

ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST:
AN INTRO-DUCTION TO THE
PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE

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“[W]onder—the essence of the philosophical life—
is a grace: a gift from another.”



I think there is no one who has rendered worse service to the human race than those who have learned philosophy as a mercenary trade.

—Seneca¹

Most people imagine that philosophy consists in delivering discourses from the heights of a chair, and in giving classes based on texts. But what these people utterly miss is the uninterrupted philosophy which we see being practiced every day in a way which is perfectly equal to itself. . . . Socrates did not set up grandstands for his audience and did not sit upon a professorial chair; he had no fixed timetable for talking or walking with his friends. Rather, he did philosophy sometimes by joking with them, or by drinking or going to war or to the market with them, and finally by

1. *Letters to Lucilius* 108.36, quoted in Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), xiii.

going to prison and drinking poison. He was the first to show that at all times and in every place, in everything that happens to us, daily life gives us the opportunity to do philosophy.

—Plutarch²

INTRODUCTION

It is never a bad idea to begin with the commonplace. As Heidegger noted in the introduction to *Being and Time*, the obvious is the first thing of which one grows forgetful. Only when the obvious is before our eyes can we move *into* the familiar and common to discover that *within* it the mystical is encountered. It is not as though the common and familiar are mere means to contemplation, which we leave behind in a meaningless world as our minds transcend to the divine and mystical. Instead, we encounter the mystical by moving into the familiar. Many have experienced the mystical-in-the-common through those two events that mark the beginning and end of creaturely existence: life and death. No happening for a creature is more common and at the same time more mystical than life and death. Moving into the everydayness of life reveals the mystery of death, and in confronting the inevitability of death, the mystery of life presents itself to those who are watchful.

The crucial characteristics of Jesus' parables is that they take off from the most common, most mundane, most thoroughly familiar points imaginable rather than from something mysterious that must be mastered like a crossword puzzle. No such puzzles confront us at all; instead, a coin or a sheep has been lost. . . .

When he chooses to use something mundane and familiar for that purpose [communicating something marvelous about himself], why should it inspire a comparison? Because the familiar itself carries something unfamiliar and marvelous within it.³

2. *Whether a Man Should Engage in Politics When He Is Old* 26.796d, quoted in Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 38.

3. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Have the Words of Eternal Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 137.

Being disposed to see the marvelous by moving into the familiar is one of the fundamental philosophical dispositions. The pre-Socratic philosophers—especially Heraclitus—emphasized the needfulness of listening. This is true in two senses: *we* need to learn to listen, and listening is itself a *need* for something. The logos in nature can be heard only by one who is “awake.”⁴ The problem is that most live as though they were asleep, immersed in their own world. Being in tune with nature opens one to hear something *beyond* nature—namely, the logos of nature. This implies a paradox: one can understand nature—i.e., be open to hear its logos—only if one is already open to hear it. The logos speaks to all, but it only successfully communicates with its lover. The philosophical life is intelligible only from within an openness to the logos. In this essay, I will argue that living a philosophical life (i.e., a *philo-logical* life: literally, a life in love with logos) is something that one has always already had.⁵ In short, a philosophical life is not something that one can decide to have or not; it is essentially something that one is *thrown into*, or perhaps more accurately, something that one *finds oneself already a part of*—like being in love—*as the fruit of an unmerited gift*. The philosophical life is a life of grace, since it is something that is given from another. This essay sets out to examine the philosophical facets of the claim that the philosophical life is a life of grace.

1. AN APOLOGY FOR THE APOLOGY: BEGINNING WITH THE END

No one outside the philo-logical life can understand the philo-logical life. It is only after pursuing logos in love that the meaning and justification for doing so comes into focus. For that reason, I do not intend to *explain* what the philosophical life is, as if it were something that I and the reader can both distance our-

4. See the many Heraclitus fragments in Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

5. In what follows, I will use the phrases “philosophical” and “philo-logical” synonymously, since their meaning as I intend them here is the same: a life in love with logos, which is a life in erotic pursuit of wisdom. Socrates notes in the *Symposium* that no philosopher should be called wise, since the philosopher is not wisdom but its lover.

selves from to examine as a medical examiner studies a cadaver. Hoping to understand the philosophical life from a “neutral” and “objective” vantage point is, *ipso facto*, to place oneself outside of the only possible means of justifying it, which as we said comes from living it. To treat the philo-logical life in this “objective” manner is to examine it in a state of ignorance. To do so is akin to the psychologist who wants to know what human love is, and so supposes that he must not make himself fall in love, since this will color his perspective on the true nature of love. He would be studying love under a microscope, and he thinks that to really see love for what it is he must see it from the outside. To inquire into love in this way is to study it from the standpoint of ignorance. In fact, inquiring in this way into an essential mystery like love is the height of irrationality; the method of his inquiry contradicts the nature of the subject. Therefore, the inquiry fails before it even begins.

Alternatively, we propose in this essay the broad contours of the Platonic method of inquiry through which one enters the philo-logical life. This essay has just as much a descriptive thesis as it does a “performative” one. It constitutes an intro-duction (literally, an “intro-duction” is a *leading into* something) to philosophy, which, if successful, will lead the reader closer to living a life in love of the logos. After filling out a few details regarding what a *Platonic intro-duction* to philosophy is, I conclude this section with an outline of how this intro-duction will unfold throughout the essay.

An intro-duction to philosophy must be both a descriptive and a performative endeavor, such that without the success of the latter, the former withers into mere shadows on a wall, concealing the nature of the philosophical life rather than disclosing it. To be introduced to the philosophical life one must be, as they say, “all in.” Peter Strawson has stated that “there is no shallow end to the philosophy pool.”⁶ In short, an *intro-duction* to the philosophical life (which is true of all lives of love) requires a

6. Peter Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), vii. Strawson’s meaning is that an *introduction* to philosophy is not the same thing as an *easy* philosophy. All philosophy—especially when one is being introduced to it—is in many ways painful and difficult. Recall Plato’s description of the freed prisoner, who first begins to orient himself toward the light and is thereby in a state of intense pain.

baptism that consists in a complete immersion.

Let me begin with a brief word as to why a *Platonic* introduction to philosophy is more apt than others (not that there *are not* others) at introducing the philosophical life. We learn to live by watching and imitating others. Different kinds of lives—like any kind of craft—are learned and handed on by watching, observing, and ultimately imitating those who are living it. One does not learn to plane a piece of hard maple with a hand plane by a priori reflection or mere description; one must stay awake and keep watch at the workbench of the carpenter. We are introduced to a life by observing it play out. Plato's dialogues have *shown* us what the philosophical life looks like through the person of Socrates. The dramatic structure of Plato's dialogues is essential to Plato's presentation of philosophy, since he is showing us what he cannot merely tell us: *philosophy is a way of life*. Just as one does not learn carpentry from abstract treatises, one does not learn philosophy from abstract treatises.

Socrates is the witness—a revelation—of what the philosophical life is. This has as much to do with how he lives as it does with how he dies. In fact, the two cannot be separated. To live a philosophical life is to pursue logos in love; a philosophical life therefore must culminate in a philosophical death, giving up one's life for that end, since there is no greater act of love than to die for one's beloved. Death can be the greatest philosophical act, since it can be the greatest act of love. In dying one gathers up one's entire life and hands it over to the beloved—in this case, the logos. A philosophical death amounts to gifting one's entire life, with no remainder, to one's beloved.

An intro-duction to the philosophical life properly begins with a philosophical death. The drama of Socrates's death will therefore be our beginning. The *Apology* consists of Plato's account of Socrates's defense speech against the charges levied against him, most notably of making the weaker argument stronger and of corrupting the youth of Athens. Socrates is ultimately found guilty of these charges by an Athenian jury and sentenced to death. Subsequently, the dialogue *Phaedo* portrays the last few hours of Socrates's life in his prison cell with his closest friends just before he drinks the hemlock. The end of Socrates's life is the best place for one to be introduced to his way of life. In fact, a good number of Plato's dialogues make explicit reference to

Socrates's expectation (and almost foreknowledge) of his indictment and execution for living a philosophical life. Plato seems to be suggesting through the person of Socrates that the philosophical life leads to death. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates makes just that observation:

I know this well: that if I do come into court involved in one of those perils which you mention, the man who brings me in will be a wicked man—for no good man would bring in a man who is not a wrongdoer—and it wouldn't be at all strange if I were to be put to death. (521d)⁷

Plato's dialogues appear to have Socrates's death on every page. In a sense, it is his death that leads him onward in his conversation, like a lamp in a cave as one journeys toward the sun. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates goes so far as to assert that his entire life has been oriented toward his death. It is here that my apology for beginning with Plato's *Apology* is rooted. Socrates's death lies always before his eyes, guiding his pursuit of logos. It is his death that unifies his life. Therefore, arriving at a clear view of Socrates's death allows one to begin to make sense of his rather mystifying life.⁸

I want to make my argument before you, my judges, as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder. . . . I am afraid that other people do not realize that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for

7. Throughout this essay, all references to Plato's works are from John Cooper, ed., *The Complete Dialogues of Plato* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997).

8. Plato, *Sophist* 354a–b (emphasis added): "Visitor: We'll find that the philosopher will always be in a location like this if we look for him. He's hard to see clearly too, but not in the same way as the sophist.

Theaetetus: Why not?

Visitor: The sophist runs off into the darkness of *that which is not*, which he's had practice dealing with, and he's hard to see because the place is so dark. Isn't that right?

Theaetetus: It seems to be.

Visitor: But the philosopher always uses reasoning to stay near the form, *being*. He isn't at all easy to see because that area is so bright and the eyes of most people's souls can't bear to look at what's divine."

dying and death. Now if this is true, it would be strange indeed if they were eager for this all their lives and then resent it when what they wanted and practiced for a long time comes upon them.⁹

In the *Apology*, Socrates is charged by two different groups of accusers: those who have been accusing him his entire life and those who have only recently made accusations against him. Socrates recognizes that the accusations of this “newer” group—spearheaded by the young Meletus—are not as “dangerous” as the accusations of the older group. The reason he gives for this evaluation is quite telling:

It is right for me, gentlemen, to defend myself first against the first lying accusations made against me and my first accusers. There have been men who have accused me to you for many years now, and none of their accusations are true. These I fear much more . . . they got hold of most of you from childhood, persuaded you and accused me quite falsely, saying that there is a man called Socrates, a wise man, a student of all things in the sky and below the earth, who makes the worse argument the stronger.¹⁰

What is on trial in the *Apology* is the *whole* of Socrates: not simply an action he did or an aspect of his life, but his whole *life*, his *way of being in the world*. For this reason, no one should read the *Apology* thinking that Socrates is defending just *himself*. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Socrates’s life reveals that his life is not his own. Remember, Socrates is a witness to a way of living, and it is that way of living, and not merely the witness himself, that is placed on trial. Therefore, Socrates’s apology is on behalf of that way of living, that way of loving logos. Plato masterfully puts logos itself on trial through the condemnation of its most erotic lover, Socrates. Socrates witnesses to something more than himself—the truth—and so his life stands for something more than itself. For this reason “the life of Socrates” is more than the life of a mere individual man, and the trial of Socrates is more than

9. Plato, *Phaedo* 63e–64a.

10. Plato, *Apology* 18b. It is also interesting, as we will see, that it was—according to Socrates—actually those who spread those rumors and false accusations about him who are the real corruptors of the youth, for they are the haters of logos.

the trial of an individual man. One could even say that the death of Socrates is more than the death of an individual man: it is the Athenian nihilistic precursor to the Nietzschean death of God.

Even the title of Plato's work, ἀπολογία (*apologia*), could be understood as proposing the trial of an ἀπο-λογος (*apo-logos*), the trial of one who is "descended from" the λόγος (*logos*).¹¹ Moreover, one could interpret Socrates himself as the ἀπολογία. He reveals the λόγος through his love of it. The philosophic life is represented by Plato as the life of argument, the life of reason, which is the life of λόγος. In accusing Socrates, the Athenians were claiming that λόγος was not a coherent end of human life. Logos itself was on trial *in persona Socratis*.

In the *Apology*, the Athenians (who took themselves to *know* what was and was not good—i.e., to be wise) demanded an apology for the life of logos, and one that made sense *from within their own non-philological life*. As we will see in section 3, demanding an apology for the philo-logical life reveals that one is already standing outside of logos. For such a person no logos *could* suffice since logos is its own logos. Just as no argument can be given proving a first principle (for, if there were, then that principle would not be a *first* principle, but founded on a more fundamental principle), nothing can make sense of the logos other than the logos itself. As we will explain later, what the Athenians demanded of Socrates during his trial is akin to the illiterate demanding—*per impossibile*—an account of language in terms they could understand. The persistent demand to give a logos that the misological could understand predisposes one to irrationality. It is on these grounds that Socrates was condemned as irrational, unwise, and ultimately corruptive. Socrates's rationality was not the rationality of the "wise" (the sophists), and it was precisely for that reason that he was seen as dangerous and even crazy.¹² Socrates's prosecutors were asking for the impos-

11. Admittedly, this is etymologically "playful," but the interpretation being given of Socrates does justify this play on words.

12. Cf. St. Antony of Egypt: "A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him saying, 'you are mad, you are not like us'" (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, SLG (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1975), 5, quoted in Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 2nd rev. ed. [Boston: Cowley Publications, 1990], 94).

sible—they wanted to understand the logos from outside—and therefore Socrates was guilty before he even began to speak. He was fully aware that his fate was set long before his trial:

There are many reasons for my not being angry with you for convicting me, men of Athens, and what happened was not unexpected.¹³

This is why one ought to begin with the *Apology* as an intro-duction to the life of logos. The *Apology* places the reader face to face with the fundamental question: Which life makes the most sense, the philo-logical life or the miso-logical life? Interestingly, instead of asserting an answer outright, Plato leaves it as a question in the last line of the dialogue:

I go to die, you go to live. Which of us goes to the better lot is known to no one, except the god.¹⁴

Why Socrates leaves this question open might be initially puzzling given his confidence (in this dialogue as well as in the *Crito* and *Phaedo*) toward facing death as a philosopher. We will return to this intriguing question in section 3, where we will consider the meta-dialogical nature of Plato's writing, but a brief word here will be helpful. Perhaps Plato leaves it an open question so as to lead his readers into—*intro-duce*—the life of logos. Perhaps asking that question constitutes an answer to it; moreover, perhaps the answer of the intelligibility of the life of logos is not something that can be argued for merely in words but needs also to be shown and participated in. No words, evidently, stand prior to the logos, since it is its own reason. Perhaps logos can only be known as received, as revealed.

Before proceeding any further, a word must be said about this essay by way of outline. In this section, section 1, I described what a Platonic intro-duction to philosophy is. The remaining sections attempt to *show* what a philosophical life is *in persona Socratis*, with the intent that the reader both (a) arrive at a better understanding of the philosophical life, and more importantly (b) find such a life worth living. In section 2, I will discuss the nature

13. *Apology* 36a.

14. *Ibid.*, 42a.

of the charges levied against Socrates, emphasizing the primary charge that Socrates made the weaker argument the stronger. This discussion will carry us into section 3, which takes up the distinction between the philo-logic life and the miso-logic life (a life hateful of logos). This distinction maps nicely onto the distinction between philosophers and sophists. The philosophical life is a life of humility, patience, obedience, receptivity. This stands in contrast to the misological life of the sophist, who is prideful, short-tempered, controlling, and assertive. The former is essentially communal and dialogical while the latter is isolated and monological. Socrates is depicted in the *Symposium* as both the ideal lover and beloved precisely because his life reveals the unification of activity and passivity; he reveals love as the active receptivity of logos. Actively preparing oneself to *receive* the logos is, therefore, the most rational act one can engage in. No one in history was more prepared to receive the logos—not even Socrates—than Mary, Seat of Wisdom. Wisdom came to her, to dwell in her. This was only possible by her active receptivity of the logos. Mary—Seat of *Wisdom*—is a philosopher *par excellence*.

Along similar lines, I will also argue that the philosophical life is a life of grace. It is not a life that one can enter through one's own efforts. In the last section of this essay, section 4, I will examine the ways in which the philosophical life is a life that participates in the incarnation of the logos. The philosopher—in searching for logos—brings forth the presencing of logos. For this reason, the philosophical life finds its fulfillment in participating in the Incarnation of *the* Logos. As we will see later, the fully human life—the life of reason—finds its perfection in erotically pursuing and ultimately knowing the divine. I will argue that knowledge of the divine brings about a certain union with it, so that the human becomes most human—attains its end—when he knows, and hence is united to, the divine. As Socrates himself states, although unable to grasp the full depths of what he says, the philosophical life is a life oriented toward deification: “He *is* divine—but then I call all philosophers that.”¹⁵

2. MAKING THE WEAKER THE STRONGER

15. Plato, *Sophist* 216c.

From the opening lines of Plato's *Apology* we are confronted with the charges brought against Socrates, and it is precisely his very defense speech that constitutes the justification the jury needs to convict him and ultimately sentence him to death. From the beginning, he is seen to make the weaker argument the stronger and the stronger argument the weaker. In fact, what comes most directly into question here is what it means to be *weaker*. Interestingly, Socrates begins his defense by praising the "strength" of his accusers:

I do not know, men of Athens, how my accusers affected you; as for me, I was almost carried away in spite of myself, so persuasively did they speak. And yet, hardly anything of what they said is true. Of the many lies they told, one in particular surprised me, namely that you should be careful not to be deceived by an accomplished speaker like me.¹⁶

So "strong" are his accusers that they even come close to persuading Socrates *himself* that he is guilty of corruption. Socrates concedes that his accusers' words are undoubtedly "strong," effective, and persuasive. "And yet, hardly anything of what they said is true." So strong, yet so weak. The juxtaposition at the beginning of the *Apology* between the "strength" of falsehood and the "weakness" of truth foreshadows what is to come. Despite the accusers' apparent strength, "hardly anything of what they said is true"; the implication is that it ought not be believed. This leads one to ask, what counts as power or strength? What makes something genuinely persuasive?

Socrates puts this question to Polus in the *Gorgias*. He argues that the rhetorician, like the tyrant, might *appear* strong in one sense: he can bring about whatever he desires (under one description). However, on closer analysis, this is false. The tyrant—like everyone—desires his own good, which he actually fails to bring about, by, say, willing an unjust murder, because he lacks the power to do what is *truly* good for him, namely, justice. The exchange between Socrates and Polus is sufficiently important on this point to warrant quoting it at length:

Socrates:

16. *Apology* 17a–b.

Hence, we don't simply want to slaughter people, or exile them from their cities and confiscate their property as such; we want to do these things if they are beneficial, but if they're harmful we don't. For we want the things that are good, as you agree . . .

Polus:

I think it's true.

Socrates:

Since we're in agreement about that then, if a person who's a tyrant or an orator puts somebody to death or exiles him or confiscates his property because he supposes that doing so is better for himself when actually it's worse, this person, I take it, is doing what he sees fit, isn't he?

Polus:

Yes.

Socrates:

And is he also doing what he wants, if these things are actually bad? Why don't you answer?

Polus:

All right, I don't think he's doing what he wants.

Socrates:

Can such a man possibly have great power in that city, if in fact having great power is, as you agree, something good?

Polus:

He cannot.

Socrates:

So, what I was saying is true, when I said that it is possible for a man who does in his city what he sees fit not to have great power, nor to be doing what he wants.¹⁷

True strength is being able to do what is *beneficial* to you. Voluntarily, this amounts to willing your *true* good, not what merely *appears* good. Epistemically, this amounts to believing what is *truly* persuasive (i.e., what is true), and not what merely *appears* true. According to Socrates, the truly powerful person is the one who orders his life according to true ends. As the famous cave allegory suggests, the person who cannot order his life to its proper end, despite being a king in the cave, is a slave in reality. Returning to the *Apology*, Socrates admits that he is weak when it comes to playing the games of orators. He lacks the power to convince

17. Plato, *Gorgias* 468c–e.

someone that a shadow is light. But as we have just seen, that is no power at all. True power lies in speaking the truth.

Of the many lies they told, one in particular surprised me, namely that you should be careful not to be deceived by an accomplished speaker like me. That they were not ashamed to be immediately proved wrong by the facts, when I show myself not to be an accomplished speaker at all, that I thought was most shameless on their part—*unless indeed they call an accomplished speaker the man who speaks the truth*. If they mean that, I would agree that I am an orator, but not after their manner.¹⁸

The remainder of the *Apology's* introduction constitutes the explanation for Socrates's conviction. In the world in which the Athenian jury lived—the world of courts and politics—Socrates was imploring them to consider the weaker argument as stronger. His fate, and indeed the fate of logos, was determined after ten sentences:

My present request seems a just one, for you to pay no attention to my manner of speech—be it better or worse—but to concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the truth.¹⁹

Socrates was no accomplished orator, but he accomplishes something unfathomable to the Athenian jury: “What I say is true, gentlemen, but it is not easy to convince you.”²⁰ Socrates is turning the Athenian way of life upside down. In a sense, he is calling Athens out of the darkness of the cave.²¹ Socrates is giving a reevaluation of all the Athenian values: piety, knowledge, justice, being, beauty, love, and wisdom. Even the point of Socrates's trial, down to his defense speech itself, is reevaluated: “Men of Athens, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf,

18. *Apology* 17b–c (emphasis added).

19. *Ibid.*, 18a.

20. *Ibid.*, 38b.

21. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 514a–517a6, which is an apt allegorical representation of the scene described by Plato in the *Apology*.

as might be thought, but on yours.”²²

The Athenian table of values has been turned upside-down, and the jury has been placed on trial.²³ Socrates has turned the prosecutor into the defendant, and the accusers into the accused. This revaluation is clearly seen in book two of the *Republic* as well as in the *Gorgias*. Let us begin with the former. Desiring to see Socrates’s strongest defense for the life of justice, Glaucon attempts to make the strongest case he can for what he calls the “general opinion”: the natural superiority of injustice over justice. Justice—according to the Athenian populace—has mere extrinsic or artificial value. As Glaucon explains,

They say that to do injustice is naturally good and to suffer injustice bad, but that the badness of suffering it so far exceeds the goodness of doing it that those who have done and suffered injustice and tasted both, but who lack the power to do it and avoid suffering it, decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to do injustice nor suffer it.²⁴

Glaucon’s account of the common notion of justice and its origins culminates in something that appears to be taken directly out of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*.

People value it [justice] not as a good but because they are too weak to do injustice with impunity. Someone who has the power to do this, however, and is a true man wouldn’t make an agreement with anyone not to do injustice in order not to suffer it. For him that would be madness.²⁵

The man with true power is “a true man.” He is not the sort of man that deliberates in terms of justice or injustice. That conceptual scheme is foreign to him. Glaucon is arguing that in the Athenian worldview, the *true man*—although quite rare—is *beyond* justice. Without going into the details of his response to this challenge, Socrates argues throughout the course of the *Republic*

22. *Apology* 30d–e.

23. Callicles explicitly states as much in his biting exchange with Socrates. See *Gorgias* 481c.

24. *Republic* 358e–359a.

25. *Ibid.* 3509b.

(especially in books four and nine) that justice is a necessary (and perhaps even sufficient) intrinsic good for living a free, human—and hence for reasons we saw at the end of section 1—a *more-than-human* life. The unjust man—the Athenian “true man”—turns out to be the weakest of men. The true man who takes himself to be beyond justice and obedient to no one is in fact dehumanized and more properly described as a beast than a man. Socrates’s life—the life of *logos*—is the antithesis to the Athenian “true man.” Socrates’s life (and here it is not in spite of its status as imprisoned but especially *when* it is in this condition, subject to the death sentence) is one of freedom, whereas the “true man’s” life is the life of slavery. In the eyes of many Athenians, Socrates is attempting to do something perverse to Athens: he is taking what they regard as weak and ugly—his life—and beseeching them to regard such a life as worthy of the rewards given to Olympian victors. It becomes evident what was at stake in his being charged with making the weaker the stronger, and why it would be nearly impossible for him to convince his jury that his *way of life* does not corrupt the youth of Athens but perfects them. Unless one is a lover of *logos* (a philosopher), one cannot understand Socrates as anything other than a corrupter of Athens. But here is the rub: if general opinion inclines toward misology, then no apology for the philosophical life could ever be regarded as justified. The only possible interpretation of the life of Socrates for the misologist is that he is a corrupter of youth who makes the weaker the stronger.

Toward the end of the *Gorgias*, after hearing Socrates’s praises of justice over injustice, the sophist Callicles can remain silent no longer. He is so bewildered by Socrates’s praise of justice that he finds it hard to determine whether Socrates is sincere, for in his ears the content of Socrates’s assertions borders on absurdity. “Are we to take it that you’re serious in all this,” he asks, “or are you having us on? You see, if you’re serious, and if what you’re saying really is the truth, surely human life would be turned upside down, wouldn’t it? Everything we do is the opposite of what you imply we should be doing.”²⁶ Callicles rightly notes that if Socrates is taken seriously, then human life would be turned upside down. Socrates’s praise of reason (*logos*) over

26. *Gorgias* 481b.

power seems to be an appraisal of weakness over strength. In a charge that is reminiscent of Glaucon's "general opinion" as well as Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, Callicles accuses Socrates of making slaves masters, the weak the strong. Socratic values are slave values. Callicles puts it thus:

In my opinion it's the weaklings who constitute the majority of the human race who make the rules. In making these rules, they look after themselves and their own interests, and that's also the criterion they use when they dispense praise and criticism. They try to cow the stronger ones—which is to say, the ones who are capable of increasing their share of things—and to stop them getting an increased share, by saying that to do so is wrong and contemptible. . . . I think we only have to look at nature to find evidence that it is right for better people to have a greater share than worse, more capable than less capable. . . . I'd even go so far as to say that they act in conformity with natural law, even though they presumably contravene our man-made laws.²⁷

Callicles's assessment sheds light on what exactly the charge of making the weaker argument the stronger amounted to, and why the Athenian jurymen saw death as the most fitting punishment for a destroyer of Athenian values. It can be summed up in the words of Callicles: "Oh, Socrates, what a clever discovery this [philosophy] is. It enables you to take a naturally gifted person and ruin him."²⁸ In a sense, Callicles is right; Socrates does ruin "naturally" gifted people. But he ruins them in the way that the freed prisoner in the cave is ruined once he returns back into the cave, unable to succeed at the shadow games. The strong (in the cave) must be made weak (in the cave) if they are to become truly strong (in the light). So, in a sense, Socrates is trying to make the stronger weaker. He is trying to blind those that see, and to give sight to those that are blind (Jn 9:39).

3. THE TWO LIVES: PHILOSOPHICAL OR MISOLOGICAL

The main charge levied against Socrates was that he makes the

27. *Ibid.*, 483c–e.

28. *Ibid.*, 486b.

weaker the stronger. In a very subtle way, Socrates *was* guilty of this. After all, he did—as Callicles noted—turn Athenian life upside down. What they regarded as weakness (i.e., logos) Socrates regarded as strength. The Athenian table of values was undoubtedly flipped; however, it is not immediately obvious whether the “Socratic turn” leaves the world upside-down, or right-side-up. This question seems to be one of the lessons of Plato’s allegory of the cave. But figuring out the orientation of the world, as it were, proves to be more difficult than one might think. But one thing is sure: a flip has occurred. Unless one has *already* made “the Socratic turn” to the philosophical life, one has little hope of understanding the goodness of such a life. Granted, the seeds of the Socratic life are given to us in our nature at birth, for “all men by nature desire to know.”²⁹ There is always hope, but it diminishes to the degree that we stifle our disposition to wonder. Wondering at nature is like tilling the soil. It prepares the soul to receive logos, and as we all know, seeds will not grow on rocky or uncultivated soil.

The logos is its own reason, and so no one can stand outside of it and demand it to speak; all one would hear is either nothing or nonsense, which amount to the same thing.³⁰ Only the lover can find meaning, since he has ears to hear and eyes to see. After we examine this paradox a bit more, we will return to the question raised earlier concerning the performative and meta-dialogical nature of the Platonic dialogue. In the next section, I will argue that Plato’s dialogues reveal logos to those who are open to receiving it; Plato’s dialogues incarnate logos in the same way that Socrates’s life did.

The philo-logical life can be characterized as a life that is obedient to reason and hence in love with and at the service of it. The philo-logical life is the life of a handmaid, a servant, and a midwife.³¹ Such individuals are not principally concerned with themselves but with another; they conform their lives to another. Rationality requires not only hearing the logos, but also

29. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 980a21.

30. This is precisely the situation Pilate is in when he questions the Logos from outside: the only answers he receives are questions and silence.

31. Throughout the *Theaetetus* Socrates uses the analogy of the midwife to characterize the life of the philosopher.

conforming one's life to it, since to hear is to follow. Conformity to and love of one greater gives rise to a clarity of vision of that other: "The more obediently one thinks, the more clearly one sees."³² The lover of logos yearns for union with it. This is what distinguishes the lover from the tyrant. The former yearns to conform himself to truth whereas the latter yearns to conform truth to himself. This is exactly why the philosopher is a lover. The miso-logical life, on the other hand, is a life that is *insubordinate* to reason and hence grows hateful of reason trying to control it; it expresses this hatred by trying to fit reason completely within its own schema. The misologist takes reason to be the tyrant of truth, since reason makes the pronouncement on what is true rather than letting truth speak for itself. The misologist is the master of reason, which is in turn the master of truth, rather than being a lover of reason as obedient to truth. The misologist is irrational precisely because he takes himself to be *above* reason and its master. Therefore, the misological life is a life of pride because it takes itself to be not *with* another but *above* another.³³

Misology is will-to-power. Misology is the death of God, since it leaves one receptive of *nothing*. It serves nothing except its own power. It takes logos as something to be grasped at. For the misologist, there is no knowledge, no meaning, no direction, no being, no logos. In one sense, Nietzsche appears to be the perfection of misology. His transvaluation of all Socratic value—knowledge is power; logos is power; being and meaning lie in becoming—strikes one as the apex of misology. However, Nietzsche's great fear is that misology, precisely in its negative orientation toward logos, is still wedded to the reality of logos. Nietzsche is trying to move beyond misology. It is only when we grow forgetful of God in the marketplace (even forgetful of the "smell of the divine decomposition") that we become free of the

32. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 160.

33. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 4: *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 169: "The philosopher wills the truth without any conditions. . . . He therefore divides men into two groups: those who serve truth and pledge to it, and those who let truth serve them and are not pledged to it. . . . But, more deeply, this front was the more brutal struggle between the service of truth and the egoism of power for which any ideology is right if only it increases power."

grip of the logos. In a sense, for Nietzsche, one who has killed logos does not even make the appearance-reality distinction. For, even allowing the misologist to communicate an *appearance* of knowledge, meaning, and logos is to concede too much to reality. Where there is appearance of logos there is some mysterious reality of logos that shines forth. The problem, as Nietzsche sees it, is that we cannot move beyond logos until we move beyond language, beyond grammar. After all, the seeds of logos are built into the very texture of language itself, which even Nietzsche recognized: "I am afraid we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar. . ."³⁴

Language is essentially *logical*; therefore, speakers of language are inherently *philo-logical*. The linguistic life and hence the philo-logical life—like the life of love—is a life of receptivity, openness, and "listening." The state of active receptivity is a necessary condition for being in love with (or even simply in communication and dialogue with) another. Likewise, being actively receptive to logos is a necessary condition for being united with (and hence of understanding) logos. Therefore, to understand the philo-logical life requires one to be already living it. It is the same with understanding the musical life: the meaning or good in living a musical life is intelligible to one who is *in* such a life. Those that have never played an instrument well lack a genuine understanding its goodness.

Likewise, beauty is its own reason, and unless one encounters the beautiful one cannot understand beauty. The same goes for living a literate life. Obviously, it is not possible to explain the reason for being a literate human being from the outside—that is, from the standpoint of illiteracy. One must find oneself already in such a life in order to understand the meaning of language. Hence, one cannot "work" one's *own* way into understanding the musical or literate life. This goes for initially learning the instrument and playing previously written pieces as well as for creating new pieces. Those who have ever been "lost" in playing music (or listening to music) realize that a whole world is opened up for them by virtue of *being musical*. However,

34. Friedrich Nietzsche, "'Reason' in Philosophy, #5," in *Twilight of the Idols*, cited in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Pearson and Duncan Large (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 464.

one must be taught to be musical. Someone must con-descend (i.e., descend to be with us) to you who know nothing of and can know nothing of such a life, if there is any hope of coming to understand the logic or point of that life. It is only by the con-descension of another that one can, with surprise, find oneself *already* living a life in union with its logos.

Consider the following example of how a child becomes capable of speech. There is nothing that the child can do on his own to arrive at his own language. There can be no private language; its essence is to be shared.³⁵ Saying that he can master language on his own is nothing short of a linguistic pelagianism, which claims that one can come to the word through one's own efforts. If the child, or anyone for that matter, is to have a language, it must be something that one is intro-duced to (brought or drawn into) through the activity *of another*. In this light, language becomes intelligible only as gifted or graced from another. However, like all gifts, a proper reception is necessary to complete the act of giving. I cannot be said to have *taught* students if no one *learned*. Therefore, one cannot be forced into learning a language (any more than one can be forced into an education); the child must willingly follow the linguistic speaker *into* the language. So, both the child and his parent are each responsible, albeit in different ways, for the child to learn a language. No one can stand outside a language and understand it. No one can stand outside of beauty, justice, or love and understand them, any more than one can stand outside language and understand it. Finally, no one can stand outside of logos and hope to understand it. Logos is intelligible only when heard in love, which means in union.

The fundamental, originary experience of every human being is that of gift: finding oneself already in existence, which one has done nothing—nor could do anything—to merit.³⁶ This is recapitulated in the way we find ourselves as already linguistic

35. Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein's argument against a private language in *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), §243ff.

36. For superb metaphysical reflections on this originary experience of gift as the foundation for metaphysics and epistemology, see Antonio López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014); and Kenneth Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982).

humans. The only fitting response for someone who finds himself always already in a life of being, language, beauty, or logos is one of gratitude. The entrance into these “lives”—that is, a life of language, beauty, logos, being, and such things—is first and foremost the result of an initial *gift* or grace from another. The life of logos (as it is for one’s very being) must come to us if we are to live it; we cannot go to it. If one *sees* or *hears* or *understands* the reason internal to such lives, one can be certain that another has con-descended for our sake, enabling us to see what we would not otherwise have seen, hear what we would not otherwise have heard, understand that which would otherwise have remained incomprehensible, and ultimately love that which we otherwise would have hated.

The philosophical life is made actual by the grace of living it. One might be worried—and this is a legitimate concern—that the thesis just stated collapses the distinction between nature and grace. If reason is actualized by the grace of another, then it does not seem *natural* for man to be rational, since reason would come from the “outside” and not be an internal principle of man.³⁷ In short, man’s nature would not be natural, and so not a nature. Before continuing, it will be fruitful to address this worry, since doing so will help to clarify the meaning of our thesis.

It is impossible for there to be any competition in principle between nature and grace, just as it is impossible for there to be any competition between language and grace. Classically, man had been *defined* as the living creature of reason or language: ζῷον λόγον ἔχον. Man is the linguistic, rational, or logos-having

37. In conversation, Aaron Riches raised the following related worry: In light of this characterization of the philosophical life as steeped in grace, what accounts for the radical newness and distinctness of the *Christian* mode of life? This is a great question, and although I do not have the room to delve into it sufficiently here, I will discuss it briefly at the end of this essay. For now, allow the following to suffice: “The way in which Jesus Christ lives in openness toward the Father and in this openness shows both the supreme exposure of the love of God and the supreme decision of man for God, can cause the metaphysician to ask himself whether he already thinks and enquires sufficiently openly, or whether perhaps he has come too quickly to an end. It is in this sense that the Christian is called to be the guardian of metaphysics in our time” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 5: *The Realm of Metaphysics in The Modern Age* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], 656).

animal, and yet man cannot have an *actual* language unless he is brought into it. Man is rational—just as he is linguistic—by nature; he possesses the capacity to reason in the sense of having the potency to reason even if not actually reasoning. Recall the multifaceted distinction between the different senses of potential and actual made by Aristotle in *De anima*; it is no coincidence that he uses as his prime example the learning of language:

But we must now distinguish different senses in which things can be said to be potential or actual. . . . We can speak of something as a knower either as when we say that man is a knower, meaning that man falls within the class of beings that know or have knowledge, or as when we are speaking of a man who possesses a knowledge of grammar; each of these has a potentiality, but not in the same way: the one because his kind or matter is such and such, the other because he can reflect when he wants to, if nothing external prevents him. And there is the man who is already reflecting—he is a knower in actuality and in the most proper sense is knowing. . . . Both the former are potential knowers, who realize their respective potentialities, the one by change of quality, i.e., repeated transitions from one state to its opposite under instruction, the other in another way by the transition from the inactive possession of sense or grammar to their active exercise.³⁸

Is it natural for man to be grammatical? Yes, just as it is natural for an embryo at an early stage of development to be a perceiver with eyes, and yet this perceptual nature is present long before the baby has eyes. The baby needs the mother in order to develop properly so he can eventually become capable of, as Aristotle would put it, transitioning from the “inactive possession of sense . . . to the active exercise” of sight. Moreover, the fact that the child has a perceptual nature does not entail that the child can see *all by himself*. There is no such thing as *pure perceptual nature*. As Aristotle’s *De anima* clearly points out, seeing—active seeing—is a co-act between the perceiver and the perceived. In fact, Aristotle even thinks that one would not even have the capacity to see if there were not perceptible objects with which the sense organ can interact. Seeing is not simply something that I (or my eyes) do, but rather it is something I do *with another*. We

38. Aristotle, *De anima* 417a22–b1.

could even say, then, that seeing is itself rooted in a kind of grace. The perceiver realizes that something is *given* to him in seeing, something that he could never have come to on his own. The perceptible object—albeit unconsciously—graces itself (as “colored,” Aristotle would say) to the perceiver. Finally, the perceiver must be actively receptive of perceptible objects if he is to see them. One could say in the poetic spirit of the Romantics that the opening of the eyes is an invitation for all of perceptible being to dwell within. But one must not forget that the eye does not force objects into itself; rather, it receives them.

The perceptual life, therefore, turns out to be a life of grace: one cannot see unless another reveals, giving himself to one; yet, it is the *potential to receive* the other that constitutes the perceptual nature. The oak tree outside my window is not (nor can be) open to receiving color as a perceptible object; it lacks a potential that humans possess in their very inner nature. Human beings are intrinsically disposed to receive color. But this does not mean we can *actually* receive color “purely naturally.” The *act* of seeing is an activity of the perceived object occurring in the sensing eye. Seeing requires something more than the seer. Moreover, it requires more than the seer being in the presence of a perceived object. No matter how long and hard I stare at a coffee mug I cannot see it unless there is light. A significant part of book two of *De anima* concerns light as the underlying, external principle that must be present in order for the act of seeing to occur. Without going into the details of Aristotle’s account of perception and the essential role played by light, we may infer from his presentation that seeing is not merely a gift of the mother to the developing embryo, nor is it merely the communication of the perceptible object to the mature perceiver, but it is also a gift of the light that makes sight actual. If it were not for the light shining in the darkness, there would be no hope of *naturally* seeing *natural* objects. In short, the light is what makes it possible for the being with a perceptual nature to act according to its nature. The light allows it to do what it is *intrinsically* disposed to do. It is also interesting to reflect on the fact that, for Aristotle, light is and must be actually transparent if active seeing of objects is to occur; otherwise we would see only light and not objects. In short, light does not displace the seeing nor the object seen but allows the two to interact according to their natures.

I think something analogous must be said about why the life of active reason—the philosophical life—is at one and the same time a perfection of man’s nature and yet only actual by the grace of another. Just as the child’s perceptual nature would never have developed perfectly so as to see colors (although he could in the broadest sense of “potential” as we saw in Aristotle above) were it not for the *in utero* gift of his mother; so too the philosopher would never have developed a mind to “see” logos (although he could in a broad sense) were it not for the persistent grace of his teacher who, as Aristotle said above, through “repeated transitions from one state to its opposite under instruction,” opens the pupil to exist in a more perfectly natural state. The object of sight—color—must *come to* the perceiver if the perceiver is actually to see; likewise, the object of reason—logos—must *come to* the reasoner if the reasoner is actually to know.

Finally, and most significantly, just as one does not actually see unless light is present, making the potentially seen actually seen; likewise, Aristotle argues (in *De anima* 3.5.430a15) that there must be “a sort of state, like light” that makes the potentially knowable actually known by the knower. In short, just as the natural perceiver can stand in front of a yellow coffee mug with his eyes open and not see its color, so too the natural reasoner can stand in front of a geometrical theorem with his mind open and still not “see” its truth.³⁹ The reason for this twofold lack of “sight” is the same: the person is standing in darkness. There is no light present. Without something like a light of reason that makes the potentially knowable actually known, so Aristotle argues, our rational nature would never attain its full actuality. Just as we are not entirely in control of the light of perception, so too we lack control of the light of reason. Therefore, actual perceiving and knowing are both the result of light being active and so allowing our nature (as perceptual and rational) to be fully actual. Light does not supplant the nature of reason but allows it to become actual—just as there is no competition between the eye, the object seen, and physical light, so too there is no competition between reason and rational light. Just as the eye must be open to the receptivity of the perceptible object through the

39. Those who have taught logic or geometry have likely experienced this many times firsthand during office hours.

active showing of itself *in light*, so must the reasoner be open to the knowable object through the active showing of itself *in light*. If the light is not present, the natural self-communication of the being in question is thwarted and hence so is the natural receptivity of that communication. Rational nature does not go out into the darkness trying to grasp truths and force them back into its own, self-generated light (its own rationalistic systems), but rather it actively prepares for the reception of the self-showing, self-communicating, and self-gracing object, the actual reception of which can occur only through the gift of that rational light.

It will surely be asked: What is this rational light? I cannot explain what this light consists in; in fact, I am inclined to think that rational light must be an ineffable mystery because—like all light—it is transparent. Light is that which shows forth something other than itself; what light could therefore illumine the light? I will only say this much, that what this rational light is, is best known experientially; for example, by those who are struck by a solution to a problem at two o'clock in the morning that they have grappled with for hours fruitlessly. Why does the solution come? Why then? No one can say. All we typically do is thank God that we were once blind but now we see and can go to bed.

Reason is most rational—and hence most natural—when it is most perfectly open to the grace bestowed on it by the light of reason. Reason—like sight—is about preparing oneself to receive another, and, as we saw in the passage from Aristotle above, preparation or capacity can be spoken of at many different levels. All humans—including the misologist—have *some* capacity to know the logos. This sense of capacity is analogous to the embryo's capacity to see. The problem is that many misologists have thwarted their own natural development by cutting themselves off from logos, as one who cuts out his own eyes, making a potential seer incapable of actualizing that potential. By gouging out his eyes, hating logos, he has forced himself to stand in darkness. As we will see below, there is always the possibility that the one who walks in darkness can see a great light; but this requires the con-descension of another. Balthasar has argued that the philosophical light is a life of love because it lives in the light of being.

Every form of metaphysics, therefore, which withdraws the light of Being from man in order to locate the light in its entirety within his self ceases of itself to be metaphysics and becomes “science” [perhaps technology] which takes control of (manifest) existence. At the same time, Being and love are extinguished, for the philosophical act lives from both.⁴⁰

As we have seen, language is an unmerited gift of one who has con-descended to communicate with the incommunicable, to speak a language to the languageless. Such a person can be likened to the knower who, after leaving the cave, descends back into it, or goes back “down to the Piraeus.”⁴¹ Such a con-descension verges on absurdity. Imagine a fully competent speaker of a language attempting to communicate with the incommunicable. This is likely why many adults feel embarrassed when they try to speak to infants, because they know the infant does not understand a single word of what is said to him. However, something miraculous can happen when one con-descends to the infant. The child eventually finds himself a competent speaker. If humans did not do what is apparently absurd—i.e., speak to the languageless—the linguistic life would die. The same goes for the life of beauty and the life of logos. If lovers of beauty and logos cease to con-descend and pass on what was originally given to them, then such lives will come to an end. The death of the philo-logical life is the end of history. How does one hand on the philosophical life when those to whom the life is being introduced stand outside it? Will they not necessarily find such a life unintelligible? Yes, at least initially. It is only through hope and love—and not through power and force—that one is introduced into the philosophical life. One cannot force the logos on anyone any more than one can force education or love on another, anymore than one can force color into the eyes of a person who has chosen to close his eyes. The *non serviam* is a real possibility.

4. ΑΙΠΟ-ΛΟΓΙΑ: INCARNATING LOGOS

40. Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 5, 645.

41. *Republic* 327a.

In a famous exchange between Socrates and the young and eager Theaetetus, Socrates brings Theaetetus into a state of *aporia* (puzzlement or bewilderment). Despite the brevity of their exchange, it penetrates to the heart of the method of con-descension for the sake of intro-ducing one to—leading one into—the philosophical life.

Socrates:

I think you must be familiar with this kind of puzzle.

Theaetetus:

Oh yes; indeed, Socrates, I often wonder like mad what these things can mean; sometimes when I'm looking at them I begin to feel quite giddy.

Socrates:

I dare say you do, my boy. . . . For this is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else. And the man who made Iris the child of Thaumás was perhaps no bad genealogist.⁴²

Socrates is articulating something profound in referring to Iris (the bridge between the divine and the human) as the child of Thaumás (wonder). Socrates is asserting that *wonder* begets communion with the divine; it carries us toward something beyond ourselves. Wonder is the way into philosophy—it is the only way one can be intro-duced to philosophy. Being perplexed by being can unlock the possibility for a more fervent openness and erotic entry into the mystery of being; it is this that pushes us toward the logos. Perplexity does not necessitate this openness because one can experience perplexity from the standpoint of despair, and in this case it leads only to the absurdity and incoherence of being. The difference is that the lover experiences perplexity as intractable fullness whereas one prone to despair experiences perplexity as ineffable emptiness. Socrates brings his fellow Athenians face to face with the possibility of entering into the philosophical life by inducing *aporia* in them. However, that *aporia* gives rise to wonder only if one embraces *aporia* with humility and meekness—that is, with love. Doing so opens the individual to something more than a puzzle or problem. Through humility, *aporia* is transfigured into a mystery sought in love,

42. Plato, *Theaetetus* 155c–d.

rather than a problem dealt with through power.⁴³ Only the philosopher—in his humility—can experience *aporia* as a mystery giving rise to a truth that surpasses all understanding. However, it was precisely this Socratic humility in *aporia* that appeared so pathetic and perverse to Callicles and the Athenian jury.

Plato was fully aware that wonder cannot be forced upon someone. It is the fruit of rational freedom. Moreover, wonder is not the same as mere confusion. Wonder is dynamic. It is teleological. Unless one's opinion is shaken to its roots, one will remain deaf—as Heraclitus has said—since all one has heard is his own ignorance.⁴⁴

Pride is the cause of deafness just as it was the cause of blindness.⁴⁵ For it takes a radical openness—i.e., wonder—to hear something outside of oneself; moreover, this openness itself comes from outside. Only something “outside” oneself can occasion wonder. The greatest cause of wonder for a creature is his very act of existence itself, and one can truly wonder at his own existence—ask the question of being—only if he finds *his* very act of being as a gift or grace from another. In short, one can truly wonder at one's own life only once one sees it as a gift from another. This implies that wonder—the essence of the philosophical life—is a grace: a gift from another.

Socrates recognizes his own wonder not only as a gift received from God, but also as a gift that is given to Athens. Socrates has con-descended to his Athenians (he went *down* to the Piraeus).⁴⁶ His con-descension—his gift to Athens—was his very philo-logical life (to the extent that it cost him his biological life). His life was an *apo-logia*. He showed Athens something that cannot be perfectly stated, namely the philo-logical life. At the same time, he tried to communicate that life in speech as much as possible, for it was through this dialogical attempt to speak the unspeakable that he *showed* them what it means to be oriented

43. Cf. Gabriel Marcel, “On the Ontological Mystery,” in *The Philosophy of Existence* (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2018).

44. Heraclitus, quoted by Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.115.3, cited in Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

45. Cf. Jn 9:39.

46. *Republic* 327a.

toward and to love the logos. His loving attempts to speak the unspeakable (i.e., the forms, the essential truth of things) was his way of showing the philo-logical life. He saw his life as originating in a gift received, and hence he saw his life's fulfillment in being a gift for others. Socrates's life was fulfilled in being a sincere gift of self.⁴⁷

Be sure that if you kill the sort of man I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves. . . . Indeed, men of Athens, I am far from making a defense on my behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god's gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me. I was attached to this city by the god—though it seems a ridiculous thing to say—as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfill such a function that I believe the god has placed me in the city.⁴⁸

Socrates is stating that the way to bring people into the life of logos—into the life of reason—is to “stir them” by “biting them” with logos, arguments, and reason, which culminates in *aporia*. The vast majority of those “bitten” by Socrates are not receptive to the good that this bite carries, and so they are not induced to wonder. However, the impossible is possible: one who is not linguistic can receive the logos. Even Socrates himself recognizes that this sounds absurd (“though it seems a ridiculous thing to say”). He is fully aware that most will not understand his apology because his apology is his life—and yet he presents it nonetheless.

Another such man will not easily come to be among you, gentlemen, and if you believe me you will spare me. You might easily be annoyed with me as people are when they are aroused from a doze, and strike out at me; if convinced by Anytus you could easily kill me, and then you could sleep on for the rest of your days, unless the god, in his care for you, sent you someone else. That I am the kind of person to be a gift of the god to the city you might realize

47. See *Gaudium et spes*, 24.

48. *Apology* 30d.

from the fact that it does not seem like human nature for me to have neglected all my own affairs and to have tolerated this neglect now for so many years while I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you like a father or an elder brother to persuade you to care for virtue.⁴⁹

Lastly, it is important to note the miracle that occurred at Socrates's trial. The apparently impossible was actualized. After having been found guilty, Socrates notes his surprise at the number of votes cast in his favor, or rather in favor of the philological life: "I am much more surprised at the number of votes cast on each side, for I did not think the decision would be by so few votes but by a great many."⁵⁰ Socrates even con-descended to his accusers one last time to reveal the *reason* for living the philosophical life to them. The majority continued to remain deaf to the logos, but to his astonishment, some actually *heard* his apology, and, like children, found themselves understanding his life.⁵¹

Let us now end by turning to consider the metadialogical nature of Plato's dialogues referenced above. In writing his dialogues, Plato appears to have crafted them in such a way that, when one reads them, one is brought *into* the conversation as a participant and not a mere observer. The Platonic dialogues are captivating. One is drawn into them, finding oneself transfigured from a mere observer into an interlocutor. The philosophical repercussions of this are eternal.

Through the medium of the Socratic dialogue, Plato has reincarnated the late Socrates. Socrates's confidence that he would survive death was rooted in his confidence in his progeny—Plato, Theaetetus, Phaedrus, Crito, and so forth—who have shared in his life. His philo-logical life will carry on after

49. *Apology* 31a–b.

50. *Apology* 36a.

51. Ironically, according to Diogenes Laërtius's "Apology of Socrates" (in his *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library 184 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925]), there were more jurymen who voted to kill Socrates than there were to acquit him; therefore, there were some jurymen who thought that he was innocent *and* that he should be put to death.

his death; indeed, his death only reinforces the survival of the philo-logical life.

Plato has made present to us the gadfly of Athens. We encounter, through the Platonic dialogue, the grace of the *apologia*, which awakens in us a love of logos. What Plato's dialogues have accomplished is truly life-changing. Plato has reincarnated the philosophical life, but not through any mere description of such a life. For mere descriptions of lives are static and dead. Plato's dialogues are not ultimately about Socrates's pursuit of the logos of some particular form (knowledge, justice, beauty, being, etc.) with an interlocutor. To interpret them thus would be to read the dialogues merely descriptively, and hence to assume they have a static nature. Rather, Plato's dialogues have a performative and dynamic nature. They are *presenting* something—a kind of life—to the reader. Therefore, the Platonic dialogue is essentially metadiological. It does not leave the reader outside as a neutral observer; rather, the written Platonic dialogue transcends its written nature.

Socrates:

It is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent.

Phaedrus:

You mean the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows, of which the written one can be fairly called an image.

Socrates:

Absolutely right.⁵²

The reader, at first unawares, finds himself engaged in his own dialogue with the text. The aim of the Platonic dialogue is to transform the reader into an interlocutor. It achieves its end when the reader becomes a lover.

I will conclude by examining one of the most important theological implications of being introduced to philosophy. Only the one who has been introduced to philosophy (in the sense of being led into a life of love of logos), rather than simply being trained in the academic discipline, can have the

52. *Phaedrus* 276a–b.

radical openness necessary for encountering the Incarnation of the Logos in the person of Jesus Christ. An orthodox theology requires this preparatory radical opening—otherwise, one will be tempted to force the Logos into a preconceived system. Those who have not been introduced to philosophy will mistakenly think that the point of theology is to view Christ as a series of problems to be solved with a will-to-conceptual-power, rather than as a mystery to be loved. The philosopher is the only one capable of being transfigured into a theologian, for philosophy in one sense perfects and in another sense is perfected by theology; and any attempt to reduce the one to the other or to divorce the one from the other entirely destroys them both.

The meaning of language is that it communicates something beyond itself. Words signify reality. But, if one thought of words as void of the reality that they signify, then no communication could occur. Therefore, the word is by nature paradoxical—its meaning is intrinsic to itself, but only as transcending itself. If one over-emphasized either side of this paradox (the intrinsic meaning or the transcendent meaning), then the word would not be communicative and hence meaningful. Language ceases to be communicative when it fails to transcend itself: sounds are meaningful only when they are more than sounds, precisely *as* sounds. In light of this, we can understand the Incarnate Logos's teaching about himself as the spoken word of the Father: "And he who sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn 12:45).

Many readers (perhaps more likely, "excerpters" or "citers") of Plato fall into the modern temptation to attribute to Plato a form of nihilism about the incarnate word. Many believe that he takes the physical world as void of meaning. They attribute to him—following Nietzsche's interpretation⁵³—the view that the philosopher's goal is to transcend the meaninglessness of the physical world of mere sound and to ascend to the meaningful world of abstracted language. However, this attribution of incarnational nihilism is a grave philosophical mistake and misinterpretation of Plato. The physical world is not void of meaning, any more than it is void of being or goodness. If it were, then the

53. See especially Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Nietzsche Reader*; although this attribution of nihilism to Plato is prevalent throughout Nietzsche's entire career.

philosophical life could not be passed on. In short, Plato's *Apology*—the Socratic *apo-logia*—would be senseless. Moreover, if the physical world were void of meaning, then, according to Plato, it would run contrary to the nature of Goodness itself.

Now why did he who framed this whole universe of becoming [the physical, tangible universe] frame it? Let us state the reason why: He was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so, being free of jealousy, he wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible. . . . The god wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible, and so he took over all that was visible—not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion—and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order, because he believed that order was in every way better than disorder.⁵⁴

Nothing could be further from the truth than the assertion that the physical world is disordered, meaningless, uninformed, or nihilistic; To say so amounts to asserting that the Good is jealous, and hence not the Good. Only a misologist (despiser of the Good) sees the physical world nihilistically. So why do so many “readers” of Plato attribute this nihilism to him? D.C. Schindler has argued that many are tempted to read Plato as a proto-Cartesian, and are thereby led to think that Descartes's ethical, theological, metaphysical, historical, and scientific concerns were those of Plato.⁵⁵ They implicitly hold that in order to understand Plato one must begin with Descartes, who offers a more explicit (because nondramatic) defense of the same theses as Plato. They presuppose a certain cosmology and metaphysics that originates in late Scholasticism and the early modernism that leaves no room for the *diffusiveness* of the Good. To put this differently, they fail to understand that at the heart of a Platonic cosmology is the metaphysically serious yet poetically rich thesis that the Good itself is so free of jealousy that it even descends into the physical world to inform that otherwise meaningless world of becoming. It does not just bring meaning *out of* becoming, but it brings meaning (order) *to* and *in* becoming precisely *as* becom-

54. *Timaeus* 29e–30b.

55. See D.C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 120–29.

ing. Without the Good, there would be no becoming. In other words, becoming is the incarnating of being.

The spoken word *as spoken*—because of the Good—is made meaningful. To think that spoken words are nothing but *mere* meaningless sounds is to be forgetful of the Good. The world of flesh is a world saturated with meaning; however, one must not confuse this saturation with the equally true fact that the world of flesh is also confusing. How can the world of becoming be? How can that-which-is-not share in that-which-is? How can noises communicate something more than noises? The incarnation of meaning, which is the creative work of the demiurge, is far from meaningless: it is wonder-filled because it is beautiful. It is precisely as both *incarnate* and *meaningful* that the created world exceeds our ability to grasp it. Only the philosopher can recognize creation for what it is: the paradox of paradoxes, the union of being and becoming. Creation is the incarnation of logos, and so only a lover of creation can understand it and through understanding also participate in it. The lover of logos (the philosopher) is the only one able to avoid nihilism, for he is the only one who is open to seeing being *in* the becoming. Or, more accurately, the philosopher—as a lover—is the only one capable of seeing the incarnation of logos, even though it is only in faith, through Christ who reveals man to himself, that he is brought to *actual* fullness. The pagan philosopher lives Advent; the Christian philosopher lives Christmas.⁵⁶ □

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