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The Philosophical Basis of the Method of Antilogic

Filozoficzne podstawy antylogiki

Abstrakt: Artykuł poświęcony jest sofistycznej metodzie antylogicznej. Tradycyjne rozumienie antylogiki ujmowanej jako przejaw agonicznych i erystycznych skłonności sofistów i pod wpływem optyki Platona przeciwstawianej dialektyce zostało w ostatnich dekadach, pod wpływem pracy G.B. Kerferda, zastąpione rozumieniem antylogiki jako samoistnej techniki argumentacyjnej, mającej swe własne źródła, istotę i cele. Idąc za interpretacją G.B. Kerferda, wedle której fundamentem antylogiki jest opozycja dwu *logoi* wynikająca ze sprzeczności lub przeciwieństwa, w konieczny sposób związanego ze światem zmysłowym, w artykule dowodzi się, że filozoficznych podstaw antylogiki należy poszukiwać w przedstawieniu poglądów przypisywanych Protagorasowi w Platónskim dialogu *Teajtet*.

Słowa kluczowe: sofistyka, Protagoras, antylogika

It is commonly accepted that interest in the *logos* as an instrument of persuasion led to the formation of the three basic sophistic methods of eristic, dialectic, and antilogic. The most mysterious, but — as Plato contends in the dialogue the *Sophist* — essentially linked with the sophistic movement is the art of antilogic.¹

¹ In ancient texts, this method is called the method of “opposed speeches” (*logoiantikeimenoí, logoi enantioi*), “two-fold arguments” (*duo logoi, amfo to logo, dissoi logoi*), “antilogic” (*antilogike*), or “enantiology” (*enantiologia*).

Traditional interpretation of antilogic

The interpretative tradition treats antilogic as an expression of eristic “word juggling,” already exposed by Plato and Aristotle. The scarcity of records about this method, the pejorative tone of Plato’s dialogues and Aristotle’s criticism, as well as the indignation that this method elicited both in the sophists’ contemporaries and in later centuries prompted researchers to attribute only rhetorical or eristic significance to the method of antilogic. The dismissive attitude towards antilogic continues to this day, and even insightful scholars succumb to it. The basic objection to antilogic is the belief that it results from the sophists’ agonistic rhetoric and its only goal is to defeat one’s opponent in a debate without any concern for truth.

Due to this odium that has been weighing on it for decades, the subject of “contrasting arguments” has not garnered adequate attention in studies in the history of philosophy, rhetoric, or logic. Though many researchers have emphasized that arguing for opposing theses is one of the methods proper to the sophists,² this has not led to in-depth research on this issue.

The reasons for this state of affairs can be seen in the traditional belief that the main sophistic method is rhetoric, understood as the ability to give judicial, political or epideictic speeches, and eristic, a method of questions and answers aimed at seeking victory in argument by refuting the opponent’s position regardless of the truth. According to this traditional belief, both methods — rhetoric and eristic — are in opposition to Socrates’s method of “questions and answers,” that is, dialectic.

From this perspective, antilogic has been equated with eristic or considered a part of rhetorical education and, as a method aimed solely at victory in a dispute, opposed to Plato’s dialectic. An example of this way of thinking is F. Ueberweg’s assessment of antilogic; Ueberweg, when he mentions the form of Protagoras’s work *Antilogikoi* (“Contradictory arguments”), speaks of “the double-sided pseudodialectic procedure” (“das doppelseitige pseudo-dialektische Verfahren”).³ F. Ueberweg uses

² G.W.F. Hegel (G.W.F. HEGEL: *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1. Berlin 1883, p. 23), contrasting “die Sophistik” with “die Sophisterei,” wrote: “Die Sophisterei ist so schlimm, in dem Sinne, als ob dies Eigentümlichkeit sei, der sich nur schlechte Menschen schuldig machen. Die Sophistik ist so aber viel allgemeiner; es ist alles Rasonieren aus Gründen — das Geltendmachen solcher Gesichtspunkte, das Anbringen von Gründen und Gegengründen.”

³ F. UEBERWEG: *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie des Alterthums*. Berlin 1876, p. 89.

the same term “pseudo-dialektisch” to describe the eristic argumentation of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus presented in Plato’s *Euthydemus* (“die pseudo-dialektischen Gaukler”).⁴ F. Ueberweg’s equating of the method of opposed speeches and eristic is significant and reflects the generally accepted view of the time.

A similar perspective also finds expression in many more recent works. Though L. Robin and T. Buchheim⁵ are aware of the distinctiveness of antilogic as a specific sophistic method, they primarily connect it with the theme of verbal disputes. L. Robin notes: “Since their (sc. the sophists’) object was to prepare the pupil for every conflict in thought or action to which social life might give rise, their method was essentially ‘antilogy’ or controversy, the opposition of the theses possible with regard to certain themes, or ‘hypotheses,’ suitably defined and classified. The pupil had to learn to criticize and to argue, to organize a ‘joust’ of reasons against reasons.”⁶ L. Robin rightly indicates the main feature of antilogic, which is the ability to argue for both contradictory arguments on any topic. However, like many other researchers, in emphasizing its agonistic nature as a basic feature of the method of contrasting arguments, he only highlights the polemical aspect of the art of antilogic.

It seems that at the root of the way of thinking represented by the above-mentioned researchers lies a belief which developed in antiquity in the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. E. Dupréel indicates this, writing: “Dès l’antiquité, on a voulu comprendre que Protagoras avait marqué son indifférence complète à l’égard du pour et du contre. Nier et affirmer une même chose a la même valeur, dès lors chacun a licence de ne s’attacher qu’à celle des deux propositions contradictoires qu’il juge la plus conforme à ses intérêts.”⁷ Protagoras’s antilogical motto, according to which it is possible to argue for and against any thesis, perfectly fit the negative image of the sophist as an unscrupulous manipulator. Combined with the “ethical” interpretation of Protagoras’s theorem, “making the weaker argument stronger,”⁸ it gave rise to the accusation that the sophists acted solely in their own interest. This interpretation of the *dissoi logoi* method can already be seen

⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

⁵ For example, T. BUCHHEIM: *Die Sophistik als Avantgarde normalen Lebens*. Hamburg 1986, p. 12. regards antilogic as a means of achieving victory in verbal disputes.

⁶ L. ROBIN: *Greek Thought and the Origins of the Scientific Spirit*. New York 1996, p. 140.

⁷ E. DUPRÉEL: *Les Sophistes. Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippas*. Neuchâtel 1948, p. 38.

⁸ H. DIELS, W. KRANZ. Eds.: *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Griechisch und Deutsch von Hermann Diels. Herausgegeben von Walther Kranz, I—III vols. 13th ed.* Dublin—Zürich 1969. (DK 80 6B).

in early sources, such as Aristophanes's *Clouds*, in which the comedy writer combined the method of "contrasting arguments with the conviction that its goal is to win in unfair trials."⁹ A reference to the method of "contradictory arguments" appears in a similar context in Euripides's tragedy *Antiope*, in which *haplos mythos*, contrasted with the sophistic "double speeches," expresses the truth.¹⁰

This negative image of antilogic was completed by Plato's works.¹¹ Already in his early dialogues, we find the opposition of sophistic methods and Socratic dialectic, which is expressed by the emphasis Plato puts on presenting the sophists' inefficiency in using the question and answer method.¹² In the late dialogue the *Sophist*, devoted to the search for the definition of a sophist, Plato shows that the most significant feature of a sophist is the connection with antilogic, and the sophist himself is called an "antilogician."¹³

This contrasting of dialectic and the sophistic methods of eristic and antilogic in Plato's works is noticed by R. Robinson, who writes: "Plato constantly has in mind a certain opposite of dialectic, something superficially like dialectic and yet as bad as dialectic is good, something against which the would-be dialectician must always be on guard. He has two chief names for this shadow or reverse of dialectic, antilogic and eristic. By 'eristic,' or the art of quarrelling, he indicates that the aim of this procedure is

⁹ T.J. MORGAN: *Literate Education in Classical Athens*. "The Classical Quarterly New Series" 1999, vol. 49 no. 1, p. 52.

¹⁰ On the "two speech" method in pre-Platonic testimonies, cf. Z. NERCZUK: *Metoda 'dwu mów' w świetle świadectw przedplatońskich*. "Studia Antyczne i Mediewistyczne" 2012, vol. 45 no. 10, pp. 37—50.

¹¹ E. Schiappa argues that the term "antilogike techne" was "almost certainly" coined by Plato, but "it is reasonable to attribute the origin of antilogike as a practice (if not as a term) to Protagoras" (E. SCHIAPPA: *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*. Columbia (South Carolina) 2003, p. 164). We know from sources that the term *antilogikos* had appeared even earlier. The earliest text in which the term appears is Aristophanes's *Clouds*, in which the term refers to someone whose profession consists in presenting the opposite opinion. We can assume that this is an allusion to the title of Protagoras's treatise *Antilogiai* or *Antilogikoi*.

¹² Cf. e.g. Pl., *Gorg.*, 466a—467c.

¹³ Cf. Pl., *Soph.*, 232b. F.M. Cornford (F.M. CORNFORD: *Plato's Theory of Knowledge, The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary*. London 1935, p. 190) interprets this passage thus: "This passage enlarges the meaning of 'controversy' so as to include the rhetorical Sophists the hunters of Division I, the 'producers of persuasion' (*pithanourgike*) and professors of spurious education in goodness, who were alternatively regarded as salesmen of the soul's nourishment in Divisions II—IV. Protagoras himself will presently be named. Because of this wider sense, 'controversy' is pitched upon as a character common to all the types described in the earlier Divisions (except the purifier of the soul) and as the 'most revealing' trait."

to win the argument, whereas the aim of dialectic is to discover truth. By ‘antilogic,’ or the art of contradiction, he indicates that it is a tendency to contradict, to maintain aggressively whatever position is opposite to that of one’s interlocutor [...]. The more detailed connotation of ‘eristic’ and ‘antilogic’ tends to be whatever Plato happens to think of as bad method at the moment, just as ‘dialectic’ is to him at every stage of his thought whatever he then considered the best method.”¹⁴

According to R. Robinson, in Plato’s works antilogic and eristic are set in opposition to the ideal method, which Plato calls “dialectic.” The contrast of the sophistic and dialectical methods, so strongly visible in all of Plato’s work, is therefore part of Plato’s polemical strategy directed against the sophists.

The opinions of F. Ueberweg, L. Robin, and E. Dupréel presented above are the result of an interpretative tradition derived from Plato and Aristotle, which connected the sophists with rhetoric and eristic, and the true philosophy and dialectic with Socrates and Plato. Under its influence, the sophists were associated with the domination of form over content, the prevalence of the eristic and ludic element, and the abandonment of any “philosophical” truth-orientedness. For example, H.-I. Marrou writes in this spirit, noting that Protagoras indeed borrowed his polemical tricks and dialectic from Zeno: “but at the same time he emptied them of their profound and serious content.” As H.-I. Marrou continues, Protagoras “kept only the bare skeleton, from which, by a process of systematization, he formulated the principles of eristics, a debating-method that was supposed to confound any kind of opponent by taking points he had himself conceded and using them as a starting-point for further argument.”¹⁵

The new perspective in interpretation of antilogic

The recent decades have brought many changes in the reigning interpretative perspective. Many scholars have pondered the source of common philosophical terms such as “philosopher,” “sophist,” “rhetor,” “dialectic,”

¹⁴ R. ROBINSON: *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*. Ithaca—New York 1941, pp. 88—89.

¹⁵ H.-I. MARROU: *A History of Education in Antiquity*. Trans. G. LAMB. New York 1964, p. 83.

and “antilogic.”¹⁶ As a result, there was a growing conviction that certain semantic and interpretational canons established in tradition are unable to withstand closer analysis. Their general understanding is largely determined by one perspective, which is that of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition.¹⁷

In this spirit, renewed reflection on the sophistic techniques of argument was also undertaken.¹⁸ Not only were the sophists’ rhetorical achievements recognized, taking into account their philosophical foundation, but so was the “element of logical formalism” that lies at the source of sophistic argumentation.¹⁹ This more thorough approach to the sophistic movement led to the distinction of sophistic methods, to the determination of their character and purpose, as well as to a rethinking of Plato’s attitude towards them.

G.B. Kerferd’s reflections in this area were groundbreaking.²⁰ In his synthetic work devoted to the sophistic movement, the researcher examines three basic forms of the “art of persuasion” developed by the sophists: dialectic, eristic, and antilogic. Their accurate distinction, and above all the indication of the essence of antilogic, was recognized by G.B. Kerferd as fundamental for understanding “the true nature of the sophistic movement.”²¹ On the one hand, G.B. Kerferd perpetuated a theme that appeared in earlier literature. The antilogical method understood as setting up contradictory predicates for the same subjects had already been written about, and it was associated with Protagoras and his lost works entitled *Antilogies* or *Art of Eristic* and a fragmentary, anonymous text entitled *Dissoi Logoi* (“Double speeches”).

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., E. SCHIAPPA: *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, pp. 39—63.

¹⁷ A. NEHAMAS: *Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato’s Demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry*. In: *Virtues of Authenticity. Essays on Plato and Socrates*. Princeton 1999, p. 110: “The reason why it is important to remind ourselves of Iocrates’s views, crude as they may appear, is that they make it clear that in the fourth century B.C. terms like ‘philosophy,’ ‘dialectic,’ and ‘sophistry’ do not seem to have had a widely agreed-upon application. On the contrary, different authors seem to have fought with one another with the purpose of appropriating the term ‘philosophy,’ each for his own practice and educational scheme. In the long run, of course, Plato (followed in this respect, and despite their many differences, by Aristotle) emerged victorious. He thereby established what philosophy is by contrasting it not only with sophistry but also with rhetoric, poetry, traditional religion, and the specialized sciences.”

¹⁸ M. GAGARIN: *Probability and Persuasion: Plato and Early Greek Rhetoric*. In: *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*. Ed. I. WORTHINGTON. London—New York 1994, pp. 46—68.

¹⁹ W. WIELAND: *Zur Problemgeschichte der formalen Logik*. In: *Sophistik*. Ed. C.J. CLASSEN. Darmstadt 1976, p. 249.

²⁰ G.B. KERFERD: *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge 1981, pp. 59—67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62: “A solution to this question, namely what is the true nature of antilogic, is a matter of some importance and indeed of urgency. It is in many ways the key to the problem of understanding the true nature of the sophistic movement.”

On the other hand, however, G.B. Kerferd set new standards. According to this researcher, the image of the sophistic movement that associates it unequivocally with eristic — understood as the pursuit of victory in arguments without any regard for the means used — does not correspond to what can be reconstructed on the basis of testimonies, including those of Plato, which are not so unambiguously critical as was previously thought. According to Kerferd, reducing the discussion between Plato and the sophists to the opposition of two methods, dialectic and eristic, is a great simplification, one of many stereotypes prevailing in the history of philosophy. Their source is superficial interpretation of Plato and the resulting conviction that the philosopher equates antilogic with eristic. Contrary to the “long tradition in Platonic studies of treating the two words as simply interchangeable,”²² Kerferd argues that Plato’s attitude toward antilogic and eristic differs. Eristic is unequivocally criticized by Plato. Etymologically speaking, it is “seeking victory in argument,” an art that deals with ways of achieving this goal regardless of the truth. Eristic develops resources helpful in achieving this goal, such as paralogisms, ambiguities, long monologues, and logical fallacies, such as the arguments of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus presented by Plato in *Euthydemus*. As G.B. Kerferd writes: “Consequently as used by Plato, the term eristic regularly involves disapproval and condemnation.”²³

According to G.B. Kerferd, antilogic and eristic differ in both their meaning and in the attitude Plato has towards each of the two methods. Kerferd notes that, although Plato does not regard antilogic as a method of philosophical debate, but develops his own dialectical method (in contrast to antilogic, it refers to an extra-sensual reality and is not limited to stating opposites in the sensual sphere),²⁴ his approach to it is positive.²⁵ According to Plato, antilogic is only a technique, in itself neither good nor bad — a method situated between dialectic and eristic. As such, it has its place in Plato’s thought. In the early dialogues, it adopts the form of the *elenchos* connected with Socrates, which consists in bringing the interlocutor to a state of *aporia* resulting from the contradiction of two statements he has made.²⁶ As G.B. Kerferd summarizes: “This is clearly an application of antilogic.”²⁷

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 63.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 67, 103.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 64. Kerferd emphasizes that Plato sees the danger in the possibility of abuse of antilogic, in particular by young people.

²⁶ R. ROBINSON: *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*, p. 7.

²⁷ G.B. KERFERD: *The Sophistic Movement*, p. 66.

In the light of this interpretation, antilogic is one of three basic sophistic methods with its own sources, essence, and goals. As G.B. Kerferd argues, the foundation of antilogic is the opposition of two *logoi* resulting from contradictions or opposites necessarily associated with the phenomenal world.²⁸ Antilogic, unlike eristic, “constitutes a specific and fairly definite technique, namely that of proceeding from a given *logos*, say the position adopted by an opponent, to the establishment of a contrary or contradictory *logos* in such a way that the opponent must either accept both *logoi*, or at least abandon his first position.”²⁹

In this view, antilogic encompasses all forms of leading to contradictory or opposing theses in a discussion, including, as G.B. Kerferd emphasizes, the form of *elenchos* so characteristic of the Platonic Socrates.³⁰ Kerferd’s description of antilogic is therefore very broad. It includes all forms of dispute in which one *logos* is set in opposition to another or attention is drawn to an opposition of *logoi* occurring in the discussion or in a given state of affairs. According to G.B. Kerferd, all procedures that rely on emphasizing opposites, not only in arguments but also in entities or facts, are antilogical.³¹

This emphasis on contradictions in Protagoras’s method has its own specific quality. According to Kerferd, there is an important difference between the occurrences of opposing arguments in the literature, and Protagoras’s method of antilogy, which is that in the case of Protagoras, the “opposing arguments” are made by one speaker, and not by two different people.³² This feature of Protagoras’s method was not always noticed by researchers, most likely due to its paradoxicality. An example of such a misunderstanding is the interpretation of nineteenth-century scholar F.A. Lange, which is worth quoting because it reflects a belief commonly accepted at the time.

²⁸ Ibid. “That Plato himself was aware that his view of the phenomenal world involved antilogic emerges clearly from a famous passage in the *Phaedo* (89d1—90c7) [...]”

²⁹ Ibid., p. 63: “It consists in opposing one *logos* to another *logos*, or in discovering or drawing attention to the presence of such an opposition in an argument or in a thing or state of affairs. The essential feature is the opposition of one *logos* to another either by contrariety or contradiction. It follows that, unlike eristic, when used in argument it constitutes a specific and fairly definite technique, namely that of proceeding from a given *logos*, say the position adopted by an opponent, to the establishment of a contrary or contradictory *logos* in such a way that the opponent must either accept both *logoi*, or at least abandon his first position.”

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 65—66.

³¹ Ibid., p. 85. According to Kerferd, antilogic is “the most characteristic feature of the thought of the whole Sophistic period.”

³² Ibid., p. 84. “But the essential feature was not simply the occurrence of opposing arguments but the fact that both opposing arguments could be expressed by a single speaker, as it were within a single complex argument.”

Summing up Protagoras's method, this researcher claimed that its characteristic feature is that contradictory judgments are uttered by two different individuals. With this interpretation, however, it would be difficult to talk about any sort of innovation on the part of Protagoras. It trivializes the claim of the sophist from Abdera, reducing it to a simple statement of contradiction occurring among expressed beliefs, i.e. to the judgment that "for every statement someone makes, the opposite statement can be made just as well, as long as there is someone who accepts it."³³

G.B. Kerferd's theses had such a big impact that a large portion of the mentions of antilogic contained in later studies boils down to a discussion of his reflections, possibly to comments or polemics with his theses.³⁴ As M. Mendelson aptly put it, the remarks contained in G.B. Kerferd's work on the antilogic have become "the critical standard" of all subsequent reflections.³⁵

The philosophical context of the antilogical method

G.B. Kerferd's work did, however, give the impetus to further research on the meaning, source, and significance of antilogic. Although its individual theses had already appeared in earlier works,³⁶ its synthetic and transparent

³³ F.A. LANGE: *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*. Iserlohn und Leipzig 1887, p. 30: "Nun erklärt sich der zweite Satz mit Leichtigkeit ohne Widersinn, sobald man die nähere Bestimmung hinzufügt, wie dies das System des Protagoras verlangt: im Sinne von zwei verschiedenen Individuen. Es fiel Protagoras nicht ein, die nämliche Behauptung im Munde des nämlichen Individuums für wahr und falsch zugleich zu erklären; wohl aber lehrt er, dass zu jedem Satz, den jemand behauptet, mit gleichem Recht das Gegenteil behauptet werden kann, insofern sich jemand findet, dem es so scheint."

³⁴ A. NEHAMAS: *Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato's Demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry*, pp. 111—115; M. MENDELSON: *Many Sides: A Protagorean Approach to the Theory, Practice and Pedagogy of Argument*. Dordrecht—Boston—London 2002.

³⁵ M. MENDELSON: *Many Sides: A Protagorean Approach to the Theory, Practice and Pedagogy of Argument*, p. 45.

³⁶ Cf., for example, G.A. KENNEDY: *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*. Princeton 1963, p. 33: "As we have seen, to many sophists such a confrontation of opposites is the fundamental process of reasoning, and it seems safe to conclude that some of the popularity of antithesis in the fifth century was its compatibility to contemporary logic. Perhaps one

form helped it draw attention to the problem itself and delineated a certain understanding of the antilogical method, later repeated many times in numerous works. It also inspired reflections on sophistic methods (often critical of Kerferd's theses) undertaken in the contributions of A. Nehamas,³⁷ Mi-Kyoung Lee,³⁸ E. Schiappa,³⁹ M. Mendelson,⁴⁰ F.D. Walters,⁴¹ and many others, which confirmed the fundamental importance of the antilogical method for the sophistic movement and its relationship with the thought of Protagoras and Gorgias. It also drew attention to the problem of the philosophical context of the antilogical method, of which, in the light of previous research, it had been completely deprived. The rehabilitation of the sophists that took place over the last century has brought only partial changes in this respect. Although the importance of the sophists in Greek culture was recognized and their philosophical achievements acknowledged, a problematic conviction remained dominant, which proclaimed the separation of the philosophical and rhetorical spheres of interest of the sophists; this conviction resulted partly from tradition, partly from the loss of the sources. Even researchers who are aware of the philosophical importance of sophistry have only infrequently perceived the relationship between the philosophical convictions and the rhetorical activity of the sophists. Hence, most texts written before G.B. Kerferd's book discuss the particular elements of individual sophists' thought, without attempting to develop those elements that could connect these areas and which could indicate that the notion of *logos* and above all the method of contradictory arguments arise from a certain view of reality and human cognition.

should go further and regard stylistic antithesis as the source of sophistic logic in the same way that judicial procedure may be the source of sophistic epistemology."

³⁷ A. NEHAMAS: *Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato's Demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry*, pp. 108—122.

³⁸ M. LEE: *Epistemology after Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus*. Oxford 2005.

³⁹ E. SCHIAPPA: *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, pp. 39—63.

⁴⁰ M. MENDELSON: *Many Sides: A Protagorean Approach to the Theory, Practice and Pedagogy of Argument*, passim.

⁴¹ F.D. WALTERS: *Gorgias as Philosopher of Being: Epistemic Foundationalism in Sophistic Thought*. "Philosophy and Rhetoric," 1994, vol. 27, no. 2, p. 145. As F.D. Walters writes, antilogic is a "theory of argumentation that stands in opposition to dialectics, either Platonic or Aristotelian [...] a method with its own recognizable philosophical imperatives, a method that resists the totalizing aims of dialectics but is not itself a formless and aimless verbal exercise."

This state of affairs has changed in recent decades. The aforementioned works of G.B. Kerferd, E. Schiappa, M. Mendelson, and M. Emsbach⁴² reflect not only on the essence, but on the source and meaning of the art of antilogic in relation to the other elements of Protagoras's thought, namely ontology and epistemology.⁴³ Each of these studies draws attention to the views attributed to Protagoras in Plato's *Theaetetus* and points to the consequences for antilogic that flow from the project presented in it.⁴⁴ Although the message contained in *Theaetetus* certainly cannot completely fill the gap caused by the disappearance of almost the entire sophistic legacy, it still gives us at least some clues regarding the philosophical foundations of the notion of conflicting *logoi*. It seems to us that this controversial method, causing scandal and condemnation in tradition, has a deeper justification, an epistemological or ontological foundation, which researchers have not noticed for various reasons. Admittedly, many researchers pointed to the logical whole consisting of a unity of the sophistic techniques of argument, the view of the world in change and the theory of cognition. But the prevailing opinions were that there was no such foundation, because the sophists were not capable of building philosophical systems.⁴⁵

It is worth subjecting this thesis to verification. In my opinion, the antilogical method is not an eristic trick or a rhetorical exercise. It has its own deep meaning, and at its root lie the fundamental — for sophistry — epistemological and ontological convictions described in *Theaetetus*, which are then repeated by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, where he criticizes opponents of the principle of contradiction.⁴⁶

⁴² M. EMSBACH: *Sophistik als Aufklärung: Untersuchungen zu Wissenschaftsbegriff und Geschichtsauffassung bei Protagoras*. Würzburg 1980.

⁴³ Z. NERCZUK: *Der Mensch als Mass aller Dinge*. In: *Philosophische Anthropologie in der Antike*. Eds. L. JANSEN, Ch. JEDAN. Frankfurt—Paris—Lancaster—New Brunswick 2010, pp. 69—98.

⁴⁴ Cf. Also Z. NERCZUK: *Miarą jest każdy z nas. Projekt zwolenników zmienności rzeczy w platońskim Teajtecie na tle myśli sofistycznej*. Toruń 2009.

⁴⁵ G. STRIKER: *Methods of Sophistry*. In: *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*. Cambridge 1996; G. REALE: *Historia filozofii starożytnej*. In: *Od początków do Sokratesa*, vol. 1. Lublin 1993.

⁴⁶ Z. NERCZUK: *Koncepcja „zwolenników zmienności” w Platońskim Teajtecie i jej recepcja w myśli greckiej*. “Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej” 2016, vol. 61, pp. 29—40; Z. NERCZUK: *References to Plato's “Theaetetus” in Book G (IV) of Aristotle's Metaphysics*. In: *Thinking Critically: What Does it Mean? The Tradition of Philosophical Criticism and Its Forms in the European History of Ideas*. Ed. D. KUBOK. Berlin—Munich—Boston 2017, pp. 65—72.

The significance of Plato's account in *Theaetetus* for the foundations of antilogic

Particularly important for the interpretation of antilogic, about which — despite its importance for the sophists — very few records have survived, is Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*. This text, which outlines the foundations of a certain view of reality and of cognition, whose components are taken from sophistic thought, simultaneously, though indirectly, shows the foundations of the antilogical method, its source and meaning. The theses of "adherents of flux," such as: the adoption of the idea of the subjectivity of perceptions, resulting from the mechanism of perception (so called *metaxy* theory); rejection of the concepts of truth and falsehood; attempts at determining the relationship between language and reality⁴⁷; and granting speech a new, independent role, also lead to a new form of world description with which the antilogical method is associated.⁴⁸ In this way, the so-called "secret doctrine" in the dialogue *Theaetetus* presents more than a series of dispersed ideas merged in one theory by Plato (as some researchers maintain), but a coherent project based on the concept of reality in flux and some fundamental epistemological theses, which consequently lead to a new logic and a new theory of language.

Not seeing or disregarding this overall project is a problem that affects most studies on the sophistic movement. Individual elements of sophistic thinking are isolated in these studies: the *homo-mensura* thesis is detached from the concept of "being in motion" and the mechanism of perception, and the entire doctrine of the power of *logos*, which includes the art of antilogic or the famous motto "make the weaker argument stronger," is detached from its epistemic and ontological roots.

A hidden source of this form of interpretation is the conviction we have already mentioned, expressed among others by G. Reale; according to this conviction, the sophists were not able to create any comprehensive philosophical system, and "philosophy" reaches maturity only with Plato.⁴⁹ In my opinion, it is a perspective that too simplistically captures the development

⁴⁷ F.D. WALTERS: *Gorgias as Philosopher of Being: Epistemic Foundationalism in Sophistic Thought*, p. 152: "The dissociation of *logos* and things naturally encourages antilogic."

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146: "To know singularity and not dichotomies is, from the antilogic position, to know nothing by claiming to know all."

⁴⁹ G. REALE: *Historia filozofii starożytnej*. In: *Od początków do Sokratesa*, pp. 294—296.

of philosophy from Thales to Plato and Aristotle; it is a perspective that was created by these two philosophers and, because of the great influence of their thought, survived unchanged for centuries.

Arguments for understanding antilogic as a method arising from a broadly understood philosophical project are provided by a whole series of doxographic records, beginning with the earliest mentions of antilogic contained in Aristophanes's comedy *Clouds* and Euripides's tragedies,⁵⁰ through the testimony of Plato and fragments of Books IV and XI of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*,⁵¹ to testimonies from Late Antiquity concerning the method of "double speeches" (Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius). All these testimonies attribute to Protagoras a universal postulate to predicate contradictions for the same subjects.

Direction of future studies

Summing up the above reflections, it can be stated that although the use of contradiction was a popular procedure in the Greek literature of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C.,⁵² it is only among representatives of the so-called sophistic movement that the antilogical method, i.e. the method of arguing for contradictory claims, becomes an expression of the philosophical stance. The importance of the method of contrasting arguments lies in the fact that it is not merely a superficial procedure or a rhetorical trick, but a practical application of philosophical solutions fundamental for the sophistic movement, something comparable in its dimension to what dialectic was to Plato.⁵³

Understanding the meaning and purpose of antilogic is therefore conditioned on reconstructing its philosophical foundations. The weakness of

⁵⁰ Z. NERCZUK: *Metoda 'dwu mów' w świetle świadectw przedplatońskich*, pp. 37—45.

⁵¹ Z. NERCZUK: *Koncepcja „zwoleńników zmienności” w Platońskim Teajtecie i jej recepcja w myśli greckiej*, pp. 32—33.

⁵² G.A. KENNEDY: *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, p. 34: "The habit of antithesis was deeply ingrained in the Greek character, as is evident from the *men... de* construction, from the fondness of the Greeks for contrasting figures like Prometheus and Epimetheus, and from the structure of most Greek art and literature."

⁵³ G. GOGOS: *Aspekte einer Logik des Widerspruchs. Studien zur griechischen Sophistik und ihrer Aktualität*. Tübingen 1998, p. 21. According to G. Gogos, antilogic is a form of logic formed before the "proper" logic initiated by Plato and Aristotle.

many interpretations lies precisely in failure to take this context into account. G.B. Kerferd's studies need to be developed, and in themselves constitute more of an inspiration for further discussion than a culmination of research. What was outlined in Kerferd's work needs to be supplemented, and often corrected. Future studies of antilogic should focus on reconstructing the philosophical background expressed by the sophistic art of persuasion and, in particular, antilogic. They should also more precisely reconstruct the very complex game Plato plays with his readers, a reconstruction very difficult to conduct due to the loss of most of the sophistic works that constitute the natural context for Plato's discussions. Only such a research program will allow for an in-depth reconstruction of both Plato's and Aristotle's thought, who know about the method of "two-fold arguments" and are trying to go beyond it. Such a program would also allow us to track the transmission of this method, which undoubtedly affected Pyrrho, the skeptical Academy, and — transformed into the doctrine of the equal strength of opposite judgments (*isostheneia*) — was revived in its new form in the skepticism of Aenesidemus and Sextus Empiricus.

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