b1-2), starting at the time 'when so many of [the jurors] were children' (18b5) and 'at their most impressionable age' (18c6-7). Of these diverse, numerous, and largely anonymous slanderers, Socrates readily remembers Aristophanes, who portrayed Socrates in the *Clouds* mainly as one who corrupts the youth by teaching atheistic natural science and eristicism.<sup>14</sup>

Aristophanes' *Clouds* was performed in 423 BC at the City Dionysia. A

revised version was put in circulation by, or after 416 BC. At the same festival in the same year, two other comedies equally adverse to the Socratic circle were performed.<sup>15</sup> The fourth century theatre held between 14,000 and 17,000 spectators, and it is likely that the late fifth century audience was roughly of this size too.<sup>16</sup> Even if a total of 10,000 attended, this would include a very high percentage of Athenian citizens, whose population after the plague of 429 BC and throughout the Peloponnesian War hovered around 20,000 to 30,000.<sup>17</sup> There is, however, some controversy over the composition of Athenian festival audiences; but in all probability most spectators would be adult male Athenian residents, perhaps with a scattering of slaves and women.

Since only a citizen 30 years old or more qualified for jury service in Athens' democratic state, the youngest of the jurors trying Socrates in 399 BC would be six or seven years old when the *Clouds* was performed. Aristophanes caricatured Socrates as typifying the atheistic natural scientist and the eristic sophist, pioneers of a newfangled education that was, in Aristophanes' view, atheistic and socially harmful. It is very likely that this Aristophanic view of Socrates was also the popular view: Aristophanes would want to win the first prize and would most unlikely put on stage a play whose theme and chief character his audience are not familiar with. But if this is so, the fact that Socrates continued to practice his elenctic philosophy for the next twenty-four years after the performance and subsequent sale of the *Clouds* in the open market, would tend to perpetuate the adverse popular image of Socrates throughout the maturing years of the youngest potential juror in 399 BC. Could we, then, conclude that the jurors who tried Socrates actually knew this adverse publicity about Socrates? Before answering this question, we must remind ourselves of the following well-known facts about Athenian society.

Greek cities were generally small territorially. And cosmopolitan ones, such as Athens, were usually populous. Communalism in Athens was reinforced by a number of social institutional factors: the agora, which was the hub of economic, social, and political activity, invited daily meeting of several people;<sup>18</sup> the gymnasia were daily resorts for the youths and adults; the symposia of the middle/upper class were recurring occasions for conviviality and for discussion of various issues; and multiple forms and number of associations, from welfare to funerary clubs, provided sundry other fora for association.<sup>19</sup>

These varied social institutions and associations were highly conducive to the rapid and widespread dissemination of information in Athens, so that any persistent adverse opinion about someone as famous as Socrates<sup>20</sup> could have a publicity effect equal to that of a mass circulating electronic or other media in a modern nation. Thus, it would be fair to say that in 399 BC

every potential juror was aware, to a degree, of an image of Socrates that was highly prejudicial to the case in court. It must be noted, however, that one could be aware of prejudicial matters against someone without being biased against him/her. Thus modern-day jurors are, as a matter of jurisprudential requirement, supposed to come from the neighbourhood where the matter in question took place or where the parties come from, because neighbours, more than the presiding judge, often do have firsthand knowledge of the facts in issue, including, where relevant, knowledge of the character of the parties and their witnesses. Hence, a juror's knowledge of pre-trial prejudicial matters against the accused does not in itself constitute judicial bias against the accused, though recent practice in some jurisdictions tends to exclude jurors who have even a smattering of pre-trial knowledge of the case to be tried.<sup>21</sup>

That brings me to my last question: if every juror sitting in Socrates' case had knowledge of the prejudicial pre-trial slanders against Socrates, was his decision influenced by such knowledge? In answering this question in the next section, I will also be addressing the following preliminary issues: what is judicial bias? and how do we test for a juror's bias? Did the Athenian legal system contain mechanisms for detecting and preventing biased jurors from sitting? If not, how do we verify that Socrates was or was not a victim of judicial bias?

### **Was Socrates a victim of judicial bias?**

A basic rule of the adversarial system of adjudication, even as it applied in ancient Athens, is that a verdict is to be based on evidence adduced and argument given in open court (cf. *Apology* 35c-d). Judicial bias occurs where a judgment or verdict is based, not on the evidence and/or argument given in court, but on extra-judicial considerations.

To prevent judicial bias, the modern practice is to test potential jurors for bias before hearing begins. The prevailing test, laid down by Chief Justice Marshall in the 1807 treason trial of Aaron Barr, is for the trial judge to elicit a potential juror's attitude toward the matter to be tried in order to determine whether his/her mind is relatively open to or closed against the testimony that may be offered in court in opposition to his/her opinion about the accused.<sup>22</sup> In other words, a juror is impartial who, at the time of the trial, is indifferent as to the guilt or innocence of the accused.

In some jurisdictions, a party could challenge the panel of selected jurors in a number of ways: the party could challenge for cause, that is, make a request to a judge that a certain prospective juror not be allowed to be a member of the jury because of a specified reason or cause; the party could also make a peremptory challenge, in which case he need not show

any reason for objection to the prospective juror sitting; or, the party could challenge the array, that is, challenge the whole panel of jurors on the ground that the form or manner of empanelling the jury was improper or illegal; for example, that it was tainted by class, racial or other prejudicial considerations.

Were there procedural means for detecting and for preventing biased jurors from sitting in the Athenian jury courts? The Athenian judicial system did not have a Marshallian test, nor would such a test have been practicable given the large number of jurors sitting on a case. The Athenian judicial system also did not have the various forms of jury challenges. It did, however, have some means of preventing judicial bias. First, jurors took an oath at the beginning of the year, in a solemn ceremony, to vote according to the laws and decrees of the Athenian people, to consider only the matter of the charge, to hear both sides impartially, and where there was no law covering the case, to vote according to their most honest judgment. The oath closed with an invocation of the gods – Zeus, Poseidon, and Demeter – to punish violators by the utter destruction of themselves and their families and to reward richly those who kept their oaths. Evidently, this is a very powerful oath.<sup>23</sup> Second, the court was empanelled by anything from two hundred to more than a thousand jurors;<sup>24</sup> and it is extremely difficult, if at all possible, to influence this large number. Third, the jurors were selected by lot, i.e., randomly, from an annual jury register of 6,000<sup>25</sup> *immediately* before the opening of the case. So that a potential juror could not choose, and could not know until the last minute, which of the many cases pending in a day he would sit on. This procedure of selection would overcome the modern-day possibility of convenors or judges influencing the selection of jurors. Yet the Athenian selection procedure was not foolproof: in the absence of a Marshallian test and challenges to jurors, there was always the possibility that biased jurors could be selected *accidentally*.

Suppose, then, that biased jurors were accidentally selected. What were the chances that Socrates left the court a victim of judicial bias? Every case had to be determined at a sitting in a day, and the verdict was voted by secret ballot *immediately* after the parties had closed their cases and while the evidence and argument of the parties were still fresh in the minds of the jurors. Thus, there was no recess for collective deliberation among jurors on the evidence and argument presented and no judge whose presiding duty was to sum up the relevant facts and direct the jury on the relevant law.<sup>26</sup> Arguably, then, the absence of collective deliberation after parties have closed their cases would serve to control the spread of any biases some jurors may harbour. However, such control could be neutralised by the fact that during proceedings jurors took liberties with the rules to murmur or whisper to each other. Yet, even if we assume that those who murmured or

whispered to others were biased against Socrates, we need further evidence to justify an inference to the conclusion that the murmurs or whispers, allowing any number and frequency of occurrence, had enough persuasive content or force to influence unbiased jurors. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that, on the balance of probabilities, biased jurors would not significantly affect unbiased ones during proceedings. Consequently, we still face the original question: suppose that biased jurors were accidentally selected, what were the chances that Socrates left the court a victim of judicial bias?

Socrates had four chances, though only one of them was formal and, indeed, required by legal procedure. The first, and this is the only formal chance, was to convince the jury by evidence and argument that he was innocent of the charges. Socrates claims that he did his best, and we began by accepting his claim. Socrates' second chance was to remind the jury of their oath; indeed, Socrates did remind the jurors of their oath at the close of his case: 'it is not a juror's duty to give justice as a favour, but to judge according to law, and this he has sworn to do' (35c3-4). However, what effect the oath could have on a biased juror depended on a number of factors, not least of which would be the juror's religiosity; but this is very difficult, if at all possible, to measure in a society like Athens, where increasing rationalism continually dented the frontiers of religion, superstition and myth. Thus, we have no means of calibrating the weight of the oath on each juror's mind. The third and fourth chances available to Socrates lay with the laxity in the rules of evidence, enabling a party to plead extra-legal considerations.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, character pleading is the third of the chances available to a party to counter jury bias against him.<sup>28</sup> Though to plead one's character may be inappropriate in all criminal cases, it is certainly appropriate in an indictment for moral corruption and for impiety, since such an indictment calls into judicial question the beliefs, practices and character of the accused. Charged with impiety and with corrupting the youth, Socrates appropriately pleaded his character, though it did not lead to his acquittal. Another extra-legal chance, the fourth chance available to Socrates to counter juror bias, was to plead for mercy and/or even to flatter the jury. Socrates, however, expressly refused to resort to this form of pleading on the grounds that it would pervert legality and justice (*Apology* 35). Socrates' conscientious refusal to resort to this type of pleading is certainly praiseworthy, but arguably a missed opportunity to neutralise any adverse biases that may have persisted in the mind of any juror.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusions

We found that, before his trial Socrates had a public image that was highly

prejudicial to the case before the court. We also found the publicity of this prejudice so extensive that every potential juror in 399 BC could be deemed to have knowledge of it. The critical question was whether, before proceedings began the individual juror was indifferent as to whether or not Socrates was guilty of the charge(s) brought against him. To answer that question we needed to know whether these prejudices had a strong or weak hold on the minds of the jurors: if strong, they would lead to juror bias, if weak, they would not. Though no individual or party could influence the selection of jurors for a court, Athenian legal procedure had no practicable method for detecting bias among prospective jurors of several hundred per court. But if biased jurors were accidentally selected, the party who is a potential victim of bias had four chances to counter the bias. First, the only formally chance required the party (potential victim of bias) to present a strong case by argument and evidence. Socrates claims that he argued well in court. Second, the party could remind the jury of their oath to judge the matter strictly according to law, where a law covered the case. But the jury oath, though powerful, depended for its effect on the religiosity of the individual juror, a factor we can hardly determine. At any rate, Socrates reminded the jury of their oath. Third, the party could plead his character. Socrates pleaded his character in court, but here too we have no means of determining its effect on the jurors. We do know, however, that Socrates was convicted despite pleading his character. Finally, the party could plead for mercy and/or flatter the jury. Socrates refused to do this. Though this pleading is perverse, Socrates' refusal to resort to it is arguably a missed opportunity to win sympathy and favour.

In the end, we have no means of verifying whether the verdict of the jurors was reached solely on the basis of the competing claims of prosecution and defence in court, or partly or wholly on the basis of pre-trial prejudicial biases against Socrates. Thus, it is impossible to verify Socrates' claim that his conviction is the result of judicial bias rather than the result of the prosecution's argument or a failure of defence.

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## Notes and References

1. 'Socrates' in this paper means the Socrates of Plato's *Apology*.
2. The Greek text is Loeb's (1914), with English translation by Fowler, H. N. The translations in this paper are my adaptation of Fowler's and Grube, G. M. A.'s in *Plato: Complete Works* (ed.) Cooper, John M. (1997), Indianapolis/Cambridge.
3. All references will be to Plato's *Apology*, unless otherwise indicated.
4. 'Malicious falsehood' is contained in 'pseudē katēgoremēna' at 18a6-7 and 'phthonōi kai diabolē' at 18d2. Cf. 19a2, 19b2.
5. Since 'being a busybody' by itself was not a crime, it is better to read the 'kai' epexegetically.

6. In Plutarch's *Alcibiades* 22.3 the indictment of impiety brought by Thessalus against Alcibiades contains the introductory clause 'adikein peri tō theō tēn Dēmētran kai tēn Korēn,' followed by the alleged offences.
7. Cf. *Republic* 538c6-539b; Aristophanes' *Clouds* 1019-1021, where Just Logic accuses Unjust Logic of inducing the belief that everything shameful is fine and the fine shameful. See further Reeve, C.D.C [1989] 164-165, *Socrates in the Apology*, Indianapolis/ Cambridge.
8. Cf. Allen, R.E. [1970] 47, *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms*. London: 'To an observer, elenchus would have appeared perhaps equal parts banter and hair-splitting. To a respondent, perhaps, a self-important politician cornered in the Agora, it must have seemed mainly to consist in subtle and unanswerable insult'.
9. As framed, the slander of eristic practice must be understood against the background of its otherwise implicit complex effects, including its potential for undermining traditional beliefs and values and for shaming men reputed or claiming to be wise.
10. Diogenes Laertius 2.40. Diogenes claims to be citing verbatim from a Roman writer called Favorinus, who in turn claims to have seen a copy of the indictment in the Metroôn in the Agora, which functioned as a public archive. Cf. *Apology* 24b6-9, where Socrates states the indictment in indirect speech as follows: [1] 'It says that Socrates does wrong (adikein), in that he [c] corrupts the youth and [a\*](i) does not acknowledge the gods the state acknowledges but (de)(ii) other new divine things'. The only important difference with Diogenes' version seems to be the order of the charges.
11. The prevailing reading is that it contains another charge, so that there are three charges in all. For those who see only two charges, see e.g., Beckman, James [1979] 55, *The Religious Dimension of Socrates' Thought*, Waterloo.
12. We do not need to quibble about the fact that the [a\*] part of the indictment is inherently contradictory, as Socrates pointed out in his defence. It is important that the one who framed it, the prosecution, understands it to constitute an accusation of atheism.
13. When Socrates, attending preliminary proceedings at the chief magistrate's office meets Euthyphro, he relates, and must therefore have understood then, that he has been indicted for corrupting the youth by teaching them not to believe in the gods of the city but other new divine things (*Euthyphro* 2c-3b, 3c6-d8).
14. Cf. Reeve, op.cit. [1989] 17-18.
15. McLeish, Kenneth [1980] 36, *The Theatre of Aristophanes*, Gt. Britain.
16. McLeish, op. cit. [1980] 35.
17. Cf. Ober, Josia [1989] 127-128, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, Princeton.
18. Cary, M & Haarhoff, T.J. [1961] 148-160, *Life and Thought in the Greek and Roman World*, London.
19. See Murray, Oswyn [1986] 204-233, 'Life and Society in Classical Times' in *The Oxford History of Classical World*, Oxford.
20. Socrates was popular in Athens (*Apology* 34e-35e1) and beyond. Though he did not travel outside Athens except on military missions (*Crito* 52b), he attracted numerous disciples both in Athens (*Apology* 33d-34a) and beyond. Cf. *Phaedo* 59b-c. In Athens Socrates spoke, and was known, to many people, different in age (*Apology* 30a), wealth,

and profession (*Apology* 21b-24b, *Republic* 1); and he spoke to them everywhere: at the agora (*Apology* 17c9); symposia (cf. Plato's *Symposium*), palaestrae (*Charmides* 153a-154a), gymnasia (*Euthyphro* 2a1-2, *Lysis* 203a, *Euthydemus* 271a).

21. See, for e.g., Gray, Christopher Berry [1999] 462, ed., *The Philosophy of Law: An Encyclopedia*, New York/London.

22. See Hasset, Joseph M. [1984] 290-296, 'Prejudicial Publicity and a Jury's Pretrial Knowledge' in *Readings in the Philosophy of Law*, ed. Arthur, John & Shaw, William H.

23. The veracity of the oath, whose source is Demosthenes 24.149-51, has been debated, but there is no powerful reason for rejecting it. See also the comments of Bonner, R. J. & Smith, Getrude [1968] 153ff., *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle*, New York, Vol. II.

24. Any citizen who was 30 years old or more and was not in debt or under *atimia* qualified for jury service. *Atimia* involved the temporary suspension of a citizen's rights until the wrong which was the ground of such suspension was discharged either by the effluxion of time or by specific performance of some obligation.

25. In his defence against the charge of violating the decree prohibiting him from attending religious festivals (*Andokides* 1.2, 1.111; *Demosthenes* 24.105), Andokides alludes to the case in which his father prosecuted Speusippus for illegally informing about him regarding the parody of the mysteries, and he says that the case came before a panel of 6,000 jurors! This is the total number of people listed for jury service in the year – perhaps the only instance, if it is true, of the whole body sitting as a single court.

26. Indeed, a party was required to produce the relevant law in support of his case. But the role of the presiding officer was merely to see that the contestants observed the rules.

27. The rules of evidence were lax in many other ways. For example, hearsay was by law excluded in evidence, except to report what had been said by a person now dead. (See McDowell, D.M. [1978] 243, *The Law of Classical Athens*, Ithaca). In practice hearsay may have been tolerated, as the first half of Socrates' defence was against what he heard others say about him.

28. Cary, T. M. & Haarhoff, T. J. [1961] 39; *Apology* 34b6-35b8; Morrow, Glenn [1960] 241-296, *Plato's Cretan City*, Princeton.

29. It may well be speculated that the small number of votes that tilted the scale toward Socrates' conviction represents those whose biases could not be disabused by his legal (that is, without the extra-legal) defence against the charges.



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# Difference, συμπλοκή and the hierarchy of ideas in Plato's Sophist

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## Abstract

*Starting from the dialectic of intertwinement, the weaving together (συμπλοκή) of ideas in the Sophist, this paper tries to determine the place, function and significance of Difference and Hierarchy among platonic ideas. To that effect, it is first established that and how the notion of difference becomes the fundamental and even substantial structural principle of the dialectic of being and non-being, motion and rest, and finally of the notions of unity and identity themselves. In the second instance, the question of the hierarchy among ideas is interpreted and understood as the question of liberty. Namely, that very hierarchy is understood as an intrinsic and an innate one, i.e. as the set of dialectical relationships between ideas that follow from their own essence and being, which therefore is not nor cannot be externally imposed or forced upon them. Such a character of hierarchy is, then, recognized and exemplified in the case of the individual and the collective, where it turns out not only that there exists a clear idea of individuality in Plato, but also that every individual necessarily belongs to some collective and indeed seeks to unite with the collective in the same way and for the same reasons every thing or idea tends towards its form, or its own proper good.*

The same origin or foundation that enables participation<sup>1</sup> enables and conditions the interlacing and intertwinement, the weaving together of ideas, their συμπλοκή.<sup>2</sup> This foundation is, again, the *Difference*. So, without difference there would be no μέθεξις and no συμπλοκή. This difference puts the latter in a relation of mutual conditioning. Thus, there would be no συμπλοκή if there were no μέθεξις, just as μέθεξις would not be possible without συμπλοκή and could not take place outside it. So, further progress towards the complete articulation of the relationship between identity and individuality, on one hand, and difference or plurality, on the other, goes through the explanation of the weaving together of ideas, or συμπλοκή τῶν *Phronimon*, Vol 7 (2) 2006 ————— 29

εἰδῶν. Ideas participate in each other because they are woven together in such a way that one idea becomes inseparable from another. Its being and essence, its εἶδος, or οὐσία, are determined by its being mixed with other ideas. More precisely, the being and essence of at least some ideas is determined and established as such (as an ideal being and essence, as the being and essence of an idea, and of that particular idea, not some other) by the mixture of their own proper attributes with attributes of other ideas. Therefore, one can read συμπλοκή as an epitome of μέθεξις which proves that (and shows how) their being the unity of identity and difference is absolutely indispensable for the very being of ideas, or how much their identity is established by and made of difference. For in συμπλοκή we have the difference as the determining factor for the essence of every single idea. So (the fact of) συμπλοκή is the existence of difference in identity, or an existence of μέθεξις, its realization and embodiment.

In view of the fact that in the *Sophist* Plato speaks about Being and Essence (οὐσία) rather than about Justice, Good or Liberty, someone might think that this has nothing to do with the problematic of the *Republic* or any other explicitly political dialogue. But, that is an unsustainable position, because Plato's insistence on the decisive significance of the theory of ideas for his political philosophy leaves little space for such ventures. In fact, everything points in the opposite direction, namely in the direction of the complete unity of metaphysics and politics, or of ethics and politics in Plato.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, every metaphysical statement has a clear and decisive impact and importance in the political context as well. What counts for the ideas as such, taken in their own proper realm and with respect to their specific οὐσία, must apply to the field of the best (or, at least, the best possible) community and its structure, character, rules, members and practices.

This is only too obvious throughout the *Sophist*, but even more so in those parts of the dialogue which explicitly deal with the concept and problem of συμπλοκή of ideas (e.g. 251d-257c). For, while the discussion about the possibility of false statements, concepts and discourses pertaining to One and Many (243d-245e) does indeed have important consequences for the relationship between the individual and the collective which are easily inferred from such an elevated ontological discussion; and while the succeeding analysis of Motion, Rest, Change and Becoming (246a-250e), and especially the definition of Being as Power to affect and be affected, or to act and be acted upon (247e1-4, 248c8-10), have an even more immediate bearing on the socio-political reality<sup>4</sup>; it is in this passage about the συμπλοκή of ideas that the possibility of the relationship and unity of the individual and the collective really decisively opens. It is here that one recognizes the necessity of multiplicity in the ideal and realizes, not only that ideas are individual collectives (or collective individuals), i.e. unique

inseparable multiplicities, but also why they are such.

Having previously (250b-c) established the Being, that is, the reality and existence, as an idea, Plato goes on (251d-253e) to explain and analyze the mutual participation, intertwinement, the weaving together of ideas, or simply their συμπλοκή. The whole passage is dedicated to proving that ideas do “interlace,” “intertwine,” or “blend” (as Cornford has it<sup>5</sup>). Thus, he first shows that it is logically impossible for ideas not to “blend” at all (252a-c), just as it is impossible for all of them to combine (252d). Therefore, the third choice imposes itself as the natural one. It must be that some ideas can and do combine, while others do not (252e-253a).<sup>6</sup> This is exactly a breaking point, which invokes dialectic as the necessary art here. Generally, dialectic is called upon whenever the situation is not black-and-white, whenever we have a complicated, intricate state of affairs and whenever we are demanded to make decisions in such situations.

Dialectic is generally a practical science or art because, more than any other method and form of thinking, it is directed to practice and has practical consequences. Dialectic links theory and practice by having them both, or by being both, and that is one of the reasons why it is the most proper philosophical method for Plato. It combines philosophy and politics in itself and is hence the epitome of the fundamental principle of his philosophy and thought in general. Dialectic is “a guide on the voyage of discourse” (253b11), it teaches the correct and proper use of that discourse, and by virtue of its being a theoretical-practical method and science, this voyage starts in the ideal and ends in the practical. For our only power, our only tool and weapon in the world, that on which depends our very survival (physical, psychical, cultural and any other) is our intellect, our faculty of thinking and knowing, so it is of ultimate importance that we know how to think accurately, clearly and distinctly.<sup>7</sup> That is why Plato does not hesitate to pronounce dialectic as a “science [which is] perhaps the most important of all.”<sup>8</sup>

It is exactly this need for clearness in our thoughts, thinking and knowledge that we accomplish with “the science of dialectic,” whose “business” is “Dividing according to kinds, not taking the same form for a different one or a different one for the same” (253c11-13). The dialectician is the only one who “discerns clearly one form everywhere extended throughout many, where each one lies apart, and many forms, different from one another, embraced from without by one form, and again one form connected in a unity through many wholes, and many forms entirely marked off apart. That means knowing how to distinguish, kind by kind, in what ways the several kinds can or cannot combine” (253d5-e1). And, which is of no less importance, the other name for dialectician is philosopher, “lover of wisdom” (253e4-5).

Therefore, just like μέθεξις in the *Parmenides*, in the *Sophist* now

συμπλοκή brings dialectic out to the front through its form and structure. Admittedly, both concepts are analyzed dialectically from the outset, so the result is not unexpected. And, one can safely assume that, if some other method were applied, the concepts and the whole examination would most probably have been different. But, that needn't concern us. All we are after in both cases is to get to the bottom of dialectic, and we couldn't have found better examples for that. Indeed, the fact that μέθεξις and συμπλοκή invoke, produce and issue in dialectic (in philosophy as dialectic) just as much as they are invoked, produced and structured by that same dialectic, is very welcome and convenient here because Plato's whole thought is permeated with dialectic and multiply marked with it. Therefore, this fact helps one grasp the notion of dialectic in its entirety by revealing its different aspects and dimensions. And without that, one can never hope to even begin to understand what Plato's political philosophy is all about.

In the immediate following section of the dialogue (254c-257c), Plato continues in the same dialectical vein and undertakes to demonstrate how συμπλοκή works on the example of the most paradigmatic (he says "important") set of ideas, that is, Being, Motion and Rest (254d3-4). This enterprise, however, shows dialectic to be rather static: everything is simply being discovered as fixed and is even further fastened in its proper constellation. Nothing is really produced nor created by the movement of thought. Thus, having both motion and rest pre-set and given, Plato continues towards exposing the basis of actually every possible relationship of ideas, and of their combining in particular.

This foundation is furnished by the concepts/ideas of *sameness* and *difference*, or of *the same* and *the different*.<sup>9</sup> The discussion that follows (255a-d) exposes the constellation of the five ideas (Being, Motion, Rest, Identity and Difference) in such a way that difference definitely acquires a central place in it, thus not only showing that every idea is a constellation of its identity (identities) and difference (differences), but also that difference is the motor of dialectic and therefore of the ideal as well. Namely, it is clearly shown that, without difference there could be no relationship between ideas – and hence no ideal realm, nor any ideality whatsoever. (One must not forget that the case in question is an exemplary one.<sup>10</sup>) The importance ascribed to difference here is so huge that Plato ends up stating that the nature of difference "pervades all the forms, for each one is different from the rest, not by virtue of its own nature, but because it partakes of the character of difference" (255e3-6). And he goes on to demonstrate how every idea, the essence and being of every idea, is the result of dialectical interplay of identity and difference.<sup>11</sup> And in this interplay, indeed thanks to it, one becomes fully aware of the possibility of the characteristically Platonic, *static dialectic*.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the dialectic of identity and difference – which, as we have seen, is based primarily on difference and is pervaded by it – pertains to the very idea of Being as well. Thus, after explaining that and how difference enables one to speak (and think) of both Being and Non-Being – thereby also connecting, uniting the idea of being with its opposite and completing it, that is, finishing and fulfilling its (both inward and outward) determination<sup>13</sup> – the conclusion easily follows: *difference pervades*. Moreover, it pervades the idea of Being as such, it at once enables it and determines it. Once again, there can be no idea of Being without the idea of Difference. The idea of Being participates in the idea of Difference, and *vice versa*, but it is the latter that carries the structuring power. That is why Plato states that non-being is difference immediately afterwards (257b2-4), but now its character as the determining force of Being is clearly made possible only because it is recognized as difference. Difference is, in fact, the creative force here. That is why Plato compares it to knowledge and emphasizes this comparison by saying that “The nature of the different appears to be parceled out, in the same way as knowledge” (257c6-7).

Together with its counter-part, identity, difference gets to be related, compared and united (identified) with being and knowledge, the two most important and prominent attributes of the paramount idea, the idea of all ideas: the Idea of the Good. After all, the Idea of the Good as the idea of ideality necessarily holds the identity (identities) and difference (differences) of ideas in itself and as itself.

For this reason Plato, in the section that closes the discussion of Being and Difference (257d-259d), further explains the nature and the status of Difference in the dialectic of ideas (and of the ideal in general) only to end up in assigning it the central and fundamental position and role.<sup>14</sup> Finally, this position and role are confirmed and strengthened with regard to the very possibility and nature of philosophical discourse and thought.<sup>15</sup>

What follows from all these deliberations is a simple fact that Being is the *harmony of differences*, which posits it among the fundamental principles and ultimate ends of dialectic. For, in its most significant part, dialectic is the science of Being; the science, method and knowledge of the difference between that which is and that which is not. This is how Plato’s “definitions” of Being<sup>16</sup> could be understood and interpreted, in spite of their apparent negativity and dismissal of the alternative. Of course, such an interpretation particularly invokes and relies on the insight that, with regard to any given pair of opposed ideas, Being is “a third thing over and above these two [παρὰ ταῦτα]” (250b7). On one hand, because it seems that, in the given context (i.e. in the context of the dichotomy between motion and rest, which directly issues in another dichotomy: that between mobile and immobile dialectic, or between the path to knowledge and that knowledge itself), the only logical

conclusion of this statement is that the Being must be the unity of the two, if it is to be in accordance with the usual Platonic logic, which always ends up in setting the third term as the resolving unity of the previous two. On the other hand, the relationship that is established between Being and Non-Being gives us the right to conclude this. For, Non-Being or negation does not lack Being. In its negativity, it still retains a positive existence, that of a different kind of being, essence, etc. On account of this different meaning, Being itself changes scope and sense, and becomes the harmonious unity of itself and the Non-Being. So, just as Being on the whole cannot be just one side of the opposition, but the totality of that opposition (and it can be that only as the harmony of differences, of opposites), it also cannot be just one of the two, but the totality of their unity. In other words, if Being is neither of the contradicting ideas, it has to be their harmonious unity. Finally, such a “unifying” perspective is certainly more proper to philosophy in contrast to sophistic. Namely, Plato demands going all the way to Being in order to be able to define the philosopher, whereas it is the definition of the sophist that can satisfy itself with the exposition and emphasis on the limit that separates Being and Non-Being (254a)<sup>17</sup>; and this demand obviously aims at the positive approach to and determination of the relation between the two.

What immediately follows from the weaving together of ideas, just as it followed from the conception of μέθεξις, is the necessity of a hierarchy between ideas as well as between realms of being. Platonic logic is very simple and very Greek here: if there is a difference and a unity, then there must also be some kind of organization of the unified differences. This for Plato means that there must exist some order of things: they have to be parts of a κόσμος, if they are to be at all. For, the only (proper) way for an individual (thing, entity, being) to exist and endure is to participate in a community, to be a part of the collective, of an organized and ordered ensemble. And, since the collective itself is an entity of a kind, which is to say that it is an individual as well (only on a different level and in a different manner), an organism<sup>18</sup>; since it is such, the collective demands and imposes a division of labor, so to speak, or better a division and distribution of responsibilities and rights among its parts/members. Thus, the division itself – the same one that stems from the difference and preserves its form in itself and as itself – establishes a hierarchy. More precisely, the division (διαίρεσις) always already is a hierarchy, it means a hierarchy.<sup>19</sup>

So, hierarchy is the fundamental form of division and difference, and therefore equal to and same as themselves. As such, then, it is also the form of ideality, the inner fundamental structure of ideas, the pattern of their being and existence. Hierarchy is the way they relate to themselves and to others, be they other ideas or other kinds of reality. Most notably, the relationship between one and many is hierarchically marked and structured.

Therefrom emerges the ever-higher position of the one in relation to the many. This primacy and precedence is structural. It depends on the necessity established by the essence of ideas. Namely, ideas themselves and as such, being “one over many,” or being the principle(s) of unity, impose exactly this type and character of hierarchy. Their own being is based on this hierarchy, they are in themselves organized in this way. Accordingly, the very condition of existence of any kind of organized unity posits the one on top of its edifice, with the many being subjected to it and striving towards it. The many have an inherent tendency to unite and become one. Unity and singularity are the innate determinations and goals of plurality. It is in the nature of every thing, being, entity, to strive towards a higher ground, which is always its unity with others, the One.

However totalitarian and authoritarian this hierarchy might seem to us today, it cannot be seriously taken as such. In its meaning and scope, it is far from any violent and forceful identification and uniformity. For, it remains as a significant Platonic insight that the only possible and true identity is the unity of differences. This insight unambiguously supposes a free union of the different many, which means that they are never forced to renounce their idiosyncrasies, not even after the completion of their unification. In all its uniqueness, the unity remains differential, even heterogeneous. And, its strongest cohesive force is exactly the completely free tendency of each part to join the union and stay in it for as long as it exists. And, exactly because participation (μέθεξις) and weaving together (συνπλοκή) are the essential attributes of each and every idea, thing, being and entity – that is, because the Difference is the foundation, the being (εἶναι) and essence (οὐσία), the truth (ἀλήθεια) of every possible unity and identity – because of that, unification is not imposed from the outside, but is an expression and a result of one’s innermost desires and dispositions, a fundamental form and mode of its essence and being. The community created in this way is fundamentally free, because it is based on and enabled by intrinsic, innate needs and qualities of its members. It is autonomously determined and brought about from within, by the internal necessity of their very οὐσία; which is to say: freely, by and through their freedom. The only real, the only true community/collectivity is the unity of free individuals, and such a unity can only mean that they unite freely in order to realize and confirm their own, individual liberty – the liberty to be what they will, and thus also what they really are.<sup>20</sup> The individuals have to tend towards their union by sheer force of their innermost being. They strive towards unity because they are as they are; and being what they are implies their communing with others, their being incorporated in a community, being a member of the collective. The very notion of individuality imposes unification as its proper mode of being. Unification is, therefore, self-

realization and self-completion of the individual, an exercise of one's own liberty.

This is nowhere so obvious and emphasized as in the realm of ideas. Each and every idea in its individuality is an example, a paradigm of such a unity, community, collectivity. The whole structure of ideality amounts to liberty.

Thus, Plato manages to conceive liberty without disposing of necessity, an accomplishment that was rarely succeeded afterwards. The key to this lies, as we have seen, in the conception of μέθεξις, or rather in the theory of ideas and in the being and essence of its central and ultimate conception, *the idea of the Good*.

In light of the last few remarks and of the context they refer to, this idea of the Good still calls for further explanation. It is easily understood that and how the questioning about the relation between one and many pertains primarily to the idea of the Good and to the μέθεξις present in it (through it). Namely, Plato's understanding of this idea supposes not only that the good of something is its unity, organized and gathered around its true essence, purpose and meaning, but in that it also assumes that there is always only one real and true good for each thing, for each phenomenon or being. Thus, the question of unity (that is, the question of the possibility, of reasons and conditions of unity) is central for Plato's main task, the examination and cognition of the Good; and reversely, the questioning of the idea of unity is the fundamental condition and proof of the existence and truthfulness of the idea of the Good and of the whole hierarchy of beings founded upon it.

Of course, the questioning of the idea of unity supposes and means the investigation of the relationship between the individual and the collective. The inner logic of such questioning also demands that it pertains to the ideas of these entities: to the idea of the individual and the idea of the collective. Since something has already been said about the collective character of ideas, and since it is in fact rather unproblematic in Plato's work, particularly compared to the idea of the individual and the according character of ideas (especially of the idea of the Good), we shall now turn to the latter.

It is commonly admitted that there is no place for individuals in Plato's work and universe.<sup>21</sup> Given its holistic character, one can rightfully assume that, if true, such a conclusion must also apply to the very *idea of the individual*. Thus, it seems that we should infer that there is no room for such an idea in Plato, either. However, this is exactly the problem. For, it does not follow from the logic of Plato's thought. One could not find any reason for that. The idea of the individual is dismissed neither by the basic principles of the theory of ideas, nor by its letter. On the contrary, everything points at the necessary existence of a "class" of beings that possess individuality as their common denominator. Such a class should comprise all individual beings

and thus almost all beings, since almost all of them are individuals in one way or another.

However, as Plato implicitly shows, the independent status of such a “class” or idea is very ambiguous. On one hand, it seems to be equal with the idea of the collective, or with the idea of idea in the above mentioned sense, for it turns out that it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of such a thing as individual in the full sense – in the sense of the individual as a unique, singular being or entity purged of all plurality<sup>22</sup> – which wouldn’t again be an idea, a pure form. Therefore, in the first place, individuality belongs exclusively to the realm of ideas, and, secondly, such individuality is always a collectivity in some sense. This springs not only from its ideal being, but also from its content, that is, from its specific form and meaning.

According to the latter, the individual is equal to the collective in the plain sense that individuals are always compounds, fabrics interwoven from different and yet elementary attributes and entities. Individuals are combinations of elements – of forms, essences, attributes, entities, even beings – just like *the paradigmatic individual* being: *the soul*.<sup>23</sup> The specific (individual) character of individuals is, therefore, due to the idea of individuality, which itself is nothing but a certain form of relationship between those elements/ingredients. The idea of the individual seems to be nothing else than the notion of a unity of elements, of their interweaving which is itself conceived as elementary, or as an individual (indivisible, integral) unity. As such, it also seems utterly paradoxical.

Therefore, the only real individual (one that can rightfully be called by that name) is the idea of the individual, which is to say that “individual” is always and only an idea. Particular individuality always returns to its ideal being, that is, returns to the collective by virtue of its being an idea, and its individuality is recognized as nothing but an ensemble of parts and elements, which are again of a collective nature. That is, individual relates to the collective not simply and not only by means of its being a unity of parts, aspects and attributes; but also because these parts, aspects and attributes are collective products, they are themselves products and creations of a community and as such fully originate from community and belong to it.

Thus, the individual is the collective *both* as a particular individual being *and* as the idea of such beings. It seems that they are not simply equal, but rather the same, identical, so one wonders whether there can be any valid, legitimate and necessary hierarchy (among ideas or anything else for that matter) whatsoever. But then – at least when it comes to the individual-collective relationship, or when it comes to the idea of the Good – there might not be any hierarchy at all, not in the usual sense of a vertically directed order. For, the idea of the Good – being the paramount idea, the idea of all ideas, and hence being the ultimate form of collectivity, the idea

of the collective as such – is at the same time one and only, unique and single, and thereby is also the ultimate individuality, the idea of the individual and individuality as such.

This counts for ideas in general as well, although to a somewhat lesser extent. For, ideas always denote and delineate some collectivity, so that being ideal always means being an ideal collective, ideal collectivity; and this is to say that ideas are thereby also ideal individuals.

This dialectic of the mutual μέθεξις of the individual and the collective is in keeping with Plato's own assumptions and assertions about the idea of the Good.<sup>24</sup> It particularly emphasizes its total, global and absolute character, and the fact that it is recognizable and understandable only within the theory of ideas; that is, only by and through the contemplation, θεωρεῖν, of ideas as such. In fact, the Good, the pure and absolute idea of the Good, *is* this very θεωρεῖν.

The recognition of the total character of the idea of the Good, therefore, resolves the problem of μέθεξις, i.e. the problem of individuality and collectivity of ideas, by (re)moving it from the realm of the relationships between ideas and things to the purely ideal sphere, to the level of ideality, into the realm of ideas. It moves the mechanism of μέθεξις to another sphere and makes it work there, thus exposing its nature and structure. But, as we have seen, by that same move, μέθεξις is turned into the principle of ideal hierarchy and eventually becomes that hierarchy. So, the question of the form, nature and structure of the idea of the Good and of ideas in general, is now not so much a problem of participation, as it is a problem of self-identity and self-contradiction (or better, of self-difference<sup>25</sup>) of ideas – of their uniqueness, unity and singularity, on one hand, and their difference and plurality, on the other. Therefore, in searching for the answers to questions like: "how can an idea (any idea) be one and many at the same time?", "how can it be a union of different things, entities or qualities?", "how can one explain such double nature of ideas?", we can no longer look simply at μέθεξις and ask about it. Rather, we have to ask about ideas as such, and examine their hierarchy, their infrastructure, their inter-relations and constellations.

And, from such a (ideal) perspective, we see clearly how μέθεξις becomes what it always genuinely was, a *dialectical technique and mechanism*, through which the idea of the Good is recognized in its totality, i.e. as the totality of relationships, and also recognized as the very form of dialectic, as its noumenal image and epitome. Since, furthermore, μέθεξις as such primarily aims at *differentiation* and *distinguishing* (between the degrees of reality, the kinds of being, kinds of thought, speech, conception and representation), and is thereby nothing else than the fundamental *unifying principle* of universe; since it must also be the organizational

principle of that (and every other possible) universe and of all its spheres and segments, a principle that posits the universe as an *organism*; we also see how μέθεξις reveals another important point, namely that universe is an organism, a living unity of being, exactly and only because it has *difference* standing at its very center as the ultimate foundation and principle. The truth of the world is the *dialectical unity of differences*.

Dialectic once again turns out to be the key to the problem of ideas, i.e. of their paradoxical status, both in relation to things and in relation to themselves. For, ideas are absolute forms of thought and language, and as such they are, in fact, nothing but *forms of relationships*. This means that they are, first, forms of relationships between absolute forms themselves, then between these forms and things that originate and participate in them, and finally between those things themselves. In other words, ideas are pure forms of συμπλοκή and μέθεξις, and the only science (or scientific method) that takes upon itself to explore and expose these relationships, the only science capable of understanding them in their totality and unity, is Dialectic. Also, thanks to its particular structure and the unique presuppositions with which it operates, dialectic can go where the common sense and its logic cannot.

This means, not only that dialectic is the crown science which provides solutions for the antinomies of common sense,<sup>26</sup> but also that ἀπορίαι of common sense and of reality on the whole – that is, the ἀπορίαι of the sensible world and of the nature of particulars belonging to it, as well as the ἀπορίαι of ideas themselves and of the ideal realm – cannot be thought properly, let alone resolved, by purely analytical means.<sup>27</sup> Simple symbolic (formal, mathematical, analytical) logic does not suffice when it comes to the totality of being. To understand this, we need exactly what Plato gives us: a dialectical logic, or simply dialectic. Dialectic is able to perform this task because it is not symbolic, nor just formal, but is also a material, essential and structural logic of the world, i.e. because it is an ontological doctrine. Dialectic is the proper dimension, proper attitude and way of dealing with paradoxical notions and entities, that is, exactly those ἀπορίαι that surpass the powers of ordinary reasoning and of what we usually call logic; because it is based upon the insight that – just as unity is founded upon its apparent opposite: difference – the foundations of rationality (and even the essence and origin of the rational) needn't be such themselves. They are most probably irrational and rationally inexplicable.

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## Endnotes

1. For an analysis of participation in Plato see: A. Zistakis, "Difference And Participation In Plato's *Parmenides*," in *Phronimon* vol. 5 [2], 2004.

2. For the record, although it will hopefully become completely clear in the course of the present discussion, let us note that this should not be understood as a statement of identity between μέθεξις and συμπλοκή, as was claimed, for example, by Cornford (cf. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935, esp. pp. 256-79). For an analytical refutation of such position see J. L. Ackrill, "Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251-259," in G. Vlastos, ed., *Plato – A Collection of Critical Essays*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1971, vol. I, pp. 216-18.
3. The arguments that, for example, J. Annas presents in support of a separation of the ethical from the political and of the primacy of the former over the latter in Plato, and particularly in the *Republic* (cf. *Platonic Ethics Old and New*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, ch. 4, esp. pp. 80-92), seem quite insufficient and unconvincing. Equally unconvincing would be a reciprocal reduction and assimilation of the ethical to the political. (Cf., for example, P. Aubenque, "Politique et éthique chez Aristote," in *Ktema* 5, 1980, p. 215, n. 14.)
4. This not the least because it is drawn from the analysis of the materialistic, i.e. empirical theory of being and reality, and thus directly connected to the phenomenal.
5. Cf. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 256 sq.
6. For this kind of reading see, among others, J. L. Ackrill, "ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΕΙΔΩΝ" (in Vlastos I, 1971, pp. 201-9); W.J. Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 56-7; L.P. Gerson, "A Distinction in Plato's *Sophist*" (in N.D. Smith, ed., *PLATO Critical Assessments*, vol. IV, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 131-32); and M. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 221-34.
7. Descartes echoes this later, both in his *Discourse on Method* and *The Meditations* (see *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. by F. E. Sutcliffe, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). In *Discourse*, however, he not only repeatedly emphasizes the demand for *clear and distinct* insight into reality (cf., for example, the first rule of method, p. 41: "to include in my judgments nothing more than what presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind that I might have no occasion to place it in doubt"), but also incorporates some fundamental Platonic methodological principles in his own newly discovered method. Most notably, and despite the obviously different intentions, those characteristic of Platonic dialectic, such as division and hypothesis. The latter, for example, appear in and as the second and the third of the four basic rules in *Discourse* 2: "The second, to divide each of the difficulties that I was examining into as many parts as might be possible and necessary in order best to solve it. – The third, to conduct my thoughts in an orderly way, beginning with the simplest objects and the easiest to know, in order to climb gradually, as by degrees, as far as the knowledge of the most complex" (p. 41). Later on, in a similarly Platonic tone, Descartes leaves no doubt as to where his inspiration lies. For, quite dialectically, he explains that the reason why the majority of people do not realize the evident truth of Cogito, God and ideas in general, "is that they never lift their minds above tangible things, and that they are so accustomed not to think of anything except by imagining it, which is a mode of thinking peculiar to material objects, that everything which is not within the realm of imagination seems to them unintelligible" (*Discourse* 4, p. 57). Finally, in a passage strikingly resembling the *Sophist*, Descartes concludes about error and untruth: "if we often enough have ideas which contain errors, they can only be those which contain something confused and obscure, because in this they participate in nothingness, that is to say that they are in us in this

confused way only because we are not completely perfect" (pp. 58-9).

8. *Sophist* 253c4-5.

9. Cf. 254d13. The additional substantive is here indispensable because the two are ideas (which means they are entities of reality, real beings and determinations) of the Being itself and as such. On the general problem of the status of Being in the *Sophist* (particularly with respect to the "greatest kinds" [μέγιστα γένη] and to the distinction between forms *qua* forms and forms *qua* their nature) see, among other: G. E. M. Anscombe, "The New Theory of Forms" (*Monist* 50, 1966, pp. 403-20); M. Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage: Platons Gebrauch von "ist" und "ist nicht" im Sophistes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967); G.E.L. Owen, "Plato on Not-Being" (in *Vlastos I*, 1971, pp. 223-67); R. Ketchum, "Participation and Predication in the *Sophist* 251-260" (*Phronesis* 23, 1978, pp. 42-62); R. Heinaman, "Being in the *Sophist*" (*Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 65, 1983, pp. 1-17); L. P. Gerson, "A Distinction" (esp. pp. 132-34); and J. Roberts, "The Problem about Being in the *Sophist*" (*History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3, 1986 – reprinted in Smith 1998, esp. pp. 147-51). For a recent example of different approach to the *Sophist*, which understands and treats the whole middle part of the dialogue (236d-264b concerning Being and Not-Being, συμπλοκή and μέγιστα γένη) as "digression," see N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist: Between the Sophist and the Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The main goal of the dialogue, according to Notomi, is the elucidation of the interdependence of the definitions of the sophist and the philosopher, and the central unifying principle of the inquiry itself is neither Being nor Not-Being, but the notion of *appearing*. As much as one is inclined to appreciate Notomi's arguments – especially his interpretation of the structure/organization of the *Sophist* and the criticism of the standard approaches to the dialogue – I fail to see, however, why notion of appearing should be more fundamental than that of difference. On the contrary, the latter seems to establish the former, not the other way round.

10. Cf. 254c.

11. This is exemplified on the case of Motion and Rest at 255e8-256d10.

12. "So too, supposing motion itself did in any way participate in rest, there would be nothing outrageous in speaking of it as stationary [Οὐκοῦν κἂν εἴ πη μετελάμβανεν αὐτὴ κίνησις στάσεως οὐδὲν ἂν ἄτοπον ἦν στάσιμον αὐτὴν προσαγορεύειν;]" (256b6-7). But, as it soon becomes clear, this possibility can stem only from the dialectic of identity and difference, not from motion's real participation in rest (cf. 256b9-c3).

13. Cf. 256d11-e3: "Ἔστιν ἄρα ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὸ μὴ ὄν ἐπὶ τε κινήσεως εἶναι καὶ κατὰ πάντα τὰ γένη κατὰ πάντα γὰρ ἢ θατέρου φύσις ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένη τοῦ ὄντος ἕκαστον οὐκ ὄν ποιεῖ καὶ σύμπαντα δὴ κατὰ ταῦτα οὕτως οὐκ ὄντα ὀρθῶς ἐροῦμεν καὶ πάλιν ὅτι μετέχει τοῦ ὄντος εἶναι τε καὶ ὄντα.."

14. Cf. 258e6-259b6: "Μὴ τοίνυν ἡμᾶς εἶπη τις ὅτι τοῦναντίον τοῦ ὄντος τὸ μὴ ὄν ἀποφαινόμενοι τολμῶμεν λέγειν ὡς ἔστιν. ἡμεῖς γὰρ περὶ μὲν ἐναντίου τινὸς αὐτῷ χαίρειν πάλαι λέγομεν εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μὴ λόγον ἔχον ἢ καὶ παντάπασιν ἄλογον· ὁ δὲ νῦν εἰρήκαμεν εἶναι τὸ μὴ ὄν ἢ πεισάτω τις ὡς οὐ καλῶς λέγομεν ἐλέγξας ἢ μέχριπερ ἂν ἀδυνατῆ λεκτέον καὶ ἐκείνῳ καθάπερ ἡμεῖς λέγομεν ὅτι συμμείγνυται τε ἀλλήλοις τὰ γένη καὶ τό τε ὄν καὶ θατέρον διὰ πάντων καὶ δι' ἀλλήλων διεληλυθότε τὸ μὲν ἕτερον μετασχὸν τοῦ ὄντος ἔστι μὲν διὰ ταύτην τὴν μέθεξιν οὐ μὴν ἐκείνῳ γε οὐ μετέσχεν ἀλλ' ἕτερον ἕτερον δὲ τοῦ ὄντος ὄν ἔστι σαφέστατα ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἶναι μὴ ὄν· τὸ δὲ ὄν αὐθιγῶς μετεληφὸς ἕτερον τῶν ἄλλων ἂν εἴη γενῶν ἕτερον δ' ἐκείνων ἀπάντων ὄν οὐκ

ἔστιν ἕκαστον αὐτῶν οὐδὲ σύμπαντα τὰ ἄλλα πλὴν αὐτό ὥστε τὸ ὄν ἀναμφισβητήτως αὐτὴ μυρία ἐπὶ μυρίοις οὐκ ἔστι καὶ τὰλλα δὴ καθ' ἕκαστον οὕτω καὶ σύμπαντα πολλαχῆ μὲν ἔστι πολλαχῆ δ' οὐκ ἔστιν."

15. It is definitely of utmost importance for discourse, because it enables συμπλοκή, which in turn enables relationship between ideas (and, therefore, also of things), which finally enables the being and the nature/essence (οὐσία) of discourse. (Cf. 259e4-260b1.)

16. Such as, for example, the one (in *Sophist* 250b7-c4) with respect to motion and rest, which posits it as "Τρίτον ἄρα τι παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ ὄν," which "οὐκ ἄρα κίνησις καὶ στάσις ἐστὶ συναμφότερον τὸ ὄν ἀλλ' ἕτερον δὴ τι τούτων."

17. See also V. Goldschmidt, *Les dialogues de Platon*, Paris: Vrin, 1963, p. 221.

18. Cf. *Republic* 462c-d.

19. Without it, there would be no context, and without this, many practices and values would lose their meaning and importance, which would make it impossible to understand why they are given any importance whatsoever. Goldschmidt (p. 148) expresses this quite correctly: "ni dans le monde des images, ni parmi les Formes, Platon n'entend abolir toute hiérarchie. La stratégie, 'précieuse et parente' de la politique (*Politicus* 303e 9-10), le législateur-philosophe, quoi qu'en dise le Sophiste, ne la tient pas pour l'égal de la chasse aux poux (*Sophiste* 227b1-5). Jugée et dirigée à partir de l'Essence, elle occupe, parmi les techniques pratiquées dans la Cité, une place privilégiée. Mais, érigée en Valeur indépendante, elle n'est que fausse valeur, en rien préférable à ses rivales – qu'elles s'appellent médecine, gymnastique ou art financier (*Gorgias* 452a)." The existence and importance of context, i.e. of hierarchy, therefore, seems to reflect the importance of the ideal realm for the (existence and meaning of) phenomenal one. It appears to serve as a sort of compass for those living, dwelling in the latter; as a blueprint of its organization without which we would be completely disoriented and hopeless.

20. As we have shown, the being of an entity is determined by its essence, which is noetic. It is from this noetic essence that springs the will to be what one is, as well. The importance of the will for being, therefore, originates in the difference between the given state of an entity, or of its temporary being, on one hand, and its noetic essence, or its rational notion and purpose, on the other. Hence, one could say that νοῦς establishes the difference and deference between the essence and the phenomena, whereas the *will* inserts itself in/within the hiatus that opens in the middle/center of being. From all this clearly follows that there cannot be any will prior to and without νοῦς, and that will is always essentially rational.

21. See M. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, esp. pp. 3-21.

22. Plato does not endorse nor does he accept τὰ ἄτομα in the Democritean or any other metaphysical sense than the formal one. He conceives their being only by and through positing them as forms, ideas. Only as ideas do they have ontological status and significance; and they are ideas only by virtue of their soulfulness. In other words, individuals are always men and the individual is primarily the human.

23. Cf. *Phaedrus* 246a-c. For a seemingly opposite determination of its being, see *Phaedo* 79e-80c. But, this latter passage, as well as the whole theory of the soul and its immortality developed in the *Phaedo*, does not really counter the individuality of the soul. On the contrary, it rather confirms its emphatically individual character, upholds and

fortifies it; especially by claiming that “The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable [τῷ μὲν θείῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ νοητῷ καὶ μονοειδεῖ καὶ ἀδιαλύτῳ καὶ ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἔχοντι ἑαυτῷ ὁμοιότατον εἶναι ψυχῇ]” (80b1-3). And, even though, for example, its insolubility clearly refers to its imperishability or immortality, one can still see that, in order to be such, the soul must retain its perfect unity and consistency, which are one and the same with its indivisibility. In other words, the assertion that the soul must be “quite or very nearly indissoluble [παράπαν ἀδιαλύτῳ εἶναι ἢ ἐγγύς τι τούτου]” (80b9-10) also points to the durability of its self-identity, which is nothing but its undividedness, or its individuality. (On the individuality of the soul as the origin of its being the principle and the guiding force of movement in general, see also R. Muller, *La doctrine platonicienne de la liberté*, Paris: Vrin, 1997, pp. 141-46.)

24. In *Republic* 510 sq., for example, he speaks about this idea as that to which all others aspire and in relation to which they only can and must be understood.

25. Or, as it has been technically named in the literature, the problem of self-predication of ideas. On the problem of self-predication much has been written, especially in the 1960's and the 1970's, and many authors got engaged in the long discussion about this concept, more precisely whether there is such a thing in Plato. For some of the best known texts regarding this problem see: G. Vlastos (“The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*,” in *Philosophical Review* 63, 1954), R. E. Allen (“Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues” in Vlastos I, 1971, pp. 167-83 – first published in *Philosophical Review* 69, 1960), G. E. L. Owen (“Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of the Forms,” in Owen, ed., *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), A. Nehamas (“Self-Predication and Plato's Theory of Forms,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, 1979; and “Participation and Predication in Plato's Later Thought,” *Review of Metaphysics* 36, 1982 – both reprinted in Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), F. C. White (*Plato's Theory of Particulars*, New York: Arno Press, 1981, pp. 151-61), J. Annas (*Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, pp. 195-208), W. J. Prior (*Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*, pp. 20-29, 33-45), R. Heinaman (“Self-Predication in the *Sophist*,” *Phronesis* 26, 1981, pp. 55-60) and M. McCabe (*Plato's Individuals*, pp. 84-89), to name just a few. See also: H. P. Cherniss, “The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues” (in R. E. Allen, ed., *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, pp. 369-74 – first published in 1957, in *American Journal of Philology* 78) and *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1944 – reprinted in 1962 by Russell & Russell, New York), esp. p. 293; G. Vlastos, “The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*,” in *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981, pp. 259-64 (first published in 1972, in *Review of Metaphysics* 25). It is worth mentioning here that Cherniss differs from Vlastos and does not even accept the self-predication hypothesis in the first place, but rather understands the so-called self-predication as identity. The general problem with this whole discussion, however, is that, regardless of the position they take with respect to self-predication, the mentioned authors tend to suppose that the analysis and analytical method can do justice and provide a reliable interpretation of a genuinely dialectical position such as theory of ideas. So, whether they reject self-predication in Plato and use it as an argument against the theory of ideas (like Vlastos, Allen and McCabe, for example), or they think it can be plausibly solved by some auxiliary argumentation (as do Nehamas, Owen, White, Prior, Mignucci and Gerson), they all seem to neglect the genuinely dialectical concept and vehicle of the theory of ideas: that of difference and

differentiation. The fact that they are obviously influenced by Aristotle's critique of ideas (cf. *Metaphysics* XIII [M] 1078b30-1079a5, 1079b10-1080a10, 1086a30-1086b12) only further complicates things, because Aristotle has a different point of view and different goals in mind. So, either they do not realize that many of the problems they are occupied with (including the third man and separation of ideas and things) do not appear as unsurpassable to Plato, or are not posed as problems at all. Therefore, if it is a problem at all, self-predication is much more a problem for us than for Plato. For him, it seems, there was nothing outrageous or problematic in the statement of self-identity of Forms/Ideas. Ideas need no predicate(s), they are that which is allegedly predicated, or the predicates themselves; and this becomes obvious in and through the structure of participation, which posits them as such. As Prior notes, "Plato develops in the middle dialogues an account of participation [which] grounds properties in terms of relations to Forms, rather than basing the relation of an object to a Form on the possession by both of a property" (p. 22). Furthermore, it seems to emerge as a problem and an obstacle in a specific, analytical line of Plato interpretation, which is more visible in another vein of investigation. Namely, Vlastos, who coined the term, introduced it in his analysis of the Third Man Argument (see "The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*," op. cit; as well as his answer to Nehamas: "On a Proposed Redefinition of 'Self-Predication' in Plato," *ibid.*, pp. 215-19), but its ontological background, which was called upon already there, reveals itself as primarily belonging and pertaining to another problem of Plato's dialectic: to the "two worlds" argument, and is given due attention and explanation in another Vlastos' essay (cf. "Degrees of Reality in Plato," in R. Bambrough, ed., *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, London: Routledge, 1965). However, there appeared the core of the difficulty: the fact that Vlastos and others who endorse such a position suppose *quantitative* differences where only *qualitative* ones are in place. All in all, given the voluminousness of the discussion, one must wonder if it really was necessary to spend so much time and energy on a discussion that eventually bore little fruit, if any. For, all they managed to come to in that long dispute (and here one should also include Ackrill's discussions about identity and predication with R. Robinson and F. M. Cornford in "Plato and the Copula"), all they finally came up with was the recognition of the fact that every identification involves predication, and that therefore it involves difference and differentiation, for these manifest themselves as predication. Namely, as the bringing together of the different, predication necessarily supposes something common to both, i.e. something by virtue of which and in which the two are identical/same.

26. See *Republic* 533d. Goldschmidt rightfully points at this saying that it is "une science 'parfaite', [quelle] nous est présentée et promise comme l'aboutissement d'une étude compare des quatre modes" (p.8) He continues: "Il est donc possible d'arriver à une science parfaite de l'objet."(*ibid.*); and later on: "L'intelligence ... est associée à la sagesse et décrite comme une révélation qui couronne l'entretien dialectique. Car c'est bien une révélation, une lumière brusque, une vision à peine supportable. *L'essence échappe à la pensée discursive, à la discussion où se succèdent questions et réponses*" (*ibid.* – my italics). Further in the same vein, Goldschmidt emphasises the irrational, intuitive moment in the knowledge of truth, by saying that "à un certain moment de la discussion intervient cette lumière qui semble transcender, ou mieux, interrompre l'ordre discursif. Elle suppose l'exercice conjugué des quatre modes de connaissance, mais elle n'est aucun d'eux" (p. 9). Thus, according to him, we have "the discursive thought, which at a certain moment turns itself into intuition" (*ibid.*). However, and in accordance with the right insight into the importance of the downward path in Plato, Goldschmidt doesn't forget to emphasise how, after the ascent to the ultimate principle, "la recherche doit

's'attacher aux conséquences qui en dépendent jusqu'à descendre vers la conclusion dernière' (*Rep.* 511b7-9). Nous revenons donc à l'ordre discursif" (*ibid.*). That is how we come to the science, which "consécutivement alors à la vision de l'essence, elle est science, non plus obscure, mais 'parfaite'" (*ibid.*).

27. The common problem with most interpretations of Plato is exactly their almost exclusively analytical character, which issues in grave disregard for the dialectical nature of his thought. Every disassembling of it into fixed analytical elements has to come across numerous paradoxes and aporias. Usually, the first appearance of such attitude is to be found in the chronological treatment of Dialogues. This, of course, does not mean that chronological division of Dialogues is something that should not or cannot be done, nor that it is totally irrelevant for their interpretation. However, it doesn't seem very productive to take chronology, as quite a few do, as an argument in substantial matters. One should leave aside the modern notion of progressive movement, either of investigation or of the investigated thing itself. Plato does not assume such progress in research and argument. It is not like he had a habit of changing his mind about things, just as he does not leave anything behind. On the contrary, everything (previous or later) actively participates in the final result, everything is included. Plato's dialectic is static here: it assumes/presumes the finished, wholly and completely articulated presence of Being from the very beginning, even before the beginning. It is just that the necessary successiveness of thought and language forced him to discover and expose different moments at different times. Truth is always given, it is one, unchanged and unchangeable, perfect and absolute, encompassing, containing and encircling everything from the time immemorial, once and forever; and, if it is to be relevant, if it is to pertain to Being, its comprehension must also aim at the absolute and eternal from the very start. Moreover, comprehension is a part of truth. The thought process, argumentation and discussion, any discourse that has even the slightest relation to it, belongs to truth. Discourse has to be truthful (in any degree) in order to be able to ever achieve its proper recognition and comprehension. The way to truth is itself an indispensable part of that same truth, and *vice versa*. Therefore, the true "description of the real" is only the whole corpus of dialogues and the whole story that they tell all together. Such, basically hermeneutic, principle seems much more appropriate to Plato's thought (and, consequently, to its interpretation) than the simple (we are tempted to say: simple-minded) logical-analytical procédé. A typical case of the latter we find in C. P. Bigler (*Participation – A Platonic Inquiry*, Baton Rouge: Univ. of Louisiana Press, 1968, p. 131) when he deals with *Sophist* 242d-246a, i.e. with the problem of Being, One and Many. There, all the weaknesses of strictly analytical approach become transparent, and all he manages to do is to retell the dialogue and displace the whole discussion by calling upon the abstract notion of participation, thus not resolving the aporia on the ground where it appeared. Such analysis does the same thing as the targets of Plato's critique (the monist metaphysicians), namely, it overlooks the fact that only the whole "triad" as a complex of relationships provides a true description of the real.



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# The Journey of the Soul in Parmenides and the Katha Upanishad

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## **Abstract**

*In the terse and compressed language of poetry, the Presocratic philosopher Parmenides of Elea expressed, for the first time in the West, the deepest ideas of nondualistic metaphysics. These ideas bear a close resemblance to, but are not necessarily derived from, the Vedantic philosophy which informs the Upanishads and other metaphysical texts of ancient India. The proemium to the poem of Parmenides contains a graphic metaphor in which the soul's progress towards ultimate truth is represented by the journey of a chariot. In developing his metaphor, Parmenides shows how it is Justice which determines the progress of the soul. His vision of Justice is both individual and universal.*

*This article examines Parmenides's parable of the chariot in comparison with a remarkably similar image which occurs in the Katha Upanishad.*

The Presocratic philosopher, Parmenides of Elea,<sup>1</sup> may rightly be said to have introduced the deepest ideas of nondualistic metaphysics to the West.<sup>2</sup> And he expressed his teachings, not in the discursive and often prolix prose used by most philosophers, but in the terse and compressed language of poetry.<sup>3</sup> His poem *On Nature*, precisely because so much of it has survived, has exerted an enduring influence on Western thought. This influence is reflected in the vast literature which the poem has spawned.<sup>4</sup> In the proemium to this poem, there occurs a graphic metaphor, in which the soul's progress towards ultimate truth is likened to the journey of a chariot. This article attempts to elucidate the meaning of Parmenides's parable of the chariot, by calling in aid a remarkably similar image which occurs in one of the *Upanishads* of ancient India.

In Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*, Socrates declares:

[I] have a kind of reverence, not so much for Melissus and the others, who say that 'all is one and at rest', as for the great leader himself, Parmenides, venerable and awful. . . . I met him when he was an old man, and I was a mere youth, and he appeared to me to have a glorious depth of mind. And

I am afraid that we may not understand his words, and may be still further from understanding his meaning. . . .<sup>5</sup>

The reverential awe with which Socrates speaks of Parmenides is bestowed on no one else in the Platonic corpus. The reason, surely, was the recognition that this 'great leader, Parmenides, venerable and awful' had seen more deeply into the nature of reality than Socrates and Plato themselves. I argue, controversially perhaps, that the discoveries of Parmenides of Elea and his fellow Eleatics, represent the very pinnacle of Greek philosophical inquiry: in the Eleatic ontology, Hellenic thought attained a level of abstraction which no later Western philosopher has surpassed.

It was Parmenides who first taught the West that ultimate reality or absolute truth is approachable only by man's inner faculty of reason, and never by the use of the senses.<sup>6</sup> This teaching, which Parmenides elaborates in the *Way of Truth*, the first part of his poem, stands in direct opposition to our Western empirical, scientific outlook. Grounded in the physical world of the senses, this outlook derives ultimately from the philosophy of Aristotle.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, the spiritual brilliance of the Parmenidean vision has been forgotten, and, instead, this secular Aristotelian mindset has increasingly held Western thought captive during recent centuries. The result has been that while the manifold benefits of modern science have been laid at our disposal, we have paid the price in the form of a spiritual void which has robbed our lives of real meaning.

This judgment, of course, runs counter to the view of many modern commentators. Thus, according to Barnes:<sup>8</sup>

In the second phase of philosophy, a thicker and darker cloud loomed: it threatened to cut off all light from empirical science, and it must have seemed almost impenetrable. The cloud blew in from Elea – from Parmenides, Melissus, Zeno.

This statement epitomises the almost total failure of modern scholarship to come to terms with the great achievement of the Eleatic school,<sup>9</sup> for the nondualistic teachings of Parmenides and Melissus are an expression of the highest truth. These teachings are harbingers of light and hope for mankind, not of darkness.

The point of departure of this study is that the poem of Parmenides is the product neither of theoretical speculation, nor of logical analysis, nor even of objective scientific investigation as we know it. Thus any attempt to understand Parmenides by the unaided use of the logical-analytical mind, referred to in this paper as the lower mind, must of necessity fail. This study rests on the premise that Parmenides's poem can only have been the product of his own direct, transcendental experience of truth, which lies

entirely beyond the reach of the lower mind. His teaching, in other words, derives from a realm which is accessible only to those rare individuals who have attained his level of inner development, who have been where he has been.<sup>10</sup> What follows below is an attempt to determine the meaning of the allegory or parable<sup>11</sup> of the chariot in the prooemium, and thereby to substantiate the views expressed in this paragraph.

The chariot features in the prooemium as a powerful metaphor for the journey of the human soul towards the realization of ultimate truth. As Radhakrishnan<sup>12</sup> points out, the idea of the self riding in the chariot, which is the psycho-physical vehicle, is a familiar one. Remarkable, however, are the points of correspondence, discussed below, between the description of Parmenides, dating perhaps from about 475 BC,<sup>13</sup> and that occurring in a Vedantic text, the *Katha Upanishad*, which belongs to the eighth or seventh century BC.<sup>14</sup> The similarity is all the more remarkable for the fact that there appears to be no compelling evidence of a direct connection between the earlier Indian text and the Greek. As we shall see, the tenor of the Upanishadic text is overtly spiritual, while in the prooemium of Parmenides, the spiritual meaning is clothed in graphic and concrete images.

Given the similarity between the texts, I shall now proceed to a reading of the *Upanishad* as an invaluable preliminary step towards a proper elucidation of Parmenides's parable. The former text reads as follows:<sup>15</sup>

3. Know the Self (*ātman* in Sanskrit) as the lord<sup>16</sup> of the chariot, and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect (*buddhi*) as the charioteer and the mind (*manas*) as, verily, the reins.
4. The senses (*indriyāni*), they say, are the horses; the object of sense (*arthā*) the paths (which they range over); the Self, associated with the body, the senses and the mind – so wise men declare – is the enjoyer.
5. He who has no understanding, whose mind is always unrestrained, his senses are out of control, as wicked horses are for a charioteer.
6. He, however, who has understanding, whose mind is always restrained, his senses are under control, as good horses are for a charioteer.
7. He, however, who has no understanding, who has no control over his mind (and is) ever impure, reaches not that goal, but comes back into mundane life.
8. He, however, who has understanding, who has control over his mind and (is) ever pure, reaches that goal from which he is not born again.
9. He who has understanding as the driver of the chariot, and controls the rein of his mind, he reaches the end of the journey, that supreme abode of the all-pervading.

10. Beyond the senses (*indriyāni*) are the objects of the senses (*arthā*) and beyond the objects is the mind (*manas*); beyond the mind is the understanding (*buddhi*) and beyond the understanding is the great self (*atmā mahān*).
11. Beyond the great self is the unmanifest (*avyaktam*); beyond the unmanifest is the spirit (*purusha*). Beyond the spirit there is nothing. That is the end (of the journey); that is the final goal.'

This passage paints a precise and vivid picture of the inner world of the human being. The Self or *ātman*, corresponding to the passenger in the chariot, is the still, innermost, invisible, indestructible, immutable, immortal, divine essence of every human being. It is Truth.<sup>17</sup> The body, corresponding to the chariot, is the transient, perishable vehicle of the Self. The intellect (*buddhi*), the higher organ of mind, is the faculty of reason and understanding, which corresponds to the charioteer.<sup>18</sup> The lower organ of mind (*manas*) is the discursive, analytical, thinking mind, represented by the reins. The horses stand for the senses (*indriyāni*) of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. Finally, the roads over which the horses and chariot range stand for the objects of sense (*arthā*).<sup>19</sup>

Consider the chain of command or control implicit in the description. The Self (*ātman*), as the lord of, and passenger in the chariot, is the animating presence, the formless essence, the source which remains perfectly still, does nothing at all, and yet enables all the activity of the chariot and horses.<sup>20</sup> The function of intelligence or intellect, for which the charioteer is a fine analogy, is to integrate the different elements of our nature and to harness these to the highest end, namely the discovery of truth. Notwithstanding differences of detail, the *Katha Upanishad* and Plato agree in looking upon intelligence as the ruling power of the soul (called *buddhi* or *vijnāna* in the Upanishad, and *nous* by Plato).<sup>21</sup> In order for the faculty of intelligence or understanding to perform these functions on a continuous basis, it must first be awakened or activated by the sustained practice of inner disciplines such as study and meditation. Absent such sustained practice, this faculty remains inactive or dormant: verses 5 to 9 above describe the active and inactive states of the faculty of understanding, and the effects on the individual of these respective states.<sup>22</sup> Only in its fully awakened state is this faculty capable of guiding and directing the lower mind in the direction of ultimate truth. In its dormant state, which at any one time is the condition of all but a few human beings, this faculty is unable to exercise proper, continuous control over the lower mind, which consequently roams about without aim or direction. The chief consequence of an unrestrained mind, the *Upanishad* reminds us, is that the senses are out of control: instead of performing the function of valuable and obedient servants, they become our masters, with predictably ruinous consequences. This is the common human condition which we may observe within ourselves

as well as in others. The analogy of a charioteer who lacks the ability to exercise effective control over his team of horses by means of the proper use of the reins is an accurate one: thought which is not restrained and guided by the intellect is unconnected with the vast realm of consciousness. In this condition, thought quickly becomes barren, insane, destructive.<sup>22</sup>

The thrust of this passage is that the awakening of the higher faculty of understanding is indispensable to human evolution: the task is laid upon every individual of engaging in the inner work which alone can effect this awakening. And only this awakening can produce the state of continuous inner harmony, coherence and stillness, which is described by the *Upanishad* as 'the final goal' and 'the end of the journey, that supreme abode of the all-pervading'.<sup>24</sup> This final goal is nothing less than the discovery of absolute truth.

This brief analysis of the meaning of *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.3-11 will serve as a template for the study of Parmenides's parable, to which I now turn. The proemium reads:<sup>25</sup>

1. The steeds that carry me took me as far as my heart could desire,
2. When once they had brought me and set me on the renowned way
3. Of the Goddess, who leads the man who knows through every town.
4. On that way was I conveyed; for on it did the wise steeds convey me,
5. Drawing my chariot, and maidens led the way.
6. And the axle blazing in the socket —
7. For it was urged round by well-turned wheels at each end —
8. Was making the holes in the naves sing, while the daughters of the Sun,
9. Hasting to convey me into the light,
10. Threw back the veils from off their faces and left the abode of night.
11. There are the gates of the ways of Night and Day,
12. Fitted above with a lintel and below with a threshold of stone.
13. They themselves, high in the air, are closed by mighty doors,
14. And avenging Justice controls the double bolts.
15. Her did the maidens entreat with gentle words
16. And cunningly persuade to unfasten without demur the bolted bar
17. From the gates. Then, when the doors were thrown back,
18. They disclosed a wide opening,
19. When their brazen posts fitted with rivets and nails
20. Swung in turn on their hinges. Straight through them,
21. On the broad way, did the maidens guide the horses and the car.
22. And the Goddess greeted me kindly, and took
23. My right hand in hers and spake to me these words:
24. "Welcome, O youth, that comest to my abode
25. On the car that bears thee, tended by immortal charioteers.
26. It is no ill chance, but Right and Justice, that has sent thee forth to travel
27. On this way. Far indeed does it lie from the beaten track of men.
28. Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things,
29. As well the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth,
30. As the opinions of mortals in which is no true belief at all.

31. Yet none the less shalt thou learn these things also — how the things that seem,  
32. As they pass through everything, must gain the semblance of being.

The prooemium describes, in vivid and concrete terms, man's spiritual journey from darkness to light, from ignorance to truth. It depicts Parmenides as a 'man who knows' (*eidota*), a mature aspirant who has attained an advanced level of inner development, and is thereby qualified to tread the divine path, the 'renowned way of the Goddess' which leads to the discovery of truth.

The graphic and dramatic imagery of the parable partially conceals its inner meaning which, as I shall seek to show, is remarkably similar to that of the Upanishadic metaphor. I have already contended that Parmenides is here describing, in richly veiled language, his own transcendental experience.<sup>26</sup> Such an experience, located entirely beyond the reach of the logical-analytical or lower mind, may be recognizable only by those very few individuals who have undergone a similar experience of their own. These individuals are the ones in whom the higher faculty of mind, variously described in the *Katha Upanishad* as understanding, intelligence and reason, is fully awakened.<sup>27</sup> Small wonder, then, that Parmenides inspired Socrates with feelings of reverential awe.<sup>28</sup>

The parable opens with Parmenides being conveyed in a chariot driven by maidens, who are described as 'daughters of the Sun' and 'immortal charioteers'. The chariot is drawn by 'wise steeds'. Provided the parallels between the Indian and Greek texts are exact — and I suggest they are — these images can readily be decoded.

The Greek text makes it clear that the steeds<sup>29</sup> which draw the chariot are in fact mares, and thus a pattern begins to emerge from the outset: all the key figures and images in the prooemium are feminine, from the horses to the charioteers<sup>30</sup> ('daughters of the Sun') to the deities invoked by Parmenides, namely Justice, the keeper of the doors of destiny, and the Goddess herself, the revealer of truth.<sup>31</sup> Later in the poem, Parmenides mentions also *Moirai* (Fate or Destiny) and *Ananke* (Necessity). All the divinities invoked by Parmenides are emblematic expressions of aspects of truth.<sup>32</sup> The emphasis which Parmenides places throughout on the sacred feminine is inescapable.

The 'wise steeds', by setting the passenger on the way of discovery of truth ('the renowned way of the Goddess'), show themselves to be well capable of taking him as far as his 'heart could desire'. Of all human desires, the deepest is the desire for Self-knowledge or Self-realization. In a mature aspirant such as Parmenides, this desire is stronger than all the lesser desires which assail the human being. In most people, however, the ultimate desire for truth is swamped by the unrelenting assault of myriad

mundane desires for material goods and worldly success. For the highest desire to prevail, the inner being of the aspirant must be well-ordered: the senses (steeds) must reside under the dominion of the discursive or lower mind (the reins), which must in turn defer to the authority of the intellect or higher mind (the charioteers). It is precisely the alignment of these three faculties in this hierarchical sequence that characterizes the aspirant in the poem. Absent this harmonious co-ordination, the discovery of truth is impossible.

The imagery in verses 6-8 vividly conveys the swift movement of the chariot under the astute direction of the charioteers. The rapid rotation of the axle, 'blazing in the socket', engenders heat and fire. This image suggests a highly evolved soul, fired by spiritual ardour, in occupation of a strong, finely-tuned body (the chariot). The sense of harmony, wholeness and completeness conveyed by the image of 'well-turned wheels' finds an echo later on in 'well-rounded truth'.<sup>33</sup>

The dramatic gesture of the charioteers in throwing back the veils from their faces signifies that a vital stage of the journey is at hand. This is the arrival at the gates of the ways of Night and Day, which mark the transition from darkness to light,<sup>34</sup> from ignorance to truth. In the all-pervading light of truth, there can be no concealment: all is open, all is revealed. The gesture of the charioteers is a graphic acknowledgment of this transition.<sup>35</sup>

The keeper of the gates of the ways of Night and Day is avenging Justice (*Dikē polypoinos*). It is this deity who weighs in the balance the aspirant's qualifications to enter the abode of truth.<sup>36</sup> Only one who has lived a life of righteousness and justice — for example, the aspirant in this poem — may pass through the gates. Chance or fortune, man's favourite scapegoats, have no part to play here.<sup>37</sup> Plato makes the point explicitly:<sup>38</sup>

[A]ccording to the ancient story, there is a god who holds in his hands the beginning and end and middle of all things, and straight he marches in the cycle of nature. Justice, who takes vengeance on those who abandon the divine law, never leaves his side. The man who means to live in happiness latches on to her and follows her with meekness and humility. But he who bursts with pride, elated by wealth or honours or by physical beauty when young and foolish, whose soul is afire with the arrogant belief that, far from needing someone to control and lead him, he can play the leader to others — there's a man whom God has deserted ... Many people think he cuts a fine figure, but before very long he pays to Justice no trifling penalty, and brings himself, his home and state to rack and ruin. Thus it is ordained.<sup>39</sup>

This passage describes justice in relation to the inner world of the individual. This aspect of justice needs to be strongly emphasized in our age of ignorance: we shirk personal responsibility for the ills that befall us, preferring to see ourselves as victims of circumstance. We have chosen to forget the ineluctable relationship of cause and effect between, on the one

hand, what we do or think, and, on the other, the state of our lives. Thus we neglect at our great peril the operation of justice within our own being, choosing instead to focus our attention on external justice in its political, social, legal and economic aspects. The discourse on justice in the media, in books and in academic debate is almost always located within these fields. But more important and immediate by far than any of these is the operation of justice within the individual, for without the assiduous cultivation of inner justice by individuals, there can be no external justice in society or in the state. Justice, like all other aspects of truth, originates in the individual, and from the individual it diffuses into society and the state. To this principle, which Plato emphasises repeatedly, there is no exception.<sup>40</sup> It follows that close, sustained observation of the workings of justice within oneself is an indispensable discipline for the seeker of truth. The poem of Parmenides, like the teaching of Plato, has the power to awaken us to the operation of justice in relation to our every thought, action, desire and feeling, from the deepest to the most trivial.

One puzzle remains: Justice — balanced, austere, impartial and unswerving — ought never to be open to cajoling, entreaty or persuasion.<sup>41</sup> Yet here<sup>42</sup> the gentle words of the charioteers do indeed succeed in swaying the deity to throw open the gates to the aspirant. The explanation, surely, is that the immortal charioteers, 'daughters of the sun', standing as they do for the fully awakened intellect, speak only words of truth and reason. Justice responds to such words and to no others.

Having passed safely through the gates, the chariot arrives at last at its destination, the abode of the Goddess.<sup>43</sup> The Goddess is to be understood as the revealer of truth, or as the truth which reveals itself. As such, she is inherently present as the innermost, immortal essence of every being. Thus she can be no stranger to the young aspirant. She welcomes him and assures him<sup>44</sup> that his arrival at her abode owes nothing to chance, for he is well-prepared to receive the teaching which she is about to impart to him. He must learn to distinguish absolute, unchanging truth (in the *Way of Truth*, the first part of the poem proper) from the false, relativistic realm of ever-shifting opinion (in the *Way of Seeming*, the second part of the poem proper).<sup>45</sup> Significantly, the aspirant is told that he may not neglect the things that seem ('the opinions of mortals in which is no true belief at all'), but must learn how they, as they pass through everything, gain the appearance of Being.<sup>46</sup> This injunction is psychologically sound: an aspirant who has not learnt, through wise instruction and keen observation, to recognize untruth (or that which is not) whenever it appears in others and especially within himself, will be repeatedly deceived by the manifold guises, wiles and subtleties of the ever-changing ego.<sup>47</sup>

First, however, the aspirant must learn what Parmenides so

memorably describes as 'the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth'.<sup>48</sup> These words emphasize both the steadfast, immovable, immutable nature of absolute truth, and its wholeness and completeness.<sup>49</sup> In the *Way of Truth*, which follows on from the prooemium, the key notion is Being, or that which is. This notion is well described by Jaeger:<sup>50</sup>

Being is without birth and therefore deathless; it is one; it is complete; it is immovable, eternal, ubiquitous, a unity, inter-connected, indivisible, homogeneous, boundless, impenetrable.<sup>51</sup>

A comparison of the subject-matter of the Upanishadic text with that of the prooemium of Parmenides reveals differences which are superficially striking, but ultimately insubstantial. For example, the discrete stages of the spiritual journey from ignorance to truth are sharply demarcated in the Greek text, but are not identifiable in the Indian. In contrast, the *Upanishad* expressly connects the physical elements of the parable (the chariot, passenger, charioteer, reins, horses and roads) with their psychological counterparts in the human make-up. This Parmenides does not do. Yet can it be doubted that, in pointing towards human realization of ultimate truth, the two texts, the Greek and the Indian, speak with one voice?

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## Endnotes

1. Parmenides was born between 515 and 510 BC, and appears to have been in his prime around 475 BC. According to Diogenes Laertius (9.21–3), the Pythagorean Ameinias converted him to the contemplative life. Strabo holds that both Parmenides and Zeno were Pythagoreans. Parmenides is said to have legislated for the citizens of his state, Elea in Italy. So admirable were his laws, according to Plutarch (*adv. Colot.* 32, 1126A), that the government annually swore its citizens to abide by them. Parmenides is said to have visited Athens late in his life and to have met the young Socrates: their conversation is recorded in Plato's dialogue, *Parmenides*. He was the founder of the Eleatic school of philosophy, of which Melissus of Samos and Zeno of Elea were adherents. Parmenides was the first Greek philosopher whose doctrines survive almost intact; they are preserved in his didactic poem, *On Nature*. Written in hexameters, the poem consists of a prologue or prooemium, followed by two sections called the *Way of Truth* and the *Way of Seeming*. According to Waterfield (p49), 'Parmenides remains probably the single most important Presocratic thinker . . . After Parmenides, Presocratic thought could not remain the same, since later thinkers felt they had to respond to the challenges he offered to all scientific thought'.
2. Less compelling is the claim of Heraclitus of Ephesus, whose surviving fragments do not add up to a coherent statement of the nondualistic position, such as we find in Parmenides's poem. Melissus and Zeno built upon the foundations laid by Parmenides.
3. According to Plutarch (quoted in Reale p81), Parmenides adopted as his vehicle the dignity and metre of poetry in order to avoid the prosaic.
4. For comprehensive surveys of the scholarly literature, see Capizzi p119–167; Reale p155–182. The bulk of this literature, however, deals with the main body of the poem, namely the *Way of Truth* and the *Way of Seeming*: less attention is devoted to the prooemium, and less still to the elucidation of the parable of the chariot. As for academic writings which examine, as this article attempts to do, Parmenides's metaphor of the chariot in the light of similar imagery in the Vedantic literature of ancient India, these appear to be scarce indeed: the two bibliographies cited above contain not a single overt example. See, in general, Staal, Conio, Hinze *passim*; McEvelley p52-9.
5. Plato *Theaetetus* 183e–184a (Jowett p284). Socrates, towards the end of this passage, is indeed prescient: he himself, despite his misgivings, would have been well

able to understand the words and meaning of Parmenides, but most modern scholars, by their own admission, are not. Here are some typical views: ‘... in many ways a bizarre and puzzling production’, and ‘... some lines of the poem are obscure to the point of unintelligibility’ (Barnes p130); ‘His diction . . . is often exceedingly obscure: the precise meaning of some of his sentences will probably never be unanimously agreed’ (Kirk and Raven p265); ‘In devilishly obscure terms, and prosaic and somewhat tortured verse, [the *Way of Truth*] lays out the heart of Parmenides's extraordinary philosophy’ (Waterfield p50). The reason for this perplexity may well be the one suggested in this article: Socrates, a man of wisdom in whom the intellect or higher faculty of mind was awakened, would have been well able to bring reason to bear on the poem. While every human being possesses this faculty, it remains underdeveloped in the great majority of persons at any one time. Thus the principal tool left to such persons (of whom I am one) is the discursive, analytical, lower faculty of mind, which may well prove inadequate for the purpose of penetrating to the deepest meaning of the poem. This is not to suggest that all commentators have been perplexed by the poem. Thus Proclus (quoted in Reale p83) holds that Parmenides, although compelled by his choice of poetic form to make use of metaphor and figures of speech, adopts in his poem an unadorned, sober and pure form of exposition. For a clear, understandable elucidation of the poem, see McEvilley p52-4.

6. The Vedantic teaching of India is entirely consonant with this position: compare, for instance, *Ribhu Gita* 2.34 and 4.6 (Krishnamoorthi Aiyer p3). The memorable words of Werner Jaeger are worth recalling at this point (Jaeger p177): ‘Our salvation depends on our abandoning the world of opinion for the world of truth. Parmenides considered this conversion to be violent and difficult, and yet a great act of liberation. He presents his reasoning with a majestic sublimity and a deep religious emotion which makes it inspiring as well as convincing. For it is entralling to watch him, in his search for knowledge, freeing himself and men for the first time from the appearances which impose on sense and discovering reason to be the organ through which alone the totality and unity of being can be apprehended.... [H]is discovery ... brought into action one of the fundamental forces of the Greek genius for educating humanity and comprehending the universe. Every line he wrote pulsates with his ardent faith in the newly discovered powers of pure reason.’

7. For views of Aristotle on the poem of Parmenides, see *Physics* 188a19–22; *Metaphysics* 986b27–987a2; *On the Heavens* 298b14–24. These views, as one would expect, are mostly hostile.

8. Barnes p39–40.

9. See, for example, the views quoted in note 5 above.

10. See note 5 on this point.

11. I use the terms allegory and parable interchangeably on the authority of *Fowler's Modern English Usage* (2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed, Gowers (1968) 558).

12. Radhakrishnan p623.

13. Kirk and Raven p265.

14. Radhakrishnan p22.

15. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.3–11 (Radhakrishnan p623–4). The transliterated Sanskrit terms given in brackets in this passage are my insertions.

16. ‘Lord’ here evidently means the passenger in the chariot.

17. This true or higher Self is not to be confused with the perishable, ever-changing lower self or ego (*ahankāra*), the seat of desires, fears, passions, anger, envy and sloth in the individual.

18. According to Goodall (pL), *buddhi* is a key concept that corresponds fairly exactly to our word 'soul'. He adds: 'For [*buddhi*], most translators use such words as 'intellect' or 'intelligence', and this, of course, is what it often means; but the concept seems to be broader than this, for in *Bhagavad-Gītā* 2.41 we read that the essence of *buddhi* is will. *Buddhi*, then is the combination of intellect and will, and this is almost exactly what Catholic Christianity understands by 'soul' .... For in our Western tradition it is the soul that is the responsible and perduring element in man; it is the soul that is saved or damned. This is equally true of *buddhi*; it is man's highest faculty and ultimately responsible for whether a man continues to be reborn or is finally released. It is not the Self or *ātman*, which has no responsibilities and is a mere onlooker at the drama of 'works' enacted in this world. *Buddhi* and *ātman* are nevertheless closely interconnected...'

19. The Sanskrit original here is elsewhere translated as 'objects of desire' or 'mazes of desire': see Prabhavananda and Manchester p28.

20. A fair analogy would be the battery of a motor vehicle.

21. Radhakrishnan p623.

22. The translation of these verses speaks of 'he who has understanding' and 'he who has no understanding'. These phrases should not be taken to affirm the presence of the faculty of understanding in certain persons, and its absence in others. The meaning, rather, is that in certain persons — a very small number at any given time — this faculty exists in an awakened, active state, while in the great majority of people it remains dormant. Thus, while everyone has the potential to undergo this awakening of intelligence, very few people do so in practice.

23. By no means every formulation of the concept of mind in Hindu philosophy is expressed in terms of this duality of the lower, analytical mind and the higher mind or intellect. For example, in the following statement by the great modern Indian sage, Ramana Maharshi, mind is described as an organic, undivided entity (Godman p49):

The mind and the ego are one and the same. The other mental faculties such as the intellect and the memory are only this. Mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), the storehouse of mental tendencies (*chittam*), and ego (*ahamkara*); all these are only the one mind itself. This is like different names being given to a man according to his different functions.

It matters little in practice whether the faculties of reason and understanding, on the one hand, and of analytical thought, on the other hand, are regarded as different functions of a single organ of mind (as in the above passage) or as two distinct organs of mind, the higher and the lower (as in the *Katha Upanishad*).

24. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.9, 11. But this description (or any other) is nothing more than a pointer or a signpost, for the ultimate state cannot be expressed in words or comprehended by the ordinary, lower organ of mind (*manas*).

25. We owe the survival of the proemium in its entirety to Sextus Empiricus, who preserved it in his work *Against the Mathematicians* 7.111. The translation used in the text is by Kirk and Raven p266-7. I have also consulted translations by Burnet (p172), Barnes (p130-1), Freeman (p41-2) and Waterfield (p56-7).

26. It was an experience, moreover, which Parmenides must have undergone relatively early in his life, for the Goddess welcomes him with the greeting 'O youth'.

27. See text to notes 22 and 24 above.

28. See text to note 5 above.

29. Compare Pindar *Olympian* 6.22-7.

30. Compare Lucretius 1.74.

31. I read verse 3 to mean that this Goddess is the constant inner counsellor or companion of the seeker of Truth. According to Jaeger (p178): 'If we study [Parmenides's prooemium], we find that the image of the 'man who knows' travelling towards truth is an essentially religious symbol.... The 'man who knows' is an initiate who is called to watch the mysteries of truth: a symbol of the new knowledge of Being. The road by which he travels .... to his goal is the road of salvation. That philosophical research could be described in the terminology of the mysteries ... is a very significant fact: it shows that philosophy was consciously taking the place of religion. ... It was the consciousness of his high mission which led Parmenides, in the prelude to his poem, to draw the first real picture of a philosopher — the 'man who knows', led by the daughters of light, far from the paths of men, along the hard road to the house of truth'.
32. See Reale p130n6.
33. Verse 29.
34. According to Waterfield p318: 'Homeric and Hesiodic echoes by Parmenides guarantee that he is locating this gateway in the underworld, not towards a transcendent upper realm of light'. This view runs completely counter to the tenor of the prooemium. And against it may be cited *Aeneid* 6.124-130 (West p134). In this passage, the prophetess addresses Aeneas: 'Trojan, son of Anchises, sprung from the blood of the gods, it is easy to go down to the underworld. The door of black *Dis* (Pluto) stands open night and day. But to retrace your steps and escape to the upper air, that is the task, that is the labour. Some few have succeeded, sons of the gods, loved and favoured by Jupiter or raised to the heavens by the flame of their own virtue.'
35. McEvelley (p57) holds: 'In terms of the iconographies of goddess religions, the gateway represents the transition between Being and non-Being, or One and Many, the birth gate from which the forms of the Many arise, and at the same time the cosmic drain through which they return to the zero point of pure Being. Poetically, Parmenides's gates, like much else in his poem, seem based on Hesiod's *Theogony* (744ff)'.
36. Verses 11-17.
37. The Goddess herself confirms this later in verse 26: 'It is no ill chance, but Right and Justice, that has sent thee forth to travel'.
38. *Laws* 715e-716b (Saunders p174-5).
39. See also Lami p275n19.
40. See, for example, *Republic* 435e.
41. It is precisely in this feature that justice differs from mercy and compassion. Justice must, however, always be tempered by these qualities.
42. Verses 15-17.
43. Verse 22.
44. Verses 24-27.
45. Verses 28-32.
46. Verses 30-32.
47. See note 17.
48. Verse 29.
49. The theme of roundness resonates with the earlier image of 'well-turned wheels' (in verse 7).
50. Jaeger p176.
51. It is arguable that Jaeger's description of Being as 'boundless' misrepresents Parmenides, who in his poem describes Being as spherical in form and, therefore, limited. It was another Eleatic philosopher, Melissus, who specified that Being is unlimited (See notes 1 and 2).



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# Women as containers in classical and African/Yoruba cultures

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## **Abstract**

*The association of women with containers in agricultural terms is a universal phenomenon for the earth was the mother of every man's village and community.<sup>1</sup>*

*The obstacles to the positive enhancement of women in both the Classical and African societies are hydra-headed. The situations of women in these societies have been compounded by factors arising from the over-romanticisation of women's role as mothers in patriarchal set-ups. This role is mythicised and symbolically represented. One of such a symbolical representation is that of a container – the earth, womb, box, and jar. Although this is a universal phenomenon, this paper examines the symbolical representation in the cultures of the ancient Greek, Roman and African/Yoruba cultures. It examines how this representation is effected in each case and shows its effects on women's empowerment in these cultures. It concludes that over-emphasising the mother-role in representing women as containers can be a demeaning factor that makes women struggle against multiple disadvantages in these societies.*

## **Part I**

In Greek myth, as in Greek art and religious rituals, and even in Greek language, the image of women as a box or container whose content can either help or harm, give or take life, is often portrayed. In Greek mythology, the primordial goddess is Gaia whose functions under the Olympian system are most completely synchronised in the figure of Demeter. In this notion, the woman is the *materia prima* out of which man is created. She is the *Tellus Mater* which brings into the world all beings as well as the very gods<sup>2</sup>. Gaia the great mother is the Mother Earth, the earth's womb where all springs are conceived. She is the great womb that gives and takes the treasures in the universe – life. She is the symbol of fertility and regeneration; things are born from her; they die in order to be born again for a new life. She nourishes her offspring and protects them from all

destructive forces. She contains in herself the negation which is feared in life – death. On one hand a demiurge, on the other the demolisher of her own works; the de-constructor of the constructed, the one that feeds itself with the dead bodies of her children.

The identification of the woman as bearer of children and its comparison with the obvious functions of the earth are evident in the tilling of the soil, ploughing and sowing with penetration and insemination of a woman, the cultivation of soil with the act of child bearing, the harvesting with breast feeding and the like. In this notion, she is a container of heavenly sperm, being the virgin deflowered by the plough and inseminated by the heavenly sperm – rain.

The Greeks called a pregnant woman a closed jar<sup>3</sup> and the word *amnion* (from which is derived the English “amniotic fluid”) is used both for the membrane that surrounds the foetus and for a jar that holds the blood of sacrifice<sup>4</sup>. Earth is the great container of seed. A phrase in the Greek wedding ceremony urged the husband to “plough his wife for the begetting of new children”, for she is the earth, holding concealment, treasure, and mystery, all mixed up with sex<sup>5</sup>.

The sentiment is also common to the ancient Romans. The Latin term *uxor* which is not found in funeral inscriptions at Rome, but in the writings of Terence, Pliny, Cicero, Juvenal and Suetonius implies “sprinkling with seed” and this succinctly describes the role of a woman as wife, container and receiver. *Viri potens* “capable of receiving a man” was a legal term used by Roman lawyers to define judicial maturity of a woman and her capacity for marriage<sup>6</sup>. The male enters into the dark recess of the virgin’s body, a treasure, and spills his milky fluid to mix with the woman’s clay, a new treasure, the hope of the future.

In ancient Greek society, it would have been unthinkable to marry without virginity as it would be tantamount to “buying an empty jar”<sup>7</sup>. In the Greek myth of Pandora, the first woman, the jar is the emblem of the woman herself. It is no coincidence that Pandora is associated with a jar in Greek mythology. Pandora means “all gifted”<sup>8</sup> reflecting the fact that every god and goddess endowed her with a charm and she was imposed on man by Zeus who wished to punish man, to whom Prometheus had given fire. In the woman-hating account of the myth of Pandora, (in both *The Theogony* and *Works and Days*), Hesiod portrays the woman as nothing but a stomach, a consumer of food and wealth to which she contributes nothing, but which like a bottomless pit consumes vast quantities of it.

Pandora opened the jar from which came forth all ills, torment, pains, dreadful diseases which hitherto had been kept from a twin spirit. For she too, very pretty on the outside, is within filled “with lies, with swindles, all sorts of thievish behaviour”<sup>9</sup>:

From her descends the ruinous race and tribe of women, who live as a curse and cause of sorrow to mortal men. No partner in grim poverty, but only useless excesses<sup>10</sup>.

Powell postulates that the name Pandora probably means "All giver" which is another name for the mother-goddess, Gaia – giver of all things, here transformed into a young girl with "thievish morals" and the "soul of a bitch". She is irresistible to the male gaze from without, but within, like Gaia, she is mud, clay.

The notion of the Great Goddess occurs in myth systems all over the world. However, the guises in which she appears in myths throughout the world vary, but certain key images remain constant suggesting that these are remnants and symbols of an archetypal female principle shared by man at all times and in all cultures. The Great Goddess is associated with many symbols, the most prominent being the serpent.

We shall concern ourselves with the other symbols which include various forms of vessels such as the jar, vase, pot oven, chalice, grail, which depict the body of the Great Goddess. As a vessel or container, her body becomes the womb of creation, container of the water of life. Thus, a descent to the underworld becomes a return to the womb of the Great Goddess<sup>11</sup>.

The story of Gaia's creation describes a process of separation and differentiation that gives birth to the tension of two opposing impulses – male and female – and an expanding and contracting universe undergoing repetitive cycles of creation and destruction<sup>12</sup>.

The association of women with containers in agricultural terms is a universal phenomenon for the earth was the mother of every man's village<sup>13</sup>. A nineteenth century North American Indian's aversion to cultivating the land was based on this linkage of women to the earth. The aversion recorded is attributed to one Smohalla of the tribe of Umatilla:

It is a sin to wound or cut or tear or scratch our common mother by working at agriculture. You ask me to dig the earth? Am I to take a knife and plunge it into the breast of my mother? But then, when I die, she will not gather me again into her bosom. You tell me to dig up and take away the stones. Must I mutilate her flesh so as to get at her bones? Then I can never again enter into her body and be born again. You ask me to cut the grass and the corn and sell them, to get rich like the white men. But how dare I crop the hair of my mother? <sup>14</sup>

This representation of female essence and magic control is a carry-over of the awe in which the primitive man held the mysteries of gestation and childbirth, which were thought to be functions reserved for women. However, for the ancient Greeks, as they came to understand their role as sexual inseminators, their pride in the male sex was kindled and this lit a fire of patriarchal revolution to the extent that "they fancied that men were

endowed with generative power, women being merely empty vessels or, at best, sort of incubators designed to carry their children and nurse them in life's early stages"<sup>15</sup>.

And so Greek literature presents a departure from the presentation of women in a high social position of the Homeric Age, wherein the woman typified by characters such as Arete, Penelope, Nausicaa, is held in noble honours as the repository of high morality and old tradition. In post-Homeric Greece, man stood alone at the centre of the universe in a position that totally excluded women from the cultured context. Hesiod introduced the new misogynistic view of the women wherein she is represented as the root of all eternal evil and source of human misery. Pandora, the woman who took off the great lid of the jar with her hands thereby bringing "bales of sorrows for men" in actual fact is a representation of Gaia, the Mother Earth, now dethroned and reduced to the status of a plague.

The effect of the patriarchal revolution in ancient Greece, which dethroned the woman from the symbolic representation of the container of eternal creative force and enthroned the man as the master of the hitherto awesome and complex female nature, is beautifully elucidated thus:

With the development of Greek culture came a steady regression of women's status; from Herodotus to Thucydides, she gradually faded into the home, and Plutarch takes pleasure in quoting Thucydides to the effect that "the name of a decent woman and her innumerable faults – witness the writings of Hesiod, Lucan, Aristophanes, and Semonides of Amorgos. Her legal status deteriorated; inheritance through the mother disappeared; she could not make contracts or incur large debts or bring action at law. Some even went so far as to legislate that anything done under the influence of women could not be legally binding. Furthermore, she did not even inherit her husband property after his death. She retreated to a virtual purdah, locked in her home and advised not to be seen near a window; she spent most of her life in the women's quarters and never appeared when male friends visited her husband."<sup>16</sup>

One of the effects of the regression of the status of women in ancient Greece is apparent in the tragedies. A citable case is that of Orestes against the Furies. Orestes, in avenging his father's (Agamemnon's) death, at the command of Apollo kills his mother Clytemnestra. By so doing, Orestes incurs blood-guilt and so his mother's furies drive him mad and they pursue him to the shrine of Apollo at Delphi. Apollo can purify Orestes of blood-guilt but cannot release him from the Furies and refers him to Athens and Athena for judgement. However in defence of Orestes Apollo gives utterance to the Greek cause of male supremacy in Aeschylus:

The mother is not the parent of the child,  
only the nurse of what she has conceived.  
The parent is the father, who commits

his seed to her, a stranger, to be held  
with God's help in safekeeping.<sup>17</sup>

The situation did not remain forever as shown above. Ancient Greek women remained submissive as long as patriarchal myth kept a hold on their imagination. However, Greek rationalism and scepticism which grew with the questioning of myth by the sophists, liberated the consciousness of the ancient Greek woman, and as the Greek society became more decadent, the feminist rebellion gathered momentum. It is this social and political emancipation of women that Euripides expresses in 431 B.C. through the chorus of Corinthian Women in his *Medea*;

Back to their sources flow the sacred rivers

The world and mortality are turned upside-down.

The hearts of men are treacherous; the sanctions of heaven are undermined.

The voice of time will change, and our glory will ring down the ages.

Woman kind will be honoured. No longer will ill sounding report attached to our sex. The strains of ancient minstrelsy will cease, that hymned our faithlessness. Would that Phoebus, Lord of song, had put into a woman's heart the inspired song of the lyre. Then I would have sung a song in answer to the tribes of males. History has much to tell of the relation of men with women.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar manner, the African/Yoruba like most traditional cultures, links virginity in a woman with a notion of purity. And it is in the symbolical representation of chastity as a half-full, empty or full container that this issue is to be considered here. In the traditional setting a girl who is not a virgin on the bridal night brings shame and disgrace to herself, family and kinsmen<sup>19</sup>. When a bride is found to be a virgin, a symbolic representation of the white sheet smeared with blood is sent in a covered container, usually a calabash bowl, to her parent and can be accompanied by a sum of money and other gifts<sup>20</sup>. In the variant described by Olajubu<sup>21</sup> a gourd full to the brim with frothing palmwine, a piece of traditional white chalk (symbolising purity) and a box full of matches from which no stick has been removed is sent to the bride's father.

However, in the case in which the bride is not found to be a virgin, the treatment is also described by Olajubu in the cited reference. A half gourd of palmwine, a piece of charcoal (symbolising defilement) and an empty match box is sent to the bride's father. In this symbolical representation of virginity, the woman is the gourd and the match box. Whether she contains what is pleasing or disgusting is represented by the fullness or emptiness of

the contents. Fadipe, cited above, adds that these may be perforated cowry shells, in case of a bride that is not found to be a virgin. The punishment for not being a virgin on the bridal night does not constitute only in humiliation and the loss of respect, it includes rough treatment of the bride by the husband or the bride's father in order to elicit a confession from her of the person that deprived her of virginity.

In referring to the loss of a child at birth in Yorubaland, the image of women as containers emerge clearly. In such a situation it is said:

*Omi lódànù; agbè kò fọ.*

It is the water that is spilt; the gourd is not broken.

The symbolical representation here of the woman as the gourd from which the precious water (the baby) poured is meant to bring consolation to the woman and her husband and family. The idea is that the concerned party should be grateful that the woman is alive because since she is an unbroken gourd, she can still be filled with again and she will produce a live baby that will survive.

## **Part II**

We have seen how the presentation of the woman as a container is effected in the ancient Greek and African/Yoruba cultures. It is therefore necessary to examine the effects of equating femaleness with a container as an embodiment of a specific image. Dubish succinctly embodies the effects of such a symbolic representation of women:

Perhaps women are a kind of "natural symbol" because they are always regarded to some extent as objects, not only within the framework of scholarly scrutiny but also within their own societies. And what men symbolise may be less carefully examined simply because it is taken for granted. If it is true that women as object tend to "stand for" things, what, then, does it mean to the women themselves to labour under this "burden of symbolism", since it must affect women's perception of themselves as well as their activities in society? <sup>22</sup>

From the above symbolising of women as a container, places her in a dual role of a social actor and a symbol. Therefore, in ancient Greek, Roman and African/Yoruba worlds, the men are the doers and achievers; women are the nourishers and sustainers-with encouragement and support. An attempt to step beyond this role and assume one of self-reliance and diligence would often earn the women the tags of tyrants and nags, repulsive in adopting a domineering attitude over men.

The association of women with nature, often expressed in allegorical symbolisms as containers, can be either pejorative or highly complimenting.

Clack<sup>23</sup> identifies three influences which have contributed to a negative rendition as the influence of religion, reason, and nature or biology as being destiny. It is in the third aspect that the symbolism of the woman as a container of life is most relevant:

In identifying women with nature, reproduction comes to determine the 'answer' to the 'question' which is women. Famously in the writings of Sigmund Freud, one's biological functions determine one's destiny. Similarly in Rousseau's writings, the identification of women with the role of motherhood determines the form her education should take. Taken together, these elements contribute an oppressive interpretation of the apparent 'connection' between women and nature. Just as the natural world is to be suppressed and overcome by the dictates of reason and order<sup>24</sup>.

This urge to control is identifiable in contemporary society and it is the basis for the production of a structure of binary opposition "in which one term is defined against what is deemed as its other, and decreed that woman shall operate as the negative of man."<sup>25</sup>

It is pertinent to strike a balance among all roles of a woman in any society. This balance is not to advocate an overturn of patriarchy and patriarchal symbols, despite their manipulation in subjugating women. Rather the search for balance in all roles in which the woman is capable of expression, should be a quest for the rejection of trite stereotypes and an embracing of tools of augment and improving opportunities and conditions for woman to excel in all spheres of life.

It is because the Roman woman failed to understand this type of balance that rendered her emancipation unappreciated. As Rome fought her many wars and the Roman State became too wealthy, moral decadence increased and the Roman woman achieved liberation "amid a widespread breakdown of religious faith, and respect for authority"<sup>26</sup>. The way in which the Roman women perceived their reality and the exigency that shaped their consciousness and mobilisation consisted in their negation of the sacredness of being the containers of life:

Roman women unwittingly wrecked with their own hands their feminine strongholds within a patriarchal society; from the proud, dignified and influential mothers they had been in early republican times, they became despisers of their prime biological function in imperial times and began competing with men on men's terms. In this, they were unsuccessful. They made no significant contribution to whatever Roman culture there was; and by failing to re-establish respect for specifically female values, they made their contribution to the corruption of Roman life under the imperial sways of the Caesars . . . Unconscious victims of an unwarranted emphasis put by Graeco-Roman culture on exclusively male values, "modern" Roman women looked down on childbearing as unworthy of their talents<sup>27</sup>.

The situation of the African woman is one case that can be used to exemplify the positive representation of women as containers. Unlike the Roman woman, the African woman on the other hand carries the burden of the family's survival much more than is generally appreciated or acknowledged. Nevertheless, the sacredness of the container of life which the woman embodies is symbolically represented in the African thought as a point of concentration in both the family and the society. The African woman does not see her role as a home maker nor her status as a mother as a liability. Rather they serve to entrench her as the centre of the family, and the centrality of the family is important to both male and female. In Yoruba language there are expressions that portray this centrality of the family as being embodied in the woman. One of these is:

*Ọmọ ìyá kí i ya* – the children of a mother i.e. siblings do not part.

This entrenches the notion that having been conceived in the same container which is their mother's womb, children of the same mother bind together for life. This notion is even more true of the polygeneous homesteads of Africa wherein very important decisions centre on the children of the same mother. It is this notion that is carried over in the Yoruba expression, "*Okùn ọmọ ìyá yí*", literally "the cord of the children of the same mother is tough and binds tight."

African societies exemplified by the Yoruba expresses a symbolical exalting of women's role as mothers. The mother is an artefact of respect, almost to be worshipped for she is the container of the egg (Yoruba *ọlẹ*) of life. This notion is articulated in the following expressions and entrenched in the consciousness of the Yoruba child:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (a) <i>Ìyá ní wúrà</i><br><i>Baba ní dígí</i><br><i>Orìṣá bí ìyá kòsì</i><br><i>Ìyá là bá ma bó</i> | Mother is Gold<br>Father is the mirror<br>There is no deity like the mother<br>The deity to worship should have been the mother. |
| (b) <i>Ìyá là bá kì</i><br><i>Ìyá là bá yìn</i>   | It is the mother that deserves exalting<br>It is the mother that we ought to praise  |
| (c) <i>Ìyá ní gbọmọgbọmọ ọmọ</i>  | The mother is the saviour of the child   |
| (d) <i>Ìyá l'alábàro ọmọ</i>  | The mother is the child's confidant.   |

It is good to note however that this exalting of the mother-role does not translate into an over-wielding of political power for the African woman. The danger that is even inherent is an over-romanticisation of the mother-role and an exclusion from the arena of power, as the woman has to struggle "to overcome the important question of a chasm between women's productive and reproductive roles"<sup>28</sup>.

In as much as it is imperative for the African woman to preserve the sacredness of her motherly role and not throw it overboard like the women of ancient Rome, it is also necessary to see the African woman's experience objectively and not emphasise one role at the expense of others.

Over-romanticisation of the role of women as the container that gives life tends to encourage many forms of oppression that simultaneously exist in her world. Ojo, in her article, points out that emphasising the woman's mother-role has been detrimental to the educational achievement of Yoruba women and this is true of African women generally:

Factors that militate against some Yoruba women have their roots in certain cultural and religious beliefs that overstress women's family responsibilities and confine them to their homes. There is still a strong belief among the Yoruba from generation to generation that a woman's first responsibility is to her home. Young females bound by such teaching may not have the incentive to explore all opportunities available to them. Also, house chores and too many business engagements are other distractions from serious educational or career pursuit<sup>29</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

In the symbolic representation of women as containers in both Classical and African cultures there is evidently a difference in assessment of values from one culture to the other. Although in both the Classical and African cultures this representation has led to what is described as "[t]he subject/object dichotomy that excludes women from the realm of the subject"<sup>30</sup> there is evidently a positive identification of the woman as a container in African culture. While in the Classical world, the woman is both the container that gives life and takes it back, and therefore an object to be subjugated, the woman in the African culture is acknowledged as a nexus connecting different strands of members (the father, children, relatives) in the family set-up.

This exalts family life in Africa, an aspect of life that the African person whether male or female must guard jealously as it enhances happy co-existence in family life:

Rather than enhance individualism, African family pattern cultivates the spirit of collective consciousness, mutual reciprocity, and role-sharing. It therefore prevents family dislocation and the plague of self-centeredness that characterize modern civilization<sup>31</sup>.

The woman as a mother is at the intersection in this collective consciousness. However the inherent danger in this role-casting is that the over-emphasising of the mother-role to the detriment of other roles and possibilities is counter-productive to advancement of life in Africa. It results in a veneering of the African woman's genuine needs and awareness, and

feminisation of poverty. And this can become a vicious cycle of oppression and subjugation, leading to dissatisfaction and rebellion and annihilation of progress and advancement, wherein women become the victims of their femaleness.

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# The Pursuit of Justice in Plato's Republic

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## **Abstract**

*The pursuit of justice in the Republic commences when the elderly, wealthy Cephalus suggests that justice involves nothing more than telling the truth and repaying one's debts. But Socrates points out that by following these simple rules without exception could have dire consequences. In an effort to avoid such difficulties, Polemarchus offers a refinement of the definition by suggesting that justice means "giving to each what is owed". The new definition codifies formally our deeply-entrenched practice of seeking always to help our friends and harm our enemies. Thrasymachus recommends that justice should be seen as the advantage of the stronger because those in positions of power simply use their might to decree what shall be right. Glaucon and Adeimantus continue with the challenge concerning the meaning and the nature of justice. According to Glaucon the pursuit of justice disadvantages the just when they are deprived of the social rewards for their behaviour because justice is a social compromise. It is well known that people ignore the demands of justice when certain opportunities arise. Adeimantus places the emphasis on the condition of the individual soul, and of the individual himself, rather than the strength of justice over injustice. However not everyone will agree that justice should be defended as praiseworthy for its own sake, rather than for the extrinsic advantages that may result from its practice. Socrates expounds on the importance of justice in a simple though ambiguous sense, pointing to the fact that true justice must also contribute to the self-fulfilment of the just man. The just city serves the primary purpose of illuminating the just soul which is liberated from the subjection of injustice.*

## I

Justice is a theme throughout not only the entire book of the Republic but in most works of Plato.

The Greek words employed to convey the meaning of justice in ancient Greek are *dike* "δίκη" and *dikaiousune* "δικαιοσύνη". Although Plato

occasionally uses the traditional term *dike*, he normally refers to “justice” by the lengthened word *dikaiosune*. Generally it has been assumed by historians and scholars of ancient Greek thought that when pre-Platonic authors speak of *dike* they might just as well have been speaking of *dikaiosune* and would thus be reasonable to say that “justice” in Greek authors is commonly assumed to represent a conceptual constant of Greek thought. It would also be fair to say that Plato did not devise the term *dikaiosune* as it appears in the historian Herodotus approximately two generations earlier. Herodotus employs regularly and frequently the traditional word *dike* and its correlatives while the term *dikaiosune* occurs eight times over five widely scattered contexts. The semantic field of *dike* had traditionally covered a procedural process of legal idioms in all its aspects while the specific reference shifted according to the context and the focus tended to narrow down by identifying the penalty or punishment inflicted as the result of process. *Dikaiosune* was formed to indicate that there is a justice within man as well as one which he operates in society. Plato completed the internalization of justice as a quality of a man by placing it as a virtue in the psyche - a concept whose definition was not available to pre-Socratic authors, employing this word to symbolize the human personality. In doing so the semantic field of justice became richer and more complex by including the double reference to the polis (πόλις) and to the individual. Justice remains the symbol of a relationship within society but now it also describes one within the human personality as there presumably is an identity of some kind shared between them because of the use of the single common term.

## II

In the *Republic*, and especially at its outset, is the most basic question of justice encountered namely “what is justice” as it is rigorously pursued by Socrates. On the one hand, Socrates plays the critic of justice when combatting Cephalus and Polemarchus’ acceptance of overly plain views about what justice is, while on the other hand, he plays the defender of justice in order to counter Thrasymachus’ brash dismissal of justice as bad for the just man. Therefore at the beginning of the *Republic*, Socrates’ interest in justice is not so much in expressing a view of justice as something simpler than it really is, but rather in exposing the complexity of justice as a question or a challenge which needs to be faced. (Stauffer, 2001: 20). The *Republic* is of course read for other reasons too as it ranges over such diverse fields as politics, economics, education, the theory of forms, the condition of poetry, the immortality of the souls etc. but these discussions are contained within the structure of a formal design which is made explicit (Havelock, 1978: 308).

The first reference to the term justice appears in the first book but not right at the outset of the dialogue. In Socrates' conversation with his wealthy host Cephalus, Socrates asks him what it is like being old and rich. Cephalus is not simply old, for he is introduced explicitly and pointedly as a father and as such reflects a familial and generational motive that recurs throughout the Republic. Socrates suggests that perhaps Cephalus has an easy time with old age because of his wealth. To this Cephalus says that there is perhaps something to this but wealth is not nearly as important in old age as some suppose. Cephalus hears many old men complain about the woes of old age, but Cephalus claims to have good character and therefore no reason to complain. In addition, he praises the freedom from baser desires that comes with old age. Socrates then asks what is the greatest benefit Cephalus has received from the enjoyment of wealth. Cephalus responds by referring to peace of mind, i.e., wealth keeps one from having to lie and deceive others and also to leave this life owing nothing to anyone and therefore without fear of having been unjust to anyone whether god or human. At this point, Socrates asks Cephalus whether justice (*dikaiosune*) is simply telling the truth and paying back debts. Socrates picks up on this conception of justice and asks whether it is really adequate as he raises the objection that it is not always just to tell the truth and return what one has taken, since, as he supposes all would concede, it would not be just to do so in instances such as the one in which one is confronted by a mentally disordered friend demanding the return of his weapons (Stauffer, 2001: 25). The dialogue is then off and running in pursuit of the question "what is justice?" that constitutes the rest of the work (Rice, 1998: 2).

Upon Socrates' objection to the Cephalus' view of justice, Cephalus leaves the scene to be immediately followed by his son Polemarchus who invokes the authority of the poet Simonides to defend his father's view of justice. According to Polemarchus, Simonides said that repayment of a debt is just, namely it is just to give to each what is owed. Socrates confesses that he doesn't know what the poet means, and asks, "What is it that is due, and to whom?" He knows, for instance, what the functions of such crafts as medicine and cooking are. But the question posed, is what is the function of the craft of justice, if indeed it is a craft (Republic 332c-333e). Polemarchus says that justice is benefiting one's friends and harming one's enemies and eventually Socrates has a clear statement that he can systematically examine. Socrates' examination of Polemarchus' definition can be divided into three parts and thus posed in the following three questions: a) In what respect is justice useful for helping friends and harming enemies? (332d-334b); b) What is the definition of "friends" (334c- 335b); and c) Does it really belong to the just man to harm anyone whatsoever? (335c-336a).

a. Socrates asks Polemarchus to explain in what ways justice can be helpful and harmful. Through a series of direct questions Socrates leads Polemarchus to the nonsensical conclusion that justice must be useless. And Socrates pursues this line of reasoning to yet another absurdity. Because justice, according to Polemarchus' definition, appears to be the craft of keepers of things not in use namely money and property, and because good keepers are in a position to be the best thieves, one may conclude that justice is simultaneously an art of guarding and an art of stealing.

This is so since arts provide only the expertise and not what we might call the just intention. When Polemarchus stated that justice is useful in war and in contracts or partnerships he did not mean that the just man is as such a knowledgeable and skilful ally in battle or a knowledgeable and skilful partner in promoting peace. He meant that the just man is good to have on your side because he is loyal and trustworthy. By supporting the model of the arts, Socrates disregards the importance of the just intention and through his argument persistently points out that experts, as experts, are more able to help friends and harm enemies than the just man, as a just man. One may however argue that the greater ability of the experts to help friends and harm enemies does not as yet ensure their willingness to do so because only the just intention would seem to ensure that. Socrates' argument implicitly points to a knowledge of what is good for people insofar as it also is needed to help friends and harm enemies and to guide the arts to know when and to whom they should be applied. In this respect the disturbing fact about justice is that the just intention or devotion to the common good is, on the one hand, needed only in defective circumstances but on the other hand the admirable fact about justice is risking own's life for the sake of one another (Stauffer 2001: 39).

b. Polemarchus protests and Socrates concedes that maybe his problem is not knowing what Polemarchus means by "friend". Polemarchus responds that friends are those who we think are good and helpful to us. But, Socrates argues that we can be mistaken about who are our friends, and enemies. Should this be the case we may be helping or harming the wrong people, which could not be justice for one can have friends who are not good and enemies who are not bad. It also implies that it would not be just to help such friends and harm such enemies. Thus a contradiction is reached namely that justice can both help and harm friends and Polemarchus is compelled to reconsider what he means by "friend" in order to gain a balanced perspective of who are ones' real friends and real enemies.

c. At this point, Socrates focuses on the crucial aspect of his quarrel with Polemarchus' definition. In Socrates' view the function of justice is surely not to harm anyone at all. Socrates considers justice to be an excellence of

character and no other excellence, whether that of horses or humans, is ever achieved through destructive means. What is striking in this admittedly ambiguous argument is Socrates' desire to conclude that justice cannot aim at anyone's misfortune. With this claim Socrates distinguishes his view from the traditional Greek conception of social relations, in which vengeance played a dominant role (Pappas, 1995:36). Socrates shows that even on Polemarchus' conception of justice, it cannot be just to harm one's enemies who are in fact bad. The function of justice is to improve human nature and moreover justice is a form of goodness that, by its very nature, cannot participate in anything injurious to someone's character.

### III

Thrasymachus explodes into the dialogue - impatient and irritated with what he thinks is a lot of hot air (Rep 336b-339a) (Rice 1998: 7-8). The first form his attacks takes is his most famous statement about justice that it is "nothing more than the advantage of the stronger". His opinion is that in any society there are those who rule, that is to say the strongest and those who are ruled. Those who rule do so by making and enforcing laws. Justice is obedience to those laws and injustice is disobedience to them. Since those who make the laws are not fools, and since they make laws that work to their own advantage, justice turns out to be the advantage of the strongest. Socrates' response is aimed at getting Thrasymachus firstly to admit that things are not always as simple as they seem. The immediate weakness in the idea that justice is the advantage of the stronger is the capacity of the strong to make mistakes about their own advantage. If a city's rulers support a law that will in fact hurt them, then, in Thrasymachus' view, justice would have to consist in disobeying that law. But such an option robs the rulers of any sense of power, for it commits their subjects to deciding what will most help the rulers and in this case the subjects will make the laws. At this point Thrasymachus may add the qualifier, as Cleitophon does, that justice is the advantage of the stronger as it appears to the stronger or he may deny that rulers make mistakes about what helps and harms them. Socrates attacks Thrasymachus' position on a series of three arguments. The first one expounds the view that the just man is wise and good whereas the unjust man is ignorant and bad. Because Thrasymachus has refused to group justice with virtues and injustice with the vices, but calls the former innocence and the latter "good counsel" (348c-d), Socrates needs to begin by finding some characteristic of injustice that he and Thrasymachus can agree on. In Greek that characteristic is conveyed by the word *πλεονεξία* "pleonexia", which means the habit or trait of wanting and seizing more than one is entitled to. Justice, by contrast, is marked by the tendency to stay within

proper bounds. Justice suppresses the spirit of unchecked competition for personal gain manifested in the unjust person's disregard for law and order. Thus in Socrates' words: "The unjust try to get the better of all others, the just only to get the better of the unjust" (349b-c). However, Socrates' argument fails to convince us that a wise person will always do the right thing. The second point reasons that justice is stronger than injustice. Socrates' argument regarding justice among the members of a city, an army or even a band of robbers highlights this point (351c-352b). The members of a gang of robbers, for example, might be viewed as practical evidence of Thrasymachus' claim that injustice is good. In breaking the law, robbers are unjust, and they are living profitably in being unjust. Socrates argues, however, that unless the members of the gang govern the interactions among themselves according to some conception of justice that goes beyond legality they could not even be profitable robbers. For example, if they are to avoid falling into contentious factions, they would presumably have to adhere to some standard for justly distributing the loot among themselves. And they could hardly define this standard of just distribution by appealing to what is legal or illegal according to law. The implication is that if even robbers cannot escape treating justice as more than a question of mere lawfulness or unlawfulness, then surely the rest of humanity cannot escape doing so either. The logical outcome is that complete injustice can only lead to total chaos and destruction. In his third argument Socrates attempts to present a sketch of what the virtue of any given being is and then to apply this sketch to the human soul. However, before dealing with the general issue of virtue, Socrates begins from the concept of "work" (ergon), reasoning that the virtue of any mere being is that which enables that being to do its work well. For example, a horse has a specific work (352d8-e1) and since a good horse is one that does the work of a horse well, it makes sense to say that whatever enables it to do so is the virtue of a horse. Likewise Socrates argues one must first know the work of a being in order to determine its specific virtue and therefore the work of a being, is that which can be done only with that being or best with it (352e2-3). Having used the examples of eyes, ears and a pruning knife to explicate "work" he then proceeds to explain virtue of a being as that with which the being is able to do its work well and without which it cannot. Socrates then applies this understanding of work and virtue to the soul. For the souls, as a being, must have a work and the work of the soul of each individual is defined as that "which you could not accomplish with anything else in the world, as for example management, rule, deliberation, and the like" (353d). Having such a function as his defining characteristic, the individual can either do it well or badly. In this sense every individual is equal in that he has such a capacity for doing his distinctive human function well and thus

can achieve his justice or virtue “ἀρετή” (arete). This preliminary statement anticipates the division later in the “Republic” of the soul into three parts or aspects with their corresponding virtues brought about by justice of the entire soul. Even so, according to Stauffer (2001: 113-115) a number of serious questions spring up plainly because the soul, unlike a horse or a knife is obviously a hard being to grasp for the soul’s work is not axiomatic and thus its virtue is difficult to define. By referring to his first argument namely that justice is virtue and injustice vice, Socrates comes to the tentative conclusion that the just man is happy, the unjust man is miserable and since it is certainly more beneficial to be happy than to be miserable, it follows that injustice is never more beneficial than justice (354a6-9). This defence of justice, however, is not very convincing to many and even Socrates has his misgivings when at the close of book one comments as follows: “...So have I gone from one subject to another without having discovered what I sought at first, the nature of justice. I left that enquiry and turned away to consider whether justice is virtue and wisdom or evil and folly; and when there arose a further question about the comparative advantages of justice and injustice, I could not refrain from passing on to that. And the result of the whole discussion has been that I know nothing at all. For I know not what justice is, and therefore I am not likely to know whether it is or is not a virtue, nor can I say whether the just man is happy or unhappy”. This statement of Socrates seems out of place if it is only seen as a summary of his discussion with Thrasymachus restricted to the questions of profit and happiness. However, if Socrates is referring here to the order of his defence of justice more specifically, what he had to say here is more viable due to the fact that the question of wisdom and virtue indeed came before the question of profit and happiness. It may, therefore be deduced that his defence of justice in book one is inadequate because it is intended to pose and help the readers reflect on the problem of justice (Stauffer, 2001: 118).

#### IV

At the beginning of Book 2 Glaucon seeks to move the discussion from one controlled by the necessities of defeating an argument to one which attempts to find out the true dimensions of justice. By developing as compelling a defence of injustice as possible, Glaucon expects that he will likewise compel Socrates to make as concerted a defence of justice in return. To provide a better description of what he believes is the most common view of justice, Glaucon introduces a classification system for things that are good (357a-358a). Firstly he states that some things are good in themselves by virtue of the fact that their goodness stands on its own and requires nothing else to justify it. Glaucon’s examples here are “rejoicing” (τὸ χαίρειν) and “innocent pleasures”(ἡδοναί

αβλαβείς) which produce only gladness at having them. Socrates is in agreement with this view. Secondly Glaucon proposes a middle category comprising things that are good in themselves and that produce other good things as well. In this regards he uses the examples of “understanding” (το φρονεῖν), “seeing” (το ὁράν), and “being healthy” (το υγιαίνειν). Socrates confirms that this kind of good exists as well. The third category consists of things that are good only in a secondary sense bearing in mind that they are instrumental in producing other things that are good in themselves. Glaucon is of the opinion that things in this category are considered “toilsome” (επίπονα) “though advantageous to us” (ωφελείν δε ημάς). Socrates agrees that this category of good also exists. Glaucon then asks in what category Socrates would place justice and although he already mentioned the terms “being just” and “being unjust” this is the first entrance of the term “justice” in book 2. It is introduced only after Glaucon has declared the properties of appearance, truth, good, pleasure and advantage while setting the stage for his intended dialogue between common opinion and Socrates. Much of the discussion which takes place in the remainder of the Republic pertains to the manner in which justice is to be considered given the structure put forward by Glaucon as he requests a Socratic perspective of justice.

Socrates’ view is that justice is indeed so in the finest sense “it belongs in the fairest class, that which a man who is to be happy must love both for its own sake and for the results” (358a1-3). Glaucon states that this is not the opinion of the masses and justice is rather considered among the forms of toil, done for the sake of wages and reputation according to opinion and for the sake of itself is avoided as being arduous. It is obvious that Glaucon wishes Socrates not only to argue the intrinsic value of justice but to do so apart from what is the popular opinion. In this respect Glaucon is prepared to disassociate his own beliefs on the subject from those held by common opinion. Socrates acknowledges that he is aware of this argument and it is similar to the one employed by Thrasymachus when “he blamed justice as being of this sort, while injustice is praised” (358a8). Socrates views both Thrasymachus’ and Glaucon’s arguments as resemblances of what justice is perceived as being, but that neither is to be considered as justice correctly understood.

Glaucon stills pursues a sufficient demonstration of justice and injustice as he says “I really want to know what each one of them (justice and injustice) is and what power it has ‘by itself’ (αυτό καθ’ αυτό) in the soul, leaving apart the wages and things arising from them”. The phrase ‘by itself’ (αυτό καθ’ αυτό) used here intensifies the idea beyond that conveyed through the pronoun alone, or some form of the simple reflexive. This phrase will be repeated by Glaucon at 358d2, but it is not found elsewhere in the dialogue. This intensive usage is reserved by Plato for those cases in which

particular notice is to be paid to the quality of the object being considered and constitutes a paradigm shift regarding what is produced as appearance or product. Moreover the ensuing connection between appearance and product on the one hand and how justice is viewed by common opinion on the other, no longer can be regarded as the sufficient means of ascertaining what justice actually is. Plato still has to allow for a collective awareness among the participants of why this transition of focus is necessary. By introducing a concern for the condition of the soul, Plato through Glaucon has created the circumstances which Socrates can put to use in order to justify the transition.

By revisiting Thrasymachus' argument, Glaucon introduces the following stages: Firstly he intends "telling what people say justice is and from where it comes", secondly "that all who practice it practice it against their will because it is necessary but not because it is good. Thirdly to show it is reasonable that they should do this, for indeed then the life of the unjust is better than the life of the just. However, Glaucon distances himself from the third argument. What justice is and from where it arises is stated as follows: *"For indeed they say that it is naturally good (ἀγαθόν) to be unjust (commit injustice) and bad (κακόν) to suffer injustice, but more does the bad from suffering injustice surpass (υπερβάλλειν) the good from doing injustice; so when they both act unjustly to each other and suffer injustice and experience of both, for those not having the power to escape the one and choose the other it seems to be useful to agree among themselves not to do injustice nor to suffer injustice"* (358e3-359a2). Two important issues came about in the above-mentioned statement. In the first place Glaucon introduced a consideration which will gain additional momentum in his presentation as well as becoming more cardinal to the manner in which Socrates must deal with this premise. Secondly while Glaucon attempts to outline the origin of justice, it is actually the prevalence of injustice - both committed and suffered - which brings about the initial agreement among individuals. They agree to cease doing injustice, but only because they have realised that the disadvantages of suffering injustice outbalance the advantages of doing injustice. The origin of justice according to the argument, is entirely seen in terms of what injustice has produced as Glaucon is of the opinion that justice is a result of what injustice produces. By this he means that the agreement to refrain from both doing and suffering injustice transpires, before justice emerges as a consideration.

In 359a3-5 Glaucon continues to sketch the nature and origin of justice by re-emphasising that it is the result of the compromise, or equilibrium which is achieved after individuals agree not to do nor to suffer injustice. Furthermore he suggests that if both the just man and the unjust man were allowed to do whatever they wish both would be found doing the

same thing, since *"We should then catch the just man in the very act of resorting to the same conduct as the unjust man because of the self-advantage which every creature by its nature pursues as a good, while by the convention of the law it is forcibly diverted to paying honour to equality"* 359c3-6. A contrast between nature and law is implied here as it is law and not nature, which by force compels one to act justly. People by natural propensity would attempt to gain advantage through injustice and because they are unable to escape injustice in return, or are not sufficiently convinced they can escape injustice that the original agreement is made. Once this agreement is effected, laws are introduced to curb injustice. The force of law causes honour to be given with the aim of treating others equally.

In his story of the social nature of justice, Glaucon has in mind as consequences only those consequences it produces in a society. Since Glaucon has opposed society to nature, his intention is surely to distinguish those social consequences from consequences of justice we would acknowledge as natural. A thing is then both good in itself and productive of good consequences if both its natural and social effects are good. In 360e-362c Glaucon contrasts the life of the just man who is generally considered unjust with that of an unjust man with an undeserved reputation for justice. He spells out the penalties that will fall upon the misunderstood just man, and gives generously every benefit on the sly unjust man. The unambiguous message is that any advantages that we may think belong to the one who lives justly are merely the advantages of a just reputation. The social consequences of justice and injustice need to be set aside because they follow less reliably, or less immediately, than the natural effects of the two states. For example the natural effect of physical strength would be an enhanced feeling of energy, while its social consequence might be constant hard work. Because employment requires more than strength alone, that social consequence is at best an indirect effect of the strength since excessive energy or vitality always comes with bodily strength. Glaucon wants Socrates to identify a natural effect of justice that similarly follows directly from the person's just disposition.

While Glaucon expresses his discontent regarding the bad reputation of justice, Adeimantus proposes to complete the dimensions of common opinion on justice and injustice by considering how justice is praised and injustice blamed in common opinion. As a society grows aware that its prescriptions are artificial, its moral rhetoric communicates a cynical attitude towards virtuous behaviour. When fathers exhort their sons to be just, they praise not justice itself but the good reputation it leads to (363a). Even promises of afterlife rewards for justice implicitly call it a burden, by suggesting that in the next life no one takes the trouble to practice virtue (363c). Moreover, once the just life has been posed as a mere intermediary

to something else, people will look for a shortcut to that other goal. This is confirmed by the practice of religious rituals where the gods mete out rewards and punishments after death, then supplications, sacrifices, and initiations into mystery cults can bring about bliss after death without the bother of virtuous living (365e-366b). As Adeimantus concentrates on existing society he makes a few important points. Whereas Glaucon wished to know how justice and injustice themselves affect the soul, Adeimantus is here concerned to know how things said about virtue and viciousness affect the souls of those most capable. It is noteworthy that Adeimantus' first mention of the soul includes three pivotal considerations. The first concerns what is spoken, rather than what is actually done. The second includes the position of poetic authority, since Adeimantus is commenting on the results of the "second form of speech" relating to the subject of justice. Third, it is not justice per se, but rather what is said about virtue, which is of immediate concern to an understanding of the condition of the soul. The emphasis which Adeimantus places on the condition of the individual soul, and of the individual himself, rather than the strength of justice over injustice, is meant to elicit a response from Socrates which considers the true nature of justice and injustice, not what either may reflect in the world of appearance. Adeimantus stresses this point: *"But take away opinion, as Glaucon urged. For, unless you take away the true opinion from each side and attach to each the false, we shall say that you do not praise the just but what appears to be, nor do you blame the unjust but what it appears to be, and that you really are exhorting us to be unjust but conceal it, and agree with Thrasymachus that the just is another's good, an advantage of the stronger, while the unjust is one's own advantage and profit, but not profitable to the weaker (367b5-c5).* In book 4 after the definitions of justice in the city and in the soul have been established, Socrates states that by suggesting such definitions as comprising what justice really is in them, it does not appear that they should be lying (444a6). Taken by itself, however the presence of justice in the city is not to be regarded as the most precise definition of justice. The very manner in which both Glaucon and Adeimantus have discussed justice requires that the discussants consider matters beyond concerns over what constitutes a merely acceptable definition of justice. The two brothers want Socrates to show that the features of the soul that produce just behaviour also lead, by some natural process, to more happiness than do the features that produce unjust behaviour (Moors, 1981).

## V

Socrates suggests that the best way to discover real justice is to look for it first where it is easiest to see (368c-369b). One could look for justice in a

single person or in the city, he says, but the larger scale of the city might produce results more readily. Hence he begins by asking how justice emerges in a city, and only apply what he has learned to the soul. After convincing the others of this strategy, Socrates sets off to construct a city in which real justice rules. A description of the details of the just city designed according to nature occupies part of book 2, book 3 and the first half of book 4. In the remainder of book 4 Socrates concentrates on exactly what justice is in such a city and then argues that it is essentially the same thing in a single human being, the soul being parallel in structure to the city. Socrates' picture of the soul in book 4 follows out these implications of the city-soul comparison for if a city resembles a soul, it should be thought of as a unity. He begins his description of the real just city with the claim that individual human beings are not self-sufficient and are naturally disposed to perform different tasks (369b-370b). By basing his first city entirely on both these natural facts he is arguing that human society is natural. Because justice arises in that one social relationship essential to every city, justice in turn becomes a natural accompaniment to every city.

Consequently Socrates' participants have characterized a city in enough detail to assure themselves of its goodness and thus they can use it as the large-scale model of justice they needed. In pursuit of justice, Socrates' strategy consists of the following points (Pappas, 1995: 74-75):

- a) The city is described as being perfectly good.
- b) It is wise, courageous, moderate and just.
- c) Having set aside those defining characteristics of the city responsible for its wisdom, courage and moderation, whatever characteristics remain will define its justice (427e-428a).

Socrates says that since his best city comprises all four virtues, justice can be discovered through a process of elimination and if the other three virtues are identified first, the true nature of justice will remain as obvious. Wisdom in a wise city, he says, is lodged primarily in the class of overseers comprised of philosophers, who are by definition, lovers of wisdom, learning and truth. Courage is located primarily within a single class, the auxiliaries, who need it mostly. Moderation, by contrast, is spread through all the classes and is reflected in agreement about who should rule. Members of all three classes are in agreement that only the philosophers should rule. Socrates is of the opinion that justice is the virtue that makes all the others possible. Simply put, it is the idea that the members of the various classes should hold fast to the business for which they are suited by nature and not get involved in the functions of the other classes. There is an element of truth to the commonsense notion that justice means giving to persons what rightfully belongs to them. However, in what Socrates regards as a deeper conception of justice, what belongs to a person must be interpreted to mean the tasks

assigned to that person by nature. Therefore, he views justice in the finished city as the principle according to which he and his interlocutors had constructed the city, namely the principle that everyone has a single job to do and ought only to do that one job (432e-433a).

Having established the definition of political justice Socrates focusses on the concept of justice in the soul and attempts to discern in the just individual the very form of justice which he found in the city. His model for true justice is presented as a conclusion in 443c9-444a2: *But the truth of the matter was, as it seems, that justice is indeed something of this kind, yet not in regard to the doing of one's own business externally, but with regard to that which is within and in the true sense concerns one's self, and the things of one's self. He (the truly just man) does not allow each part in him to mind the affairs of others or the classes in his soul to meddle with each other, but he really sets his own house in good order; he rules himself, orders himself, becomes his own friend, and brings the three parts into harmony, just like three notes on a harmonic scale - lowest, highest and middle. And if there turn out to be some other parts in between, he binds all of them together and becomes completely one from many. Moderate and harmonised, this is how he acts - if he acts in some way - either concerning the acquisition of money, or the care of the body, or some political matter, or concerning private contracts. In all of these actions, he believes and names a just and noble action one that preserves and helps to complete this state of the soul, and wisdom the knowledge that governs this action; but an unjust action he believes and names one that destroys this state of soul, and ignorance, in turn, the opinion that governs this action.* From his model we can deduce that Plato thinks he has established several things about the likeness of "city" and "soul". He believes he has established that soul and city have the same function for the two prosper if their parts each "do their own" and desist from being busy bodies, namely the soul and the city are just if they are harmonious. But Plato goes further, and believes he has made another discovery about justice in the city and in the soul. Both the city and the soul, he says, have three parts, "the higher, the lower, and the mean", and for either of them to be just, is for the higher part to rule, and the mean to assist it in controlling the lower part. Each part of the soul will reveal a distinct virtue, and in that sense will be similar to its counterpart in the city. For instance, wisdom is the virtue of the rational part of the soul, and that displayed by the rulers of the ideal city. The two categories of claims Plato is making about justice in the soul and the city differ essentially in the kind of claims they are. The "discovery" that justice is "doing one's own" is a widely held belief that Plato recognised early on in his explorations, in fact, one that he identifies when he arranges the first city. The claim that the city has three parts, and the various "discoveries" about each of these parts, on the other

hand, is a rather complex and somewhat strained empirical hypothesis involving politics and psychology. To put it simply, both the city and the soul have parts which must be in harmony if there is to be any justice in them. One can then choose to accept Plato's description of the parts of the city and their role, or of the parts of the soul and their role, but there certainly is no compelling reason why one should accept either, or that the parts of soul and city are alike in anyway.

## VI

The great British philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead once commented that all philosophy is but a footnote to Plato and a similar point can be made regarding ancient Greek literature as a whole. According to Whitehead (1967) one may argue that in certain instances Plato posed the wrong questions but his line of thought stands as a touchstone against which much of subsequent philosophy must define itself, either positively or negatively. The question with which "The Republic" sets out, is to define justice. Given the difficulty of this task, Socrates and his interlocutors are led into a discussion of justice in the city, which they see as the same as justice in the person, but on a expansive and therefore easier to discuss scale. Because of this, some critics such as Julia Annas (1981) interpret Plato's paradigm of a just state as an allegory for the paradigm of the just person. Justice is obviously a very odd virtue, different in kind from wisdom, courage and self-control and jointly with justice, constitute the catalogue of the virtues. The difference between justice and the other virtues is that the other virtues are worth practising even though others do not practise them. It is to someone's advantage to be wise if others are feeble-minded, courageous if others are cowards, and moderate if others are unrestrained. At the very least, these virtues do not make us vulnerable and they might also enable us to protect ourselves from others. Justice does not offer a similar undertaking. The just are not necessarily immune to hardship and suffering and it is not an enviable position to be especially when the unjust prosper. One may argue that wisdom, courage and temperance are obviously political virtues in a sense that justice is not. These virtues are directly and positively related to the power relations between human beings, while justice can hardly be recommended as a course of life and as a prescription of happiness. In the "Republic" Plato argues the reverse namely that justice is a political virtue in a sense in which the others are not. The other virtues are certainly worth having, and Plato will end up by showing that the just person will in fact possess all the other virtues, but he wants to convey the message that justice is the central political virtue, useful in politics in a way the others are not.

Many hold the view that justice is good but only in the secondary,

instrumental sense. If one could be certain of always being on the giving end of injustice, the practice of justice would be foolish. People recognise, however, that they are going to be on the receiving end of injustice quite often, and that suffering injustice is naturally bad. Therefore, they strike a compromise by entering into a contract with each other, promising not to do injustice to others if others, in return, will not do injustice to them, and proceed to set up a system of laws prescribing what people can and cannot do. Justice turns out to be, as Thrasymachus said, obedience to the laws, and people practice justice, not because they believe it is good in itself, but because they know they are not powerful enough to always be on the giving rather than the receiving end of injustice.

The impersonal Socratic model of justice clearly represents a significant challenge to the concept of justice as developed in the modern world, and it represents a threat to the power base that has come to rely on modern models of justice. Whether the Socratic model represents a better model is an issue we need to think and reconsider. Should this model be utilised to the immense emerging global problems based in the social, cultural, economic and environmental spheres, it may well be argued as a better model. But, if applied to the letter, Socratic Justice would most definitely represent a severe limitation of many of the individually defined freedoms that individuals, institutions and many corporations, have come to accept in a modern democracy for the simple reason that many of the so-called freedoms would be deemed to be just.

In order to see clearly the full character of the best life, including the virtue of justice as Plato understood it, it would require a study of the entire Republic and indeed all of Plato's dialogues. Since the final word on justice and the Republic has not yet been written or spoken I will rest my case with Socrates' words in the last sentence of the Republic (621c-d). *"Wherefore my counsel is that we hold fast ever to the heavenly way and follow after justice and virtue always, considering that the soul is immortal and able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil. Thus shall we live dear to one another and to the gods, both while remaining here and when, like conquerors in the games who go round to gather gifts, we receive our reward. And it shall be well with us both in this life and in the pilgrimage of a thousand years which we have been describing"*.

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