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## Socrates' "Flight into the *Logoi*": A Non-Standard Interpretation of the Founding Document of Plato's Dialectic

Plato's Socrates uses the term δεύτερος πλοῦς (*Phd.* 99c9–d1) in connection with his intellectual autobiography, in the course of which he was led away from that "wisdom" (σοφία) they call "the study of nature" (φύσεως ἱστορία, *Phd.* 96a8) to instead look to "the truth of things" (τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν) in the *logoi* (*Phd.* 99e6). He compares this move to a flight—a "flight into the *logoi*"—and calls this "flight into the *logoi*" the "second voyage" (δεύτερος πλοῦς, *Phd.* 99c9–d1). The decisive passage runs as follows:

[S<sub>1</sub>] ἔδοξε δὴ μοι χρῆναι εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα ἐν ἐκείνοις σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων ἀλήθειαν.

[S<sub>2</sub>] ἴσως μὲν οὖν ᾧ εἰκάζω τρόπον τινὰ οὐκ ἔοικεν:

[S<sub>3</sub>] οὐ γὰρ πάνυ συγχωρῶ τὸν ἐν λόγοις σκοπούμενον τὰ ὄντα ἐν εἰκόσι μᾶλλον σκοπεῖν ἢ τὸν ἐν ἔργοις.<sup>1</sup>

*Preliminary translation:*

[S<sub>1a</sub>] So I decided that I must take refuge in the *logoi* and look at the truth of things in them.

[S<sub>2</sub>] However, perhaps this image is inadequate;

[S<sub>3</sub>] for I do not altogether admit that one who investigates things by means of the *logoi* is dealing with images more than one who looks at realities.

Initially, (1.) I will propose a non-standard interpretation of this passage, then (2.) I will proceed to address the philosophical problem raised in this passage according to this interpretation, that is, the *problem of the hypothesis* or the *problem of the unproved principle* before indicating (3.) the kernel of truth contained in the standard interpretation and concluding with some remarks on the "weakness of the *logoi*".

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1 Cf. *Phd.* 99e4–100a3, Oxford Classical Texts by Duke, E. A., Hicken, W. F., Nicoll, W. S. M., Robinson, D. B., and Strachan, J. C. G., trans. Grube, modified.

# 1 The standard and the non-standard interpretations

The correct meaning of the proverbial expression δεύτερος πλοῦς is suggested already by Eustathios from Thessaloniki (ca. 1110–ca. 1195), who refers to Pausanias: δεύτερος πλοῦς means “the next-best way”, that is, the way adopted by those who try another method if the first does not succeed, specifically those who “try oars when the wind fails according to Pausanias” (*Eust.*, p. 1453).<sup>2</sup> There has been some dispute about whether this is really Plato’s intended meaning and whether he is not using the expression ironically here<sup>3</sup>—that is, whether the second-best here is not actually the second-best, but rather the best voyage for the Platonic Socrates. But in the wake of the study by Martinelli Tempesta, who insists that the expression δεύτερος πλοῦς is proverbial and not to be confused with a metaphor,<sup>4</sup> there can no longer be any reasonable doubt that it refers to a second voyage

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2 Cf. Burnet (1911) *ad loc.*, LSJ s.v., and Martinelli Tempesta (2003), p. 89: “... il significato del celebre proverbio utilizzato da Platone in *Phd.* 99c–d può essere soltanto quello ... di *second best*, come è suggerito inequivocabilmente da tutte le testimonianze antiche”. Tempesta (2003), pp. 123–125, also contains a useful index of the passages where the expression δεύτερος πλοῦς is used in a proverbial way; he argues at pp. 108–109 (*pace* Kanayama 2000, pp. 88–99) against the interpretation of Plb. *Hist.* 8.36.6.2 B.–W. that δεύτερος πλοῦς merely means a safer voyage that takes longer. Cf. n. 6.

3 Cf. Burnet (1911), p. 99, *ad loc.*: “In any case, Socrates does not believe for a moment that the method he is about to describe is a *pis aller* or ‘makeshift’”. Cf. Gadamer (1968), p. 254: “Ein sehr ironischer Passus. Ich habe schon in meinem oben abgedruckten Buche 1931 ausgeführt, wie weit gerade die Erforschung des Seienden in den Logoi der Zugang zur Wahrheit des Seienden ist...”. Gadamer seems not to see the problem: how the Socratic *logoi*—especially the hypothesis of ideas—can lead not only to consistency but also to truth, nor does he distinguish between “simple” and “complex” irony. Cf. also Thanassas (2003), p. 10: “The ‘images of logoi’ are the only means at our disposal for approaching the truth of beings”. But the hypothesis of ideas is not an image. For the distinction between “simple” and “complex” irony, cf. Vlastos (1991), p. 31: “In ‘simple’ irony what is said just isn’t what is meant: taken in its ordinary, commonly understood, sense that statement is simply false. In ‘complex’ irony what is said is and isn’t what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another”. For Gadamer’s interpretation of the *Philebus* in 1931, cf. Ferber (2010).

4 “‘Deuteros plous’ is not a metaphor but just a proverb. On my view, they are two different kinds of expressions: the proverb has a single and fixed meaning that is always the same, while we can use a word or an expression in different metaphorical ways. Of course, a proverb can be used as a metaphor of something else, but it is its sole meaning that can refer to something else, which is implied by its not equivocal meaning” (Letter from 02/25/2018, quoted with the permission of the author).

not only in the chronological sense,<sup>5</sup> but also in the evaluative sense of inferiority (δευτερότης) to the first voyage. It is also clear that it is not being used ironically here,<sup>6</sup> as it is not used in this way in the two other occurrences in Plato (*Phlb.* 19c2–3; *Plt.* 300c2) and Aristotle (cf. *EN* 2.9, 1109a34–35; *Pol.* 3.11, 1284b19). In fact, the related comparison of the Socratic enterprise with a “raft” (*Phd.* 85d1), instead of a boat, is also not ironical (unless the irony is not “simple”, but “complex”).

This “second voyage” stands in contrast to the “first” one (πρώτος). Although Socrates does not explicitly use the expression “earlier voyage” (πρότερος πλοῦς) or “first voyage” (πρώτος πλοῦς), this implied earlier or first voyage is, in fact, reflected in his intellectual autobiography as a former student of the natural sciences (*Phd.* 95a–99d). These sciences represented a method by means of which he hoped to obtain direct access to reality, a process that ended in disappointment,<sup>7</sup> since it instead led to complete blindness of the soul—that is, complete ignorance (cf. *Phd.* 99e2–3)—because of its bewildering effect (cf. *Phd.* 79c7). In contrast to the “first voyage”, the “second voyage” has the advantage of being safer (ἀσφαλέστερον, cf. *Lg.* 897e1–2), although it is slower and more laborious. Thus, the very notion of a second voyage implies a change in the means or method used, but not in the goal aimed, namely “to look at the truth of things” (σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν, *Phd.* 99e5–6). This goal of “the second-best voyage in search of the cause” (τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν, *Phd.* 99c9–d1) implies that the Platonic Socrates investigated the “true” (ἀληθῶς, *Phd.* 98e1) or “real” (τῷ ὄντι, *Phd.* 99b2) cause, that is, the final or second-order cause of the mechanical causes, the latter of which are mere necessary (cf. *Phd.* 99b3) or “co-causes” (συναίτια, cf. *Phd.* 98c2–e1; *Ti.* 46c7) “that would direct everything and arrange each thing in such a way as would be best” (*Phd.* 97c5–6). Thus, Socrates starts from the anti-naturalistic assumption that nature has a teleological structure and that the “study of nature” ought to explain this structure, a project that was to be realised by Plato later on in the *Timaeus* (cf. *Ti.* 30a2–7).

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5 Cf. the scholium quoted in Greene (1938), p. 14: “Since those who failed in the prior voyage (πρότερος πλοῦς) prepare the second safely, the proverb ‘second voyage’ is said about those who do something safely”, quoted in Kanayama (2000), pp. 88–89, especially p. 89: “According to this reading, ‘second’ means only ‘second in time’ and there is no implication of the inferiority of the second voyage relative to the prior one; it rather suggests that the second voyage is better than the prior in being a safer voyage”.

6 Cf. already Murphy (1936), p. 41, n. 1, and Hackforth (1955), p. 127, n. 5.

7 With Goodrich (1903), p. 382, I assume that τὰ ὄντα σκοπῶν (cf. *Phd.* 100a2) “must refer to the physical speculations previously described and condemned”. For this reason, I prefer the first of the three interpretations of the “first voyage” mentioned by Kanayama (2000), p. 95, n. 112. The best overview of what belongs to Plato’s intellectual history versus that of Socrates is to be found in Hackforth (1955), pp. 127–130.

But can we say in more detail what this “second-best voyage” involves? According to [S<sub>1</sub>], it is a flight from direct perception or vision of “the things” (τὰ πράγματα, *Phd.* 99e3) to the indirect method of using *logoi*, which stand in contrast with “the things”. Plato’s Socrates employs here a commonly accepted way of thinking, which we also find, for example, in the *Apology* (cf. 32a4–5) and the *Seventh Letter* (cf. 343c2–3), but he then departs from the claim that the *logoi* constitute mere empty talk (ἀδολεσχία, cf. *Phd.* 70c1; *Prm.* 135d5; *Tht.* 195b10; κενεαγορία, *R.* 607b7), turning it into an interesting philosophical claim that is at odds with what is normally believed. In contrast to the common opposition between the realities themselves (τὰ ὄντα, *Phd.* 99e5)<sup>8</sup> and mere talk (οἱ λόγοι), Socrates claims that the things that are commonly believed to be realities are not true realities, while arguing, conversely, that paying attention to “mere talk” can lead us to the true realities. Hence, what looks like a path that leads us far away from reality turns out to be exactly the right path to reach true reality. This is—so to speak—the Socratic turn away from “the study of nature” towards what we say (διαλέγεσθαι, cf. *Phd.* 63c7–8). Although the Platonic Socrates does not yet “refer to dialectic as such”<sup>9</sup> in the *Phaedo* or employ the substantive “dialectical pursuit” (διαλεκτική μέθοδος, *R.* 533c7),<sup>10</sup> he nevertheless speaks of “another form of pursuit” (ἄλλος τρόπος τῆς μεθόδου, *Phd.* 97b6–7) to find out “the reasons of each thing—why it comes into being, why it perishes, why it exists” (*Phd.* 96a9–10, trans. Rowe), namely “the art concerning the *logoi*” (ἡ περὶ τοὺς λόγους τέχνη, *Phd.* 90b7). This is the first occurrence of dialectic as an art, which is later called “the art of dialectic” (διαλεκτικῆ τέχνη) (*Phdr.* 276e5–6), an expression coined in an analogous way to μουσική or γυμναστική τέχνη (cf., e.g., *R.* 409c5–9).<sup>11</sup> He may have already alluded to this art in speaking of a “path” or “byway” (ἀτραπός): “It looks as if there’s a byway (ἀτραπός) that’ll bring us and our reasoning safely through in our search (ἐν τῇ σκέψει)” (*Phd.* 66b3–4, trans. Rowe, modified; cf. *Plt.* 258c3).<sup>12</sup> If it is not the path that leads directly to the goal, then the byway brings us “on to the trail

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Burnet (1911), p. 99, *ad loc.*: “*ta onta* like *ta pragmata*”.

<sup>9</sup> Kahn (1996), p. 313.

<sup>10</sup> For an interpretation, see Ferber (1989), p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> For further remarks, cf. Müri (1944), especially p. 158. A classification of the dialectical subspecies is to be found in Gaiser (2004), p. 196. Dixsaut (2001) documents in Appendix I, pp. 345–352, “les occurrences du verbe διαλέγεσθαι dans les dialogues” and in Appendix II, pp. 353–354, “Les occurrences de διαλεκτικός, διαλεκτική, διαλεκτικόν, διαλεκτικῶς”.

<sup>12</sup> Pace Ebert (2004), p. 140, n. 16, who follows Harry (1909), I do not see in the ἀτραπός an allusion to the body which misleads us, but rather to “another form of pursuit” (ἄλλος τρόπος τῆς μεθόδου, *Phd.* 97b6–7), that is, to dialectic. On this difficult passage, cf. Burnet (1911), pp. 35–36, Dixsaut (1991), p. 332, n. 83, Trabattoni (2011), p. 41, n. 49, and Casertano (2015), pp. 292–293.

in our hunt after truth".<sup>13</sup> This "byway" anticipates "another form of pursuit" (ἄλλος τρόπος τῆς μεθόδου, *Phd.* 97b6–7) for which the Platonic Socrates then uses the proverbial expression "second voyage". But both expressions—"byway" and "second voyage"—indicate second-best options for reaching the goal, that is, "the true" (τὸ ἀληθές) (*Phd.* 66b7).

Socrates gives no explicit affirmative theoretical definition (by genus and difference) of this "second-best option", but primarily a negative contextual one, insofar as he distinguishes it (a) from the "first voyage" of Ionian natural philosophy on the grounds that it makes no use of sense perception—that is, it proceeds a priori—and (b) from "antilogic", that is, arguments that aim merely at contradiction (ἀντιλογικοί λόγοι, *Phd.* 90c1, cf. 101e2; *Ar. Nu.* 1173). Socrates defines his second-best option positively as a method of "giving an account of being" (λόγον διδόναι τοῦ εἶναι), that is, a λόγος τῆς οὐσίας by means of questions and answers (ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἀποκρινόμενοι, *Phd.* 78d1–2).<sup>14</sup> Hence, the second voyage is a method involving the use of questions and answers to give an account of being or essence.

According to these negative contextual definitions, the "second voyage" should thus not be *immediately* identified with (a) the hypothetical method, (b) the theory of forms or (c) the explanation of things in terms of formal causes.<sup>15</sup> We may, however, ask *if* this "dialectical turn" on Socrates' part leads to (a) the hypothetical method, (b) the theory of forms or (c) the explanation of things in terms of formal causes, as Rose has argued.<sup>16</sup> (In my opinion, it leads indirectly to all three of them, namely, to the hypothesis of forms which explains the characteristics of things in terms of their formal causes.) Leaving aside Parmenides DK B78 here, then it is the first expression of what was later called "metaphysics",<sup>17</sup> in the sense of giving an account of invisible things of which no a posteriori experience by means of our sensory organs is possible. We may therefore also refer to this "flight" from "wisdom" (σοφία), which they call "the study of nature" (φύσεως ἱστορία, *Phd.* 96a8), as Socrates' "dialectical turn", in the sense of a "meta-physical turn".

When it comes to the meaning of the expression λόγοι in *Phd.* 100a1, which is "not easy to translate",<sup>18</sup> the reality is that we do not have an equivalent word in our modern European languages. Plato may be using the word at *Phd.* 100a1 in the non-technical sense of "discussions" (Grube's translation), as he does at *Phd.* 59a4.

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<sup>13</sup> Burnet (1911), *ad loc.* Cf. also: "It will be seen that the metaphor of the ἀτραπός gains very much when we bring it into close connexion with the hunt" (Burnet 1911, *ad loc.*).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Burnet (1911), *ad loc.*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rose (1966), pp. 466–477, and Preus and Ferguson (1969), p. 105.

<sup>16</sup> Rose (1966), p. 473.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Reale (1997), pp. 137–158.

<sup>18</sup> Burnet (1911), p. 99, *ad loc.*

But his “definiteness of intention”, to borrow an expression from Arne Naess,<sup>19</sup> may be more subtle in [S<sub>1</sub>]. In fact, there have been a wide range of other translations proposed,<sup>20</sup> which I subdivide into non-sentential and sentential translations, with the sentential translations being further subdivided into mono-sentential, poly-sentential and ambiguous translations.

Non-sentential translations are “Begriffe”, “conceptos” (Apelt/Horn/Gual) or “ideas” (Jowett). But as Burnet remarked long ago: “The term *logos* cannot possibly mean ‘concept’. So far as there is any Greek word for ‘concept’ at this date, it is *noêma*”.<sup>21</sup> Ambiguous translations include “rationes” (Ficino), “Gedanken” (Schleiermacher/Rufener) and “raisonnement” (Dixsaut) which do not render the linguistic aspect of *logoi* (cf. *Cra.* 431b5–c1; *Tht.* 189e4–6, 202b3–5; *Sph.* 264a8–9) and leave open whether these “rationes” or “Gedanken” or “raisonnements”, when expressed in sentences, are mono- or poly-sentential. Mono-sentential translations include “definitions” (Bluck), “propositions” or “statements” (Ross/Kanayama), “postulati” (Reale) and “Grund-Sätze” (Natorp). Hence, Ross, for example, writes: “The language of ‘agreement’, and the fact that what Plato calls the ‘strongest *logos*’ is the proposition that Ideas exist, shows that *logoi* means statements or propositions”.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, with the flight into the *logoi*, Plato also looks back to the *Crito*, where he describes his Socrates as “the kind of man who listens only to the *logos* [that is, not only the proposition, but the argument] that on reflection seems best (βέλτιστος) to [him]” (*Cri.* 46b4–6). Later on, in the *Parmenides*, young Socrates’ eager desire ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους (cf. *Prm.* 135d3) also implies a zeal for *logoi*, in the sense not only of propositions, but also of arguments. In the section on μισολογία (*Phd.* 89d4), Socrates also uses the word in the sense of arguments (cf. *Phd.* 90b4.6.7.c1.4). Hence, the “mono-sentential” translations in terms of “statements” or “propositions” may be replaced with “poly-sentential” ones, not with “discussions” (Grube)—since it is possible for discussions to not contain any arguments—but rather with “arguments” (Hackforth), “theories” (Tredennick, Gallop) or “reasoned accounts” (Rowe), since theories or reasoned accounts by definition contain arguments.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, we can maintain the translation “propositions”

19 Naess (1952), pp. 256 ff.

20 For a selection, cf., e.g., Murphy (1936), p. 40, and Casertano (2015), pp. 360–362.

21 Burnet (1914), p. 317, n. 1. Also Loriaux (1975), p. 93: “... dès 99e5, *tous logous* vise plus que de simples ‘notions’”.

22 Ross (1951), p. 27.

23 Cf. Murphy (1936), pp. 40–41: “... *logoi* are verbally contrasted with *erga*, and perhaps some word like ‘theories’, though it is not an exact equivalent, would bring out this contrast ...”

if, with Ebert, we translate λόγοι as “premises of theories”, since premises of theories are propositions.<sup>24</sup> Thus, I will attempt to elucidate the intended meaning by translating *logoi* in the passage as follows:

[S<sub>1b</sub>]: So I thought I must take refuge in theories and their premises, and investigate the truth of things in them.

[S<sub>2</sub>] makes an addition and a qualification: Socrates declares the sight of the reflection of the sun in water, which is used as a comparison, to be an image (εἰκάζω) and qualifies this image as being in some sense inadequate. What is inadequate about this image? To see reality through an image suggests that one has indirect access to that reality; however, as Hackforth remarks: “[The image] is a good parallel in so far as the contrast of direct and indirect apprehension goes; but in so far as it might imply that *logoi* stand to physical objects (*erga*) in the relation of images to real things, it is misleading”.<sup>25</sup>

[S<sub>3</sub>] is indeed “misleading” or “confusing”.<sup>26</sup> It seems to have so far gone unnoticed that this passage has at least two different interpretations. I call these the standard interpretation<sup>27</sup> and the non-standard (or astonishing) interpretation.<sup>28</sup> In the first interpretation, Socrates pursues the parallel; in the second, he retracts it, at least in a certain sense. The issue is whether Socrates means that (a) both the student of *erga* and the student of *logoi* consider the “truth of things” in images, because *logoi* are also images (the “standard interpretation”) or that (b) the student of *logoi* does not consider “the truth of things” in images, because *logoi* are not *eo ipso* images of the “truth of things”, but must only be consistent (the “non-standard interpretation”).

On the standard interpretation, the indirect approach is not inferior to the direct approach, because theories are also images of reality, namely “pictures in

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24 Cf. Ebert (2004), p. 350: “Die *logoi*, die Sokrates im Auge hat, sind also offenbar Teile von Argumenten oder allgemeiner von Schlüssen, sind aber selbst keine Argumente oder Schlüsse. Sie haben den Status von Prämissen, aber nicht den von Schlüssen”.

25 Hackforth (1955), p. 137, and mentioned in Frede (1999), p. 121, n. 29.

26 Gallop (1975), p. 178: “The sentence [S<sub>3</sub>] in which Socrates qualifies his comparison of ‘theories’ with images (a1–2) is confusing in translation”. Cf. the different translations in the appendix. But the sentence is also confusing in Greek.

27 The standard interpretation has been defended by, e.g., Gallop (1975), p. 178, Bostock (1986), pp. 157–162, Gadamer (1978), p. 254, Gonzalez (1998), pp. 188–208, Thanassas (2003), Dancy (2004), p. 295, and Costa (2017), p. 141.

28 The non-standard interpretation has been defended, e.g., by Burnet (1911), p. 99, *ad loc.*: “It is not really the case that the *logoi* are mere images of *ta onta* or *ta pragmata*”. Cf. Dixsaut (1991), p. 140: “Saisir une réalité à travers un discours réflexif, ce n’est pas n’en saisir qu’une image. Au contraire, c’est l’expérience concrète qui ne livre que l’image de la chose, alors que la réflexion accède à sa réalité véritable”. Cf. also Kanayama (2000), p. 47.

words” (cf. *Cra.* 431b2–c2),<sup>29</sup> just as the image of the sun in the water is an image of the real sun. *Logoi* or theories, which depict (εικάζειν) real things, would thus be on the same level as what Socrates later calls εικασία, that is, conjectures through images, or—more precisely—conjectures through images of images (cf. *R.* 511e2, 534a1–5; cf. also *R.* 598b6–8).<sup>30</sup> As the sun seen “in water or some such reflection” (*Phd.* 99d8–e1, my translation) is an image of the real phenomenon, so too would *logoi* be images of realities. Hence, the upshot of Socrates’ flight into the *logoi* is that theories, as images of reality, are inadequate—even if they are “images of a higher grade than objects in the sensible world, and thus closer to Forms”.<sup>31</sup> Socrates would thus, in a way, anticipate Wittgenstein’s picture-theory of language and thought: “The picture is a model of [phenomenal] reality” (*TLP* 2.12). As “a model of [phenomenal] reality”, a picture is not an exact representation of phenomenal reality.

In the non-standard interpretation, [S<sub>3</sub>] makes the claim that the indirect approach is nevertheless not inferior to the direct approach involving vision: the indirect approach does not use *logoi*, in the sense of images, whereas the reflection of the sun in water is an image of the real sun.

The standard interpretation, however, raises the following problems: (a) it insinuates that the Platonic Socrates treats *logoi* like images—or even εικασίαι—that is, conjectures through images of images; (b) it insinuates that *these* conjectures posit ideas and then (c) assumes the logical impossibility that the *logoi* which posit ideas (cf. *Phd.* 100b5) first depict what they subsequently posit; (d) it leaves open the question about what false *logoi*, which misrepresent “the truth of things”, depict; and (e) nowhere in the *Phaedo* are “objects in the sensible world” explicitly called “images of Forms”.<sup>32</sup>

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29 I owe this reference to *Cra.* 431b2–c2 to Costa (2017), p. 28. Costa is anticipated by Bostock (1986), p. 160, who gives the following caveat: “However, it is not even clear that this (rather confused) line of thought was Plato’s own view at the time when he wrote the *Cratylus*. This is partly because the dialogue goes on to reject the premise that names need to be rightly framed (434c–435c), and partly because there are evidently many things in that dialogue that Plato is not very serious about, and the way the argument is extended from names to propositions may well be one of them” (quoted without footnote).

30 Cf. Ferber (1989), pp. 85–91 and pp. 111–114.

31 Gallop (1975), p. 178.

32 For anticipations of the *interpretatio difficilior*, cf. Natorp (1903), p. 156; 2004, p. 167: “For logic is not something like a mere organ or instrument with which to grasp the ‘existing’ objects to be found outside us; it is not merely the eye-glass that protects from blinding, in order that we may look with impunity at the externally existing being of sensible things that radiates in the sunlight, so to speak, of immediate truth in itself. This simile is defective for it is not the logical shape of being that is merely a copy ...” (trans. Politis and Connolly). Cf. Murphy (1936), p. 43: “the *logoi*



But let us (f) nevertheless assume that the standard view is right: what, then, would the “philosopher’s progress” be, if “Plato’s philosopher”, Socrates, turns from the old method of observing facts to the new one involving *logoi* as inadequate images of facts? Would Socrates not, in this case, merely be turning from blindness to imprecision or even confusion, such that his “progress” would really be a regress—eliciting the *schadenfreude* of his enemies?

Since I am unwilling to concede this joy to his enemies, I may be forgiven for preferring the non-standard interpretation. In fact, the Socrates who turns to the *logoi* in the sense of theories and their premises is not simply looking at reflections: the criterion of consistency (συμφωνία), which *logoi* must fulfil (*Phd.* 100a5), suggests that *logoi* are not mere images or reflections of real things, in the sense of the correspondence theory of truth, but that συμφωνία or “consistency should suffice for truth”.<sup>33</sup> In fact, we read:

But in any case, this was my starting point: hypothesizing (ὑποθέμενος) on each occasion whatever account I judge to have the most explanatory power, I posit as true (ἀληθῆ ὄντα) whatever seems to me in tune (συμφωνεῖν) with this ... (*Phd.* 100a3–4, trans. Rowe).

Hence, in the non-standard interpretation, *logoi* as theories are not images of real things, but are posited as true even if they are only in harmony with or consistent with their premises.

In this non-standard interpretation, as in the standard interpretation, Socrates will, in the words of Shorey, “not admit that discussion is a less direct approach to truth than sense”,<sup>34</sup> or more precisely, as Ross puts it, “not altogether admit that his method of studying things is less direct than that of the physicists ...”.<sup>35</sup> But the non-standard interpretation gives quite a different twist to these words than the common one does: the physicists study things ἐν ἔργοις, that is, in reality.<sup>36</sup> Socrates studies things ἐν λόγοις, that is, in light of the premises of theories. If Socrates, as Ross claims, “will not altogether admit that his indirect method of studying things is less direct than that of the physicists”, then his indirect method is no less direct than that of the physicists. If it is no less direct, then it is at least on an equal

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are in no sense *like* the things being studied, and it becomes equally clear as we read on that the *logoi* are not *logoi* of the things. ... But surely, they are independent propositions and thoughts introduced *ab extra*. For Socrates, *logoi* (and hypotheses) are not on the same level as images or *eikasias*; cf. *R.* 511d6–e4.

<sup>33</sup> Vlastos (1991), p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Shorey (1933), p. 131.

<sup>35</sup> Ross (1953), p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Robin (1950), XLIX: “L’expression *en ergois*, ... fait penser à l’*energeia* d’Aristote: *acte* qui est à la fois forme logique et réalité ; qui, à l’état pur, est Dieu même”.

footing with the physicists' method of getting at the truth of things. As Kanayama argues, “[a]n enquirer who studies his objects in *logoi* studies them as directly and clearly as those who study in concrete, and what’s more, without any fear of being blinded by the employment of the senses”.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, to summarise, I attempt to elucidate the intended meaning of [S<sub>i</sub>] in the following ways:

[S<sub>1a</sub>] So I decided that I must take refuge in the *logoi* and look at the truth of things in them.

[S<sub>1b</sub>]: So I thought I must take refuge in theories and their premises, and investigate the truth of things in them.

[S<sub>1c</sub>] So I thought I must take refuge in the coherence of theories with their premises, and investigate in the coherence of theories the reality of things.

## 2 The problem of the non-standard interpretation

The question—left unasked by Shorey, Ross, Kanayama or others—now arises: how is it possible that the indirect approach involving arguments is on an equal footing with the more direct way involving seeing, that is, how is τὸ σκοπεῖν ἐν [τοῖς] λόγοις τὰ ὄντα on an equal footing with τὸ σκοπεῖν τὰ ὄντα ἐν [τοῖς] ἔργοις? This problem is analogous to the problem that Vlastos called “*the* problem of the elenchus”.<sup>38</sup> For our part, let us call it *the* problem of the hypothesis, that is—to borrow an expression from the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions*—*the* problem of the “unproved principle” (ἀρχὴ ἀναπόδεικτος, *Def.* 415b10).

In contrast to the elenchus employed by Plato’s Socrates in the early dialogues, the Platonic Socrates of the *Phaedo* does not start from premises or hypotheses advanced by the interlocutor (cf., e.g., *Euthphr.* 11c4–5; *Hp.Ma.* 302c12; *Grg.* 454c4–5) to which he is not committed, but from his own premises, to which he is committed. Nevertheless, *the* “problem of the elenchus” persists in *the* problem of the hypothesis or “unproved principle”. This is because all the theories can do is to arrive—in a way analogous to how Plato’s Socrates and his interlocutors in the early dialogues

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<sup>37</sup> Kanayama (2000), p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> Vlastos (1983), pp. 38–39: “[T]he question then becomes how Socrates can claim, ... to have proved that the refutand is false, when all he has established is the inconsistency of p with premises whose truth he has not undertaken to establish in that argument: they have entered the argument simply as propositions on which he and the interlocutor are agreed. This is *the* problem of the Socratic elenchus ...”.

arrived at ὁμολογία (cf., e.g., *Chrm.* 157c6–7; *Ly.* 219c4; *Grg.* 487e6–7)—at συμφωνία, that is, “harmony” or “concord” (cf. *Phd.* 100a5). The meaning of the term συμφωνία or “concord” has been made more precise by Robinson, both here and at 101d5, by distinguishing “consistency” from deducibility (cf. *Prt.* 333a6–8; *Grg.* 457e1–3; *Phdr.* 270c6–7).<sup>39</sup>

I cannot enter into the logical problems which the translations “consistency” and “deducibility” present here,<sup>40</sup> but will restrict myself to making the following point concerning consistency. If a hypothesis leads to inconsistent consequences, then it is supposed to be false: “if anyone should question the hypothesis itself, you would ignore him and refuse to answer until you could consider whether its consequences were mutually consistent (συμφωνεῖ) or not (διαφωνεῖ)” (*Phd.* 101d3–5, trans. Rowe). If the consequences are not mutually consistent, then the hypothesis is false and must be rejected.

But consistency or “concord” is only a negative test of truth.<sup>41</sup> Hence, the *deuteros plous* also seems to be a mere negative test of truth, as was observed by Leibniz, long before Robinson, in a summary of the *Phaedo*:

... after establishing something like a second voyage [*secunda navigatio*] I entered another path [*aliud iter*] which, if it does not explain everything, does not tolerate that something false is said.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, we can pose the remaining question: granting that *logoi* or theories may be consistent or harmonious like a piece of music, are they also true in the sense of corresponding to reality? Mere consistency is, for the Platonic Socrates,

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<sup>39</sup> Robinson (1953), p. 131.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Robinson (1953), pp. 126–136. But cf. also Kahn (1996), p. 316: “I suggest that the term for consequence is deliberately avoided, because Plato is here presenting the method hypothesis as more flexible and also more fruitful than logical inference. ... Whatever is incompatible with some basic feature of the model, as specified in the *hypothesis*, will be ‘out of tune’ (*diaphōnein*) or fail to accord. But the positive relationship of ‘being in accord’ (*symphōnein*, *synâidein*) is not mere consistency. It means fitting into the structure, bearing some positive relationship to the model by enriching or expanding it in some way”. This point has been further developed by Bailey (2005), especially pp. 104–110, by accentuating the musical undertones of “being in accord”, a point made also by Stefanini (1949), p. 258: “*Il criterio della verità, è, adunque, la legge stessa della musica: armonia. Ciò che resta fuori dell’euritmia universale è ad un tempo dissonante e falso*”.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Robinson (1953), pp. 135–136: “‘Seeing whether the results accord’, considered as a test, is merely negative. It can sometimes show that the hypothesis must be abandoned, but never that it must be retained”.

<sup>42</sup> Leibniz (1980), p. 294: [*Cum ergo causas rerum ex optimi electione sumptas, neque ipse per me consequi, neque ab alio me discere posse viderem,] velut secunda navigatione instituta aliud ingressus sum iter, quod si non omnia explicet, nihil tamen patiatur dici falsum.*

not yet in itself a guarantee of truth: “if your premise (ὕποθεσις) is something you do not really know and your conclusion and intermediate steps are a tissue (συμπλέκται) of things you do not really know, your reasoning may be consistent with itself (ὁμολογία),<sup>43</sup> but how can it amount to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)?” (R. 533c5–6, trans. Cornford; cf. *Cra.* 436c7–d7). What is said here about mathematical *hypotheses*, which the mathematicians lay down as “known” (R. 510c6) and treat as absolute or non-hypothetical assumptions, seems to me valid in an analogous way to the hypothesis of ideas (cf. *Phd.* 100b1–9). Since the hypothesis of ideas is presented as something that is much “talked about” (τὰ πολυθρόλητα, *Phd.* 100b5), it is therefore not yet established as true, even if it enjoys consensus among the interlocutors and its consequences are mutually consistent.

In fact, we find in Plato not only consensus (ὁμολογία, cf. *Grg.* 487e6–7) or consistency (συμφωνία) as a criterion of truth (*Phd.* 100a4–7), but also correspondence: “a true *logos* says that which is, and a false *logos* says that which is not” (*Cra.* 385b7–8; cf. *Sph.* 263b3–7): “The [true] statement as a whole is complex and its structure *corresponds to* the structure of the fact”.<sup>44</sup> In the same vein, we might say that a true hypothesis as a whole is complex and that its structure *corresponds to* the structure of the facts

If the Socrates of the *Phaedo* tries to investigate “in the *logoi*” “the truth of things”, by his flight into the *logoi*, he not only does “not tolerate that something false is said”, but tries to reach the reality of things. Therefore, [S<sub>3</sub>] seems to indicate that consistency is not a mere negative test of truth, but is in itself a guarantee of truth, no less than correspondence is.

Metaphorically speaking, the second sailing is no less a method of arriving at the goal—“the truth of things”—than the first sailing, just as a rowboat is no less a vehicle for reaching the final destination than a sailing boat. Or, to put it in yet another way, in dreaming—as Socrates sometimes does (cf. *Smp.* 175e2–3; *Cra.* 439c6–d; *Phd.* 60e1–61a4)—we may arrive at reality as if in a state of wakefulness, whereas in seeing with our eyes we are blinded, at least if our dreams are consistent.

To use the metaphor deployed by the Platonic Socrates in the *Republic*, by distinguishing the essence of the Good from everything else and “surviving, as if in a battle, all attacks with refutations” (ὥσπερ ἐν μάχῃ διὰ πάντων ἐλέγχων διεξιών, R. 534c1–2, my free translation) with a “*logos* not liable to fall” (ἀπτῶτι τῷ λόγῳ, R. 534c3), the projected philosopher-kings and -queens not only survive all attacks with an infallible—or at least at the end of the battle still unrefuted—*logos*, but

<sup>43</sup> ὁμολογία may mean consensus or consistency. Cf. the remarks on ὁμολογουμένως (R. 510d2) in Ferber (1989), p. 96, where I plead for consensus.

<sup>44</sup> Cornford (1935), p. 311.

they are “brought at last to the goal” (R. 540a6), namely “to lift up the eye of the soul to gaze on that which sheds light on all things” (R. 540a7–9), that is, “the Good itself” (R. 540a8–9), a “principle which is not a hypothesis” (ἀρχὴ ἀνυπόθετος, R. 510b7) to which the expression “something sufficient” (τι ἰκανόν, *Phd.* 101e1) may allude.<sup>45</sup>

This is quite an astonishing claim. The question was *in principle* aptly formulated by Davidson:

Consistency is, of course, necessary if *all* our beliefs are to be true. But there is not much comfort in mere consistency. Given that it is almost certainly the case that some of our beliefs are false (though we know not which), making our beliefs consistent with one another may as easily reduce as increase our store of knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, the flight into the *logoi* brings with it the risk that some of the *logoi*—or even the *logos* judged to be the “strongest” (*Phd.* 100a4), in the sense of the “hardest to refute” (δυσεξελεγκτότατος, *Phd.* 85c9–d1)—are false. Now, the method through which the Platonic Socrates takes refuge in the *logoi* in the *Phaedo* is the mathematical method known from the *Meno* as the method of hypothesis (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως, *Men.* 86e3). But in the *Phaedo*, it is neither a mathematical hypothesis that is put forward (cf. *Men.* 85b7–86d2) nor the hypothesis that virtue is a science (“if virtue is a science, then it would be teachable”, *Men.* 87c5–6). Rather, it is the hypothesis that ideas are, where “is” has the emphatic Parmenidean meaning of being real or really real (ὄντως ὄν).<sup>47</sup>

My aim is to try to show you the kind of reasons that engage me, and for that purpose I’m going to go back to those much-talked-about entities (πολυθρύλητα) of ours—starting from them, and hypothesizing that there’s something that’s beautiful and nothing but beautiful, in and by itself, and similarly with good, big, and all the rest. If you grant me these, and agree that they exist, my hope is, starting from them, to show you the reason for things and establish that the soul is something immortal.<sup>48</sup>

The reasoning is roughly as follows: if the hypothesis of the ideas is true, then the soul is immortal. Not only does the theory of ideas depend on a hypothesis, but the final proof of the immortality of the soul also depends on the hypothesis of the ideas. That is, the final proof depends on the hypothesis of the ideas

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Gallop (1975), pp. 190–191. This is nevertheless a debatable issue; cf. Verdenius (1958), p. 231, and Ferber (1989), p. 100.

<sup>46</sup> Davidson (2005), p. 223.

<sup>47</sup> On the influence of Parmenides in the *Phaedo*, cf. Hackforth (1955), pp. 84–85.

<sup>48</sup> *Phd.* 100b1–9 (trans. Rowe).

(*Phd.* 100b7–9), while the hypothesis of ideas depends on a hypothesis or premise.<sup>49</sup> Hence, the immortality of the soul is, like the theory of ideas, “something necessary because of a hypothesis” (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ἀναγκαῖον; cf. *Arist. PA.* 1.1, 642a9).

But in the short time remaining before his death—“as long as there is still daylight” (*Phd.* 89c7–8)—the Platonic Socrates cannot do what the Platonic Parmenides will later do in the *Parmenides*, i. e., consider the consequences of the negations of his hypothesis, namely “if that same thing is hypothesized (ὑποτίθεσθαι) not to be” (*Prm.* 136a1–2). What are the consequences if “the beautiful, the good and every such reality” (*Phd.* 76d8–9) are hypothesised not to be? In fact, concerning the pre-existence of the soul, Socrates assumes that if these realities do not exist, then this argument would be altogether futile (cf. *Phd.* 76e4–5).

And *even if* Socrates were to prove that these realities exist, he would not have the “five” years (*R.* 539e2) needed to ascend, with Simmias and Kebes, the upward path to “the Good itself” (*R.* 540a8–9), a “principle which is not a hypothesis” (ἀρχὴ ἀνυπόθετος, *R.* 510b7) to which the expression “something sufficient” (τι ἰκανόν, *Phd.* 101e1) may allude.

But without this time-consuming “exercise” (cf. *Prm.* 135c8, 135d4–7, 136c5), how does the Platonic Socrates know that his hypothesis of the individual ideas is not false as a hypothesis (cf. *Arist. APr.* 62b12–20)—just as other hypotheses he has advanced have been proven false (cf. *Arist. Pol.* 2, 1261a16, 1263b29–31)—or, even worse, that it is not mere idle talk (ἀδολεσχία, cf. *Phd.* 70c1; *Prm.* 135d5; *Th.* 195b10; κενεαγορία, *R.* 607b7), as is commonly assumed?

In fact, Plato’s first interpreter, Aristotle, would go on to say that the πολυθρόλητα—the Platonic ideas—are τερετίσματα (*APo.* 1.22, 83a33), that is, mere twittering, and that to speak of ideas as paradigms and of participation is κενολογεῖν, “idle talk” (cf. *Metaph.* 1.9, 991a21–22). With this critique, Aristotle is clearly referring to the δεύτερος πλοῦς of the *Phaedo* (cf. *Metaph.* 1.9, 991b3–7). Already his remark that “... [Plato’s] introduction of the Forms (ἡ τῶν εἰδῶν εἰσαγωγή), was due to his inquiry in the *logoi* (τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἐγένετο σκέψιν), for the earlier did not partake in dialectic ...” (*Metaph.* 1.6, 987b31–33) is “pretty clearly a reminiscence” of *Phd.* 99e5–100a4.<sup>50</sup> In *De generatione et corruptione*, Aristotle explicitly attributes the theory not to Plato, but to the Platonic Socrates, that is, to “the Socrates in the *Phaedo*” (ὁ ἐν τῷ Φαίδωνι Σωκράτης, *GC* 2.9, 335b10–14; cf. *Pol.* 2, 1261a6).

The answer Plato’s Socrates gives to “the problem of the Socratic elenchus” is that, like Meno’s slave, we have true opinions hidden in us (cf. *Men.* 81a–d, 85b–

49 Cf. Sedley (2018), pp. 210–220.

50 Cf. Ross (1924), Vol. I, p. 171, and now the careful article by Delcomminette (2015).

86b), because we are “fallen souls”, for “the truth of things is always in our soul” (*Men.* 86b1), meaning that a Cartesian *dubitatio de omnibus* or a global error “in our soul” is impossible. Similarly, the inhabitants of the Platonic cave are not ensnared in a global error concerning moral matters either, but rather see “shadows of the just” (*R.* 517d8–9). Davidson thus writes in his article “Plato’s Philosopher”:

[T]he assumption is that, *in moral matters, everyone has true beliefs which he cannot abandon and which entail the negations of his false beliefs.* It follows from this assumption that all the beliefs in a consistent set of beliefs are true, so a method like the elenchus which weeds out inconsistencies will in the end leave nothing standing but truths.<sup>51</sup>

In the same vein, the Platonic Socrates *could* have said in the *Phaedo*, evoking the *Meno*, that everyone has hidden true beliefs about the universals like “the equal” (cf. *Phd.* 74a5–75a3). Although “the equal” seems to belong to the *metaxy* between Ideas and sense phenomena (cf. Arist. *Metaph.* A6 987b14–18),<sup>52</sup> since Socrates also uses the plural forms “the equals themselves” (αὐτὰ τὰ ἴσα, *Phd.* 74c1) and “the three” (τὰ τρία, *Phd.* 104e1), the “equal” is nevertheless a universal like “the beautiful, the good and every such reality” (*Phd.* 76d8–9). But at the end of the day this hypothesis will remain true because an examination of it would leave realism about universals like the equal and “the beautiful, the good and every such reality” as the only viable option for these universals. Through the δεύτερος πλοῦς we arrive at reality, just as we do through the πρῶτος πλοῦς, because we have inside ourselves true opinions about the universals—which entail negations of false opinions and which cannot be shaken or are elenchus-resistant—but which must nonetheless be made explicit by cross-examination.

Metaphorically, we can give the answer in the following way: the rowboat contains within itself a sail, which can be hoisted—that is, by τὸ σκοπεῖν ἐν λόγοις, we arrive at the ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων. Or, to use another metaphor, our soul as the “place of ideas” (τόπος εἰδῶν, Arist. *De an.* 3.4, 429a27–28)<sup>53</sup> is a mirror of the truth, but must, in its incarnated form, be purified from its hidden contradictions by an examination of the *logoi* until it can reflect the unveiled truth.

51 Davidson (2005), p. 229.

52 Cf. Wippert (1970), pp. 276–277: “Die Lösung dieser Aporie kann von Platon aus gesehen nur darin liegen, dass jedenfalls die Seele und die scheinbar nur der Exemplifikation dienenden partikulären ‘Ideen’ der *monas dyas, trias* oder der *pemptas* eine Art *Zwischenstellung* zwischen dem Reich der absoluten eidē selbst und der sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Dinge innehaben”. Cf. also Wippert (1970), p. 277, n. 14, Schiller (1967), pp. 57–58, and Ross (1924), p. 194, *ad loc.*

53 Cf. Ferber (2007), p. 183.

Once again, in the same vein, Socrates could say: everyone has hidden true beliefs about his soul and its destiny after death, for example that the soul brings life (φέρουσα ζώην, cf. *Phd.* 105d3–4; *Cra.* 399d11–e2; *Lg.* 895c11–12) “whenever it exists” (ὅτανπερ ἦ, *Phd.* 103e5),<sup>54</sup> which entails the negation of his false beliefs, for example that the soul dies with the body. The hypothesis of the immortality of the soul will remain true in the end because an examination of this hypothesis would leave it as the only viable, elenchus-resistant option.

### 3 The kernel of truth in the standard interpretation

Only now are we at last able to point out the kernel of truth in the “standard interpretation”, according to which the student of *logoi* considers the “truth of things” in images: *logoi* or theories may become images of “the truth of things” in the sense of the correspondence theory only when purified from their hidden contradictions. But in that case, they are no longer εικασίαι, that is, conjectures through images, or through images of images (cf. *R.* 511e2, 534a1–5; cf. also *R.* 598b6–8), but rather they express justified true beliefs which say that which is.

I use the expression “justified true beliefs”, not “knowledge”, because there is a *caveat* in the *Phaedo*: as long as our soul is embodied, in the best case we may come as near as possible or “very near” (ἐγγύτατα, *Phd.* 65e4, 67a3; cf. ὁμοιότατον, 80b3 with ἐγγύς τι τούτου, 80b10) to the truth, but it remains at a “distance” from the truth—a distance caused by our corporeality. There is a distance between pure knowledge “of anything”, which would imply the complete consistency of our belief system, and the closest-possible approach to this knowledge in life, a gap that cannot be bridged by a “byway” or “shortcut” (ἀτραπός, *Phd.* 66b4):

[If] it's impossible to get pure knowledge of anything in the company of the body, then one or the other of two things must hold: either knowledge can't be acquired, anywhere, or it can be, but only when we're dead; because that's when the soul will be alone by itself, apart from the body, and not until then.<sup>55</sup>

If this principle is applied to the soul, it is impossible to acquire *pure* knowledge of the soul and its immortality in the company of the body—that is, in this life—al-

<sup>54</sup> For the remark “whenever it exists” (ὅτανπερ ἦ, *Phd.* 103e5), cf. the neglected, but pertinent, comments by Wipern (1970), pp. 273–274.

<sup>55</sup> *Phd.* 66e4–67a2 (trans. Rowe).



though it may be possible to attain different degrees of approximation, depending on the progressive separation of the soul from the body (cf. *Phd.* 67a2–3).<sup>56</sup> Only after death—after our *excarnation*—will we not only *believe*, but also really *know* that we are immortal, if, paradoxically speaking, we are still alive after death.

This limit of the δεύτερος πλοῦς may also be alluded to in the *Philebus*: “but while it is a great thing for the wise man to know everything, the second-best voyage (δεύτερος πλοῦς) is not to ignore oneself, it seems to me” (*Phlb.* 19c1–3, trans. Frede, modified)—“to know everything” may be an ironical allusion in the “simple” sense to the “wise man” Anaxagoras and his “first voyage”, which led Socrates to complete ignorance (cf. *Phd.* 99e2–3).

This lack of self-knowledge is mentioned again in the *Seventh Letter*: “I know that certain others have also written on the same matters; but who they are they themselves do not know” (*Ep.* 7.341a5–7, trans. Morrow).<sup>57</sup> This implies also that these “certain others”, that is, the writers of the “so-called unwritten doctrines” too, like Aristotle, Speusippus, Xenocrates, Heraclides, Hestiaeus,<sup>58</sup> did not attempt the δεύτερος πλοῦς.

At the same time, the human impossibility of arriving at pure knowledge also seems to hold for Plato right up to the *Seventh Letter* because the four means of knowledge at our disposal—ἐν μὲν ὄνομα, δεύτερον δὲ λόγος, τὸ δὲ τρίτον εἶδωλον, τέταρτον δὲ ἐπιστήμη (*Ep.* 7.342b1–2)—are not able to grasp the essence, but only the quality or “the vague, general likeness”<sup>59</sup> of “the fifth”, that is, the postulated “object itself, the knowable and truly real being” (ὁ τε καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐστὶν ὄν) (*Ep.* VII.342a7–b1),<sup>60</sup> or the Platonic idea. Although we do not find the verb διαλέγεσθαι (*Phd.* 63c7–8) or the noun “dialectical pursuit” (διαλεκτική μέθοδος (*R.* 533c7) in the *Seventh Letter*,<sup>61</sup> the *Seventh Letter* alludes to the method mentioned in the *Phaedo* of “giving an account of being” (λόγον διδόναι τοῦ εἶναι), that is, the method of giving a λόγος τῆς οὐσίας by means of questions and answers (cf. *Phd.* 78d1–2) by mentioning twice the process of questioning and answering (cf. *Ep.* VII. 343c8–d1, 344b6). In a kind of reformulation of the δεύτερος πλοῦς in the digression (*Ep.* 7,

56 Cf. Fine (2016), pp. 563–564.

57 Cf. Ferber (2007), p. 42 and p. 133, n. 3.

58 Cf. Novotny (1930), pp. 213–217, especially pp. 215–216.

59 See Bluck (1949), p. 507, in his review of Boas (1948).

60 Agamben's (1999, p. 32) emendation of *ho* through *di' ho* with reference to Ficino's translation “*quintum vero oportet ipsum ponere quo quid est cognoscibile, id est quod agnosci potest, atque vere existit*” seems to me unnecessary and the replacement of “the thing itself” by “that by which the object is known, its own *knowability and truth*” tautological.

61 Cf. Dixsaut (2001), pp. 353–354.

344b3–c1),<sup>62</sup> we find the reason indicated in the formula “because of the weakness of *logoi* or arguments” (διὰ τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές, *Ep.* 7, 343a1)<sup>63</sup>—a corollary of the “human weakness” (ἀνθρωπίνη ἀσθένεια, *Phd.* 107b1; cf. *Plt.* 278c9–d6, *Lg.* 853e10–854a1) caused by the *incarnation* of our souls. This weakness caused by our incarnation implies that even the human *nous* only comes as “near as possible” (ἐγγύτατα) (*Ep.* VII. 342d4) “in kinship and similarity” to the “fifth”. Thus, in the *Philebus*, Socrates and Protarchus are only able to capture the idea or the essence (of the Good, cf. 342a4), with three characteristics or qualities (343b8–c2) which intend “no less” (342e3) than to cover the “fifth” (342e2), that is, essence. As the light of the one sun is broken into three *parhelia*, so the one Good appears to “us” (*Phlb.* 64e5) as if in three qualities: an “aesthetic” one, beauty; a relational one, symmetry; and an ontological one, truth.<sup>64</sup>

In Kantian terms, as *homo phaenomenon*, even the dialectician is not able to grasp and communicate the “the thing in itself” (τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ, *Ep.* VII. 341c7), because the means of knowledge, intuition and categories give only the appearance of “the thing in itself”.

Although there is in the *Seventh Letter*, in distinction to Kant, an “illumination” (ἐξέλαμψις) “of reason and understanding if one goes to the limit of human power” (ἐξέλαμψε φρόνησις περὶ ἕκαστον καὶ νοῦς, συντείνον τι μάλιστ’ εἰς δύναμιν ἀνθρωπίνην, *Ep.* VII. 344b8–c1), this “illumination” also admits of degrees<sup>65</sup> and is not the faculty of an *excarnated* νοῦς, but rather the *activity* or awakening of the “sleeping” *incarnated* νοῦς which comes, to repeat, only as “near as possible” (ἐγγύτατα) (*Ep.* VII.342d4) “in kinship and similarity” to the “fifth”.<sup>66</sup>

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62 That the digression in the Seventh Letter contains a reformulation of the δεύτερος πλοῦς has been suggested by Forcignanò (2020), pp. 41–42. For an interpretation of the digression, cf. Ferber (2007), pp. 51–66 and 106–120, as well as Forcignanò (2020), pp. 38–41.

63 Cf. Ferber (2007), especially pp. 56–66 and pp. 106–120. The interpretation of Burnyeat (2015), pp. 121–132, does not take into account this discussion. Cf. now inter alia the critique of Burnyeat by Szlezák (2017), pp. 311–323, especially pp. 318–320.

64 Cf. Ferber (2020), pp. 177–183, especially p. 183.

65 Cf. Ferber (2007), pp. 111–112, and Forcignanò (2020), pp. 45–46.

66 Pace Szlezák, (2021), p. 191: “Die Beschreibung und Deutung der Schwäche der *logoi* macht verständlich, dass die gesuchte Erkenntnis des *on*, des wahrhaft Seienden einer jeden Sache (341a1, b8), also ihrer Idee, zwar nicht ohne die vier Mittel—sie sind unentbehrlich: 342d8–e2—, aber doch irgendwie gegen sie oder trotz ihrer erreicht wird”. Szlezák seems to ignore that only an *excarnated nous* can reach this knowledge, but an *incarnated nous* can come only as near as possible, cf. especially Ferber (2007), especially p. 110, and long ago Stefanini (1949), pp. XLVI–LVIII, especially p. IV: “La verosimiglianza platonica non è apparenza di verità, ma approssimazione alla verità”.

In any case, just as we must distinguish between *acquaintance as such* and *knowledge by acquaintance*,<sup>67</sup> we must also distinguish between *illumination as such* and *knowledge by illumination*.<sup>68</sup> Illumination as such (in the rational rather than mystical sense of the *Seventh Letter*<sup>69</sup>) signifies direct experience without linguistic symbols (if and so far as it is possible in certain *Grenzsituationen* for human beings). Knowledge by illumination is, however, propositional and affected by the “weakness of the *logoi*”. But the “illumination” of “reason and understanding if one goes to the limit of human power” implies that Plato does not speak of a non-propositional *illumination as such*, but of *knowledge by illumination*. The *logoi*, or arguments, used to formulate such knowledge-claims, are either sound or unsound—that is, they start from true propositions and contain valid deductions or not—and they can be replaced by other propositions, just as Plato’s “Theory of Ideas” is formulated in different ways in the dialogues,<sup>70</sup> and the unwritten “Theory of the Principles” has been handed down to us in different words.<sup>71</sup>

This *körperliche Verdüsterung* of our soul—to borrow an expression from old Goethe<sup>72</sup>—may in fact remain true even in the “so-called unwritten doctrines” (Arist. *Ph.* 209b14–15) if old Plato did, in fact, say there: “Not only the happy (*euty-chounta*) but also the proving (*apodeiknynta*) human being (cf. *Phd.* 77a5, b2–3, c2–6, d4, 87a4–c4, 105e8) must remember that he is a human being”.<sup>73</sup> To remember that we are human beings means also to remember our “human weakness” and mortality, in light of which achieving complete consistency in our incarnated *logoi* is at the very least difficult, if not, as for the Platonic Socrates, impossible, to reach—at least for most ephemeral *incarnated* human beings “participating only to a small extent in truth” (*Lg.* 804b3–4).

In fact, with the metaphor of a “raft” (*σχεδία*, sc. *ναῦς*), “literally, ‘improvised boat’”<sup>74</sup> with which one must sail through life (*Phd.* 85d1–2), Plato’s Socrates of the *Phaedo* indicates not only the fragile instrumental character of the flight into the *logoi* as a *Hilfskonstruktion*, but also of the hypothesis of ideas—a *Hilfskonstruktion* which even for the Plato of the *Timaeus* is not a self-evident axiom, but “something necessary because of a hypothesis” (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ἀναγκαῖον, cf. Arist. *PA.* 1.1, 642a9): if we distinguish between true belief and knowledge, then we must also ac-

67 Cf. Feigl (1967), p. 37.

68 The distinction is made neither by Szlezák (2021), p. 191, nor by Forcignano (2020), pp. 42–47.

69 Cf. Ferber (2007), especially pp. 99–100.

70 Cf., e.g., the short summary in Baltes and Lakmann (2005), pp. 2–6.

71 Cf. Van der Wielen (1941), pp. 178–179.

72 Talks with Eckermann (March 11, 1828).

73 Gaiser (1963), p. 455, Testimonium 11.

74 Kanayama (2000), p. 92.

cept ideas<sup>75</sup>—at least if we may hear in the voice of the Platonic Timaeus also old Plato's voice: “so here's how I cast my own vote” (*Tim.* 51d3).

A raft is not a stable vehicle like a sailing boat or a rowboat, although, like the raft of Odysseus, to which Simmias possibly alludes (cf. *Phd.* 85d1), it can also have sails (ιστία) (cf. Hom. *Od.* 5.259–261). A second voyage on a raft with oars and at least one sail (ιστίον) capable of being hoisted may also be an apt metaphor for the Socratic δεύτερος πλοῦς in the *Phaedo*. But for all its instability, a raft with oars and one sail is still a better way than swimming without the “raft” of a hypothesis through the troubled water, the πόντος ἀτρύγετος of the γένεσις and φθορά of our lives.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Ferber (1998), p. 438.

<sup>76</sup> An earlier version of this article appeared in the first two sections of “*Second Sailing towards Immortality and God: On Plato's Phaedo 99e4–100a3, with an Outlook on Descartes' Meditations, AT VII, 67*”. *Mnemosyne* 74. No. 3, 2021, pp. 371–400. I thank Chad Jorgenson for some helpful remarks.

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## Appendix: Translations of Phd. 99e4–100a3

Quapropter operae pretium esse censui, ut ad rationes confugerem, atque in illis rerum veritatem considerarem. Forte vero nostra haec similitudo non omni ex parte congruat. Non enim prorsus assentior; eum, qui res in rationibus contemplantur, in imaginibus aspicere potius, quam qui in operibus intuetur. (Marsilio Ficino)

Sondern mich dünkte, ich müsse zu den Gedanken meine Zuflucht nehmen und in diesen das wahre Wesen der Dinge anschauen. Doch vielleicht ähnelt das Bild auf gewisse Weise nicht so, wie ich es aufgestellt habe. Denn das möchte ich gar nicht zugeben, dass, wer das Seiende in Gedanken betrachtet, es mehr in Bildern betrachtet, als wer in den Dingen. (F.D. Schleiermacher)

Es erschien mir demnach notwendig, zu den Begriffen meine Zuflucht zu nehmen und an ihrer Hand das wahre Wesen der Dinge zu erforschen. Vielleicht trifft mein Vergleich nicht ganz zu; denn ich leugne auf das bestimmteste, dass der, welcher die Dinge begrifflich betrachtet, sich in höherem Grade einer bildlichen Betrachtungsweise bediene als der, welcher sich unmittelbar an die gegebenen Dinge wendet. (O. Apelt)

Es schien mir daher nötig zu sein, meine Zuflucht zu den Argumenten zu nehmen und in ihnen die Realität des Seienden zu untersuchen. Vielleicht ist aber mein Vergleich in gewissem Sinne unpassend: Denn ich will gar nicht zugeben, dass jemand, der das Seiende in Argumenten untersucht, dabei eher in Bildern untersucht als derjenige, der es in der Wirklichkeit untersucht. (Th. Ebert)

So I thought I should take refuge in theories, and study in them the truth of the things that are. Perhaps my comparison is, in a certain way, inept; as I don't at all admit that one who examines in theories the things that are is any more studying them in images than one who examines them in concrete. (D. Gallop)

So I decided that I should take refuge in theories and arguments and look into the truth of things in them. Now maybe in a way it does not resemble what I'm comparing it to. For I don't at all accept that someone who, when studying things, does so in theories and arguments, is looking into them in images any more than someone who does so in facts. (A. Long and D. Sedley)

Il me sembla dès lors indispensable de me réfugier du côté des idées et de chercher à voir en elles la vérité des choses. Peut-être, il est vrai, ma comparaison en un sens n'est-elle point exacte, car je ne conviens pas sans réserve que l'observation idéale des choses nous les fasse envisager en image, plutôt que ne fait une expérience effective: (L. Robin)

Voici alors ce qu'il me sembla devoir faire: me réfugier du côté des raisonnements, et, à l'intérieur de ces raisonnements, examiner la vérité des êtres. Il se peut d'ailleurs que, dans un sens, ma comparaison ne soit pas ressemblante: car je n'accorde pas du tout que lorsque l'on examine les êtres à l'intérieur d'un raisonnement, on ait plus affaire à leur images que lorsqu'on les examine dans des expériences directes. (M. Dixsaut)

E mi parve necessario rifugiarmi nei concetti, e considerare in essi la realtà delle cose esistenti. Sebbene forse, in certo senso, la similitudine non si addice. Perché io



non posso ammettere che chi considera le cose nei loro concetti le veda in imagine più di chi le consideri nella loro realtà. (M. Valmigli)

Perciò ritenni di dovermi rifugiare in certi postulati e considerare in questi la verità delle cose che sono. Forse il paragone che ora ti ho fatto in un certo senso non calza, giacché io non ammetto di certo che chi considera le cose alla luce di questi postulati le consideri in immagini più di chi le considera nella realtà. (G. Reale)

Juzgué, pues, que era necesario refugiarme en las proposiciones y buscar en ellas la verdad de las cosas; por cierto que la comparación de que me sirvo no me parece exacta, porque no convengo de ningún modo que quien examina las cosas en las proposiciones las examina en imágenes más que quien lo hace en los hechos. (C. Eggers Lan)

Opiné, pues, que era preciso refugiarme en los conceptos para examinar en ellos la verdad real. Ahora bien, quizás eso a lo que lo comparo no es apropiado en cierto sentido. Porque no estoy muy de acuerdo en que el que examina la realidad en los conceptos la contemple más en imágenes, que el que la examina en los hechos. (C. Garcia Gual)

