

The Unexamined Life on Trial
A Crucial Problem in Plato's Writings

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[DECLARAÇÕES]

Declaro que esta dissertação é o resultado da minha investigação pessoal e independente. O seu conteúdo é original e todas as fontes consultadas estão devidamente mencionadas no texto, nas notas e na bibliografia.

O candidato,

Helder Gonçalo Cunha Telo

Lisboa, 7 de Fevereiro de 2018...

Declaro que esta dissertação se encontra em condições de ser apreciada pelo júri a designar.

O orientador,

M. J. A. Carvalho

Lisboa, 7 de Fevereiro de 2018...

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”

T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”¹

¹ See T. S. ELIOT, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & New World, 1963, 207.

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ABSTRACT

The Unexamined Life on Trial. A Crucial Problem in Plato's Writings

Hélder Telo

KEYWORDS: Plato, Socrates, philosophy, philosophical examination, life, βίος, unexamined life, wisdom, σοφία, care, πόλις, happiness, εὐδαιμονία, δόξα, knowledge claim, view, belief, εἶδος, ignorance, ἀμαθία, ἔλεγχος, φύσις, soul, ψυχή, truth, ἀλήθεια, good, superlative good, ἀκράτεια, tripartition, love of gain, love of honor, love of knowledge, φιλοσοφία, πολιτεία, illness, deformity, latent badness, latent misery.

The goal of this dissertation is to discuss the assertion that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (*Apology*, 38a). We will start by considering how, according to the *Apology*, such a life is marked by false knowledge claims, self-neglect, drowsiness and a merely apparent happiness. Then, we will extend this analysis to the whole Platonic corpus, in order to better understand the implications of this perspective. This extension will include four moments.

First, we will analyze Plato's conception of philosophical examination. Although it may seem there is no unitary conception of examination in the corpus (especially because of the difference between a negative and a positive kind of examination), we will see that philosophical examination is always directed at views or beliefs. We all possess a complex system of beliefs, and these beliefs may contain many errors and distortions, which are bound to vitiate any positive examination. Consequently, we must first verify the beliefs we already have, and only then can we search for new views.

Second, we must consider the inner constitution of our being (i.e., of our ψυχή) and see how it determines the general structure of each particular life (βίος). The ψυχή has a complex cognitive structure, and it is essentially marked by the pursuit of a superlative good. A βίος is thus a system of practical tensions, directed at the superlative good, and based on our views of the good and of how to attain it. Moreover, the ψυχή is marked by three constitutive drives (love of gain, love of honor, and love of knowledge – φιλοσοφία), and these drives try to control the pursuit of the good, are always in a particular relation of forces, and also contaminate or transform each other – which means, among other things, that our entire ψυχή and our entire life are deeply marked by love of knowledge.

Third, we will describe the constitution of the unexamined life on the basis of the structures previously identified. We will see that although there are many modalities of unexamined life, they all have a similar constitution. They are characterized by the rule of a non-philosophical drive and by a weak love of knowledge, and this in turn constitutes a practical system and a cognitive system that are marked by many defects.

Fourth, we will reconsider Plato's assertion in light of all that was seen. We will show that the unexamined life is constitutively defective or bad because it is ruled by a drive that is unfit to rule and its way of seeing things is severely distorted. This prevents the ψυχή from attaining the knowledge and the superlative good it desires. Hence, the unexamined life should be rejected and we should devote ourselves to philosophical examination, in order to attain truth and the superlative good. However, philosophical examination can have different outcomes and it faces several risks. Thus, we will close with the discussion of whether or not these variables may affect the imperative of philosophical examination and the rejection of the unexamined life.

RESUMO

A vida não-examinada no banco dos réus. Um problema crucial nos escritos de Platão

Hélder Telo

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Platão, Sócrates, filosofia, exame filosófico, vida, βίος, vida não-examinada, sabedoria, σοφία, cuidado, πόλις, felicidade, εὐδαιμονία, δόξα, pretensão de saber, perspectiva, convicção, εἶδος, ignorância, ἀμαθία, ἔλεγχος, φύσις, alma, ψυχή, verdade, ἀλήθεια, bem, bem superlativo, ἀκράτεια, tripartição, amor ao ganho, amor à honra, amor ao saber, φιλοσοφία, πολιτεία, doença, deformidade, mal latente, miséria latente.

O objectivo desta dissertação é discutir a declaração de que “a vida não-examinada não é digna de ser vivida” (*Apologia*, 38a). Começaremos por considerar o modo como na *Apologia* tal vida está associada a falsas pretensões de saber, à auto-negligência, ao torpor e a uma felicidade meramente aparente. Em seguida, alargaremos a análise à totalidade do *corpus platonicum*, de modo a compreender melhor o que está implicado em tal perspectiva. Este alargamento inclui quatro momentos.

Em primeiro lugar, analisaremos a concepção platónica de exame filosófico. Embora possa parecer que não há uma concepção unitária de exame no *corpus* (especialmente por culpa da diferença entre um tipo negativo e um tipo positivo de exame), veremos que o exame filosófico tem sempre como objecto teses ou convicções. Em geral, todos possuímos um complexo sistema de convicções e estas convicções podem conter muitos erros e distorções, os quais acabam por viciar qualquer exame positivo. Logo, temos de começar por verificar as convicções que já temos, e só então poderemos procurar novas teses.

Em segundo lugar, consideraremos a constituição interna do nosso ser (i.e., da nossa ψυχή) e veremos o modo como ela determina a estrutura geral de qualquer vida em particular (βίος). A ψυχή tem uma estrutura cognitiva complexa e é essencialmente caracterizada pela procura de um bem superlativo. Um βίος é, portanto, um sistema de tensões práticas dirigido ao bem superlativo e baseado nas nossas convicções sobre o que é o bem e sobre como o alcançar. Além disso, a ψυχή define-se por ter três pulsões constitutivas: o amor ao ganho, o amor à honra e o amor ao conhecimento (φιλοσοφία). Estas pulsões tentam controlar a procura do bem, têm sempre uma determinada relação de forças, e além disso contaminam-se ou transformam-se mutuamente – o que significa, entre outras coisas, que toda a nossa ψυχή e toda a nossa vida estão marcadas pelo amor ao conhecimento.

Em terceiro lugar, trataremos de descrever a constituição da vida não-examinada com base nas estruturas previamente identificadas. Veremos que, apesar de haver muitas modalidades diferentes de vida não-examinada, todas elas são todas caracterizadas pela prevalência de uma pulsão não-filosófica e por um fraco amor ao conhecimento – o que constitui sempre um sistema prático e um sistema cognitivo marcados por muitos defeitos.

Por fim, reconsideraremos o enunciado de Platão à luz de tudo o que foi visto. Mostraremos que a vida não-examinada é constitutivamente defeituosa ou de má qualidade, visto que é governada por uma pulsão que não tem qualificações para governar e por ter uma perspectiva gravemente distorcida. Isto impede a ψυχή de alcançar o conhecimento e o bem superlativo que ela deseja. Por conseguinte, a vida não-examinada deve ser rejeitada e devemos consagrar-nos ao exame filosófico, com vista a alcançar a verdade e o bem superlativo. Contudo, o exame filosófico pode ter diferentes resultados e enfrenta vários riscos. Terminaremos por isso a análise com a discussão do modo como estas variáveis podem ou não afectar o imperativo de exame filosófico e a rejeição da vida não-examinada.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Plato's works:

<i>Alc. I</i>	<i>Alcibiades I</i>	<i>Ly.</i>	<i>Lysis</i>
<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apology</i>	<i>Men.</i>	<i>Meno</i>
<i>Chrm.</i>	<i>Charmides</i>	<i>Mx.</i>	<i>Menexenus</i>
<i>Cra.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>	<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Cri.</i>	<i>Crito</i>	<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Criti.</i>	<i>Critias</i>	<i>Phlb.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Plt.</i>	<i>Statesman</i>
<i>Euthd.</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>	<i>Prm.</i>	<i>Parmenides</i>
<i>Euthphr.</i>	<i>Euthyphro</i>	<i>Prt.</i>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Grg.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Hp. Ma.</i>	<i>Hippias Major</i>	<i>Smp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Hp. Mi.</i>	<i>Hippias Minor</i>	<i>Sph.</i>	<i>Sophist</i>
<i>La.</i>	<i>Laches</i>	<i>Tht.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Lg.</i>	<i>Laws</i>	<i>Ti.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>

Other works:

<i>DK</i>	H. DIELS & W. KRANZ (eds.), <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , 3 vols., Berlin, Weidmann, 1951-1952 ⁶ (1903 ¹)
<i>KSA</i>	F. NIETZSCHE, <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> . Kritische Studienausgabe, edited by G. Colli & M. Montinari, 15 vols., München, Deutscher Taschenbuch, Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 1988 ² (1980 ¹)
<i>PCW</i>	J. COOPER & D. HUTCHINSON (eds.), <i>Plato Complete Works</i> , Indianapolis (IN)/Cambridge (MA), Hackett, 1997
<i>TWNT</i>	G. KITTEL/G. FRIEDRICH (eds.), <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> , 10 vols., Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1933-1979

INTRODUCTION

“Der Geist einer Philosophie ist ihre Philosophie der Philosophie.”

F. Schlegel, *Geist der Fichtischen Wissenschaftslehre*²

1. The radicalism of Socrates’ assertion about the value of an unexamined life and the problem of its meaning, foundations and validity

The problem to be discussed is raised by one of the most well-known assertions in the Platonic corpus, often used as a slogan for philosophical activity in general. The *Apology of Socrates* lets us know that “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being”.³ It is not clear whether the historical Socrates ever said such words or whether they are a perfect expression of his beliefs. Nevertheless, the assertion expresses in a compact and incisive manner a perspective on human life that is at the center of Plato’s interpretation of the figure of Socrates. It is patent throughout the *Apology* and the more Socratic moments of Plato’s writings, but it is not confined to those moments. The entire Platonic corpus can be read as a discussion of this assertion or as an extensive presentation of the case against the unexamined life. The criticism of the unexamined life and the appeal to examine oneself, others and life in general is a central moment of Plato’s thought.

It is important to bear in mind from the start that these words are not uttered in ordinary circumstances. According to the *Apology*, Socrates is at risk of being sentenced to death for his dedication to examining himself and the others around him. Many had come to regard this form of constant examination as harmful to life and to the πόλις, and wanted to get rid of it. Socrates, however, does not falter. Instead of abandoning his ways, he remains faithful to the idea for which he lived and is ready to die for it. He also does not compromise. He does not try to convince others that his activity is harmless and that they should tolerate a certain degree of it in their lives. Instead, he turns his defense into a praise of his form of

² See F. SCHLEGEL, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. 18, München/etc., Schöningh, 1963, 37.

³ *Ap.* 38a5-6: “(...) ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ (...)” For now, we will follow T. West’s translation of the passage (see T. WEST, *Plato’s Apology of Socrates. An Interpretation, with a New Translation*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 1979), but later we will consider its wording and meaning in more detail. See Chap. 3, Sect. 2.

examination (which we may call philosophical examination) and declares it the greatest good for any human being.⁴ At the same time, he counterattacks and reverses the accusation, thereby turning his ἀπολογία into a κατηγορία. He opens a second trial – the trial of the unexamined life. Instead of letting it be, he identifies, isolates and questions such a life. And he does not stop here. He presses charges against it. The unexamined life is defective, inferior, undesirable, something to be avoided. It stands in absolute need of philosophical examination in order to overcome its defects and become a good life. Examination is thus an absolute value or at least the source of all value. Socrates is fully convinced of it and therefore he cannot compromise. He would rather die than accept a life deprived of philosophical examination. And this has nothing to do with a personal taste. His condemnation of the unexamined life is valid not only for all jurors and all Athenians of his time, but for all human beings. Socrates' words resonate through the ages and denounces all those who fail to examine themselves.

It is true that Socrates' assertion has been read in different ways. It is often watered down and reduced to a call for more reflection, more critical thinking, and a more rational life. Such a version is relatively easy to subscribe to. However, it overlooks the fact that Socrates is saying more than that. He is making a radical claim, which he himself recognizes as surprising and hard to believe.⁵ As we will see, he is talking of an extreme form of philosophical examination, which may consume one's whole life (as it did his own), and which we not only do not perform, but would hardly accept performing. But he says we must, because without it life is not worth living. So one could borrow Callicles' words in *Gorgias* and say to Socrates that “(...) if you are in earnest, and these things you're saying are really true, won't this human life of ours be turned upside down, and won't everything we do evidently be the opposite of what we should do?”⁶ Socrates' view in the *Apology* is indeed counterintuitive and seems to be refuted by the facts. Many lead lives that are not dedicated to philosophical examination and there seems to be no problem with that. By criticizing those lives, Socrates can easily strike us as extremist, inflexible, intolerant and fanatic – even if we

⁴ He says this precisely before passing judgment on the unexamined life. See 38a2-5: “(...) τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὃν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἐμοῦ ἀκούετε διαλεγόμενου καὶ ἑμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος (...).”

⁵ See 38a6-8: “(...) ταῦτα δ' ἔτι ἤττον πείσεσθέ μοι λέγοντι. τὰ δὲ ἔχει μὲν οὕτως, ὡς ἐγὼ φημι, ὃ ἄνδρες, πείθειν δὲ οὐ ῥᾶδιον.”

⁶ *Grg.* 481c: “εἰ μὲν γὰρ σπουδάξεις τε καὶ τυγχάνει ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγεις, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἀνατετραμμένος ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία πράττομεν, ὡς ἔουκεν, ἢ ἃ δεῖ;” I follow D. Zeyl's translation (see *PCW*).

happen to have philosophical interests. A good life does not seem to depend exclusively (and not even primarily) on the kind of examination Socrates had in mind.

But is it possible that Socrates knows something that we normally do not? Is there any truth to what he says? What is really the value of an unexamined life? And what need do we have for philosophical examination? This is the problem we must discuss. We must see what exactly does Socrates mean, what are the grounds for his judgment and whether it is valid or not. In other words, we must grab the Socrates of the *Apology* by the arm and force him to render an account of his assertion. In fact, we will try to grab Plato by the arm and force the Platonic corpus to render an account of this judgment of the unexamined life and of philosophical examination. But before considering how we plan to approach the corpus, it is important to develop a greater sensibility to the problem as such, to avoid handling it as a distant and abstract question, that concerns only what some ancient philosopher said.

2. The relevance of the problem for human life

The problem concerning the value of the unexamined life and the need for philosophical examination is far from being irrelevant. It affects us very closely. It is an intimate problem of ours and we always have some relation to it (even if we hardly ever can formulate it as such). In a sense, the problem of the unexamined life is actually at the center of human life.⁷ We can better understand it if we briefly consider some aspects of our immediate understanding of the terms “life” and “examination”.

Life as we experience it is a domain that encompasses everything that appears to us, but it has at its center a particular being that relates itself to itself, is interested in itself and wants the best for itself. This being (which we could also call the self) is not a mere spectator of his destiny. It must rather make its own path in life, and it is faced with many junctures or crossroads. In other words, it has always many possibilities to choose from. It does not matter here whether this choice is fully conscious and fully free or not. One must nevertheless define one's life at each step of the road, one must take a stance, and refusing to do so is already a form of defining one's life.

⁷ The problem we will consider not only helps describe the kind of being that we are (namely, a being that is fundamentally faced with this problem), but its solution also determines the kind of being that we should be or what we should do with our life. In this sense, it is a fundamental problem of philosophical anthropology understood not in its usual strict sense (corresponding to a very particular discipline founded in the 20th century), but in the broadest sense possible, as the general consideration of the Kantian question “Was ist der Mensch?”, which may well be the basis of all other philosophical disciplines (or at least it may strongly influence them).

Now, any decision we make is determined by our views or beliefs, but these are not infallible. They may contain many limitations, blind spots and distortions. In fact, we all made the experience of discovering defects in our views when we were fully convinced of them. This experience can in turn give rise to doubts and to the anticipation of further defects. But we are not condemned to accept our cognitive defects or our doubts without being able to do something about them. We can interrupt the regular course of life and dwell on things, review them, question them, or put them to test. In short, we can examine them or examine our views of them. We are aware of the possibility of examining things, we often embrace it and we know it has a certain degree of efficiency. It allows us to accelerate discoveries that would only be made later (perhaps at a much greater cost), or not at all. We can use it to overcome perceived limitations of our way of seeing things or even to confirm that there is no problem and we are seeing things correctly. Examination can thus help us make better choices in life and live a better life.

However, while we are examining, we cannot do other things and move on with our life. We cannot do everything at the same time, so if we examine, we end up losing other possibilities. We have to choose and this is in fact a fundamental juncture. At each moment, we must decide between acting based on our views or reviewing them. This applies both to any particular situation and to the whole of our life. We must decide between living an unexamined or an examined life, and in a way all other possibilities (all other junctures) depend on this one. Before deciding what to do or what to choose, we must decide whether or not we will examine our views of what can be done or how it can be done. If we do not examine, then we proceed according to our views and may regret it. If we do decide to examine, we may make a better choice or we may even end up redefining the practical juncture we had before us. But we always have to decide one way or the other.

To be sure, we do not expressly think about this alternative at all times nor are we usually aware of it as such. We tend not to think about it at all. But this does not mean we do not decide anything. Our decision is automatic or tacit. We have something like a predetermined strategy of examination, which is itself based on our own views. This strategy establishes that we do not need to carry out all possible examinations. Usually we only need to examine things when we are faced with strong doubts in an important matter and have time to examine. Our examinations are very restricted and this means our views, as well as our life in general, are mostly unexamined. We are concerned with many other things (namely, with

the practical junctures of life) and do not even think about whether we should examine everything or not.

It is thus difficult to realize that we are always taking a stance on whether we will examine or not and on whether we will live an unexamined life or not. However, even if we become explicitly aware of it, it is still not guaranteed that we will regard it as a serious problem and understand what is really at issue. We can conceive the terms of the alternative in light of the beliefs we already have and never truly examine what these beliefs imply. In other words, the problem can be posed and solved without ever leaving the unexamined life. It is in fact highly probable that, when faced with the question, we will settle it quickly and rashly, thereby solving all tension and difficulty it might involve.

Indeed, at first sight there seems to be no need of any intense form of examination. Life works just fine and the usefulness of examining things is very limited. We may perhaps recognize that it helped our personal development and the development of culture at some points, but that is mostly in the past. Now we do not need it anymore. If we were to start examining everything, it would only invade our life and prevent us from acting. More than that, it could even attack our practical beliefs (i.e., the beliefs that guide our life) and the meaning of everything. We could become entirely rudderless. But why should we put everything in question? It seems better to limit examination to those particular circumstances in which we have some important doubt (which is what we already do, anyway).

However, when we think like this, we probably assume that our practical beliefs are fundamentally sound. Our life is meaningful, its meaning is firm, and it will not collapse by itself. There is no serious defect that would call for a serious examination of our life and everything in it. Additionally, even if there was some defect, it is not clear for us that philosophical examination would bring a better life. It is not even clear it can produce any result. It can very well be an endless process. So why should we fully dedicate ourselves to it? For all the reasons just considered, an exacerbated form of examination seems rather useless and even harmful.

However, we may question these reasons. Nothing guarantees that the most important examinations are already made, that examination cannot bring something better, or that the unexamined life is intrinsically meaningful and firm. The adoption of an unexamined life and the rejection of philosophical examination may be based on naive and unexamined assumptions about them. But the same may happen when we agree with Socrates, as we saw. We may do it based on a naive understanding of the problem and of what is implied in his

view. In sum, the fact that we have an immediate view on the matter does not mean we have solved it in a satisfactory manner – and it also does not mean that Plato does not have anything important to teach us. Socrates may be saying something less innocuous than it seems and his view may have the potential to unsettle our way of seeing things and our way of living. Therefore, we should not immediately reject (or accept) his assertion. It is important to dwell on it, try to find the best or strongest interpretation of it, and determine the arguments that could justify it.⁸ We need to see how it can put us and our whole lives in question. In other words, we need to examine Plato’s assertion in such a way that at the same time we will be examining ourselves, our life and the role philosophy or philosophical examination may play in it.

The importance of discussing the problem and considering Plato’s treatment of it is thus a result of the problem’s importance for our life. We need to decide between examining or going on with our life, and we will have to live with the consequences of what we decide. When we realize what we should have done, it may already be too late to do it. Or we may never discover it and lead a worthless life (even if we do not realize it). Given our interest in ourselves and in our own life, we do not want to make the wrong choice. Hence, we need to examine the question concerning the value of the unexamined life and of its opposite, for only so can we make an informed decision and be sure that we are not missing anything important.

3. Scope and itinerary of the investigation

In order to discuss Socrates’ assertion and the understanding of life it expresses we will start by considering what is said in the *Apology of Socrates* about the value of the unexamined life and the possible need for philosophical examination. Socrates’ assertion represents the culmination of the arguments presented by Socrates during his three speeches and its meaning becomes clearer when we consider it in its context. In interpreting the *Apology*, we will not concern ourselves with the historical Socrates and with how faithful Plato’s portrayal of him might be. We will simply consider the arguments put forward in the text and their relevance for understanding the perspectives underlying Socrates’ assertion. As

⁸ In other words, we need to apply the so-called “principle of charity” to it, and doing so is not just a matter of being respectful or fair to Plato, but is also something we should do in our best interest. We need to find the strongest arguments for Plato’s case, so that we may benefit as much from its discussion as we can.

we will see, these arguments will provide us some important insights, but they also raise many questions for which we find no sufficient answer in the *Apology*.

However, the problem concerning the value of the unexamined life is not confined to this text, but rather pervades the entire Platonic corpus. It is particularly manifest in the moments when Socrates' trial is foreshadowed or when Plato presents the idea of an accurate judgment of our life.⁹ Yet, the question is present even when there is no explicit reference to judging the value of a life. The corpus is indeed full of examinations that try to oppose the general tendency of the unexamined life (which presupposes a certain appraisal of it) and many of them are directly relevant for determining the essence and value both of the unexamined life and of philosophical examination. The whole corpus can thus be read as a discussion in many voices of unexamined life and its opposite, or as we could also say, it presents a much longer version of the trial of the unexamined life. Throughout the texts many relevant testimonies are introduced and discussed, and their interaction results in a much more elaborate condemnation of the unexamined life and a much stronger appeal to philosophical examination. Our task then is to collect and order the testimonies scattered throughout the dialogues, in order to see in what way the unexamined life is not worth living, according to Plato.

Thus, after considering the discussion of the problem in the *Apology* (Part I), we will divide it in four groups of questions and consider them in turn. For each question we will try to combine the relevant passages in the corpus and see what results from their combination. In Part II we will consider the conception of philosophical examination that is presented in the corpus. There are several discussions of it and some of them very different from one another, but we will try to organize them into a single project. In Part III we will determine the basic structures of our being (or of our life), which are what enables both the unexamined life and its opposite. In Part IV we will consider the unexamined life as such and see how it is formed and what characterizes it. We will then have all the elements necessary to properly discuss the meaning of Socrates' assertion. So in Part V we will consider Plato's appraisal of the unexamined life and the Platonic arguments for the necessity (or for an imperative, as we could also say) of philosophical examination.

⁹ We find important references to Socrates' trial in *Grg.* 486a-b, 521b ff., *Rep.* 517a and *Th.* 172c ff. Moreover, several dialogues take place immediately before, during or right after Socrates' trial, and are thus intimately connected with it. As for the idea of an accurate or perfect judgment of one's life, Plato tends to present it in mythological garments, as in *Grg.* 522e ff., *Rep.* 614b ff., *Phd.* 113d ff., and *Phdr.* 248c ff. The most "rational" discussion of it can be found in *Republic IX* (580a ff.). In general, the judge considers whether one led a just or an unjust life, but as we will see, for Plato the difference between these two kinds of life is intimately connected with the difference between a philosophical and a non-philosophical life.

4. The elusiveness of Plato, the problematic status of every interpretation and the hermeneutical decisions of the following inquiry

Our discussion of the question concerning the value of the unexamined life will make constant reference to Plato, but this reference to Plato is far from being clear and uncontroversial. It is never easy to determine an author and his thought, but in Plato's case the interpreters face additional difficulties, which render the task of determining his thought almost (if not entirely) impossible. The Platonic corpus has a problematic status and it admits of very different readings. Plato's interpreters are thus required to decide for themselves how the texts are to be read and their decisions are never entirely warranted by the texts. It is important to be aware of this and so we will consider which features of Plato's writings render it so problematic and how this problematicity is reflected in the main currents of secondary literature on Plato. Then, in light of this, we will be able to discuss the particular decisions that shape the following inquiry and what status it claims for its results.

4.1. The labyrinth of the corpus

Let us start by considering the main features of Plato's writings and the particular kind of interpretative problems posed by them. The texts that compose the corpus are not essays or treatises. They do not try to communicate the author's course of inquiry and his findings as honestly and clearly as possible. Plato rather hides himself and does not talk in his own voice.¹⁰ He writes dialogues in which he portrays different characters discussing among themselves, examining different questions, putting forward different views and often refuting them. But it is never clear how Plato relates to any of this. We do not know exactly what he thought. We can only have an indirect access to his mind and this requires us to determine how the dialogues and the characters therein are to be regarded.

One is naturally inclined to interpret the main speaker in each dialogue (i.e., the one that controls and apparently wins the discussion) as a mouthpiece or spokesperson for Plato. However, such an approach raises many issues. The main speaker is usually Socrates, but it is difficult to determine whether the depictions of him in the dialogues are fully compatible with each other or not. Then there is also the problem of how these depictions relate to the

¹⁰ The only significant exception to this is probably the *Seventh Letter* (whose authenticity, however, has also been doubted). In it we find some indications about his life and his thinking (some of which we will consider below), but still it is very far from letting us understand what exactly his thought was.

historical Socrates. And are they to be interpreted in reference to the historical figure or rather in their own right? But putting all that aside, the Socrates depicted in the Platonic corpus is not easy to pin down. He does not communicate his views in a direct and straightforward manner. In many dialogues he cross-examines other characters and follows their lead. The questions and arguments he makes are adapted to these other characters' views, and are not necessarily an expression of his beliefs. In fact, he is for the most part an ironical or dissimulative character. He plays the fool and gives the impression he is hiding something.¹¹ But even when he puts forward views, he tends to add some sort of disclaimer. He says many times that they are only provisional claims, and other times he says they are something he heard from someone else, something he dreamt or the result of a sudden inspiration.¹² At some points, he does seem to express views he is certain of, but he says that he will present only a simplified version.¹³ As a result, it is never completely clear what he thinks. Moreover,

¹¹ The value of Socratic εἰρωνεία is itself a problem and has given rise to many discussions. But we will not enter into that here. For more on the matter, as well as on the meaning of the words εἰρών and εἰρωνεία, see O. RIBBECK, Über den Begriff des *Eiron*, *Rheinisches Museum* 31 (1876), 381-400; W. BÜCHNER, Über den Begriff der Eironeia, *Hermes* 76 (1941), 339-358; R. SCHAEFERER, Le mécanisme de l'ironie dans ses rapports avec la dialectique, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 48 (1941), 181-209; P. PLASS, Philosophical Anonymity and Irony in the Platonic Dialogues, *American Journal of Philology* 85 (1964), 254-278; Z. PAVLOVSKIS, Aristotle, Horace, and the Ironic Man, *Classical Philology* 63 (1968), 22-41; E. BURGE, The Irony of Socrates, *Antichthon* 3 (1969), 5-17; L. BERGSON, Eiron und Eironeia, *Hermes* 99 (1971), 409-422; W. BODER, *Die sokratische Ironie in den platonischen Frühdialogen*, Amsterdam, Grüner, 1973; D. ROLOFF, *Platonische Ironie. Das Beispiel: Theaitetos*, Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1975; R. BURGER, Socratic Irony and the Platonic Art of Writing, *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 9 (1978), 113-126; G. VLASTOS, Socratic Irony, *Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987), 79-96; D. HYLAND, Taking the Longer Road. The Irony of Plato's *Republic*, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 93 (1988), 317-335; S. KIERKEGAARD, *The Concept of Irony. With Continual Reference to Socrates*, transl. by H. Hong & E. Hong, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1989 (original version: *Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates*, Diss. Kopenhagen, 1841); P. GOTTLIEB, The Complexity of Socratic Irony. A Note on Professor Vlastos' Account, *The Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992), 278-279; M. GELLRICH, Socratic Magic. Enchantment, Irony, and Persuasion in Plato's Dialogues, *The Classical World* 87 (1994), 275-307; D. ROOCHNIK, Socratic Ignorance as Complex Irony. A Critique of Gregory Vlastos, *Arethusa* 28 (1995), 39-52; J. GORDON, Against Vlastos on Complex Irony, *Classical Quarterly* 46 (1996), 131-137; A. NEHAMAS, *The Art of Living. Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, 19-98; I. VASILIOU, Conditional Irony in the Socratic dialogues, *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1999), 456-72; D. BOUCHARD, L'ironie socratique, *Laval théologique et philosophique* 57 (2001), 277-289; I. VASILIOU, Socrates' Reverse Irony, *Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002), 220-230; C. GRISWOLD, Irony in the Platonic Dialogues, *Philosophy and Literature* 26 (2002), 84-106; J. CONSTÂNCIO, *Imagens e Concepções da Vida Humana em Platão*. Investigações sobre bios e psychē, Diss. Univ. Nova de Lisboa, 2005, 34ff.; M. MCCABE, Irony in the Soul. Should Plato's Socrates be Sincere?, In: M. TRAPP (ed.), *Socrates, from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, Aldershot/etc., Ashgate, 2007, 17-32; D. WOLFSFORF, The Irony of Socrates, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 (2007), 175-187; D. LEIBOWITZ, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates. Plato's Apology*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2010; M. LANE, Reconsidering Socratic Irony, in D. MORRISON, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 237-259.

¹² To give a few examples: Socrates admits the provisional character of the inquiries in *Men.* 86d ff. and *Phd.* 107b; his views are attributed to a sudden blow of inspiration in *Cra.* 396d-e, 399a, 428c-d, and *Phdr.* 241e ff.; he talks of insights that came from dreams in *Chrm.* 173a, *Cra.* 439c ff., *Tht.* 201d ff., and *Phlb.* 20b; he presents views he heard from someone else in *Men.* 81a-b and *Smp.* 201d.

¹³ See e.g. *Phdr.* 246a and *Rep.* 506d-e.

to make matters worse, his whole character is mysterious and full of apparent contradictions.¹⁴ It is not easy to comprehend why he does what he does and says what he says. The Socrates of the dialogues is completely ἄτοπον, both for the other characters and for the reader.

These problems are less accentuated in the case of the other main speakers (namely, the Visitor from Elea, Parmenides, Timaeus, Critias, the Athenian), though they are also somewhat ironical or dissimulative, and the views they put forward are also sometimes accompanied by disclaimers.¹⁵ But even if in some cases they present definite or settled views, we still cannot be sure that these are the views held by Plato. Moreover, we may take the views of the dominant speakers more seriously, but we cannot simply assume that all other views put forward by the non-dominant figures in the dialogues are to be disregarded as mere foils to the dominant views. They may very well contain important insights and we should not promptly dismiss them. Consequently, Plato's voice seems to become lost in a complex choir of dissonant views. We cannot immediately identify what he thinks, and it is perhaps best to try a different approach: instead of identifying Plato with any particular character, we should shift our attention to the interplay of views – i.e., to the conversation proper – and what results from it. We may then try to bring the different dialogues and their different moments together, in order to see what they say as a whole.¹⁶ But such an endeavor also faces many problems.

¹⁴ There are many examples of this. For instance, he often declares he knows nothing (see e.g. *Ap.* 21d), and yet he seems to have very strong beliefs. Moreover, he claims not to know what ἀρετή is (see e.g. *Ap.* 20b-c), but he seems to be portrayed as its perfect embodiment. His behavior in general is often a source of astonishment – especially the serene way in which he accepts his condemnation to death as a kind of “martyr” of philosophical examination. In this respect, it is also important to bear in mind the explicit description of Socrates' strangeness (ἄτοπία) made by Alcibiades in *Smp.* 215a ff.

¹⁵ Parmenides' long discussions are only meant as exercises (see *Prm.* 135c ff.). Timaeus offers no more than a plausible argument (εἰκὸς λόγος – cp. 29b-d). The Visitor in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* presents many different views on the same thing, though there seems to be some progress. It is also relevant that Socrates is present in some of these dialogues as a mostly silent character, which suggests that something else could be said or that the views put forward could perhaps be further examined. The *Laws* is perhaps the only exception, but the nameless Athenian is also mysterious and it is not clear if he says all that he (or the author) thinks about the matters at hand, or if he is only presenting a more popular version of his ideas.

¹⁶ This is not an easy task. One could say of it what Socrates said of Heraclitus' book: it requires a Delian swimmer in order to be fully understood. Cp. e.g. A. ADLER (ed.), *Suidae Lexicon*, vol. 3, Leipzig, Teubner, 1933 (re-ed. Stuttgart, Teubner, 1967), Δ.400. Hamann, referring to this remark of Socrates, further elaborates the idea in his *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* by saying: “Ein Zusammenfluß von Ideen und Empfindungen in jener lebenden Elegie vom Philosophen machte desselben Sätze vielleicht zu einer Menge kleiner Inseln, zu deren Gemeinschaft Brücken und Fähren der Methode fehlten.” See J. HAMANN, *Sämtliche Werke*. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe, edited by J. Nadler, vol. 2, Wien, Thomas-Morus-Presse im Verl. Herder, 1950, 61. The same applies to the Platonic corpus. The dialogues lack a specific order and so they are like an archipelago of scattered islands with no communication between them.

First, it is not clear that the dialogues themselves (the interplay of characters) are something conclusive and not just a sample of possible philosophical examinations. The portrayal of the conversations has indeed some important limitations, which render it rather incomplete. The dialogues presented in the texts are only intermediary stations, with provisional value. Whether fully fictional or not, they often refer to previous or subsequent conversations that are not part of the corpus.¹⁷ As for those conversations that are actually depicted in the corpus, they are also far from being exhaustive. They contain argumentative steps that are too quick or possibilities that are opened but not explored.¹⁸ In addition, some of the dialogues are presented as narrations of past conversations, which puts the conversation at a greater distance from us and raises the question about the reliability of the narrator, since the distance thus introduced may also introduce involuntary (and even voluntary) distortions.¹⁹ We must therefore ask ourselves if we can truly trust these narrations and how faithful they are supposed to be.

To be sure, this is not enough to discredit the main views put forward in the texts, but we also come upon serious difficulties when we try to pin down what these main views are, since the corpus often provides views on the same topics that are inconsistent or even contradictory with one another. This is particularly evident in the aporetic dialogues, where all different attempts at answering a question are thwarted and one is invited to examine the matter further, either by searching for new solutions or by reexamining the attempts made to see if they might be corrected in some way. Something similar happens in the more positive (and apparently doctrinal) dialogues, if we consider them all together, in a dialogue of dialogues. We would hardly find a claim that is not contradicted somewhere else in the

¹⁷ Sometimes we catch the conversation underway (as it happens in the *Philebus* and the *Meno*) and other times the characters allude to past conversations (as for instance when they talk about perplexities they have from past examinations of the matter – see e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 286c ff., *Phlb.* 36e). In some cases, there are parts of the conversation missing (as the discussion between Socrates, Aristophanes and Agathon at the end of the *Symposium* or part of the conversation between Socrates and Hippocrates in the *Protagoras* – see 223c-d and 314c, respectively). As for the endings, they do not always coincide with a satisfactory resolution of the problem. Sometimes the examination must be abruptly interrupted (as in the *Lysis* or even the *Euthyphro*) and other times the text simply ends without following the conversation through to the end (see the finale of the *Philebus*, or of the *Statesman*, where the φιλόσοφος is still to be defined). All this leads us to realize that what we read in the corpus is intrinsically connected with a much vaster set of examinations of which the ones we come in contact with are only a small fraction.

¹⁸ In some cases, the text only provides a short version of an argument, which is promptly accepted or refused, without developing it in full. Sometimes there is an explicit reference or an allusion to what is being left aside. See e.g. *Prt.* 357b and *Phlb.* 33b-c. In other moments there is no reference at all – and it is up to the reader to realize that something is missing and to find out what.

¹⁹ Plato depicts such narrated conversations (which in some cases even took place many years before the narration) in *Lysis*, *Charmides*, *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides*.

corpus. Some of these contradictions are easier to spot than others, but an attentive reader would see how very different views (and often mutually exclusive) are simultaneously taken as correct or plausible in different texts.²⁰ We are thus required to examine the views in conflict and see if they can be in some way conciliated and, if not, what their respective strengths are. As a result, we cannot easily say what exactly is the corpus affirming.²¹

However, there is still more to be said. Aside from the inconsistencies, it also happens that the questions and views presented in the texts often have an unclear or cryptic content. There are several reasons for this. First, the characters (especially Socrates) often use images, allegories and myths to explain their views and persuade their interlocutors, and this introduces a great deal of imprecision.²² In fact, the use of different registers of language (colloquial, poetical, scientific, and so on) and the constant shift from one to the other renders many discussions particularly hard to follow. Another source of difficulties and imprecision is the fact that the corpus does not have a fixed terminology. The terms are often ambiguous and may be understood in different ways, depending on the context and who is using them. They are also frequently used as equivalents, without being clear if they coincide entirely or not.²³ However, even when the mode of presentation and the language are not problematic, the views themselves may still be cryptic or insufficiently explained.

Apart from all this, there is also the problem that many of the arguments defended and accepted during the discussions have a very questionable basis. Many arguments are based on analogies, inductions, probabilities, common sense or the beliefs of one interlocutor. Other arguments seem to misrepresent the views that are being examined and confirm or disprove

²⁰ Just to name a few examples (some of which we will discuss at a later stage): the soul is said to have parts in *Rep.* 435d ff., but in *Phaedo* it is said to be simple or non-composite (see 78b ff.); according to *Theaetetus*, when we are born, our soul is an empty receptacle (see 197e), but in *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* we are said to have recollections of things we saw before birth; in *Crito*, Socrates says he must either persuade or obey the law (see 51b), but in the *Apology* he seems to imply that he would never obey a law that would prohibit him from examining (cp. 29c ff.); in some texts (such as *Cra.* 430a ff., *Rep.* 509d ff., 596c ff., *Sph.* 234b ff.), Socrates criticizes images, but he constantly employs them. Moreover, we find several different (and perhaps incompatible) versions of the same “doctrine” (such as the doctrine of ideas, the doctrine of the parts of the soul, the doctrine of ἀκρᾶσία) and some of these doctrines even seem (at least at first sight) to be incompatible with one another (such as the so-called intellectualism and the tripartition of the soul). These are just a few examples of the inconsistencies found throughout the texts, and their number increases if we consider not only the views directly stated, but also their presuppositions and consequences.

²¹ Cicero expresses this by saying that in Plato’s books “(...) nihil affirmatur et in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quaeritur nihil certi dicitur (...)” See *Academicorum reliquiae cum Lucullo*, I.12.46, in: O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Scripta quae mansuervnt omnia*, Fasc. 42, Leipzig, Teubner, 1922.

²² As Thomas Aquinas says, “(...) Plato habuit malum modum docendi. Omnia enim figurate dicit, et per symbola docet: intendens aliud per verba, quam sonent ipsa verba (...)”. See A. PIROTTA (ed.), *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis In Aristotelis Librum de Anima Commentarium*, Taurini, Marietti, 1925, 31 (*liber I, lectio 8, 107*).

²³ This does not necessarily mean that one needs a fully univocal language (which may well be an artificial and unfruitful ideal) in order to be clear, but still one must be attentive to the ambiguity of the terms and try to account for it.

them too easily. At times the arguments seem to rest solely on the ambiguity of words and give the impression of being nothing more than word-play. Plato's writings are indeed full of glaring fallacies, which are in many cases passed off as sound arguments and accepted by the characters.²⁴ These fallacies may be more or less conspicuous and they make any attentive reader wonder whether they are the result of the author's carelessness or incompetence, or whether they rather serve any particular purpose. Be that as it may, they are particularly disturbing and force us to reexamine all arguments that appear to be faulty, in order to see if these arguments have some validity after all.²⁵ In addition, the fact that some fallacies are more evident should be enough to make us wary of possibility that there are other fallacies which we do not immediately notice, and therefore we should consider everything that is being said with increased attention.

All these features prevent us from immediately identifying Plato's views. He is an ironical or dissembling author, who withholds his views and leaves us to wonder what he might have wanted to convey with such an elaborate and confusing play of perspectives. But this is not all. Even if we are able to bring some order and clarity into this chaos, we still have to come to grips with the criticism of the written word in the *Phaedrus* (274c ff.) and in the *Seventh Letter* (341b ff.). These two passages share many common traits and even a cursory reading of them lets us see how they undercut or disavow the corpus in its entirety, thereby rendering it even more problematic.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates considers the value of writing by telling the story of its invention by Theuth and the subsequent appraisal of its benefits and drawbacks by the King of Egypt. This appraisal is then extended to all those who try to communicate knowledge or wisdom (ἐπιστήμη or σοφία) by leaving writings behind. In the *Seventh Letter* Plato directly denies having written a treatise (σύγγραμμα) about the subjects he studies and he also argues

²⁴ Much has been written about this. See e.g. R. ROBINSON, Plato's Consciousness of Fallacy, *Mind* 51 (1942), 97-114; M. COHEN, The Aporias in Plato's Early Dialogues, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23 (1962), 163-74; R. SPRAGUE, *Plato's Use of Fallacy. A Study of the Euthydemus and Some Other Dialogues*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962; G. KLOSKO, Toward a Consistent Interpretation of the *Protagoras*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 61 (1979), 125-42; IDEM, Criteria of Fallacy and Sophistry for Use in the Analysis of Platonic Dialogues, *Classical Quarterly* 33 (1983), 363-374; IDEM, Plato and the Morality of Fallacy, *American Journal of Philology* 108 (1987), 612-26.

²⁵ These fallacies can be used to quickly refute or confirm some claim. The characters sometimes reject weaker versions of claims that are defended – or at least play an important role – elsewhere (such as the definition of σωφροσύνη as τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν, which is promptly rejected in *Charmides* 161b ff., but is used as the definition of justice, as well as the basis for the definition of σωφροσύνη, in the *Republic* – 430d ff.). Plato also seems to use arguments that are very weak to establish something. But we should also not reject these claims too quickly. We have to bear in mind the so-called “fallacy fallacy”, which assumes that some claim is wrong simply because it was defended with the aid of a fallacy. But if a claim is correct and Plato used a fallacy to defend it, then it is up to us to find the best arguments to prove it.

that no one with knowledge would do so, since “it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies”.²⁶ In both cases, Plato speaks of serious subjects about which one is in earnest (especially, what is just, fine, good).²⁷ These subjects cannot be entrusted to writing because the written word is unable to convey anything clear or certain, as is stressed in the *Phaedrus*.²⁸ In the *Seventh Letter*, besides talking about its unclearness, Plato goes further and ascribes the unreliability of writing to the weakness of language (τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές). Λόγος is inaccurate and cannot communicate the essences of things, since it confuses their essence with their inessential qualifications.²⁹ To make matters worse, writing is lifeless (as a painting), unalterable, unable to defend itself, silent when interrogated, and cannot choose whom it talks to.³⁰ This makes it unable to teach others. If one relies on it, any doctrines will be misunderstood, thereby giving rise either to an arrogant semblance of knowledge or to unfair criticism.³¹ Therefore one should never entrust serious matters to the written word. The latter cannot convey the truth and is therefore no more than an amusement (or child’s play, παιδιά).³²

If we believe this description, then it seems the entire Platonic corpus can be no more than an amusement. It is nothing serious and should not be taken seriously. However, this is not the whole story. These passages also suggest that there is something like a serious doctrine, whose learning must nevertheless be something other than a direct reception of teachings.³³ It also raises the question of whether written texts (and the dialogues in

²⁶ See 341c: “οὐκ οὐκ ἐμὸν γε περὶ αὐτῶν ἔστιν σύγγραμμα οὐδὲ μήποτε γένηται· ῥήτων γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἔστιν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα (...).” I follow Bury’s translation, in PLATO, *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, transl. by R. Bury, Cambridge (MA)/London, Harvard University Press/William Heinemann, 1929.

²⁷ Cp. *Phdr.* 276b-c, and especially *Ep.* VII, 344c: “διὸ δὴ πᾶς ἀνὴρ σπουδαῖος τῶν ὄντων σπουδαῖον περὶ πολλοῦ δεῖ μὴ γράψας ποτὲ ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἰς φθόνον καὶ ἀπορίαν καταβαλεῖ. ἐνὶ δὴ ἐκ τούτων δεῖ γινώσκειν λόγῳ, ὅταν ἴδῃ τίς τοῦ συγγράμματα γεγραμμένα εἴτε ἐν νόμοις νομοθέτου εἴτε ἐν ἄλλοις τισὶν ἄτ’ οὖν, ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τούτῳ ταῦτα σπουδαιότατα, εἴπερ ἔστ’ αὐτὸς σπουδαῖος, κείτοι δέ που ἐν χώρᾳ τῇ καλλίστῃ τῶν τούτου.”

²⁸ See 275c: “οὐκοῦν ὁ τέχνην οἰόμενος ἐν γράμμασι καταλιπεῖν, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ παραδεχόμενος ὡς τι σαφές καὶ βέβαιον ἐκ γραμμάτων ἐσόμενος, πολλῆς ἀν εὐηθείας γέμοι καὶ τῷ ὄντι τὴν Ἄμμωνος μαντείαν ἀγνοοῖ (...).”

²⁹ See 342a-343d, and in particular 342e-343a: “(...) ταῦτα οὐχ ἤττον ἐπιχειρεῖ τὸ ποῖόν τι περὶ ἕκαστον δηλοῦν ἢ τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου διὰ τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές.” For more on this distinction, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 2.1 below.

³⁰ See *Phdr.* 275d: “δεινὸν γάρ που, ὦ Φαῖδρε, τοῦτ’ ἔχει γραφή, καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁμοίον ζωγραφία. καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἐκείνης ἔκγονα ἔστηκε μὲν ὡς ζῶντα, ἐὰν δ’ ἀνέρι τι, σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾶ. ταῦτόν δὲ καὶ οἱ λόγοι· δόξαις μὲν ἀν ὡς τι φρονούντας αὐτοὺς λέγειν, ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρη τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος μαθεῖν, ἐν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταῦτόν αἰεῖ.” Cp. also *Ep.* VII 343a: “ὧν ἕνεκα νοῦν ἔχων οὐδεὶς τολμήσει ποτὲ εἰς αὐτὸ τιθέναι τὰ νενοημένα ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα εἰς ἀμετακίνητον, ὃ δὴ πάσχει τὰ γεγραμμένα τύποις.”

³¹ Cp. *Phdr.* 275a-b, 275e, and especially *Ep.* VII 341e-342a.

³² See *Phdr.* 276c: “οὐκ ἄρα σπουδῆ αὐτὰ ἐν ὕδατι γράψει μέλανι σπείρων διὰ καλάμου μετὰ λόγων ἀδυνάτων μὲν αὐτοῖς λόγῳ βοηθεῖν, ἀδυνάτων δὲ ἰκανῶς τάληθῆ διδάξαι.” See also 276d-e, and especially 276d1-2: “ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν ἐν γράμμασι κήπους, ὡς εἴοικε, παιδιᾶς χάριν σπερεῖ τε καὶ γράψει, ὅταν δὲ γράφῃ (...).”

³³ In the *Phaedrus*, Plato talks of a different kind of λόγος, which is written inside the soul of the learner and thus alive. See 276a. The method to impart this λόγος is διαλεκτική (the τέχνη of conversation), as is said in 276e. But we must bear in mind that Plato is also very critical of the oral word and its ability to convey truth (cp. e.g. *Smp.* 175d-e). Real teaching implies much study, effort and time. In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato says that “as a

particular) are absolutely useless for learning. Or can they have an indirect usage? The passages at issue do admit that written texts can be used as reminders, especially for old age – since in this case knowledge is already present in the soul (having been acquired in the past), though it is not immediately available.³⁴ But more than that, these passages admit that writings can help someone who follows in the same track (ἵχνος) or “those that are able to discover truth with but little instruction” (ἐνδειξις).³⁵ Texts can contain traces of truth or instructions – some hints, glimpses, enigmas or prophecies that need interpretation. This is perhaps what we can find in the Platonic corpus: some indications of Plato’s thought that still need to be developed.³⁶

However, it is not clear whether or not this is the right way of dealing with the corpus. The application to the whole corpus of the passages that criticize the written word is problematic – not only because they also seem to admit a positive usage of writing, but especially because these passages are also part of the corpus and, as such, the criticism also applies to them. They put themselves in question and are thus a particular instance of the liar paradox. This does not mean we can simply dismiss them, but we cannot accept them at their face value either. Consequently, we are left without clear instructions of how to deal with the texts. We do not know the author’s views nor his intentions.³⁷

For all these reasons, we can understand why Plato was compared to an elusive swan which the interpreters cannot catch.³⁸ His writings are a confusing maze of which we do not

result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it [namely, the knowledge of the subjects Plato studies] is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself”. See 341c-d: “(...) ἐκ πολλῆς συνουσίας γιγνομένης περὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ συζῆν ἐξαίφνης, οἷον ἀπὸ πυρὸς πηδῆσαντος ἐξαφθὲν φῶς, ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γενόμενον αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἤδη τρέφει”. It also requires a certain character or inner disposition (a ψυχὴ προσήκουσα, as is said in *Phdr.* 276e), which encompasses both intellectual and moral qualities. See in particular *Ep. VII* 343e-344b.

³⁴ See *Phdr.* 275d and 276d. In *Letter VII*, however, Plato says that even that would not be necessary (see 344d-e).

³⁵ See *Phdr.* 276d: “(…) γράψει (...) καὶ παντὶ τῷ ταῦτόν ἵχνος μετιόντι (...)”. See also *Ep. VII* 341e: “ἀλλ’ οὔτε ἀνθρώποις ἡγοῦμαι τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν περὶ αὐτῶν λεγομένην ἀγαθόν, εἰ μὴ τισιν ὀλίγοις ὁπόσοι δυνατοὶ ἀνευρεῖν αὐτοὶ διὰ σμικρᾶς ἐνδείξεως (...)”.

³⁶ In this sense, we can appreciate the aptness of Antiphanes’ comparison of the Platonic writings to frozen words, which can only be thawed and heard after a long time (i.e., after much examination). See PLUTARCH, *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus*, in: F. BABBITT (ed.), *Plutarch’s Moralia*, vol. 1, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1927, 79a 1-8: “συμβαίνει δὴ τὸ τοῦ Ἀντιφάνους, ὃ τις εἶπεν ἐπὶ τῶν Πλάτωνος συνήθων. ὁ γὰρ Ἀντιφάνης ἔλεγε παίζων ἐν τινὶ πόλει τὰς φωνὰς εὐθὺς λεγομένας πῆγνυσθαι διὰ ψυχῆς, εἴθ’ ὕστερον ἀνιεμένων ἀκούειν θέρους ἢ τοῦ χειμῶνος διελέχθησαν· οὕτω δὲ ὑπὸ Πλάτωνος ἔφη νέοις οὔσιν ἔτι λεχθέντων μόλις ὄνπερ τοὺς πολλοὺς αἰσθάνεσθαι γέροντας γενομένους.”

³⁷ The problem is made worse by the fact that we do not know the author’s intentions behind writing the dialogues – that is, whether they are meant to be ways of promoting or divulging philosophy, preparations for philosophical studies, or even a sort of textbooks for the Academy.

³⁸ See L. WESTERINK (ed.), *Olympiodorus. Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, Amsterdam, North Holland, 1956 (repr. Amsterdam, Hakkert, 1982), 2.156-162: “πολλοὺς τοίνυν ἐραστὰς αὐτοῦ καταστήσας καὶ πλείστους ὠφελήσας, μέλλων τελευτᾶν ἐνόπνιον εἶδεν ὡς κύκνος γενόμενος ἀπὸ δένδρου εἰς δένδρον

have a map nor an overview.³⁹ We are lost in the middle of it, trying to find an exit. There is no ὁδὸς βασιλική to the meaning of the corpus. It is not clear what the writings are meant to say – and still it is very hard to bring oneself to believe that they are no more than a vain amusement (παιδιά). There is always the suggestion of a different meaning, which lies elsewhere, and we must exert ourselves, if we want to reach it. In this sense, the texts call for and strongly stimulate interpretation or examination.⁴⁰ They require a very particular participation of the reader, who is called to decide how things are to be interpreted. We have to take part in the dialogues and keep writing them. Although the same could in a way be said of all interpretations, it applies in a greater degree to Plato, given the fact of how opaque he is as an author and how indeterminate everything becomes as a result of this opaqueness.

4.2. The labyrinth of readings of Plato

The complexity of the Platonic corpus has given rise to innumerable interpretations. Many of these are general interpretations of Plato's thinking, others restrict themselves to some text or problem – though they may still presuppose a certain understanding of the whole and how the part they focus on relates to it. A full enumeration and systematization of the manifold understandings of the Platonic corpus is very difficult and we will not undertake it here. We will simply consider some of the main currents of interpretation, in order to see how problematic the corpus can be. These currents have often been influenced by general philosophical tendencies and they have all been object of much criticism, but we will leave

μετέρχεται καὶ ταύτη πόνον πλεῖστον παρεῖχε τοῖς ἰξευταῖς. ὁ Σιμμίας ὁ Σωκρατικὸς ἔκρινεν, ὅτι ἄληπτος ἔσται τοῖς μετ' αὐτὸν ἐξηγεῖσθαι βουλομένοις αὐτόν· ἰξευταῖς γὰρ εἰκόσασιν οἱ ἐξηγηταὶ τὰς ἐννοίας τῶν ἀρχαίων θηρᾶσθαι περὶόμενοι, ἄληπτος δὲ ἔστιν ἐπειδὴ καὶ φυσικῶς καὶ ἠθικῶς καὶ θεολογικῶς καὶ ἀπλῶς πολλαχῶς ἔστιν ἀκούειν τῶν αὐτοῦ, καθάπερ καὶ τῶν Ὁμήρου.” See also L. WESTERINK (ed.), *Anonymous – Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, Amsterdam, North-Holland, 1962, 1.29-35.

³⁹ What is said about the course of a particular examination in the *Euthydemus* (291b7-c2) aptly describes what happens when we try to interpret the whole corpus: “(...) ἐνταῦθα ὥσπερ εἰς λαβύρινθον ἐμπεσόντες, οἴομενοι ἦδη ἐπὶ τέλει εἶναι, περικάμψαντες πάλιν ὥσπερ ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς ζητήσεως ἀνεφάνημεν ὄντες καὶ τοῦ ἴσου δεόμενοι ὄσουπερ ὅτε τὸ πρῶτον ἐζητοῦμεν.”

⁴⁰ In other words, they lead us to perform something and not simply to receive ideas. In Kierkegaardian terms, they are not a direct communication of contents, but rather an indirect communication of an art or a competence – namely, the art of philosophical examination. They try to awaken us and mobilize us, and in this sense Plato himself is also a sort of gadfly. For Kierkegaard's notion of direct and indirect communication, see in particular his notes for a course with the title “The Dialectic of Ethical and Ethical-Religious Communication”, in: S. KIERKEGAARD, *Journals and Papers*, transl. by H. Hong and E. Hong, vol. 1, Bloomington/London, Indiana University Press, 1967, 273-308 (VIII 2 B 79-89).

those questions aside and see only the main strategies of interpretation and how much they differ from each other.⁴¹

The different readings are often organized in main dichotomies, but there are also attempts to find middle grounds or “third ways” that may combine the advantages of two alternate readings. The major and oldest dichotomy in the study of Plato (and one that shows just how ambiguous the corpus is) is the one between the skeptic and the dogmatic reading of Plato. The skeptic reading inspired the New Academy, is reflected in Cicero’s interpretation of Plato and has been revived in the last decades.⁴² Based on the problems mentioned above, this tradition holds that the Platonic corpus conveys no definite truth whatsoever. It is rather supposed to show us our own ignorance and possibly help in one’s own search for the truth – though it may also be interpreted as a defense of the argument that truth is unattainable.

Plato’s studies, however, have been largely dominated by the dogmatic reading, which defends that the texts put forward clear-cut doctrines and perhaps even a system of knowledge. We find this conception already in Aristotle, who refers to the main views of the dialogues simply as Plato’s views, and in other ancient authors (such as Alcinous – or Albinus – and Diogenes Laertius).⁴³ Since the 18th century there has been a revival of this conception and many efforts were made to determine Plato’s doctrines. However, the elusive nature of the corpus has caused many problems and has divided the dogmatic interpretation into two camps. On the one hand, there are the unitarians, who defend that the corpus has coherent and univocal doctrines, which constitute a single system.⁴⁴ But this does not square easily with the disagreements we find through the texts and thus many adopted a

⁴¹ There have been several attempts to systematize the different currents of interpretation. For more detailed analyses, see e.g. E. TIGERSTEDT, *Interpreting Plato*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977, G. REALE, *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone alla luce delle “doctrinae non scritte”*, Milano, Bompiani, 2010²² (Milano, CUSL, 1984¹), 31-74; F. GONZALEZ, A Short History of Platonic Interpretation and the “Third Way”, in: IDEM (ed.), *The Third Way. New Directions in Platonic Studies*, Lanham (MD)/London, Rowman & Littlefield, 1995, and G. PRESS, The State of the Question in the Study of Plato, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 34 (1996), 507-532.

⁴² For more on the ancient skeptical interpretation of Plato, see e.g. E. TIGERSTEDT, *op. cit.*, 103-105; H. TARRANT, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 1985; J. ANNAS, Plato the Sceptic, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol. (1992), 43-72. For recent skeptic readings of Plato, see for instance D. HYLAND, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1995; K. VOGT, *Belief and Truth. A Skeptic Reading of Plato*, Oxford/etc., Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁴³ See e.g. P. LOUIS (ed.), *Albinos – Epitomé*, Paris, Belles Lettres, 1945, and DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Vitae Philosophorum*, III (especially III.52 ff.).

⁴⁴ For a defense of the unity of Plato’s thought, see in particular P. SHOREY, *The Unity of Plato’s Thought*, Chicago, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1903, and IDEM, *What Plato Said*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1933.

developmentalist approach, according to which Plato changed his mind and his views throughout his philosophical career. One would be able to solve many of the inconsistencies of the corpus by distinguishing between earlier works (in which Plato was more influenced by Socrates), mature works (in which he distanced himself of Socrates' views), and later works (in which he became critical of his own mature views).⁴⁵ Plato's biography and especially the chronology of his works thus became very important, since they helped determine the precise development of the doctrines. These, however, are very contested issues. The knowledge of his life is vague and the order of the texts is very problematic. Some scholars tried to solve the latter question once and for all by means of a stylometric analysis, whose results have been largely accepted. But it has also been object of some criticism, which once more raises the question of whether we can really determine the order of the dialogues.⁴⁶

Another question that is particularly important in the context of the developmentalist interpretation (though not only in this context) is the Socratic question. Who was the historical Socrates, what were his thoughts and his character, and how faithful is Plato's portrayal of him, especially in the early works, which are supposed to be more strongly influenced by the real Socrates? We cannot solve the question based on the Platonic corpus, and though we find other portrayals of him in Aristophanes, Xenophon, and the fragments of other Socratics, it is in no way easy to infer from these sources who Socrates was and how faithful Plato's version of him is.⁴⁷ As a result, it is also difficult to determine what distinguishes Socrates from Plato and what is specifically Platonic.

⁴⁵ For examples of this kind of approach, see e.g. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1953; J. RAVEN, *Plato's Thought in the Making. A Study of the Development of his Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965; J. GOULD, *The Development of Plato's Ethics*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1972; G. KLOSKO, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, New York/etc., Methuen, 1986. The idea that Plato's thought had several phases was originally associated with a genetic approach to Plato's writing, which was mainly concerned with Plato's biography and how it related to his writings. For a conspectus of such approach, cp. E. TIGERSTEDT, *op. cit.*, 25-51.

⁴⁶ Indeed, the results from stylometric studies of Plato are not entirely unanimous. There is a fixed point (the *Laws*) and then some groups of texts that share similar aspects of style. The groups may be ordered in sequence, but the whole analysis is based on several questionable assumptions. For a discussion of the method and for criticisms of it, see e.g. H. THESLEFF, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, Helsinki, Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1982; IDEM, Platonic Chronology, *Phronesis* 34 (1989), 1-26; G. LEDGER, *Re-Counting Plato. A Computer Analysis of Plato's Style*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989; L. BRANDWOOD, *The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 1990; J. HOWLAND, Re-reading Plato. The Problem of Platonic Chronology, *Phoenix* 45 (1991), 189-214; D. NAILS, Platonic Chronology Reconsidered, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 3 (1992), 314-27; C. KAHN, On Platonic chronology, in: J. ANNAS and C. ROWE (eds.), *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, Washington D.C., Center for Hellenic Studies, 2002, 93-127.

⁴⁷ Many attempts were made to determine the views and the way of being of the real Socrates, but the results differ greatly. Interpreters often refer to Aristotle's differentiation of Socrates and Plato, but it is not absolutely

In sum, both the unitarian and developmentalist orientations are problematic and far from being fully persuasive. This lead to some attempts at a conciliation, which talk neither of a static system nor of a complete change of views, but rather of an unfolding or deepening of some basic ideas and doctrines (although in doing so, these interpretations still assume that the corpus has a dogmatic character). Other interpreters, in turn, have departed from the dogmatic model and adopted a more skeptic approach, according to which the corpus does not aim at conveying a system of doctrines. These approaches, however, vary greatly in the way they interpret the corpus and in the results they achieve. Many of them still admit that Plato had firm beliefs, doctrines and perhaps even a system – but it is not communicated in the corpus (or at least not directly).

One of these interpretations was developed mainly by the so-called Tübingen school, which holds that Plato had esoteric doctrines which he did not communicate in the corpus (the unwritten doctrines or ἄγραφα δόγματα mentioned by Aristotle), but were rather transmitted by oral teaching.⁴⁸ This makes the inconsistencies of the texts compatible with the idea of a Platonic system, insofar as the system is not presented (just alluded to) in the written texts. In fact, we find several passages in the corpus in which the characters (especially Socrates) explicitly hold something back and there are also the passages in which Plato says

clear whether Aristotle is referring to the historical Socrates or the Socrates from early dialogues. The lines are blurred and this allows some to see Plato's portrayal as being very faithful and others to regard it as very inaccurate. See e.g. S. KIERKEGAARD, *The Concept of Irony*. With Continual Reference to Socrates, transl. by H. Hong & E. Hong, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1989 (original version: *Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates*, Diss. Kopenhagen, 1841); H. MAIER, *Sokrates*. Sein Werk und seine geschichtliche Stellung, Tübingen, Mohr 1913; J. BURNET, *Greek Philosophy*. Part I: Thales to Plato, London, Macmillan, 1914, 126-192; A. TAYLOR, *Socrates*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1951; V. de MAGALHÃES-VILHENA, *Le problème de Socrate*. Le Socrate historique et le Socrate de Platon, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1952; G. FIGAL, *Sokrates*, München, Beck, 1995. For a history of the Socratic problem, see e.g. L.-A. DORION, *The Rise and Fall of the Socratic Problem*, in: D. MORRISON, *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2011, 1-23.

⁴⁸ Cp. ARISTOTLE, *Physica* 209b14f. For some examples of this interpretation, belonging to or directly connected with the Tübingen school, see e.g. H. KRÄMER, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*. Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie, Heidelberg, Winter, 1959; K. GAISER, *Platons Ungeschriebene Lehre*, Stuttgart, Ernst Klett, 1963; H. KRÄMER, *Platone e i fondamenti della metafisica*. Saggio sulla teoria dei principi e sulle dottrine non scritte di Platone, trans. by Giovanni Reale, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1982; G. REALE, *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone*. Rilettura della metafisica dei grandi dialoghi alla luce delle "Dottrine non scritte", Milano, CUSL, 1984; T. SZLEZÁK, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie*. Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen, Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1985; R. FERBER, *Die Unwissenheit des Philosophen oder warum hat Plato die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben?*, Sankt Augustin, Academia, 1991; T. SZLEZÁK, *Das Bild des Dialektikers in Platons späten Dialogen*. Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie, Teil II, Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2004. For other interpretations of Plato's unwritten doctrines, see for instance L. ROBIN, *La théorie Platonicienne des idées et des nombres d'après Aristote*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1908; J. FINDLAY, *The Written and the Unwritten Doctrines*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.

that one should not write down the most serious things (τὰ σπουδαιότατα).⁴⁹ If we are to understand Plato, we should then read his texts in light of these doctrines, which requires us to reconstruct them. The attempts at reconstruction often use other sources. Aristotle provides some indications as to what these doctrines might have been, whereas Plotinus and other Neoplatonics have been read as a development of Plato's hidden doctrines. Some interpreters have also tried to use the corpus in this inquiry, insofar as some passages can be taken as alluding to these doctrines.⁵⁰ But the precise content of these doctrines is unclear.⁵¹ The reconstructions are vague, their validity and interest is questionable, and some even contest the existence of such doctrines. So it is doubtful whether the corpus should (or even could) be read in light of them. Moreover, even if such doctrines existed and the dialogues were just meant as protreptic or preparatory works, we could still read them by themselves and see what we can learn from them. We are not forced to read them in reference to any unwritten doctrines.

Another very important kind of interpretation of the dialogues is the one that pays special attention to the literary form of the dialogues and in particular to their dramatic context (the setting, the characters, the situation, and so on). Literary or poetical aspects of the text had already played an important role in the old allegorical or figurative reading of the dialogues, which was characteristic of Neoplatonic interpreters. It saw many elements in the text as symbolic, meant to conceal the real meaning of the texts (i.e., Plato's real doctrines) from the public.⁵² In modern times, Schleiermacher was one of the first to call the attention to how inseparable the form and the content of the dialogues are.⁵³ This was developed by

⁴⁹ A good example of the characters withholding something are the already mentioned passages in which they present shorter versions of some doctrines (such as the doctrine on the good in *Rep.* 506d ff. or the doctrine of the soul in *Phdr.* 246a ff.), which suggest that the author had a best and more complete version. For the notion of σπουδαιότατα, already mentioned above, see *Ep.* VII 344c. Also relevant here is the idea of things more precious than those composed or written (τιμιώτερα ὧν συνέθηκεν ἢ ἔγραψεν), which appears in *Phdr.* 278d.

⁵⁰ A passage that has often been considered in this context is precisely the discussion of the good in the *Republic* (see 506b ff.). But several other passages have been brought into connection with these doctrines, as can be seen in the works mentioned above.

⁵¹ The reconstructions often focus on the distinction between the one and the indefinite dyad, mentioned by Aristotle, and then apply it to many domains. See *Metaphysica* 987a29 ff., 1080b24ff, and on the notion of ἀόριστος δυάς, see e.g. W. ROSS, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924, ad 987b20. Interpreters also relate this distinction of unity and dyad to Plato's notion of the good, especially because Plato seems to have identified it with the one in the public lecture "On the Good". On this respect, see Aristoxenus' report of what Aristotle used to say about the lecture, in R. da RIOS (ed.), *Aristoxeni elementa harmonica*, Roma, Polygraphica, 1954, 39-40. However, nothing very clear can be said in these respects.

⁵² We find this kind of interpretation in Plotinus' and Proclus' readings of Plato, and their approach later influenced Ficino and other Renaissance interpreters.

⁵³ Schleiermacher says in the introduction to his translation of Plato: "(...) so ist in ihr [sc. der Philosophie des Platon] Form und Inhalt unzertrennlich, und jeder Satz nur an seinem Orte und in den Verbindungen und

several authors, especially in the second half of the 20th century, in ways that greatly differ from the old allegorical interpretation. The so-called “Chicago school” is perhaps the main exponent of this orientation. Following Leo Strauss’ example, many interpreters focused their attention on the dramatic aspects of the texts and what they can reveal about Plato’s thought.⁵⁴ This line of interpretation is also characterized by the idea that the texts have a hidden or deeper meaning, which is not immediately accessible, and thus requires a very refined hermeneutical analysis of all these elements. This does not necessarily imply that Plato has definite doctrines. Such interpretations can also be skeptic or wholly unconcerned with Plato’s doctrines as such. They can read each dialogue not as a disguised treatise, but rather as a literary work in which different characters present different views, according to different motivations, and whose interplay leaves open what exactly the solution to the presented problems is.

Some interpreters have also defended that Plato’s writings do not put forward doctrines, but rather try to point to something that is in itself ineffable or inexpressible. Some talk of a non-propositional knowledge or understanding which has more of a practical nature.⁵⁵ Others talk of an ineffable experience and develop a more mystic interpretation of the corpus.⁵⁶ These are just two examples of a kind of reading which is skeptic about the possibility of expressing truth directly (in fact, it even declares it impossible), but still believes the corpus communicates some kind of understanding or experience.

Other kinds of interpretation could be mentioned, especially in the domain of post-modern interpretations of Plato, which are usually more concerned with bringing Plato into a dialogue with contemporary thinking.⁵⁷ But the different currents of interpretation mentioned are enough to show how difficult it is to determine the best way to deal with

Begränzungen, wie ihn Platon aufgestellt hat, recht zu verstehen.” Cp. PLATON, *Werke*, transl. by F. Schleiermacher, Part I, Vol. I, Berlin, Realschulbuchhandlung, 1818² (1804¹), 16.

⁵⁴ Cp. e.g. L. STRAUSS, On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy, *Social Research* 13 (1946), 326-367; IDEM, *The City and Man*, Chicago, Rand MacNally, 1964, 50-138; S. ROSEN, *Plato’s Symposium*, New Haven/etc., Yale University Press, 1968; J. SALLIS, *Being and Logos. Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, Pittsburgh/etc., Duquesne University Press/etc., 1975; D. HYLAND, *The Virtue of Philosophy. An Interpretation of Plato’s Charmides*, Athens (OH), Ohio University Press, 1981; S. ROSEN, *Plato’s Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, New Haven/etc., Yale University Press, 1983; C. GRISWOLD, *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1986.

⁵⁵ A good example of this is W. WIELAND, *Platon und die Formen des Wissens*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982.

⁵⁶ See e.g. C. SCHEFER, *Platon und Apollo. Vom Logos zurück zum Mythos*, Sankt Augustin, Academia, 1996; EADEM, Ein neuer Zugang zu Platon?, *Hermes*, 127 (1999), 422-436; EADEM, *Platons unsagbare Erfahrung. Ein anderer Zugang zu Platon*, Basel, Schwabe, 2001.

⁵⁷ Plato has influenced several important contemporary philosophers and they in turn have influenced the way Plato is read by many. On this matter, see e.g. C. ZUCKERT, *Postmodern Platos. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Plato's writings. In fact, they raise many important questions. To begin, what is the most appropriate kind of reading? And what is the criterion to decide which one is best? Can such a criterion be established? Is there really a best kind of reading? If so, what does that mean for the other readings? Do they still have some interest? And what if no particular reading is the best? The answer to such questions is difficult. But, as we saw, the texts come without an instruction manual and do not allow us to decide how to read them. This means that none of the above interpretations is fully justified or fully excluded by the corpus. Interpreters must decide by themselves how they will proceed, based on criteria other than the texts. This does not mean that one is completely free to do what one wants with the texts. Interpreters must still be faithful to the indications given in the text, as well as to the immanent principles of their own interpretation. But as to the principles of interpretation, the corpus offers a great degree of leeway. It does not tell us what to do and it does not say how we can be faithful to the texts. It rather forces us to decide how we interpret everything in it.

4.3. The procedure and status of the following interpretation

So how will we proceed in what follows? How will we discuss the problem concerning the value of the unexamined life in light of the corpus? How can we best interpret the problem in Plato's own terms and the full potential of his claim?

Our approach will differ from the previously considered interpretations in several important respects. We will not try to determine whether Plato was a dogmatist or a skeptic. In fact, we will not be concerned with the status of Plato's writings and how they relate to the historical Socrates or to an oral teaching. We will also disregard any biographical question, as well as the motivations and intentions behind the texts. Since the texts are not univocal, we will not try to determine Plato's beliefs and the best way to formulate them. We will thus not consider whether there was some development in Plato's views or not. Regardless of the order of the dialogues and Plato's beliefs at the time he wrote them, there are many indications, many ideas and even a play of ideas – and this is what we will focus. More precisely, we will consider the texts and the ideas expressed therein in light of a problem and the questions directly associated with it. We will search for, collect and order any relevant indications given in the texts. Some attention will be given to the context of each passage, though such a synoptic approach necessarily implies loss of detail. We will try to determine how the different indications given by the texts may complement each other. When they are

in conflict with one another, we will try to conciliate them or at least determine the basis of the conflict. This will allow us to pin down some general tendencies of the Platonic corpus, which we will bring together and discuss, thereby producing a certain unification of the texts.

However, such a unity will not correspond to an absolutely defined system of doctrines. It will contain inner tensions, elements that resist the general scheme, and some important questions that are left undecided or unjustified. Moreover, the results we will arrive at (and which will partially unify the texts) are not to be conceived as the reconstruction of a body of beliefs the author tried to communicate to us, but they are rather the product of a particular reflection concerning the indications he left behind in his writings. This reflection is shaped by the choices of the interpreter (i.e., by a certain selection, ordering and development of the passages and ideas in the corpus, as well as by the methodology discussed below), and different choices could produce a different final result. Whether any of these results correspond to Plato's beliefs or not (or to what extent they do) cannot be decided with certainty in virtue of all the difficulties considered above. We cannot be sure of what Plato had in mind. But this is not all that matters. Even if we knew Plato's own views and how convinced he was of them, we could still use the corpus and the play of ideas therein as a basis for new reflections, which would perhaps not be of historical or doxographical interest, but would nonetheless be of philosophical interest, because they would allow us to think about things and discover new ways of conceiving them. The corpus and its indications are in all cases a catalyst for new perspectives, and the following interpretation is above all concerned with the new perspectives we can arrive at with the help from the texts. In this sense, it is a philosophical (and not an historical or doxographical) interpretation. So it must be judged not by how plausible a reconstruction of Plato's beliefs it puts forward, but by how faithful it is to the indications found in the texts and how it is able to extract from them a complex and plausible discussion of philosophical problems that concern us all. It will not simply report what we find in the texts, but it will also not depart completely from them. It is a philosophical reflection born from the contact with the Platonic corpus and it intends to illuminate both what is said in the texts and who we as human beings are.

Finally, it is necessary to remark that some formulations in what follows may be misleading. We will often talk of Plato and his conceptions, but "Plato" is to be regarded simply as the author of the corpus or, more precisely, as the standpoint that corresponds to the play of ideas in the texts. In other others, the name "Plato" and the qualification "Platonic" will only refer to the indications that are found in the texts and also, in a secondary sense, to

the development of these indications, which is the result of Plato's writings and in this sense can be attributed to him. We will talk of Plato's conceptions, but not in the sense of something the historical Plato would undeniably subscribe. As was said, the conceptions we will consider are rather conceptions we can extract from Plato's writings.

5. The relevance of the problem for the interpretation of the Platonic corpus and for the definition of philosophy in general

The problem concerning the value of the unexamined life lies at the center of the corpus. Many passages are more or less directly concerned with the relation between life and philosophical examination, and in these passages the characters discuss what characterizes a life that lacks examination, as well as what this examination can bring to life and how it can change it. Moreover, even when it is not expressly discussed, Plato is still depicting people that have different relations to philosophical examination. These relations affect the characters' lives in different ways and presuppose different views (which may be either naive or already examined) about the importance of philosophical examination. Thus the problem of the unexamined life is essential to understand not only the figure of Socrates as he is presented in the corpus, but also all other characters and the play of thoughts that compose the dialogues. In other words, Plato's writings are not just a presentation of abstract views about different subjects. They depict the examination that leads to these views and how this examination relates to the lives of the characters. Plato is very mindful of philosophical examination as the instrument and place of thought, and also of how this examination is integrated in a particular life and determined by it. The examinations illustrated in the corpus are thus associated with a reflection about life's structure, what it needs and what role philosophy plays therein. In other words, the concern with life and philosophy's place in it is not just one more aspect or view among others. It is not simply a matter of exhortation to philosophy not directly connected with the other views. It is rather something that is at the center of the corpus. All other problems and views are, either expressly or tacitly, intrinsically connected with the problem we will discuss. Their content and relevance can only be fully understood in light of this. Furthermore, many of these other problems and views, despite not being directly referred to the structure of life and its need of philosophical examination, give important contributions to the discussion of these questions. There is indeed a reciprocal relation between the different parts, despite the fact that the problem we

will tackle can be seen as a key to understanding what is happening at the corpus. Regardless of whether this is the only or the best key, it is definitely an important angle through which we can determine the whole.

The role of the problem in Plato can also be seen as an illustration of how important the problem is for philosophy in general. It is not only one possible subject within a field of studies, but it has very important consequences for the definition of that field of studies. Indeed, philosophy requires an understanding of itself (what is often designated as metaphilosophy or philosophy of philosophy) and such an understanding, in turn, defines its procedure and results. But the essence of philosophy is far from being completely self-evident. There can indeed be different metaphilosophies, and based on Plato (for whom there was still no clear paradigm of what philosophy should be) we can understand something essential for any metaphilosophical reflection. All philosophy is essentially defined by its relation to life – and life itself is defined by how it needs philosophy. Both things are constitutively entangled. Therefore, the question of the value of philosophy is a central question of philosophy. It determines our relation to any philosophical content. Moreover, all philosophical contents are themselves a part of life and somehow integrated in it. As a result, their full definition also requires a definition of life's structure (in which the need for philosophy plays precisely a central role). In other words, both our relation to philosophical reflections and the content of the latter presuppose an understanding of the problem that will be discussed in the following. In fact, every particular kind of philosophy involves an understanding (however tacit) of the importance of philosophy in general – and this raises the question of what exactly the role of philosophy in life should be. This, in turn, is also decisive to define what philosophy should be.⁵⁸

Finally, returning to what was said above about the importance of this problem for what we might call “philosophical anthropology” (despite the ambiguity of the term, which is often understood in a very strict sense), we can now understand the importance of philosophical anthropology (as a reflection about what characterizes human life in general)

⁵⁸ This goes against the tendencies of much of contemporary metaphilosophical reflections, which usually focus either on a history and comparison of philosophical methods or on a discussion of the adequate method. See e.g. J. GILL, *Metaphilosophy*. An Introduction, Washington D.C., University Press of America, 1982; N. RESCHER, *Philosophical Dialectics*. An Essay on Metaphilosophy, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006; T. WILLIAMSON, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Malden (MA)/etc., Blackwell, 2007; S. OVERGAARD et al., *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2013; N. RESCHER, *Metaphilosophy*. Philosophy in Philosophical Perspective, Lanham (MD)/etc., Lexington Books, 2014; N. JOLL, Contemporary Metaphilosophy, in: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/con-meta/>, October 2015 (last consulted July 2017).

within philosophy at large. Far from being a very confined domain of philosophy, its subject matter plays a decisive role in the whole of philosophy. The fact that the definition of human life (and of philosophy's relation to it) is often neglected does not mean that it is not important for philosophy. Rather, this means means that one is normally unaware of one's views on these matters, and philosophy's self-understanding thus tends to be naive. We could also say that philosophy tends to be unexamined, which in turn raises the question about the value of an unexamined philosophy.

Although we will not directly tackle these metaphilosophical questions in what follows, it is important to have in mind that the whole investigation has important consequences for them.

6. Brief survey of the secondary literature on the problem

The problem concerning the value of the unexamined life and all the questions involved therein have been object of considerable attention by the interpreters, and they have been treated in many different manners. It is not easy to make a full survey of this literature, given its extraordinary vastness and complexity. But a simplified version of it, considering only some of its main tendencies, will allow us to understand that there are still significant gaps.

To begin, there are several discussions of Socrates' assertion in the *Apology* that leave aside everything else that is said in the *Apology* or the Platonic corpus and just consider the possible validity of the statement in itself.⁵⁹ In this case, the assertion is taken as a pretext for one's own reflection, and the resulting understanding of the problem is usually very different from the one we find in the corpus. In contrast, other texts (especially philological commentaries on the *Apology*) discuss the meaning of the statement, although without discussing its grounds and validity.⁶⁰ The philosophical commentaries of the *Apology*, in turn,

⁵⁹ See e.g. H. MESERVE, Editorial. The Examined Life, *Journal of Religion and Health* 2 (1963), 183-186; P. DALTON, The Examined Life, *Metaphilosophy* 23 (1992), 159-171; G. BRADDOCK, The Examined Life, *Think* 8 (2009), 41-46; J. FAMA-KINWA, Is the Unexamined Life Worth Living or not?, *Think* 11 (2012), 97-103.

⁶⁰ One of the best considerations of the meaning of Socrates' assertion is H. GOLDMAN, Reexamining the "Examined Life" in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, *Philosophical Forum* 35 (2004), 1-33. The philological commentaries also provide important indications about the meaning of the assertion, though for the most part they tend not to say much on the matter. See in particular E. BLAKENEY, *The Apology of Socrates*, London, The Scholartis Press, 1929, 156-157; S. SLINGS, *Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Leiden/New York, Brill, 1994, ad 38a5; M. STOKES, *Plato – Apology of Socrates*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1997, ad 38a5-6.

pay some attention to the grounds of the assertion.⁶¹ However, for the most part, they tend to neglect it. They usually attempt to interpret the *Apology* as a whole and have therefore many different concerns. Moreover, they often place their emphasis on other questions, such as the relation between philosophy and politics, Socrates' rhetorical strategies, the persuasiveness of his arguments or the historical reasons for the process. This prevents them from discussing in full what the structure of the unexamined life is and in what sense it lacks examination.

There are, however, some articles or book chapters that directly discuss Socrates' views about the unexamined life and the need to examine. F. Gonzalez, for instance, presents an interesting analysis of many points in the *Apology* that are directly related with Socrates' assertion.⁶² R. Kraut considers the reasons for Socrates' assertion in the broader framework of the so-called earlier dialogues.⁶³ M. McPherran discusses the nature of the duty to philosophize, as it is outlined in the *Apology*. He tries to determine the relation between the religious and rational reasons to examine in Socrates' case, as well as whether the duty applies to everyone or not.⁶⁴ The last question plays indeed an important role in secondary literature, especially given the apparent contradiction between the *Apology* and the *Republic* (where philosophical activity seems to be restricted to a single class). R. Kraut mentions this and considers that Plato changed his views later on. R. Hackforth and S. Lublink also discussed the question, with different results.⁶⁵ These are indeed the main tendencies in interpreting Socrates' views about the value of the unexamined life and the importance of philosophy. One often considers the relation between the *Apology* and other works and, in doing so, the discussion seems to be confined either to the earlier dialogues or to the problems of compatibility between the *Apology* and the *Republic*. In sum, the interpretations are often dominated by the developmentalist view of Plato and this prevents scholars from considering the relevance of later texts for understanding all that may be implied in Socrates' assertion.

⁶¹ See e.g. T. WEST, *Plato's Apology of Socrates. An Interpretation, with a New Translation*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 1979, 216-218; C. REEVE, *Socrates in the Apology. An Essay on Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 1989, 176-179.

⁶² See F. GONZALEZ, Caring and Conversing About Virtue Every Day. Human Piety and Goodness in Plato's *Apology*, in: P. FAGAN & J. RUSSON (eds.), *Reexamining Socrates in the Apology*, Evanston (IL.), Northwestern University Press, 2009, 117-167.

⁶³ See R. KRAUT, The Examined Life, in: S. AHBEL-RAPPE & R. KAMTEKAR (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, Malden (MA)/etc., Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

⁶⁴ See M. MCPHERRAN, Socrates and the Duty to Philosophize, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1986), 541-560.

⁶⁵ See R. HACKFORTH, The ἀνεξέταστος βίος in Plato, *The Classical Review* 59 (1945), 1-4; S. LUBLINK, Who May Live the Examined Life? Plato's Rejection of Socratic Practices in Republic VII, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19 (2011), 3-18.

Of course, these discussions of the passage in the *Apology* can be complemented by works on other topics of Plato's writings that are closely related with it. The presentations of the figure of Socrates, usually based on Plato's earlier dialogues, often include some explicit considerations on why he took philosophical examination to be so important – though they tend to focus on other questions (such as Socrates' philosophical method, his conception of ἀρετή, his intellectualism and the so-called eudaimonism).⁶⁶ The broader discussions of philosophy as a way of life also include important considerations about the meaningfulness of such a life, in contrast with other ways of living (even though they normally do not consider the constitutive defectiveness of all non-philosophical lives and how this is the basis for a sort of “imperative” of philosophy).⁶⁷ In this context, the discussions about what constitutes a good life are also relevant, since they discuss the role philosophy should play therein.⁶⁸ Likewise, the works that consider the question of care and therapy must also consider the limitations of our usual way of living, as well as what we must do to correct it and the role that philosophical inquiry plays therein.⁶⁹ Particularly significant are the texts that consider the different sides of Socrates' and Plato's protreptics – though they tend to focus on the rhetoric strategies for converting someone to philosophy and not so much on the rational

⁶⁶ There are many books on Socrates. In addition to those mentioned above, when we talked about the Socratic question, see also e.g. H. MAIER, *Sokrates. Sein Werk und seine geschichtliche Stellung*, Tübingen, Mohr 1913 (re-ed. Aalen, Scientia Verlag, 1964); N. GULLEY, *The Philosophy of Socrates*, London/etc., Macmillan, 1968; W. GUTHRIE, *Socrates*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971; G. SANTAS, *Socrates*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979; T. BRICKHOUSE & N. SMITH, *Plato's Socrates*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994.

⁶⁷ One of the most exhaustive works in this respect is M. SCHWARTZ, *Der philosophische bios bei Platon. Zur Einheit von philosophischem und gutem Leben*, Freiburg/München, Alber, 2013. For the general discussion of philosophy as a way of life, cp. P. HADOT, *Exercices Spirituels Et Philosophie Antique*, Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 1981 (re-ed. Paris, Albin Michel, 2002); IDEM, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Paris, Gallimard, 1995; A. NEHAMAS, *The Art of Living. Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998; P. HADOT, *La Philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2001; J. SELLARS, *Art of Living. The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*, London, Bristol Classical Press, 2009² (Aldershot/etc., Ashgate, 2003¹); J. COOPER, *Pursuits of Wisdom. Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, Princeton/Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2012. For the application of this question to the *Apology*, see in particular J. SELLARS, *Plato's Apology of Socrates. A Metaphilosophical Text*, *Philosophy and Literature* 38 (2014), 433-445. For the comparison of ways of life in Plato and the Ancient thought in general, see e.g. A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *Les Trois Vies*, in IDEM, *Études de philosophie grecque*, Paris, Vrin, 1971; R. JOLY, *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l'antiquité classique*, Bruxelles, Palais des Académies, 1956.

⁶⁸ See e.g. U. WOLF, *Die Suche nach dem guten Leben. Platons Frühdialoge*, Hamburg, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996; U. WOLF, *Die Philosophie und die Frage nach dem guten Leben*, Hamburg, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, R. CUSHMAN, *Therapeia. Plato's Conception of Philosophy*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1958; M. MOES, *Plato's Dialogue Form and the Care of the Soul*, New York, Lang, 2000; M. FOUCAULT, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, Paris, Seuil, 2001; J. PATOCKA, *Plato and Europe*, transl. by Petr Lom, Stanford (CA.), Stanford University Press, 2002; G. BALISTRERI, *La terapeutica filosofica, Sul paradigma platonico*, Milano, Lampi di Stampa, 2004.

arguments that present the need to do so.⁷⁰ In fact, the question of why we need to philosophize is often neglected. Many interpreters focus rather on philosophy's self-presentation, its practices and methods, as well as on the discussions about what is knowledge and truth, rather than considering the importance of philosophy, knowledge and truth for human life in general.⁷¹ There are, however, some exceptions that discuss the human need for knowledge and truth, often in relation with Nietzsche's own conceptions about the will to truth (*Wille zur Wahrheit*) and will to illusion (*Wille zur Täuschung*).⁷²

All the questions just mentioned help determine the value of the unexamined life and the need to examine and we find in works that study them many important indications for our problem. However, we find no detailed description of the structure of the unexamined life as

⁷⁰ See e.g. K. GAISER, *Protreptik und Paränese bei Platon*. Untersuchungen zur Form des platonischen Dialogs, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1959; A. FESTUGIÈRE, *Les trois protreptiques de Platon. Euthydème, Phédon, Epinomis*, Paris, Vrin, 1973; S. SLINGS, *Plato – Clitophon*. Cambridge, University Press, 1999, 58ff.; J. COLLINS II, *Exhortations to Philosophy*. The Protreptics of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle, Oxford/etc., Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁷¹ In fact, there is much discussion about the self-presentation of philosophy in Antiquity (including the discussions about the history and meaning of the word φιλοσοφία). See e.g. W. JAEGER, *Die Griechen und das philosophische Lebensideal*, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 11 (1957), 481-496; W. BURKERT, *Platon oder Pythagoras? Zum Ursprung des Wortes "Philosophie"*, *Hermes* 88 (1960), 159-177; A.-M. MALINGREY, "*Philosophia*". Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.-C., Paris, Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1961; R. JOLY, *Platon ou Pythagore? Héraclide pontique fr. 87-88 Wehrli*, *Latomus* 114 (1970), 137-142; C. MOORE, *When "Philosopher" was a Bad Name. The Origins of Philosophos*, <http://www.personal.psu.edu/crm21/philosophos.htm>, March 2011 (last consulted July 2017). Plato's concept of philosophy has also been object of much discussion. Cp. for instance J. PIEPER, *Über den Philosophie-Begriff Platons*, Köln, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1955; E. MIRRI, *Il concetto della filosofia in Platone*, Bologna, Edizioni ALFA, 1966; K. ALBERT, *Über Platons Begriff der Philosophie*, Sankt Augustin, Academia, 1989; S. YONEZAWA, *Socrates' Conception of Philosophy*, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12 (2004) 1-22; S. PETERSON, *Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2011; B. SCHUR, "*Von hier nach dort.*" Der Philosophiebegriff bei Platon, Göttingen, V&R, 2013. Other interpreters discuss philosophy as a form of contemplation (θεωρία), as well as its relation with action in general or its role in the πόλις. See for instance A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon*, Paris, Vrin, 1936; O. GIGON, *Theorie und Praxis bei Platon und Aristoteles*, *Museum Helveticum* 30 (1973), 65-87, 144-165; A. ADKINS, *Theoria versus Praxis in the Nicomachean Ethics and the Republic*, *Classical Philology* 73 (1978), 297-313; A. W. NIGHTINGALE, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy. Theoria in its Cultural Context*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2004. There has also been much discussion about Socrates' method of examination (usually identified as ἔλεγχος) and what it entails (which may also include considerations about its protreptic character). Cp. e.g. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1953; B. WALDENFELS, *Das sokratische Fragen. Aporie – Elenchos – Anamnesis*, Meisenheim, Anton Hein, 1961; G. VLASTOS, *The Socratic Elenchos*, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), 27-58; H. BENSON, *Socratic Wisdom*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; G. SCOTT (ed.), *Does Socrates have a Method. Rethinking the Elenchos in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, University Park (PA.), Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002; R. CAIN, *The Socratic Method. Plato's Use of Philosophical Drama*, London/New York, 2007. As for Plato's conception of knowledge and truth, see e.g. J. MOLINE, *Plato's Theory of Understanding*, Madison (Wi.), The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, J. SZAIF, *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*, Freiburg/München, Alber, 1996 (re-ed. 1998).

⁷² See e.g. D. SIMPSON, *Truth, Truthfulness and Philosophy in Plato and Nietzsche*, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15 (2007), 339-360; M. CARVALHO, *Sobre a prescindibilidade ou imprescindibilidade do φρονεῖν*. Um Gedankenexperiment no Filebo e no Protréptico, Porto, Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 2013.

such within the framework of Plato's general understanding of human life (which must include at its center the analysis of how our life is marked by a constitutive love of knowledge or φιλοσοφία). We also do not find an extensive discussion of its constitutive deficiencies and of how they render philosophical examination absolutely necessary. Moreover, there is also no serious discussion of the possible results and risks of philosophical examination as it is conceived by Plato and whether or not they put the need to examine in question. The following investigation will precisely tackle these questions and try to supply these lacks.

7. Goals and limitations of the investigation

As was said in Section 4.3 above, this investigation does not have a doxographical or historical character. It does not try to ascertain Plato's views and doctrines. Likewise, it does not try to determine which earlier thinkers influenced Plato or how he influenced later authors. The main goal is rather to discuss the value of an unexamined life and whether there is something like an imperative of philosophical examination. We will see what is said about the matter in the corpus and consider the meaning and plausibility of Plato's indications. In doing so, we will notice how Plato puts our ordinary way of life in question and also how his objections to it cannot be promptly dismissed without careful consideration.

However, the fact that this dissertation tries to show the strengths of Plato's views (or, more precisely, of the views we may develop on the basis of Plato's indications) does not mean that it simply assumes these views are all valid and it is only necessary to defend them and try to convince readers to adopt a philosophical way of life as outlined in the corpus. The goal is rather to consider the assumptions and implications of the views outlined or alluded to in the corpus and see to what extent they can be questioned. In other words, we must also admit the possibility that Plato is wrong in his criticism of the unexamined life or that he did not use the best arguments to criticize it. This may then suggest that the investigation actually intends to refute or discredit Plato and defend an alternate answer to the problem. But this is also false. The investigation has no previous commitment to defend or attack Plato. It intends to patiently and openly examine the views put forward or alluded to in the corpus, in order to determine as well as possible their strengths and weaknesses. Ideally, after carefully examining the problem and what is said by Plato about it, we would find a solution to the problem and decide whether what is said or suggested by Plato is correct. But, as we will see,

the problem is too complex and the results presented in this investigation are only provisional and require further examination. To be sure, the lack of a definite answer can be frustrating and discourage the reader. However, provisional inquiries as the one that follows can still help us see the questions more clearly and they can likewise contribute to finding better answers in the future.

But let us consider in more detail the factors that prevent us from achieving a definite answer to the problem. First, many of the arguments we will develop based on what is said by Plato are based on unexamined or unjustified presuppositions, whose alternatives are not considered in full. But there are also limitations in the way the problem will be treated. More specifically, we will follow a certain path and, although we will try to consider the corpus as a whole, we will inevitably give more attention to certain passages and dialogues in detriment of others. However, given the kaleidoscopic nature of the Platonic corpus, it is possible to consider the same questions from different angles – and without considering all angles, we cannot be sure we found a definite answer to the problem.

Moreover, in our treatment of the problem we will give more attention to some questions than to others. The most glaring example of this is perhaps the fact that the problem will be considered from an individual (and thus universal) standpoint. More precisely, we will see how each human being as such relates to the unexamined life and to philosophical examination. But Plato's thinking is also very sensitive to the political dimension and the reciprocal relation between the individual and the πόλις. This plays an important role in the *Apology* and it is further developed in other texts – especially in the *Republic*. But we will leave the political dimension of the question mostly in the background and will rather try to determine the importance of philosophical examination for any individual. Only at the end of the investigation will we briefly consider the question about the role philosophical examination should play in the πόλις and who should perform it.

Finally, there is still one more limitation that we must bear in mind. As was said, the whole investigation aims at finding an answer to a problem that is not confined to Plato's writings, but rather concerns us all. We consult Plato in order to better understand the problem and also to find an answer. However, the fact that we restrict our analysis to Plato and even formulate the problem in Platonic terms can be regarded as a limitation. It is possible to formulate the question and discuss it in other ways. Plato is just one among many authors who, in a more explicit or implicit manner, think about the relation between life and philosophical inquiry. The history of philosophy provided many other solutions to the

problem. Why then should we direct our attention to Plato, especially given how old his texts are?

The answer is complex and will not be given in full here. But there are some important reasons for focusing our attention on Plato. He is indeed one of those that explored the question more insistently and exhaustively. He considered many aspects from many different angles. Moreover, many of the later treatments of the problem are often a reaction to what Plato said and try to build on or overturn the ideas we find in his writings. Therefore, these writings are the best place to start investigating the problem. It will certainly help us better understand our origins (or the origin of many conceptions we still have today), but there is also the possibility of learning something important with Plato – something the subsequent generations may have failed to understand. Only a patient consideration of the texts will tell whether they can reveal something decisive or not.

However, none of this exempts us from considering other authors – i.e., other possibilities of conceiving the same question and other answers. An adequate treatment of the problem would require a complete hearing of the history of philosophy, and this could still not be enough, since we would also have to see which other relevant positions could be conceived apart from the ones that were already defended by someone. Only then could we be sure that there were no significant blind spots.⁷³ The following investigation is very far from achieving such a full discussion of the problem, and also for this reason the answer it provides can only be provisional and precarious.

8. Methodological considerations

The content of the analyses that follow is also determined by some methodological choices, and it is important to be aware of them and of the reasons behind them, in order to better understand the course of the analyses and to better appraise their validity.

8.1. The materials used

The investigation will deal primarily with Plato's writings, but it will not be very strict in this respect. Some texts whose authorship is disputed (especially *Hippias Major* and

⁷³ In other words, we would have to follow Aristotle's instructions about what is necessary to reach *ἐπιστήμη* – namely, we must go through all difficulties, which include “ὅσα τε περὶ αὐτῶν ἄλλως ὑπειλήφασιν τινες, κἂν εἴ τι χωρὶς τούτων τυγχάνει παρεωραμένον”. See *Metaphysics* B, 995a24-27.

Alcibiades I) will also be considered at some points. This does not imply the belief that Plato wrote these texts. We leave the question open. But regardless of who wrote them, they show a clear thematic continuity with the other dialogues and thus allow us to better understand aspects that are mentioned in the latter. This is why we will also consider them.

We will not enter into the discussions about the fixation of the texts and the authority of manuscripts. Although a fully critical reading of Plato should consider these problems, they are nonetheless very difficult to solve and the impact of different readings on our interpretation would be very small. Therefore, we will simply base our analysis on Burnet's version of the texts and quote from it.⁷⁴ When citing some important passage in the body of the text, we will use an English version of the text and supply the original version in the notes. The English renderings will be based on other people's translations, though some small changes may be made at certain points. The choice of a translation is somewhat random and not the result of a careful comparison of all available translations. This is so because providing the best perfect rendering of the Greek is not a goal of this work. The Greek version is the actual basis of the analysis and the translation is only meant as an indication for those less familiarized with Ancient Greek.

As for Plato's terminology, we will often employ English renderings of the Greek terms, though in many cases we will also use the Greek words, to make the connection with Plato's text clearer. When the term is decisive for the analysis, we will carefully consider its usage and meaning in Plato (and often also in Ancient Greek culture). This consideration must then be borne in mind every time the term is used. The following investigation will indeed pay close attention to the language used by Plato. It will consider the layers of meaning of each term and the different intellectual contexts from which they are taken. It will also try to be mindful of the often metaphoric nature of this language. In fact, we will often consider Plato's use of images and myths, and try to determine their philosophical or conceptual relevance. At some points we will also reflect about the philosophical meaning of some dramatic aspects of the text (such as characters' idiosyncrasies or their interaction), though we will be very far from exploring all that could be said in this respect.

Our analysis will make many references to Plato's cultural *milieu* and the different contexts he is in dialogue with (such as literature, science, religion, politics, popular culture, and so on). This will help us bridge the cultural gap that separates us from Plato's texts and

⁷⁴ J. BURNET (ed.), *Platonis opera*, 5 vol., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1900-1907. As for the editions used for the other Ancient authors, see Sect. 2.1 a) of the Bibliography.

which is always a great obstacle when interpreting them. By better understanding the context in which Plato was writing, the ideas he presents will become less strange, and we will be able to better see what is implied in them. At some points we will compare the views and concepts we find in the texts (or which are suggested therein) with what is said by more recent thinkers, but such comparisons are not concerned with outlining a history of ideas. We will not try to determine Plato's place in the history of thought (neither in general nor with respect to any particular question) nor will we try to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of different authors. The references to other authors rather serve the purpose of letting us better determine the problems we are discussing and the indications given by Plato.

The treatment of secondary literature also requires some remarks. The sheer volume of works on Plato and on Greek culture in general is overwhelming. Much can be gained from studying these works, but it is probably beyond human strength to read them all (and to read them with the attention they deserve). One is then faced with many alternatives, and in particular one must choose between concentrating one's efforts and attention on a very restricted domain (for instance, a particular problem or a particular tradition of interpretation) and lose sight of all other relevant elements – or, alternatively, trying to attain some sort of overview, reading texts about various problems, from different traditions, in different languages, but at the cost of losing depth of analysis in relation to each problem and each tradition of interpretation. I followed the latter strategy, aware that many relevant texts were certainly left out of consideration. However, I am confident that a broader (though less intensive) approach can provide a solid enough basis to consider our main problem from a new and interesting angle. For the most part, I avoid entering into direct discussion with the secondary literature, since that would make the dissertation even longer and also partly shift the focus from the philosophical discussion of the problems. As a result, the access to the analyses may perhaps be more difficult for some, since they will not be developed in reference to the main debates in secondary literature, but I believe that in most cases my own position in these debates can be easily inferred from the course of the analyses.

Some bibliographical indications about many important terms and problems will be supplied in the footnotes, mostly as a complement to the aspects considered in the text. In general, these indications will be just a sample of all that has been written on the topics in question. At the end, the reader will find a list of many of the most important works about Plato and the aspects of Greek culture more relevant for the questions tackled in the dissertation. Some of the bibliographical indications given in footnotes were deliberately

omitted from this final list for being too specific and to avoid making the list unnecessarily longer. But these are not the only omissions. The list is in fact very far from being complete. It is mainly focused on the problems considered in the dissertation and it reflects a particular path of exploration. However, many other paths could be followed within the complex labyrinth of secondary literature.

8.2. The philosophical and phenomenological character of the interpretation

After determining the content of the investigation and the materials used by it, it is also important to consider the fact that our whole approach to the texts and the course of the analyses will be shaped by two major concerns. The first was already mentioned. The investigation will be philosophical and not doxographical or historical. This means that its main concern is to ascertain who we are and what happens to us in our lives. The discussion of Plato's indications in the corpus will be subordinated to this concern. We will thus not try to ascertain which historical circumstances separate Plato from us. We will rather read his texts in search of views that are relevant for our own self-understanding and the understanding of our circumstances. This requires us to give the benefit of the doubt to Plato's writings and to seek the arguments that may render the views we find in the corpus (or to which the corpus points) as plausible as possible. This does not mean that we will consider Plato in light of contemporary debates, since the latter normally imply a way of conceiving problems that is already very loaded. We have to let the texts talk and define the terms and questions we will use to interpret them, but without forgetting that our interest is to ascertaining their relevance for our life.

In addition to these philosophical concerns, the investigation will also be marked by phenomenological tendencies. The whole approach is inspired by the method elaborated by Husserl and, in particular, by the way Heidegger developed it during the 1920s, which culminated in the hermeneutical phenomenology presented in *Being and Time*.⁷⁵ But this will

⁷⁵ See in particular M. HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 2001¹⁸ (1927¹), 27ff. For other explicit discussions of phenomenology, cp. e.g. E. HUSSERL, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*. Fünf Vorlesungen, Dordrecht/etc., Nijhoff, 1973; IDEM, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1976; M. HEIDEGGER, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1979; IDEM, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1987; IDEM, *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1992; IDEM, *Phänomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks*. Theorie der philosophischen Begriffsbildung, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1993; *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1994.

not translate into the particular contents of the analysis. Plato's conceptions will not be compared with Husserl's or Heidegger's, and for the most part the concepts of these two authors will not be used to clarify what we find in the corpus. Phenomenology will rather influence the attitude of the analysis and the approach to the problems. A full discussion of what constitutes the core of a phenomenological approach would take us very far, but it is important to give some (however brief) indications about it, in order to make what follows more easily accessible to those accustomed to different approaches. Saying that the analyses will be phenomenological means that they will not be primarily concerned with appraising the logical validity of arguments, as if the texts were simple theoretical constructions. We will rather try as much as possible to refer Plato's concepts and arguments back to the "lived experiences" (*Erlebnisse*) of each one of us. Plato's views will be considered as a possible way of seeing or interpreting what we are always in contact with – i.e., what appears to us most immediately or the "phenomena". However, these phenomena are always invested with particular meanings and interpretations, and these meanings and interpretations may block our access to Plato's interpretation of our experiences. Therefore, it is important to be aware of how we most commonly see the phenomena (or how we most commonly interpret our experiences), and also of how Plato puts these common views in question and presents alternate versions of them, which in addition provides an account for our distorted interpretation of what we experience. We must then see whether or not Plato's account is more faithful to our experience of reality in general and of our own self in particular.

The phenomenological tendencies of the investigation are thus intimately connected with the fact that the investigation is mainly concerned with what happens with each one of us. In phenomenological terms, we are concerned with what we most immediately experience (or what most directly mediates and shapes our experience of things). We can understand from here how the investigation is simultaneously personal and general – and this is why the analyses are often referred to an indeterminate "we" (which is supposed to encompass not only myself and the readers, but every other being that resembles us). At first, this usage of the first person is meant to call the reader's attention to the fact that what is being discussed is not something distant. *Tua res agitur!* But the plural form stresses something more – namely, that we will be trying to determine something that characterizes all human beings. But nothing guarantees the success of this attempt. In fact, nothing guarantees that at the core of our being we are all alike. So all reference to a common or universal experience is only hypothetical and every individual must see whether he or she can recognize the description in

his or her own experience – and in doing so, one will have a better access to what is being discussed.

PART I

The discussion of the unexamined life in the *Apology*

“λέξω δὲ καὶ ἅ Ἑρμογένους τοῦ Ἴππονίκου ἤκουσα περὶ αὐτοῦ. ἔφη γάρ, ἤδη Μελήτου γεγραμμένου αὐτὸν τὴν γραφήν, αὐτὸς ἀκούων αὐτοῦ πάντα μᾶλλον ἢ περὶ τῆς δίκης διαλεγομένου λέγειν αὐτῷ ὡς χρὴ σκοπεῖν ὅ τι ἀπολογήσεται. τὸν δὲ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον εἰπεῖν· Οὐ γὰρ δοκῶ σοι τοῦτο μελετῶν διαβεβιωκέναι; ἐπεὶ δὲ αὐτὸν ἤρετο ὅπως, εἰπεῖν αὐτὸν ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο ποιῶν διαγεγένηται ἢ διασκοπῶν μὲν τὰ τε δίκαια καὶ τὰ ἄδικα, πράττων δὲ τὰ δίκαια καὶ τῶν ἀδίκων ἀπεχόμενος, ἦνπερ νομίζοι καλλίστην μελέτην ἀπολογίας εἶναι.”

Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 4.8.4

Socrates' assertion about the unexamined life is the culminating point of an argument that is developed during the entire *Apology*. The question about the value of the unexamined life (as well as about the value of philosophical examination) is intimately tied to the figure of Socrates and his fate. According to Plato's version, Socrates understood how life is unexamined and how this is a serious defect, so he assumed examination as his life's task. Many, however, did not understand why he did what he did and got angry with him, which is what ultimately led to his trial. So the trial is not simply a trial of Socrates, but also of philosophical examination (i.e., the kind of examination performed by Socrates) and its role in the polis and in human life at large. In order to defend himself, Socrates must therefore present his understanding of life and of himself – and this means he must discuss the vital importance of the examination he performs and with which he is identified.

We will now try to determine Socrates' self-presentation and his understanding of life as they are expressed in Plato's *Apology*. We will pay special attention to the aspects of the text that are more directly relevant for this. This means the following analysis is far from being a full discussion of the *Apology* and of all the questions that are contained therein or are associated with it. Many relevant questions which are often at the center of the text's readings will be left untouched or will be only superficially considered. For instance, we will not discuss the faithfulness of Plato's text either to the actual trial or to the historical Socrates in general. We will also not try to determine the actual reasons behind the process against

Socrates or the reasons that lead Plato to write the *Apology*. It is very difficult to find a satisfactory answer to these historical questions and, important though they are, they are not indispensable to our goal of seeing how the unexamined life and its opposite are described in the text. All mentions of Socrates will thus refer to the character of Plato's text, and not the historical figure. We will focus our attention on the understanding of life (and particularly of the unexamined life) presented in the text and see what is implied therein. In doing so, we will not consider all layers of the text. We will not pay much attention to the rhetoric dimension of Socrates' speeches and his use of irony, nor to the effectiveness of his defense strategy.⁷⁶ Instead of carefully distinguishing the face value and the real value of the arguments, we will start by considering the main concepts and ideas of the text and try to see how they can best be interpreted. Finally, in keeping with the general approach of the dissertation, we will be primarily concerned with the implications of the question for all individual lives and only secondarily with its political implications. One could also make a more political reading of the text.⁷⁷ Indeed, both questions are deeply intertwined in the text. But we will rather try to see how the problem directly affects the life of each and every one of us, and how we relate to it as individuals. Whatever else the text may be, it is also an appeal to all individuals, and at the end of the analysis we will even try to ascertain the effects the text might have on the reader or how it determines our relation to it. But before doing so we have to consider what is said in the text.

For the most part, we will restrict the analysis to the *Apology* and avoid comparing it with other Platonic texts (though we may occasionally refer to other passages in order to clarify some point). We will also try to leave out of consideration the views that are normally imputed to Socrates, in order not to read the text in light of them. We will rather follow the sequence of ideas in the text and systematize it, in order to see what understanding of life is contained therein. By isolating this understanding, we will also be better able to appraise it and pin down the questions that are not answered in the *Apology* and that will guide our subsequent consideration of the whole Platonic corpus.

⁷⁶ For interpretations more focused on these questions, see e.g. E. WOLFF, *Platos Apologie*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1929; T. MEYER, *Platons Apologie*, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1962; T. WEST, *Plato's Apology of Socrates. An Interpretation, with a New Translation*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 1979; C. REEVE, *Socrates in the Apology. An Essay on Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 1989; D. LEIBOWITZ, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates. Plato's Apology*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁷⁷ Cp. for instance J. COLAIACO, *Socrates against Athens. Philosophy on Trial*, New York/London, Routledge, 2001.

CHAPTER 1

The accusations against Socrates

“οἴμοι παρανοίας· ὡς ἐμαινόμεν ἄρα,
ὅτ’ ἐξέβαλλον τοὺς θεοὺς διὰ Σωκράτη.
ἀλλ’ ὦ φίλ’ Ἑρμῆ, μηδαμῶς θύμαινέ μοι,
μηδέ μ’ ἐπιτίρησις, ἀλλὰ συγγνώμην ἔχε
ἐμοῦ παρανοήσαντος ἀδολεσχία (...).”

Aristophanes, *Nubes*, 1476-1480

In order to determine the understanding of life that is outlined in Socrates’ defense speech, we must begin by considering his analysis (or his understanding) of the accusations made against him. These accusations present a certain version of who Socrates is, and Socrates goes on to isolate and refute this version, replacing it with his own self-presentation. But in order for him to do so, he needs to consider the content and implications of the accusations. Though we do not “hear” the prosecution speech, we can get an idea of its content from the way Socrates interprets it. This interpretation will also provide us with some important indications about the unexamined life, since the accusations are themselves an expression of such a life and its reaction against the life that opposes it by dedicating itself to the task of examining oneself and others. Let us then see how the accusations are presented and interpreted in Socrates’ speech.

1. The starting-point of the defense speech: the accusations’ mode of presence

Socrates starts his speech by reflecting about the circumstances or state of mind in which the jurors find themselves after hearing the accusations against him. Then, he considers the hostile disposition against him that preceded the trial and which is itself the effect of a different kind of accusations. He is thus concerned with how his words will be received. The jurors may not be impartial. Their relation to the person and to the issue on trial is not immediate and simple (as it would be if this were their first contact with Socrates), but it is rather determined by the accusations (both those heard at trial and other), and it is

important for him and for the jurors to be fully aware of this, in order to come to a just verdict.

1.1. The resonance of the explicit accusation. The problematic relation between λόγος and ἀλήθεια

When Socrates starts his defense, the prosecution speech and the portrait it painted of Socrates still echoes in the mind of the listeners, and Socrates calls the attention precisely to this. He says he does not know how the accusers affected the jurors, but points to the possibility that their words may have left a strong impression or feeling (a πάθος).⁷⁸ He can infer it from his own experience. He admits (even if ironically) that he almost forgot himself, which means he was almost persuaded of an interpretation of who he is that is, from his viewpoint, entirely false.⁷⁹ So if he, who should know himself the best, almost believed the accusation, then it is far more likely that the others will have been persuaded by it.

This leads Socrates to reflect about the medium in which the trial takes place – namely, λόγος. Λόγος (here understood primarily as speech or argument) enables us not only to say something that is not true, but also to convince others of it (that is, to entrap them in a “logical” fiction, as it were), making them lose sight of the truth – even if this truth is something one is frequently in contact with.⁸⁰ However, λόγος can also correct one’s way of seeing things and reveal things for what they are. It can do so not only by directly saying what things are, but also by rationally discussing a particular matter. So the same thing – λόγος – can be an agent of truth or of untruth (of ἀλήθεια or λήθη). It all hinges on how it is used. In Socrates’ words, one can use it to say what is true (τάληθῆ λέγειν) or one can be awfully good or clever at speaking (δεινὸς λέγειν) and use λόγος to convince others of

⁷⁸ The opening words of the *Apology* are precisely: “ὅτι μὲν ὑμεῖς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πεπόνθατε ὑπὸ τῶν ἐμῶν κατηγορῶν, οὐκ οἶδα (...).”

⁷⁹ See 17a: “ἐγὼ δ’ οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ὀλίγου ἑμαντοῦ ἐπελαθόμεν, οὕτω πιθανῶς ἔλεγον.”

⁸⁰ We find an extraordinary expression of this power of λόγος in *Menexenus* 234c ff. Socrates says that funeral orations, by praising people from a certain land, can bewitch people’s souls to the point that they forget themselves (thus thinking they are taller, nobler or more beautiful than they really are) and also the land where they live (thinking they live in the Isles of the Blessed). At least this is his own experience, and if some stranger is present, he also sees Socrates and the Athenians in a different light. Speech affects people’s perspectives and its effects can last for long. Socrates says that in the case at hand the spell is broken after a few days, and he then remembers who he is and where he lives. But it is not necessarily so. A good speech may deeply and permanently affect one’s way of seeing things (especially if it is frequently heard), and Socrates will argue that something along these lines happened in his case and determined the way he is seen by others (cp. Section 1.2 below).

something false.⁸¹ This essential contrast is at the core of Socrates' trial. The accusers (which in a way act as representatives of the unexamined life) and Socrates put forward two different versions of who he is (and also of what should be the role of philosophical examination in life) and only one of these versions can be true.

Socrates stresses this conflict of claims and calls the jurors' attention to the fact that it is not easy to distinguish what is true from what is merely persuasive. Skillful speaking has the semblance of speaking the truth, and that is why it can easily persuade anyone of something false. But one can be a clever speaker and at the same time tell the truth. Moreover, the fact that one is not a good speaker does not mean one is not telling the truth. As a result, everybody should be under suspicion and the jurors should be particularly attentive to what is said. They must hear every argument with the alternative between truth and mere rhetoric in mind, in order to determine who is telling the truth – or, as Socrates also stresses, who is telling what is just or right (δίκαια λέγειν).⁸² Indeed, the two different versions of who Socrates is are also two versions of justice or what is right (δίκαιον), so it is not only the truth about Socrates that is at issue, but also justice itself or the correct way of living.⁸³ The jurors must then be concerned with justice (since that is indeed what constitutes the excellence or ἀρετή of a juror, as Socrates stresses) and in order to decide what is just they must be aware of the possibility of someone distorting the truth. In other words, they must carefully examine what is said, so that they can avoid any injustice. As for the orator, his ἀρετή consists in telling the truth – and Socrates will take pains to do so.⁸⁴ It is, however, difficult to determine what exactly the truth is, and also to say it in a way that allows it to be recognized as such and understood.⁸⁵

Socrates thus opens his speech with an appeal to examination, truth, ἀρετή and justice – which are all central notions of his defense. The trial itself is a sort of examination. It tries to ascertain the truth about Socrates and the examination he carries out. As such, it

⁸¹ Socrates uses these expressions in 17b.

⁸² The idea of δίκαια λέγειν appears in 17c and 18a.

⁸³ It is important to bear in mind that the term δίκαιον refers broadly to what is fitting, proper, to how things should be, and cannot be reduced to a code of laws or even a set of social norms. Here and throughout the *Apology*, Socrates is referring to this broad sense of how we should live.

⁸⁴ Cp. 18a: “(...) καὶ δὴ καὶ νῦν τοῦτο ὑμῶν δέομαι δίκαιον, ὥς γέ μοι δοκᾷ, τὸν μὲν τρόπον τῆς λέξεως ἔαν – ἴσως μὲν γὰρ χείρων, ἴσως δὲ βελτίων ἂν εἴη – αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο σκοπεῖν καὶ τούτῳ τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν, εἰ δίκαια λέγω ἢ μή· δικαστοῦ μὲν γὰρ αὕτη ἀρετή, ῥήτορος δὲ τάληθῆ λέγειν.”

⁸⁵ Socrates must face this difficulty and this may require him to use elaborate communicative strategies. At some points, Socrates even seems to be less than straightforward, and this raises the question of whether he remains faithful to his pledge of telling the whole truth (see 17b-c). However, we will not enter into those discussions. We will assume that he is saying something meaningful, even if in some cases that may not be immediately clear to the jurors or to the reader.

requires the jurors to examine the question carefully and to concern themselves with the truth, in order to determine what is just and correctly carry out their duties. This may seem obvious, but Socrates needs to emphasize it because he has reason to fear that the opposite will rather be the case. There is a strong tendency to neglect these things, and such a tendency is in fact an essential feature of the unexamined as such, as will be shown. Accordingly, Socrates' appeals are a reminder that both he and the examination he embodies tend to be judged in the context of the unexamined life itself (i.e., a life that does not examine things carefully and so can easily accept false views).

1.2. The old accusations as a crucial element in the whole process

Though Socrates starts by focusing on the effects caused by hearing the prosecution's case, he immediately goes on to show that the stance of the jurors towards Socrates is in fact affected by a stronger and deeper factor. He expresses it by saying that the accusations are not simple, but rather twofold. There are the express accusations, brought to court by Anitus and Meletus, but there are also other accusations, which are much older. Although the accusers did not mention them, they resonate in everybody's minds or at least affected the way they look at Socrates. Therefore, Socrates must call the attention to these old accusations. Despite the fact that the new accusations have just been heard and may still affect the emotions and mind of the jurors, their effects are nonetheless smaller than the ones from the old accusations, which are the result of a multitude of voices repeating the same things during a long time. More precisely, Socrates says that many members of the jury have heard slanders (διαβολαί) against him for a long time and since they were little (i.e., since the time when they were most credulous).⁸⁶ The fact that usually no one defended him (i.e., no alternate views about him were put forward), and many people did not know him that well, made the accusations particularly persuasive.⁸⁷ Moreover, the process of persuasion was complex and the first accusers persuaded others.⁸⁸ Soon these accusations were a matter of common knowledge – and one no longer could say what their source was.⁸⁹ They were,

⁸⁶ See 18c: “(...) ἐπειτά εἰσιν οὗτοι οἱ κατήγοροι πολλοὶ καὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἤδη κατηγορηκότες, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ λέγοντες πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ἧ ἂν μάλιστα ἐπιστεύσατε, παῖδες ὄντες ἔνιοι ὑμῶν καὶ μειράκια (...).”

⁸⁷ See *ibidem*: “(...) ἀτεχνῶς ἐρήμην κατηγοροῦντες ἀπολογουμένου οὐδενός.”

⁸⁸ See 18d: “(...) ὅσοι δὲ φθόνῳ καὶ διαβολῇ χρώμενοι ὑμᾶς ἀνέπειθον – οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ πεπεισμένοι ἄλλους πείθοντες – οὗτοι πάντες ἀπορώτατοί εἰσιν (...).”

⁸⁹ See 18c-d: “ὁ δὲ πάντων ἀλογώτατον, ὅτι οὐδὲ τὰ [18δ] ὀνόματα οἷόν τε αὐτῶν εἰδέναι καὶ εἰπεῖν, πλὴν εἴ τις κωμωδοποιὸς τυγχάνει ὧν. (...) οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀναβιβάσασθαι οἷόν τ' ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἐνταυθοῖ οὐδ' ἐλέγξαι οὐδένα (...).”

therefore, extremely persuasive. Most of the jurors have had some contact with these old accusations, and though their presence was much hazier than the speech just heard, they were deeply ingrained in how the jurors viewed Socrates. They had grown up believing in this version of Socrates. So, in a sense, the trial is already over before it even began.

This is very important. By calling the attention to these accusations, Socrates is not trying to increase the charges against him, but he rather intends to show the basis for the accusations just made. The two layers of accusation are indeed closely connected. The old accusations correspond to assumptions (or *ὑποθέσεις*, in the sense we will consider later) that underpin the new accusations.⁹⁰ They caused the latter and they are also what lends them strength or plausibility. In other words, the old accusations make the jurors receptive to the new accusations and averse to the defense. Socrates' words and behavior are simply interpreted in light of the prejudices against him.⁹¹ Therefore, he must first deal with them and the resulting background of ill-will (*φθόνος*) and hostility towards him. Socrates must render the old charges explicit and try to disarm them. He must show their falsehood and their hidden motivations. Only so can his defense be successful. If, on the contrary, he were not to mention and face them, the explicit charges would be much more effective, since their source would be left untouched.

But Socrates is also very aware of how difficult it is to refute these old accusations. There are mainly two reasons for this. The first concerns the nature of this shared view of Socrates. The process that led to it made it not only unquestionable, but also independent from any particular accuser, as was noted above. No one can be held accountable, there is no one to examine, so Socrates must fight with shadows.⁹² The other reason is the disproportion between the time during which the old accusations have been heard (in many cases since childhood) and the time Socrates now disposes to try to reveal the truth about himself.⁹³ He will put forward a *λόγος* and *λόγος* has indeed the power to reveal the truth, but such a power can also be limited by other factors, especially time. Socrates does not have enough time to

⁹⁰ For the notion of *ὑπόθεσις* in the sense here meant, see in particular Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3a).

⁹¹ His words and acts thus appear as particularly wilful, haughty or arrogant, and this will also cause heckling (*θορυβεῖν*) at some points (cp. e.g. 27b and 30c), which reminds the reader of the jurors' ill-disposition towards Socrates and how they are not really willing to hear him out.

⁹² See 18d: “οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀναβιβάσασθαι οἷόν τ' ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἐνταυθοῖ οὐδ' ἐλέγξει οὐδένα, ἀλλ' ἀνάγκη ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ σκιαμαχεῖν ἀπολογούμενόν τε καὶ ἐλέγχειν μηδενὸς ἀποκρινόμενον.” The expression *σκιαμαχεῖν* evokes the image of a boxer punching the air and fighting an imaginary opponent (cp. *Lg.* 830a-c).

⁹³ See 18e-19a: “ἀπολογητέον δὴ, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, καὶ ἐπιχειρητέον ὑμῶν ἐξελέσθαι τὴν διαβολὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ ἔσχετε ταύτην ἐν οὕτως ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ.” Cp. also what Socrates says after being found guilty, at 37a-b: “(...) εἰ ἦν ὑμῖν νόμος, ὥσπερ καὶ ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις, περὶ θανάτου μὴ μίαν ἡμέραν μόνον κρίνειν ἀλλὰ πολλάς, ἐπέισθητε ἄν· νῦν δ' οὐ ρᾶδιον ἐν χρόνῳ ὀλίγῳ μεγάλας διαβολὰς ἀπολύεσθαι.”

fully examine the accusation and produce his defense. Therefore, he anticipates his failure, and at the same time points to the fact that what follows is not his true defense speech, but only a very abbreviated version. This raises the question of how then would his real defense (as well as the real defense of Socratic examination) look like.⁹⁴

But let us look at what Socrates says. Albeit his low expectations, he tries to show that these old accusations are false and also that they were deliberately fabricated. He discusses their origin and tries to show the motivations behind them – more precisely, he tries to show how they are the reaction of people that were examined by him and tried to hide what this examination revealed.

2. The content of the accusations and the central role of σοφία therein

Socrates carefully considers the content of both kinds of accusation, what is implied in them and how they relate to each other. He cites the new accusations, made by the prosecution. They run as follows: “Socrates is an offender in that he corrupts the young men and does not accept the gods the city accepts, but other novel superhuman beings.”⁹⁵ Despite the problems in translating νομίζειν and δαίμονια, which we will leave aside, the content of the accusations seems pretty clear (though Socrates will also put it in question and show that it contains some inconsistencies). There are two parts: one concerns the effect of Socrates’ activities on the young, the other concerns their effect on the religion of the πόλις.

Socrates also gives an explicit form to the old accusations. Despite their mostly indeterminate source, they have a very specific content, which Socrates formulates in three different passages. The two first formulations are the most significant. The first runs as follows: “there was a certain Socrates, a wise man and investigator of things both above and below the earth, and one who made the weaker argument the stronger”.⁹⁶ The second says: “Socrates is an offender and a meddler, in studying things below the earth and in the sky, and making the weaker argument into the stronger and instructing other people in these same

⁹⁴ In a sense this dissertation is an attempt to reconstruct and present such a defense with the aid of the whole Platonic corpus.

⁹⁵ See 24b-c: “Σωκράτη φησὶν ἀδικεῖν τοὺς τε νέους διαφθείροντα καὶ θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, ἕτερα δὲ δαίμονια καινά.” I follow M. Stokes’ translation (see M. STOKES, *Plato – Apology of Socrates*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1997).

⁹⁶ See 18b-c: “(...) ἔστιν τις Σωκράτης σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, τὰ τε μετέωρα φροντιστὴς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς πάντα ἀνεζητηκῶς καὶ τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν”.

things.”⁹⁷ The two formulations are very similar, though only the second introduces the important idea of teaching. They also begin in different ways, and the beginning of the first formulation in fact provides an important indication about the whole accusation. It ties the figure of Socrates to the notion of σοφία, and the rest of the accusation is actually a breakdown of some of the things usually seen as being implied in the notion. Although σοφία is not reduced to the study of nature and λόγος, this is one of the forms it can take. The term has indeed different nuances, but here Socrates (or his hypothetical accuser) is referring to a rather negative sense of the word, which is associated with the idea of περιεργάζεσθαι (i.e., of meddling or being a busybody and occupying himself with something that is not his business). But the term can also have a positive sense, and in fact these different senses determine the meaning of the accusation and also of the defense. Σοφία is a central concept in the *Apology* and everything therein is connected to it and to the cultural debates it refers to. It is therefore important to consider its meaning and associations (which will then help us define the figure of Socrates and the kind of examination he carried out).⁹⁸ We will start by defining its formal sense and then we will see the discussions in Plato’s time that were associated with the term and help determine the accusations. After doing so, we will finish by considering Socrates’ whole defense strategy in light of this understanding of the accusations.

2.1. The formal notion of σοφία and the problem of what kind of knowledge corresponds to it

The term σοφία is very complex. It is one of several terms used to designate forms of knowledge and the boundaries between these terms were not always clear (at least until Aristotle). Σοφία, in particular, was associated with several cultural developments and changes, and so its meaning took on new nuances. We will start by looking at the older layers

⁹⁷ See 19b-c: “Σωκράτης ἀδικεῖ καὶ περιεργάζεται ζητῶν τὰ τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ οὐράνια καὶ τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν καὶ ἄλλους ταῦτα ταῦτα διδάσκων.” For the third formulation, presented when Socrates is explaining the origin of these older accusations, cp. 23d: “(...) λέγουσιν ὡς Σωκράτης τίς ἐστὶ μιαιώτατος καὶ διαφθείρει τοὺς νέους· καὶ ἐπειδὴν τις αὐτοὺς ἐρωτᾷ ὅτι ποιῶν καὶ ὅτι διδάσκων, ἔχουσι μὲν οὐδὲν εἰπεῖν ἄλλ’ ἀγνοοῦσιν, ἵνα δὲ μὴ δοκῶσιν ἀπορεῖν, τὰ κατὰ πάντων τῶν φιλοσοφούντων πρόχειρα ταῦτα λέγουσιν, ὅτι ‘τὰ μετέωρα καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς’ καὶ ‘θεοὺς μὴ νομίζειν’ καὶ ‘τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν.’ ”

⁹⁸ The consideration of the term σοφία is also very important given the fact that Socrates describes his own activity as a love or pursuit of σοφία (i.e., as a form of φιλοσοφεῖν – see 28e, 29c, 29d). The word φιλοσοφεῖν (as well as φιλόσοφος and φιλοσοφία) actually plays a central role in the corpus, as we will see. Cp. especially Chap. 14 below.

of meaning and then we will consider the discussions it was associated with in the 5th century BCE (and which are echoed in Socrates' trial).⁹⁹

Let us begin with the translation of the term. Σοφία is usually rendered as wisdom. Though both terms do not entirely coincide, “wisdom” does express an essential component of σοφία: namely, the fact that it usually designates a superior or superlative form of knowledge. But how is this superlative knowledge to be understood? In order to answer this question, we may start by considering the earlier uses of the word. We see it applied to many different forms of technical skill or expertise. Carpenters, sailors, flute-players, poets, seers, generals, statesmen, physicians, car drivers, and others can all be designated as σοφοί.¹⁰⁰ Σοφία is thus close in meaning to τέχνη, which designates an expert and productive knowledge – i.e., a knowledge that has an insight into a particular domain of reality and is thus qualified to intervene in it, in order to solve a particular problem and thus render human life better.¹⁰¹

These τέχναι or σοφία are not something everybody possesses. In fact, most people do not have them.¹⁰² Aristotle expresses this in the *Metaphysics* by saying that τέχνη is something that lies παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις.¹⁰³ The ordinary way of seeing things is indeed limited in many respects and is very far from being a fully discerning gaze. Τέχνη or σοφία, however, allow one to have an “extra eye”, which renders us able to see or understand what things are. In other words, τέχνη and σοφία give access to a domain that lies beyond common

⁹⁹ Our analysis, however, will be very brief. For more on the meaning of the word σοφία since the Archaic period until Late Antiquity, see e.g. B. SNELL, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie*. Σοφία, γνώμη, σύνεσις, ἱστορία, μάθημα, ἐπιστήμη, Berlin, Weidmann, 1924, 1-20; U. WILCKENS, σοφία, σοφός, σοφίζω, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; B. GLADIGOW, *Sophia und Kosmos*. Untersuchungen zur Frühgeschichte von σοφός und σοφία, Hildesheim, Olms, 1965; W. GENT, Der Begriff des Weisen. Eine historisch-kritische Untersuchung, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 20 (1966), 77-117; F. MAIER, *Der σοφός-Begriff*. Zur Bedeutung, Wertung und Rolle des Begriffs von Homer bis Euripides, Diss. München 1970; B. SNELL, Wie die Griechen lernten, was geistige Tätigkeit ist, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 93 (1973), 172-184, especially 178-179; G. KERFERD, The Image of the Wise Man in Greece in the Period before Plato, in: *Images of Man in Ancient and Medieval Thought*. Studia Gerardo Verbeke ab amicis et collegis dicata, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1976, 17-28; W. SCHADEWALDT, *Die Anfänge der Philosophie bei den Griechen*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1978, 178-180; G. WOHLFART, Das Weise. Bemerkungen zur anfänglichen Bedeutung des Begriffs der Philosophie im Anschluß an Heraklits Fragment B108, *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 98 (1991), 18-33; H. GOLDMAN, Traditional Forms of Wisdom and Politics in Plato's *Apology*, *The Classical Quarterly* 59 (2009), 444-467.

¹⁰⁰ For a list of occurrences of the terms σοφός and σοφία in this sense, see e.g. B. SNELL, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie*, 6-7; B. GLADIGOW, *op. cit.*, 9ff.; F. MAIER, *op. cit.*, 13ff.

¹⁰¹ Aristotle expresses this proximity between σοφία and τέχνη by saying that σοφία is ἀρετή τέχνης. Cp. *Ethica Nichomachea*, 1141a9-12.

¹⁰² As Socrates says in *Ap.* 20c, they are something περιττότερον or ἄλλοιον.

¹⁰³ See *Metaphysica* 981b13-17: “τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον εἰκὸς τὸν ὅποιαν οὖν εὐρόντα τέχνην παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις θαυμάζεσθαι [15] ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων μὴ μόνον διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον εἶναι τι τῶν εὐρεθέντων ἀλλ’ ὡς σοφὸν καὶ διαφέροντα τῶν ἄλλων (...).”

perception – a domain of things that are difficult and not easy to know, as Aristotle also says.¹⁰⁴ For this reason, σοφία is often considered something more than human, and even a divine boon, though it is also frequently regarded as something that can be learned, at least up to a point. But let us leave aside the questions of its origin and teachability.

The problem we must now consider stems from the existence of multiple forms of σοφία. All these σοφίαι share the fact that they see or understand something many human beings usually do not. But the term σοφία (unlike τέχνη) often implies more than the idea of extraordinary knowledge. It also carries the connotation that the knowledge in question is the highest or superlative, as we said above. But what can a superlative form of knowledge amount to? One possible way of conceiving it is as the sum of all forms of uncommon or extraordinary knowledge (i.e., all τέχνηαι). One would thus possess all σοφία and be πάσσοφος. There are indeed several references to this idea and we find echoes of it (even if in an ironical tone) in the Platonic corpus.¹⁰⁵ But regardless of the fact that it is very difficult to acquire all forms of knowledge, since each of them requires much dedication and effort, it is also important to note that such a conception of a superlative form of knowledge equates all forms of knowledge or considers them as having a similar importance or status. However, the σοφίαι or τέχνηαι have different degrees of importance, according to their subject matter and the role of this subject matter in our life. Some things are trivial, whereas others are of the highest importance – and σοφία tends to be associated with the latter. It is thus regarded as something that is not only *παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις*, but also “*παρὰ τὰς τέχνας*” (or at least beyond most of them).

What is then the most important (or most noble) subject matter? After Plato and especially Aristotle, the term σοφία came to be used to designate the knowledge of the fundamental structures of reality.¹⁰⁶ But initially it rather denoted a knowledge of how to live and how to have a good life (or even the best possible life). Its concern was εὐδαιμονία, which could not be achieved by chance, but through insight. Practical concerns were at the center of σοφία. This is also valid for many of the uses of the word in Plato. In the *Apology*, for instance, σοφία is also expressly related to the most important matters (τὰ μέγιστα) at one point.¹⁰⁷ It may not be very clear what these matters are, but given the context we can

¹⁰⁴ See *ibidem* 982a10-11: “(...)τὸν τὰ χαλεπὰ γινῶναι δυνάμενον καὶ μὴ ῥάδια ἀνθρώπῳ γιγνώσκειν, τοῦτον σοφόν (τὸ γὰρ αἰσθάνεσθαι πάντων κοινόν, διὸ ῥάδιον καὶ οὐδὲν σοφόν) (...)”

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, *Hp. Mi.* 368b, *Euthd.* 271c-272b, *Rep.* 596c, *Sph.* 232e f.

¹⁰⁶ Cp. e.g. ARISTOTLE, *Ethica Nichomachea*, 1141a12 ff., where the proper meaning of σοφία is restricted to the knowledge of the first principles (αἱ ἀρχαί).

¹⁰⁷ See 22d.

understand that Socrates has in mind things such as justice, piety, truth, ἀρετή, the good and the “beautiful” – i.e., all that is essential to determine how we should live. But knowledge of such matters may still have different sides or even assume different forms. It may correspond to something like a τέχνη περὶ τὸν βίον, which will guide each individual life, or it may become a τέχνη πολιτική or βασιλική, which will govern the πόλις, as well as all the other τέχναι that are relevant for it (insofar as they allow us to rule over nature, at least up to a point).¹⁰⁸ In any case, σοφία in the pre-eminent sense is something that enables one to guide life, insofar as it gives insight into how things should be done and how one should live, and it will thus guarantee practical success. So we can clearly see then that σοφία is something important for all and not just an abstract problem. It is expected to perform an important task (perhaps the most important task) in our lives.

2.2. The ambiguous character of the σοφία imputed to Socrates. Old and new σοφία. The conflict with the traditional values and the traditional religion

This description lets us understand what σοφία is supposed to do, but it still does not say what the content of σοφία is – i.e., how we should guide our lives. And this was precisely an acute problem in Socrates’ time and in Ancient culture in general (if not in the whole of human history). Several τέχναι claimed to be σοφία in the sense that they claimed to know how we should live, and they were thus involved in a war of τέχναι. We find a meaningful allusion to these quarrels in Plato’s *Gorgias*, when Socrates refers to the disagreements between gymnastics, economy and medicine about how to live, and how rhetoric presents itself as yet another τέχνη that claims to be able to guide life.¹⁰⁹ Both traditional and new forms of knowledge tried to persuade people of their merits and also to disqualify the other forms of knowledge, denying them the title of σοφία. In other words, σοφία in the pre-eminent sense was first and foremost a problem – and this is decisive to understand Socrates’ trial and his defense.

In fact, the situation in Socrates’ time was even more complex than this. Besides the fact that there were several candidates to the title of σοφία, there was also an intense conflict

¹⁰⁸ We find several references to these ideas in Ancient culture in general and particularly in Plato. For the notion of τέχνη τοῦ βίου (or τέχνη περὶ τὸν βίον), cp. e.g. A. NEHAMAS, *The Art of Living*. Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998 and J. SELLARS, *Art of Living*. The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy, London, Bristol Classical Press, 2009² (Aldershot/etc., Ashgate, 2003¹). For the notion of τέχνη πολιτική or βασιλική, see e.g. *Euthd.* 288d ff.

¹⁰⁹ See *Grg.* 451d ff.

between old and new σοφία (or between an old and a new conception of σοφία and its role in life), which was associated with deep cultural, social and political changes. But what exactly did this conflict consist in and how is it relevant for the problem of who Socrates is and what he does? Let us start with the traditional conception of σοφία. There were several forms of σοφία that were publicly acknowledged. They helped organize life and the πόλις for a long time. These σοφία are also those that Socrates singles out in the *Apology*, when he describes his search for σοφοί in the πόλις. He went to the artisans (whose work helped to control nature and protect us from it), the poets (who not only afforded pleasure, but also played a central role in education and the transmission of values) and the statesmen (who governed the πόλις and determined its destiny). The two latter in particular were supposed to possess a general outlook on life that allowed them to determine everything – and were in these sense σοφοί in the pre-eminent sense. But without any of these experts, human life would be very different.

The importance of such experts is made manifest in the praises of τέχνη or σοφία that were composed usually in the context of sophistry or at least reflected sophistical ideas.¹¹⁰ These praises describe human beings as a sort of invented animal – i.e., an animal whose condition is essentially transformed by discoveries, new insights and progress. Originally, human nature was marked by lack, frailty and helplessness.¹¹¹ This was to a great extent due to the fact that humans lacked discernment or clarity. Things were indistinct or hard to distinguish for them, and so they saw without seeing or gazed in vain.¹¹² But then a series of human discoveries or divine gifts brought discernment and τέχνη, allowing them to improve their life. They overcame the previous limitations by creating a new configuration of life.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ See AESCHYLUS, *Prometheus vincitus* 441-506; SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, 332-375 (the so-called “Ode to Man”); EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 195 ff.; GORGIAS, DK B11a, Sect. 30; PLATO, *Prt.* 320c ff., *Plt.* 274b-d.

¹¹¹ In Aeschylus’ play (granting he is the author), Prometheus speaks of the πῆματα of mortals (*Prometheus vincitus*, v. 442). Palamedes, in Gorgias’ text, says that human life was ἄπορος. In *Supplices*, Theseus implies that without all good things brought by the τέχνη, life would be too bad and we would not exist (οὐκ ἂν ἦμεν ἐν φάει, v. 200). In *Statesman*, Plato describes human beings without τέχνη as “ἀσθενεῖς ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἀφύλακτοι γεγονότες διηπάζοντο ὑπ’ αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔτ’ ἀμήχανοι καὶ ἄτεχνοι κατὰ τοὺς πρώτους ἦσαν χρόνους” (274b-c). In *Protagoras*, human beings are said to be at first “naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed”. See 321c: “(...) τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον γυμνὸν τε καὶ ἀνυπόδητον καὶ ἄστρωτον καὶ ἄοπλον (...)” I follow S. Lombardo’s and K. Bell’s translation (see PCW).

¹¹² In *Prometheus vincitus* (vv. 447-450), it is said that the original human beings “βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην./ κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον, ἀλλ’ ὀνειράτων/ ἀλίγκιοι μορφαῖσι τὸν μακρὸν βίον/ ἐφυρον εἰκῆ πάντα (...)” Moreover, Prometheus speaks twice of things difficult to discern (δύσκριτα – vv. 458 and 486). In *Supplices*, Theseus says that our life was πεφυρμένος and θηριώδης (vv. 201f.).

¹¹³ Euripides uses the expression: “θεοῦ κατασκευὴν βίωι δόντος τῆσάυτην” (*Supplices* 214f.). Gorgias, in the above mentioned fragment, talks of making life “κεκοσμημένον ἐξ ἀκόσμου”. Plato uses the verbs συγκατασκευάζειν (*Plt.* 274d) and παρασκευάζειν (*Prt.* 322a). All these expressions emphasize the ordered character of what τέχνη or σοφία bring about.

Τέχνη and σοφία improved human life greatly, and this empire of σοφία over nature (as described in Sophocles' "Ode to Man") even appeared to elevate human beings to a divine condition.¹¹⁴

These praises of τέχνη or σοφία mention many examples of traditional forms of knowledge, which already existed for a long time – such as agriculture, weaving, architecture, astronomy, the art of sailing, writing, calculus, medicine, divination, military art, laws, and so on. But the praises in question are associated with a context that criticized these traditional forms of knowledge and tried to establish new τέχνηαι or σοφίαι – and in particular a new form of σοφία in pre-eminent sense. In order to establish this new σοφία, these innovators appealed to the usefulness and prestige of traditional τέχνηαι and to how they had changed human life. Similarly, the new forms of knowledge that Sophists and other experts were trying to introduce or divulge would also change life and expand the empire of knowledge.

These attempts of promoting a new σοφία were thus in conflict with the traditional form of life and the corresponding wisdom. From the vantage point of the old σοφία, the new forms of knowledge were an excess and an invasion of domains in which one had no business (and in this sense, they were a form of περιεργάζεσθαι as is said in the old accusations against Socrates). Life was already ordered, but now some people tried to replace this order with a new one. The Sophists in particular defended the need for a new form of education (παιδεία), and this affected the core of Greek life. Παιδεία was what allowed one to overcome the childish condition and become an adult – or, more properly, a citizen. One had to acquire the cognitive competence (i.e., the insight and values) that made one qualified or fit to interfere in public life. This was usually transmitted from generation to generation and all members of the tribal community (or, more precisely, all citizens) were viewed as qualified to educate the young. We see precisely this conception being defended by Meletus in the *Apology* (24d ff.) or Anytus in *Meno* (92d ff.). However, the Sophists put this model of education in question. They denounce traditional education (and the σοφία it is based on) as insufficient to truly overcome the childish condition, to give true insight, and to properly guide the πόλις and life in general. A new form of παιδεία was necessary – one that even adults and reputed citizens lacked. This idea was in a way outrageous, since it meant most people (including those aristocratic classes that traditionally held positions of power in the πόλις) were not qualified

¹¹⁴ Cp. EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, vv. 216-218: "(...) ἡ φρόνησις τοῦ θεοῦ μᾶλλον σθένειν/ ζητεῖ, τὸ γὰρ ὄν δ' ἐν φρεσὶν κεκτημένοι/ δοκοῦμεν εἶναι δαιμόνων σοφώτεροι."

to guide their own lives and the life of the πόλις. Only Sophists could provide this qualification, and they would provide it not just to aristocrats, but to anyone who would pay them. Thus, the Sophists challenged both the traditional σοφία and but also the traditional social order – and hence they were not in the good graces of conservative people, who accused them precisely of corrupting the young and thereby the whole πόλις.

These accusations were also motivated by the prominent role of rhetoric in the new education and new σοφία.¹¹⁵ People needed to persuade others in trials, assemblies or simply in exhibitions of one's τέχνη, and so the ability to speak persuasively was a valuable asset. Teaching it often involved learning to defend both sides of every question, what implied learning how to make weaker arguments stronger (τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν). But from a traditional standpoint, this was interpreted as a technique of making the unjust causes appear just and thus escaping justice. One could simply serve one's self-interest without any concern for others or the πόλις.¹¹⁶ In fact, the Sophists themselves were seen as people that served only their self-interest, given their itinerant lifestyle and their lack of ties to the πόλις where they taught. So their education was highly questionable in the eyes of most people.

But sophistry is not the only source of cultural conflict in the intellectual life at the time. The development of natural philosophy was also seen as an attack on traditional life. The φυσιολόγοι (as Aristotle called them) investigated things that were remote and apparently useless for everyday life – such as the celestial bodies (μετέωροι) and the things below the earth. These domains were associated with weather and food, but they were largely obscure (ἄδηλα) or unknown, and they were also under the tutelage of the gods. In fact, they had a great importance for religion, because one could see signs from the gods in the heavens and the dead went to the underworld. These domains seemed therefore to have an invisible control over the entire life of the πόλις. But now, thanks to naturalistic explanations, these domains seemed to be deprived of their divine value. Natural philosophers were indeed regarded as atheists, and this was not just a problem of their inner state of mind and private relation to the gods. By disturbing traditional religious views, natural philosophers also disturbed religious practices and even the νόμοι of the community (i.e., its way of seeing things and its way of living). The whole life of the πόλις had a religious foundation and so

¹¹⁵ This new central role of rhetoric is later highlighted by Dicaearchus, when he opposes the traditional form of σοφία, described as an ἐπιτήδευσις ἔργων καλῶν, to the new σοφία, which is understood as a τέχνη λόγων – cp. fr. 31, in F. WEHRLI (ed.), *Die Schule des Aristoteles*. Heft 1: Dikaiarchos, Basel, Schwabe, 1967. Indeed, λόγοι became more and more central and the ἔργα faded out into the background.

¹¹⁶ We see an illustration of this in Aristophanes' *Nubes*. Strepsiades' goal is to deceive his creditors and this is why he wants his son to join Socrates' school.

naturalistic thinkers threatened public order and the very survival of the πόλις. At least this is what many thought.

We can thus understand why the new forms of σοφία were regarded as dangerous by so many people. They turned everything upside down and, from the traditional standpoint, there was absolutely no need for such inquiries. They were wholly superfluous (i.e., a form of περιέργαζεσθαι). But was it really so? The conflict between old and new forms of σοφία raises the question of their cognitive competence and their credentials to properly govern life. Is traditional σοφία good enough or is there a need for an additional (and superior) σοφία? And do the new σοφίαι just considered satisfy this need? It is not easy to answer these questions, at least until we find a way of discerning the value of different σοφίαι. Moreover, this way of framing the question assumes the existence (or at least the possibility) of a supreme σοφία that is able to govern human life, and also that the answer to life's problems lies on knowledge and insight. But even the Greeks contested the idea that knowledge is able to solve all life's problems. Sophocles, for instance, stresses that despite all progress brought about by the τέχναι, we are not able to defeat death.¹¹⁷ Moreover, tragedy also considers our expectations and how they may be too great to be satisfied at all. So what can σοφία really offer us?

These and other questions mark the context in which Socrates' life and trial took place – and they play a central role in the *Apology*. They determine the accusations and also Socrates' defense. Let us see how.

2.3. The meaning of the newer accusations in light of the older ones and Socrates' defense strategy

We must now consider in more detail the structure of the old accusations, how they give rise to the new accusations, what portrait they paint of Socrates and how Socrates tries to correct it. As was said, there was a traditional interpretation of σοφία and also new forms of σοφία, which tried to reconfigure life, and were rather associated with self-interest, amorality and irreligion. Socrates' examination of others was promptly identified with these new forms of σοφία – and its specificity was not understood. This is the core of the old accusations, which in turn were the basis for the new accusations that led Socrates to trial. He was accused

¹¹⁷ In the above mentioned passage, Sophocles says that human being is “παντοπόρος, ἄπορος ἐπ’ οὐδὲν ἔργεται/ τὸ μέλλον”, but he also adds: “Αἶδα μόνον φεῦξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται· νόσων δ’ ἀμηγάνων φυγὰς ξυμπέφρασται.” See vv. 359-361.

of corrupting the young (by imparting a defective παιδεία, spreading his σοφία, and thus harming them and making them worse) and also of impiety (of not accepting or honoring the gods of the πόλις and introducing new ones, which had the strong connotation of not believing in the real gods and thus being godless). The precise relation between the question of corrupting the young and the question of religious innovation is not clear in the accusation, since it is not specified whether the corruption of the young is mainly caused by religious teaching or not. Meletus will confirm that it is so at the cross-examination.¹¹⁸ But the other cultural issues considered above (especially the role of rhetoric and its association with self-interest) also seem relevant – although the prosecution could perhaps think there was an intrinsic connection between all those issues and religious matters. But regardless of all this, the bottom line was that Socrates innovated and attacked the traditions, and at a time of crisis his influence became more questionable than ever.¹¹⁹

What is then Socrates' defense strategy given this complex set of accusations and the portrait they paint of him? By shifting the focus from the new accusations to the old ones, Socrates identifies the center of the accusations and tries not only to refute it, but also to show the motivations that lead to it or that made it plausible to many people. In order to refute it, Socrates says that he did not teach any students, as the Sophists do.¹²⁰ He was never paid to do so, he never promised any teaching, and he talked to everyone in the open (which means he did not communicate hidden doctrines in private).¹²¹ He also says he is no clever speaker and has no knowledge of what is the excellence of a human being and a citizen.¹²² He has no positive doctrines to impart and no one can come forward and say that he did impart such doctrines.

Socrates also dissociates himself from natural philosophers by saying he has no knowledge of the subject and never talked about it.¹²³ Whether this means he never studied it or simply never was able to understand it and thus adopt the views of natural philosophers as

¹¹⁸ See 26b: “ὅμως δὲ δὴ λέγε ἡμῖν, πῶς με φῆς διαφθεῖρουν, ὦ Μέλητε, τοὺς νεωτέρους; ἢ δῆλον δὴ ὅτι κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν ἦν ἐγράψω θεοὺς διδάσκοντα μὴ νομίζειν οὐδὲ ἡ πόλις νομίζει, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινά; οὐ ταῦτα λέγεις ὅτι διδάσκων διαφθεῖρω; – πάντο μὲν οὖν σφόδρα ταῦτα λέγω.”

¹¹⁹ The problems we are considering became inflated after Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War and the loss of the empire. Athens hit rock bottom and people needed to find who was responsible for the debacle. Some part of the blame was assigned to Socrates and so he was brought to trial and condemned. But, as Socrates stresses, these accusations far preceded the time of the trial.

¹²⁰ Cp. 19d-e.

¹²¹ See 33a-b,

¹²² Cp. 17b and 20c.

¹²³ Cp. 19c-d.

his own (as is said in the *Phaedo*) is not important.¹²⁴ He is far from subscribing them and being a natural philosopher as depicted in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. This does not prevent him from treating them (as well as the Sophists) with some respect, insofar as they are supposed to possess some form of σοφία – even if there are hints of irony in his words, especially because he raises the possibility that they do not possess any σοφία at all.¹²⁵ At any rate, he stresses his own ignorance and his inability to replace the values and practices of the πόλις with new positive values and practices, based on a new sort of σοφία (at the least in the sense of σοφία just considered). His activity has a different character and a different result, as he explains, and by explaining it he is also able to explain how the ill-will and the slanders against him came about.

But before proceeding to that, it is important to briefly consider Socrates' defense against the new accusations, since that helps us understand the portrait of Socrates painted by the accusation and how Socrates interpreted it. The defense is explicitly undertaken in the cross-examination of Meletus (24b-28a). Socrates considers Meletus' credentials to make the accusations – i.e., his understanding of the matters involved therein and of the accusations themselves. First, Socrates asks Meletus about the corruption of the young and also about its opposite – their improvement. He wants to know who makes the young better, who can educate them, and Meletus ends up affirming that all Athenians do (thus following the model of traditional education, in which all citizens were qualified to educate the future citizens).¹²⁶ Socrates, however, compares the case of human beings with animals and points to the fact that there are experts that can make the animals better, whereas most people make them worse.¹²⁷ Human beings will also likely require an expert to be improved, but Meletus cannot name one, and as a result Socrates accuses him of having neglected the question and only pretending to be concerned with it.¹²⁸ Moreover, according to Socrates, Meletus assumes that either Socrates knows he is harming the young despite knowing this will cause them to harm

¹²⁴ Cp. *Phd.* 96a ff.

¹²⁵ In 19c, Socrates says “ταῦτα γὰρ ἐωρᾶτε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀριστοφάνους κωμῳδίᾳ, Σωκράτη τινὰ ἐκεῖ περιφερόμενον, φάσκοντά τε ἀεροβατεῖν καὶ ἄλλην πολλὴν φλυαρίαν φλυαροῦντα, ὧν ἐγὼ οὐδὲν οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν πέρη ἐπαῖω. καὶ οὐχ ὡς ἀτιμάζων λέγω τὴν τοιαύτην ἐπιστήμην, εἴ τις περὶ τῶν τοιούτων σοφός ἐστιν (...).” In 20b-c, he states: “καὶ ἐγὼ τὸν Εὐθὺνον ἐμακάρισα εἰ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἔχοι ταύτην τὴν τέχνην καὶ οὕτως ἐμμελῶς διδάσκει. ἐγὼ γοῦν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκαλλυνόμην τε καὶ ἡβρυνόμην ἂν εἰ ἠπιστάμην ταῦτα (...).”

¹²⁶ See 25a: “πάντες ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, Ἀθηναῖοι καλοὺς κάγαθοὺς ποιοῦσι πλὴν ἐμοῦ, ἐγὼ δὲ μόνος διαφθείρω. οὕτω λέγεις; – πάνυ σφόδρα ταῦτα λέγω.”

¹²⁷ See 25a-b: “ἢ καὶ περὶ ἵππους οὕτω σοὶ δοκεῖ ἔχειν; οἱ μὲν βελτίους ποιοῦντες αὐτοὺς πάντες ἄνθρωποι εἶναι, εἷς δὲ τις ὁ διαφθείρων; ἢ τὸνναντίον τούτου πᾶν εἷς μὲν τις ὁ βελτίους οἷός τ' ὧν ποιεῖν ἢ πάνυ ὀλίγοι, οἱ ἵπτικοί, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ ἐάνπερ συνῶσι καὶ χρῶνται ἵπποις, διαφθεῖρουσιν; οὐχ οὕτως ἔχει, ὦ Μέλητε, καὶ περὶ ἵππων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ζώων;”

¹²⁸ See 25c: “ἀλλὰ γάρ, ὦ Μέλητε, ἰκανῶς ἐπιδείκνυσαι ὅτι οὐδεπώποτε ἐφρόντισας τῶν νέων, καὶ σαφῶς ἀποφαίνεις τὴν σαυτοῦ ἀμέλειαν, ὅτι οὐδὲν σοὶ μεμέληκεν περὶ ὧν ἐμὲ εἰσάγεις.”

him in return (what Socrates declares to be absurd) or he does it unknowingly (in which case he says he deserves admonishment and not trial).¹²⁹ Whether the argument is fallacious or not, it still points to the matter of Socrates' possible motivations and his representation of what he is doing, as well as the purpose of the trial. Also in this respect, Socrates exposes Meletus' lack of knowledge, since the latter cannot explain these questions. As for the accusation of religious innovation, Socrates shows the inner contradiction of apparently not believing in gods (as he leads Meletus to affirm) and at the same time introducing new ones, thereby accusing Meletus of making riddles, being frivolous and playing with serious matters.¹³⁰

The refutation of the accusations is not very satisfying and somewhat sophistical. Many have indeed discussed the validity of Socrates' arguments.¹³¹ But Socrates at least raises a strong suspicion that Meletus is not at all competent in the matters under discussion. Socrates considers this kind of defense sufficient (especially given the fact he had already attacked the underpinnings of these accusations when refuting the old accusations), although he will still put forward other important arguments in the course of his speeches. Socrates will explain that instead of harming others, he tried to incite them to be as good as possible, and also tried to improve the πόλις. Hence, if people were not improved, it is because they paid no heed to his exhortations. Socrates also explicitly presents himself as a model of piety at several points – both in his behavior in court (for instance, by not being willing to beg and do everything to influence the jurors) and in his life at large (by undertaking a divine mission and fully dedicating himself to it, even at the risk of his own life).¹³² He clearly believes in something beyond himself and beyond his more immediate self-interest, since he guides his behavior by an objective standard that was indirectly communicated to him by the god via an oracle.¹³³ To be sure, he did not believe in the oracle blindly and rather needed to interpret it

¹²⁹ Cp. 25c-26a.

¹³⁰ Cp. 26b-28a, especially 27d: “οὐκοῦν εἴπερ δαίμονας ἠγοῦμαι, ὡς σὺ φῆς, εἰ μὲν θεοὶ τινές εἰσιν οἱ δαίμονες, τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη ὃ ἐγὼ φημί σε αἰνίττεσθαι καὶ χαριεντίζεσθαι, θεοὺς οὐχ ἠγοῦμενον φάναι με θεοὺς αὖ ἠγείσθαι πάλιν, ἐπειδήπερ γε δαίμονας ἠγοῦμαι (...).”

¹³¹ See e.g. T. de LAGUNA, *The Interpretation of the Apology*, *The Philosophical Review* 18 (1909), 23-37, especially 30-33; C. REEVE, *Socrates in the Apology. An Essay on Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 1989, 74ff.; W. CALEF, *Does Apology 24c-25c Contain an Argument that Socrates is Innocent?*, *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (1993), 293-304; L. SMITH, *The Interrogation of Meletus. Apology 24c4-28a1*, *The Classical Quarterly* 45 (1995), 372-388; M. STOKES, *Plato – Apology of Socrates*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1997, ad 24c10-25c3, 25ce-26b2, 26b2-28a2; J. COLAIACO, *Socrates against Athens. Philosophy on Trial*, New York/London, Routledge, 2001, 105ff.

¹³² See in particular 28e f. and 35d.

¹³³ Cp. 21b ff. and also Chap. 2 Sect. 1 below, for an interpretation of the passage.

rationally – but this was just a necessary requirement for him to understand what the god wanted.

However, despite all characteristics that differentiate him from the new σοφοί and from the portrait painted of him by the old and new accusations, Socrates still resembles this kind of σοφός in some respects, and such a resemblance renders his defense less convincing, especially for someone not familiarized with him. Socrates explains how he exposes the ignorance of others, which seems to imply the ability to make the weaker arguments stronger, and he confesses the young imitate him, which means he does affect them in some way.¹³⁴ He also seems to introduce significant changes in the normal understanding of religion. He follows a more rational and ethical version of religion, directed at truth, justice and goodness. Therefore, his piety seems to imply new practices and values. From his standpoint, he is not trying to undermine the old values. Instead, he is trying to show how people fall short of them. But still he attacks the usual configuration of life (i.e., the unexamined life) and to this extent the accusations seem to have some kernel of truth. He and his philosophical examination are removing something and trying to introduce something else. The question then is whether the innovations are an improvement of the young and the πόλις at large or not. He will argue that philosophical examination does not attack ἀρετή or true transcendence, but rather promotes them and is essential to improve life. It is the accusers and the citizens at large that corrupt the young (by defending a bad education that fails to promote ἀρετή) and are impious (which implies they do not guide themselves by superior values), so they are the ones to blame for Athens' debacle. At least this is what Socrates strongly suggests.

¹³⁴ Cp. 23c-d.

CHAPTER 2

Socrates' presentation of his life and of his relation to philosophical examination

“(…) wohin er seine prüfenden Blicke richtet, sieht er den Mangel der Einsicht und die Macht des Wahns und schliesst aus diesem Mangel auf die innerliche Verkehrtheit und Verwerflichkeit des Vorhandenen. Von diesem einen Punkte aus glaubte Sokrates das Dasein corrigieren zu müssen: er, der Einzelne, tritt mit der Miene der Nichtachtung und der Ueberlegenheit, als der Vorläufer einer ganz anders gearteten Cultur, Kunst und Moral, in eine Welt hinein, deren Zipfel mit Ehrfurcht zu erhaschen wir uns zum grössten Glücke rechnen würden.”

F. Nietzsche, *Der Geburt der Tragödie*, 13¹³⁵

After considering the structure of the accusations as interpreted by Socrates, it is now necessary to consider the core of his defense – namely, Socrates' justification of his actions and his fame. In order to justify them, he will have to present himself and his activity in a new light. He will thus try to convey the “real Socrates” and explain the understanding of life that moves him. This self-presentation is composed of two main moments. First, he tells about a special episode that left him perplexed, mobilized him to examine its meaning and in turn lead him to a clear understanding of himself and of what matters in life. Then he describes the way of life he adopted in the wake of this episode (namely, a philosophical life or a life essentially marked by philosophical examination) and the values that govern such a life.

1. Socrates' presentation of his own peculiar σοφία

Socrates' elucidation of his acts and behavior, as well as his understanding of life, is based on a particular event that he presents as decisive in his life – namely, the oracle that his friend Chaerophon brought from Delphi, which declared that no one was wiser (σοφώτερος)

¹³⁵ See KSA 1, 89-90.

than Socrates.¹³⁶ It is this event that led him to question the wisdom of others as well as his own – and provided him with an understanding of what he should do in life. We will not discuss how the Pythia could have known, or what kind of oracle this was, or whether the episode really took place or is rather an invention either of the historical Socrates or of Plato. We will likewise leave aside the questions concerning the role of oracles in Greek religiosity. We will only analyze the episode as it is presented. We will see how Socrates reacted, how he initially interpreted it and how his interpretation changed. The oracle and the process of its interpretation are indeed presented as a turning point in Socrates' life and this has originated much discussion about whether or not he was already in the habit of examining others before the oracle.¹³⁷ Looking at the text, nothing forces us to regard this as an absolute beginning of Socrates' philosophizing, although it is supposed to have brought at least a greater or clearer understanding of the importance of philosophical examination in human life – up to the point of defining a mission and outlining a way of life. Thus, regardless of whether or not the description of the episode exaggerates its importance (and also regardless of whether or not it is just a rhetorical strategy), it nevertheless shows us very important traits of Socrates' outlook on life and helps us understand the importance of philosophical examination. That is why we must carefully consider the terms in which it is presented.

1.1. Socrates' road to self-understanding. The oracle and the examination (ἐξέτασις) it generated

Interrogated by Chaerophon, the god at Delphi declared that no one was wiser (σοφώτερος) than Socrates.¹³⁸ This left Socrates perplexed, since he was in no way aware of being σοφός – at least in the ordinary sense of σοφία, according to which it is a positive

¹³⁶ See 21a: “(...) ἤρετο γὰρ δὴ εἴ τις ἐμοῦ εἶη σοφώτερος, ἀνεῖλεν οὖν ἡ Πυθία μηδένα σοφώτερον εἶναι.”

¹³⁷ To be sure, Socrates must have done something that would make him at least as wise as anyone else. More precisely, he had to know he knew nothing. Therefore, he must have examined himself to a certain extent, and he probably had already examined others. But at what stage of his development was he supposed to be when he received the oracle? Was he interested in natural sciences (as is said in *Phaedo*, 96a ff.) and did the oracle lead him to a new kind of concerns and a new kind of examination – or had he already developed it and oracle only confirmed it? It is probably impossible to answer these questions based on the *Apology*. For more on the topic, cp. e.g. C. REEVE, *Socrates in the Apology. An Essay on Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 1989, 21ff.; S. SLINGS, *Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Leiden/New York, Brill, 1994, 78-82; H. HEITSCH (ed.), *Platon – Apologie des Sokrates*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, 197-202.

¹³⁸ It is important to note that the way the oracle is formulated does not logically exclude that others have as much wisdom as Socrates, but we will see that in a sense he is actually the wisest.

knowledge, of the superlative kind, that can guide life.¹³⁹ But at the same time Socrates could not bring himself to admit that the god could make a mistake or tell a lie.¹⁴⁰ Thus the oracle presented itself as a problem that required solution. Its meaning was not univocal and patent. As was his custom, the god had talked in an obscure manner or in enigmas (αἰνίττεσθαι), and his words required interpretation.¹⁴¹

What is then the meaning and importance of the oracle? Before all else, it is important to keep in mind that the oracle about Socrates is in keeping with a particular tradition of oracular pronouncements which are supposed to reveal some important aspect of human life or a certain way of interpreting it. There are many instances of oracular answers declaring that someone is the most pious, the most εὐδαίμων or the most σοφός.¹⁴² These are not only judgments that compare two or more people. They provide an indication about what piety, εὐδαιμονία or σοφία are, by identifying it with someone who is presented as its emblem or quintessence. This indication usually goes against the ordinary conceptions. What ordinarily seems to be an inferior state is now declared superior, thus subverting the ordinary conception of some important notion and introducing a new perspective on it (and often with consequences for our understanding of life as a whole). The new perspective would share the main traits of the so-called wisdom of Delphi – namely, the acute awareness of the limitations of human nature and the importance of being measured or restrained. The oracle about Socrates follows this model. Socrates is very deficient in terms of knowledge – to the point of not seeming to be σοφός in any respect. But by declaring him σοφός, the oracle points to a new interpretation of the meaning of σοφία.

Socrates does not immediately understand the indication given by the oracle. He must investigate and search for the meaning of the oracle he received. Therefore, he decides to go to those that regard themselves and are regarded by others as σοφοί.¹⁴³ Socrates thus follows

¹³⁹ Cp. 24b: “πολὸν μὲν χρόνον ἠπόρουσιν τί ποτε λέγει”. The verb ἀπορεῖν expresses the lack of resources to solve something or come through. One is left paralyzed, without knowing what to do or say. In this case, Socrates cannot give a meaning to what the god says, and so he does not know how to react to it.

¹⁴⁰ See 21b: “οὐ γὰρ δήπου ψεύδεται γε· οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῷ.”

¹⁴¹ Cp. 21b: “τί ποτε αἰνίττεται [sc. ὁ θεός];” This was in fact a common feature of oracles, which is accurately expressed by Heraclitus: “ὁ ἀναξ, οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει” (DK B93). In other words, the oracle does not directly articulate its meaning, but it does not entirely conceal it either. It points in a certain direction, it gives a sign or an indication that must be followed, and as such it gives us an indirect access to something that transcends us. But it still requires us to pursue the latter and try to understand it. In other words, it is supposed to mobilize us and this mobilization is what can lead us to understand what is being said.

¹⁴² On this matter, see in particular R. HERZOG, *Das delphische Orakel als ethischer Preisrichter*, in: E. HORNEFFER, *Der junge Platon. I: Sokrates und die Apologie*, Giessen, Alfred Töpelmann, 1922, 149-170.

¹⁴³ Cp. 21c: “ἔδοξέ μοι οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφός ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, εἶναι δ’ οὐ· κάπειτα ἐπειρώμην αὐτῷ δεικνύναι ὅτι οἷοιτο μὲν εἶναι σοφός, εἶη δ’ οὐ.” The claim to knowledge

the ordinary understanding of σοφία and searches for those that are normally seen as emblems of σοφία. In other words, he goes to the main representatives of traditional σοφία: statesmen, poets and artisans. These play a crucial role in Greek public life and are thought of as possessing some knowledge other people normally do not have. One could wonder why, in this context, Socrates does not consider any other classes – and especially the new forms of σοφία. But these traditional forms of σοφία are paradigmatic. They will show the cognitive state of all citizens or of the whole πόλις (and perhaps even of all human beings).

Socrates interaction with these reputed σοφοί will assume the form of an examination (ἐξέτασις).¹⁴⁴ More precisely, it is a threefold examination or an examination that has three objects. First, it is an examination of the oracle and of the god at Delphi – or more precisely, of the god’s wisdom. Socrates seeks out those that seem to be able to refute the oracle, because that is the best way to put the oracle to the test and see what it means (τί λέγει).¹⁴⁵ Second, it is an examination of the alleged σοφία of the reputed σοφοί (and thus of the public view of σοφία). Finally, it is an examination of Socrates himself, his self-understanding and his own cognitive state. The three examinations are intrinsically connected and together they constitute a radical examination of the notion of σοφία. They will question (and deeply change) the usual understanding of it, thereby bringing a new appraisal of everyone in the πόλις (including Socrates) and even a new conception of life and what we should do in it.

The oracle thus directs Socrates to some particular others and sends him on a journey (like Ulysses) or on a series of labors (like Heracles).¹⁴⁶ At the same time, the oracle leads Socrates to examine himself. The whole human experience is called into question. But what exactly happened during this complex examination and how did Socrates interpret it?

and in particular to wisdom plays indeed a central role in the Socratic examination, as we will see in the following. The examination does not take place in a neutral territory with no particular claim to knowledge, but in one that is marked by a claim (which in itself is fallible and may be wrong) of having a perfect cognitive access to things. This renders philosophical examination particularly useful, since it allows one to cast away the conceit of knowledge. For a more detailed discussion of this question, see Chaps. 5-8.

¹⁴⁴ He actually uses several terms in this passage to express the idea of examination: ζήτησις (21b8), διασκοπεῖν (21c3), σκοπεῖν (21c4, e6), ζητεῖν (22a4), ἐξέτασις (22e6). We can still add διερωτᾶν (22b4). Later, in 23b5, when he stresses the continuity between the process of deciphering the oracle and what he does afterwards, he also uses ἐρευνᾶν, along with ζητεῖν, to designate what he does. The use of all these terms shows that the process Socrates is describing is already identified with what it shall give rise to – namely, the philosophical examination Socrates will discuss later. For an analysis of these terms, cp. Chap. 4, Sect. 2.

¹⁴⁵ See 21b-c: “ἦλθον ἐπὶ τινα τῶν δοκούντων σοφῶν εἶναι, ὡς ἐνταῦθα εἶπερ που ἐλέγξων τὸ μαντεῖον καὶ ἀποφανῶν τῷ χρησμῷ ὅτι ‘οὐτοσὶ ἐμοῦ σοφώτερός ἐστι, σὺ δ’ ἐμὲ ἔφησθα.’ ” Cp. also 21e6: “(...) ἰτέον οὖν, σκοποῦντι τὸν χρησμὸν τί λέγει, ἐπὶ ἅπαντας τοὺς τι δοκοῦντας εἰδέναι.” It may seem that Socrates sets out to prove the oracle is wrong and is thus being impious, but Socrates is actually unsure of what to think, as was said above, and he only wants to discover the truth about what the god is saying.

¹⁴⁶ These two figures are especially brought to mind by the reference to πλάνη (22a) and πόνοσ (22a).

1.2. The immediate results of Socrates' examination of σοφία

Socrates' examination had two immediate outcomes and it is important to consider each in turn. On the one hand, Socrates was able to diagnose the cognitive state of the reputed σοφοί. On the other hand, it caused a strong reaction by the latter, which is itself an expression of their cognitive state (and, according to Socrates, it is also the ultimate reason for the old accusations against him). Socrates describes these two results, and he also describes how they led to a reappraisal of his own cognitive state and a revision of the oracle – which is thus the ultimate and most important result of the examination undertaken by Socrates. But let us start with the more immediate results.

a) The ignorance of the alleged σοφοί

Socrates is left very disappointed with the examination of the alleged σοφοί. He does not describe his conversations in detail (though we can imagine he is referring to conversations similar to the ones we find in the so-called aporetic dialogues). He says that he went to the reputed wise, talked with them (διαλεγόμενος, 21c5) and interrogated them (διηρώτων, 22b4). Their wisdom is thus examined in and through λόγος. Any practical competence they have and which is the source of their reputation will indeed be based on an insight or knowledge, and Socrates will question them precisely about this knowledge. They must render it explicit and explain or justify it. If it is actual knowledge, they should be able to demonstrate it. However, something else happened when they tried to demonstrate their knowledge or σοφία.

Socrates mentions three distinct stages, directed to three different kinds of alleged σοφοί, and he describes what he ascertained in each of these stages.¹⁴⁷ The first stage was the examination of statesmen or public men (πολιτικοί), who are supposed to have a knowledge that enables them to govern the state and human life in general. They should thus have a superlative knowledge or a σοφία in the pre-eminent sense. But Socrates says they possess only a claim or a semblance of σοφία, which coexists with its opposite: the lack of σοφία.¹⁴⁸ Their cognitive state is marked by the contradiction between what one supposes about it or

¹⁴⁷ It does not matter whether Socrates really went about examining the three classes in succession or if their examination was somewhat simultaneous. The important thing is how they present three different forms of alleged σοφία, each with its own traits.

¹⁴⁸ Cp. once more 21c: “ἔδοξέ μοι οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφὸς ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, εἶναι δ' οὐ”.

what it appears to be (δοκεῖν) and what it really is (its εἶναι). A false appearance hides their real state – and this is what is conveyed by the expression οἴεσθαι τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς (21d5). They combine or mix in themselves σοφία (in the form of a claim) and its opposite – ignorance. Though in a way they are similar to Socrates (insofar as none of them knows something admirable and good), statesmen are far from recognizing their state – unlike Socrates, who has no illusions about himself and, since he does not know, he also does not think he does.¹⁴⁹

The second stage of Socrates' examination of σοφία provides a similar outcome, though with some different features. Socrates goes to the poets, who have the ability to say many admirable things (πολλὰ καὶ καλά). In fact, the things they say (their poems) were at the time a sort of repositories of culture or a “tribal encyclopedia”.¹⁵⁰ They expressed the general Greek outlook on life and in this sense even the statesmen somehow depended on them for their knowledge. However, Socrates realizes by examining them that they have no knowledge of what they say.¹⁵¹ They cannot interpret and explain their verses, which shows that their poetical competence or ability to compose (and thus to say admirable things) does not come from actual knowledge.¹⁵² They do what they do and say what they say in virtue of a natural disposition (φύσις τις) and because they are inspired or possessed (ἐνθουσιάζοντες).¹⁵³ A divine force operates in the poets and gives them a perspective on things that lies beyond the ordinary way of seeing them. Therefore, what the poets produce is not the result of their action nor is it under their control. When they compose, they are out of their minds and possess no clear understanding or no clear access to what they say.¹⁵⁴ The meaning of their verses transcends them and in this sense they are like prophets (θεομάντις and χρησμοδοί), who do not speak on their own authority, but because some superior entity speaks through them and guarantees the validity of what they say. If the poets say something

¹⁴⁹ See 21d: “(...) κινδυνεύει μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲν καλὸν κάγαθὸν εἰδέναι, ἀλλ’ οὔτος μὲν οἶεται τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἶομαι (...).”

¹⁵⁰ This was particularly valid of the Homeric poems, but it applies to a greater or lesser degree to most poetry of the time. For the notion of a “tribal encyclopedia”, see E. HAVELOCK, *Preface to Plato*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1963, especially 36-86.

¹⁵¹ See 22b-c: “ἀναλαμβάνων οὖν αὐτῶν τὰ ποιήματα ἃ μοι ἐδόκει μάλιστα πεπραγματεῦσθαι αὐτοῖς, διηρώτων ἂν αὐτοὺς τί λέγοιεν, ἵν’ ἅμα τι καὶ μανθάνοιμι παρ’ αὐτῶν. αἰσχύνομαι οὖν ὑμῖν εἰπεῖν, ὧ ἄνδρες, τάληθῆ- ὅμως δὲ ῥητέον. ὡς ἔπος γὰρ εἰπεῖν ὀλίγου αὐτῶν ἅπαντες οἱ παρόντες ἂν βέλτιον ἔλεγον περὶ ὧν αὐτοὶ ἐπεποιήκεσαν. (...) καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι λέγουσι μὲν πολλὰ καὶ καλά, ἴσασι δὲ οὐδὲν ὧν λέγουσι.”

¹⁵² At this time the Sophists had developed the practice of rationally interpreting the poems and myths. We see a good illustration of this in Plato's *Protagoras* (339a ff.). Socrates must have interrogated poets in a similar way, which led him to the discovery of their limited understanding of what they were saying (i.e., of the different ideas and even the whole outlook on life expressed in their compositions).

¹⁵³ See 22b-c: “ἔγνω οὖν αὐτὸν καὶ περὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐ σοφία ποιοῖεν ἃ ποιοῖεν, ἀλλὰ φύσει τι καὶ ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντις καὶ οἱ χρησμοδοί (...).”

¹⁵⁴ The idea is developed in *Ion*. See in particular 533d ff.

true, they do it in virtue of a superior authority and not because they possess actual knowledge of it. To use an expression from a parallel passage in *Meno*, they possess no more than a correct judgment or opinion (ὀρθὴ δόξα).¹⁵⁵ This allows them to do something, but they have no real control over what they are doing. At the end of the day, one can even wonder if they are really inspired or not. But assuming this is the case, their state is still defective and corresponds to a mixture between knowledge and ignorance different from the one that characterized the cognitive state of the πολιτικοί. The poets possess correct views, but they have no clear insight into them. At its core, their supposed knowledge is affected by its opposite, ignorance, and this distorts their whole way of seeing things. Thus, the only actual knowledge they have is the knowledge of composition. But according to Socrates, this core of knowledge caused them to believe they were σοφώτατοι with respect to other things – though they were not.¹⁵⁶ They were not aware of their cognitive boundaries and their cognitive state. As a result, they believed they knew everything they talked about in their compositions. They thought their λόγος was an expression of their knowledge, but it was not. And so they too differed greatly from Socrates, who was fully aware of his cognitive limitations.

Socrates discovers something similar in the third stage of his examination of σοφία, which concerned the artisans (χειροτέχναι). Socrates recognizes that they possess actual knowledge in a particular domain. They see things clearly in this domain (thus surpassing the ordinary way of seeing them) and this allows them to intervene in reality and do things. If they are inquired about it, they can explain what they do and why (even if they do not know everything about physics, biology, or whatever other science is relevant for the things they deal with). They are not in a trance. They possess a form of σοφία, or more precisely a τέχνη. It is true that this σοφία is limited to a particular domain – and a modest one at that. It has nothing to do with the most important matters of life (τὰ μέγιστα), which are the object of σοφία in the pre-eminent sense. But still they seem to know more than Socrates and thus to be in a better than him.

However, Socrates noticed that artisans do not see their σοφία as something limited and humble. Because of their limited knowledge, they also fancy themselves wise in other

¹⁵⁵ In *Meno*, Plato actually compares the statesmen with poets and prophets and say that they all act in virtue of divine inspiration (which is what gives them a correct judgment) and not because they possess knowledge. See 96e ff., and especially 99c-d. For more on this passage and the distinction between ὀρθὴ δόξα and knowledge, cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.3 below.

¹⁵⁶ See 22c: “(...) καὶ ἅμα ἡσθόμην αὐτῶν διὰ τὴν ποιήσιν οἰομένων καὶ τᾶλλα σοφωτάτων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἃ οὐκ ἦσαν.”

matters – and particularly in the most important ones. They thus make the same mistake (ἀμάρτημα) the poets did and this fault (πλημμέλεια) conceals the knowledge they effectively have.¹⁵⁷ They erroneously think they have a homogeneous understanding of things that allows them to govern everything.¹⁵⁸ In other words, their cognitive state is also a mixture of σοφία with its opposite, which now consists in effectively knowing some things and falsely thinking one knows all others, or at least the most important. The structure of this false σοφία is similar to the ones that characterized the poets, though in the latter case the domain of knowledge and the domain of ignorance were closer to each other (insofar as their compositions, which they did know how to do, talked about things they did not know). Here the two domains are more separate and their knowledge is firmer (since it is more independent from what they do not know), even if their vain conceit of knowledge is equally vast.

The result of the examination of σοφοί is thus very disappointing and turns the ordinary appraisal of σοφία upside down. Those that would initially seem the most lacking (ἐνδεεῖς) and paltry (φαυλότεροι), because they deal only with handicrafts, are in fact the wisest within the πόλις. They are in a more decent state (ἐπιεικέστεροι) with respect to being lucid (φρονίμως ἔχειν).¹⁵⁹ In turn, those that seemed the wisest (because they were primarily occupied with the most important matters – particularly the government of the πόλις) had nothing more than a false knowledge claim. In sum, none of the reputed σοφοί turned out to possess a superlative knowledge (that is, a knowledge in the domain of the most important things). The only kind of knowledge Socrates was able to find was very insignificant. Moreover, the reputed σοφοί lacked any idea of their own cognitive state and also any notion of what actual knowledge would correspond to.

This is what Socrates found by examining those that stand out in the πόλις in terms of knowledge. But what about the other people in the πόλις? Socrates does not say much about them at this stage, but we can infer from what was said that they at least think they can identify who is wise and has some special knowledge that may guide them in the different circumstances of life. Moreover, as will be shown later, they have some general outlook on life (even if hazy and received from others). In this sense, the results of Socrates’

¹⁵⁷ See 22d-e: “ἀλλ’, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ταῦτόν μοι ἔδοξαν ἔχειν ἀμάρτημα ὅπερ καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ δημιουργοὶ – διὰ τὸ τὴν τέχνην καλῶς ἐξεργάζεσθαι ἕκαστος ἡζίου καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ μέγιστα σοφώτατος εἶναι – καὶ αὐτῶν αὕτη ἢ πλημμέλεια ἐκείνην τὴν σοφίαν ἀποκρύπτειν (...)”

¹⁵⁸ This is particularly relevant in the context of Athenian democracy, in which artisans took an important role, but Socrates is actually describing something that may apply to all of us.

¹⁵⁹ See 22a: “(...) οἱ μὲν μάλιστα εὐδοκμοῦντες ἔδοξάν μοι ὀλίγου δεῖν τοῦ πλείστου ἐνδεεῖς εἶναι ζητοῦντι κατὰ τὸν θεόν, ἄλλοι δὲ δοκοῦντες φαυλότεροι ἐπιεικέστεροι εἶναι ἄνδρες πρὸς τὸ φρονίμως ἔχειν.”

examination also apply to them. Socrates discovers something not only about the reputed σοφοί, but about all Athenians and probably all that lead an unexamined life. In general, we are all full of false knowledge claims, and the fact that is so is essential to understand the importance of philosophical examination.

b) The annoyance of the supposed σοφοί

The series of examinations just described revealed to Socrates the state the others were in.¹⁶⁰ But Socrates does not just observe from a distance the bad cognitive state of others, without interfering in their lives and affecting them. These people have no idea of how far they are from knowing what they believed they knew. So Socrates tries to reveal to them their cognitive state.¹⁶¹ He tries to wake them up from their false σοφία. In fact, by examining the reputed σοφοί, Socrates ends up unmasking their false knowledge claims – i.e., he refutes, exposes and shames them.¹⁶² Therefore, his examination is far from being innocuous. It is described as infliction of pain on others (λυπεῖν).¹⁶³ This pain results from the fact that Socrates' examination attacks something that the others are very fond of – to wit, their self-image and their public image. They want to be admired by their knowledge and it is precisely their love of honor (φιλοτιμία) that causes them to resent Socrates.¹⁶⁴

Being examined by Socrates left them annoyed and irritated. They were not able to endure Socrates' ways of passing the time (διατριβαί) and discussions (λόγοι). In fact, these things became too much of a burden (βαρύτεραι) and the cause of ill-will (ἐπιφθονώτεραι).¹⁶⁵ Philosophical examination is indeed something very cumbersome and violent, and to make matters worse, the young that followed Socrates took pleasure in these examinations and started imitating him. They examined other people, who would then blame Socrates and get

¹⁶⁰ The text says that he perceives it (αἰσθάνεσθαι, 21e3 and 22c5), which expresses how evident the result of the examination appears to Socrates. In fact, the examination not only raises suspicion about people's knowledge claims, but it also renders their lack of knowledge patent – or, as Socrates says in 23d: “(...) κατάδηλοι γίνονται προσποιούμενοι μὲν εἰδέναι, εἰδότες δὲ οὐδέν.”)

¹⁶¹ Socrates mentions several times that he shows or exhibits to others their lack of wisdom. See 21c: “(...) κάπειτα ἐπειρώμην αὐτῶν δεικνύναι ὅτι οἴοιτο μὲν εἶναι σοφός, εἶη δ' οὐ.” See also 23b: “(...) καὶ ἐπειδάν μοι μὴ δοκῆ, τῷ θεῷ βοηθῶν ἐνδείκνυμαι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι σοφός”.

¹⁶² This is precisely expressed by the term ἔλεγχος, which we will consider below (see Chap. 4, Sect. 2.2 and Chap. 8).

¹⁶³ See 41e3.

¹⁶⁴ Socrates briefly refers to φιλοτιμία in 23d, but it is actually a very important constituent of the unexamined life, as we will see.

¹⁶⁵ See 37c: “(...) ὑμεῖς μὲν ὄντες πολῖταί μου οὐχ οἴοί τε ἐγένεσθε ἐνεγκεῖν τὰς ἐμὰς διατριβάς καὶ τοὺς λόγους, ἀλλ' ὑμῖν βαρύτεραι γεγόνασιν καὶ ἐπιφθονώτεραι, ὥστε ζητεῖτε αὐτῶν νυνὶ ἀπαλλαγῆναι (...).”

angry at him.¹⁶⁶ Thus Socrates' examination of the alleged σοφοί became the cause of many hatreds (ἀπέχθειαι), which he further qualifies as very hard and difficult to bear.¹⁶⁷

In Socrates' view, these hatreds were the source of the old accusations against him.¹⁶⁸ People started saying that Socrates disturbed life and inspired the young to do the same. He refuted what seemed the best λόγοι and rendered the weaker ones stronger. This was taken to be a manipulation. Socrates wanted to make others look bad or cause them harm. He declared he knew nothing, but those who were refuted thought that he had to have some knowledge about the matters being discussed, which allowed him to refute others.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, he would know how to trick others into contradicting themselves, and he would also impart this knowledge to the young that followed him. Socrates points precisely in this direction. He states that when the people that accused Socrates of wrong doing were inquired about it and had to explain who Socrates was and what he knew, they would take refuge in the stock accusations against intellectuals (for lack of anything more specific) and say that he practiced rhetoric and natural science, and so nothing was sacred for him.¹⁷⁰ In doing so, they were looking at Socrates' activity from the outside, and not from the angle Socrates himself regarded it.

But were they all that distant from the truth? As was already mentioned, Socrates' examination does have some resemblance to rhetoric and perhaps even to natural philosophy. It goes against the regular course of life, insofar as it puts everything in question and destroys one's confidence in the way one was living. It attacks individuals and public life, thereby altering the usual configuration of life. In this sense, it is an attack on traditional values, by showing that they are based on false knowledge claims. Socrates' description of his own activity thus seems to confirm the accusation – at least to a certain extent. However, Socrates also says that he is accused by others not because he attacks their life, but because he exposes their ignorance and they get angry at that. Their true motivations are personal.

Philosophical examination is indeed difficult to bear when one is full of false knowledge claims. Life is under attack and one will inevitably strive to get rid of it.¹⁷¹ But as

¹⁶⁶ See 23c.

¹⁶⁷ See 22e-23a: “ἐκ ταυτησὶ δὴ τῆς ἐξετάσεως, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πολλοὶ μὲν ἀπέχθειά μοι γεγόνασι καὶ οἷα χαλεπώταται καὶ βαρύτερα (...).” For more references to this hatred, see 21d1, 21e2 and 21e4.

¹⁶⁸ See *ibidem*: “(...) ὥστε πολλὰς διαβολὰς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν γεγονέναι, ὄνομα δὲ τοῦτο λέγεσθαι, σοφὸς εἶναι (...).”

¹⁶⁹ See 23a: “(...) οἴονται γὰρ με ἐκάστοτε οἱ παρόντες ταῦτα αὐτὸν εἶναι σοφὸν ἢ ἂν ἄλλον ἐξελέγξω.”

¹⁷⁰ See 23d: “(...) λέγουσιν ὡς Σωκράτης τίς ἐστὶ μιαιώτατος καὶ διαφθείρει τοὺς νέους· καὶ ἐπειδὴν τις αὐτοῦς ἐρωτᾷ ὅτι ποιῶν καὶ ὅτι διδάσκων, ἔχουσι μὲν οὐδὲν εἰπεῖν ἀλλ’ ἀγνοοῦσιν, ἵνα δὲ μὴ δοκῶσιν ἀπορεῖν, τὰ κατὰ πάντων τῶν φιλοσοφούντων πρόχειρα ταῦτα λέγουσιν, ὅτι ‘τὰ μετέωρα καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς’ καὶ ‘θεοὺς μὴ νομίζειν’ καὶ ‘τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρεῖττω ποιεῖν.’”

¹⁷¹ At 37d2, Socrates speaks precisely of a ζητεῖν ἀπαλλαγῆναι.

Socrates stresses, there is more than one way of releasing oneself from the unpleasantness of being examined and having one's ignorance revealed. One may get angry at the one doing the examination and try to repel it, but Socrates talks of another possibility or a different direction for one's anger. It can indeed be directed at oneself for being in such a state, for which the examiner and the examination are not responsible. In that case, the release from the attack requires one to become the best possible (i.e., to find knowledge or at least be aware of one's ignorance). According to Socrates, this is the most admirable and easiest release (καλλίστη καὶ ῥάστη), whereas the other is not just ignoble, but even impossible, since it is no real release.¹⁷² One will continue in a bad state, even if one has no clear notion of it. In fact, one's unawareness will precisely contribute to remaining in such a state.

The alternative between the two attempts at release is very important for philosophical examination, but it is not very clear what determines the direction of one's frustration or irritation. There is indeed some attachment to one's knowledge claims (the semblance of wisdom) and how we guide our life – and this closes us to philosophical examination. We do not admit the possibility that we do not know and thus we are closed to other possibilities of seeing things. This being the case, there seems to be only one interpretation or one possible reaction to what happens. The examinee thinks there is nothing wrong with him or her (since he or she is convinced of knowing all that matters). Any discomfort is therefore the examiner's fault.

In sum, the very anger and accusations against Socrates are an expression precisely of this and of how strong and stubborn our knowledge claims normally are. If any other reaction is to take place, it seems necessary to remove these knowledge claims first. Only then will one be flexible enough to search for a different release from the discomfort. But how can they actually be removed? Socrates does not say in the *Apology*, but we can find some indications in other texts.¹⁷³

1.3. The deciphering of the oracle and the discovery of human σοφία

As we saw, the oracle declared that no one was wiser than Socrates, but such a declaration is far from having a clear meaning. How can there be no one wiser than Socrates? What does that say about the others? And what does it say about Socrates? Is he the wisest

¹⁷² See 39d: “οὐ γάρ ἐσθ’ αὐτῆ ἢ ἀπαλλαγῆ οὔτε πάνυ δυνατῆ οὔτε καλῆ, ἀλλ’ ἐκείνη καὶ καλλίστη καὶ ῥάστη, μὴ τοὺς ἄλλους κολοῦειν ἀλλ’ ἐαυτὸν παρασκευάζειν ὅπως ἔσται ὡς βέλτιστος.”

¹⁷³ Cp. Chap. 8 below.

then? How can this be? How can Socrates be the quintessence of wisdom? How are we to conceive this wisdom? According to the ordinary sense of the word (either in the general or in the pre-eminent sense), the oracle seemed a nonsense. Socrates has no extraordinary knowledge. If anything, he seems to have less knowledge than anyone else. He disavows knowledge and has no special knowledge claim. He knows nothing about more trivial matters (such as handicrafts) and much less about the most important questions (τὰ μέγιστα). This is why he decided to put the oracle to the test by examining the reputed σοφοί and, after examining them, Socrates appears to have continued being as ignorant as before. He acquired no expert knowledge of any kind. He only realized the bad cognitive state the others found themselves in. And yet he was praised by the god for his σοφία.

What does he have that they do not? They all lack superlative knowledge (and the artisans even have some expert knowledge). But there is a significant difference: Socrates has no claim to σοφία, no knowledge claim in important matters. In this sense, he is wiser. He knows as much as the statesmen and, despite knowing less than the poets and the artisans, he does not commit the same error they commit. He is better off, as he says, for having neither their knowledge nor their stupidity (ἀμαθία).¹⁷⁴ Their lack (ἔνδεια) is greater than Socrates', since they do not realize what they should realize – namely, that they do not possess knowledge of what matters the most. There is an undeniable gain in Socrates' condition. Despite being a negative state (a state of lack), it has a positive character in comparison with the state of the reputed σοφοί.

So we begin to understand the new concept of σοφία the oracle is alluding to. It is based on the awareness that there is more than simply knowing and simply not knowing something. There are also knowledge claims and the disavowal of knowledge. The former can coexist with ignorance, in which case it is an ignorance disguised of σοφία, and is worse than disavowing one's knowledge, in which case one is at least aware of one's cognitive state and also of the fact that something important eludes one's grasp. This constitutes still another intertwining of σοφία with its opposite, but now one is aware of it. The component of ignorance is not disguised.

But can such a state be described as σοφία? Socrates recognizes that it is a sort of σοφία.¹⁷⁵ There is something out of the ordinary (ἄλλοῖον, περιττότερον) in this awareness of

¹⁷⁴ See 22e: “(...) ὥστε με ἐμαυτὸν ἀνερωτᾶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ χρησιμοῦ πότερα δεξαίμην ἂν οὕτως ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν, μήτε τι σοφὸς ὢν τὴν ἐκείνων σοφίαν μήτε ἀμαθὴς τὴν ἀμαθίαν, ἢ ἀμφοτέρω ἀ ἐκείνοι ἔχουσιν ἔχειν. ἀπεκρινάμην οὖν ἐμαυτῷ καὶ τῷ χρησιμῷ ὅτι μοι λυσιτελοῖ ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν.”

¹⁷⁵ See 20d: “ἐγὼ γάρ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, δι’ οὐδὲν ἄλλ’ ἢ διὰ σοφίαν τινὰ τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ἔσχηκα.”

one's ignorance, or something that lies beyond the common perceptions (κοινὰ αἰσθήσεις). The surplus is actually very small.¹⁷⁶ It does not consist in any positive knowledge about some domain of reality and much less about τὰ μέγιστα. Yet, it allows Socrates to be in a better state than everybody else. It may seem absurd to the other Athenians and to us that someone who has no real knowledge might be wiser than all others – especially given the fact that we tend to believe we and other people know many things. But even if we recognize that this is not the case (and even if we acknowledge that the alleged σοφοί do not know anything special), it is still difficult for us to conceive that Socrates is wiser than anybody else, given the fact that he repeatedly denies having any special knowledge.¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, we tend to interpret the oracle in a weak sense: everybody knows nothing (i.e., no one is wiser than anyone else) and so Socrates is in no better condition than the others. It is indeed difficult for us to understand how a conscious lack of knowledge can be a privilege and an extraordinary state.

But Socrates' cognitive state implies a knowledge of his own lack of knowledge – or, as we could also say, a σοφία of his lack of σοφία. This is not just an increase in self-knowledge, but also a negative expansion (to use Kant's expression) with respect to the things he does not know.¹⁷⁸ It allows him to somehow overcome his own cognitive limits and establish a relation with what escapes him or what is beyond him. This relation is one of strong tension towards what one does not know and it is also the closest one can be to σοφία without possessing it. It constitutes a higher degree of lucidity (of φρονίμως ἔχειν). It brings us closer to the truth and mobilizes us to seek it.

In contrast, all other people in the πόλις are in a worse state, because they lose sight of themselves (viz. their real state) and reality. They have no idea of what true wisdom amounts to. They are stagnated, satisfied, and in a state of blameworthy ignorance or stupidity (ἐπονείδιστος ἀμαθία). As we will see, the word “ἀμαθία” denotes an exacerbated form of ignorance – one that is reproachable because one fails to see something that should be entirely within reach. It constitutes a heightened incapacity or inferiority. One should indeed know one does not know, but one fails to see it. Socrates then further stresses this by qualifying this ignorance (or stupidity) as blameworthy.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ See 21d: “(...) ἔοικα γοῦν τούτου γε μικρῶ τι ἀπὸ τούτου σοφώτερος εἶναι (...).”

¹⁷⁷ See 21b, 21d, 22d-e, 23b.

¹⁷⁸ Cp. I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, Berlin, Georg Reimer, 1904, 212 (A256/B312).

¹⁷⁹ Cp. 29b: “καίτοι πῶς οὐκ ἀμαθία ἐστὶν αὕτη ἢ ἐπονείδιστος, ἢ τοῦ οἶεσθαι εἶδέναι ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν;” For more on this notion, see Chap. 7, Sect. 1 below.

Socrates' σοφία consists precisely in having no blameworthy stupidity and thus being closer to true σοφία. However, his state is still something other than full-blown σοφία. It is rather a human σοφία, whereby we have to bear in mind the pejorative sense of ἄνθρωπος in Greek culture. Human beings are frail, exposed to what the day brings (or to fortune), and above all mortal.¹⁸⁰ Likewise, human wisdom is a frail, limited wisdom, and it is contrasted to two superior forms: god's wisdom (i.e., the wisdom of a perfect, infallible, invulnerable being) and the σοφία that is beyond human measure (or beyond human limits – μείζων τις ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον σοφία), which is how Socrates refers to the σοφία the Sophists allegedly possess, since they claim they know and can teach the ἀρετή of the human being and the citizen.¹⁸¹ Whether anyone possesses it or not, Socrates is for sure far from possessing it. His wisdom is “worth little or nothing”.¹⁸² But still, it is a form of knowledge or σοφία, insofar as he knows that he is worth very little or nothing in terms of knowledge. He observes the precept γνῶθι σαυτόν (which is not mentioned, but is implicitly present in the *Apology*): he knows himself and knows his limitations.¹⁸³ The connection between the oracle and the wisdom of Delphi is thus once more manifest. Both stress the frailty of human condition. In the case of the oracle, as was said, more than comparing individuals in terms of knowledge, it says something about human cognitive state – namely, it points to Socrates' cognitive limitations and exalts them as the highest form of knowledge. It is not clear whether or not this is a constitutive limitation of human beings in the sense that no one can ever know more than Socrates. The view of the limitation is itself limited. But at least the ordinary understanding and appraisal of knowledge is replaced by an acute awareness both of its difficulty and of our usual distance from it.

No one is wiser than Socrates because no one is as aware as him of our cognitive state. So he triumphs over all. But it is important to bear in mind the meaning of this triumph. Socrates cannot be satisfied with himself, since he knows nothing. He lacks something essential, something we all need and long for. So he cannot govern his life and the life of others. He is blindfolded and rudderless. His human σοφία is a violent and disturbing experience. Human σοφία is not a sustainable state or a final destination. It points beyond itself. One may be surprised at this, given Socrates' serenity and all his certainties. He is sure

¹⁸⁰ For more on the matter, cp. the introduction to Part II below.

¹⁸¹ The wisdom of god is presupposed in 21b and confirmed in 23a. For the alleged σοφία of the Sophists, see 20d-e.

¹⁸² See 23a: “(...) ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία ὀλίγου τινὸς ἀξία ἐστὶν καὶ οὐδενός.”

¹⁸³ “Knowing oneself” implied precisely knowing one's place, one's faults, one's limitations, and it was a warning against an overestimation of oneself and against overreaching. For more on this, see e.g. E. WILKINS, “*Know Thyself*” in *Greek and Latin Literature*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Libraries, 1917.

about his task and its usefulness. But, at the same time, his words also imply that he is in a state of restlessness, marked by a strong desire of the knowledge he does not have. He says he is better off, but he never says his state is perfect or easy to be in. It is just preferable to others.

If this is so, we could then wonder whether he is really better off. Is his state something desirable for us? This question may be essential for our main problem: the value of unexamined life and philosophical examination. The latter is indeed what allows us to achieve the state of conscious ignorance – and it may fail to lead to anything beyond it (i.e., to an actual knowledge of things). If so, what is the value of philosophical examination? Does the answer depend on what comes from it (especially whether or not we can ever attain true σοφία)? Or is its value something unconditional, valid even if we achieve nothing more than knowledge of our ignorance? In sum, how desirable is the knowledge of our ignorance and what is the criterion that determines its desirability? And assuming we desire it, is this a permanent and constitutive desire or can it change (or even vanish) in virtue of some yet unspecified factors?

All these questions are raised by Socrates' interpretation of the oracle. He was able to give it meaning and render it unattackable or unimpeachable (ἀνέλεγκτος).¹⁸⁴ In doing so, he developed a new understanding both of knowledge and of human life. But what are the consequences of this new understanding, both for Socrates and for us? What does it entail? This is what Socrates will go on to explain.

2. Socrates' way of life and the problem of care

The episode of the oracle is presented as a defining moment in Socrates' life, for two main reasons. On the one hand, it is the remote cause of the accusation. His cross-examination was unpleasant and annoyed others, who started slandering him, and then the slanders ended up causing the lawsuit. On the other hand, Socrates' examination of the oracle is used to justify his practice, and the need to persist in it and not to stop examining. Socrates understood something essential about himself and human life, and this led him to discover his purpose in life – or, more precisely, it outlined a mission and a destiny which were essentially tied to the examination of philosophical claims.

¹⁸⁴ Cp. 22a7-8.

In the end, the oracle and its examination gave him a clear indication or guidance about how he should live. They produced a way of life entirely dedicated to examining himself and others (a βίος ἐξεταστικός, as it were), and this way of life was based on an extraordinary conviction, which resisted even the threat of death. Socrates is convinced of the value of philosophical examination, he became the agent of such an examination, and his defense is thus a defense of philosophical examination and its importance. The fact that he possesses such a conviction may be surprising, given Socrates' disavowal of knowledge, which should produce a state of disorientation. However, the human σοφία carries with it a certain knowledge of how one should guide oneself in life. This appears to be somewhat contradictory and at the end of this Part I we will have to consider it a little better. But first we must consider how Socrates explains his way of life and commitment to it in the excursus that follows his answer to the old and new accusations.

2.1. The examination (ἐξέτασις) as personal mission and destiny

As was said, in the process of examining and deciphering the oracle, Socrates understood something essential about himself and life, and this understanding also gave him a clear indication of what to do. More specifically, it showed him the importance of what he did to interpret the oracle. Therefore, he kept going through the city searching for and examining (ζητεῖν, ἐρευνᾶν, pursuing) those that he thought might be σοφοί, he put their semblance of wisdom to the test and, in case it failed the test, he tried to show to these people that they were not wise, so that he could replace their apparent σοφία with the human σοφία that was characteristic of him.¹⁸⁵ The goal is to make them realize the state they are in – since this frees them from illusions, and thus brings them to a better state.

The task of interpreting the oracle thus becomes a full time job.¹⁸⁶ Examining is his business and occupation, and it takes up all his time.¹⁸⁷ As he says, he spends his time in this pursuit (ἐν ταύτῃ τῷ ζητήσῃ διατριβεῖν, 28c8) and does not stop a minute in life (ἐν τῷ βίῳ οὐκ ἡσυχίαν ἤγον, 36b6). He promises that as long as he breathes and is able, he will not stop

¹⁸⁵ Cp. 23b: “ταῦτ’ οὖν ἐγὼ μὲν ἔτι καὶ νῦν περιῶν ζητῶ καὶ ἐρευνῶ κατὰ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τῶν ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων ἄν τινα οἶμαι σοφὸν εἶναι· καὶ ἐπειδὴν μοι μὴ δοκῆ, τῷ θεῷ βοηθῶν ἐνδείκνυμαι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι σοφός.”

¹⁸⁶ According to the inner logic of the text, and as was briefly discussed above (see footnote 137), this does not mean he did not examine himself and others before. The text does not say it one way or the other. We can suppose that he obtained the knowledge of his ignorance by this kind of self-examination. But this did not involve a clear notion of what ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία is and of its value. The examination of the oracle gave him a confirmation of his standpoint and of the importance of examination.

¹⁸⁷ Socrates says it is a πράγμα (20c), an ἐπιτήδευμα (28b), and an ἀσχολία (23b).

doing it (ἕωσπερ ἄν ἐμπνέω καὶ οἶός τε ᾧ, οὐ μὴ παύσωμαι, 29d4f.). He also qualifies this as a πολυπραγμονεῖν (31c5) – i.e., a way of occupying himself with things that do not concern him directly or of meddling in other people’s affairs.¹⁸⁸ His dedication and commitment are absolute, and they outline an entire way of living (βίος). He leads a life of philosophical examination or a philosophical life.

According to Socrates, the need for such a strong dedication to examining others was shown by the oracle and, therefore, he sees it as a mission delivered by the god. To examine is to obey and serve the god at Delphi.¹⁸⁹ A transcendent being ordered him to do so and, in fact not only via the oracle, but (as he later adds) also through signs such as dreams and other forms of divine communication that he leaves unspecified.¹⁹⁰ The foundation is thus initially religious. But Socrates does not follow these signs blindly. He interprets them rationally and tries to see the meaning behind them. In doing so, he examines others and also himself – and ends up confirming the meaning of the oracle. Likewise, we can also confirm it in ourselves, using only rational means. We already saw some features of the unexamined life that Socrates recognized and helped him confirm the oracle, and we will consider more. Thus, even if Socrates’ understanding came from a divinity (and a very particular divinity, namely the god at Delphi, that stresses the distance between humans and gods), it should still be regarded as much more than a private religious experience. Socrates extracts from it an understanding of life and, based on it, constitutes a new kind of religion or piety, which is ultimately tied to the importance of philosophical examination. He undertakes such an examination and tries to spread it to others, who should subject themselves to it and (as will become more and more manifest) even imitate Socrates, thereby adopting a godly given model of action.¹⁹¹

One must, however, be careful with this imitation. Socrates provides the example of the those that imitate him because they take pleasure in exposing other’s false knowledge

¹⁸⁸ The word πολυπραγμονεῖν implies that one does things that one was not supposed to be doing, thus invading the domain of others. It has strong political connotations. In the mouth of an aristocrat, it designates the excessive political ambitions of lower classes. It also designated Athens’ foreign policy and its constant meddling in other state’s affairs. For more on the matter, see e.g. V. EHRENBERG, Polypragmosyne. A Study in Greek Politics, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 67 (1947), 46-67.

¹⁸⁹ Socrates talks of his activity as service, cult, or assistance of the god. Cp. 23c1 (λατρεία) and 30a7 (ὕπηρεσία). At 23b7 he describes his activity as a τῷ θεῷ βοηθεῖν: assisting or helping the god. The verb βοηθεῖν is used in reference to entities (such as gods or πόλεις) that cannot protect their interests in person and thus require agents or instruments. In this case, Apollo needs Socrates to be his instrument and divulge the understanding of σοφία and of human life expressed by the oracle. For more on this, cp. e.g. S. SLINGS, *op. cit.*, 290.

¹⁹⁰ See 33c: “ἔμοι δὲ τοῦτο, ὡς ἐγὼ φημι, προστέτακται ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πράττειν καὶ ἐκ μαντείων καὶ ἐξ ἐνυπνίων καὶ παντὶ τρόπῳ ᾧπέρ τις ποτε καὶ ἄλλη θεία μοῖρα ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ ὀτιοῦν προσέταξε πράττειν.”

¹⁹¹ For more on the religious or rational foundation of Socrates’ undertaking, cp. Chap. 19, Sect. 1 below.

claims.¹⁹² Their activity has only an external resemblance to what Socrates does. They do not understand the meaning of the activity. What is then a true μίμησις of Socrates? In fact, such an imitation would require the young to become like him. They would have to incorporate his attitude and outlook on life. Socrates is not moved by an iconoclastic furor and he is not pursuing pleasure. He avoids making any knowledge claims. He is only interested in σοφία and its pursuit. He is dominated by φιλοσοφεῖν in the strongest sense of the word, which is (as we shall see) a strong form of attachment to (or even obsession with) knowledge.¹⁹³ He understands that he has no knowledge and needs to have it. He also understands that others are full of false knowledge claims, and he wants to show them that they are not in the condition in which they think they are. In doing so, he also tries to incite them to pursue knowledge. This is Socrates' orientation in life or his way of life. He examines himself and others, so that they may all better pursue knowledge or wisdom.¹⁹⁴

2.2. The value of examination *vis-à-vis* the risk of dying because of it

In 28bff., in order to further elucidate his understanding of human life and of the importance of philosophical examination, Socrates imagines the jurors asking him if he is not ashamed of having dedicated himself to an activity that may lead him to death.¹⁹⁵ His dedication to philosophical examination is thereby put face to face with the risks that may ensue for him – and in fact with what seems to be the highest risk, death, along with the shame of being responsible for it and not being able to assist oneself.¹⁹⁶ The question is thus a

¹⁹² See 23c: “πρὸς δὲ τούτοις οἱ νέοι μοι ἐπακολουθοῦντες – οἷς μάλιστα σχολή ἐστίν, οἱ τῶν πλουσιωτάτων – αὐτόματοι, χαίρουσιν ἀκούοντες ἐξεταζομένων τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ αὐτοὶ πολλάκις ἐμὲ μιμοῦνται, εἶτα ἐπιχειροῦσιν ἄλλους ἐξετάζειν (...).” See also 33c: “(...) ἀκούοντες χαίρουσιν ἐξεταζομένοις τοῖς οἰομένοις μὲν εἶναι σοφοῖς, οὔσι δ’ οὐ. ἔστι γὰρ οὐκ ἀηδὲς.”

¹⁹³ Cp. in particular Chap. 13, Sect. 3.3.

¹⁹⁴ In fact, such description still fails to account for something that is not very clear in Socrates' words – namely, how his personal pursuit of wisdom (which would be the natural result of his conscious ignorance) relates to his role in the πόλις – i.e., with his examination of others. Both things seem compatible and deeply interconnected, if only because he may try to learn from others when he is examining them. But in his defense speech Socrates does not articulate this interconnection very clearly and rather emphasizes the importance of his activity for others and the πόλις at large, which is precisely what is at issue in the trial. Therefore, we will likewise leave aside the question of how self-examination relates to the examination of others, but we will return to it later. See Chap. 19, Sect. 5.

¹⁹⁵ “Εἴτ’ οὐκ αἰσχρὴν, ὦ Σώκратες, τοιοῦτον ἐπιτήδευμα ἐπιτηδεύσας ἐξ οὗ κινδυνεύεις νυνὶ ἀποθανεῖν;”

¹⁹⁶ We find a more elaborate version of this question in *Grg.* 486a-c, in a passage that foreshadows the trial of Socrates. Callicles asks Socrates: “(...) οὐκ αἰσχρὸν δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς ἐγὼ σὲ οἶμαι ἔχειν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς πόρρω ἀεὶ φιλοσοφίας ἐλαύνοντας; νῦν γὰρ εἴ τις σοῦ λαβόμενος ἢ ἄλλου ὅτουσιν τῶν τοιούτων εἰς τὸ δεσποτήριον ἀπάγοι, φάσκων ἀδικεῖν μηδὲν ἀδικοῦντα, οἷσθ’ ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ἔχοις ὅτι χρήσαιο σαυτῶ, ἀλλ’ ἰλιγγιώης ἂν καὶ χασμῶ οὐκ ἔχων ὅτι εἶποις, καὶ εἰς τὸ δικαστήριον ἀναβὰς, κατηγοροῦ τυχὼν πάνυ φαύλου καὶ μοχθηροῦ, ἀποθάνοις ἂν, εἰ βούλοιο θανάτου σοι τιμᾶσθαι. καίτοι πῶς σοφὸν τοῦτο ἐστίν, ὦ Σώκратες,

test of Socrates' conviction and of the way he leads his life. Will he carry on examining only as long as nothing serious is at stake, as a sort of pastime, and sing a different tune when his own life is at risk? No, he says. The risk of dying changes nothing. Socrates does not waver.¹⁹⁷ He faces the risk of dying with confidence and serenity. Later he will also emphasize that he will not beg nor do everything to escape the accusations.¹⁹⁸ He is willing to die for the principles that ruled his life (which in fact renders even more pressing the problem to which we already alluded, concerning the status of Socrates' beliefs).

But Socrates does not simply reaffirm his commitment. He also examines (and even attacks) what is frequently regarded as one of the greatest fears (if not the greatest fear) in life – the fear of dying. We all experience it somehow and it may determine our lives in different ways (even if only tacitly). Socrates, however, will introduce meaningful and deep changes in our usual perspective on death. These changes are based on the previously considered changes in the conception of σοφία, and they are brought about in two fronts.

First, Socrates resorts to the aristocratic categories of honor and shame in order to determine what is shameful or not. He starts by distinguishing two kinds of calculation or concern (ὕπολογίζεσθαι), directed at two different goals, and that may determine one's action and perhaps even one's entire life. On the one hand, one may take into account the risk or danger, being thus concerned primarily with being alive and surviving. On the other hand, one may observe and examine (σκοπεῖν) whether what we do is just or unjust, and whether it is a deed of a good or a bad man.¹⁹⁹

“ἥτις εὐφυῆ λαβοῦσα τέχνη φῶτα ἔθηκε χείρονα”, μήτε αὐτὸν αὐτῷ δυνάμενον βοηθεῖν μηδ' ἐκσῶσαι ἐκ τῶν μεγίστων κινδύνων μήτε ἑαυτὸν μήτε ἄλλον μηδένα, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἐχθρῶν περισυλᾶσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οὐσίαν, ἀτεχνῶς δὲ ἄτιμον ζῆν ἐν τῇ πόλει; τὸν δὲ τοιοῦτον, εἴ τι καὶ ἀγροικότερον εἰρησθαι, ἔξεστιν ἐπὶ κόρρησ τύπτοντα μὴ διδόναι δίκην.”

¹⁹⁷ In this sense, Socrates answers to the imaginary challenge of the jurors the same way he answers Crito, when the latter tries to convince him to break out from jail. See *Cri.* 46b-c: “τοὺς δὲ λόγους οὓς ἐν τῷ ἔμπροσθεν ἔλεγον οὐ δύναμαι νῦν ἐκβαλεῖν, ἐπειδὴ μοι ἤδε ἡ τύχη γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ σχεδόν τι ὅμοιοι φαίνονται μοι, καὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς πρεσβεύω καὶ τιμῶ οὕσπερ καὶ πρότερον· ὧν ἐὰν μὴ βελτίω ἔχωμεν λέγειν ἐν τῷ παρόντι, εὖ ἴσθι ὅτι οὐ μὴ σοι συγχωρήσω, οὐδ' ἂν πλείω τῶν νῦν παρόντων ἢ τῶν πολλῶν δύναμις ὥσπερ παιδᾶς ἡμᾶς μορμολύττηται, δεσμοὺς καὶ θανάτους ἐπιπέμπουσα καὶ χρημάτων ἀφαιρέσεις.”

¹⁹⁸ See 34c ff.

¹⁹⁹ See 28b: “(...) ἐγὼ δὲ τούτῳ ἂν δίκαιον λόγον ἀντεῖποιμι, ὅτι ‘οὐ καλῶς λέγεις, ὦ ἄνθρωπε, εἰ οἶε δεῖν κίνδυνον ὑπολογίζεσθαι τοῦ ζῆν ἢ τεθνάναι ἄνδρα ὅτου τι καὶ σμικρὸν ὄφελός ἐστιν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκεῖνο μόνον σκοπεῖν ὅταν πράττη, πότερον δίκαια ἢ ἄδικα πράττει, καὶ ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἔργα ἢ κακοῦ.’” It is very important to bear in mind that the notions of “justice” and “goodness” do not have a primarily ethical and much less normative sense. Their meaning is rather functional. Both terms refer to an inner standard of a particular being, which defines how this being should be. As we noted above (see footnote 83), δίκαιον designates what is fitting or proper, how things should be. Goodness, in turn, is connected with excellence (ἀρετή) and with fulfilling one's task in the best way possible. For more on the notions of ἀγαθόν and κακόν, see Chap. 12, Sect. 3.1 below.

These two concerns may be in conflict at decisive moments of one's life, and the way one solves the conflict will not only shape one's life, but according to Socrates and the aristocratic categories he appeals to, it will also determine the value of such a life. The natural tendency is to be more concerned with survival, but it is possible to invert one's natural priorities and shift the emphasis towards what is just and good. Socrates provides the example of Achilles, who was given the choice between death and dishonor, and decided to die in honor.²⁰⁰ This is precisely what Socrates will do. He will behave like one of the most admired Greek heroes. Of course, there are marked differences between Achilles and Socrates – or between what both take to be just and good. It is not even clear that Achilles was moved by the concern with what was best. Rather, his action seems to have been motivated by anger or pride. If anything, the comparison with Achilles raises the question about what is truly valuable and admirable. For Socrates, what really matters is philosophical examination. This is what a good and just human being should do. It is what is truly valuable, or at least it is intrinsically referred to what is truly valuable: σοφία. Therefore, it is not shameful, but rather honorable and admirable, to sacrifice everything for it.

Socrates then uses some military images in order to show the importance of paying no attention to danger in certain circumstances. He declares as a rule that one should remain and endure where one was ordered to stay, either because one thought that was better, or because some superior ordered it.²⁰¹ The verb used is τάττω, which has the sense of giving an order, assignment or post, but also of giving order to something, disposing it in the best way. It is part of military language and the comparison with what happens in the army is very relevant here. The Greek army's strength (and thus the survival of the state) depends on each soldier staying at his post. Only so can one secure a free and good life. Socrates is thus referring to a kind of duty whose particular content may well be given from the outside (by someone superior) or be identified within (what seems better), but is at any rate directed to what is good.

²⁰⁰ See 28c-d: “(...) ὁ τῆς Θέτιδος υἱός, ὃς τοσοῦτον τοῦ κινδύνου κατεφρόνησεν παρὰ τὸ αἰσχρὸν τι ὑπομεῖναι ὥστε, ἐπειδὴ εἶπεν ἢ μήτηρ αὐτῷ προθυμουμένῳ Ἔκτορα ἀποκτεῖναι, θεὸς οὐσα, οὕτωςί πως, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι· ‘ὦ παῖ, εἰ τιμωρήσεις Πατρόκλῳ τῷ ἐταίρῳ τὸν φόνον καὶ Ἔκτορα ἀποκτενεῖς, αὐτὸς ἀποθανῆ – αὐτίκα γάρ τοι,’ φησί, ‘μεθ’ Ἔκτορα πότμος ἐτοῖμος’ – ὁ δὲ τοῦτο ἀκούσας τοῦ μὲν θανάτου καὶ τοῦ κινδύνου ὠλιγόρησε, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον δείσας τὸ ζῆν κακὸς ὢν καὶ τοῖς φίλοις μὴ τιμωρεῖν, ‘αὐτίκα,’ φησί, ‘τεθναίην, δίκην ἐπιθείς τῷ ἀδικοῦντι, ἵνα μὴ ἐνθάδε μένω καταγέλαστος παρὰ νηυσὶ κορωνίσιν ἄχθος ἀρούρης.’ μὴ αὐτὸν οἶε φροντίσαι θανάτου καὶ κινδύνου;”

²⁰¹ See 28d: “οὐδ’ ἂν τις ἑαυτὸν τάξῃ ἡγησάμενος βέλτιστον εἶναι ἢ ὑπ’ ἄρχοντος ταχθῆ, ἐνταῦθα δεῖ, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, μένοντα κινδυνεύειν, μηδὲν ὑπολογιζόμενον μήτε θάνατον μήτε ἄλλο μηδὲν πρὸ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ.”

Socrates then appeals to his own experience. In the army, he stayed at his post and did not leave it. He followed his orders. But he also received an order from a superior authority: the god. Guided by the oracle, he understood how life itself required philosophical examination and that he should spend life philosophizing and examining himself and others.²⁰² He must thus obey the god and the understanding of life revealed by his oracle. He must pursue σοφία and examine. This is the supreme value in life and Socrates' worth (as well as everyone else's) hinges on it. It is by examining that one becomes just, good, and even pious. Therefore, Socrates does not flinch in the pursuit of it, and the resoluteness, persistence and courage (καρτερία) he shows will actually lend an arrogant tone to his defense. He fears nothing more than failing in his fundamental task – and the jurors cannot scare him in any way. If he is condemned to death, he has nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary: what is worthless, unacceptable, shameful is a life without examination. By leading such a life, he would not be doing what is just or the deed of a good man. The right thing to do is to pursue the knowledge one lacks, and this pursuit must determine one's relation to oneself and to others. Socrates thus redefines the ordinary conceptions of shamefulness, justice and goodness. Other people will not examine and they will rebuke Socrates for doing so, but they do not realize that examining is the just or good thing to do. They think their life is valuable without philosophical examination and that one does not need it to live well. But for Socrates it is not so. They all need philosophical examination more than anything else.

This is one of the ways Socrates attacks the innate and seemingly obvious conviction that makes us fear death and explains why he must perform philosophical examinations. But there is another form of attack – which is actually a counterattack of philosophical examination. Socrates imagined the jurors, as representatives of the unexamined life, trying to cast doubt over the commitment to philosophical examination by invoking his fear of dying. But philosophical examination retorts by calling into question the very fear of dying. Socrates points out that at the core of this fear is a particular view or knowledge claim (a οἶσθαι σοφὸς εἶναι or a οἶσθαι εἰδέναι) about the value of death (more precisely, about death carrying with it the greatest evils – ἔσχατα κακῶν, 40a8). But this view or knowledge claim has no real basis. Though Socrates does not fully explain it here, the value of death depends on two things: what happens after death and the value of life. We must have a view

²⁰² See 28e: “(…) τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τάπτοντος, ὡς ἐγὼ ᾤηθην τε καὶ ὑπέλαβον, φιλοσοφοῦντά με δεῖν ζῆν καὶ ἐξετάζοντα ἑμαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους (…).” Here, Socrates associates the act of examining (ἐξετάζειν) with loving wisdom (φιλοσοφεῖν), and this is not incidental. As we saw, the examination is a pursuit of knowledge, it examines knowledge claims and it wants to find real knowledge.

on both, but they are both problematic questions. On the one hand, we have no way of knowing what happens after death and so we cannot exclude the possibility of it being a good thing or even the greatest good. On the other hand, our life may also be undesirable or not worth living (even if we do not realize it) and so one would be better off dying.²⁰³ However, we disregard these problems or rather promptly (and acritically) accept the view that death is bad and living is good. This is the cause of our strong feelings about death – and what could lead one to feel ashamed for being sentenced to death. Socrates thus questions the views or beliefs that underpin the question he just put in the mouth of the jurors, and he goes even further. He says that these views or beliefs about death (and about life) constitute a form of blameworthy stupidity (ἀμαθία ἢ ἐπονείδιστος), and it is therefore much more shameful than running risks whose value we do not know.²⁰⁴ So once more Socrates must do what a just and good man would do – namely, he must obey god’s wisdom and, consequently, examine himself and others. Socrates commits himself fully to this line of action and he says he would not abandon his task even if he had to die many times.²⁰⁵ He must obey the god, and be just and good. This is his conception of excellence and also of piety, and he lives according to it.

2.3. The introduction of the question of what one cares for (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) and its importance for philosophical examination

After making clear his commitment to philosophical examination and the way it determines his life, Socrates seems to introduce a significant shift in his conception of philosophical examination. Hitherto Socrates had only talked of an examination of knowledge claims and of the cognitive state of the reputed σοφοί. Now, however, he begins to talk of examining what one cares for. The two versions may not seem immediately compatible, but, as we will see, they do not correspond to two different concepts of examination. The second version is rather a development of what was said before, and it helps us understand the importance of σοφία and also of philosophical examination. Let us then see what is at issue here.

In 29c7f., Socrates speaks once more for the jurors and imagines them making a proposal according to which he will be able to go away unscathed, on the condition that he

²⁰³ In his final speech, Socrates will consider the first of these questions (namely, what may happen after death) and he will also allude to the second. Cp. Chap. 3, Sect. 3 below.

²⁰⁴ The notion of blameworthy ignorance or stupidity was mentioned above (see Sect. 1.3). For a more detailed analysis of it, cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 1 below.

²⁰⁵ See 30b8s.: “(...) ἐμοῦ οὐκ ἂν ποιήσαντος ἄλλα, οὐδ’ εἰ μέλλω πολλάκις τεθνάναι.”

stop spending his time on this pursuit (ζήτησις) of his and stop desiring or pursuing σοφία (φιλοσοφεῖν).²⁰⁶ In other words, the jurors would try to turn Socrates away from his activity and make him compromise. Socrates, however, affirms that he would pay no heed to such an apotrepic effort and reaffirms his will to continue examining and to do so while he breathes and is able.²⁰⁷ Immediately thereafter, Socrates describes what he usually says to the Athenians and thus summarizes the central points of his conversations and examinations. It is precisely at this point that he seems to shift his way of conceiving philosophical examination.

Socrates states that when talking to the Athenians, he contrasts the reputation of the πόλις (the greatest and best reputed for σοφία and strength) with the shame its citizens should feel for how they guide their lives and for what their care or concern (i.e., their ἐπιμελεῖσθαι or φροντίζειν) is directed to.²⁰⁸ At the center of everything is thus one's act of ἐπιμελεῖσθαι and φροντίζειν. These words designate the special way in which one cares for (or concerns oneself with) something that does not happen by itself or is not guaranteed, and thus requires our intervention.²⁰⁹ Such a way of caring is also an expression of how we are not indifferent to what happens to us. Our life can follow different courses and have different contents. It is open and the shape it assumes at any given moment depends on us and what we do. We are called to intervene. We may let life continue as it is or try to improve it, in order to make it better. This is what we normally do. We try to improve our life.²¹⁰

However, there can be multiple directions of care. We may care for different things and in different ways. In fact, we seem to care for many different things at different times,

²⁰⁶ See 29c: “(...) ἀφίμεν σε, ἐπὶ τούτῳ μέντοι, ἐφ’ ὅτε μηκέτι ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ζητήσῃ διατριβεῖν μηδὲ φιλοσοφεῖν.”

²⁰⁷ See 29d: “(...) εἰ οὖν με, ὅπερ εἶπον, ἐπὶ τούτοις ἀφίετε, εἶπομι’ ἂν ὑμῖν ὅτι ‘ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀσπάζομαι μὲν καὶ φιλῶ, πείσομαι δὲ μᾶλλον τῷ θεῷ ἢ ὑμῖν, καὶ ἕωσπερ ἂν ἐμπνέω καὶ οἶός τε ὃ, οὐ μὴ παύσωμαι φιλοσοφῶν καὶ ὑμῖν παρακελευόμενός τε καὶ ἐνδεικνύμενος ὅτῳ ἂν ἀεὶ ἐντυγχάνω ὑμῶν (...).’”

²⁰⁸ See 29d-e: “(...) οὐ μὴ παύσωμαι φιλοσοφῶν καὶ ὑμῖν παρακελευόμενός τε καὶ ἐνδεικνύμενος ὅτῳ ἂν ἀεὶ ἐντυγχάνω ὑμῶν, λέγων οἷάπερ εἶωθα, ὅτι ‘ὃ ἄριστε ἀνδρῶν, Ἀθηναῖος ὢν, πόλεως τῆς μεγίστης καὶ εὐδοκιμωτάτης εἰς σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχύον, χρημάτων μὲν οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ ἐπιμελούμενος ὅπως σοὶ ἔσται ὡς πλεῖστα, καὶ δόξης καὶ τιμῆς, φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς βελτίστη ἔσται οὐκ ἐπιμελῆ οὐδὲ φροντίζεις;’ ”. It is important to keep in mind that Socrates says this at a time in which the greatness of the πόλις had apparently vanished, given its very recent defeat and humiliation in the Peloponnesian War (which, as we saw, was also one of the motives behind the hostility and the process against Socrates). The πόλις had lost its empire and had almost been destroyed. The situation was extremely dire, and the claim to greatness was at this point no more than an empty claim. Therefore the exhortation to make something about it and care for it is very significant. Greatness requires a certain direction of care.

²⁰⁹ The idea of care or concern was already implied in what we considered in the previous section. In certain circumstances, one must be concerned either with one's survival or with justice and goodness. But now Socrates will consider it in a more general way, as something that determines our life at every moment.

²¹⁰ The idea of improving one's life was already present in the notions of σοφία (which was defined as a knowledge able to guide one's life) and παιδεία (which was associated precisely to the idea of improving someone). Σοφία and παιδεία are essential conditions for the improvement implied in ἐπιμέλεια. However, Plato will not expressly focus these links at this point.

though usually there is a general direction that coordinates all efforts. Socrates will focus precisely on the latter. The general direction of our care is not fixed or pre-determined, and so we can change it. But there are only a few general directions to choose from. Socrates does not make a long inventory. He organizes and divides all forms of care into two groups, thereby emphasizing a single juncture. One may either care for one's possessions (χρήματα), body (σῶμα), reputation (δόξα), honor (τιμή). But one may also care for one's intelligence or lucidity (φρόνησις), truth (ἀλήθεια) and the soul being the best possible (βελτίστη, ἀρίστη) – and thus possessing excellence.²¹¹

By making this contrast, Socrates points to the fact that the decisive factor is whether we care for our ψυχή or rather neglect it. But what is the ψυχή? It is not immediately clear what the term means and how it was understood at this time. We will consider its meaning in more detail later, but we can anticipate some important aspects of it now.²¹² Ψυχή is often translated as mind or soul, but both renderings are one-sided. Mind gives the term an excessively cognitive connotation, which applies to some of Plato's uses, but is not by itself contained in the Greek word (which includes at its center a volitive and an emotional component). The term soul in turn seems excessively metaphysical, though it is somewhat apt to designate the mystery of our inner being – and that is precisely what is primarily at issue here. Ψυχή is the core of our being. It is at the center of our life – and in a way it can even be said to be our life as such. As a result, the term raises the question of how it relates not only to itself, but also to other things (and what distinguishes it from them). The soul is indeed a sort of self, but it somehow pervades all other things and renders them relevant for one's self, as things of the self or one's belongings.²¹³ It is, however, difficult to bring the ψυχή into focus. We all have a good idea of what possessions, the body, reputation and honor are – and so it is also clear how we can care for them. But the soul is more difficult to define – and we may not even notice it as something distinct from all other things.

Socrates, however, tries to call the attention to the ψυχή as such and stresses the importance of being aware of it. Indeed, the soul or our inner being is not something absolutely fixed. It can have different modalities, and these modalities have different values. The soul can be bad (κακή) or it can be good and even the best possible – i.e. it can have

²¹¹ Socrates formulates the alternative more than once, and not always the same way. See 29d-30b, 36c, and 41e. He talks of excellence (ἀρετή) in 29e5, 31b5, 41e3-5.

²¹² For more on the notion of ψυχή, cp. Chap. 10.

²¹³ This aspect is clearer in *Alc. I*, where Socrates distinguishes between the self (αὐτός), the belongings of the self (τὰ ἑαυτοῦ – i.e., the body) and the belongings of the belongings of the self (τὰ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ). See 129c ff., and for a consideration of some important aspects of the passage, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 2.1 below.

excellence (αρετή) or not. This alternative is essential, according to Socrates. We are not indifferent to it, because it determines the quality of our life. Moreover, although the soul is not necessarily good, it can improve and become better. It all depends on whether we care for it or not. The alternative between self-care (or care of the soul) and self-neglect affects our whole life. One must make the soul better – and according to Socrates that implies making it more lucid and give it a better access to the truth. Our core depends on its cognitive state and we must care for it, which we do by performing philosophical examination. The latter is thus the way of making us realize the importance of caring for the soul and also the way of caring for it. This is why it is so important.

This is the gist of what Socrates is saying, but it is important to consider some aspects of the question in more detail. To begin, we usually think the quality of our life depends on what we have or what go through, and not on our inner self or the modality of our soul. With respect to the latter, we tend not to see any alternatives. Life can have different contents, but we are always the same. Socrates, however, focus his attention on the soul's state, and more precisely on whether it is in a state of ignorance, and distorts things or has false knowledge claims – or whether it sees things as they are, and has therefore φρόνησις and truth (i.e., whether is marked by εἰδέναι or σοφία). This is essentially connected with our caring for the soul or not. We can neglect it and its relation with φρόνησις and truth, and so we will steer ourselves to something different from φρόνησις and truth. But we can also focus on it and turn our attention to it. Socrates does precisely this and tries to steer others in the same direction. But people are usually turned in a different direction. Other objects seem all-important – such as possessions, body, etc. – and we have no time and no interest to care for knowledge. This does not mean we are complete indifferent to φρόνησις and ἀλήθεια. We still need knowledge, but we already have many knowledge claims, and this is why we live as we do and care for something the way we do. We do not need to care for φρόνησις and ἀλήθεια because supposedly we already have them. We regard our immediate contact with life as clear and evident. We only care for what is beyond this (i.e., that to which our supposed φρόνησις and ἀλήθεια direct us). But this has serious consequences for our life and our soul – and they are revealed by philosophical examination. Our life is characterized by a οὐκ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι ὧν δεῖ and a οὐκ ὀρθῶς ζῆν – even if we do not realize it. We neglect what it important, though we think the opposite. We live in a fundamental state of neglect of ourselves, and consequently we are worth nothing (or, as Socrates says, we are marked by a

οἶεσθαί τι εἶναι ὄντες οὐδενὸς ἄξιοι, 41e7) and our life, as we will see, is not worth living (οὐ βιωτός).

This is, at least, what Socrates defends. But he also knows that it is very difficult for people in general to accept that it is so, and he even describes what he does when others do not accept this kind of accusation. When they deny that it is so and say they care for what matters, Socrates interrogates them, examines them, and puts them to the test.²¹⁴ This seems to be a new kind of examination, no longer of σοφοί or of knowledge claims. The examination is now about one's care – i.e., about what matters and what does not matter to oneself. In other words, it is now a test of one's life (or, as is said later in the *Apology*, an ἔλεγχος τοῦ βίου), which tries to ascertain whether one lives correctly or not.²¹⁵ But this does not mean Socrates abandons the examination of knowledge and only focus on what one does. These are not two different kinds of examination that have nothing to do with each other. They are in fact two sides of the same examination and the new features now introduced are just a deepening of the previous description. The two descriptions focus on two important elements of life that belong together – namely, knowledge and care. We can infer their intrinsic relation from what was said (though it was not clearly stated). On the one hand, care depends on knowledge (or one's knowledge claims). Our way of seeing things is essential to determine how we live and, as we saw, σοφία (or the claims thereof) is primarily about most important things in life (i.e., about what they are and how to reach them). So one tests one's life (and one's way of caring for it) by considering one's views or knowledge claims. Indeed, practical failure is always connected with cognitive failure. On the other hand, our cognitive state depends on care – and not only because practical knowledge is somehow at the center of all knowledge (or all knowledge claims). One's views (and their quality) depend on what we care for. Our caring affects what we see or think, and how we can develop it. There is thus a correlation between our cognitive state and our caring (or the way of life that results from it).

²¹⁴ See 29e: “καὶ ἂν τις ὑμῶν ἀμφισβητήσῃ καὶ φῆ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, οὐκ εὐθὺς ἀφήσω αὐτὸν οὐδ' ἄπειμι, ἀλλ' ἐρήσομαι αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξετάσω καὶ ἐλέγξω (...).”

²¹⁵ See 39c7, and for a more elaborate description of such an examination of one's life, cp. *La.* 187e-188c: “οὐ μοι δοκεῖς εἰδέναι ὅτι ὃς ἂν ἐγγύτατα Σωκράτους ἢ λόγῳ ὥσπερ γένοι καὶ πλησιάσῃ διαλεγόμενος, ἀνάγκη αὐτῷ, ἂν ἄρα καὶ περὶ ἄλλου του πρότερον ἄρξῃται διαλέγεσθαι, μὴ παύεσθαι ὑπὸ τούτου περιαιγόμενον τῷ λόγῳ, πρὶν ἂν ἐμπέσῃ εἰς τὸ διδόναι περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον, ὄντινα τρόπον νῦν τε ζῆ καὶ ὄντινα τὸν παρεληλυθότα βίον βεβίωκεν· ἐπειδὴν δ' ἐμπέσῃ, ὅτι οὐ πρότερον αὐτὸν ἀφήσει Σωκράτης, πρὶν ἂν βασανίσῃ ταῦτα εὖ τε καὶ καλῶς ἅπαντα. (...) ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν οὐδὲν ἄηθες οὐδ' αὖ ἀηδὲς ὑπὸ Σωκράτους βασανίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάσαι σχεδὸν τι ἠπιστάμην ὅτι οὐ περὶ τῶν μαιρακίων ἡμῶν ὁ λόγος ἔσοιτο Σωκράτους παρόντος, ἀλλὰ περὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν.”

In fact, the connection is even more complex, as we will see later, when considering what is said in the whole corpus.²¹⁶

The important thing here is the fact that we usually neglect knowledge – and thus neglect our soul and live incorrectly. Socrates sees this and tries to counteract this movement by shifting the direction of our ἐπιμελεῖσθαι. He tries to awaken in others the desire or pursuit of knowledge or σοφία (i.e., the desire to know or φιλοσοφεῖν). This depends on philosophical examination and it will lead to further examination. Philosophical examination is thus at the core of Socrates' intervention. It puts one's usual life in question and constitutes a new way of life. To examine is indeed the way of steering us towards the care of the soul, and at the same time it is the way to care for it and to make it as good as it can be. Thus, Socrates teaches others to care for themselves, which requires them to imitate him by examining knowledge claims and caring for their soul.

²¹⁶ See the analysis of βίος in Chap. 13, Sect. 6, and especially the analysis of the unexamined life in Chaps. 15 and 16, which illustrates precisely this connection.

CHAPTER 3

The value of philosophical examination

“Τίς νυν ἐσώθη διὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου νίκη; Τίς πόλις ἄμεινον ᾠκήθη; Τίς αὐτοῦ γέγονε βελτίων ιδιώτης ἀνήρ; Πλουσιωτέρους μὲν γὰρ πολλοὺς ἂν εὖροις, σοφώτερον δὲ οὐδένα [καὶ] <οὐδὲ> σωφρονέστερον [οὐδὲ] αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ καὶ μᾶλλον ἀλαζόνα καὶ ὑπερόπτην. Ὅσοι δὲ σώζονται νῦν ἐκ φιλοσοφίας, διὰ τὸν Σωκράτη σώζονται.”

F. Julianus, *Θεμιστίω φιλοσόφῳ*, 264d²¹⁷

We began by considering Socrates’ analysis of the accusations, which expressed how he was seen by others and how philosophical examination appears to the unexamined life. We saw that philosophical examination is basically seen as something superfluous and disruptive. Then we considered Socrates’ self-interpretation, his understanding of philosophical examination and the reasons for his dedication to it. Now we have to tackle a question that emerges in the final part of the first speech and in the other two speeches. After describing his activity, Socrates tries to determine the precise value of philosophical examination. This is indeed the central question of his trial, and though Socrates had already given some important indications about it, he now brings the question to the forefront and tries to discuss it. He does so from two different standpoints: the political standpoint and what we could call the anthropological standpoint. In other words, he tries to show how crucial his activity is for the πόλις and also for all human beings as such. Both domains are deeply intertwined, which raises the question about their precise relation. But we will not consider this question here, since (as stated above) our goal is only to determine the importance of philosophical examination for human life in general – at least to the extent in which it allows for a separate consideration.²¹⁸ Many relevant aspects of the question are indeed discussed

²¹⁷ See G. ROCHEFORT (ed.), *L’empereur Julien – Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 2.1, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1963 (repr. 2003).

²¹⁸ The arguments in the *Apology* are actually somewhat vague. Socrates seems to assume an isomorphism between the individual and the πόλις, and so what is beneficial for individuals is also beneficial for the πόλις and vice versa. Socrates goes on to stress the political benefits of his activity, but this is influenced by the setting. He is, after all, discussing his role in the πόλις. However, he talks mostly about things he does in a non-political setting. Socrates interacts with individuals and he seems to be equally concerned with all of them.

with respect to the entire πόλις. In particular, Socrates is adamant that his way of examining life brings about the greatest benefits. This implies the admission that his activity has some effects, not only on the young, but also on everybody else, and so it somehow disrupts life in the πόλις. But Socrates will argue that the effects and the disruption produced are not the ones the prosecution claims. He is not to blame for the moral decay and the fall of the πόλις. Philosophical examination is not harmful, it does not corrupt, but is rather a source of improvement and perhaps even salvation. It is something good and even the greatest good, as Socrates says.²¹⁹ This is valid for everybody. The unexamined life is intrinsically undesirable and philosophical examination is absolutely necessary for all of us. This is precisely the view we want to discuss in this dissertation, and so we must see in detail the main lines of reasoning in the text.

1. The usefulness of philosophical examination (ἐξέτασις) to the πόλις and to every individual

After describing the examination of one's knowledge claims and of what one cares for in life, Socrates goes on to describe the protreptic side of his activity (which to a certain extent was already implied in the passages considered above). He not only examines people's knowledge claims and sees their lack of knowledge and self-neglect (i.e., their bad inner state and lack of ἀρετή), but he also shows them that they are in such a state and that they need to care for φρόνησις and ἀλήθεια. He tries to persuade them to do so and keep examining.²²⁰ But this is not easy. People normally do not see any defect, nor do they see any need to change their ways. Therefore, they resist Socrates' injunction and try to get rid of him. Nevertheless, Socrates persists. As he says, he reproves, insults or offends (ὀνειδίζειν) those who neglect what really matters.²²¹ He tries by all means to stimulate them to change their behavior, so he intensifies the aggression that was already involved in exposing people's false knowledge claims or in the Socratic ἔλεγχος.

In other writings, Plato restricts this concern in virtue of political and psychological considerations. In the ideal city of the *Republic*, for instance, philosophical examination is not for everyone. This raises questions we will discuss later (cp. Chap. 19, Sect. 6.1). But for now let us just see what is said in the *Apology*.

²¹⁹ See 38a: “(...) τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὃν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὃν ὑμεῖς ἐμοῦ ἀκούετε διαλεγόμενου καὶ ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος (...).”

²²⁰ In 29d5 he talks of exhorting others (παρακελεύεσθαι) and in 36d8 of persuading them (πειθεῖν).

²²¹ Cp. 29e f., 30e, 39d, 41e.

Socrates thus admits that he tries to affect the lives of the people he deals with (and this is quite a large group of people, since he talks with young and old, rich and poor).²²² His philosophical examination is not just a theoretical activity, but it is directly concerned with how we live and can deeply affect our life. It shows its deficiencies and tries to change it – i.e., it tries to guide our care in a different direction. To this extent, the protreptic exhortation is intimately connected with philosophical examination. Since the latter reveals false knowledge claims and our distance from excellence or an excellent inner state, it also tries to change our ways – which means that it tries to make us realize the importance of philosophical examination and that we need to commit to it.

In sum, philosophical examination, as Socrates describes it, is not a private matter. It is concerned with others and affects them. As was said above, Socrates meddles in other people's affairs (or is guilty of *πολυπραγμοσύνη*).²²³ He does not mind his own business. Instead, he affects others and even takes this as his mission. But what is the value of this interference in other people's lives? Is philosophical examination in itself something detrimental, indifferent, useful, beneficial or indispensable? This is the decisive question in Socrates' trial, because it determines his role (and consequently the role of philosophical examination) in the *πόλις* and human life. What is then the value of philosophical examination?

By trying to change other people's lives and lead them to examine themselves, Socrates is assuming philosophical examination is beneficial. But this is not all. He expressly states that there is no greater good for the Athenians than his own service to the god.²²⁴ He goes about in the *πόλις*, showing people their ignorance, and trying to persuade others to care for their souls – and according to him this is what contributes the most for the individual and collective good. But how can this service be the greatest good? Is Socrates exaggerating or does he have good reasons for saying such a thing?

Everything seems to be based on the diagnosis of the individuals and the *πόλις*. From the standpoint of Socrates and his examination, the city is corrupted and he is not the cause. He is only calling the attention to the situation and the need to correct it. He tries to improve the young, as well as the old and even the entire *πόλις*. But people do not recognize the state

²²² Cp. 33a-b: “(...) εἰ δέ τις μου λέγοντος καὶ τὰ ἐμαυτοῦ πράττοντος ἐπιθυμοῖ ἀκούειν, εἴτε νεώτερος εἴτε πρεσβύτερος, οὐδενὶ πώποτε ἐφθόνησα, οὐδὲ χρήματα μὲν λαμβάνων διαλέγομαι μὴ λαμβάνων δὲ οὐ, ἀλλ’ ὁμοίως καὶ πλουσίῳ καὶ πένητι παρέχω ἐμαυτὸν ἐρωτᾶν, καὶ ἐάν τις βούληται ἀποκρινόμενος ἀκούειν ὧν ἂν λέγω.”

²²³ Cp. 31c: “(...) ἐγὼ ἰδίᾳ μὲν ταῦτα συμβουλεύω περιῶν καὶ πολυπραγμονῶ (...).” For more on *πολυπραγμονεῖν*, see footnote 188 above.

²²⁴ See 30a: “(...) ἐγὼ οἶμαι οὐδέν πω ὑμῖν μεῖζον ἀγαθὸν γενέσθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει ἢ τὴν ἐμὴν τῷ θεῷ ὑπηρεσίαν.”

they are in, and therefore they cannot see any benefit in what Socrates does. This is what Socrates must try to change. He must show people their state, what results from the lack of examination and how important it is to examine. He must also explain why people do not realize that it is so important and deem it useless and even detrimental.

In order to do this, Socrates employs two striking images. First, he compares the πόλις to a magnificent horse (ἵππος μέγας καὶ γενναῖος) that is sluggish and dull (νωθής) due to its greatness.²²⁵ This means that the πόλις (as well as the people in it), despite its potential, is benumbed and its faculties are diminished. This is what characterizes the unexamined life at large. Therefore, like the horse mentioned needs a sting or gadfly (μύωψ), the city needs Socrates and philosophical examination to awaken from its torpor. By comparing his own activity to a gadfly, Socrates establishes an interesting contrast between the magnificence of the horse (and also of the πόλις) and the insignificance of the gadfly (and of philosophical examination). The latter is something of little value, but without it the horse and the πόλις cannot reach their potential. They need a stimulus. Moreover, by talking of a gadfly, Socrates stresses once more how difficult it is to bear being examined by him. If we look at Io's description in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Vincit* of the gadfly that torments her, that condemns her to roam aimlessly and almost drives her to madness, we understand how violent the experience of this examination can be.²²⁶ The horse (i.e., the πόλις) cannot rest – it is constantly prodded. But unlike Io's case, the gadfly here is not a punishment, but rather a divine gift.²²⁷ The horse needs to be awakened (ἐγείρεσθαι), needs to obtain awareness of things and of itself, it needs to move and to dedicate itself to serious things, needs to take care of its soul, and it needs to obtain knowledge. This is what Socrates stimulates, and the discomfort he may cause is what allows one to achieve a better (viz. more lucid) state.

Socrates then further stresses the connection between the aggression and usefulness of philosophical examination by using another image. He gives the example of people being awakened when they are drowsy or half-asleep (νυστάζοντες, 31a4). Drowsiness is a form of relation to things which is not yet entirely closed off to things around oneself and one's circumstances, but is already very distracted or inattentive. It is a minimum of awareness, marked by inactivity and by the fact that it is progressively letting go of itself and its awareness. Socrates says that when people are in that state and someone tries to awaken

²²⁵ See 30e: “ἐὰν γὰρ με ἀποκτείνητε, οὐ ῥαδίως ἄλλον τοιοῦτον εὐρήσετε, ἀτεχνῶς – εἰ καὶ γελοιότερον εἰπεῖν – προσκείμενον τῇ πόλει ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὥσπερ ἵππῳ μεγάλῳ μὲν καὶ γενναίῳ, ὑπὸ μεγέθους δὲ νωθεστέρω καὶ δεομένῳ ἐγείρεσθαι ὑπὸ μύωπος τινος (...).”

²²⁶ See vv. 566ff.

²²⁷ Socrates expressly calls himself “ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ δόσις” (30e1).

them, they have the impulse to strike (κρούειν) the one disturbing them since they are annoyed by it (ἀχθόμενοι).²²⁸ Likewise, those that are stung by philosophical examination are annoyed, irritated and try to answer in the same manner. In truth, despite being a sluggish, weakened and poor state, drowsiness also has a certain inertia and sweetness to it. It is experienced as something positive, to which we are attached, and it contrasts with the effort, hardship and toil of our waking life. A negation of this effort can thus be cherished. The same happens with the unexamined life. Socrates tries to awaken people to the need of caring for the soul, and this care implies much effort and hardship. But one would rather stay in bed and rest. The negative state is experienced as good. One is like a prisoner who does not want to leave his or her prison. Moreover, both in the case of drowsiness in general and of the unexamined life in particular, one is not fully aware of what one is choosing and why. One has a limited awareness of the alternative at the moment of choosing. More specifically, when Socrates tries to wake people up and motivate them to examine, they are not clearly aware of the defects of their way of life nor of the need to wake up. Otherwise, they would react differently. Indeed, although we appreciate resting, we would not want to spend our whole lives in bed, sleeping.

Socrates, however, says that this is what will end up happening without philosophical examination. One will spend one's life sleeping and fall in an even deeper sleep in Hades.²²⁹ Socrates thus associates unexamined life to the life of a shadow in Hades. In a sense, to live an unexamined life is a sort of death. One does not really see things as they are, one neglects what matters the most and one has no notion that this is happening. One is in a bad state, and without Socrates and philosophical examination one will not be able to improve it.²³⁰ This does not mean one will automatically become fully awake (or fully lucid) if one embraces philosophical examination. But even if it does not lead to φρόνησις and σοφία, it still makes us aware of how far we are from possessing them – i.e., it provides us with human wisdom, which already corresponds to a greater degree of awareness or wakefulness, preferable to being full of false knowledge claims or false claims to wisdom. In the latter state, however,

²²⁸ See 31a: “(...) ὑμεῖς δ’ ἴσως τάχ’ ἂν ἀχθόμενοι, ὥσπερ οἱ νυστάζοντες ἐγειρόμενοι, κρούσαντες ἂν με, πειθόμενοι Ἀνύτῳ, ῥαδίως ἂν ἀποκτείναιτε (...).”

²²⁹ See 31a: “(...) πειθόμενοι Ἀνύτῳ, ῥαδίως ἂν ἀποκτείναιτε, εἴτα τὸν λοιπὸν βίον καθεύδοντες διατελοῖτε ἂν, εἰ μὴ τινα ἄλλον ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἐπιπέμψειεν κηδόμενος ὑμῶν.”

²³⁰ At least this is what Socrates says. It is not clear whether Socrates is assuming that only he (or someone like him, sent by the god) can release people – i.e., if everybody needs help or if people can also leave the unexamined life and alter their state on their own. But given the fact that they are not inclined to do so, they seem to need Socrates. And be that as it may, philosophical examination is always needed for us to be released or to wake up from the drowsiness of the unexamined life.

philosophical examination seems irrelevant, since we think we already know everything, or at least we think we know how to guide ourselves in order to have a good life. Indeed, the problem is that normally we do not realize or understand any of this. We take our state as wakefulness. We see no false knowledge claims (though we may admit the remote possibility of some of them being wrong), and we see no important neglect of ourselves or our soul. Therefore, philosophical examination is only good to create some discomfort and disturbance. It uses elaborate arguments and abstruse inquiries to attack the meaning of things and turn it into clouds and smoke.

In sum, by saying all this, Socrates explains at the same time the usefulness of philosophical examination (which implies a different diagnosis of our normal state) and why the latter normally does not seem useful. But he says more. Later, in the second speech, Socrates again considers the usefulness of his examinations for the πόλις. After being found guilty, he must say what punishment he thinks he deserves and present it as a counterproposal to the death sentence proposed by the prosecution. Socrates discusses several possibilities, but the problem is that he does not think he deserves any punishment. In fact, he clearly states that he is responsible for the greatest benefaction to the πόλις (μεγίστη εὐεργεσία) by trying to convince others to care for what is essential – namely, the self and the πόλις itself, instead of one’s affairs or the affairs of the πόλις.²³¹ He appeals thus to the same model of center and periphery which we saw above with respect to our own being. Socrates pointed out that things such as possessions or honor were external and did not determine the core of our being. The latter rather corresponded to the soul, which was determined by its ἀρετή, its intelligence or lucidity (φρόνησις), and truth. Now Socrates applies the same distinction to the πόλις. It talks of things external to it and says that it is essentially determined by its relation to ἀρετή, lucidity (φρόνησις) and truth. It is important that the πόλις be the best and most lucid possible (βέλτιστος καὶ φρονιμώτατος) – and that is precisely the concern of philosophical examination.

In order to emphasize the importance of his benefaction, Socrates goes on to contrast his role in the πόλις with the role of the winners at the Olympic Games (who are usually the highest and most admired representatives of the πόλις). The latter make people seem happy or make them think they are happy (εὐδαίμονας δοκεῖν εἶναι). Socrates, in turn, along with

²³¹ See 36c-d: “(...) ἐνταῦθα μὲν οὐκ ἦα οἱ ἐλθὼν μήτε ὑμῖν μήτε ἑμαυτῶ ἔμελλον μηδὲν ὄφελος εἶναι, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸ ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστον ἰὼν εὐεργετεῖν τὴν μεγίστην εὐεργεσίαν, ὡς ἐγὼ φημι, ἐνταῦθα ἦα, ἐπιχειρῶν ἕκαστον ὑμῶν πείθειν μὴ πρότερον μήτε τῶν ἑαυτοῦ μηδενὸς ἐπιμελεῖσθαι πρὶν ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιμεληθεῖν ὅπως ὡς βέλτιστος καὶ φρονιμώτατος ἔσοιτο, μήτε τῶν τῆς πόλεως, πρὶν αὐτῆς τῆς πόλεως, τῶν τε ἄλλων οὕτω κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἐπιμελεῖσθαι (...).”

his philosophical examination and his exhortations, makes them really happy (εὐδαίμονας εἶναι).²³² At the center of everything is one's happiness (εὐδαιμονία), which is in fact very problematic. One may feel happy or not, but in the context of Greek culture happiness was not thought of simply as a subjective state of feeling, but rather as an objectively good state (regardless of how one feels and of whether one regards one's state as happy or not). The dissociation between one's apparent state and one's real state is crucial here – and that is what Socrates is alluding to.²³³ He points once more to the difference between δοκεῖν and εἶναι. He had admitted that we may seem knowledgeable or wise without being so. Now he admits that we may make a similar mistake with respect to our life. We may have a wrong diagnosis of how it is going. More precisely, we can be in a bad state and thus in a state of misery without realizing it – as was the case of Oedipus, before discovering who he really was.²³⁴ Our happiness may be illusory and no happiness at all. Our life may have no real value and real happiness may correspond to something else. It may even be something which we would not immediately recognize as such.

Socrates argues that happiness depends on philosophical examination and the unexamined life is an unhappy or miserable life. If the latter regards itself as being happy, then it is mistaken. It should be rejected and not embraced. Of course this presupposes that we want to be really happy. But how undesirable is this state of illusory happiness if we do not realize it is illusory? How much do we desire real happiness? And what does true happiness amount to? How does Socrates conceive it? From what was said, it seems it would require φρόνησις, ἀλήθεια, and excellence of the soul. In turn, these things require philosophical examination, which is essential to reveal ignorance, lack of ἀρετή, and unhappiness – and thus to make us pursue (and possibly attain) knowledge, ἀρετή and happiness. Socrates, however, does not enter into much detail about this. We have to consult the whole Platonic corpus in order to find a full explanation of his view.

²³² See 36d-e: “οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅτι μᾶλλον, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πρέπει οὕτως ὡς τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα ἐν πρυτανείῳ σιτειῖσθαι, πολὺ γε μᾶλλον ἢ εἴ τις ὑμῶν ἵππῳ ἢ σινοβρίδι ἢ ζεύγει νενίκηκεν Ὀλυμπίασιν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ ὑμᾶς ποιεῖ εὐδαίμονας δοκεῖν εἶναι, ἐγὼ δὲ εἶναι (...).”

²³³ For more on the matter, see Chap. 12, Sect. 3.2.

²³⁴ His state was indeed characterized as a “κάλλος κακῶν ὑπουλον” (v. 1396) – or, as R. Jebb translates it, “a fair surface, with secret ills festering beneath it”. Cp. R. JEBB (ed.), *Sophocles – The Plays and Fragments*. Vol. 1: The Oedipus Tyrannus, Cambridge, University Press, 1893³ (1883¹), *ad loc.* For more on this subject, see Chap. 18.

2. Socrates' final verdict about the value of the unexamined life and of philosophical examination

All the questions we considered so far let us better understand why Socrates declares that the unexamined life is not worth living. The *Apology* has provided many indications about the meaning and grounds of this assertion. But we still have not considered the immediate context in which Socrates pronounces his harsh verdict on the unexamined life. This judgment appears in Socrates' second speech, where (as was already mentioned) he must declare what penalty he thinks he deserves. The prosecution calls for the death sentence and Socrates considers different counter-penalties. In doing so, he reveals some other important features of his outlook on life.

First, he says (for the reasons considered in the previous section) that he does not deserve any punishment, but rather a reward (and even a prestigious reward, as being fed in the Prytaneum).²³⁵ Then, he briefly discusses possible penalties.²³⁶ Imprisonment and slavery, as well as a high fine (which would also result in imprisonment and slavery, since he would not be able to pay it) are absolutely undesirable. Banishment too would be unacceptable, because, according to Socrates, he would be likewise expelled from any other city. His cross-examinations would always be difficult to bear, and so he would be condemned to a life of endless roaming, without belonging to any community. This is intrinsically undesirable (and all the more so because of his old age). All those punishments would indeed prevent him from employing his life in doing what is really meaningful – namely, examining himself and others. Therefore, they are not preferable to death.

After discussing these penalties, Socrates puts once more words in the mouth of the jurors and imagines them asking him if he could not stay quiet, instead of examining others and meddling in their business.²³⁷ Socrates says this is unthinkable and explains once more why he is so inflexible in his dedication to philosophical examination. The explanation given is composed of two different arguments. The first argument is of a religious nature. Socrates declares that not examining would be to disobey the god and to act impiously. Therefore, he cannot stop examining. But Socrates is aware of how unusual and strange his religious

²³⁵ See 36d: “(...) τί οὖν εἰμι ἄξιος παθεῖν τοιοῦτος ὄν; ἀγαθόν τι, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, εἰ δεῖ γε κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ τιμᾶσθαι· καὶ ταῦτά γε ἀγαθὸν τοιοῦτον ὅτι ἂν πρέποι ἐμοί. τί οὖν πρέπει ἀνδρὶ πένητι εὐεργέτη δεομένῳ ἄγειν σχολὴν ἐπὶ τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ παρακελεύσει; οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅτι μᾶλλον, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πρέπει οὕτως ὡς τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα ἐν πρυτανείῳ σιτεῖσθαι (...).”

²³⁶ See 37b-e.

²³⁷ See 37e: “ἴσως οὖν ἂν τις εἴποι· ‘σιγῶν δὲ καὶ ἡσυχίαν ἄγων, ὃ Σώκратες, οὐχ οἷός τ’ ἔσῃ ἡμῖν ἐξελεθῶν ζῆν;’ ”

conceptions and mission are. He recognizes that people will not believe him and think he is not being serious.²³⁸

Thus, he resorts to a second argument, which is secular and rational, but according to him still more unbelievable. This argument presents in a concentrated manner Socrates' understanding of his activity and of human life in general. It is also at this point that Socrates passes – in no uncertain terms – his verdict on the unexamined life. He says (or imagines himself saying): “(...) that this does happen to be the greatest good for a human being, every day to discuss excellence and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining myself and others, and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being”.²³⁹ The passage is very compact, but also very meaningful, and therefore we must consider the different elements separately, in order to determine their meaning, their possible ambiguity and the questions they raise.

The first words of the argument immediately underscore that Socrates is not talking about something irrelevant. He is revealing what is the greatest good – that is, the best thing in life, the thing whose possession will constitute true happiness and to which we are therefore the least indifferent. The greatest good is something we deeply desire and to which we are always directed. So when Socrates says he will reveal what is the greatest good, he has (or at least he should have) our full attention. He does not want to reveal what is the greatest good for him personally or for a particular group of people. He is talking about the greatest good for the human being as such (and more precisely for the frail and finite being: ἄνθρωπος). For any human being as such, there is something that stands out, that is desirable in the highest degree and produces the greatest benefit. This is what Socrates will reveal. The matter is thus of the highest importance. But Socrates' revelation is far from evident. In fact, it is unexpected and even unbelievable. It is completely at odds with the ordinary understanding of life.

First of all, Socrates affirms that the greatest good consists in conversing or discussing (λόγους ποιεῖσθαι, διαλέγεσθαι). It requires one to use words and speech. But this is not simply a matter of talking or conveying one's views or conceptions and persuading others of their validity. The conversations here at issue are rational discussions, which are supposed to bring us closer to the truth. As such, one must be aware of the risks of λόγος that Socrates

²³⁸ See 37e-38a: “ἐάντε γὰρ λέγω ὅτι τῷ θεῷ ἀπειθεῖν τοῦτ' ἐστὶν καὶ διὰ τοῦτ' ἀδύνατον ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν, οὐ πείσεσθέ μοι ὡς εἰρωνευομένῳ (...).”

²³⁹ See 38a: “(...) ἐάντ' αὖ λέγω ὅτι καὶ τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὃν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἐμοῦ ἀκούετε διαλεγομένου καὶ ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος, ὃ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ (...).” The translation is mine.

alluded to at the beginning of the first speech. In order to avoid such risks, these conversations require much examination. In fact, Socrates says that these conversations are like the ones he has when he examines himself and others. The views of those involved and what they care for (i.e., how they live) are subject to examination, in order to find any defects and correct them, or at least to mobilize one to pursue what one lacks.

But this is not all Socrates says. He also mentions the subject of these conversations or discussions. He singles out a topic – namely, ἀρετή. His conversations examine primarily what the good quality of the soul consists in. Socrates had declared that he does not know anything about it (unlike the Sophists, who supposedly teach it). But he also said that we need to care for it most of all, and conversing about it is precisely the way to care for it. It is in this sense that such conversations are the greatest good. They bring us closer to being excellent and in doing so they affect our whole life and everything in it. Ἀρετή is thus at the center of the Socratic examination. However, it is not its only topic. Socrates mentions that one should also converse about all the other things he usually converses about. This is a vague indication and does not specify what these other topics are or how they relate to ἀρετή. Are they directly implied in the latter, are they directly relevant to how we live, or are they simply other possible objects of knowledge? We could perhaps be tempted to reduce Socrates' conversations to strictly practical questions, but it is important to bear in mind that he stressed above that ἀρετή is not just a matter of acting in a certain way. It is intrinsically referred to knowledge (or more precisely to φρόνησις and ἀλήθεια), so it may well require a complete elucidation of our situation and all that is relevant in it – i.e., it may require a superlative knowledge or σοφία that goes way beyond the more practical questions.

It may sound strange that the greatest good consists in discussing excellence and not in being excellent. This may mean that Socrates is just referring to what is the greatest good given our circumstances. To be absolutely good may not be an immediate possibility of ours, since it would require a perfect (i.e., more than human) knowledge, which is something we do not have. Since we do not have a full knowledge of things, the best thing to do is to examine and pursue ἀρετή. We must begin by trying to come closer to it, and this implies noticing that we fall short of it. The discussion about ἀρετή thus works both as an exhortation and a means to achieve true ἀρετή. It helps us recognize our false knowledge claims (in fact, it may be the only way of overcoming our blameworthy ignorance or our conceit of wisdom) and increase our awareness of the state we are in. To that extent, examining ἀρετή is already

a way of increasing it, and it is also a provisional form of ἀρετή (a human ἀρετή) – i.e., the best thing we can do for now and the best state we may be in.

This brings us to another important indication given by Socrates in this passage, which concerns the specific temporality of philosophical examination. We are supposed to examine every day. It is supposed to become a routine, part of everyday life. It is not done once and for all, but it is rather a constant and permanent endeavor that is to be renewed every day, and may never be concluded. It is a hard and long task, that implies much more than what we would immediately think. It is therefore at odds with the ordinary course of life, which is based on the acceptance of our views and on the pursuit of the concrete goals established by these views. Philosophical examination is a counter-movement which changes our entire existence and constitutes an entirely new way of living – namely, a philosophical life, dedicated to examining oneself and others.

These are all meaningful indications about how one should live – even if they are still imprecise in several respects. After giving these indications, Socrates considers once more the kind of life that is opposed to his, and presents a definite appraisal of it. He says: “ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπων.”²⁴⁰ These words constitute the center of this whole dissertation, but we have not yet considered their meaning in detail – so we must do it now (whereby we will anticipate some of the analyses we will carry out later).

The central term of the assertion is βίος. It means “life”, but not in a biological sense, as the simple fact of being alive. It rather refers to life in the sense mentioned in the Introduction: as something to which we are constitutively related and about which we are passionate.²⁴¹ Moreover, it is something open, that may have different contents, and these contents as a whole define it in a particular way – as a good or bad life. Any significant change in the content may thus change the value of a life. This is not something to which we are indifferent. We want to have a good life and this is, in fact, the source of all interest, as we will see. In addition, our interest in life and its contents is not the interest of someone who cannot but watch it unfold. We can (and actually must) intervene and decide the course of our life, both in particular circumstances and in general. This means we must determine our behavior, our choices and our ultimate goals. All this constitutes our βίος. The term can indeed designate all these different aspects, but it is particularly used to denote one’s way of

²⁴⁰ The concise form reminds of the maxims at Delphi, as H. Goldmann points out. Cp. H. GOLDMAN, Reexamining the “Examined Life” in Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*, *Philosophical Forum* 35 (2004), 1-33, especially 6ff.

²⁴¹ See Intro., Sect. 2 above.

life as such – i.e., a particular pattern of behavior associated with a certain way of seeing and valuing things. A specific way of life is something that may be adopted by several persons, but it has particular features that distinguishes it from other possible ways of life. In this sense, a βίος is often designated by its distinguishing (and often defining) mark.²⁴²

Here, Socrates, isolates a particular kind of life he qualifies as ἀνεξέταστος. It lacks ἐξέτασις. As we will see, this term designates a careful inspection or a review of something, as well as a cross-examination of someone. In short, it implies putting something or someone to the test.²⁴³ An ἀνεξέταστος βίος is thus a life that lacks this act of testing or examining things. It has a distracted relation to things and is therefore exposed to errors and distortions. It must also be noted that the verbal adjective ἀνεξέταστος is somewhat ambiguous. The ending -τος can have both a passive sense (thus designating a life that is not subjected to examination) or an active sense (which means that the way of life in question fails to perform examinations). The difference is not entirely meaningless. The passive sense leaves the possibility open that one is guided by someone else when examining, while the active sense requires one to take an active role, which implies a greater engagement and ability. Moreover, the passive sense emphasizes life (or one's way of life) as the primary object of examination, whereas the active sense suggests that everything must be examined. As we saw, the ambiguity is important in Plato, since the examination is simultaneously an examination of knowledge claims and an examination of what one cares for (and thus of how one lives). Both things are intimately connected and an ἀνεξέταστος βίος is indeed a life that has a distracted relation with both of them. It is unexamined and it does not examine.

Socrates says about such a life that it is not βιωτός. The word βιωτός expresses a positive appraisal of a life and its contents. They are such that make us accept life as something worth living. In contrast, saying of a life that it is not βιωτός usually means that one cannot (or should not) accept, embrace or endure it (precisely what is expressed by being “worth living”), because it is worthless, bad, or miserable – i.e., it does not correspond to what we want or falls short of our desires. When that happens, life becomes “intolerable” (to use De Strycker's and Slings' translation) or something that is “not to be lived” (as Kraut renders it).²⁴⁴ This still does not say anything about the criterion that makes such a life bad or miserable. It may be suffering, dishonor or something else. It all depends on what gives value

²⁴² For more on this, see in particular Chap. 12, Sect. 5.2, and Chap. 13, Sect. 6.

²⁴³ For more on ἐξέτασις, see Chap. 4, Sect. 2.1.

²⁴⁴ See S. SLINGS, *op. cit.*, ad 38a5, 196, 394f., and R. KRAUT, The Examined Life, in: S. AHBEL-RAPPE & R. KAMTEKAR (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, Malden (MA)/etc., Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 231.

to life. Moreover, the appraisal of such a life is something expressed by a particular subject, who has a certain recognition of the value of his or her life. However, as we will see, this appraisal also refers to the intrinsic or objective value of one's life, and, as such, it is something of which one may or may not be aware. In other words, we may not know the real value of our life, either because we have a distracted relation to it, or because we are not aware of what we truly desire. We may thus think we lead a good and happy life when that is not the case. So a life may be "unlivable" or unacceptable without us realizing it.

All this is decisive for Socrates' argument. He is saying that a life that is characterized by the lack of examination (and in particular the kind of examination he performs, which we called philosophical examination) is a bad or miserable life. It does not correspond to our desires and should be rejected. As mentioned, this is a rather harsh and counterintuitive judgment. We normally do not see a life without examination as unacceptable or bad. There can be many bad things in life, but failing to examine does not seem to be one of them. It does not seem to be a fundamental criterion in the quality of our life. In fact, very few would accept a life fully dedicated to examining oneself and others.

So what does Socrates mean? What are his reasons? And is he right? If so, why are we usually convinced of the opposite? We saw that the *Apology* presents several arguments in defense of this view. Socrates identifies some important features of a life marked by the lack of philosophical examination, and they also account for the dissociation between our normal appraisal of our life and its real value. We tend to believe we know what matters and also that our self is in good state and does not need special care. In many cases we may even deem ourselves happy. So from the standpoint of the unexamined life, philosophical examination seems useless. But Socrates tries to show that such a life contradicts itself. Its state is very different from what it believes – and in fact the reason why it is in such a state and why it does not realize it is the same: the lack of examination.

We can thus understand why Socrates cannot renounce to philosophical examination. From his standpoint, life requires examination. The latter is not just a good thing, but the root of all good (and so of all we desire). Without it, life does not just lose one good thing among others. It loses everything. Despite what may seem, a life without examination is worthless.

3. The *Apology*'s concluding remarks about philosophical examination and death

In his final speech, after being condemned to death, Socrates reflects about the trial and its outcome. He addresses the jurors who condemned him and reproaches them. He reaffirms that he prefers death to badness (πονηρία) and to living inappropriately (οὐκ ὀρθῶς ζῆν).²⁴⁵ Then, talking to those who voted in his favor, Socrates stresses that he would not change anything in the way he defended himself, despite the negative outcome. He thus confirms not only what he said, but also the need to say it as he did. But what is here of particular interest for us is the question of what may follow the trial. By considering his future after being condemned to death, Socrates adds some remarks that help us better understand the way he lived and the importance of philosophical examination.

3.1. The Socratic version of the Isles of the Blessed

At the end of the text (40c ff.), Socrates reconsiders the question of death and whether it is something good or bad. He had previously said that he would rather die than do something unjust or bad, because that would render his life worthless. Now he goes on to consider what death might be, and his eschatological reflections are not only an interesting illustration of Ancient beliefs about the afterlife, but they also express a certain outlook on life and how we should live it – and it is in this respect that it becomes relevant for us.

First, Socrates acknowledges his ignorance about the afterlife and distinguishes two possibilities: either we have no perception of anything when we die (and then it is a sort of dreamless night) or it is a change of abode (μετοίκησις).²⁴⁶ Then he goes on to argue that in both cases death would be a gain for him. A dreamless night is devoid of any concerns and pain, and, to this extent, it is better and more pleasant than almost all our nights and days.²⁴⁷ In fact, Socrates suggests that such a state would be an absolute gain, which is surprising,

²⁴⁵ See in particular 39a-b, where Socrates describes life as an attempt to escape two evils that run after us – one that is slower (death), and another that is faster (badness). For the expression οὐκ ὀρθῶς ζῆν, see 39d.

²⁴⁶ See 40c: “δυσὸν γὰρ θάτερόν ἐστιν τὸ τεθνήσκειν· ἢ γὰρ οἷον μηδὲν εἶναι μηδὲ αἰσθησὶν μηδεμίαν μηδενὸς ἔχειν τὸν τεθνεῶτα, ἢ κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα μεταβολὴ τις τυγχάνει οὐσα καὶ μετοίκησις τῆ ψυχῆ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἐνθένδε εἰς ἄλλον τόπον.”

²⁴⁷ See 40c-e: “καὶ εἴτε δὴ μηδεμία αἰσθησις ἐστὶν ἀλλ’ οἷον ὕπνος ἐπειδὴν τις καθεύδων μηδ’ ὄναρ μηδὲν ὄρεται, θαυμάσιον κέρδος ἂν εἴη ὁ θάνατος – ἐγὼ γὰρ ἂν οἶμαι, εἴ τινα ἐκλεξάμενον δεοῖ ταύτην τὴν νύκτα ἐν ἧ οὕτω κατέδραθεν ὥστε μηδὲ ὄναρ ἰδεῖν, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμέρας τὰς τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἀντιπαραθέντα ταύτῃ τῆ νυκτὶ δεοῖ σκεψάμενον εἰπεῖν πόσας ἄμεινον καὶ ἥδιον ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας ταύτης τῆς νυκτὸς βεβίωκεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ βίῳ, οἶμαι ἂν μὴ ὅτι ἰδιώτην τινά, ἀλλὰ τὸν μέγαν βασιλέα εὐαριθμήτους ἂν εὐρεῖν αὐτὸν ταύτας πρὸς τὰς ἄλλας ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας – εἰ οὖν τοιοῦτον ὁ θάνατός ἐστιν, κέρδος ἔγωγε λέγω (...).”

especially since the criterion seems to be solely hedonistic. Besides, Socrates has also just criticized a life of drowsiness and sleep. It is true that one will get rid of all the unpleasant things of life (especially those concerned with old age), and there is no blame in a state of dreamless sleep (i.e., one is not unjust and bad). Still, it is strange that he would not regret disappearing. Perhaps he is just trying to convince others that in this case death has a positive side. But it is far from being an absolute good.²⁴⁸

Next, Socrates focuses his attention on the second alternative, and he dwells much longer on it, which intimates that this might be his own view or at least the one he finds most plausible. As he says, death may be a journey to a different place. In order to imagine this other place, Socrates takes refuge in the things normally said about it. This implies restricting all the possible conceptions of the hereafter to a certain version of it, which mingles representations of the Isles of the Blessed in Homer and Hesiod, representations of afterlife in Orphism and the Mysteries, as well some Socratic or Platonic innovations.²⁴⁹ In this sense, Socrates' consideration of the hereafter will be far from exhaustive. Still, it will reveal something interesting about Socrates' conception of philosophical examination.

Socrates expects that those who had a reputation for being true and just judges will be there, which suggests that his life will then be properly judged.²⁵⁰ In fact, he imagines he will meet all the main figures of Greek culture. After the judges, he mentions the poets (Orpheus, Museus, Hesiod, Homer), who were for long the epitome of the wise man, and also those that were unjustly condemned, such as Palamedes and Ajax, with whom Socrates will be able to compare his own sufferings.²⁵¹ He will spend time and talk with all these people, which is already enough for him to say that he is willing to die many times if this is what awaits him.²⁵² But he then adds what would be for him the greatest thing (τὸ μέγιστον): to wit, he would be able to spend his time examining those people and determining who is actually σοφός and who has a false claim of σοφία.²⁵³ Socrates imagines himself examining Agamemnon, Ulysses, Sisyphus and many others, and requiring them to explain and justify

²⁴⁸ For a more elaborate discussion of these questions, see in particular A. van HARTEN, Socrates on Life and Death (Plato, *Apology* 40c5-41c7), *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 57 (2011), 165-183.

²⁴⁹ For a consideration of this, see e.g. E. de STRYCKER, Socrate et l'au-delà d'après l'*Apologie* Platonicienne, *Les Études Classiques* 18 (1950), 269-284; S. SLINGS, *op. cit.*, 216-232; M. STOKES, *Plato – Apology of Socrates*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1997, 191-193.

²⁵⁰ Cp. 40e f.: “εἰ γὰρ τις ἀφικόμενος εἰς Ἄιδου, ἀπαλλαγεῖς τουτωνὶ τῶν φασκόντων δικαστῶν εἶναι, εὐρήσει τοὺς ὡς ἀληθῶς δικαστάς, οἵπερ καὶ λέγονται ἐκεῖ δικάζειν, Μίνως τε καὶ Ῥαδάμανθους καὶ Αἰακὸς καὶ Τριπτόλεμος καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσοι τῶν ἡμιθέων δίκαιοι ἐγένοντο ἐν τῷ ἑαυτῶν βίῳ, ἄρα φαύλη ἂν εἴη ἡ ἀποδημία;”

²⁵¹ See 41a-b.

²⁵² See 41a: “ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ πολλάκις ἐθέλω τεθνᾶναι εἰ ταῦτ' ἔστιν ἀληθῆ.”

²⁵³ See 41b: “(...) καὶ δὴ τὸ μέγιστον, τοὺς ἐκεῖ ἐξετάζοντα καὶ ἐρευνῶντα ὥσπερ τοὺς ἐνταῦθα διάγειν, τίς αὐτῶν σοφός ἐστιν καὶ τίς οἶται μὲν, ἔστιν δ' οὐ.”

the knowledge claims on which their famous actions were based. He mentions some of the greatest symbols of Greek culture and says that he would examine all of them (men and women) endlessly. In other words, his philosophical examination would encompass all the past and also all the future, insofar as he would have all the time to examine all those that died and will one day die (but still focusing primarily on all those who stood out and who should therefore have the greatest knowledge claims).

Socrates says that conversing, associating with and examining these people would be an unconceivable happiness – especially since he could no longer be condemned to death.²⁵⁴ In other words, nothing could restrict his examining. And so, even though he admits people would also be happier in other respects (alluding probably to the traditional and more hedonistic representations of the Isles of the Blessed), his eternal beatitude would be intrinsically connected with the apparently endless examination and pursuit of knowledge. The characterization of his philosophical examination as endless raises some questions, though. In particular, it is not clear whether philosophical examination is happiness itself or if there is something else philosophical examinations aims at (such as the contemplation of truth), which is what we really desire and what would make us fully or really happy. Here, Socrates does not seem to talk of philosophical examination as a means to achieve a better state (namely, a state of actual knowledge or actual σοφία). At least he does not mention it. This may imply that this activity would not be aiming at something else and would be fulfilling in itself. We (or he at least) would already be happy with the endless pursuit of knowledge. But it may also be the case that Socrates is simply not considering it, but rather focusing his attention on what we can most easily conceive and what we actually need to do in our circumstances (which is precisely what he argues during the whole *Apology*). It is indeed difficult to conceive what lies beyond philosophical examination, so instead he imagines death as being subordinated to philosophical examination and integrates everything (the whole past and the whole future) in this activity. Everything is conceived as just another stage in the extremely long (and potentially infinite) examination of everybody and everything. What all this effort aims at is left undiscussed.

²⁵⁴ See 41c: “(...) οἷς ἐκεῖ διαλέγεσθαι καὶ συνεῖναι καὶ ἐξετάζειν ἀμήχανον ἂν εἴη εὐδαιμονίας; πάντως οὐ δῆπου τούτου γε ἔνεκα οἱ ἐκεῖ ἀποκτείνουσι· τὰ τε γὰρ ἄλλα εὐδαιμονέστεροί εἰσιν οἱ ἐκεῖ τῶν ἐνθάδε, καὶ ἤδη τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἀθάνατοὶ εἰσιν, εἴπερ γε τὰ λεγόμενα ἀληθῆ.”

3.2. The meaning of Socrates' last words in the *Apology*

After reflecting about the outcome of the trial, Socrates closes with an interesting remark, which seems to affirm a more skeptical and indeterminate view about what just happened, though it can also be read as a final provocation to his jurors and the reader, in order to motivate them to further reflect about everything that was said. Socrates says: “But now it is the time to depart, both for me who am to die and for you who are to live; and which of us goes to the better thing, is unclear to all except the god.”²⁵⁵ The unclearness of the matter raises the question of what is actually a better lot or destiny – i.e., what is a more fortunate or happy (and thus more desirable) possibility. By raising this question, Socrates is not only wondering what might be better for him, in his old age. His question concerns the intrinsic value of the two possibilities mentioned: namely, life and death. This aspect is further emphasized by the reference to the absolute standpoint of the god, who supposedly possesses a perfect knowledge of the real value of these possibilities. Their real value is precisely what Socrates is referring to, and the answer to this question (which cannot be easily decided, as Socrates stresses) is something to which we are not at all indifferent, since it concerns the goodness or badness of these two ultimate possibilities.

But what can be said about the two alternatives in question? Socrates speaks of going to one's life and going to one's death. Both things seem pretty straightforward. However, the alternative is more ambiguous than it may seem. On the one hand, the life Socrates is talking about can either be a life like his (dedicated to examining himself and others) or, more probably, a life free from Socratic examination – i.e., the unexamined life. Dying, on the other hand, is itself defined either as a dreamless night (which would amount to a state of non-being) or an endless life of philosophical examination. Therefore, the alternative between life and death can have different senses. But what is more interesting here is the contrast between the unexamined life and the different possible destinies after death. In that case, the alternatives that come to mind are the alternative between the unexamined life and non-being and the one between the unexamined life and philosophical examination. Socrates is then asking whether the unexamined life is better than nothing and also whether it is better than the alternative – namely, an examined life. It may happen that it is the absolute worst of these

²⁵⁵ See 42a: “ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἤδη ὥρα ἀπιέναι, ἐμοὶ μὲν ἀποθανομένῳ, ὑμῖν δὲ βιωσομένοις· ὁπότεροι δὲ ἡμῶν ἔρχονται ἐπὶ ἄμεινον πρᾶγμα, ἄδηλον παντὶ πλὴν ἢ τῷ θεῷ.” I follow Stokes' translation.

three alternatives, although it may also be the intermediate one (better than non-being and worst than examination) or even the best.

Socrates says that the question is unclear to all, that it cannot be decided by him or those that are going to continue leading an unexamined life. Perhaps no one will ever be able to fully decide it. But how is this to be understood? Is he really skeptical with regard to this matter and leaves the answer to god alone (i.e., to a transcendent authority) or is he being ironical and concealing his beliefs? His whole life expressed a certain belief about the value of the unexamined life and he was not shy about it in court. He declared the unexamined life unacceptable and explained his view in detail. Moreover, he also considered the value of death and justified his tranquility in face of it. So he does not seem to have any doubt about it. For him, death is better than the unexamined life.²⁵⁶ But Socrates does not end on such a note. He poses a problem and by posing it he incites the jurors and the readers to ask themselves once more what exactly do they think about life and death – and specially what do they think of an unexamined life and its opposite, a life of philosophical examination. The latter may seem at first a sort of death (insofar as it implies a radical change in one's life and the neglect of everything that seems to matter) and in some extraordinary cases it may even lead to physical death (as we see happening with Socrates). But what about the former? What is the value of an unexamined life? And what does that mean for us? How should we live after all?

²⁵⁶ This is not very different from what we find in fr. 110 of Aristotle's *Protrepticus*: “ἡ φιλοσοφητέον οὖν ἢ χαίρειν εἰποῦσι τῷ ζῆν ἀπιτέον ἐντεῦθεν, ὡς τὰ ἄλλα γε πάντα φλυαρία τις ἔοικεν εἶναι πολλῆ καὶ λῆρος.” Cp. I. DÜRING (ed.), *Aristotle's Protrepticus. An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Stockholm/etc., Almqvist & Wiksell, 1961.

CONCLUSION OF PART I

1. Some remarks on how to relate to the text. Socrates' contemporaneity, the inner Socrates and the inner πόλις

Reading the *Apology* hardly leaves us indifferent. Although it is possible to read the text as an historical document or as a simple sequence of arguments that are more or less plausible, it can also have a strong personal meaning. The tragic tone of the speeches can deeply touch us.²⁵⁷ Moreover, Socrates is presented as a martyr and a philosophical hero. He is highly charismatic and the embodiment of an ideal. The reader is thus easily inspired by his actions and his words, and led to imitate him. But this does not mean there is only one way of being moved by Socrates' portrayal. In fact, there are two main ways of being inspired by Socrates. We can perhaps best understand them if we consider what Kierkegaard says about our ways of relating not only to Socrates, but also to Jesus, since both cases share many similar features. Kierkegaard says we can see them as historical characters, and thus as something romanticized or an ideal at a distance. We will then understand them as simple possibilities, without realizing what coming into contact with them or trying to be them would really amount to. But we can also relate to them in the mode of contemporaneity – and this is precisely the proper way of relating to them. We will see and understand them as something real or actual, with which we interact and to which we must react. It concerns us directly and requires something from us. This greatly increases the tension and pressure over us. The ideal becomes demanding, frustrating and even violent. One will be accused by it if one fails to live up to it – and a merely external imitation is not enough to satisfy its demands. One must really come to resemble the persons one is imitating and what they represent.²⁵⁸ In

²⁵⁷ On this topic, see e.g. C. COULTER, *The Tragic Structure of Plato's Apology*, *Philological Quarterly* 12 (1933), 137-143; J. HOWLAND, *Plato's Apology as Tragedy*, *The Review of Politics* 70 (2008), 519–546.

²⁵⁸ Kierkegaard often uses the notion of contemporary and contemporaneity. See e.g. S. KIERKEGAARD, *Journals and Papers*, transl. by H. Hong and E. Hong, 7 vols., Bloomington/London, Indiana University Press, 1967-1978, 690 (V B 18), 691 (IX A 95); 692 (IX A 153), 693 (X.1 A 132), 694 (X.2 A 253), 695 (X.3 A 653), 696 (XI.1 A 38), 697 (XI.1 A 59), 698 (XI.1 A 362), 825 (X6 B 233), 937 (VII.1 A 179), 961 (IX A 314), 973 (X.1 A 393), 974 (X.1 A 412), 1050 (VIII.1 A 320), 1059 (X.2 A 439), 1291 (VI A 21), 1640 (IX A 112), 1643 (IX B 45), 1644 (X.1 A 415), 1654 (X.2 A 451), 1769 (XI.2 A 255), 1793 (X.3 A 670), 1825 (XI.3 B 199), 1837 (VIII.1 A 303), 1843 (VIII.1 A 536), 1851 (X.1 A 179), 1862 (X.2 A 361), 1864 (X.3 A 171), 1867 (X.3 A 276), 1888 (X.3 A 712), 1891 (X.3 A 750), 1927 (XI.1 A 41), 1994 (VII.1 A 149), 2093 (X.2 A 602), 2354 (VI B 35), 2377 (X.1 A 465), 2500 (X.1 A 595), 2926 (VIII.1 A 296), 3075 (IV A 47), 3353 (IX A 133), 3473

the case we are considering, one is required to nurture one's inner Socrates – i.e., to embrace self-examination and the examination of others. The Socrates presented in the text may well be an invention of Plato, but the philosophical examination associated with him is nevertheless a possibility of ours and we may feel pressured to adopt it.

The Socrates we see in the *Apology* can thus stimulate us to do more than superficially adore him. In fact, he can stimulate us to embrace the possibility he embodies – and if we look at his words attentively, this is precisely what he demands. However, this demand is not easy to fulfill and when we realize the great exertion that is implied in the ideal, we may easily side with the jurors and condemn the inner Socrates and philosophical examination to death. This is so because we are sensitive not only to Socrates' motivations, but also to the motivations of the other characters mentioned by Socrates, who in a way are also internal characters of our soul. The *Apology* can thus be read as a particular instance of the isomorphism between the πόλις and the human soul that is at the center of Plato's *Republic*.²⁵⁹ All the tensions and interactions Socrates refers to also illustrate our inner conflicts. In this sense, Socrates' lawsuit is an exacerbated situation that reveals the πόλις of our inner motivations. When push comes to shove, we are not just partisans of Socrates, but also his victims and enemies – and all these facets of our being must debate among themselves and decide Socrates' worth (and thus the worth of philosophical examination). Looking at the text from this angle opens up new layers of meaning. Even if the author of the speeches did not have this in mind (and nothing indicates he did), we can better understand our relation to text and also to philosophical examination by using Socrates' speeches to identify and determine our inner πόλις and its characters.

Let us then briefly consider what the characters in the *Apology* reveal about ourselves and the main characters of our soul. The features Socrates stresses in these characters are of different kinds, and so they present different criteria for identifying our inner drives. For instance, if we look at the starting-point of the speeches, Socrates calls attention to the inner resistance the jurors may feel not only on account of the effects of the prosecution speech on them, but also because of the slanders they had heard. The jurors thus represent a part of us that is more sensitive to feeling (πάθος) and also more credulous (as the children to which the old accusers talked).

(VII.2 B 235), 3578 (X.4 A 532), 3579 (X.4 A 532), 4059 (XI.2 A 343), 4301 (XI.1 A 430), 4444(VIII.1 A 160), 4626 (IX A 407), 4881 (X.4 A 609), 4888 (XI.1 A 508), 4961 (VIII.2 C 3), 4973 (X.4 A 178), 4975 (X.4 A 381), 4977 (X.5 A 18), 6667 (X.3 A 399), 6839 (X.5 A 104).

²⁵⁹ See in particular *Rep.* 368c ff., and for a more developed analysis of this isomorphism, see Chap. 13, Sect. 4.4.

Then, when he is explaining the slanders against him, Socrates identifies two particular kinds of people who can easily be mistaken for him: natural philosophers and sophists. The first are concerned with distant matters and the second, although occupied with how one should live, think they already possess the knowledge required for it and thus try to convey it to others. To this extent, they both differ from the philosophical examination Socrates represent, although there are also similarities between them. They all question the ordinary practices of the πόλις – and are thus contrasted with the traditionalists, who cling to those practices and just want to transmit them to the young. These traditionalists, represented by Meletus, represent our inclination to follow the views shared by many or the public version of truth.

Also relevant in this context is Socrates' description of the people he examines and who are characterized by a claim to traditional σοφία. These alleged σοφοί represent different relations to σοφία and also different inner possibilities. The statesmen are concerned with guiding the life of the πόλις and thus with acting, but they lack proper knowledge to do so. They thus depict a tendency to act and live without having the required knowledge. The poets, in turn, do what they do out of instinct and inspiration. They conceive themselves as having contact with a superior authority that renders what they say true. Likewise, we all can believe to have correct views, even if we cannot fully justify and explain them. Finally, the artisans (and to some extent also the poets) mistake what they know for what they do not think and think they also master the most important matters, thus representing our tendency to disregard the boundaries of our knowledge and think we know everything that matters. In sum, the three kind of alleged σοφοί correspond to essential traits of the unexamined life, which is precisely at odds with Socrates' philosophical life.

Beside these characters, Socrates also identifies some groups that are marked by particular kinds of motivation. He talks about all those alleged σοφοί whose ignorance was exposed by his examination, got angry at him and, when inquired about this anger, accused him of all the usual things intellectuals were accused of. These people were taken by love of honor (φιλοτιμία) and did not want to lose face.²⁶⁰ One's value is indeed put in question by Socrates' examination and one could react in different ways. By getting angry at Socrates and accusing him without fully understanding what he does, people reveal their blind φιλοτιμία, which does not seem concerned with true worth, but only with the semblance thereof. Socrates also refers to the young that follow him and who examine others only because it is

²⁶⁰ See 23d.

pleasurable and fun.²⁶¹ They are not truly concerned with knowledge, but rather with pleasure. In addition, Socrates alludes more than once to those that are so concerned with survival (i.e., so taken of φιλοψυχία in the ordinary sense) that they will do anything just to continue living.²⁶² All these figures are based on inner drives of ours and reveal what we become when these drives come to dominate us. They are all distinct from and opposed to Socrates' examination and what it represents – namely our philosophical or knowledge-loving drive and its hypertrophy (or πολυπραγμοσύνη), which gives rise to a life dedicated to philosophical examination or a φιλόσοφος βίος.

The Socratic drive is at odds with all the other drives. The *Apology* not only calls our attention to this potential conflict, but it also tries to awaken it and intervene in favor of one of the parts. In effect, we always have a certain stance toward philosophical examination, which is an expression of the drives that prevails in us. The *Apology* tries to make us realize this and reappraise our position. It also tries to change the balance of our inner drives and make us revise our decision about who prevails in our soul and, more specifically, about what role the inner Socrates plays within our inner πόλις. The outer trial we read about in the text should stimulate the inner trial, and lead us to ponder and decide whether we kill the inner Socrates or absolve him and let him examine as much as he can. We could perhaps be tempted to find some middle ground between the two alternatives, but Socrates stresses that there can be no compromise: one either leads an unexamined life (which may indeed include some forms of examination, but is not fully determined by them) or one fully embraces philosophical examination. These are the terms of an alternative in which we always take some stance, even if unconsciously. But if we want to properly decide the question, we must determine the true value of the unexamined life and also of philosophical examination. The considerations in the *Apology* help us do that, but given the importance of the matter at hand (and also because of our tendency to see the question at a distance), it is important not to accept the arguments in the *Apology* at their face value, but instead we have to examine carefully all that is implied therein.

²⁶¹ See 23c and 33c.

²⁶² See 38d-39a.

2. Reassessment of the problem and transition to an analysis of the whole corpus

Our goal was to discuss the problem raised by Socrates' assertion about the unexamined life. The text provides us with some important indications in favor of Socrates' view, although as a whole these indications are still far from a full explanation and justification of his assertion. They contain many limitations, and in order to properly identify them, we must consider once more some of the most important aspects of Socrates' arguments.

According to Socrates, the unexamined life is essentially characterized by false knowledge claims (which are described as a form of blameworthy ignorance) and also by a neglect of ourselves and our ἀρετή. Both these characteristics amount to a state of dozing off or sleep, insofar as one is not aware of oneself and the state one is in. Although everything may seem fine, one is actually in a bad, unjust and shameful state, which is moreover far from any real happiness (even if it does not think so). In sum, even if it appears to be a happy state, the unexamined life does not achieve what it desires and it does not possess what it thinks it possesses. It is in disagreement with itself, and hence it is not a life worth living – even if, because of this life's inner constitution, we do not notice it. Philosophical examination is thus required both to break the spell of unexamined life and to improve it. In other words, it shows us our false knowledge claims and our self-neglect, and allows us to search for actual knowledge and thus to actually care for ourselves. To this extent it is the greatest good both for any individual, and also for the πόλις as a whole. One needs it if one is ever to achieve what one truly desires and really be happy.

This is the formal structure of the argument, but the concise and dense manner in which Socrates presents his ideas leaves many questions open. For instance, it is not clear which knowledge claims we may have and how much they may distort our life. It is also not clear how they can be examined and what happens when they are revealed as false. In addition, the *Apology* fails to describe the structure of human life in general (apart from some generic traits, such as the important role of knowledge, care, and happiness). It also does not explain how life in general can be essentially defined by the alternative between the unexamined life and its opposite. In fact, the unexamined life itself is not extensively characterized and it may be difficult for us to recognize the whole complexity of our existence in the brief characterization made in the *Apology*.

Given all these lacunae and insufficiencies, it is also not entirely plain how “unlivable” the unexamined life is and why exactly it is so. Its lack of worth, as well as the need to examine, appears to be connected to our need for knowledge, but this need for knowledge is itself insufficiently determined. Moreover, the text does not discuss whether the outcome of examination affects the need to examine or not. The imperative of examination seems to have an absolute value, but Socrates does not go into much detail about it. In fact, the status and foundation of the imperative are themselves problematic. It seems to have both a religious and a rational basis, but Socrates defines neither the relation between the two in his own case, nor the way others may relate to the imperative if they did not go through Socrates’ religious experiences. And the relation with others is the source of still other problems. Socrates stresses the importance of examination for life, but he does not talk much about the value of self-examination for his own life and why he must also examine others. Is this examination of others a necessity for everybody? On what account? Only because a god commands it or for some other reason? And what may that reason be? How is it to be conceived?

Finally, one last example of a problem insufficiently discussed in the *Apology* results from the at least apparent contradiction between Socrates’ admitted lack of knowledge and the strong certainties that he seems to have.²⁶³ Several of these certainties have a strong connection with the question of the importance of philosophical examination. This raises the problem of whether philosophical examination and the dedication to it fully depend on these particular views. If so, what is then the status of these views? Are they dogmatic and naive, or are they provisional and also subject to examination? There is indeed no clear reason for us to

²⁶³ Socrates affirms that he is no σοφός and that he has no knowledge of important things (which includes ἀρετή). Cp. 20c, 20e, 21b, 21d, 23a-b. Yet, his behavior shows that at the same time he has strong convictions about important matters. For one, he is fully convinced that he committed no wrongdoing. He also believes in gods and even has claims about them. He is fully persuaded of his interpretation of the oracle, of the importance of his mission and that all people should care for their souls and become as good as possible. He also has very strong claims about important matters. In 29b, he says: “τὸ δὲ ἀδικεῖν καὶ ἀπειθεῖν τῷ βελτίονι καὶ θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅτι κακὸν καὶ αἰσχρὸν ἐστὶν οἶδα.” In 30b he affirms that “οὐκ ἐκ χρημάτων ἀρετὴ γίγνεται, ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἀρετῆς χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαντα καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ”. In 41c-d, he also tries to convince the jurors that “οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ κακὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε ζῶντι οὔτε τελευτήσαντι, οὐδὲ ἀμελεῖται ὑπὸ θεῶν τὰ τούτου πράγματα.” These are just a few examples of the many assertions Socrates makes in the *Apology* – and we must also include the assertion about the value of the unexamined life. The conflict between his ignorance and his strong claims (which is actually not confined to the *Apology*, but pervades many of Plato’s works) has led many to relativize one side of the conflict. Either he is not truly ignorant and possesses some kind of knowledge in a weaker sense, or he is not fully convinced of the views he put forward. But is this really a satisfactory solution? For more on the matter, see e.g. T. BRICKHOUSE & N. SMITH, *The Paradox of Socratic Ignorance in Plato’s Apology*, *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1 (1984), 125-131, and C. REEVE, *Socrates in the Apology. An Essay on Plato’s Apology of Socrates*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 1989, especially 37-62.

exempt them from examination. However, in examining them we keep presupposing the importance of examination. Hence we can imagine that Socrates would be glad to examine them, and adopting them seems to be no more than a provisional act, though one that is perhaps required if we are ever to find a firm setting for our life. The problem of Socrates' coherence may very well be the problem of our life's coherence. In order to understand life and live well, we must examine, and in order to examine we must have certain beliefs about the examination itself. But what exactly are these beliefs, how can we explain and justify them, and are they really valid? Our analysis of the *Apology* gave us some indications about these problems, but it still not enough to fully solve them.

In sum, the *Apology* is far from providing sufficient answers to these and many other questions it raises. Socrates himself announced at the beginning of his defense speech that his time was very limited and he would not be able to adequately defend himself.²⁶⁴ Though he may be referring mainly to the rhetorical efficiency of the speech, this also applies to its content. A perfect defense would also have to contain a full justification of his views on philosophical examination and what the lack thereof entails. Therefore, it is up to us to mount a complete defense of Socrates and his views, and we can look for such a defense in the Platonic corpus as a whole. As we will see, it provides precious indications that help us develop a more detailed explanation of the views put forward by Socrates in the *Apology*, and also a better consideration of all the problems raised by them.

²⁶⁴ See 18e-19a.

PART II

Plato's conception of philosophical examination

“ἄ δὲ
δόξη τοπάζω, ταῦτ' ἰδεῖν σαφῶς θέλω”.
Sophocles, fr. 235²⁶⁵

According to the *Apology* (and according to Plato's writings at large, as will be shown), examination (ἐξέτασις) is the factor whose presence or absence decides the worth of an entire βίος. But what exactly is this activity or operation, which we do not automatically perform, and which may be lacking and must be adopted and enacted by us? What is this examination, how must it be performed and what is it supposed to achieve? These are the first questions we must ask, before trying to determine our relation to examination (or, to be more specific, before trying to determine whether we need it or not, and what its effects on our life may be). We must begin with an examination of examination itself and of how Plato conceives it.

Examination is not a completely strange concept for any of us. In general, we all have a pre-understanding of what an examination in the broadest sense of the word is. This pre-understanding is enough to perform certain ordinary examinations, but it is in most cases tacit and vague. We cannot explain in full detail what examining is, what characterizes the objects of examination as such, and how these objects may be affected by the examination. Moreover, we do not have a clear notion of all possibilities of examination. Besides ordinary examinations, there also other more developed forms of examination. One of these, perhaps the most developed of all, is the examination Plato has in mind, which we can call “philosophical examination”. This form of examination is the one that can fulfill our potential for examination and convert our life into a fully examined life. It is also something we usually lack. It is a kind of examination we do not usually perform, of which we may even have no idea.²⁶⁶ Our regular examinations are just a pale shadow of this Platonic examination.

²⁶⁵ A. PEARSON (ed.), *The Fragments of Sophocles*, vol. 1, Cambridge, University Press, 1917, 175.

²⁶⁶ This raises the question of how good an understanding of philosophical examination we need in order to perform it adequately. Perhaps we do not need a fully developed concept of the operation to perform it (and in

The latter is quantitatively and qualitatively different. Through it, one examines much more and one examines in a different way.

How does Plato then characterize philosophical examination, and how does one carry it out? If we look at the texts, we find different methodological reflections, which seem to point in different directions. In particular, there is a significant difference between a negative kind of examination (the so-called *ἔλεγχος*, which refutes someone's convictions) and more positive kinds of examination (in which one can reach some results and find some answers). This partially coincides with the difference between aporetic and doctrinal texts (though the status of the supposed doctrine is always dubious, as we saw in the Introduction).²⁶⁷ Given this diversity, how can we speak of a single conception of philosophical examination?

Interpreters often tend to solve the tension between the different kinds of examination by distinguishing at least two phases in Plato's thought: one under strong influence of the historical Socrates and another strictly Platonic. However, the emphasis on the negative dimension is not restricted to the texts of an early phase (assuming the usual chronologies of the dialogues are correct).²⁶⁸ This suggests both kinds of examination are more closely connected than we may think. We must therefore try to see to what extent they can be regarded as two sides of a single process and why so much emphasis is laid in the negative dimension.

Before doing this, it is important to consider the main features of philosophical examination as such. More precisely, we have to determine exactly which object is examined and what philosophical examination can reveal about it. In order to do this, we must consider some important traits of Plato's conception of the being that we are and the role knowledge plays in our life (thereby anticipating some aspects we will discuss in more detail in Part III). This conception differs in many aspects from our usual self-understanding and we must keep it in mind if we want to understand the particular kind of examination Plato is envisaging.

We will collect and organize many elements found throughout the *corpus*. Some of these elements can be seen in the way philosophical examination is depicted in the texts, while others are part of explicit discussions the characters have about the meaning of what they are doing. For the most part, we will pay little attention to the difference between

the dialogues many characters seem to lack any such concept), but a precise understanding of it allows us to better control its execution – and it is indispensable if we want to determine the value of the unexamined life and its opposite.

²⁶⁷ Cp. Sect. 4 of the Introduction.

²⁶⁸ We also find it in the *Theaetetus*, which shares many features of the so-called aporetic dialogues, and in *Sophist*, where we find the most developed discussion of a negative form of philosophical examination. Cp. 226b-231b (and for a discussion of this passage, see Chap. 8 below).

self-examination, examining others or being examined by them. We will rather focus on the general structure examination as such, which may then assume these different configurations.

It would be interesting to compare Plato's conception of philosophical examination with other cultural practices of the time that to some extent resemble this kind of examination and probably influenced its development. There are indeed many references to other practices (such as sophistry, oratory, cosmology, medicine, tragedy, comedy, epic poetry, and so on) in the dialogues. But we will restrict our scope and focus only the particular features of philosophical examination as it is conceived by Plato, since this is what is more directly relevant to our problem.

We will likewise leave aside the question of whether Plato's definition of philosophical examination (or, more precisely, the definition we can outline based on his writings) is supposed to be a description of what all philosophers do or only the presentation of a particular way of philosophizing. The understanding of philosophy and its method or methods often changed during the history of philosophy and it would indeed be interesting to compare Plato's conception of philosophical examination with the ones put forward by other authors – especially with respect to the relation between the negative or destructive and the positive or constructive sides of philosophy. However, we will only consider Plato's conception and how his description of the two sides of philosophical examination can be integrated in a single project.

Let us then see which conception of philosophical examination can be found in the Platonic corpus.

CHAPTER 4

The images of philosophical examination

“Χαλεπόν, ὃ δαιμόνιε, μὴ παραδείγμασι χρώμενον ἱκανῶς ἐνδείκνυσθαι τι τῶν μειζόνων.”

Statesman, 277d

We will begin our analysis of the kind of examination Plato has in mind by considering the way Plato portrays the act of examining something. Throughout the texts we find many images that put before us the outward appearance of philosophical examination. This is not surprising. Plato’s writings are indeed full of images, of very different kinds, which are used to present more or less abstract entities. The nature and meaning of this device are not immediately clear, but Plato’s own reflections about the notion of image (εἶδωλον or εἰκόν) are particularly elucidating and help us understand the usefulness of such images.²⁶⁹

These reflections are very complex and contain many elements that we will not consider now.²⁷⁰ But restricting ourselves to the bare essentials, we can say Plato defines an image as something whose identity (what it itself is, its ὅπερ εἶναι) constitutively refers to something else.²⁷¹ Its manifestation or appearance is the manifestation or appearance of some other being – namely, the thing itself whose image it is (τὸ αὐτό).²⁷² In order for this to happen, an image does not need to closely resemble the thing itself it refers to. It can include many defects – and in fact it must always contain some defect and fall short of being the thing it refers to (otherwise it would simply be a second thing, equal to the first, and not its

²⁶⁹ The most relevant passages for Plato’s notion of image, in which he most explicitly discusses the notion, are *Cra.* 430a ff., *Rep.* 509d ff., 596c ff., *Sph.* 234b ff., *Ti.* 52a ff.

²⁷⁰ We will consider some aspects of this reflection in more detail below. See in particular Chap. 7 Sect. 2.4, and Chap. 16, Sect. 5.2 f).

²⁷¹ See in particular *Sph.* 240a7-8: “τί δῆτα, ὃ ξένε, εἶδωλον ἂν φαῖμεν εἶναι πλήν γε τὸ πρὸς τἀληθινὸν ἀφωμοιωμένον ἕτερον τοιοῦτον;”

²⁷² An image must include this reference to something other than itself, but this does not entail that this other being (the thing itself) must actually exist. It can be something fictitious (as a Centaur, for instance). However, even in the case of fiction, the reference to something else is an intrinsic component of images, and in fact something that is at their core.

image).²⁷³ In this sense, defectiveness is a central feature of an image. An image is different from the thing itself and it does not fully contain or present it. However, it does point to this thing and it does put us in relation to it. It evokes it or brings it to mind (in other words, it produces an *ἀνάμνησις*).

This relation with the thing itself that is depicted and presented in an image (or to which an image is constitutively referred) constitutes both the strength and the weakness of an image. It can reveal something that is absent or hidden – but, because of the absence of the thing itself, the image can also replace and hide the very thing whose image it is (and simultaneously hide its own status as an image). This is the reason for Plato’s strong criticism of the notion of image. An image can cause us to lose sight of the thing to which the image refers and mistake the defective presentation of something for the thing itself.

But if images involve this risk, then why does Plato employ so many images and why should we start our investigation about philosophical examination with the images of this examination? We seek Plato’s concept of philosophical examination – i.e., what characterizes all occurrences of such an examination and all its images. We seem to require an explicit and rational discussion (a *λόγος*) that may grasp what the philosophical examination as such is. So why care about images at all? What advantages are there in reflecting about them? Is it only a matter of making our analysis more vivid and more pleasant, or does it rather help us gain access to the essence of examination?

As was mentioned, an image has always some relation to the thing itself. It evokes this thing. Hence, it can be very helpful. It all hinges on how we experience the image or how we relate to it. If we are aware of an image’s constitutive lack, it not only reveals something about an absent object, but it can also awaken a longing for the thing itself.²⁷⁴ An image can mobilize us, guide us and put us on the right track. Therefore, we can also learn more about something by considering its images. Although they are defective and only provide us a hazy access to something, they can be a basis for further developments. They show something in a more concrete and immediate manner and allow us to become more familiar with an object

²⁷³ This is expressly said in *Cra.* 432a-c: “[ΣΩ.] (...) οὐδὲ τὸ παράπαν δέη πάντα ἀποδοῦναι οἷόν ἐστιν ᾧ εικάζει, εἰ μέλλει εἰκὼν εἶναι. σκοπεῖ δὲ εἰ τί λέγω. ἄρ’ ἂν δύο πράγματα εἴη τοιάδε, οἷον Κρατύλος καὶ Κρατύλου εἰκὼν, εἴ τις θεῶν μὴ μόνον τὸ σὸν χρῶμα καὶ σχῆμα ἀπεικάζειεν ὥσπερ οἱ ζωγράφοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐντὸς πάντα τοιαῦτα ποιήσειεν οἷαπερ τὰ σά, καὶ μαλακότητος καὶ θερμότητος τὰς αὐτὰς ἀποδοίη, καὶ κίνησιν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν οἷαπερ ἡ παρὰ σοὶ ἐνθεῖη αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ πάντα ἅπερ σὺ ἔχεις, τοιαῦτα ἕτερα καταστήσειεν πλησίον σου; πότερον Κρατύλος ἂν καὶ εἰκὼν Κρατύλου τότε εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτον, ἢ δύο Κρατύλοι; [ΚΡΑ.] δύο ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσιν, ᾧ Σώκρατες, Κρατύλοι.”

²⁷⁴ In fact, an image can be defined as a sort of desire or longing for the thing itself. The description of the object that provokes an *ἀνάμνησις* in the *Phaedo* fully applies to Plato’s notion of image: it wants to be like (βούλεται or ὀρέγεται εἶναι οἷον) the thing evoked by it, but falls short of it (ἐνδεεστέρως ἔχει). See 74d-75a.

and its essential traits before trying to define it conceptually. Reflecting about the images of something can thus help us develop a concept and understand the problems associated with it, especially when the concept is neither immediately available nor easy to understand. We start with something which is more familiar and clearer to us and, through its consideration, we try to arrive at a clear insight into something else.

We must, however, be aware of the risks of confounding the image with the thing itself. In our present inquiry we cannot assume that we will fully know what philosophical examination is only by focusing Plato's portrayal of it. If anything, this portrayal will actually show the impossibility of defining the operation simply by referring to its manifestations. As we will see, there are many diverse images of philosophical examination in Plato's writings and such a diversity makes the question about the unity of them all (a question for which we find no answer in the domain of images as such) all the more pressing.

Let us then consider the images of philosophical examination. They can be organized into two groups. The first group comprises the different aspects of the enactment or dramatic representation (μίμησις) of philosophical examination in the dialogues. The second group is composed by the terms Plato uses to designate the act of examining. These terms have a metaphoric nature and compare philosophical examination to other activities. We will see the many images that are contained in both these groups and reflect on the meaning of this multiplicity, which will also be a good preparation for the following discussion on the unitary concept of philosophical examination.

1. The dramatization of philosophical examination in the *corpus*

As was seen in the Introduction, Plato's writings are not treatises that put forward the author's views and the arguments that sustain them.²⁷⁵ They rather present many different examinations, which are neither in Plato's own voice nor anonymous. Plato's writings are indeed dramatic texts and have a mimetic character. Dramatic μίμησις is defined in the *Republic* as "likening one's self to someone else either in voice or in appearance".²⁷⁶ This is precisely what we find in the texts. Plato adopts different voices and behaviors, impersonates different persons (some of them fictitious and even nameless) and disappears behind them.

²⁷⁵ See Section 4.1 of the Introduction.

²⁷⁶ See 393c: "οὐκοῦν τό γε ὁμοιοῦν ἑαυτὸν ἄλλῳ ἢ κατὰ φωνήν ἢ κατὰ σχῆμα μιμεῖσθαι ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνον ᾧ ἂν τις ὁμοιοῖ;" The translation is mine. It is important to remark that the word σχῆμα means not only appearance, but also bearing.

His texts are theatrical plays (or more precisely, philosophical dramas). As a result, the examinations are not simply communicated, but enacted. They are carried out by different characters and therefore reflect these characters' interests, personalities, states of mind, as well as the relations between them.²⁷⁷

Among all characters, one in particular stands out: Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus. He partakes in almost every discussion and is depicted as unique, outlandish, full of contradictions and an almost mythical figure. As was said in the discussion of the *Apology* above, he is the perfect embodiment of philosophical examination and a model which some strive to imitate. The other characters, in turn, have other stances towards philosophical examination. They can be more or less committed, more or less active, and they react differently to what happens during examination. They also have more or less philosophical potential, which they can neglect or try to develop. Socrates himself is the extreme case of someone who had much potential as a young man and who has developed it to the fullest. We see him at different moments of his life and follow this development. This is very important, because it shows how his talent for examination is a possibility that does not appear spontaneously, but is rather something that must be acquired through training.

All these and many other aspects characterize Plato's μίμησις of philosophical examination. A close consideration of all of them would be too extensive and we will not undertake it here. We will rather focus our attention on aspects that let us see some of the most important features of Plato's understanding of philosophical examination. In particular, we will consider the many guises under which philosophical examination appears in Plato's writings. Philosophical examination has indeed a protean character. It constantly changes shape, not only from dialogue to dialogue, but also within the same text. This is a salient feature of Plato's depiction and it raises some important questions. We will thus collect many different elements that are associated with how philosophical examination is enacted in the Platonic corpus. This collection will not be complete, but it will give us a pretty precise idea of the diversity we find in the texts. We will briefly see many of the different configurations philosophical examination may assume, without entering into much detail about their

²⁷⁷ The characterization of these figures is quite complex. What they say and what they do betrays their thoughts, emotions and ambitions. They have different ages, occupations and social standings. They have their own way of speaking and thinking. They have their own character (ἦθος) and different degrees of intelligence. All these idiosyncrasies are relevant. They are reflected in one's relation to philosophical examination and show how the latter is always integrated in a particular way of life. Furthermore, these characters were for the most part public figures and everybody knew how their lives had turned out. Plato integrated the examination precisely in these lives, thus making it all very concrete and putting it in direct relation to the good or bad fates of these figures.

structure or meaning. We will organize them under different headings, which correspond to different factors that determine the kind of examination that is employed and thus help us understand why the philosophical examination can assume all these configurations.

1.1. The μίμησις of the genesis and of the interruption of philosophical examination

Let us start at the beginning. The dialogues often depict and discuss the irruption or outbreak of particular examinations. At first, there was no examination and many things were left unexamined, then suddenly a particular examination is set in motion. But what does this depiction tell us about philosophical examination?

The first thing that stands out in this respect is the fact that philosophical examination may have many different geneses. Several dialogues begin in the middle of an examination and we receive no indication of how it started.²⁷⁸ In other cases we follow the shift from a trivial conversation to the examination of a matter implied in what someone said. Normally it is Socrates who makes this transition, by submitting someone else to examination. He may be in some cultural event where someone reads a text or exhibits his intellectual virtuosity and Socrates then examines him about what he said.²⁷⁹ He can also inquire someone about the boys that show intellectual promise and afterwards submits some boy to a test.²⁸⁰ Sometimes, Socrates crosses paths with some acquaintance of his who is about to do something, which leads to Socrates questioning him about the intended action.²⁸¹ Other times, he meets someone and questions his usual actions and what they presuppose.²⁸² It can even occur that Socrates wakes up with someone besides him and starts examining him almost immediately.²⁸³ In some cases, Socrates had arranged a meeting with friends and in this meeting he makes the acquaintance of someone, whom he quickly submits to questioning with hopes of learning something.²⁸⁴ But the examination is not always directed at others. Sometimes it is his own circumstances and predicaments (especially when his life is at risk)

²⁷⁸ This is the case of *Meno*, *Cratylus* and *Philebus*, for instance.

²⁷⁹ See the beginning of *Hippias Minor*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras* and *Parmenides*.

²⁸⁰ This is how the examination begins in *Charmides* and *Theaetetus*.

²⁸¹ See for instance the opening of *Euthyphro* or *Alcibiades I*.

²⁸² Socrates does this in *Ion* and *Hippias Major*. In a way, something similar happens in *Lysis*, since Socrates inquires two φίλοι about the meaning of φιλία.

²⁸³ This is how *Crito* and *Protagoras* begin.

²⁸⁴ Cp. the beginning of *Sophist* and *Timaeus*.

that prompt the examination.²⁸⁵ In general, Socrates does not need much to start examining something. But he is not the only one that sets examinations going. Sometimes people who want to know his opinion or advice start questioning him.²⁸⁶ In fact, anyone can cause the examination to start and anyone can be submitted to it.

A quick glance over the starting points of the dialogues thus shows how diverse the genesis of examination can be – and although we find many different geneses of examination, Plato's writings are far from making a full inventory. They provide no more than a sample of how philosophical examination can begin and thereby indicate that each moment in life (not only cultural gatherings, but also everyday life and difficult or extreme situations) can become the starting point of complex examinations. These examinations may take place in very different contexts and in very different places in the πόλις. There is no typical situation (even if some may be more propitious or more suited than others). Ultimately, everything depends on one's capacity to release oneself from the more immediate concerns and start examining.

Plato, however, not only presents examinations being undertaken one after the other. He also shows us their interruption or breakdown. The cause for this may be either extrinsic or intrinsic to the examination. At some points, the arrival of a particular person causes the examination to stop.²⁸⁷ At the end of *Symposium* Aristophanes and Agathon fall asleep. This is an expression of our physiological limitations and of how they restrict our ability to examine. Sometimes, a character is otherwise engaged (or so he claims) and has to leave.²⁸⁸ Other times, the examination can also be aborted because a character grows impatient, tired or exasperated with it and does not want to continue.²⁸⁹

All this goes to show just how fragile the examination is and how easily it can wither down and die. The problem is thus not only about its genesis, but also (and perhaps mainly) about its preservation and development. The commitment to examination and value recognized in it may vary greatly – and this means the examination can be performed as something casual, loose, discontinuous, or as an intensive and global project. Only the latter

²⁸⁵ The *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo* show precisely this.

²⁸⁶ See the beginning of *Laches*, *Hippias Minor* and *Meno*.

²⁸⁷ At the end of *Lysis*, for instance, the boys' guardians bring the discussion to a close, whereas in *Symposium* the arrival of Alcibiades prevents Aristophanes from giving a reply to Socrates' speech (see 212c ff.).

²⁸⁸ It happens at the end of *Euthyphro* or in Socrates' conversation with Cephalus at the beginning of *Republic* (cp. 331d). Even Socrates must at times stop the examination because of other commitments (see the very end of *Theaetetus*). Other times he must stop because his time has run out (as is the case in the *Apology* and in *Phaedo*).

²⁸⁹ A good illustration of this is the conversation with Anytus in *Meno* (see 94e-95a).

truly fulfils the potential of philosophical examination, but it requires great effort and dedication.

The longevity of examination is not the only factor that can vary, though. While the examination is being performed, it may follow different paths, according to the views, interests, capabilities and difficulties of the interlocutors. These paths may lead to dead ends or ἀπορία and one must start all over again.²⁹⁰ The exploration of new possibilities may then entail an inversion of roles. The one who was trying to answer may now ask the questions and the other has to answer and account for his answers. It may also happen that someone that was just listening (and of whom we might not even have been aware) now takes part in the dialogue, either because of his own initiative (in order to ask a question, raise an objection, express his perplexity) or because someone addressed him.²⁹¹

Sometimes the search for answers seems to lead to results, but they may be merely apparent. It is therefore important not to accept them right away. One must insist and renew the examination.²⁹² This raises the question of when does it all end – which is a constitutive problem of the examination.²⁹³ One thing is clear, though. Such an examination is not our usual position in life. We may examine or not, and when we do, we may examine just a little or undertake it as our destiny. But at first we tend to have other engagements. The different examinations thus appear as interstices in the middle of life's journey and they are not something we can easily undertake and maintain. This raises the question about the factors that provoke, encourage, sustain and eventually interrupt an examination of something. There seem to be several of them, but we will not consider them here.²⁹⁴ The important thing for now is the fact that philosophical examination may have different possible origins.

²⁹⁰ This movement of πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς is a constant feature of the dialogues (see e.g. *Euthphr.* 11b, 15c, *Chrm.* 163d, *La.* 197e-198a, *Men.* 79c, e, *Euthd.* 295e, *Grg.* 489d, *Phd.* 88d, *Tht.* 151d, 164c, 187a-b, 200d, *Plt.* 264b, 268d, *Prm.* 142b). The answers or definitions that were put forward collapse and the interlocutors must make a fresh start. Other times Socrates, comparing the examination to a game of πεττεία, allows someone to remake a move (ἀναθέσθαι) – i.e., to give a different answer at some of the questions that were raised during the course of the examination) and thus open a new line of inquiry. See, for instance, *Chrm.* 164d, *Grg.* 461d, 462a, *Prt.* 354e, *Phd.* 87a. Cp. also *Hipparchus*, 229e.

²⁹¹ This happens many times. See e.g. *Grg.* 461b, 481b, *Rep.* 336a ff., *Tht.* 168c, 183c ff.. In some cases, the defense of a thesis is actually transferred to someone else. In *Republic* (331d) and *Philebus* (11a f., 12a, 19a), Polemarchus and Protarchus are said to inherit the thesis of Cephalus and Philebus, respectively.

²⁹² Socrates often exhibits this capacity of suspecting what was achieved and keep examining. One of the best illustrations of this is *Ly.* 218c, where Socrates says: “καὶ δὴ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ πάνυ ἔχαιρον, ὥσπερ θηρευτὴς τις, ἔχων ἀγαπητῶς ὃ ἐθηρευόμην. κάπειτ’ οὐκ οἶδ’ ὀπόθεν μοι ἀτοπωτάτη τις ὑποψία εἰσηλθεν ὡς οὐκ ἀληθῆ εἶη τὰ ὁμολογημένα ἡμῖν, καὶ εὐθὺς ἀχθεσθεῖς εἶπον· βαβαῖ, ὦ Λύσι τε καὶ Μενέξενε, κινδυνεύομεν ὄναρ πεπλουτηκῆναι.” There are also other characters who are sometimes hard to please with the answers that are given and who are commended for it by Socrates (see e.g. *Rep.* 367e-368a and *Phd.* 62e-63a).

²⁹³ For more on this topic, see Chap. 19, Sect. 3.4.

²⁹⁴ For a consideration of this topic, cp. Chap. 17, Sects. 4 and 5.

1.2. The different modes of relation to philosophical examination and to the views being examined

Another important aspect that varies greatly throughout the corpus is the different relation characters have with philosophical examination. It is indeed possible to have different degrees of commitment while examining. Someone may regard a particular examination (or all examination in general) simply as a game or a contest in which victory is all that matters.²⁹⁵ But one can also perform the examination in full earnest and be very passionate about it. Moreover, examination in general can play different roles in the lives of the characters. Some dedicate themselves entirely to it, but for others philosophical examination is something occasional, instigated by some particular circumstance or by someone. These different relations with examination may be conditioned by one's past experiences, as some passages expressly point out. If in the past someone hit many dead ends, this may cause him to have grown frustrated and skeptic – or affected by misology. If, however, one notices progress and is hopeful to find answers, then one's motivation is bound to be much greater.²⁹⁶

In the cases in which the characters are committed to philosophical examination, they may still have different relations to the views under examination, and this in turn will help determine the kind of examination that they perform. Some are examining their own beliefs (either alone or with the help of someone else) and so they are fully involved in the examination. But the examination may also concern the beliefs of someone else – either the interlocutor or someone absent. In the latter case, the characters may examine something heard by one of the characters.²⁹⁷ However, the views put forward can also be presented as the result of a sudden inspirational insight or a dream.²⁹⁸ In some cases, there is even a complete ignorance about the origin of a thesis – especially when it is shared by most people and for a long time, as is the case in the *Apology*.²⁹⁹ The examination may be precisely about the views shared by most people or everybody – or it may concern the views of past and

²⁹⁵ We find a perfect illustration of this in the behavior of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus throughout *Euthydemus*.

²⁹⁶ For a discussion of misology and its opposite, see in particular *Phd.* 89d ff.

²⁹⁷ See e.g. *Chrm.* 161b and *Tht.* 201c-d.

²⁹⁸ Cp. for instance *Cra.* 396d, *Phdr.* 237a, *Tht.* 201d ff., *Phlb.* 20b.

²⁹⁹ Here Socrates must fight shadows in order to defend himself. See 18b ff.

contemporary Greek culture (and in particular famous philosophers and poets).³⁰⁰ As a result, the ones performing the examination may disagree partially or fully with these views – or they may be unsure about their own stance with respect to them (especially after going through the examination process). The views examined may in fact be taken as mere conjectures, which one regards as more or less plausible. In *Phaedo*, Socrates even presents a hypothetical kind of examination, in which one provisionally accepts what seems to be the best view and considers the consequences.³⁰¹ Other times, however, the hypothetical method simply considers many or all different alternatives and sees their implications. In this case, one may very well not have any particular inclination and it is the examination itself that is supposed to reveal what is the correct view.³⁰²

In all these cases, one is transparent about one's relation to the views being examined. But it is not always so. One may also be ironical or dissimulated (as Socrates often is, not letting one's beliefs transpire).³⁰³ In some cases, one may even defend views that are the exact opposite of one's beliefs. One may be wheedling or wily (αἰμύλος) and try to obtain something by defending a view opposite to one's own.³⁰⁴ Other times, we see people defending a view that is very implausible exclusively (or at least mainly) for epideictic purposes.³⁰⁵ All these different relations to the views being examined will strongly affect the development of the examination and the meaning it has for the ones that perform it.

1.3. The difference between practical and theoretical examinations

Another factor that determines the different examinations we find illustrated in the *corpus* is the kind of relation the examination has with one's own life or how it is integrated in it. Some examinations are very close to the practical sphere (here understood in a broad sense), while others seem to have a strictly cognitive or theoretical nature and concern some

³⁰⁰ To name only a few important examples: in the *Theaetetus* Socrates examines the views of Protagoras (152a ff.), in *Sophist* the Stranger examines Parmenides and the φυσιολόγοι in general (237a ff.), while Simonides is examined in the *Protagoras* (349a ff.).

³⁰¹ Cp. 100a ff.

³⁰² The hypothetical method is indeed an important device to expand one's knowledge, especially when one does not happen to have any strong convictions in the matter. For an analysis of this method and its different forms in the Platonic corpus, see Chap. 9, Sect. 3.1 below.

³⁰³ For more on Socrates' εἰρωνεία, see Sect. 4.1 of the Introduction.

³⁰⁴ See in particular *Phdr.* 237b.

³⁰⁵ For instance, given the negative view of love in Greek culture, the project of praising love in *Symposium* is originally introduced as an epideictic challenge (cp. 177a ff.). The first two speeches in the *Phaedrus* also have an epideictic character, since they go against what one would expect in the context of an ἐρωτικός λόγος. See in particular 227c-d.

abstract matter which, at first sight, may seem to have none or only a few remote implications on what one does and how one lives.³⁰⁶ This distinction between a practical and a theoretical examination seems to be clear, though it is also somewhat artificial, as Plato's writings time and again show. Any reflection about life implies tackling abstract problems that can have great implications in our life, and the discussion of abstract problems often requires one to consider not only important questions about the nature of life in general, but also what one does and the way one lives. In a sense, each problem is always connected with both domains, though one side may be predominant.

Let us then consider the more practical examinations first. Philosophical examination is often concerned with the concrete circumstances in which the characters find themselves. It can examine either their actions or their course of life. It may focus on the past and what they have done.³⁰⁷ Other times, what is subject to examination is one's present situation: more precisely, one's condition, one's credentials, one's talent.³⁰⁸ The examination may also look to the future and inspect what one is about to do.³⁰⁹ It can even imagine a situation (or make a thought experiment) and raise the question of what one would do in such a case. Furthermore, this practical examination is not restricted to particular matters and circumstances. One's life as a whole can also be subject to examination – and even several possible ways of life.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ This corresponds in part to the distinction between those who occupy themselves of ethereal and abstract matters (which was usually expressed by the figure of the μετεωρολόγος, as presented in Aristophanes' *Clouds* or in *Tht.* 173c ff.) and those that considered problems that affect individual life and the political community, which according to Cicero was an innovation of the historical Socrates. Indeed, Cicero indeed says in *Tusculanae Disputationes*, V.4: "Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in urbibus conlocavit et in domus etiam introduxit et coegit de vita et moribus rebusque bonis et malis quaerere." See M. POHLENZ (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis Scripta quae mansuerunt omnia*, Fasc. 44, Leipzig, Teubner, 1918.

³⁰⁷ Cp. for instance the end of the *Apology* (40a ff.), where Socrates examines his defense strategy and wonders if it was the most appropriate one. In fact, the whole defense speech itself constitutes a form of examination concerning what one has done. We see this model of apologetic examination also in *Phaedo*. Socrates says that he will now defend himself before philosophers and justify the fact that he is not concerned with his imminent death. See in particular 63b.

³⁰⁸ We see Alcibiades and Socrates examining the state the former is in (cp. in particular *Alc. I* 118b). In *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus* and *Hippias Major* Socrates examines who certain sophists are, what knowledge they have and what their credentials are. This also happens in *Ion* and, in a way, in *Laches*. Other times, Socrates examines the qualities and faculties of a youth – as for instance Charmides' σοφροσύνη or Theaetetus' intellectual talent. In *Lysis*, the two young boys are examined with respect to their understanding of φιλία, which is precisely what characterizes their relationship.

³⁰⁹ This is the case in *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, *Alcibiades I* and the beginning of *Protagoras*. Socrates intercepts someone and asks him to justify what he intends to do. In other cases, the reflection about what is to be done takes the form of a shared deliberation (as we see in *Laches*, where the characters deliberate about what education Lysimachus and Melesias should give their sons).

³¹⁰ We could perhaps include in these practical examinations many of the myths, since they reflect about how we live and how we understand what matters in life. The eschatological myths in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo* examine the broad context in which our life takes place, what we should concern ourselves with and how we should live. For a closer consideration of how it is so, cp. Chap. 16, Sect. 5.1 below.

As for the more theoretical and abstract examinations, they usually take place in moments of leisure (σχολή) and in some intellectual context (schools, symposia, readings or any other cultural gathering) in which people are discussing cultural or philosophical questions, exploring possibilities, defending positions or just showing off their skills.³¹¹ Sometimes well-known sophists or philosophers (such as Gorgias, Protagoras and Parmenides, alongside Socrates) take part in the conversation, but even when there are no intellectual celebrities and the context is not strictly intellectual, the course of the conversation (be it a trivial one or itself an examination of some practical matter) may end up leading to these more theoretical questions. These questions may have been prompted by something that was said or read. Someone (usually Socrates) is surprised by some thesis or assumption and requires a justification.³¹² Other times a character outright inquires another about his view on a certain matter.³¹³ This can happen either because one wants to stir up a discussion or because one is interested in learning something. Furthermore, characters do not always proceed immediately to the discussion of a serious question in which they are interested. Sometimes they examine something as a form of preparation for further examination – i.e., philosophical examination may be an exercise (a γυμνασία or μελετή) to gain practice and acquire skill in this operation.³¹⁴

1.4. The different modalities of λόγος

Another relevant factor of differentiation concerns the modalities of λόγος. Philosophical examination uses λόγος, takes place in it and largely coincides with it. The meaning of the term λόγος is actually very complex, but we will not enter into a detailed discussion of it at this point.³¹⁵ What is at issue is the fact that philosophical examination uses speech, but also that it produces a rational discussion, in which one attempts to explain and account for one's views. In this sense, philosophical examination is “logical”. However, this

³¹¹ In fact, some texts illustrate a very particular intellectual context: namely, that of the ἐπίδειξις, i.e. the exhibition or display of one's intellectual capacity, with the intention of being admired by the listeners and also of seducing others (in particular the young) to become one's students and learn one's intellectual trade (and often with both intentions). The best examples of this are *Euthydemus* and *Protagoras*.

³¹² See e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 286c-e, *Prt.* 329b ff., and *Rep.* 331b-c.

³¹³ Cp. for instance *Hp. Mi.* 363a and *Men.* 70a.

³¹⁴ The exercise may be lighter than the actual examination. One may apply the method to a simple object, to illustrate what is supposed to be done. See e.g. *Men.* 73e ff. or *Sph.* 218c. In *Parmenides*, however, the exercise is extremely demanding and described as a διὰ πάντων διέξοδος τε καὶ πλανή (136e) or a swimming across the sea of λόγοι (137a). For a consideration of this difficult exercise, see Chap. 9, Sect. 3.1 c) below.

³¹⁵ For two brief considerations of this notion, from two different angles, cp. Sect. 2.2 of this chapter and Chapter 6, Section 1.3 b).

λόγος can have different modalities – and Plato sometimes calls our attention to an important difference between a conversation or dialogue (διαλέγεσθαι) and a long monologue or speech (μακρὸς λόγος).³¹⁶ Let us briefly see what characterizes each one.

Characters often examine something during the course of a conversation. But this is not just any conversation. It is rather a dialogue in which one guides and asks questions, whereas the other must answer, explain his answers, justify them and avoid contradiction.³¹⁷ This renders the examination particularly personal. It also allows characters to consider a view in detail, breaking it into pieces (as is said in *Hippias Major*) and seeing all its implications.³¹⁸ As a result, one's relation with the contents of a view becomes more demanding than usual, and they must be clear and well grounded. Moreover, this method of examination is particularly malleable and unpredictable. The line of inquiry is not predetermined, but it depends on what is asked and affirmed by both parties during the investigation. The whole process can thus bring to light aspects that were hidden and of which one had no idea (especially unexpected implications or internal inconsistencies of one's views).

But the corpus is comprised of more than conversations. There are also long speeches, in which a particular subject is discussed and a particular view is expounded.³¹⁹ One could think that the examination is confined to the strictly dialogical moments, in which two characters converse and the views of one of them are examined. Speeches would rather be a moment of presenting one's doctrine. But speeches are the result of examinations and they themselves contain moments in which the orator examines things, confronts or questions other views, presents alternatives, explores possibilities, gives definitions, and so on.³²⁰ It is true that the views presented in a speech may be more imprecise than the ones discussed in a conversation, since in a speech one is not forced to account for everything being said, but

³¹⁶ Cp. in particular *Hp. Ma.* 304a-b, *Prt.* 334c ff., *Grg.* 449b-c, *Sph.* 217c-218a.

³¹⁷ For more on this kind of conversation or questioning, see Sect. 2.6 below.

³¹⁸ Cp. *Hp. Ma.* 304a. Frustrated with Socrates questions and objections, Hippias describes them as “κνήσματά [...] καὶ περιτμήματα τῶν λόγων [...] κατὰ βραχὺ δηρημένα”. He also calls it μικρολογία (304b), which has the connotation of hairsplitting or being excessively occupied with minutiae, but is actually a suitable designation of what we see Socrates doing – especially if we consider that he often begins his inquiries asking about some small thing (σμικρὸν τι or βραχὺ τι) implied in what someone said. Cp. e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 286c, *Prt.* 328e.

³¹⁹ This mode of λόγος is also referred to in disparaging terms. For instance, it is described as a relaxing the reins of λόγος (*Prt.* 338a), a stretching of it (*Prt.* 335c) or a running away to the high sea of λόγοι (*Prt.* 338a), with the further implication of being prolix and tedious in doing so. Usually these λόγοι are pronounced by sophists, but we also see Socrates pronouncing them. This is the case in the *Apology*, *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, but also elsewhere, when he needs to explain something in detail or when he tells a myth. Cp. *Grg.* 464b ff., especially Socrates' explanation at 465e.

³²⁰ In some cases, speeches can even resemble conversations, as Socrates' speech in the *Apology*, where he imagines questions asked by the jury and answers them. See 20c-d, 28b, 33b-c, 37e.

what is lost in detail is gained in amplitude. Indeed, speeches can more easily provide a synoptic view of a particular question. In addition, a speech has a more rigid form than a conversation, since it is fully controlled by an orator, who can manipulate the presentation at his will in order to best instruct (or simply to persuade) the audience. Consequently, it can also be a more impersonal form of examination, which hides one's own views and does not force one to account for them.

These marked differences do not necessarily mean that one modality of examination is better than the other. They are in fact complementary and in some occasions either one or the other may be more suitable. Moreover, the opposition between the two modalities is not necessarily as absolute as this analysis suggests. There is a certain continuity between them, the characters easily transition from one to the other, and sometimes the boundaries between them are not very clear. Some speeches are very brief and either the result of a question or the cause of further questions, whereas some questions and especially some answers are longer than usual. Moreover, some conversations are explicitly used to present doctrines.³²¹

On this topic it is also relevant to consider that long speeches do not need to have a strictly rational form. They can assume the form of myths or fables, in which a certain fantastic vision of reality is presented at length. Although it is difficult to generalize about them, because Plato uses different kinds of myths, with different degrees of complexity and different functions, we can nevertheless make some general remarks about their relation to philosophical examination. First, they originate in a certain examination of things (or, as Aristotle says, in a certain wonder or perplexity about them).³²² Normally they are connected with the conversations or speeches that precede and follow them. They illustrate these other λόγοι, make them more concrete and help us visualize them. In addition, insofar as they are questionable and imprecise, they also call for further examination. We can even ask if it is possible to fully translate these myths into rational discourse or into a dialectic conversation.³²³ But even if that is not the case, myths still allow Plato to handle certain themes – especially eschatological questions – that otherwise would be very hard to discuss. Myths are thus much more than poetic interludes. They are also part of the project of philosophical examination we find in the corpus and must be regarded as such.

³²¹ In the *Sophist* Socrates seems to assume that the same content could be presented either way. See *Sph.* 217c.

³²² See *Metaphysica* 982b17-19: “[...] καὶ ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφος πῶς ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων”.

³²³ Protagoras seems to do this when he answers a question posed by Socrates by telling a myth and then puts forward a rational explanation of what was expressed in the myth. Cp. *Prt.* 320c ff.

1.5. The different procedures employed in the *corpus*

Regardless of whether the examinations are performed through conversation or speeches, we find many different procedures or techniques of examination being employed in the texts. Some of these procedures are more direct, others more indirect. The examination may focus on a single reality or property, leaving aside everything else. It then tries to understand the specific nature, power or properties of its object, considered in itself.³²⁴ This consideration may focus either on the full identity of something or on some particular property, to ascertain whether something is characterized by it or not.³²⁵ The examination may also focus on language and the words used to refer to something.³²⁶ It may try to define a particular word, distinguish its different senses (in order to avoid ambiguity) and see if any of them is its proper sense.³²⁷ It may also discuss the origin of these terms and try to explain them through alleged etymologies.³²⁸

Very often, however, the devices employed in examining things have a more indirect nature. A good example of this indirectness is the procedure employed to determine the good in *Philebus*. Since it is difficult to find it directly, Socrates says that one should first search for its home – as when one is searching for a particular person.³²⁹ In other words, one must start by a generic or vague identification of something and then one will add detail and get a more precise identification of it. This vague and indirect identification may also be done by means of a comparison, a metaphor, or an analogy. Plato frequently employs images of

³²⁴ We find examples of this in the dialogues that discuss a single notion, such as *Euthyphro* (piety), *Laches* (courage), *Charmides* (σωφροσύνη), *Lysis* (φίλος).

³²⁵ In *Republic* I, for instance, the characters examine the notion of justice, but as Socrates points out at the end (354b), their discussion was more about a predicate of it than about the notion itself (see 354b). For more on this distinction between the identity of something and its qualifications, see Chapter 6, Section 2.1 below.

³²⁶ The boundaries between this and the previous procedure, in which a particular reality was focused, is sometimes difficult to draw, since the consideration of a word often entails the consideration of the reality it refers to. However, some examinations may be more sensitive to questions of language.

³²⁷ There are many moments in which terms are defined and meanings distinguished – something inspired by Prodicus' practice of ὀνόματα διαίρειν and the general interest in language at the time. In other cases, the discussion is about the proper form of something (i.e., the ὀρθότης of a word) – for instance, what is the proper form of φιλοσοφία (a question we will consider in Chap. 14, Sect. 4 below).

³²⁸ We find many fantastic etymologies in the *Cratylus* (see 391d ff.), but they also appear in other moments of the corpus (e.g. *Phdr.* 244c-d). It may not be clear how convinced Plato was of their validity, but it is certain that he used them at least to clarify the meaning of terms.

³²⁹ See 61a ff. Socrates uses several metaphors to characterize his approach. When inquiring about the good, Socrates speaks of knowing which path to take and where to find it (where it lives, where its home is). See in particular 61a-b: “καθάπερ εἴ τις τινα ἄνθρωπον ζητῶν τὴν οἴκησιν πρῶτον ὀρθῶς ἴν’ οἰκεῖ πύθοιτο αὐτοῦ, μέγα τι δῆπου πρὸς τὴν εὔρεσιν ἂν ἔχοι τοῦ ζητουμένου”. Later, in 64c, Socrates will speak of reaching the threshold of the habitation of the Good.

concrete beings in order to show important traits of more abstract or intelligible entities.³³⁰ In some cases, he resorts to larger entities in order to clarify the structure of smaller entities that are structurally similar to the first.³³¹

Another procedure that can be used to examine something is the method of divisions, usually in the form of dichotomies. Sometimes the characters distinguish a good and a bad form of something (which is connected with the aforementioned analysis of words).³³² This method of distinctions may then be taken to the extreme, in an attempt to define all realities within a system of progressive dichotomies, starting from more general determinations through to the moment in which no more distinctions can be made.³³³

In other cases, the examination assumes the form of a contest (ἀγών) between two or more alternatives. The examination may even start with the formulation of different possible answers and someone is expected to choose between them.³³⁴ Other times, the alternatives are introduced at a later point and in several cases they correspond to different ways of life from which one has to decide (κρίνειν) which one is best.³³⁵ The characters compare the different possibilities, which often requires them to better determine their content.

The examination may also employ thought experiments, in which the characters wonder what they would do or say in a particular situation, which is normally absolutely fantasized and sometimes implies the intervention of a deity.³³⁶ Other times the thought experiment consists in the isolation of something that we normally only experience in

³³⁰ Plato discusses the method of comparison (or more precisely, of using a model, παράδειγμα) and how it can help us understand something in *Plt.* 277d ff. For an inventory of these images or metaphors, see e.g. G. BERG, *Metaphor and Comparison in the Dialogues of Plato*, Diss. Baltimore, 1903, and P. LOUIS, *Les métaphores de Platon*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1945.

³³¹ The best example of this is the whole discussion in *Rep.* II-X, which is based on an analogy between the soul and the πόλις (see in particular 368c ff.).

³³² This thought pattern is already used by Homer and Hesiod – as when the latter distinguishes a good and a bad ἔργον (see *Opera et dies*, 11-26). Plato follows this model when he distinguishes, for instance, a good from a bad ἔργον (*Smp.* 180c ff.) or a good from a bad μανία (*Phdr.* 244a ff., 265a).

³³³ This method is discussed, employed and to a certain extent parodied in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. For a more detail consideration of it, see Chap. 9, Sect. 3.3 below.

³³⁴ This is the starting point of the examination of ἀρετή in *Meno* (70a) and of the correction of names in *Cratylus* (383a-384a).

³³⁵ It is precisely in these cases that an explicit reference to a contest is made. In the *Philebus*, Socrates talks several times of a contest between the life of knowledge and the life of pleasure (see in particular 11e f., 14b, 22c ff., 66e ff.). In the *Republic*, we find a contest between justice and injustice (cp. 360e, 361d, 577a ff.). To a certain extent, it is also what we find in Socrates conversation with Callicles in *Gorgias*, where the political and the philosophical life are compared (see 484c ff.). The same alternative appears at the end of *Euthydemus* (see 305b ff.). For more on the topic of choosing a way of life, see Chapt. 13, Sect. 6.5 below.

³³⁶ See for instance *Alc. I* 105a ff. (where Alcibiades is questioned by a god about his ambitions), *Smp.* 192d-e (where Hephaestus questions two lovers) and *Cri.* 50a ff. (where Socrates imagines himself being interrogated by the Laws of Athens).

combination with something else, to see if this thing is desirable by itself or not.³³⁷ These hypothetical and often extreme situations constitute a moment of truth, in which one is forced to identify and declare one's true views, feelings or desires about something.

Finally, one can also imagine what some reality would be or create it in speech, in order to better define it or better define something through it.³³⁸ In the *Timaeus*, Socrates says that he expects to see the theory they discussed in the day before come to live – and this is what Critias is supposed to do in the eponymous dialogue.³³⁹ The abstract is thus made concrete, in order to better examine something.

1.6. The different possible results of philosophical examination

One final factor that determines the difference between examinations is the kind of results they produce or are expected to produce.³⁴⁰ In some cases, the examination may lead to a dead end, to a situation of ἀπορία. One is perplexed and cannot find a definite answer to a problem.³⁴¹ In other cases, the characters seem to reach conclusions.³⁴² However, the positive results can themselves have different statuses – both for the persons examining and in themselves. One can be fully convinced of the result and take it for a definite answer, or one can conceive of it as something likely or plausible (as the λόγος εἰκός in the *Timaeus*).³⁴³ Likewise, one can take it as a provisional answer, still lacking development and revision. Finally, one can also fail to understand the true nature of the result achieved – in particular, one may be convinced that one found the answer when the result is in fact insufficient or even erroneous. Therefore, it is important to insist and not be satisfied with the first semblance of a solution.³⁴⁴

³³⁷ Cp. *Rep.* 360e ff., *Phlb.* 20e ff.

³³⁸ In the *Republic* Socrates talks of outlining a city in λόγος (548c-d), which is a means to determine what justice is. In the *Laws*, it is rather a matter of shaping or molding it through λόγος (712b2).

³³⁹ See *Ti.* 19b-c.

³⁴⁰ We will consider this aspect in greater detail in Chaps. 8 and 9 below, so at this point we will make only a very brief mention of it.

³⁴¹ This is the case of aporetic dialogues such as *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Hippias Major*, *Theaetetus*.

³⁴² *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*, *Laws* are just a few examples of dialogues that seem to reach conclusions.

³⁴³ Cp. *Ti.* 29b-d.

³⁴⁴ Usually Socrates reminds others of this, but sometimes he is not present or fails to do so – and so it is up to the other characters and the reader to question any result the examination may have produced.

1.7. The problem of the unity of philosophical examination and of the meaning of this multiplicity

As was seen, philosophical examination can vary according to several different factors and assume very different configurations. Plato's writings give a very complex illustration of this. He shows how flexible this examination can be. Philosophical examination is not simply a matter of mechanically employing a particular technique or a set of techniques. It is determined by the context in which it takes place (the subject matter, the character and intelligence of the interlocutors, the situation) and the challenges it faces.

This raises the question of what the different forms of philosophical examination have in common. Given all their differences, it is not even completely clear whether we can still talk of a unitary concept of philosophical examination. At first sight, it is difficult to determine which features are shared by all the forms of examination. It is likewise difficult to say whether they all have the same status or if some of them are more important than the others. The relation between them is unclear. The texts lack a methodological reflection that explicitly integrates all these moments in a global project. We cannot immediately locate and determine the value of each of these forms of examination. We do not know whether they can all be applied to the same topics and we also do not know if they are all equally efficient. We also do not have a criterion to determine which form of examination is to be employed in which circumstances. It is not even clear whether this is to be determined on the basis of the concept of philosophical examination or only case by case, by comparing the results.

Another question raised by the multiple modalities of examination is whether or not all the modalities are derived from the project of philosophical examination and required by it. Is it better to use all these different configurations instead of just one? Is it not possible to reduce and replace them all with a simple configuration? And if diversity is important, can there still be other relevant configurations that are not contemplated in the corpus?

These and other questions require the definition of philosophical examination. In other words, the way philosophical examination is enacted in the corpus forces us to think about the nature and purpose of this examination. But, since we cannot define philosophical examination simply at the level of its dramatic representation, we must find a new approach.

2. The vocabulary used to convey the notion of philosophical examination

A different set of images of philosophical examination can be seen in the language employed by Plato to designate the very act of examining something. Besides the term ἐξέταξις, which is directly connected with the passage about the unexamined life in the *Apology*, Plato uses several other terms with a similar meaning. These terms (ἐξετάζειν included) are associated with different everyday contexts and with particular activities or even particular forms of examination that have some resemblance with philosophical examination. These more familiar activities are thus used as metaphors in order to clarify what the characters are doing in the dialogues. Considered by themselves, they show different traits of the philosophical examination, and together they compose a portrait of this operation.³⁴⁵

We can group the different terms according to the main aspects or facets of examination they express (although some of them actually express more than one facet). Each term has a common usage (which in many cases can also be found in Plato's texts) and a technical one. The latter is not necessarily an innovation of Plato. Many of these technical usages can already be found in pre-Platonic literature. However, we will not consider how these terms were used outside the Platonic corpus. A brief synopsis of their meaning, with some references to their origins, will suffice to see what these terms tell us about philosophical examination.

Before considering the different groups of terms, we will turn our attention to the term ἐξετάξις – not only because it is directly connected with Socrates' assertion about the unexamined life, but also because its meaning encompasses several of the different facets of philosophical examination we will discuss in the following and, to this extent, it provides us an overview of the complexity of the language used to express the idea of examination.

³⁴⁵ This kind of metaphorical language is very common in Plato's writings (as was mentioned in Section 4.1 of the Introduction). The terms employed are in many cases far from being well-defined and unambiguous. They are frequently taken from other areas (such as nature, society, politics, professions, pastimes, other theoretical disciplines and so on). Moreover, these words are often employed in various senses (sometimes during the same discussion) and they are constantly replaced by other words that may contain different associations. This can be regarded both as a weakness and a strength of Plato's style. Although it introduces imprecision, it also makes concepts more intuitive and in some cases almost phenomenological.

2.1. The meaning of ἐξετάζειν/ἐξέτασις and ἀνεξέταστος

It has been argued that ἐξετάζειν is etymologically connected with the adjectives ἐτός and ἐτεός (which means “true”, “real”, “genuine”). The prefix ἐκ- would then mark the accomplishment of a process – in this instance, the complete attainment of what is true or real in relation to something.³⁴⁶ But regardless of its etymology, ἐξετάζειν always denotes an act or effort of ascertaining what some being really is and whether or not this being is as it seems or claims to be. In order to do so, one needs to carefully inspect, scrutinize, examine or test this being. Only so can one overcome the possible limitations of one’s first impressions or one’s regular contact with it, thereby forcing it to reveal itself as it really is.

The word and the act it designates can in turn be connected with different contexts. It is often used in a military sense. Ἐξέτασις is a muster, inspection or review of troops, their arms, horses, etc. This is an act that is performed before an important event, as a preparation for it. One has to gather the different elements of a complex reality and align them, thus altering their disposition and one’s mode of relation to them. In the case of an army, this allows one to see whether it is prepared to defend the entire community. An ἐξέτασις can thus be decisive before proceeding to the campaigns of practical life.

The term ἐξέτασις may also have a more economic usage and emphasize the idea of being exhaustive. In this case, it has the sense of enumeration or inventory (for instance of possessions). It not only lets us see things that may otherwise escape our notice, but it enables one to determine with precision the whole set of things that compose a certain group. The term is used in a similar sense in the context of the control of magistrates and their expenses during office.³⁴⁷ One must verify the way they handled public money. In this case, it also has the sense of verifying the honesty and probity of someone. This sense of verification can even become predominant in the use of the word.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ Cp. e.g. H. FRISK, “Wahrheit” und “Lüge” in den Indogermanischen Sprachen. Einige morphologische Bemerkungen, *Göteborgs Hogskolas Arsskrift* 41 (1935), 1-35 (especially 16-18); IDEM, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3 vols., Heidelberg, Winter, 1960-1972, *sub voces* ἐτάζω and ἐτεός; P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. Histoire des mots, 4 vols., Paris, Klincksieck, 1968-1980, *sub voces* ἐτάζω and ἐτεός; J.-P. LEVET, *Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque*. Tome I: Présentation générale – Le vrai et le faux dans les épopées homériques, Paris, Les Belles Letres, 1976, 8; R. BEEKES, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 2 vols., Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2010, *sub voces* ἐτάζω and ἐτεός.

³⁴⁷ For more on the control of magistrates, see the discussion of λόγον διδόναι in the following section.

³⁴⁸ It is in this sense that the word could also be used (at least at a later date) for the verification of citizenship claims, just like δοκιμάζειν. On this usage of the term, see e.g. A. GOMME & F. SANDBACH, *Menander*. A Commentary, Oxford, University Press, 1973, *ad Samia* 141.

But perhaps more important is the judicial use of the word. Ἐξέτασις denotes a cross-examination of witnesses (in particular of the plaintiff or the defendant) in a lawsuit. What undergoes examination in this case is primarily one's version of events (though its plausibility is also connected with one's character and one's reliability). The opponent searches for inconsistencies in one's testimony, tries to find something that may be hidden and bring it to light through the pressure of relentless questioning. This pressure was increased by the fact that either party was obliged to answer the questions of the opponent. One could not simply say something. One had to stand by one's claims and justify them.³⁴⁹

The process of cross-examination is particularly important in a context where contradicting claims face each other and threaten the public order. The jury has a deficient and indirect access to what happened and an ἐξέτασις is thus (at least ideally) the means to verify each version, disarm falsity, reach the truth and pass a fair verdict, thereby restoring social order. This is not very far from what we see in Plato's dialogues, where ἐξέτασις is used as an intense interrogation of different claims or views, often in controversial matters, in an attempt to ascertain the truth of these matters, which in turn allows to restore the order in the conversation and in the characters' minds.³⁵⁰

In sum, ἐξέτασις designates the verification of the quality or worth of something through careful (usually exhaustive) inspection. It may be directed at a concrete object (or group of objects), a claim or view, and a person (or group of persons). This threefoldness also characterizes the Platonic use of the term (as well as of most of the other terms we will be considering), and so we shall return to it afterwards.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ We see an illustration of this in the *Apology*, when Socrates interrogates Meletus (24c ff.).

³⁵⁰ For more on the meaning of ἐξέτασις and ἐξετάζειν, see for instance W. GOODWIN (ed.), *Demosthenes – On the Crown*, Cambridge, University Press, 1905, ad 173, 277, 310, 320; J. BURNET (ed.), *Plato's Euthyphro Apology of Socrates and Crito*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1941, ad 22e6; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 199; A. GOMME & F. SANDBACH, *Menander. A Commentary*, Oxford, University Press, 1973, ad *Samia* 141; J.-P. LEVET, *Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque*. Tome I: Présentation générale – Le vrai et le faux dans les épopées homériques, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1976, 8-12, 165-180; A. MAFFI, L'exetastikon eidos nella *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, in A. PENNACINI (ed.), *Rhetorica e storia nella cultura classica*, Bologna, Pitagora, 1985, 29-43; H. GOLDMAN, Reexamining the "Examined Life" in Plato's *Apology* of Socrates, *Philosophical Forum* 35 (2004), 1-33; P. PONTIER, *Trouble et Ordre chez Platon et Xénophon*. Paris, Vrin 2006, 200-202; D. MIRHADY, The Disappearance and Reappearance of Exetasis, *Mouseion*, Journal of the Classical Association of Canada 8 (2008), 395-408; G. PASINI, The ἐξεταστικὸν εἶδος of the Rh. Al. and Parallels in Aeschines' *Against Timarchus* and Demosthenes' *On the False Embassy*, *Rhetorica* 29 (2011), 336-356.

³⁵¹ See the introductory remarks on Chap. 5 below. For Plato's use of ἐξέτασις or any cognate to designate any form of philosophical examination, see *Ap.* 22e, 23c, 24c, 28e, 29e, 33c, 38a, 41b, 41c, *Chrm.* 167a, 170d, 172b, *La.* 189a, 189e, *Cra.* 410d, 436d, *Prt.* 333c, *Grg.* 495a, 514b, 515b, *Rep.* 489a, 598d, 599a, *Phdr.* 258d, 261a, 270c, 277a, *Tht.* 154d, 155a, 184c, 210c, *Sph.* 230b, *Phlb.* 55c, *Ti.* 62c, *Criti.* 107c, 107d, *Lg.* 685a, 837e, 891c, 900d. These terms are also used for other kinds of examinations. *Cp. Criti.* 119d, *Lg.* 720d, 764a.

Finally, it is also important to make some remarks about the adjective “ἀνεξέταστος”, which is found in Socrates’ statement in the *Apology* (38a) and which is usually translated as “unexamined”. As was mentioned above, the word is more complex, since the suffix -τος can have either a passive or an active force.³⁵² Ἀνεξέταστος can thus indicate that something or someone is not submitted to examination or that one does not oneself perform a particular examination. In the occurrences outside of Plato the meaning is usually passive.³⁵³ Ἐξέτασις is indeed a means of identifying and preventing the faults of something. Its omission may therefore be the cause of limitations and defects. One lets something pass, admits it without submitting it to any special demands, and this leaves one exposed to problems. However, in the *Apology* the use of the word is more complex. It seems to have a simultaneously passive and active sense, especially given the reflexive character of the object that is supposed to undergo the ἐξέτασις. Life (βίος) is what must be examined (and what may be left unexamined), but in a sense it is also what is supposed to carry out this examination. This is the case even when someone is examined by another and seems to be entirely passive. The examinee must still give answers, follow what is being said, think about it – and is thus to a certain extent active. One could therefore translate ἀνεξέταστος βίος as “life without examination”, in order to reflect this ambiguity and avoid putting too much emphasis on the passive component.³⁵⁴

2.2. Philosophical examination as a test or assessment of value

The first facet or side of philosophical examination that we have to consider corresponds to an idea that is present in several uses of the term ἐξέτασις, as well as in several other terms. Things, persons and views often do not fully reveal themselves as they are. Their nature and their worth may remain hidden or they may give the impression (by their aspect, their behavior or their words) that they are something they are not. Our access to them has limitations and blind spots, which in turn can have serious consequences in our actions and our life in general. However, with respect to each being we can either credulously accept what it appears to be (i.e., accept what it reveals of itself on its own or what we think

³⁵² See Chap. 3, Sect. 2.

³⁵³ See e.g. ISOCRATES, *Evagoras*, 42; AESCHINES, *In Ctesiphontem*, 22; DEMOSTHENES, *Philippica I*, 36.4, *In Midiam*, 218; MENANDER, *Sententiae*, 17 (Meineke).

³⁵⁴ The translation “life without examination” is suggested by De Strycker and Slings. They also add that this is a life “in which there is place neither for examination nor for being examined”. See E. De STRYCKER and S. R. SLINGS, *Plato’s Apology of Socrates*, Leiden/New York, Brill, 1994, ad 38a5. For more discussion on the meaning of the expression “ἀνεξέταστος βίος”, see Chap. 3, Sect. 2 above.

of it in a first moment) or we can put it to test or proof, in order to force it to react and reveal itself. The object or person may pass or fail the test and this passing or failing may be more or less conclusive (depending on how reliable the test is) – but at any rate we have the possibility of trying to lay bare what something really is (its “true colors”, its true value) through our own acts. Sometimes the simple interaction with something or someone is enough to reveal new aspects. It gives us more time with something and time is indeed an important factor in our access to things. But in many cases there is need for more artificial means, which one will then use to compel things, views, persons to show themselves as they truly are. We only have to determine what exactly has this power, how it is to be employed and what the extent of its revealing power is.

Plato expresses this idea of submitting something to a test with several terms and their respective associations. One of the most common and meaningful is βάσανος or βασανίζειν. Βάσανος is the name of the touchstone, which was used to test gold. One had to rub or scrape the supposed gold and this would leave a streak whose color was then used to ascertain if the material was genuine or counterfeit gold. The noun also denotes (as does the verb) the process itself of testing the alleged gold and determining its value, whereby one could prevent the circulation of false currency and the accumulation of an illusory (or merely dreamt) wealth.³⁵⁵ These words may then apply to any test of genuineness or truthfulness, especially in the case of persons. The character, inner dispositions and thoughts of someone are not immediately accessible and are often not easy to ascertain. People sometimes turn out to be the opposite of what they seem and therefore we may need a sure test in this domain, in order to determine if others are sincere, reliable, worthy, or not.

It is important to remark that βάσανος does not designate a simple and innocuous test. It referred originally to a test done through rubbing or scrapping and this implied submitting something to a certain amount of violence. The same holds for the other uses of the word. It always suggests a hard test, which submits something to strong pressure and in a way beats the truth out of it. With respect to persons, it often involves being submitted to great suffering or being put under duress – as can be seen in several examples. A person’s character may indeed be tested not only by the more neutral passing of time, but more intensely and with

³⁵⁵ The idea of a dreamt wealth (ὄναρ πλουτεῖν) was a common topos in Greek culture and it plays an important role in the cognitive domain, as we will later see. Cp. Chap. 14, Sect. 3.1.

greater precision by a misfortune, by the acquisition of wealth (in which case gold itself becomes the βάσανος) or by drunkenness.³⁵⁶

This notion of testing through hardship is most patent in the use of βάσανος and βασανίζειν to designate the questioning of someone (particularly slaves) under torture. In Attic lawsuits, one litigant could challenge his opponent to submit one of his slaves to torture in order to confirm that he is saying the truth. Being almost omnipresent and often regarded as little more than furniture by their masters, slaves often had access to privileged and often incriminating information.³⁵⁷ But it was assumed that slaves would not disclose this information without coercion, for fear of being afterwards punished by their masters. Hence their testimony could only be trusted when given under extreme duress.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ For more on the general meaning of βάσανος and βασανίζειν, cf. R. BURY (ed.), *The Symposium of Plato*, Cambridge, Heffer, 1909, ad 184a; A. C. PEARSON (ed.), *The Fragments of Sophocles*, vol. III, Cambridge, University Press, 1917, ad 1033; J. SCHNEIDER, Βάσανος, βασανίζω, βασανισμός, βασανιστής, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; A. GOW (ed.), *Theocritus*, vol. 2, Cambridge, University Press, 1950, ad 12.36-37; E. DODDS (ed.), *Plato – Gorgias*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, ad 486d; B. van GRONINGEN, *Pindare au banquet*, Leiden, Sijthoff, 1960, 37-39; R. TURASIEWICZ, *De servis testibus in Atheniensium iudiciis saec. V et IV a. Chr. n. per tormenta cruciatis*, Wrocław/etc., Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich/ Wydawn. Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1963, 17-19; B. van GRONINGEN, *Theognis*. Le premier livre édité avec un commentaire, Amsterdam, Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1966, 164-5; G. THOMSON (ed.), *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, Amsterdam/Prague, Hakker/Academia, 1966, ad Agamemnon 390-4; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 207f.; J. MOLINE, *Plato's Theory of Understanding*. Madison (WI), University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, 130-134, 224; D. LEVINE, Symposium and the Polis in: T. FIGUEIRA/G. NAGY (eds.), *Theognis of Megara Poetry and the Polis*, Baltimore/London, 1985, 176-96, especially 195-196; D. WHITEHEAD (ed.), *Hypereides. The Forensic Speeches*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, 70; S. DOUGLAS OLSON (ed.), *Aristophanes – Acharnians*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, ad 110, 646-7.

³⁵⁷ For this idea of slaves being regarded by their masters as little more than furniture, see in particular V. HUNTER, *Policing Athens. Social Control in the Attic Lawsuits, 420-320 B.C.*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1993, 70-93.

³⁵⁸ There has been much discussion about the torture of slaves in Athenian lawsuits and about the value of the challenge (πρόκλησις εις βάσανον). See e.g. M. GUGGENHEIM, *Die Bedeutung der Folterung im attischen Prozesse*, Zürich, Bürkli, 1882; J. HEADLAM, On the πρόκλησις εις βάσανον in Attic Law, *Classical Review* 7 (1893), 1-5; R. BONNER, *Evidence in Athenian Courts*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1905 (rev. ed., N.Y., Arno Press, 1979), 69ff.; J. LIPSIUS, *Das attische Recht und Rechtsverfahren*. Mit Benutzung des "Attischen Processes" von M H. E. Meier u. G. F. Schömann dargestellt, Leipzig, Reisland, 3 vols., 1905-1915 (republished in one volume: Hildesheim, Olms, 1966), 729, 888-95; R. BONNER & G. SMITH, *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle*, vol. 2, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1911, 126-130, 132, 224-29; E. LEISI, *Der Zeuge im attischen Recht*, Frauenfeld, Huber, 1908, 20-26; R. TURASIEWICZ, *op. cit.*; A. HARRISON, *The Law of Athens*. Vol. II: Procedure, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, 147-150; A. SOUBIE, Les preuves dans les plaidoyers des orateurs attiques, *Revue internationale des droits de l'Antiquité* 20 (1973), 171-253, especially 226-238; G. THÜR, Die πρόκλησις zur βάσανος, *Symposion* (1974) 153-173; G. THÜR, *Beweisführung vor den Schwurgerichtshöfen Athens*. Die Proklesis zur Basanos, Wien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977; M. GAGARIN, The Torture of Slaves in Athenian Law, *The Classical Philology* 91 (1996), 1-18; IDEM, La torture des esclaves dans le droit athénien, in: P. CARLIER (ed.), *Le IVe siècle av. J.-C. Approches historiographiques*, Paris, de Boccard, 1996, 273-279; D. MIRHADY, Torture and Rhetoric in Athens, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 116 (1996), 119-131; G. THÜR, Reply to D. C. Mirhady. Torture and Rhetoric in Athens, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 116 (1996) 132-134; K. DOVER (ed.), *Aristophanes – Frogs*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, ad 616f.; K. KAPPARIS (ed.), *Apollodoros – "Against Neaira" [D. 59]*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1999, 424ff.; D. MIRHADY, The Athenian Rationale for Torture, in: V. HUNTER & J. EDMONDSON (eds.), *Law and Social Status in Classical Athens*,

All this helps us understand Plato's use of the terms βάσανος and βασανίζειν. It denotes on the one hand a test that submits its object to a strong pressure and forces it to reveal itself as it really is. On the other hand, when applied to persons, the test pressures them not only to reveal their views, but also to recognize and admit the worth of these views (i.e., whether they are correct, justified, accurate, or not).³⁵⁹

Another word sometimes used to express the idea of testing is δοκιμάζειν. Like βασανίζειν, it refers to the metallurgical domain, in which it denotes the testing of gold and its genuineness. But δοκιμάζειν has a broader use and also applies to other domains. It is particularly used to designate several forms of scrutiny or vetting in the πόλις which tried to ascertain if certain individuals had the qualifications required to perform a certain role or not. One example is the scrutiny to which young men were submitted before being admitted as full citizens of the state. They had to confirm their coming of age (which was supposed to imply the possession of certain moral and intellectual skills associated with adulthood) and their descendency from legitimate citizens (and thus their connection to the πόλις). As V. Farenga points out, only after going through this process could they assume a superior status and all the rights associated with their place in the social body, leaving behind "the liminal experience when an individual wavered between noncitizen and citizen".³⁶⁰ Also very important in Athens was the scrutiny of officials (for instance, of orators, cavalrymen, new citizens, etc.) before entering office, which tested not only their competence and legal qualification, but also the probity of their lives, and thus helped protect the institutions.³⁶¹

Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, 53-74. For the use of this sense of βάσανος for other sorts of interrogation or examination, cp. for instance B. KNOX, *Oedipus at Thebes*, N. Haven/London, Yale University Press/Oxford University Press, 1957, 97f., 231f.; R. MARTEN, *Der Logos der Dialektik. Eine Theorie zu Platons Sophistes*. Berlin, de Gruyter, 1965, 37, 41; D. KURZ, *Ἀκριβεία. Das Ideal der Exaktheit bei den Griechen bis Aristoteles*, Göppingen, Kümmerle, 1970, 48f.; P. de LIMA, *L'inchiesta e la prova*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, 135f.; S. SCABUZZO, *Violencia en el escenario. El básanos, de la tragedia a la comedia*, *Logo* 4 (2003), 201-206.

³⁵⁹ For Plato's use of βάσανος and βασανίζειν in the context of philosophical examinations, see *La.* 188a, 188b, *Euthd.* 307b, *Grg.* 486d, 487a, 487e, *Rep.* 361c, 434e, 537d, *Th.* 150c, 191c, 203a, *Sph.* 237b, 241d, *Plt.* 290c, *Phlb.* 19d, 21a, 23a, 31b, *Ti.* 68d. For other uses of these words, cp. *Grg.* 486d, *Smp.* 184a, *Rep.* 413e, 503a, 503e, 531b, 537b, 540a, *Plt.* 303e, 308d, *Lg.* 648b, 649d, 650a, 650b, 735a, 736c, 751c, 768a, 831a, 922d, 946c, 957b, 957d, 961a.

³⁶⁰ See V. FARENGA, *Citizen and Self in Ancient Greece. Individuals Performing Justice and the Law*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2006, 350.

³⁶¹ For more on this subject, see e.g. J. LIPSIUS, *op. cit.*, 269-285; W. GRUNDMANN, δόκιμος, ἀδόκιμος, δοκιμή, δοκίμιον, δοκιμάζω, ἀποδοκιμάζω, δοκιμασία, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; A. DILLER, *Scrutiny and Appeal in Athenian Citizenship*, *Classical Philology* 30 (1935), 302-311; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 205f.; A. HARRISON, *op. cit.*, 200-207; D. MacDOWELL (ed.), *Aristophanes – Wasps*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, ad 578; D. MacDOWELL, *The Law in Classical Athens*, London/Ithaca (NY), Thames and Hudson/Cornell University Press, 1978, 69f., 167-69; G. ADELEYE, *The Purpose of Dokimasia*, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 24 (1983), 295-306; R. GARLAND, *The Greek Way of Life. From Conception to Old Age*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1990, 180-33; V. HUNTER, *op. cit.*, 106-108; K. A. KAPPARIS (ed.), *op. cit.*, 171, 320f.; R.

Plato himself mentions and describes scrutinies of this kind in the *Laws*, when determining the functioning of his ideal city.³⁶² The philosophical use of δοκιμάζειν (based either in the metallurgical or the political sense) is rare in the corpus – but the association is nevertheless meaningful to understand the importance of examination to preserve the quality of our body of views and also of the civic body in general.³⁶³

Much more frequent in the corpus is another expression taken from the political sphere, namely λόγον διδόναι. This expression refers to the public control of magistrates or, more specifically, to the process of “setting them straight” or correcting them – the εὔθυναί. At the end of their office, magistrates had to render an account of what they had done, both in the stricter sense of declaring how they handled public funds (to prove they had not embezzled any money) and in the broader sense of justifying their actions during office. This was very important instrument to avoid corruption and social conflicts, since it allowed the community to keep their officials in check. They had to answer for their actions and justify them.³⁶⁴

Λόγον διδόναι may then be used in a broader sense to denote the justification or explanation of something. This reflects the polysemy of the word λόγος. Without entering into a detailed consideration of its many meanings and their interconnection, there are some aspects that we should bear in mind in order to better understand the general meaning of λόγον διδόναι. First, λόγος can mean a computation or an account, in which many elements must be concatenated or grasped together, in order to determine their quantity or general value, which is not immediately accessible when we first see them. Based on this idea of concatenation, λόγος can also mean formula, definition, argument, theory, thesis. In these cases, the word denotes a discursive chain (of words or thoughts) that goes through a multiplicity of elements and fits them together in a meaningful way, thus allowing us to better

KRAUT, Dokimasia, Satisfaction, and Agreement, in R. KAMTEKAR (ed.), *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology and Crito*, Lanham/etc., Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, 175-209; D. MacDOWELL, The Athenian Procedure of *Dokimasia* of Orators, in: M. GAGARIN & R. WALLACE (eds.), *Symposion 2001*, Wien, Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2005; V. FARENGA, *op. cit.*, 26, 346ff.

³⁶² See *Lg.* 753e, 754d, 755d, 756e, 759c, 759d, 760a, 763e, 765b, 765c, 765d, 766b, 767d, 802b, 876c. See also *Cri.* 51d.

³⁶³ For the use of the term to denote philosophical examination, see *Rep.* 546e, *Th.* 181b, 197b, *Ti.* 20d.

³⁶⁴ For more on this process, see for instance J. LIPSIUS, *op. cit.*, 101-110, 286-298; R. BONNER & G. SMITH, *op. cit.*, 30-36, 256-9; A. HARRISON, *op. cit.*, 14-15, 28-31, 208-11; D. MacDOWELL (ed.), *Aristophanes – Wasps*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, *ad* 102; M. PIÉRART, Les εὔθυνοι athéniens, *L'Antiquité classique* 40 (1971), 526-573; D. MacDOWELL, *The Law in Classical Athens*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1978, 170-2; S. DOUGLAS OLSON (ed.), *Aristophanes – Acharnians*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, *ad* 937-9; P. FRÖHLICH, *Les cités grecques et le contrôle des magistrats. IVe - Ier siècle avant J.-C.*, Genève, Droz, 2004.

understand them. Λόγος can still have the sense of ground, reason, pretext or justification, in which case it is the basis for something else (i.e., it accounts or is responsible for it).³⁶⁵

These different senses of λόγος determine Plato's use of λόγον διδόναι. Λόγον διδόναι is the act of providing (or attempting to provide) a discursive account that explains or justifies something, in order to let us better understand it. The account given may be a definition, an argument, or set of arguments, but it always implies that the immediate appearance of things is often not enough to elucidate them. Just like in the case of the magistrates, something may be escaping one's notice, and so the object is regarded with suspicion. It cannot be taken at its face value and a deeper insight into it (i.e., into its essence and its grounds) is required, in order to understand what this thing is and why it is what it is.³⁶⁶ In fact, this suspicion and requirement of further information are not only directed at the object and the view someone has of it, but in many cases it also pertains to the person that has that view, who must justify his cognitive probity. The notion of λόγον διδόναι carries with it the idea of personal responsibility or accountability – of not simply saying or acting, but having to stand by one's words or actions, having to submit to cognitive εὔθυνα (to the corrections or chastisements of what is wrong). This is something we normally do not do. We do not have to explain ourselves, our views, our life. But philosophical examination changes that and submits our views and ourselves to test.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ We leave aside for now the sense of spoken word and all it entails – though this shade of meaning is also present in Plato's use of the word. For more on λόγος, see Section 1.4 above, as well as Chapter 6, Section 1.3 b) below. The secondary literature on λόγος is very vast, but one can find a good overview of the different senses of the word in texts such as H. SCHMIDT, *Synonymik der griechischen Sprache*, vol. 1, Leipzig, Teubner, 1876, 1ff.; G. SCHRENK, λέγω, λόγος, ῥήμα, λαλέω, λόγιος, λόγιον, ἄλογος, λογικός, λογομαξία, ἐκλέγομαι, ἐκλογή, ἐκλεκτός, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; T. HOROVITZ, *Vom Logos zur Analogie. Die Geschichte eines mathematischen Terminus*, Zürich, Hans Rohr, 1978; W. SCHADEWALDT, *Die Anfänge der Philosophie bei den Griechen*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1978, 182-188; H. BOEDER, Der frühgriechische Wortgebrauch von Logos und Aletheia, in: *Das Bauzeug der Geschichte. Aufsätze und Vorträge zur griechischen und mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 1994, 1-30.

³⁶⁶ The suspicion and requiring of further information about something are very important here. The act of λόγον διδόναι (or the equivalent λόγον ὑπέχειν) presupposes or is the correlate of a request for λόγος or of the act of receiving it (λόγον ἀπατεῖν, λαμβάνειν, or δέχεσθαι). Plato uses all these expressions and they reveal the complexity of the process. If someone is to give an account, then there must be someone that exacts and receives it (i.e., someone that knows what must be justified, that can guide the process, weight the arguments, judge their validity and decide the matter). This may actually involve two persons or it may designate two different moments of a complex process one may carry out by oneself. We see this in Plato's texts. He uses the expression to designate an interpersonal process and also an activity of the mind by itself, and in both cases he associates it with the notion of διαλεκτική, which will be considered in Sect. 2.6 below.

³⁶⁷ These different nuances are present in Plato's use of λόγον διδόναι, λόγον λαμβάνειν and similar expressions. Cp. *Chrm.* 162c, 165b, *La.* 187c, 187d, 187e, *Hp. Ma.* 292b, *Euthd.* 285e, *Prt.* 336c, 336d, 338d, 338e, 339a, 348b, *Grg.* 465a, 501a, *Men.* 75d, *Cra.* 426a, *Phd.* 63e, 76b, 78d, 95d, 101d, *Smp.* 202a, *Rep.* 337e, 344d, 493d, 510c, 531e, 533c, 534b, 599b, *Th.* 148d, 161b, 169a, 175c-d, 177b, 180a, 183d, 202c, *Sph.* 230a, *Plt.* 286a, *Phlb.* 50e, *Ti.* 20b, *Lg.* 653b4, 720c, 861b, 959b, 968a. For more on the expression λόγον διδόναι, cp. E. THOMPSON (ed.), *The Meno of Plato*, London, Macmillan, 1901, ad 75d; N. HARTMANN, *Platos Logik des Seins*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1965² (Gießen, Töpelmann, 1909¹), 94, 184, 223f., 236, 242, 257, 415, 451, 459, 466,

Other terms expressing the idea of a test are ἔλεγχος and the corresponding verb, ἐλέγχειν. These words can express the act of accusing people, exposing their faults, putting them to shame, discrediting and disgracing them. They are also associated with the idea of getting the better of someone in some kind of contest, either athletic, forensic or intellectual – and thereby exposing this person’s weakness and inferiority. In a forensic or an intellectual context, the word acquires the sense of disproving or refuting someone and thereby vexing and humiliating him. All these cases involve a strong component of antagonism and even personal attack. One aims at exposing the personal flaws of another and these flaws may be related with his character, capabilities or intelligence. Ἐλεγχος and ἐλέγχειν, however, do not only denote the successful attempt of exposing another, but also the process that leads to it, the effort of getting the better of, exposing or refuting the other – independently of it being successful or not. Hence ἔλεγχος may refer to the act of submitting someone to a proof – i.e., the act of testing someone’s value, strength, character, or knowledge. In some cases, the word may even mean cross-examination – i.e., the act of questioning someone with hard, invasive and relentless questions.³⁶⁸ Additionally, ἔλεγχος may have the meaning of proof, when the one submitted to the test withstands it. The term can therefore have a neutral or even positive sense – although the idea of antagonism, conflict and personal risk is always present.³⁶⁹

472; H. FRÄNKEL, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*. Eine Geschichte der griechischen Epik, Lyrik und Prosa bis zur Mitte des fünften Jahrhunderts, München, Beck, 1976³ (1962¹), 423f.; H. BOEDER, *Grund und Gegenwart als Frageziel der frühgriechischen Philosophie*, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1962, 6, 22, 97; R. MARTEN, *Der Logos der Dialektik*. Eine Theorie zu Platons *Sophistes*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1965, 30-44, 62-85, 241; C. TAYLOR, Plato and the Mathematicians. An Examination of Prof. Hare’s Views, *Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (1967), 193-203; P. KUCHARSKI, *Aspects de la spéculation platonicienne*, Paris, Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1971, 172-174; L. TARÁN, *Academica*. Plato, Philip of Opus, and the Pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1975, 28f., 239; T. HOROVITZ, *op. cit.*, 95-97, 101-105, 154, 156f.; J. LABORDERIE, *Le dialogue platonicien de la maturité*, Paris, Belles Lettres, 1978, 150, 156-8; H. MEISSNER, *Der tiefere Logos Platons*. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Problem der Widersprüche in Platons Werken, Heidelberg, Winter, 1978, 190-2; G. LLOYD, *Magic, Reason and Experience*. Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, 252-3; K. DOVER (ed.), *Plato – Symposium*, Cambridge, University Press, 1980, ad 189b9; J. MOLINE, *op. cit.*, 34-46; W. WIELAND, *Platon und die Formen des Wissens*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982, 217, 239f., 247-9, 306; C. KAHN, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*. The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form, Cambridge, University Press, 1996, 305; J. SZAIFF, *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*. Freiburg/München, Alber, 1998² (1996¹), 230f., 289; K. SIER, *Die Rede der Diotima*. Untersuchungen zum platonischen *Symposion*, Stuttgart/Leipzig, Teubner, 1997, 62f.; G. BÖHME, *Platons theoretische Philosophie*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000, 100f.; N. DENYER (ed.), *Plato – Protagoras*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2008, ad 336c2, 338d4-5.

³⁶⁸ For more on examination as questioning, see Section 2.6 below.

³⁶⁹ For more on this term, cf. F. BÜCHSEL, ἐλέγω, ἐλεγξις, ἐλεγχος, ἐλεγμός, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; H. BOEDER, *Grund und Gegenwart als Frageziel der frühgriechischen Philosophie*. Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1962, 150-153; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 206f.; H. HOMMEL, Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit. Zur Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffspaares, *Antike und Abendland* 15 (1969), 159-186, 180; G. LLOYD, *op. cit.*, 252f.; J. MOLINE, *op. cit.*, 37f.; D. CAIRNS, *Aidos*. The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature,

We find all these senses in Plato. The term often designates the process of refuting someone's views. It is in this sense that it is used to designate a particular method or the negative side of philosophical method.³⁷⁰ But the word also denotes in many cases the neutral idea of submitting what one thinks, what one says or the way one lives to a test.³⁷¹ One can pass or fail this test, thereby saving or losing one's face, and this is very relevant in the dialogues, since the interlocutors are often conceited and proud of their supposed knowledge and intellect. This conceit of knowledge is an important feature of human beings, as we will see.³⁷² Ἐλεγχος echoes this and thereby expresses how personal philosophical examination can become.

The noun πεῖρα (especially in the construction πεῖραν λαμβάνειν) and its cognates also belong to this group of terms. Their original sense is associated with the ideas of piercing, perforating or penetrating something. They can also denote the passing or going through something (especially some place or situation), which allows us to get acquainted with it – with its details or its hidden sides.³⁷³ From πεῖρα we gain empirical knowledge (ἐμπειρία), which was often regarded as the best (or surest) form of knowledge, in contrast with knowledge from hearsay or some theoretical and abstract knowledge. Moreover, the word implies some resistance of the object or situation and the need to make a special effort to go through. Accordingly, the word may also have the sense of “attempt” or “enterprise”, as well as of “test” or “trial”. It is in fact particularly used to denote an athletic or military trial, in which one has to prove one's strength and worth. The word also applies to dialectical trials, in which persons are submitted to difficult tests and must fight to prove their cognitive worth. Πείρα is therefore an important means of showing and revealing what something or

Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, 65-68; P. de LIMA, *op. cit.* 136; F. MAIULLARI, *L'interpretazione anamorfica dell' Edipo Re*. Una nuova lettura della tragedia sofoclea, Pisa/Roma, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1999, 122f., 142, 265; H. TARRANT, Naming Socratic Interrogation in the *Charmides*, in T. ROBINSON & L. BRISSON (eds.), *Plato – Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides*. Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum, Sankt Augustin, Akademie, 2000, 251-258; H. AUSLAND, Forensic Characteristics of Socratic Argumentation, in: G. SCOTT (ed.), *Does Socrates have a Method? Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, University Park (PA), Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, 36-60; J. LESHER, Parmenidean Elenchos, *ibidem*, 19-35; H. TARRANT, Elenchos and Exetasis. Capturing the Purpose of Socratic Interrogation, *ibidem*, 61-77, C. YOUNG, Comments on Lesher, Ausland, and Tarrant, *ibidem*, 78-86.

³⁷⁰ We find a description of this method in *Sph.* 226b-231b. For a discussion of this passage and for some bibliography on this negative method, see Chap. 8 below.

³⁷¹ For this neutral sense, cp. *Ap.* 18d, 39c, 39d, *Prt.* 331c, 331d, *Grg.* 474b, *Phd.* 85c, *Phdr.* 278c, *Rep.* 534c, *Phlb.* 14b, 52d, *Lg.* 702b, 891a, 893b, 963b.

³⁷² For more on the notion of conceit of knowledge, see in particular Chap. 7, Sect. 1 below.

³⁷³ The idea of going through something is actually representative of philosophical examination, as will be shown in Section 2.4 below.

who someone really is.³⁷⁴ Because of this, Plato often uses the word to express the idea of examination. The Platonic *πειρα* may be referred to particular objects, to views of them or to the persons who hold these views.³⁷⁵ In each case, something must face some kind of attack and prove its own worth.

The idea of a test to determine the quality of something can also be expressed by the verb *κρούειν*, which denotes the act of striking or smiting something, normally with the fingers (e.g. a door, a string in a musical instrument). In a stricter sense, it designates the tapping of a piece of pottery to assess through the sound if it is in good condition (*ὕγιης*) or if it is cracked (*σαθρός*).³⁷⁶ Plato then employs it as a metaphor for the examination of an object or a view with the purpose of confirming their quality or forcing them to reveal any faults they may contain. They must be tapped in order to see through the resulting *λόγος* if they are as sound as they seem.³⁷⁷

Besides all these terms, there are still some groups of images that are used to denote philosophical examination as a testing of something. The first group comprises several different fight metaphors. Examination is often compared to a wrestling match, in which two opponents try to overthrow each other. Returning to an interrupted examination can be described as resuming a previous handle or grip (*λαβή*) and an objection is designated as a handle against someone or a point of attack (*ἀντιλαβή*).³⁷⁸ An examination can also be regarded as a kind of boxing match, which may or may not have a specific opponent.³⁷⁹ Finally, it can be compared to an all-out war – even the greatest of them all: the *γγαντομαχία*.³⁸⁰ These metaphors express particularly well the interplay of different characters and their views during a philosophical examination. The characters fight for some argument and assist it,

³⁷⁴ For more on the notion of *πειρα*, see e.g. G. CURTIUS, *Grundzüge der griechischen Etymologie*, Leibniz, Teubner, 1869³ (1858-62¹), 256; H. SEESEMAN, *πειρα, πειράω, πειράζω, πειρασμός, ἀπείραστος, ἐκπειράζω*, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 199; W. SCHADEWALDT, *op. cit.*, 169-171; N. DENYER, *op. cit.*, ad 348a2-3.

³⁷⁵ For Plato's use of *πειρα* and its cognates as a designation of the act of philosophical examination, cp. *Ap.* 27a, 27e, *Chrm.* 171a, *Euthd.* 275b, *Cra.* 396c, *Prt.* 341d, 342a, 348a, 349c-d, *Grg.* 448a, *Phd.* 60e, *Rep.* 537c, *Th.* 157c.

³⁷⁶ Cp. for instance J. SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, 289-290; R. BURY (ed.), *The Philebus of Plato*, Cambridge, University Press, 1897, ad 55d; G. BERTRAM, *κρούω*, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; P. LOUIS, *Les métaphores de Platon*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1945, 27f.,

³⁷⁷ For Plato's use of the *κρούειν* and its cognates in reference to philosophical examination, see *Hp. Ma.* 301b, *Th.* 154e, 179d, *Phlb.* 13d, 55c.

³⁷⁸ Cp. e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 287a, *Phd.* 84c, 87a, 88d, *Phdr.* 236b-c, *Rep.* 336b, 497d, 505a, 544b, *Sph.* 241b, *Prm.* 130e.

³⁷⁹ See for instance *Prt.* 339e and *Ap.* 18d (where Socrates talks of fighting shadows – *σκιαμαχεῖν*).

³⁸⁰ See *Sph.* 246a.

while at the same time they can also assist each other.³⁸¹ Through this fight, they try to ascertain their strength, the strength of their argument and also how things are. In fact, we could say they are fighting against the indeterminateness of things or what things may withhold from them (and us). They fight for the truth, against its hiding away from us (i.e., against λήθη). But there is also the possibility and the risk of someone not caring about the truth of the matter and being only concerned with winning the discussion and employing all possible means and tricks in order to do so. The examination may become simple eristic, which is no more than a distorted form (or a mere semblance) of the examination Plato has in mind.³⁸²

Very close to the image of examination as a fight is its representation as a game. The most common example of this is the comparison between philosophical examination and the game of πεττεία (a sort of draughts), which is a game of intelligence (as opposed to games of chance or of strength) and requires one to defeat the opponent with one's wits.³⁸³ The characters then describe their answers or agreements (i.e., any logical step) as moves in the game and sometimes need to revoke (ἀνατίθεσθαι) some move and follow a different line of argumentation.³⁸⁴ At other times, Plato speaks of other, less meaningful games.³⁸⁵ By comparing philosophical examination to a game, Plato once more highlights the idea of it being a competition or contest between views and individuals – but now this competition is not as serious as in the case of a fight. It is rather a παιδιά – child's play. In other words, it is a moment of leisure and relief of the serious business.³⁸⁶

But this relief is not only a way of distracting oneself. Like any game, it can also be an occasion for practicing one's abilities and preparing for serious action. Something similar is indicated by the representation of philosophical examination as a form of physical exercise (γυμνάζεσθαι, μελετᾶν, ἀσκεῖν). The idea of exercise also stresses the importance of effort

³⁸¹ Apart from the comparisons and metaphors just mentioned, there are many simple references to fighting (using for instance the verb μαχεῖν and its cognates, as is the case for instance in *Cra.* 430d, *Phd.* 89c, 106c, *Th.* 170d, etc.) and to assisting or succoring others (which can be expressed by the verb βοηθεῖν, as we see e.g. *Phdr.* 272c, 275e, 276c, 277a, 278c, *Th.* 164e, 165a, 168c, 169e, 171e). For a more detailed and exhaustive consideration of fighting metaphors and their role in Plato's writings, cp. e.g. G. BERG, *Metaphor and Comparison in the Dialogues of Plato*, Diss. Baltimore, 1903, 159ff.; P. LOUIS, *op. cit.*, 57-63, 215-217; K.-A. BENKENDORFF, *Untersuchungen zu den platonischen Gleichnissen, Vergleichen und Metaphern aus dem Bereich der Gymnastik und Agonistik*, Diss. Tübingen, 1966.

³⁸² The whole *Euthydemus* is an illustration of this. For explicit references to eristic τέχνη, eristic persons or eristic arguments, see in particular *Men.* 80e, *Rep.* 454b, 499a, *Sph.* 225c, *Phlb.* 17a.

³⁸³ On this topic, cp. e.g. E. DODDS (ed.), *op. cit.*, ad 450d6; L. KURKE, Ancient Greek Board Games and How to Play Them, *Classical Philology* 94 (1999), 247-267.

³⁸⁴ For this use of ἀνατίθεσθαι, cp. E. DODDS (ed.), *op. cit.*, ad 461d2 and also footnote 290 above.

³⁸⁵ For instance, it is sometimes compared to a ball game (see *Euthd.* 277b, *Th.* 146a) or a game of trying to drag the opponents across a line (cp. *Th.* 181a). For a more exhaustive list, cp. P. LOUIS, *op. cit.*, 64, 212.

³⁸⁶ Cp. *Phlb.* 30e: “ἀνάπαυλα γάρ, ὦ Πρώταρχε, τῆς σπουδῆς γίγνεται ἐνίοτε ἡ παιδιά.”

and practice for the development of one's ability to examine and determine things.³⁸⁷ In addition, it suggests that philosophical examination is a form of mental gymnastics that has some medicinal value, insofar as it can cure or prevent ills.

Finally, there is some affinity between the idea of testing and the imagery of flavoring and sampling some food or delicacy.³⁸⁸ The sense of taste expresses a deeper mode of contact with something – a contact that goes beyond its looks and is different from simply devouring something in a voracious manner, without appreciating it. On the other hand, it also stresses the provisional or preparatory character of examination, insofar as it is different from a full assimilation and digestion of something. This comparison is probably also connected with the conception of learning as a form of nourishment (τροφή) or with the idea of being hungry for knowledge and needing truth in order to be properly nurtured.³⁸⁹

2.3. Philosophical examination as an intense gaze and close inspection

A second important side of philosophical examination is expressed by the vocabulary of inspection in the Platonic corpus, which reveals examination as a particular mode of looking at things. Plato's texts are full of references to vision, be it sensible vision (by means of the physical body, which has – or at least seems to have – direct and full access to its object) or intellectual vision (either as a particular way of looking at sensible things or a vision of non-sensible beings).³⁹⁰ In fact, vision is often used as a metaphor for knowledge, insofar as it is understood as providing us a perfect access to something.³⁹¹ But it can also be used to express some important traits of philosophical examination. This is possible because our vision (both in the literal and the figurative sense) is not simple. It admits of different modalities. We can have a perfect access, in which nothing escapes, or we can catch no more than a glimpse. This can be determined by several factors. First, we can have a good or a bad vision. We may have perfect vision or be nearsighted (although in the latter case we can still

³⁸⁷ The passage that best illustrates this is *Prm.* 135c ff., which we will consider in more detail in Chap. 9, Section 3.1 c) below. Cp. also the association between philosophical examination and stripping down to exercise in *Th.* 162b ff.

³⁸⁸ The verb used in this context is usually γεύεσθαι. Cf. *Alc. I* 114a, *Rep.* 354b, 475c, *Th.* 157d. In this context, Plato also employs the image of feasting. See e.g. *Ly.* 211c, *Ti.* 17a-b, 27b. For more on these images, cp. G. BERG, *op. cit.*, 82-84, P. LOUIS, *op. cit.*, 55-57.

³⁸⁹ At some points, Plato criticizes the idea of learning as a mere ingestion of teachings (see for instance the discussion in Chap. 8, Sect. 1.4 below), but he also talks of knowledge as a kind of food. See e.g. *Prt.* 313c ff., *Phdr.* 246e1-2, 247a8, 247d-e, 248b5, etc.

³⁹⁰ Plato admits indeed something as an inner gaze and he even talks of an eye of the soul at *Rep.* 533d2.

³⁹¹ For more on this, see Chap. 5, Sect. 2.3 below.

use artificial means to correct the defect). Second, things may be more or less illuminated. Third, our own position may vary and we may be closer or farther away from something, which will then offer us a more detailed or more panoramic view of things. Fourth, we can adopt different standpoints. We can see things from different angles and this allows them to show different sides. Some angles may be more favorable than others – and some may be blind spots. We can also direct our attention to different things in the field of vision, changing what is in the spotlight and what is in the background. Fifth, we may look at things in very different states of mind. For instance, we may be relaxed or concerned, pleased or scared, and this also affects how we see things.³⁹² Sixth, we can be focused in what we are seeing or so distracted that we look at something without really seeing it or without noticing it. In this case, our gaze is apathetic or drowsy and, despite having some access to something, it still lets this thing escape us. Finally, we can also have a better or worse understanding of what we are seeing. In this sense, we may also see something (have it before our eyes or our mind) without really seeing it (i.e., without discerning what it is).³⁹³ All these factors determine our access (or lack thereof) to things, views and persons. But we may also try to change the conditions in which we see something. We can redirect our gaze or take a closer look at things, we can increase our attention, intensify our gaze, try to notice something we did not or see things differently. This is precisely what philosophical examination does. It changes our relation to something and tries to see it in a different light. Plato is very aware of this and we find the notion of a changed and intensified gaze in various of terms he uses to express the idea of examination.

The most important of these terms is σκοπεῖν. It is frequently used by Plato to indicate an attentive and tense gaze. The word itself is from the same family as σκοπή and σκοπιά, which designate a lookout place or a watch-tower – i.e., some high place, from which one has an unhindered and panoramic gaze. In this context, one's gaze was normally intense and preoccupied with discerning particular things (especially suspicious movements and threats) that should not go unnoticed. The verb is also linked with the Greek word for target (σκοπός), and this link lets us better understand its sense. Σκοπεῖν involves a focused or concentrated gaze, directed at something in particular. Regardless of whether its target is an external physical object or something that can only be seen with the eye of the mind, one's gaze is

³⁹² On this matter, see e.g. B. SNELL, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen, Hamberg, Claassen, 1955³ (1945¹), 18-21.

³⁹³ This was expressed in Greek culture by formulas such as “βλέποντες βλέπειν μάτην” (cp. e.g. Aeschylus, *Prometheus vincitus*, 447) or “ὄρῶν οὐκ ὄρᾶν” (see Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1623). For more on these formulas, see e.g. E. FRAENKEL (ed.), *Aeschylus – Agamemnon*, 3 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950, ad 1623.

focused and strives to come near its goal, hit it, not pass it by. It inspects, considers closely, examines and tries to attain a perfect knowledge of its object.³⁹⁴ Plato thus uses the word and its composites to designate an intense gaze that is trying to gain a better access to its object.³⁹⁵

Another term that conveys the idea of an intensified gaze is ἀθρεῖν. The verb belongs to the same family as the adjective ἀθρόος, which means “jumbled together”, “in heaps”, “compact”. Accordingly, ἀθρεῖν involves a concentrated or compact gaze that focus on a point and strives to grasp, encompass or comprehend it, without leaving anything aside.³⁹⁶ In the Platonic corpus it designates precisely this impulse to see and understand something.³⁹⁷ In this respect, one passage in particular stands out. In *Cratylus*, Plato uses the composite ἀναθρεῖν to describe the essence of human being.³⁹⁸ The verb has the meaning of seeing anew or once more, reviewing, looking over or back on. It expresses the possibility of returning to something we already saw and searching for new aspects, new sides, new angles – thus rediscovering this thing and coming closer to it. By identifying our essence with such an act, Plato may be alluding to our ability to reflect on things and thereby gain access to something more than their sensible properties, but he may also have in mind the possibility of reviewing any perspective, whether its content is sensible or not. The latter alternative is precisely what characterizes philosophical examination.

One other form of intensified gaze is the one expressed by the verb τηρεῖν, which has the meaning of “watch over something”, “guard it”, “take care of it”. These actions require an attentive and concerned gaze, a gaze that watches its object closely, usually with the intent of protecting it or protecting oneself from it. One does not lose sight of the object and is ready to react to anything that may happen. The verb can also have the sense of observing or keeping a promise, an oath, the peace, and so on – something that does not capitulate even in face of

³⁹⁴ For more on this term, see e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 261-264; E. FUCHS, σκοπός, σκοπέω, κατασκοπέω, κατάσκοπος, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; B. KNOX, *op. cit.*, 120f.; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 14; R. ALPERS-GÖLZ, *Der Begriff σκοπός in der Stoa und seine Vorgeschichte*. Mit einem Anhang: Materialien zum Zielbegriff in der griechischen und lateinischen Literatur von W. Haase, Hildesheim, Olms, 1976; R. PRIER, *Thauma Idesthai*. Sight and Appearance in Archaic Greek, The Florida State University Press, Tallahassee, 1989, 33-36.

³⁹⁵ There are many instances of σκοπεῖν and its cognates in Plato’s writings. See e.g. *Euthphr.* 7a, 7b, 7c-d, 9c, 9d, 9e, 15c, *Ap.* 21b, 21e, 27a, 40d, *Cri.* 46b, 46c, 46d, 47a, 48b, 48c, 48e, 49d, 50a, 51c, 53a, *Phd.* 63d, 64c, 64d, 65b, 65e, 66d, 67e, 70c, 70d, 70e, 73b, 74a, 74b, 78b, 79c, 79d, 80a, 82e, 83b, 84c, 85c, 85d, 87b, 87c, 89a, 95e, 96b, 96c, 96d, 97d, 99d, 99e, 100a, 100c, 101d, 103c, 104a, 107b, etc.

³⁹⁶ For more on this term, cp. e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 260f.; R. PRIER, *op. cit.*, 27-29.

³⁹⁷ For the use of the term in Plato, see *Cri.* 49e, *Ly.* 215c, *Hp. Ma.* 287d, *Grg.* 495b, 497e, *Phd.* 104b, *Rep.* 394e, 420d, 551c, 552b, 558c, 572b, 577c, 583b, 601b, *Tht.* 156c, 191e, *Prm.* 144d, *Phlb.* 24e, 29a.

³⁹⁸ Cp. 399c: “σημαίνει τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ὁ ἄνθρωπος” ὅτι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θηρία ὧν ὀρθῶς οὐδὲν ἐπισκοπεῖ οὐδὲ ἀναλογίζεται οὐδὲ ἀναθρεῖ, ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἅμα ἐώρακεν – τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ ὄπωπε – καὶ ἀναθρεῖ καὶ λογίζεται τοῦτο ὃ ὄπωπεν. ἐντεῦθεν δὴ μόνον τῶν θηρίων ὀρθῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἄνθρωπος ὀνομάσθη, ἀναθρῶν ἃ ὄπωπε.”

the greatest difficulties.³⁹⁹ Much in the same way, philosophical examination requires an attentive and undistracted gaze that allows us to really see what happens with something.⁴⁰⁰

Some other verbs used by Plato in this context refer to particularly intense experiences, which cause us to look at things in a more attentive manner. One of these verbs is θαυμάζειν. It designates an intense gaze directed at something extraordinary, something that goes against expectations, that stands out and captures our attention. This gaze may be caused by astonishment, admiration, or even horror, and it can lead us to examine something in detail. But this intense experience is not only a trigger of examination. It is by itself a form of intensified gaze and in this sense a form of inspection or examination.⁴⁰¹ For this reason, Plato can also use the verb to designate the philosophical examination of something, thereby stressing how this examination includes a component of wondering at something and dwelling on it, in order to understand what this something is. It is an intense consideration of something, marked by perplexity and the incapacity (at least at first) of fully accounting for what is being seen.⁴⁰²

Another relevant verb in this context is θεᾶσθαι, which usually denotes a gaze that is not personally invested in what it sees or considers. One has no personal interest in what is going on before one's eyes. But this does not mean that θεᾶσθαι is an impassive gaze. On the contrary: it is interested in seeing what it sees. It is surprised and pleased with what it sees and this binds it intensely to its object. It is precisely in this sense that the verb is used of watching or beholding a play or some spectacle (θέα).⁴⁰³ But it can also designate the contemplation of a problem, which is in a way something distant and abstract, but can be seen with a sense of marvel and satisfaction (and thus with a very increased attention).⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁹ For more on this term, see for instance H. RIESENFELD, τηρέω, τήρησις, παρατηρέω, παρατήρησις, διατηρέω, συντηρέω, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*.

⁴⁰⁰ The term is used to denote a philosophical examination in *Tht.* 169c. Usually it is used in its ordinary sense. See e.g. *Rep.* 412e, 413c, 413d, 442a, 484c, *Lg.* 836d, 952b.

⁴⁰¹ Much has been written about the meaning of θαυμάζειν and its relation with philosophy. For a more detailed consideration of the meaning of the word, see for instance G. BERTRAM, θαῦμα, θαυμάζω, θαυμάσιος, θαυμαστός, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; H. METTE, Schauen und Staunen, *Glotta* 39 (1960), 49-71; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 76f.; R. PRIER, *op. cit.*, 84ff.; C. HUNZIGER, Le plaisir esthétique dans l'épopée archaïque. Les mots de la famille de θαῦμα, *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1 (1994), 4-30.

⁴⁰² The term is often used by Plato to denote astonishment or perplexity, but in some cases it refers to a certain way of looking at things and examining them. Cp. in particular: *Chrm.* 164a, *Euthd.* 286c, *Prt.* 326e, *Grg.* 456a, 458e, *Men.* 96d, 97c-d, *Phd.* 97a, *Smp.* 205b, *Rep.* 489a, *Tht.* 155c, 162c, *Lg.* 628e.

⁴⁰³ For more on θεᾶσθαι, cp. for instance H. SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 265f.; W. MICHAELIS, ὄραω, εἶδον, βλέπω, ὀπτάνομαι, θεάομαι, θεωρέω, ἀράτος, ὀρατός, ὄρασις, ὄραμα, ὀπτασία, αὐτόπτης, ἐπόπτης, ἐποπτεύω, ὀφθαλμός, καθοράω, προοράω, προεἶδον, in *TWNT*, *sub voce*; H. METTE, *op. cit.*; R. PRIER, *op. cit.*, 81-84.

⁴⁰⁴ For Plato's use of the term θεᾶσθαι and its cognates to describe the act of philosophical examination, see *Euthphr.* 5e, *Chrm.* 154e, *Hp. Ma.* 295b-c, *Cra.* 411a, 418a, 424d, 425b, *Phd.* 66e, *Rep.* 369a, 421b, 434d, 490e, 504d, 511c, 545c, 576e, 579e, 611c, *Tht.* 154e, *Sph.* 237b, 245e, 254b, *Plt.* 260c, 267e, 281d, 292d, 305b, *Phlb.* 53a, *Ti.* 48b, *Lg.* 676a, 683a, 702a, 720e, 816d, 862b, 965c.

Not very distant in sense is the verb θεωρεῖν, which designates a solemn or contemplative gaze, usually interested in learning. The term is closely connected with the figure of the θεωρός – the ambassador that takes part in a religious festival or consults an oracle. The term is thus associated with religious festivities and the sacralized or ritualized visuality (to use A. Nightingale’s expression) experienced therein.⁴⁰⁵ But it can also refer more generically to an experience of what is distant and alien. In this sense, it is also connected with the idea of travelling to explore and know other customs.⁴⁰⁶ In sum, θεωρεῖν is a gaze that leaves its sphere of familiarity and gains distance, searches for extraordinary knowledge and returns to share it with its community.⁴⁰⁷ In this sense the verb can also be associated with the idea of examination, insofar as the latter implies this careful contemplation or beholding of something distant and extraordinary, with the intent of understanding it.⁴⁰⁸ But the term may also designate the perfect contemplation of an object, which is precisely the goal of philosophical examination, and it is actually in this sense that the word is more frequently used in the history of philosophy.⁴⁰⁹

Finally, there are still some other more generic verbs which are sometimes used to express the act of focusing on something. Two of these verbs are ὁρᾶν and ἰδεῖν, which can designate either the act of seeing with no further qualification or an attentive seeing, capable of noticing and discerning what things are.⁴¹⁰ Plato frequently uses both verbs to express the

⁴⁰⁵ See A. NIGHTINGALE, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy. Theoria in its Cultural Context*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2004, 4, 69, 82, 113, 139. Nightingale’s notions of sacralized or ritualized visuality are based on Elsner’s notions of sacred or ritual-centered visuality. Cp. J. ELSNER, *Between Mimesis and Divine Power. Visuality in the Graeco-Roman World*, in: R. NELSON (ed.), *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 45-69, especially 60 ff.

⁴⁰⁶ For this sense, see for instance Herodotus, *Historiae*, 1.30.1 and 1.30.11. For more on the idea of travel, see the following subsection.

⁴⁰⁷ For more on this term, see e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 266-269; C. BILL, Notes on the Greek θεωρός and θεωρία, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 32 (1901), 196-204; J. BURNET (ed.), *Plato’s Phaedo*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1911, ad 58b2; F. BOLL, *Vita Contemplativa*, Heidelberg, Carl Winters, 1920, 6, 23-25; W. MICHAELIS, *op. cit.*; H. KOLLER, Theoros und Theoria, *Glotta* 36 (1958), 273-286; H. METTE, *op. cit.*; G. REDLOW, *Theoria*. Theoretische und praktische Lebensauffassung im philosophischen Denken der Antike, Berlin, VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1966; F. THORDARSON, OPΩ – ΒΑΕΠΩ – ΘΕΩΡΩ. Some Semantic Remarks, *Symbolae Osloenses* 46 (1971), 108-130; W. SCHADEWALDT, *op. cit.*, 181f.; J. REDFIELD, Herodotus the Tourist, *Classical Philology* 80 (1985), 97-118; J. KER, Solon’s *Theōria* and the End of the City, *Classical Antiquity* 19 (2000), 304-329; I. RUTHERFORD, Theoria and Darśan. Pilgrimage and Vision in Greece and India, *The Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000), 133-146; A. NIGHTINGALE, On Wandering and Wondering. Theōria in Greek Philosophy and Culture, *Arion* 9 (2001), 23-58; A. NIGHTINGALE, *op. cit.*; D. ROOCHNIK, What is Theoria? Nichomachean Ethics Book X.7-8, *Classical Philology* 104 (2009), 69-82.

⁴⁰⁸ See *Rep.* 372e, 511c, *Th.* 177e, *Phlb.* 38b., *Lg.* 663c, 695c, 720b, 815b, 951a ff.

⁴⁰⁹ We also find this usage in Plato. See *Phd.* 65e, 109e, *Smp.* 210d, *Phdr* 247c, 247d, *Rep.* 486a, 517d, *Ti.* 57d.

⁴¹⁰ For more on ὁρᾶν and ἰδεῖν, see e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 244-260; W. MICHAELIS, *op. cit.*; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 175f.; F. THORDARSON, *op. cit.*

act of focusing on and examining something.⁴¹¹ For the idea of a directed, steadfast gaze, that turns to something and focuses on it, abstracting from all else, Plato uses the constructions *πρός τι βλέπειν* (looking at something) and *νοῦν προσέχειν τινι* (literally, turning one's mind or attention to something).⁴¹²

Finally, another way of expressing the idea of focusing on something is through the verb *λαμβάνειν* and, in particular, through *ἀναλαμβάνειν*. The latter verb can designate the act of picking something up, taking it from where it was, isolating it and bringing it closer, in order to inspect it and see it with more detail.⁴¹³ Such an act can bring about a new perspective which corrects one's immediate perception of something.⁴¹⁴

2.4. Philosophical examination as a journey

Also very common in the Platonic corpus is the comparison between philosophical examination and a journey. The association of knowledge with the idea of a journey was a common topos in Greek culture. To name just two examples, Ulysses is presented as having learnt much during his travels, whereas Parmenides's truth about being is revealed at the end of a journey to the gates of the paths of Night and Day.⁴¹⁵ The very notion of *θεωρία*, as was just mentioned, shows the connection between the idea of travelling to see a festival (or simply the world at large) with the acquisition of knowledge. It is therefore no wonder that Plato also employs the idea of a journey when describing the process of examination, as can be seen in the vocabulary he uses to describe the act of examining something. However, this vocabulary is not very specific and so we will also bring into consideration the complex network of images that Plato uses to compare philosophical examination to a journey.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ Usually these verbs are used by Plato in the imperative form as a command or request to examine something. See e.g. *Euthphr.* 11e, 12d, *Cri.* 48e, 49c, *Phd.* 92c, 105a, etc.

⁴¹² The notion of *πρός* (or *εἰς*) *τι βλέπειν* (or *ἀποβλέπειν*) appears many times in the dialogues, with several senses, but it is often used to express the idea of examination. See e.g. *Phdr.* 237d, *Rep.* 421b, 431b, 545c, 578b, 611d, *Tht.* 155c, 175a, *Sph.* 232e, 265e, *Phlb.* 44e-45a. For the meaning of *βλέπειν*, cp. e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 255-260; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 175; F. THORDARSON, *op. cit.* As for the expression *νοῦν προσέχειν*, see e.g. *Euthphr.* 14d, 15d, *Ap.* 18a, *Sph.* 233d, 262e, *Plt.* 259d, 306c, *Phlb.* 32e, 45d, *Smp.* 174d, 187a, 189b, 191e, 210e, 217b, *Phdr.* 235a, *Chrm.* 160d, 166e, *La.* 197e, *Euthd.* 283a, *Men.* 96d, 97d, *Hp. Ma.* 295c, *Hp. Mi.* 369d, *Rep.* 432b, *Lg.* 652a-b, 809e, 858d.

⁴¹³ Cp. E. De STRYCKER and S. R. SLINGS, *op. cit.*, ad 19a8.

⁴¹⁴ For this use of *ἀναλαμβάνειν*, see *Ap.* 19a, 22b, *Cri.* 46c, *Men.* 87e, *Rep.* 606e, *Sph.* 232b, 255e, *Plt.* 261c, *Phlb.* 33c, *Lg.* 644b. Other times, *ἀναλαμβάνειν*, as well as *ἐπαναλαμβάνειν*, have the more general sense of taking something (some subject) up again. See e.g. *Tht.* 187c, *Plt.* 294d, *Phlb.* 34e, 60d, 66d *Lg.* 781b, 961c.

⁴¹⁵ See HOMER, *Odyssey*, I.1-3, and PARMENIDES, DK B1.

⁴¹⁶ What follows is just a brief consideration of the ways in which philosophical examination is compared to a journey in the Platonic corpus. For more on the image of a journey (applied either to philosophical examination or to other things, and particularly to one's life), cp. e.g. G. BERG, *op. cit.*, 151-158; O. BECKER, *Das Bild des*

We find a very complex geography of philosophical examination in the corpus. The characters often talk of roads, paths or ways (a ὁδός or a πορεία) during examination and they employ many verbs that express movement from one place to the other, such as ἰέναι, πορεύεσθαι, ἔρχεσθαι (along with their composites).⁴¹⁷ In some cases, the movement is ascending or descending, which expresses an additional qualification of the starting point and the destination of the movement.⁴¹⁸ Sometimes they speak of impulses or assaults (ὀρμαί or ὀρμαῖν).⁴¹⁹ We also find the distinction between being immobile (μένειν) or even seated (as in the Allegory of the Cave) and being in movement (either by one's own initiative or because one was made to walk by someone else, who may then guide oneself during the examination).⁴²⁰

In general, the journey of examination has a particular destination, which can be more or less qualified.⁴²¹ But this does not prevent characters from straying off topic, going on an excursus only to come back on topic later.⁴²² At any rate, philosophical examination has a course which one must traverse in order to see something, contemplate, come to know, and thereby transform oneself. In this sense, it is a form of theoretic travel or θεωρία in the sense considered above. This travel, however, is not simple and its difficulties are emphasized in different manners.

One source of difficulties is the fact that there are multiple directions or paths one can follow. There are many forks in the road and the examiners must choose a direction. This choice is often expressed via adverbs such as πῆ, τῆ, τῆδε, ταύτη, ἧ, ὅπη. These adverbs often have an almost spatial sense and indicate different paths one can follow – and thus different

Weges und verwandte Vorstellungen im frühgriechischen Denken, Berlin, Weidmann, 1937; P. LOUIS, *op. cit.*, 45-55; R. DRIESCH, *Platons Wegbilder. Untersuchungen zur Funktion der Wegbilder und -metaphern im Aufbau der Dialoge Platons*, Diss. Köln, 1967; E. MESSIMERI, *Wege-Bilder im altgriechischen Denken und ihre logisch-philosophische Relevanz*, Diss. Tübingen, 1998.

⁴¹⁷ For the use of ὁδός and πορεία to refer to a philosophical examination, see e.g. *Ly.* 213e, *Phdr.* 272c, *Rep.* 435a, 532b, 532e, *Th.* 147c, *Sph.* 218d, 237b, 242b, *Plt.* 265b, 266e, 268d, *Phlb.* 16a-b, 50e, 61a, *Lg.* 685a-b, 799c-d, 810e, 859b. For occurrences of the verbs ἰέναι, πορεύεσθαι, ἔρχεσθαι with a similar sense, see for instance *Ly.* 213e, *Cra.* 415a, *Phdr.* 239d, *Rep.* 420b, 510b, *Th.* 187c, *Phlb.* 50e, *Plt.* 259d, 262b, 290d.

⁴¹⁸ These terms are particularly important in the context of the Allegory of the Cave. See in particular *Rep.* 515e ff.

⁴¹⁹ See e.g. *Phdr.* 279a, *Rep.* 354b, 487c, 506e, 511b, *Prm.* 130b, 135d, *Phlb.* 57d.

⁴²⁰ For the contrast between being immobile and moving, see e.g. *Euthphr.* 11b-d, *Rep.* 514a ff.

⁴²¹ In many cases Plato speaks simply of the end (τέλος) of a particular examination. See e.g. *Prt.* 347c, *Phd.* 77c, *Rep.* 392c, 497e, 533e, *Phlb.* 23b.

⁴²² For the moment of coming back to a previous discussion after an excursus, cp. e.g. *Cra.* 414b, *Plt.* 263a, *Th.* 177b-c, *Lg.* 682e.

ways of examining.⁴²³ The path chosen can indeed correspond to a certain procedure or method (which is expressed precisely by terms such as ὁδός).⁴²⁴

However, the difference between possible roads is not just a difference of method. They do not necessarily lead us to the same place – and some may even seem to lead us nowhere. Moreover, the course of examination can be hindered by difficulties – in particular by a situation of ἀπορία in which one cannot find a passage or an exit.⁴²⁵ This forces one to go back and return to the beginning (what is expressed in the frequent formula πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς).⁴²⁶ Other times the examination simply goes in circles and one comes to the starting point (to the same difficulty one departed from) without realizing it.⁴²⁷ The entire effort was in vain and one must go in another direction. But the journey can be even more difficult or complex and this is then expressed by the image of wandering or roaming about (πλανᾶσθαι). The characters move from one answer to another and all are refuted, so they do not know which way to turn and what to say.⁴²⁸ This difficulty is then condensed in the image of the philosophical examination as a maze.⁴²⁹

But assuming the paths of examination eventually lead to their destination, they can still have different extensions, which also causes problems. The paths can be shorter or longer.⁴³⁰ The characters often take the shorter road or a shortcut, which entails a loss in detail and rigor. Other times, the road taken is the longest possible, as in *Parmenides*, when they embark into a διὰ πάντων διέξοδος καὶ πλάνη.⁴³¹ This is indeed not only a very long and exhaustive path, but a wandering or roaming about, a going back and forth, completely lost,

⁴²³ See for instance *Phlb.* 38b.

⁴²⁴ In order to express the idea of doing something methodically, the characters use qualifications such as καθ' ὁδόν and ὁδοῦ. See e.g. *Cra.* 425b, *Phdr.* 263b, *Rep.* 434a, 533b, *Ti.* 20c. As for the word μέθοδος, it is normally not connected to the idea of “method”, but rather with the idea of pursuit, as we will see in the following section.

⁴²⁵ This happens often during the course of examination and the characters themselves reflect about the meaning of such situations (see e.g. *Chrm.* 169c, *Hp. Ma.* 304c, *Men.* 80a-b, *Tht.* 187d, 200a). In the so-called aporetic dialogues, the situation of ἀπορία is even the final result of all the characters' efforts. For the description of a situation of ἀπορία as such, see *Lg.* 700c-d.

⁴²⁶ Cp. footnote 290 above.

⁴²⁷ See e.g. *Euthphr.* 15b, *Chrm.* 174b, *R.* 456b, *Tht.* 200a.

⁴²⁸ Cp. *Alc. I* 112d, 117a-118b, *Ly.* 213e, *Hp. Ma.* 304c, *Hp. Mi.* 372d-e, 376c, *Sph.* 230b. The idea of πλανᾶσθαι and πλάνη is very important in the dialogues and we will consider it in more detail below. Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 1.2 a) and Chap. 8, Sect. 1.5. For more on the notion of πλάνη, see e.g. J. LOEWENCLAU, Die Wortgruppe πλάνη in den platonischen Schriften, in: H. FLASHAR & K. GAISER (eds.), *Synusia*, Pfullinge, Neske, 1965, 111-122; S. MONTIGLIO, *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

⁴²⁹ See *Euthd.* 291b.

⁴³⁰ See e.g. *Phdr.* 246a, *Rep.* 435c-d, 504b, *Plt.* 265a-b.

⁴³¹ See 136e.

without having a clear path or a fixed destination – which in this case emphasizes that one must explore all possibilities.

The idea of exploration is present in many uses of the prefix δια- (and sometimes also of εκ-), which express the idea of exhaustiveness, of going from one end to the other, not leaving anything aside. We find frequently verbs of movement like διεξιέναι, διαπορεύεσθαι, διέρχεσθαι or διαπεραίνειν used as designations of the act of examining and the examination can be referred to as a διαπορεία or a διέξοδος. It is, for instance, common to present philosophical examination as an act of λογῶν διελθεῖν: a going through every aspect of something by means of a λόγος viz. an articulate and rational discussion. This is in line with the description of dialectic in the *Republic* as a “going through every test (ἔλεγχος)”.⁴³²

Such a long journey requires much effort and, in fact, sometimes the path one has to make is described as being particularly hard.⁴³³ The difficulty may be expressed by the image of a path upwards (ἀνάβασις).⁴³⁴ Other times Plato compares philosophical examination to a journey made by water, which emphasizes the difficulty and the risks involved therein. For the Greeks, seafaring was the symbol of unpredictability and danger. It is also in this sense that Plato employs images of swimming and navigation. In *Parmenides* the characters must swim across a sea of λόγοι.⁴³⁵ Other times one can sail, but here Plato distinguishes between a first and a second sailing – i.e., between an easier and faster way of sailing and a slower and harder one.⁴³⁶ But particularly meaningful is the reference to waves, tempests and shipwrecks during some examinations.⁴³⁷ One must then hold on to a raft (to use an image from *Phaedo*) and follow the wind of λόγος (as is said in the *Republic*).⁴³⁸ All this, along with the possibility considered above of straying off or following the wrong road, shows how one can never be sure that one will reach one’s destination, even after much insistence. Philosophical examination can indeed be extenuating and even exasperating.

⁴³² See *Rep.* 534c. For other constructions with δια-, see e.g. *La.* 187c, *Prt.* 320c, 329c, *Phlb.* 18a, 33a, 50e, 66e, *Prm.* 136e, *Criti.* 106a, *Lg.* 718b, 768d.

⁴³³ See e.g. *Ly.* 213e.

⁴³⁴ This is the case in the Allegory of the Cave (see *Rep.* 515e ff.) and also in Socrates’ Palinode in the *Phaedrus* (see in particular 246d ff.).

⁴³⁵ Cp. 137a. For another meaningful association of swimming with philosophical examination, see *Rep.* 453d.

⁴³⁶ The expression δεύτερος πλοῦς is used in *Phd.* 99c-d for a different kind of examination – one that is not directly focused on things, but rather sees their reflection on λόγοι. For the use of the expression “second sailing” in Plato, see also *Plt.* 300c and *Phlb.* 19c.

⁴³⁷ See e.g. *La.* 194c, *Euthd.* 293a, *Rep.* 472a, *Phlb.* 13d, 14a, 29a-b.

⁴³⁸ See 85c-d and 394d, respectively.

2.5. Philosophical examination as a search or pursuit

Philosophical examination is also presented as a sort of search or pursuit. Searching for something or pursuing it is a meaningful possibility for us, since we do not possess or do not have access to everything we want at once. There are things that are unavailable, that escape us, are absent or hidden. Our possessions in general (and our cognitive possessions in particular) are limited and we can be unsatisfied with them. As a response, we can mobilize and exert ourselves, with the purpose of attaining more, and discovering, finding, capturing or grasping what eludes us – otherwise we may never reach what we desire.⁴³⁹ Movement is once more essential, just like in the portrayal of examination as a journey, but now what matters the most is not the fact that we go through the path or explore its complexity, but the directionality of the movement, what it tries to reach and how it tries to reach it. The search or pursuit of something requires the identification of a target and at the same time effort, time and resourcefulness. The same can be said of philosophical examination. It is directed at something that eludes our grasp in some way (i.e., something that is not immediately given in all certainty or clearness). We must have an idea of this and set it as a target. At the same time, we must search for it, seek it, pursue it – and this is what we do when we investigate the matter or inquire into it.

Several terms make reference to this pursuit and the most important in this context are ζητεῖν and ζήτησις. They denote the act of searching or seeking after something – i.e., the attempt to discover and reach it. They can designate any kind of search or inquiry, but are especially applied to judicial inquiries (where one wants to find out what happened and who is responsible for it), as well as to scientific or philosophic researches (where one inquires into some particular matter).⁴⁴⁰ In these cases, the terms express an insistent pursuit that tries to clarify the truth about something – and the characters in the corpus often try to do precisely this.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ We find this idea that things do not reveal themselves at once, without effort on our part, expressed already in many pre-Platonic texts. See, for instance, XENOPHANES, DK B18 (“οὔτοι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖσ’ ὑπέδειξαν,/ ἀλλὰ χρόνοι ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον”) and SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 110f. (“τὸ δὲ ζητούμενον/ ἄλωτόν, ἐκφεύγει δὲ τὰ μελούμενον”).

⁴⁴⁰ For more on the term, see e.g. H. GREEVEN, ζιτέω, ζήτησις, ἐκζιτέω, ἐπιζιτέω, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; P. HUART, *op. cit.*, 14, 199f.; B. KNOX, *op. cit.*, 117-120.

⁴⁴¹ For the use of the term ζητεῖν and cognates in the Platonic corpus, see e.g. *Euthphr.* 7a, *Ap.* 18b, 18c, 19b, 21b, 22a, 23b, 24b, 29c, 37d; *Alc. I* 106d, 109e, 110a, 130b; *Cra.* 384c, 391b, 409e, 411b, 415b, 424a, 432c, 433b, 436a, 439b; *Phd.* 65a, 65d, 66d, 95b, 95e, 99d, 107b; *Phdr.* 244c, 265a; *Tht.* 144b, 148b, 174b, 180a, 187a, 188c, 191a, 196d, 200c-d, 201a, 202d, 210a; *Sph.* 218b-c, 218c, 221c, 223c, 224c, 229b, 232b, 235d,

Frequently, the search or pursuit we find in the corpus is further qualified by a more explicit comparison with a particular kind of pursuit – especially one in which its object tries to escape. The best example is the frequent use of hunt or chase as an image of philosophical examination.⁴⁴² The object being examined or the knowledge pursued is like a wild animal running away from the examiners, which try to capture it. The capture itself requires the effort of pursuing, but is not simply a matter of running after something. It also requires devices, tricks, craft and cunning. But this is not all. The image of hunt also expresses how the result of one’s pursuit is uncertain. The prey (i.e., the object of examination) may escape or hide in a dark and inaccessible spot.⁴⁴³ Moreover, like hunting, philosophical examination is often a collective undertaking, in which various persons try to surround the game and prevent its escape.⁴⁴⁴ The parallels are varied and Plato often alludes to them.

These allusions are also found in the vocabulary of examination. For instance, one of the verbs used to talk about examination is ἐρευνᾶν, which denotes the way dogs sniff out something or the tracing of a scent or trail. It can also be used to refer the act of sweeping a region, in order to scare off any prey that may be hidden.⁴⁴⁵ Based on these senses, the term can then be used in the judicial domain with the sense of “inquiry” and can also be applied to any intellectual research whatsoever.⁴⁴⁶

The hunting metaphor is even clearer in θήρα and θηρεύειν. These words designate the eager pursuit with the intent of capture. They refer primarily to the pursuit of pedestrian animals, fishes, and birds, but they can also be figuratively used of persons – in particular in the context of sexual interest and romantic love. Plato, in turn, uses them to denote the chase of knowledge or of the reality that one strives to know.⁴⁴⁷

Also relevant is the verb ἰχνεύειν, which denotes the act of tracking or following the traces, footsteps or trail (ἵχνος) of someone or something. This image stresses not only one’s

246d, 253c, 258b, 258c, 261a, 261d, 264b; *Prm.* 133a; *Phlb.* 16d, 18d, 27c, 30d, 34d, 45c, 46b, 53d-e, 57a, 58b, 58d, 59a, 61b.

⁴⁴² For a detailed consideration of the hunting metaphors in Plato, see C. CLASSEN, *Untersuchungen zu Platons Jagdbildern*, Berlin, Akademie, 1960. See also G. BERG, *op. cit.*, 133-137; P. LOUIS, *op. cit.*, 53-55.

⁴⁴³ See e.g. *Rep.* 432b-d, *Sph.* 231c, 236d, 239c, 254a, 260c-d.

⁴⁴⁴ Cp. for instance *La.* 194b, *Rep.* 432b, *Sph.* 231c.

⁴⁴⁵ Cp. *Mx.* 240b.

⁴⁴⁶ For more on the term, cp. J. BURNET (ed.), *Plato’s Phaedo*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1911, *ad* 63a2; G. DELLING, ἐρευνᾶω, ἐξερευνᾶω, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*. For its use in Plato, see *Ap.* 23b, 41b; *Chrm.* 166b, 166d; *Phd.* 63a; *Rep.* 368c; *Tht.* 155e, 168e, 174a, 174b, 200e; *Sph.* 236d, 241b, 243d, 260e; *Phlb.* 58d; *Lg.* 654e, 735c, 816c, 821a, 968c.

⁴⁴⁷ See e.g. *Ly.* 218c, *Phd.* 66a, 66c; *Tht.* 197c ff.; *Sph.* 235a, *Plt.* 264a, 285d, *Phlb.* 65a. We also find in Plato the expression “ὀνόματα θηρεύειν”, which denotes a distorted modality of examination, in which one employs verbal traps to cause the other to contradict himself. The whole *Euthydemus* is an illustration of this hunting of words. See in particular 295d. Cp. also *Grg.* 489b, *Tht.* 166c.

distance from something, but also the indirect contact with what is pursued. The tracks the persons or things pursued leave behind already reveal something about them, point towards them and show where they can be found.⁴⁴⁸

The verb διώκειν also belongs to this group. It has the meaning of impelling or causing something or someone to run, especially because one draws nearer or is pursuing the person or thing that runs. In addition, the word denotes the act of pursuing. It is used in judicial language to designate the prosecutor, who attempts to convict (i.e., to capture, αἰρεῖν) someone because of their alleged injustices – whereas the defendant, ὁ φευγών, tries to escape or run away. Likewise, the examination is an attempt to capture something that tries to elude our effort to capture it and runs away from us quickly.⁴⁴⁹

The idea of pursuit is also implied in the term μέθοδος. Despite its similarity to the word “method”, the word is normally not used by Plato in that sense.⁴⁵⁰ It rather works as the *nomen actionis* of verb μετιέναι and, consequently, designates the act of going after something or someone, pursuing it, following its trail.⁴⁵¹

Finally, Plato also employs some terms and images that are more or less explicitly taken from the context of amorous pursuit (which was itself frequently conceived as a form of chase or hunt, as was mentioned above). The examination is sometimes described as φιλοσοφία or φιλοσοφεῖν (i.e., as a strong or obsessive desire for wisdom), as a form of intense love (an ἔρωσ or ἐρᾶν) for knowledge or lucidity, as a desire (ἐπιθυμία) or yearning of knowledge (πόθος τοῦ εἰδέναι) or as a striving for being (ὀρέγεσθαι τοῦ ὄντος).⁴⁵² In other words, philosophical examination is an intense pursuit of knowledge and reality. One is fully committed to it and desires it deeply. Certainly not all forms of examination involve such a

⁴⁴⁸ For the use of ἰχνεύειν and cognates to refer to philosophical examinations, see *Rep.* 365d, 432d, *Th.* 187e, *Sph.* 226b, *Plt.* 263b, 290d, 301e, *Phlb.* 44d, *Prm.* 128c, *Lg.* 654e.

⁴⁴⁹ For the use of διώκειν (or μεταδιώκειν) in this sense, cf. *Euthd.* 307c, *Cra.* 420b, *Grg.* 482e, 492c, *Smp.* 210b, *Phdr.* 266b, *Rep.* 490a, 531c, *Sph.* 224e, 225e, *Plt.* 307c, *Phlb.* 23e, 32d, 44d, *Ti.* 46d-e, 59c, 64b, 72e, 80a.

⁴⁵⁰ For the idea of method and proceeding methodically, Plato rather uses expressions such as καθ’ ὁδόν and ὁδῶ (as was mentioned in footnote 424), ἐξῆς or even τρόπος τῆς μεθόδου (as in *Phd.* 97b).

⁴⁵¹ For Plato’s use of the word, see *Phd.* 79e, 97b, *Phdr.* 269d, 270c, 270d, *Rep.* 435d, 510b, 510c, 528d, 531d, 533b, 533c, 596a, *Th.* 183c, *Sph.* 218d, 219a, 227a, 235c, 243d, 265a, *Plt.* 260e, 266d, 286d, *Lg.* 638e, 965c. For the use of verb μετιέναι (as well as μετέρχεσθαι) to designate the act of examining something, cp. *Men.* 74d, *Prt.* 350d, *Phd.* 88d, *Smp.* 210a, *Phdr.* 263b, 270e, 276d, *Rep.* 502e, 528e, 530b, *Th.* 187e, *Sph.* 218d, 235c, 252b, *Plt.* 257b, 263b, *Ti.* 50c, *Lg.* 754e. For a careful discussion of this question and a list of further literature on the subject, see M. de CARVALHO, Μέθοδος εὑρεσις – ο πρόβλημα do pressuposto na fundação platónica da ciência, in: D. FERRER (ed.), *Método e Métodos do Pensamento Filosófico*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 2007, 9-69 (especially 10-17).

⁴⁵² Cp. e.g. *Ap.* 28e and 29c (where φιλοσοφεῖν is accompanied by other terms that designate examination), *Hp. Ma.* 297e, *Men.* 84c, *Phd.* 65c, 66e, 68a. For an analysis of the term φιλοσοφία, see also Chap. 13, Sect. 3.3, and Chap. 14 below.

love, but Plato presents this as a fundamental feature of any genuine philosophical examination, and something that distinguishes it from superficial or merely apparent forms of examination.⁴⁵³

2.6. Philosophical examination as the act of asking questions or cross-examining someone

We are often aware of our ignorance about some things. Some matters are completely open and indeterminate for us. Other times, we may have some definite view about something, but we may be unsure about it. In all these cases, we can not only seek to know how things are, but we can also formulate questions (which is a particular form of relating to what we do not know, making it more determinate to us and giving us a direction of investigation) and search for answers, in order to overcome our cognitive limitations. These questions may be experienced within us, in silence (and Plato indeed uses them to identify a structural moment of our being, as we will see below).⁴⁵⁴ But frequently they are directed at others as requests for information. We are often dependent on their testimony, either because they saw or experienced something first hand or simply because they know something we do not. By eliciting information from them we can thus expand our knowledge. But the questions may also be directed at those who do not know, in order to make them aware of their own ignorance or to help them further inquire about something. There can be different relations between questioner and respondent, as is illustrated in the Platonic corpus. The texts often depict philosophical examination as a shared undertaking based on questions and answers, and this makes it even more natural to conceive philosophical examination as a form of asking questions.

Two terms that commonly designate the act of asking questions and requesting information are ἐρωτᾶν and πυνθάνεσθαι. Ἐρωτᾶν is the more generic term for asking about something, but it can also designate a more intense form of questioning, as we will see below. Πυνθάνεσθαι, in turn, has the sense of asking for or gathering information. We find it often in Herodotus to designate the gathering of testimonies about realities with which the author has had no direct contact.⁴⁵⁵ In the Platonic corpus we also find the attempt to learn from others something one might not know. This is an expression of the limitations of one's point of view

⁴⁵³ For more on this, cp. in particular Chap. 14, Sect. 4.

⁴⁵⁴ See Chap. 5, Sect. 1.3.

⁴⁵⁵ See e.g. *Historiae* 1.22, 1.92, 1.105, 1.111, 1.170, 1.196, 1.207, 1.214, and so on.

and also of how useful other points of view may be if one is ever to overcome one's limitations. To designate these requests for information, Plato also uses *πυνθάνεσθαι*.⁴⁵⁶

However, philosophical examination is about more than just asking questions to others. The questions we find in the corpus, as well as the questions with which philosophical examination is often compared, involve more than a simple request for information. We can understand this if we consider what happens when we ask someone a question and receive an answer. The information we receive is strongly influenced by who gave it to us – and this makes it highly questionable. Other persons may lie to us, withhold information or they may be themselves deceived or deluded. But we are not forced to simply accept whatever the other says. We can insist, put pressure on the other, ask further questions, require more details and check for inaccuracies or inconsistencies. The need of doing so becomes particularly evident when we are faced with different versions of events that contest each other. One can then relentlessly cross-examine the other and employ particular techniques in order to find out the truth. Such a cross-examination is especially employed in law courts, where two versions of things are opposed and cause a conflict that disturbs the public order. It is necessary to see who is in the right and thereby restore order.⁴⁵⁷

Plato uses this judicial cross-examination as a model for philosophical examination, as becomes patent in several of the terms he employs to designate the latter. Some of these terms were already considered above. We saw how *ἐξέτασις*, *βάσανος* and *ἔλεγχος* also have a judicial sense. *Ἐξέτασις* is rather neutral and designates the cross-examination of the other party in a trial. *Ἐλεγχος* is an antagonistic questioning which has the refutation or discrediting of someone as its goal. *Βάσανος* is a questioning (frequently, but not exclusively, of slaves) which involves torture, in order to force the truth out of someone who would otherwise not disclose it.⁴⁵⁸ The idea behind all these forms of questioning is that one cannot

⁴⁵⁶ Cp. *Chrm.* 158e, *La.* 187b, 189c, 191d, 191e, 196c, *Hp. Ma.* 287d, 293b, 295b, *Hp. Mi.* 363a, 363b, 369d, 369e, 372c, *Euthd.* 280b, 295c, *Grg.* 447c, 455c, 462c, 462d, 463b, 463c, *Prt.* 318a, *Cra.* 384a, 399c, 413a, 413b, *Smp.* 204e, *Rep.* 328e, 337b, 353a, 358d, 469a, 476e, 491c, 599d, *Tht.* 209e, *Sph.* 216d, 226b, 237c, 243d, 248d, *Plt.* 272c, 286a, *Phlb.* 54a, 61b, 63a, *Lg.* 635b, 638c, 758c, 888d, 952a.

⁴⁵⁷ There were, however, several other contexts in which such cross-examination was relevant. We saw in Sect. 2.2 above that in politics there is also a need for magistrates to render an account (*λόγον διδόναι*) of their expenses and their decisions in general, which are then submitted to a close scrutiny. Questioning also played an important role in the people's dealings with *τέχνη* (and especially medicine). There were frequent controversies regarding who was better qualified to intervene in a certain domain, so that one had to demonstrate one's knowledge by answering questions and convincing the others of one's credentials. Finally, it was also necessary to question people in the context of historiography. An historian had to interrogate witnesses and ascertain what truly happened. Plato, however, seems to pay more attention to the judicial metaphor and to conceive the examination more along those lines – perhaps because of how present judicial questions were in Athenian life.

⁴⁵⁸ See Sections 2.1 and 2.2 above.

simply take persons at their word, one must ascertain the truth and this requires putting each person's version to the test and checking its consistency and sense.

To these we can add two other terms that are also used by Plato to compare philosophical examination to a questioning. The first is ἀνακρίνειν (or ἀνάκρισις). It refers to the preliminary hearing in a lawsuit, in which the magistrate inquires both parties, in order to determine their versions of events and decide if the matter shall go to court.⁴⁵⁹ In the dialogues, the characters are sometimes required to introduce precisions and better explain their views, in order to prepare for a decision of the matter.⁴⁶⁰

Another important term in this context which is often used by Plato is ἐρωτᾶν (together with ἐρώτησις). As was said, it can have a more neutral sense, though it can also designate an intense interrogation of someone (as the ones in law courts). Here one must assent or deny something, justify one's position, present proofs and convince the others.⁴⁶¹ Furthermore, ἐρωτᾶν is also used by Plato (along with ἀποκρίνεσθαι) to describe a particular method of investigation illustrated in many of the dialogues – namely, the method of conversation (διαλέγεσθαι) or διαλεκτική.⁴⁶² In this method two persons occupy asymmetrical positions. One guides the inquiry and asks questions, requires explanations and proofs, in order to understand the other's views and ascertain their value. The other must answer by presenting his views, standing by them and justifying them. The positions may be inverted and the one asking the questions may then answer them – but the process is always

⁴⁵⁹ For more on this stage of judicial processes, see e.g. J. LIPSIUS, *op. cit.*, 54f., 829ff.; E. CARAWAN, *Erotosis. Interrogation in the Courts of Fourth-Century Athens, Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 24 (1983), 209-226, especially 211-212.

⁴⁶⁰ See *Chrm.* 176c, *Smp.* 201e and *Th.* 188d.

⁴⁶¹ For more on the judicial ἐρώτησις, see e.g. J. LIPSIUS, *op. cit.*, 876f.; E. CARAWAN, *op. cit.*; P. de LIMA, *op. cit.*, 22-24. For Plato's use of the term ἐρωτᾶν (as well as ἀνερωτᾶν, διερωτᾶν, etc.), see e.g. *Euthphr.* 6d, 8a, 11a, 12c, 12d, 14b, *Ap.* 22b, 22e, 24e, 25c, 33b, *Cri.* 49a, 49e, 50a, 50c, *Cra.* 383b, 390c, 398d, 406b, 406c, 407c, 413a, 420e., 421a, 422b, *Phd.* 73a, 75d, 78d, 85b, 87c, 102a, 103e, 105b, *Th.* 146b, 146e, 147a, 147b, 147c, 148b, 150c, 151c, 154c-d, 157d, 158b, 158e, 162c, 165b, 165d, 166a, 166b, 167d, 167e, 168d, 178a, 178b, 179e-180a, 181d, 182c, 182e, 183d, 184b, 184e, 185c, 185d, 190a, 196a, 198e, 206e, 207a, 208c, 210a, etc.

⁴⁶² There are many references in the corpus to conversing and to a τέχνη of conversing and some of these passages explicitly associate conversing with asking and answering questions (or something equivalent). Cf. *Prt.* 335b, 348c, *Grg.* 449b, 458e, *Men.* 75d, *Cra.* 390c, 398d, *Rep.* 534b, *Th.* 161e-162a, 167e. It is, however, important to bear in mind that in texts such as *Phaedrus*, the *Republic*, *Sophist* and *Philebus* the words διαλεκτική and διαλεκτικός acquire a more specific meaning and refer to a more elaborate method, which is not directly associated with conversing. We will return to this below (see Chap. 9, Sect. 4). The literature on the notion of dialectics is very vast, but for more on the topic, see e.g. W. MÜRI, *Das Wort Dialektik bei Platon, Museum Helveticum* 1 (1944) 152-168; J. ELIAS, "Socratic" vs. "Platonic" Dialectic, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), 205-216; E. BERTI, Ancient Greek Dialectic as Expression of Freedom of Thought and Speech, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3 (1978), 347-370.

the same.⁴⁶³ Διαλέγεσθαι is thus a form of conversation in which something is rationally discussed. It employs one's discursive capacity to analyze different views and determine their validity.⁴⁶⁴

This method and all other terms that convey the idea of an intense interrogation emphasize an important aspect of philosophical examination. As we will see in the following chapters, philosophical examination (whether it includes two interlocutors, as is normally the case in the dialogues, or is rather conceived as an inner movement of the soul) usually has a personal character and is primarily concerned with someone's views. This personal character of examination can be seen as a logical flaw, but it is actually determined by the conditions in which the examination always take place. We have always adopted many views and they must be put into question if we are ever to determine the truth about anything.

2.7. Philosophical examination as an effort to determine something or reach a decision

One final group of terms stresses the idea of determining something or giving it precise contours. This is actually the goal of examination. While the latter is taking place, the matter is still open, but one already aims at a decision. Because of this, the examination can be designated as an act of giving determination, whereby one can emphasize either the process that leads to a decision or the achievement of a decision.

One term that denotes the process that leads to a decision is βουλευέσθαι, which has the sense of debating or deliberating some matter (either privately or in public gatherings) in order to reach a decision or a verdict. The fact that many deliberations are intersubjective processes (and even inner deliberations are often conceived as a discussion between different inner entities) contributes a great deal to the use of this verb in Plato's writings, where most

⁴⁶³The method has very precise rules (especially the way Plato presents it), which we find frequently mentioned in the *corpus*, in particular when someone breaks them. To give a few examples: the respondent must present what seems to him to be true and not simply enunciate someone else's views; he must be concise and clear; he must also stand by his previous claims. As for the inquirer, he must (among other things) be clear in his questions, check if the answer makes sense, and follow the direction given by the answer. Both participants are obliged to ascertain what the truth of the matter is and not simply defeat the other by any kind of language or logic tricks. For a more complete list of the rules and for the passages where they are mentioned, see for instance J. MOLINE, *Plato's Theory of Understanding*, Madison (WI), The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, 39-41.

⁴⁶⁴As we saw in Section 1.4 above, this method is opposed to making long speeches, in which one does not need to justify each argumentative step and reach an agreement with one's listeners about all that is said.

of the examinations are also a shared undertaking.⁴⁶⁵ In fact, the deliberation may even assume the form of a ballot, in which the interlocutors must decide which view they are voting for.⁴⁶⁶

However, the idea of reaching a decision is best conveyed by the verb κρίναι, which means separating or choosing, but also judging, deciding and passing a verdict (thereby settling a dispute). Such judgments take place in courts and in all other sorts of contests (physical, artistic and so on). Likewise, philosophical examination (as was said above) often assumes the shape of a competition or contest between different possibilities of acting or of seeing and understanding something. Moreover, the fact that the examination is often compared to an interrogation or a trial also contributes to understanding it as an attempt to reach a decision or verdict about what something is.⁴⁶⁷

Also relevant in this context is ὀρίζειν, which denotes the act of demarcating or setting the boundaries of something. ὄρος referred originally to the limits and the delimitation of a territory, but it can also be applied in a figurative sense to a view, a notion or a thing. The limits or contours define what something is and also allow this thing to be seen as what it is and as distinguished from other things. ὀρίζειν is then the act of demarcating or defining what something is. It allows for a clearer perspective on something and may lead up to a definition in the stricter sense of the word – which is what many examinations in the corpus are actually searching for.⁴⁶⁸

Not very distant from the idea of defining something is the idea of division (usually expressed by διαπεῖν) or of cutting something in twain, as with a knife or an axe (τέμνειν). In their figurative sense, as operations of examination, these terms express how our way of

⁴⁶⁵ For the use of the verb βουλευέσθαι (and also of συμβουλευέσθαι) in the context of philosophical examinations, see *Cri.* 46a, 49d, *Chrm.* 176c, *La.* 185a, 185b, 185d, 187d, 201c, *Grg.* 527d, *Men.* 91a, *Smp.* 190c, *Phdr.* 237c, 238d, *Rep.* 345b, 400b, 428c-d, 458a, *Sph.* 218d, *Plt.* 257c, *Phlb.* 20a, 62e.

⁴⁶⁶ There are several references to “voting with someone” (i.e. being σύμψυφος) in the sense of sharing the same view. Cp. *La.* 184d, *Grg.* 500a, *Cra.* 398c, *Phdr.* 267b, *Rep.* 380c, *Lg.* 907b. However, the corpus also presents a strong criticism of the appeal to the majority vote in philosophical matters. See in particular *Grg.* 471e-472c, 473e-474b.

⁴⁶⁷ For Plato’s use of κρίναι (and κρίσις) in association with the act of examining something, cp. *La.* 184e, *Ion* 539d, *Phd.* 100a, *Phdr.* 237d, 277a, *Rep.* 344a, 360e, 361d, 420c, 433c, 486a, 545c, 555b, 576d, 577a, 577b, 578b, 579c, 580b, 580c, 582a, 582d, 585c, *Tht.* 150b, 170d, 186b, *Sph.* 234e, 242c, *Plt.* 272b, 305b, *Phlb.* 20e, 27c, 33a, 38c, 41b, 41d, 41e, 44d, 50e, 52e, 55c, 57e, 59d, 64d, 65b, 66c, 67a, *Lg.* 633a, 658a, 667d, 667e, 732a, 814d.

⁴⁶⁸ For the use of ὀρίζειν (as well as of διορίζειν and ἀφορίζειν) in this sense, see *Chrm.* 163d, 163e, 173a, 173e, *La.* 194c, *Grg.* 453a, 457c, 470b, 475a, 488d, 491c, 495a, 513d, 521a, *Phd.* 104c, 104e, 105a, *Smp.* 205e, *Phdr.* 239d, 265d, 269b, 277b, *Rep.* 341b, 344e, 346b, 436b, 454b, 455c, 474b, 474c, 499e, 507b, 511c, 524d, 534b, 558d, 598a, *Tht.* 146e, 158d, 187c, 192a, 208c, *Sph.* 217b, 222b, 222c, 227c, 239a, 240c, 242c, 246b, 257c, 257e, 267a, *Plt.* 259d, 261a, 264e, 267d, 275a, 275e, 282e, 283b, 292a, *Prm.* 131e, 133a, 133b, 135c, *Phlb.* 19e, 37a, 56d, 66c, *Ti.* 29b, 51b, 51d, 54b, 68e, *Lg.* 632b, 643a, 802e, 815c, 861b, 861d, 867b, 874d, 944a, 963c.

seeing things is often gross or imprecise, seeing things in bulk and without establishing relevant distinctions. We do not pay attention to the specificities or details of things and notions. Hence it is important to break them down and see their different moments. This will provide us with a more precise perspective about what something is and how it is different from other things.⁴⁶⁹

Some other meaningful terms in this group are associated with mathematic and thus involve the idea of a precise decision or definition of something. Philosophical examination may thus be referred to as an act of λογίζεσθαι or a λογισμός – that is, as a calculation in which disperse elements are brought together and considered in their unity. Calculation lets us consider, connect and add up all relevant elements of a thing or of a question and thus reach a more discerning view about something. Plato's use of the notions of λογισμός and λογίζεσθαι actually emphasize how these operations give us access to more than our sensible perception lets us see.⁴⁷⁰

The idea of determining something with precision or exactitude is also stressed in verbs like μετρεῖν (measuring), ἰστάναι (weighting) and ἀριθμεῖν (counting). Such operations allow one to know exactly what one is dealing with or what the properties of something are. They are also presented as a way of discovering and correcting perceptual illusions or the way things appear to us. Measuring, weighting and counting counteract the immediate access and what is suggested by it, giving us a more rigorous and revealing perspective about something.⁴⁷¹

In contrast with these terms, philosophical examination may also be represented as a fallible and provisional decision of a matter, more or less based on conjectures or guesses. Plato sometimes refers to it as a τεκμαίρεσθαι – that is, as an act of making an inference

⁴⁶⁹ In some passages, Plato even develops a method of divisions, as was mentioned in Sect. 1.5 above. Cp. Chap. 9, Sect. 3.3. For references to philosophical examination as an act of dividing or cutting something in twain, see *Hp. Ma.* 301b, *Prt.* 340b, *Grg.* 495c, 500d, *Cra.* 396a, 424b, 425b, 425c, *Phdr.* 265b, 265e, 266a, 266b, 273e, 277b, *Rep.* 412b, 454a, 476a-b, 523a, 534a, 618c, *Tht.* 181d, *Sph.* 217a, 219e, 220b, 221e, 223c, 223d, 225a, 227d, 235b, 235c, 248a, 252b, 253d, 264c, 265a, 265e, 266a, 267b, 267d, *Plt.* 258e, 260b, 261a, 261b, 261c, 262b, 262c, 262d, 262e, 263c, 263e, 264a, 264b, 264e, 265a, 265b, 265c, 265d, 266a, 266e, 267b, 276a, 276d, 276e, 279b, 282c, 282d, 283d, 284e, 285a, 286d, 287b, 287c, 288d, 291e, 302c, 302d, *Phlb.* 20c, 23e, 48d, 49a, *Ti.* 27d, 35b, *Lg.* 658a, 672e, 895e.

⁴⁷⁰ For the use of λογίζεσθαι and its cognates (such as ἀναλογίζεσθαι and συλλογίζεσθαι), see *Ap.* 21d, 37c, *Cri.* 46b, *La.* 193a, *Grg.* 511e, 512a, 524b, *Men.* 98a, 100b, *Cra.* 399c, 412a, *Phd.* 62e, 65c, 66a, 79a, 83b, 83c, 84a, 85a, 91b, 97d, *Smp.* 207b, *Phdr.* 246c, 249c, *Rep.* 330e, 339a, 431c, 439c-d, 439d, 440a-b, 441a, 496d, 516b, 524b, 524d, 546b, 553d, 586d, 587e-588a, 603a, 604d, 606b, 611c, 618c, *Tht.* 165c, 165d, 175a, 175b, 186a, 186c, 186d, *Sph.* 248a, 254a, *Prm.* 130a, *Phlb.* 21a, 21c, 41c, 52a-b, 52b, 57a, *Ti.* 52b, 55c, 69a, 72a, 75b-c, 87c, *Lg.* 644d, 645a, 670c, 693c, 728b, 739a, 798c, 805a, 813d, 854e.

⁴⁷¹ See in particular *Prt.* 356a ff., *Rep.* 602c ff. See also *Euthphr.* 7b-c, *Rep.* 426d-e, 522b-533d, *Phlb.* 17d, 55d-56c, *Ti.* 39c-d, *Lg.* 819a ff.

based on signs.⁴⁷² This term thus conveys the constitution of a questionable and provisional perspective on something, for which one does not have enough grounds, but which is also a form of examination or something that results from it.

2.8. A preliminary sketch of Plato's concept of philosophical examination

Plato makes an analogy between philosophical examination and all the ordinary acts just considered. There are affinities between the different groups of acts and they represent different sides of the act Plato has in mind. Some particular moments of philosophical examination may have a greater resemblance with one side or the other, but in a way they coexist and complement each other. Therefore, they can be integrated in a unitary description of philosophical examination. We could say that philosophical examination is the act whereby we put something (a thing, a view, a person) to test by focusing on it and going through its different moments, questioning ourselves (or another) and seeking to reach a definite decision about it in the end of the whole process. This is the formal structure of philosophical examination and it gives us important clues about what is submitted to examination. The fact that it is meaningful to submit it to this operation strongly suggests several things. For one, it is something that is insufficiently tested, that is not usually forced to demonstrate its value, that rather tends to be taken at face value; it is also something we normally do not focus on, about which we are distracted or which we see as if from a distance; our contact with it is imprecise and we do not go through its elements or parts; we do not embark in any journey of exploration and we do not feel the need to mobilize ourselves to search for it or anything about it; it does not raise any particular questions and it is not fully indeterminate or unknown. But the circumstance that it can be examined points to the fact that the regular access to it is not as sure and precise as it could be. There is still something that eludes our grasp (in other words, there is λήθη) and philosophical examination fights against it – against things not showing or not revealing themselves and thus escaping us. It tries to bring out the truth about something. By examining, we fight for a

⁴⁷² The term τεκμαίρεσθαι appears more directly connected with philosophical examination in *Chrm.* 172c, *La.* 192c, *Ion* 537d, *Euthd.* 289b, *Rep.* 433b, 501b, 578c, *Lg.* 790d. For more on this term, see e.g. B. KNOX, *op. cit.*, 122-4; W. SCHADEWALDT, *op. cit.*, 189-191; H. INGENKAMP, Erkenntnisserwerb durch στοχάζεσθαι bei Aristoteles, *Hermes* 109 (1981), 172-178.

better access to reality, and even if such an act does not produce immediate results, with time and effort it can bring about discoveries and better views.⁴⁷³

However, this is still a very vague description. It does not tell us how exactly philosophical examination is performed. The comparison with ordinary acts of examination gives us some direction, but it also raises the question of exactly what is the difference between the original operation (the literal sense of the words above considered) and the philosophical operation. The latter is not just a simple test, a simple journey or a simple cross-questioning, but rather a sublimated form thereof. It transposes the original act to a new domain, which is analogous to the one we already know. But we cannot take this new test, this journey or this question in a literal sense – otherwise we would mistake the image for the thing itself (or, as Plato would say, we will have an oneiric relation to it).⁴⁷⁴ That such a direct identification of both things is to be avoided becomes particularly clear if we consider that Plato sometimes attacks the kinds of ordinary acts we have just considered, both in themselves (insofar as they do not guarantee truth and often depart from it) and with respect to philosophical examination. The latter aspect is particularly relevant. Love of competition and honor is criticized as something that disturbs the search for truth.⁴⁷⁵ Love of sights and spectacles is a mere semblance of philosophy.⁴⁷⁶ Dedicating oneself fully to judicial matters and judicial λόγοι is a form of slavish education, which is opposed to life dedicated to philosophy and philosophical λόγοι.⁴⁷⁷ So it is still unclear how philosophical examination is supposed to overcome the limitations of these ordinary activities. By invoking them, Plato points towards a new kind of examination, but does not fully present it. Just as in the first section of this chapter, the images are insufficient to guide us to an adequate understanding of philosophical examination – and therefore further discussion of it is still required.

⁴⁷³ In this sense, our condition corresponds to what Xenophanes says in the already quoted fragment DK16: “οὔτοι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖσ’ ὑπέδειξαν./ ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον.”

⁴⁷⁴ For more on Plato’s notion of dream, see in particular Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 below.

⁴⁷⁵ See e.g. *Grg.* 457c ff., 511b, *Phd.* 91a, *Phlb.* 14b.

⁴⁷⁶ See *Rep.* 475d ff.

⁴⁷⁷ Cp. *Tht.* 172c ff.

CHAPTER 5

Δόξα and οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι as the objects of philosophical examination

“εἰ δὲ μηθὲν ὑπολαμβάνει ἀλλ’ ὁμοίως οἶεται καὶ οὐκ οἶεται, τί ἂν
διαφερόντως ἔχοι τῶν γε φυτῶν;”

Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1008b10-12

The philosophical examination (ἐξέτασις) is a transitive operation. It presupposes that there is an object that undergoes examination and suffers its effects. This object is not incidental to the examination. Rather, it is essential to determine it. Therefore, in order to obtain a unified notion of Plato’s ἐξέτασις, we have to understand the nature of this object.

At first sight, the philosophical examination seems to have many different objects. In principle, anything can be submitted to examination. Such a diversity, however, does not preclude the existence of a unifying principle – something that all the possible objects have in common and qualifies them to be examined. In the previous chapter we saw that the examination is directed to three main kinds of objects: persons, views and things at large. But these are not simply three juxtaposed objects that can be examined in turn. They are intrinsically connected. But how are they connected? What exactly is at the core of this connection and, consequently, at the core of the Platonic examination?

An examination of things, of all particular beings in the world, could be understood as a direct contact with these beings, in which one inspects their properties. However, the Platonic examination seems to focus on human beings. Socrates is very clear in the *Apology*: it is a matter of examining oneself and the others.⁴⁷⁸ The kind of being that carries out the examination is in a way also the object that undergoes it. But in what respect are human beings to be examined? It is not their physical properties, their actions, their desires, their feelings or their biography that is primarily at issue. The examination is above all concerned with one’s way of seeing or understanding things, with one’s set of perspectives, with one’s access to beings or with how they appear to us. In short, the examination is primarily an examination of our views. This does not mean that the examination is circumscribed to a

⁴⁷⁸ See 28e5-6 (“ἐξετάζοντα ἑμαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους”) and 38a5 (“ἑμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος”).

particular aspect of a particular being, leaving everything else unexamined. The aspect at issue here (namely, our views) is an essential feature of this being (i.e., of who a person is, their character, their intelligence). Moreover, our views can mediate or encompass everything. Everything we come in contact with is conditioned by them and possibly even constituted by them. Perhaps there is nothing that is not in some way a view or a set of views. Thus, by being confined to something as plastic as our views, philosophical examination extends to everything these views refer to and is potentially universal.

We must therefore determine how our views or perspectives are to be understood, how they are constituted according to Plato. In order to do this, we must focus on two notions used throughout the corpus to designate our views: namely, δόξα and οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι. They are the primary object of examination. This does not mean, however, that there are two different objects of examination. Δόξα and οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι are not two different things. They are rather two different and complementary descriptions of the same reality. They emphasize different aspects of it and this means that certain features can be more clearly seen in one term than in the other. Thus, in order to see how the primary object of examination is understood by Plato, we will look into the meaning of these notions and the passages in which they are discussed.

However, it is important to bear in mind that the meaning of these notions in Plato's writings is complex. They both have a neutral (potentially positive) and a negative sense. In other words, they denote either our views in general (in a sense in which we still do not know whether they are true or false) or the fact that these views are mere opinions or conceit of knowledge and nothing more. Plato normally calls our attention to the negative component and points to a constitutive defect in virtue of which many (perhaps even all) of our views are somehow distorted and false. But from the standpoint of examination itself, our views have a neutral value, and it is these neutral views, whose truth value is not yet determined, that undergo examination. It is in this sense that our δόξαι and our οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι are objects of examination. The negative value of these notions is an added property that is ascertained by the examination. Therefore, we must first analyze the neutral sense of δόξα and οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι and only later will we look at the kinds of cognitive defects with which these two expressions are associated.⁴⁷⁹ We will begin with the notion of δόξα, whose analysis in the Platonic corpus is more explicit and developed, and then we will see what is added and emphasized by the notion of οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι.

⁴⁷⁹ For a detailed consideration of these cognitive defects, see Chap. 7 below.

1. Δόξα in the neutral sense as the object of philosophical examination

The philosophical examination is often associated with δόξαι (or some cognate expression) in the dialogues. The examinees are often explicitly asked to produce their own δόξαι.⁴⁸⁰ In addition, someone else's δόξαι (sometimes even the ones shared by all) are also brought into discussion. In general, the word is employed by Plato in various contexts, with different shades of meaning. In some of these contexts, it does not seem to be used in a technical sense. Other times, we find not only a very specific usage, but also important indications or even detailed analyses about the meaning of the term.⁴⁸¹ These analyses have many points in common, but they also have some important discrepancies. This mirrors the common usage of the word, which associates it with things whose interconnection is not immediately clear. Both the word δόξα and Plato's treatment of it thus raise the question of how to unite this diversity.⁴⁸² But we will not consider this in depth here. We will simply consider a part of what is implied in this word. As was said before, there are the two main usages of the word. In the first, δόξα has a neutral and broader sense. It designates the result of an operation and is in itself indeterminate with respect to its truth or falsity. In the second usage, δόξα has a pejorative sense and designates a defective result (or, more precisely, a defective access to things), which is in some cases associated with a particular kind of defect that is supposed to affect all δόξαι as such. Since it is δόξα in the neutral sense that is the object of examination (though the examination may also discover a global or even constitutive defect in this object), we will first consider some passages in which this sense of δόξα is discussed. In doing so, we will abstract from other forms of knowledge (other cognitive powers or capacities) and how they connect to each other. We will not discuss here the inner structure of our cognitive apparatus and the central role δόξα (understood as a cognitive power or capacity among others) plays therein. We will isolate δόξα as such and we

⁴⁸⁰ For explicit requests of someone's δόξα, see *Chrm.* 159a, *Grg.* 501c, *Men.* 84d, 85b, 85c, *Rep.* 346a, 350e, 456d, 470a, 576e. Other times, the request uses the verb δοκεῖν and is thus also referred to one's δόξα. The examiner may ask for “τό σοι δοκοῦν” or “τά σοι δοκοῦντά”. See *Chrm.* 163e, *Grg.* 495a, 500b-c, *Men.* 83d, *Rep.* 349a, 487d, 509c, 523a, *Th.* 157c-d, *Lg.* 641d-e. The inquiry may also assume the form of “δοκεῖ σοι;” See e.g. *Euthphr.* 12b, 12d, *Ap.* 24d, 25a, *Cri.* 49e, 50b, *Phd.* 62b, 64d, 64d-e, 64e, 67b, 76d, 79d, 80a, 87b, 92e, 96e, 100e, 103d, 104a, 105b, etc. See also *Th.* 161e, where “ἡ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι πραγματεία” is defined as “τὸ ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖν ἐλέγχειν τὰς ἀλλήλων φαντασίας τε καὶ δόξας”.

⁴⁸¹ The more detailed discussions are found in *Men.* 97b ff., *Rep.* 476d ff., *Th. passim* (in particular 189e f.), *Sph.* 263d ff., *Phlb.* 36ff. and *Ti.* 27d ff.

⁴⁸² One could be tempted to regard this as an accidental unity, caused by the attribution of different meanings to the same word in the Greek language. It would be something idiosyncratic and philosophically irrelevant. But it may also be the result of an insight into an intrinsic connection between different aspects of reality or of our experience of it – and in the following we will see that this is rather the case.

will try to define its structure in light of the analyses we find in Plato's works.⁴⁸³ We will likewise pay little attention to the contents of our δόξα and whether they are all somehow referred to sensible beings (as Plato often suggests) or whether they can also correspond to intelligible realities (as seems to be the case in some other passages). This will play an important role in the discussion of the pejorative sense of δόξα and for this reason will be discussed only at a later stage.⁴⁸⁴

1.1. The complex meaning of δόξα, δοκεῖν and δοξάζειν in Greek as the basis for Plato's concept of δόξα

Before tackling Plato's analysis of δόξα in the neutral sense, it is important to make a brief survey of the complex meaning this word has in colloquial Greek. This meaning serves as a basis for the Platonic usage of the term and surveying it will thus give us important indications about how Plato understands this term. It will likewise provide us the chance to see how problematic and unilateral the usual translations of the term are. The semantic fields of these English words do not coincide with the Greek word δόξα, and this means that much of what a Greek would immediately understand by this word always gets toned down or lost in translation.

We will consider the semantic field of the term δόξα along with the corresponding verbs δοκεῖν and δοξάζειν.⁴⁸⁵ Much could (and has been) said about these terms.⁴⁸⁶ We will, however, confine ourselves to the most essential aspects.

⁴⁸³ Later, in Chap. 11, we will consider how our cognitive apparatus is structured according to Plato. This will require us to consider in detail other cognitive powers, which are "below" δοξάζειν (i.e., may give us access to something inferior, less complex) and "above" or "beyond" it.

⁴⁸⁴ See Chap. 7, Sect. 2.

⁴⁸⁵ Δόξα is the noun most directly related to both these verbs, whose meaning do not entirely coincide. Δοξάζειν only refers to an act of a subject, whereas δοκεῖν can be used of a subject or of an object (and the same applies to δόξα, as we will see, which has both an active and a passive sense).

⁴⁸⁶ See in particular H. SCHMIDT, *Synonymik der griechischen Sprache*, vol. 1, Leipzig, Teubner, 1876, 323ff., 335ff.; O. IHM, *Über den Begriff der platonischen Doxa und deren Verhältnis zum Wissen der Ideen*, Leipzig, Edelmann, 1877; A. MURRAY, On a Use of δοκῶ, *Classical Philology* 5 (1910), 488-493; G. KITTEL, δοκέω, δόξα, δοξάζω, συνδοξάζω, ἔνδοξος, ἐνδοξάζω, παράδοξος, in: *TWNT*, sub voce; J. SPRUTE, *Der Begriff der Doxa in der platonischen Literatur*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 250-255, 259-263, 489-491; E. TIELSCH, *Die Platonischen Versionen der griechischen Doxalehre*. Ein philosophisches Lexikon mit Kommentar, Meisenheim am Glan, Anton Hain, 1970; W. SCHADEWALDT, *Die Anfänge der Philosophie bei den Griechen*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1978, 174-177; Y. LAFRANCE, *La théorie platonicienne de la doxa*, Montréal/Paris, Bellarmin/Les Belles Lettres, 1981; M. CARVALHO, O caso do cogito no Filebo de Platão, in: A. CAEIRO & M. CARVALHO, (ed.), *Incursões no Filebo*, Porto, Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 2012, 179-318 (in particular 214-216 and, for further bibliography, 271ff.).

First of all, the etymology of these words has been the matter of much discussion.⁴⁸⁷ Δόξα, δοκεῖν and δοξάζειν have the root δεκ-, which is also found in δέχομαι and δοκεύω, or in Latin words as *doceo*, *decet*, *dignus*. It seems to express the idea of adequateness or conformity to something. This can be construed in different ways, but it seems to include a reference to an objective pole and a component of reception or passivity. Because of this, δοκεῖν and δόξα can denote the appearance or semblance of something, the impression it produces on us, how it strikes us. In this sense, it almost coincides with the verb φαίνεσθαι.

But δόξα, together with the verbs δοκεῖν and δοξάζειν, can also be used to denote a decision or judgment, the formation of an opinion, the settling of a matter, the fixation of a version of things.⁴⁸⁸ The word δόξα and its cognates (in contrast with other verbs of similar meaning) may further qualify this decision or judgment by conveying the idea that this judgment does not depend on an inner feeling, but rather on the outer appearance of something (which brings the meaning of δόξα closer to αἴσθησις).

Δοκεῖν is also used in official formulas to refer to political decisions and decrees. In these and similar contexts, the word has the sense of judging good or fit, approving, resolving, intending – which in turn is based on the fact that something seems good or fit. But despite the objective basis, there is also a component of activity, which renders us responsible or accountable for our δόξαι. In other words, each δόξα is always partially passive and partially active. The emphasis may be laid either on the objective or the subjective side, but they are always connected.

Δόξα and δοκεῖν can also acquire a derogative sense and designate the mere appearance or semblance of being something (*Schein*), which is opposed to and hides the true being of something.⁴⁸⁹ As a result, δόξα comes to mean illusion, fancy or even dream image.⁴⁹⁰ This usage of the word expresses how we tend to simply accept without

⁴⁸⁷ See for instance E. BOISACQ, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. Étudiée dans ses rapports avec les autres langues indo-européennes, Paris/Heidelberg, Klincksieck/Carl Winter, 1916, *sub voce* δοκεύω; G. REDARD, Du grec δέχομαι “je reçois” au sanskrit *átka-* “manteau”. Le sens de la racine **dek-*, in: *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung*. Festschrift Albert Debrunner, Bern, Francke, 1954; H. FRISK, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3 vols., Heidelberg, Winter, 1960-1972, *sub voce* δοκεύω; A. HUS, *Docere et les mots de la famille de docere*. Étude de sémantique latine, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965, especially 1-10; P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. Histoire des mots, 4 vols., Paris, Klincksieck, 1968-1980, *sub voce* δοκάω, δοκεύω, δοκέω; R. BEEKES, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 2 vols., Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2010, *sub voce* δοκέω.

⁴⁸⁸ Here and in the following the term “judgment” should not be primarily understood as a logic act of asserting or denying the connection between a subject and a predicate. It rather refers to one’s act of determining something in a certain way, regardless of the logical structure of such an act.

⁴⁸⁹ One of the most emblematic passages that expresses this idea is AESCHYLUS, *Septem contra Thebas*, 592: “οὐ γὰρ δοκεῖν ἄριστος, ἀλλ’ εἶναι θέλει”. Plato himself quotes this passage in *Rep.* 362a.

⁴⁹⁰ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 275, 421, *Choephoroe* 1051, 1053.

examination what something appears to be. We take things at their face value, interpret our views as purely passive and thereby dilute our own responsibility in our δόξα.

Δόξα can also acquire the sense of conjecture or opinion, which implies an awareness of the frailty of one's decision or judgment. In this case, δόξα emphasizes the personal character of the decision and opposes it either to other views or δόξαι (which may or may not be held by others) or to effective knowledge and true insight. The admission of frailty can then be used rhetorically, to attenuate a categorical assertion, or to express one's actual lack of commitment to a particular view.⁴⁹¹

Finally, in line with the political usage of the expression, δόξα, δοκεῖν and δοξάζειν (or δοξάζεσθαι) can also express public appearance or public opinion, as well as the reputation something or someone can have (whether positive, negative or neutral). These are collective experiences to which all individuals are somehow related and that affect how things appear and what one thinks about them.

This complex network of meanings is the basis for Plato's analysis of the term δόξα. Plato does not so much modify it as he tries to elucidate it. He will isolate the center of this network and then determine how the other meanings are derived from it. This is what we must now consider.

1.2. Δόξα as decision or judgment (κρίσις)

Plato uses different strategies in the corpus to isolate and define δόξα. These strategies often imply the contrast with more basic forms of cognitive access to something – in particular with sensation (αἴσθησις, which has a certain proximity with δόξα, as was indicated above), but also to a lesser degree with memory (μνήμη, which is understood as a preservation or retention of one's αἰσθήσεις).⁴⁹² Plato attempts to isolate components in our access to beings that are irreducible to our sensations and memories.

One such attempt can be found in the *Philebus*. Socrates gives the example of someone seeing something from a distance, not very clearly (μὴ πάνυ σαφῶς), and not being able to discern if it is a person or a statue.⁴⁹³ There are different possible identifications and

⁴⁹¹ We will see the same holds true for οἶεσθαι.

⁴⁹² These contrasts presuppose the scale of cognitive powers or faculties we will consider in Chapter 11.

⁴⁹³ See 38c-d: “[ΣΩ.] πολλάκις ἰδόντι τινὶ πόρρωθεν μὴ πάνυ σαφῶς τὰ καθορώμενα συμβαίνειν βούλεσθαι κρίνειν φαίης ἂν ταῦθ' ἄπερ ὀρθῶ; [ΠΡΩ.] φαίην ἄν. [ΣΩ.] οὐκοῦν τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸς αὐτὸν οὔτος ἀνέροιτ' ἂν ὧδε; [ΠΡΩ.] πῶς; [ΣΩ.] τί ποτ' ἄρ' ἔστι τὸ παρὰ τὴν πέτραν τοῦθ' ἑστάναι φανταζόμενον ὑπὸ τινὶ δένδρῳ; ταῦτ' εἰπεῖν ἂν τις πρὸς ἑαυτὸν δοκεῖ σοι, τοιαῦτ' ἄττα κατιδὼν φαντασθέντα αὐτῷ ποτε; [ΠΡΩ.] τί μήν; [ΣΩ.]

one is in a state of doubt or hesitation (of διστάζειν, to use an expression from the *Theaetetus*).⁴⁹⁴ In this moment, one is closer to having a pure αἴσθησις. One has a muddled access from a distance and is unable to determine what appears. This is what characterizes our sensations as that which is immediately given to us. They are in themselves indeterminate or indistinct. If we only had sensations, we would be completely at a loss about what things are. It is necessary to have more – and this surplus in relation to mere sensation is precisely what we lack in the moment of hesitation or doubt. But in general we do not leave things at that. Socrates says that in this moment we strive and strain ourselves to fully determine (διαδοξάζειν) things.⁴⁹⁵ We are directed to more than an absolutely hazy access. We want to remove doubts. We want to decide and determine what things are. Δόξα is precisely this decision, this κρίνειν.⁴⁹⁶ The latter term is used in judicial language, as was noted in the previous chapter. In a court of law, the jury must decide which of the two conflicting versions of events is in the right, thereby bringing order to the conflict. The term is also used for contests in general, in which a winner must be chosen. This is precisely what happens when forming a δόξα. One must set apart the right alternative (in the example given, whether something is a person or a statue) and establish a version as the right one. One has to reach a judgment that lets one discern the truth (or as Plato says, one has to διαδοξάζειν).⁴⁹⁷ In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes this as setting the boundaries of something or defining it (ὀρίζειν).⁴⁹⁸ This process of judging something is precisely what brings clarity to our access to something. It brings the object nearer, defines its contours, allows us to make out what it is. In other words, a δόξα does what a sensation or αἴσθησις cannot do. The latter cannot identify its object. It does not even have doubts or hesitations about it. It is neutral in terms of deciding or judging. In order to decide or judge, it is necessary to have something additional – namely, a δόξα.

Plato isolates this moment by considering what happens when we have doubts about the identity of something seen from afar and have to make a decision about it. This may suggest that all δόξαι imply a kind of judicial process of hesitation between possibilities and

ἄρ' οὖν μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ τοιοῦτος ὡς ἀποκρινόμενος ἂν πρὸς αὐτὸν εἴποι τοῦτο, ὡς ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος, ἐπιτυχῶς εἰπόν; [ΠΡΩ.] καὶ πάνυ γε. [ΣΩ.] καὶ παρενεχθεὶς γ' αὖ τάχ' ἂν ὡς ἔστι τινῶν ποιμένων ἔργον τὸ καθορώμενον ἄγαλμα προσείποι. [ΠΡΩ.] μάλα γε.”

⁴⁹⁴ See 190a: “ὅταν δὲ ὀρίσασα, εἴτε βραδύτερον εἴτε καὶ ὀζυτέρων ἐπάξασα, τὸ αὐτὸ ἤδη φῆ καὶ μὴ διστάζει, δόξαν ταύτην τίθεμεν αὐτῆς.”

⁴⁹⁵ See 38b: “οὐκοῦν ἐκ μνήμης τε καὶ αἰσθήσεως δόξα ἡμῖν καὶ τὸ διαδοξάζειν ἐγχειρεῖν γίγνεθ' ἐκάστοτε;”

⁴⁹⁶ In 38c, Socrates speaks precisely of a βούλεσθαι κρίνειν, which describes the process of constituting a δόξα.

⁴⁹⁷ The verb διαδοξάζειν appears in passage quoted above. The prefix δια- conveys here both the idea of a complete process and the idea of full discernment and clarity about something.

⁴⁹⁸ See the above quoted passage in 190a.

finally reaching a verdict. However, this is not what normally happens. Normally there is no hesitation between different alternative versions (we may even be aware only of one possibility) and there is also no deferral of judgment. But this does not mean our access is immediate or absolutely sensible. Neither does it mean that we are in suspense about what appears to us. Our access is still pervaded by decisions or judgments – only they are immediate or automatic. A version is adopted, taken as valid and as something that does not pose any problems and has no need of revision. Because of this, we do not even think about it. We only do think about it if there is any disturbance similar to the one described in the *Philebus*. But in these relatively rare moments of doubt and hesitation we can more clearly identify, by contrast, the decisions that affect everything we come in contact with. This is why Plato calls our attention to them.

By emphasizing the idea of decision in his description of δόξα, Plato also points out to one's personal responsibility in our access to things. We are not purely passive (even if one has in many cases a strong tendency to follow appearances).⁴⁹⁹ Things are not absolutely given as what they are. It depends on us to decipher or determine them. Δόξα is precisely this attempt at decipherment. It establishes a version of events. In addition, this version (i.e., our δόξα) is not predetermined and fixed. There are (or there can be) alternative versions. One can define things differently and one can revise one's decision (i.e., one can μεταδοξάζειν). This may happen automatically or it may be the result of an explicit reflection about one's judgment.⁵⁰⁰ But it is in any case the result of our own inner activity.

1.3. Δόξα as a process of thinking (διάνοια) and a conversation (διάλογος)

Plato also tries to define δόξα by comparing it to the process of thinking. This process is not simply a monologue, but rather a conversation in our mind or soul (ψυχή).⁵⁰¹ This implies a certain scission within the soul. Moreover, this is a very particular kind of

⁴⁹⁹ “Following appearances”, however, cannot mean “following one's αἴσθησις”, for αἴσθησις as such is indeterminate. It can only mean “following the version of events that must promptly suggest itself”.

⁵⁰⁰ Even if most of our decisions are made without a previous process, this does not mean that such a process cannot take place. On the contrary, any of our decisions can be revised and revoked. We can consciously take the role of the decider. This is precisely what happens in the philosophical examination.

⁵⁰¹ See *Tht.* 189e: “[ΣΩ.] τὸ δὲ διανοεῖσθαι ἄρ' ὅπερ ἐγὼ καλεῖς; [ΘΕΑΙ.] τί καλῶν; [ΣΩ.] λόγον ὃν αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἢ ψυχὴ διεξέρχεται περὶ ὧν ἂν σκοπῇ.” See also *Sph.* 264a-b: “οὐκοῦν ἐπεὶπερ λόγος ἀληθὴς ἦν καὶ ψευδὴς, τούτων δ' ἐφάνη διάνοια μὲν αὐτῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ψυχῆς διάλογος, δόξα δὲ διανοίας ἀποτελεῦτησις (...).” For the term ψυχή, see in particular Chap. 10 below.

conversation. The soul asks itself questions and gives itself answers.⁵⁰² Thinking is thus a dialectic conversation and what we see Socrates doing with other characters in the dialogues is actually prefigured at the heart of who we are. Our soul needs answers and when it does not find them it assumes an interrogative structure and strives to overcome its doubts.⁵⁰³ More specifically, it submits us to a kind of cross-examination. There is a tension to determining things. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato describes this activity as a consideration (ἐπισκοπεῖν or σκοπεῖσθαι) or calculation (ἀναλογίζεσθαι or συλλογισμός) regarding what is immediately given by the senses.⁵⁰⁴ As he says, the soul “is busy by itself about the things which are”.⁵⁰⁵ It tries to go beyond what appears and decide (κρίνειν) what things are. In other words, the soul demands answers from itself. It has to affirm or deny some version of things (i.e., it must produce a φάσις or ἀπόφασις).⁵⁰⁶ When it does, it brings the process of thinking to completion. A δόξα is precisely the completion of this process (a διανοίας ἀποτελεύτησις, as it is said in the *Sophist*).⁵⁰⁷ It produces non-immediate, non-sensible, intellectual contents.

This process can either take place externally, via a loud λόγος (so that others can hear it and possibly participate in it), or it can take place within us.⁵⁰⁸ In both cases, the structure is the same and this means the structure of our statements reflects the structure of our thoughts. Both are dialogical, discursive or, as we could also say, rational (even if usually they are not fully rational). Still, the possibility of a silent dialogue is something we often do not notice (only when there is more resistance and the conversation is therefore more intense) and this is very significant, as we shall see in the next chapter.⁵⁰⁹ It might suggest that there is always a certain conversation within us, a certain examination of what appears and a finding of

⁵⁰² For an illustration of this, see once more *Phlb.* 38c-d. See also *Tht.* 189e-190a: “τοῦτο γάρ μοι ἰνδάλλεται διανοουμένη οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ διαλέγεσθαι, αὐτὴ ἑαυτὴν ἐρωτῶσα καὶ ἀποκρινομένη, καὶ φάσκουσα καὶ οὐ φάσκουσα.”

⁵⁰³ This description of δόξα is in fact very close to the one we first considered, based on the *Philebus*, since doubt or hesitation is itself what raises the question and the decision is the answer. This is made clear in the words used by Socrates in the *Philebus*. He describes a person having doubts about what he is seeing as someone who is asking questions to himself and giving answers. See *Phlb.* 38c-d for the use of the verbs ἀνερωτᾶν and ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

⁵⁰⁴ For all these terms, see 185e-186d.

⁵⁰⁵ See 187a: “(...) αὐτὴ [sc. ἡ ψυχὴ] καθ’ αὐτὴν πραγματεύεται περὶ τὰ ὄντα.” I follow M. Levett’s translation, revised by Myles Burnyeat (see *PCW*).

⁵⁰⁶ See once more *Tht.* 189e-190a. See also *Sph.* 263e-264a: “[ΞΕ.] καὶ μὴν ἐν λόγοις γε αὐτῷ ἴσμεν ἐνὸν – [ΘΕΑΙ.] τὸ ποῖον; [ΞΕ.] φάσιν τε καὶ ἀπόφασιν. [ΘΕΑΙ.] ἴσμεν. [ΞΕ.] ὅταν οὖν τοῦτο ἐν ψυχῇ κατὰ διάνοιαν ἐγγίγνηται μετὰ σιγῆς, πλὴν δόξης ἔχεις ὅτι προσείπης αὐτό; [ΘΕΑΙ.] καὶ πῶς;”

⁵⁰⁷ See 264a-b: “οὐκοῦν ἐπεὶπερ λόγος ἀληθῆς ἦν καὶ ψευδῆς, τούτων δ’ ἐφάνη διάνοια μὲν αὐτῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ψυχῆς διάλογος, δόξα δὲ διανοίας ἀποτελεύτησις (...).”

⁵⁰⁸ See *Sph.* 263e-264a and *Phlb.* 38d-e.

⁵⁰⁹ See Chap. 6, Sect. 1.

answers. But we do not spend every moment examining and our δόξαι are not the result of a long explicit dialogue with ourselves. As we saw, most δόξαι are automatic. We simply have answers (i.e., we affirm a certain version of things, without even considering alternatives). Things are decided and we do not have to ask questions about them. Only the lack of answers (or our doubting them) creates the pressure and the intense dialogue that correspond to the cross-examination described.

1.4. Δόξα as the writing in the book of the soul

In the *Philebus*, Socrates takes the similarity between δόξα and λόγος even further. He says that our soul resembles a book and that the association of memories and sensations writes as it were λόγοι (statements) in our soul.⁵¹⁰ He then mentions an internal scribe (ὁ παρ' ἡμῶν γραμματεὺς). This artisan is precisely the δοξάζειν and the statements being written are δόξαι. They are based on our present or past sensations, but they produce something that goes beyond them. Δόξα exceeds what is given, adds to it and completes it. This addition is primarily a tying together of our sensations. But this is done by means of something that is compared to writing. The soul has a scribe – a secretary that is literate, able to read and write. He is able to transform sounds into writing (whereby he fixates them) and is able to understand the graphic symbols and their meaning. Analogously, our soul is able to translate or codify its immediate experience and produce a new and heterogeneous meaning that transcends it. The new meaning (the δόξαι and λόγοι) is not a mode of sensation or memory. It differs from a fixed image of a sensation we had, just like the written word is different from sound.⁵¹¹ This heterogeneity is further proven by the fact that the scribe needs a painter. According to Socrates, this new sphere can produce its own quasi-perceptive contents. There is a second artisan in our soul, a painter (ζωγράφος), who comes after the scribe, paints images of the things being said or written in the soul, and lets one see (or have a quasi-sensible contact) with what is being written.⁵¹² Plato seems to be describing imagination and stressing that it is determined by our δοξάζειν. Our judgments determine what we see and

⁵¹⁰ See 39a: “ἡ μνήμη ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι συμπίπτουσα εἰς ταῦτόν κακεῖνα ἃ περὶ ταῦτ' ἐστὶ τὰ παθήματα φαίνονται μοι σχεδὸν οἷον γράφειν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τότε λόγους· καὶ ὅταν μὲν ἀληθῆ γράφῃ τοῦτο τὸ πάθημα, δόξα τε ἀληθῆς καὶ λόγοι ἀπ' αὐτοῦ συμβαίνουσιν ἀληθεῖς ἐν ἡμῶν γιγνόμενοι (...).”

⁵¹¹ In other words, the soul is not simply a tablet in which sensations leave impressions (to use the metaphor employed in *Theaetetus* 191c ff. to describe our memory). It is also something in which the soul itself writes.

⁵¹² See 39b: “[ΣΩ.] ἀποδέχου δὴ καὶ ἕτερον δημιουργὸν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐν τῷ τότε χρόνῳ γιγνόμενον. [ΠΡΩ.] τίνα; [ΣΩ.] ζωγράφον, ὃς μετὰ τὸν γραμματιστὴν τῶν λεγομένων εἰκόνας ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τούτων γράφει.”

how we see it. They not only transform our sensations, but can also produce sensible (or quasi-sensible) moments.

The scribe is thus able to transfer our immediate experience to a domain analogous to writing. Such a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος* allows one to fixate one's experience (give it some permanence at least in our mind).⁵¹³ It also allows us to interpret it by establishing a version of events. Without this operation, the soul would be illiterate. It would not be able to read and understand the text of reality. In other words, our sensations and memories cannot discern what things are and what happens. In the *Philebus*, Socrates even argues that without *δόξαι* we would not even be aware of our own sensations while having them.⁵¹⁴ Therefore, even if our *δόξαι* are frequently (if not always) referred to sensations, they still have a different origin and structure. This causes them to affect and transform all sensations. In a way, they teach our sensations to read, allow them to have an understanding of what happens.

The scope of this activity is vast and Plato even suggests, by comparing the soul to a book, that it can be global. Not only are our sensations and memories collected and brought together by the scribe, thereby connecting our past and present, but the scribe's activity can also be referred to moments of which the soul had no sensation – and particularly to the future. He then uses the painter to complete these projections. All these moments are then linked up in a whole (the book as such, the narrative) and seen in light of it. In other words, no sensation, memory or *δόξα* is isolated or loose. They are all connected and constitute a world. This world appears as a *λόγος* or a text that is being written – something that cannot be reduced to sensory moments.⁵¹⁵ It is a text written not in mathematical characters, as was later said, but in *λόγοι* or *δόξαι*.

⁵¹³ Fixity is one of the most important features of writing, according to Plato. It is also presented as one of its limitations (cf. *Phdr.* 275d-e, *Ep. VII* 343a). A written text cannot explain or defend itself. But fixity is also a condition for having access to something determinate. Otherwise, we would not be able to discern something or have some clarity about it. *Δόξα* is precisely what allows us to do this.

⁵¹⁴ See 21c: “(...) *δόξαν δ' αὖ μὴ κεκτημένον ἀληθῆ μὴ δοξάζειν χαίρειν χαίροντα (...)*”. Without judgment, we would have no relation to pleasure and we would not be aware of its existence. The same applies to any other sensation of ours.

⁵¹⁵ This reminds of Heraclitus and his application of *λόγος* both to his philosophy (or the expression of it), to the representation a soul has of reality and to reality itself. There is a language of things which the soul must understand. The senses by themselves are insufficient to decipher what things are if one's soul does not know this language. See in particular DK B1, 2, 45, 72 107, 115.

1.5. The intentional character of δόξα and the semblance of immediacy

By comparing δόξα with judging, giving answers and writing, Plato emphasizes the active component of δόξα. It can be conceived as the act of a subject – as a δοξάζειν. This act as such is an absolute fact, as Socrates stresses in *Philebus*. It is something whose occurrence we cannot doubt, much less prove false or illusory. Every time there is a δόξα, there is a δοξάζειν.⁵¹⁶ But δόξα is not simply an act within our soul, absolutely contained in itself. Any δοξάζειν is related to an object, it has a content – or, as it is formulated in the *Philebus*, it has a δοξαζόμενον.⁵¹⁷ Something is judged and the δόξα refers intrinsically to that. We could say, using the language of phenomenology, that δόξα has an intentional character. Judging is always judging something.⁵¹⁸ It is a power or capacity (δύναμις) and, as Socrates says in the *Republic*, each power or capacity is determined not by any physical property (as color or shape), but rather by that on which it depends (ἐφ’ ᾧ ἔστι) and by what it accomplishes (ὁ ἀπεργάζεται). There is something to which the δοξάζειν refers (a δοξαστόν) and something that results from the power, namely δόξα itself.⁵¹⁹

This something to which the δόξα refers is often mediated by our sensations (in which case it corresponds to what is called φαντασία in the *Sophist*, i.e., the power of letting something appear).⁵²⁰ But our δοξάζειν can also create its own sensible content by employing the painter within our soul, as was seen above. In general, something appears before us and δόξα tends to be absorbed in this appearance (be it real or imaginary). With this, we tend to lose sight of the act itself (unless we face some resistance and cannot immediately determine something). Our act of judging sets things before us. In fact, this is how things are seen by us. Our judgments constitute our immediate experience and pervade everything with which we come in contact. Moreover, our δόξαι do not refer only to our sensible or quasi-sensible experiences. Sometimes Plato also uses the word with respect to judgments about intelligible

⁵¹⁶ See 37a: “οὐκοῦν τὸ δοξάζον, ἄντε ὀρθῶς ἄντε μὴ ὀρθῶς δοξάζει, τό γε δοξάζειν ὄντως οὐδέποτε ἀπόλλυσιν.” For more on this passage, see Chap. 10, Sect. 1 below.

⁵¹⁷ Cp. 37a: “[ΣΩ.] (...) ἔστιν γάρ πού τι δοξάζειν ἡμῖν; [ΠΡΩ.] ναί. (...) [ΣΩ.] καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ δοξαζόμενον ἔστι τι; [ΠΡΩ.] πῶς δ’ οὐ;”

⁵¹⁸ See *Chrm.* 168a3-5 and *Tht.* 189a6.

⁵¹⁹ Cp. *Rep.* 477c ff. For an analysis of this passage, cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 below. To be sure, the discussion in the *Republic* refers to a narrower sense of δόξα – a sense in which it implies a constitutive limitation and is opposed to a superior form of access or a superior cognitive power (simply called γνῶσις in this passage). Nonetheless, this particular feature we are now considering is an essential feature of δόξα in broader sense, i.e., of all our judgments.

⁵²⁰ See 264a: “[ΞΕ.] ὅταν οὖν τοῦτο ἐν ψυχῇ κατὰ διάνοιαν ἐγγίγνηται μετὰ σιγῆς, πλὴν δόξης ἔχεις ὅτι προσείπης αὐτό; [ΘΕΑΙ.] καὶ πῶς; [ΞΕ.] τί δ’ ὅταν μὴ καθ’ αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ δι’ αἰσθήσεως παρῆ τι, τὸ τοιοῦτον αὐτὸ πάθος ἄρ’ οἶόν τε ὀρθῶς εἰπεῖν ἕτερόν τι πλὴν φαντασίαν; [ΘΕΑΙ.] οὐδέν.”

realities (i.e., about notions of which we have a certain understanding and which are then reflected in all sensible contents).⁵²¹ The range of our judgments is extremely broad and in a sense it corresponds to the world or the totality of our experience.⁵²²

What is judged (the δοξαζόμενον) can thus be very complex. But this complexity still does not consider a fundamental ambiguity that is present in the usage of the term in the *Philebus* and that pervades all that was said just now. Δοξαζόμενον can mean either the immanent content of a judgment or the object or reality outside the judgment (i.e., a reality that transcends the act of judging as such). Plato does not specify what he means. However, this ambiguity is neither incidental nor irrelevant. Both elements characterize any δόξα and its intentionality. A δόξα has an apparent object, which appears to it or within it. This apparent object is as absolutely given as the act of judging. But δόξα also has a constitutive relation to reality as such, regardless of whether it appears to us as such or not. These two moments may coincide or not and their coincidence or non-coincidence defines any δόξα. This is what we must consider now, for it is not only a decisive structure of our judging as such, but it also essential to determine the examination of our judgments or δόξαι.

1.6. The δόξα as a shot (βολή) aimed at truth and the possibility of a false δόξα

It was already mentioned how the soul has a tension to decide or determine what things are.⁵²³ This is in line with another image that is used to elucidate the nature of δόξα, namely the image of shooting the bow (ἀπὸ τοῦ τόξου βολή). This is put forward in *Cratylus* as one of two possible etymologies of δόξα. The other (presented as less likely) describes δόξα as soul's pursuit of the knowledge of how things are.⁵²⁴ In *Theaetetus*, the false δόξαι are described as the work of a bad archer (τοξότης φαῦλος).⁵²⁵ Finally, in *Sophist*, Plato compares the soul with beings that partake of motion, set a target for themselves and try to hit

⁵²¹ In the *Theaetetus* (184d ff.), for instance, Plato associates this operation with common predicates such as οὐσία, ὁμοιότης, ἀνομοιότης, τὸ ταῦτόν, τὸ ἕτερον, etc. In *Philebus* 44a, Socrates talks of a judgment about the notion of having pleasure (τὸ χαίρειν). For more on this, see Chap. 10, Sect. 3.3 below.

⁵²² This global character of δόξα can then have different meanings in Plato, in accordance with the two main senses of δόξα. It can mean that everything is mediated by a judgment or that everything is mediated by a false judgment. For a consideration of the latter possibility, see Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 and Chap. 16, Sect. 5.

⁵²³ For instance, in *Philebus* we find expressions such as διαδοξάζειν ἐγχειρεῖν (38b) or βούλεσθαι κρίνειν (38c), which we considered above in Section 1.2.

⁵²⁴ See 420b: “δὲ δόξα δὴ ἦτοι τῆ διώξει ἐπωνόμασται, ἣν ἡ ψυχή διώκουσα τὸ εἶδέναι ὅπῃ ἔχει τὰ πράγματα πορεύεται, ἢ τῆ ἀπὸ τοῦ τόξου βολῆ. ἔοικε δὲ τούτῳ μᾶλλον.”

⁵²⁵ See 193e-194a: “ἢ καὶ ἐθελήσεις ὁμολογεῖν ἃ δι’ ἐτέρας δυνάμεως καὶ ἄμφω ὁρῶντα ἢ τινα ἄλλην αἴσθησιν ἔχοντα ἄμφοῖν τῷ σημείῳ μὴ κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ αἴσθησιν ἐκάτερον ἔχειν, ἀλλ’ οἷον τοξότην φαῦλον ἰέντα παραλλάξει τοῦ σκοποῦ καὶ ἀμαρτεῖν, ὃ δὴ καὶ ψεῦδος ἄρα ὠνόμασται.”

it. He speaks of various impulses, thrusts or assaults (ὀρμαί) and says that they may hit this target, but they may also go astray (suffer a deviation, a παράφορα) and miss (ἀποτυγχάνειν).⁵²⁶ In *Philebus*, we find once more the image of hitting or missing a target.⁵²⁷ All these images show how we are directed at something, namely at reality as it is.⁵²⁸ This is the object of any δόξα. Indeed, the act of δοξάζειν is not simply an arbitrary or subjective decision. It tries to establish the right version of events. It is in itself related to an objective sphere, to reality and to the truth. It strives toward this target and hence all the particular judgments are in themselves determined by whether they reach their target or not. A δόξα is not simply a δόξα, but it is always qualified in a certain manner (always ποία τις), namely either as true and correct (ὀρθή), or as false.⁵²⁹ This is so regardless of whether or not we can properly determine its truth or falsehood. In many cases we may wrongly think we hit the target, but when this happens, the act of judging still contains in itself the relation to a target (to the truth of the matter), and this is precisely what makes a false δόξα false.

Any δόξα is in itself exposed to these two possibilities and characterized by one of them. This raises some problems, which are tackled in several moments of Plato's works. The first is how can we explain the possibility of falsehood as such – in other words, how can a δόξα hit something else than the target that was set and judge of what is not, that it is or, of what is, that it is not.⁵³⁰ A second problem is how this can happen to us, which psychological motivations can lead us to judge something falsely. Also problematic is the nature of the target itself – i.e., what the truth is – and how we can reach it. Is a true or correct δόξα the highest form of access to the truth sc. the highest form of knowledge? Finally, although Plato does not discuss this possibility in detail, we could also wonder what the status of this setting of the target is (i.e., of our relation to truth). Is it an inherent and inextricable structure of the soul or can it also be the result of a δόξα (the δόξα that there is truth and that we should be directed to it) and as such be exposed to the possibility of being false? And how can the latter

⁵²⁶ See 228c-d: “[ΞΕ.] τί δ’; ὅσ’ ἂν κινήσεως μετασχόντα καὶ σκοπόν τινα θέμενα πειρώμενα τούτου τυγχάνειν καθ’ ἑκάστην ὀρμὴν παράφορα αὐτοῦ γίγνηται καὶ ἀποτυγχάνη, πότερον αὐτὰ φήσομεν ὑπὸ συμμετρίας τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα ἢ τούναντίον ὑπὸ ἀμετρίας αὐτὰ πάσχειν; [ΘΕΑΙ.] δῆλον ὡς ὑπὸ ἀμετρίας. [ΞΕ.] ἀλλὰ μὴν ψυχὴν γε ἴσμεν ἄκουσαν πᾶσαν πᾶν ἀγνοοῦσαν. [ΘΕΑΙ.] σφόδρα γε. [ΞΕ.] τό γε μὴν ἀγνοεῖν ἔστιν ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὀρμωμένης [228δ] ψυχῆς, παραφόρου συνέσεως γιγνομένης, οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν παραφροσύνη.” For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Chap. 8, Sect. 1 below.

⁵²⁷ See 38d: “[ΣΩ.] ἄρ’ οὖν μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ τοιοῦτος ὡς ἀποκρινόμενος ἂν πρὸς αὐτὸν εἴποι τοῦτο, ὡς ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος, ἐπιτυχῶς εἰπών; [ΠΡΩ.] καὶ πάνυ γε. [ΣΩ.] καὶ παρενεχθεὶς γ’ αὐτὰ τάχ’ ἂν ὡς ἔστι τινῶν ποιμένων ἔργον τὸ καθορώμενον ἄγαλμα προσείποι.”

⁵²⁸ As we will see, this constitutes the core of the soul's intrinsic love of knowledge or wisdom (φιλοσοφία). See in particular Chap. 13, Sect. 3.3 below.

⁵²⁹ For this discussion of δόξα being always qualified, see *Phlb.* 37b ff. The predicates “true” and “false” are there presented as something that can accrue (ἐπιγίγνεσθαι, προσγίγνεσθαι) to the pure fact of judging.

⁵³⁰ For Plato's discussions of this possibility, see in particular *Thet.* 187d ff. and *Sph.* 236e ff.

possibility be conceived, given the fact it puts the very structure of truth and falsity in question? We will consider some of these problems later.⁵³¹ But whatever the answer to them is, it is nevertheless clear that for Plato each judgment of ours is in itself related to what things are and determined by whether it reaches these things and establishes the right version about them or not. The possibility of failing the constitutive target of any δόξα is in turn what gives meaning to the examination. We examine δόξαι to see whether they hit the target (truth) or not.

2. Οἶσθαι εἰδέναι in the neutral sense as the object of philosophical examination

Let us now take a look at the notion of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι and what it entails. Οἶσθαι εἰδέναι is a different mode of characterizing the object of examination. It coincides partly with the notion of δόξα, but it also shows the object of examination in a different light. Literally, οἶσθαι εἰδέναι means “thinking one knows” or “presuming to know”. However, for the sake of convenience, it is often rendered as a noun: namely, as “knowledge claim” or some close equivalent. We will also use this rendering, since it emphasizes the most important aspect of the notion: the perhaps unjustified conviction that one knows something in particular. This conviction is what we will now consider.

2.1. Οἶσθαι εἰδέναι and equivalent expressions. The usually pejorative sense of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι and the isolation of a neutral sense

Though we will focus the expression “οἶσθαι εἰδέναι”, several other expressions can be found throughout the *corpus* that have a very close meaning and basically refer to the same. The variation of formulas is itself meaningful and it is important to have some idea of this.

First, both verbs can be replaced by other verbs or expressions. In the place of οἶσθαι (and in combination either with εἰδέναι or with one of the other expressions that may replace it) we find expressions such as δοκεῖν (e.g. *Ap.* 22a, 29a, *Sph.* 229c), δοξάζειν (*Sph.* 244a) ἠγγεῖσθαι (e.g. *Alc. I* 106e, *Sph.* 230d), ἀξιοῦν (*Ap.* 22d), πιστεύειν (*La.* 186d, *Rep.* 450d), πείθειν (*Phd.* 97b). Also close in meaning is the idea of saying (φάναι, φάσκειν – see *Euthphr.* 13e, *Chrm.* 165b) or insisting (δυσχυρίζεσθαι, *Euthphr.* 5c) that one knows. As for

⁵³¹ See in particular Chap. 8, Sect. 3.4, and Chap. 20, Section 3.4.

the idea of knowing, it can likewise be expressed by ἐπίστασθαι (e.g. *Euthphr.* 4e, *La.* 184b, *Alc. I* 106d, 110c, 117b), γινώσκειν (e.g. *Alc. I* 116d, *Euthd.* 301e, *Sph.* 244a), ἐπαίειν (*Tht.* 145d), μανθάνειν (e.g. *Euthphr.* 10a, *La.* 194d, *Men.* 73d, 75e, *Phdr.* 263a *Phlb.* 17a), συνιέναι (*Tht.* 147a, *Sph.* 243b), σοφὸς εἶναι (e.g. *Ap.* 21c, 29a, *Chrm.* 162b, *Sph.* 230a), νοῦν ἔχειν (*Cra.* 406c), ἐν εὐπορίᾳ εἶναι (*Hp. Ma.* 298c) or δεινὸς εἶναι περὶ τινός (*Sph.* 230a). Each of these terms has its own meaning and associations, but they all point to the ideas we will consider in the following.

Our knowledge claims may also be denoted by the separate use of any of these expressions. The verb οἶσθαι and the like may imply the idea of knowing (or they may be experienced as knowledge), and the term οἴησις, as well as δόξα and πίστις, often have a sense that is very similar to οἶσθαι εἰδέναι. In turn, the verb εἰδέναι and its equivalents may sometimes have a merely presumptive character, which is more clearly expressed in the construction “ὡς εἰδώς” (e.g. *Ap.* 29a, *Hp. Ma.* 298c, *Men.* 84a, *Rep.* 510c).

When together, both verbs can also receive additional qualifications. In particular, the verb of knowing can be qualified with an adverb such as ἰκανῶς, εὖ, σαφῶς, ἀκριβῶς, which emphasizes the high quality of the supposed knowledge.⁵³² This emphasis can also be given by specifying the importance or the amplitude of what is known (as in εἰδέναι τὰ μέγιστα or εἰδέναι πάντα).⁵³³ In these cases, the ones who claim to know believe that they possess the μεγίστη φρόνησις or that they are the wisest of all human beings.⁵³⁴

Despite all these different ways of referring to knowledge claims in the corpus, we will center the following analysis on the expression “οἶσθαι εἰδέναι”, because it is frequently used by Plato and also because it is the most generic designation for our knowledge claims.⁵³⁵

As was said, we will isolate the knowledge claim as such, regardless of whether one actually has knowledge or not. Rigorously speaking, it is the knowledge claim as such (the οἶσθαι εἰδέναι) that constitutes the object of philosophical examination. This examination strives to ascertain which of our knowledge claims are legitimate and which are hollow or false. However, when the expression is used in the dialogues, it usually refers to knowledge claims that were or will be proven illegitimate and thus correspond to what Plato designates as “οἶσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς” or “οἶσθαι εἰδέναι ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν”.⁵³⁶ In fact, the corpus

⁵³² See e.g. *Euthphr.* 15e, *Ap.* 29a, *La.* 186d, *Sph.* 243b.

⁵³³ Cp. for instance *Ap.* 22d and *Lg.* 732a.

⁵³⁴ See e.g. *Ap.* 22c, *Euthd.* 305c, *Lg.* 886b.

⁵³⁵ For Plato’s use of the notion of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι, see *Euthphr.* 15e, *Ap.* 21d, 23c, 29b, *Chrm.* 166d, 167a, *Alc. I* 110a, 113e, *Prt.* 312c, *Men.* 82e, 84a, *Phd.* 96c, *Tht.* 187c, 210c, *Sph.* 267e, *Lg.* 732a, *Ep.* VII 345b.

⁵³⁶ For an inventory and discussion of these and other similar expressions, see Chap. 7, Sect. 1 below.

strongly hints – and at times even explicitly asserts – that all knowledge claims are false. The notion of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι itself points to this defect, since it expresses – as we will see – a formal defect in our beliefs which opens the door to many errors and misunderstandings.⁵³⁷

But let us start by isolating the neutral sense of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι and see what it tells us about the particular structure of our access to beings in general. In order to do this, we will first consider each component of the expression separately and then bring these components together and determine what results from their combination.

2.2. The meaning of “οἶσθαι”

Let us first consider the verb οἶσθαι as such, independently of its usage in the expression οἶσθαι εἰδέναι (though its meaning by itself comes close to the latter). On the one hand, the verb denotes a certain decision, the adoption of a version of things without indecision. From a subjective standpoint, one is convinced of something. We can understand this better if we consider the fanciful etymology of the substantive οἴσις in *Cratylus* (420c), which comes immediately after the etymology of δόξα and is presented as a confirmation of it. Socrates says that οἴσις conveys “the motion (οἴσις) of the soul to every thing, towards how each of the things that really are is”.⁵³⁸ There is an alterity or otherness to which it is directed, a distance that must be overcome, and a movement towards it. The οἴσις thus determines things as being in a certain way (οὕτως) and not otherwise (ἄλλως), which is very different from having no decision whatsoever.

However, at the heart of the term οἶσθαι lies the idea of cognitive debility or frailty – which can be translated by such expressions as “suppose”, “presume”, “think”, “believe”, “deem”, “have the impression”, “be of the opinion”. One establishes something, one is not totally confused about something, but this establishing can be wrong. It is not necessarily so. A supposition does not have a definite guarantee of its validity. What one “decides” lacks confirmation. It is intrinsically characterized by a modal weakness (or by a ἐνδέχεσθαι ἄλλως ἔχειν). Οἶσθαι is thus a particular access to something that is not

⁵³⁷ See in particular Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4, and Chap. 16, Sect. 5.

⁵³⁸ “ἢ γοῦν ‘οἴσις’ τοῦτω συμφωνεῖ. ‘οἴσιν’ γὰρ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπὶ πᾶν πρᾶγμα, οἷόν ἐστιν ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων, δηλοῦση προσέεικεν (...)”. I follow C. Reeve’s translation (see *PCW*).

absolutely certain and absolutely clear. There is not a solid or legitimate ground for one's conviction. It is not indubitable and irrefutable – even if it is experienced as such.⁵³⁹

Οἴησις or οἴεσθαι thus denote a questionable or precarious conviction. This questionable or precarious character is expressed by all verbs of opinion (such as δοκεῖν, ἠγεῖσθαι, νομίζειν, ἀξιοῦν, ὑπολαμβάνειν, πιστεύειν and πείθεσθαι), but in a way it is intensified by the particular nuances of the verb οἴεσθαι. It has been noticed that οἴεσθαι designates the adoption of a view based on subjective factors, as feeling or inclination, what strongly suggests an unreflected and hasty character. In contrast, the verb δοκεῖν, as we saw, refers to the adoption of a view more based in what appears to us (thus having a more objective basis) and the verbs νομίζειν, ἠγεῖσθαι and ἀξιοῦν indicate a view that is based rather on evaluation or reflection. As for the verbs πιστεύειν and πείθεσθαι, they stress the conviction (the adherence to a view) and are neutral with respect to its reasons. The same holds for ὑπολαμβάνειν.⁵⁴⁰ These differences, however, are very subtle and Plato does use all these terms somewhat interchangeably, especially because the impulsive and ungrounded nature of the οἴεσθαι in a way characterizes all these verbs. It is also an essential component of the expression οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι, as we shall see.

One important aspect to keep in mind about οἴεσθαι, though, is that the frailty or deficiency of one's access may be recognized by the one who has it or by someone else. In other words, the one that presumes something may have different relations to this presumption and this is reflected in the use of the word. When one uses it of oneself and one's view, it can be just meant to soften an affirmation or claim, without any genuine admission of frailty (just like δοκεῖ μοι). It can also correspond to the admission of a merely academic possibility that one might be wrong, without producing any actual insecurity or doubt.⁵⁴¹ However, the use of the verb οἴεσθαι can also be the expression of a light doubt or

⁵³⁹ In this sense, the verb seems to be sometimes associated with the domain that is intrinsically open or undetermined (at least from our point of view): the future. According to H. Liddell and R. Scott, the verb can mean “forebode”, “presage”, “suspect”, “fear”, “guess”, “mean”, “intend”. See *A Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996⁹ (1843¹), *sub voce* οἴομαι. This shows an important aspect of the verb. Though it does not always (nor mostly) relate to the future, it is constitutively related to a domain that is outside of our immediate and perfect grasp, to which we are not totally oblivious and blind (we can anticipate something), but to which we do not have an unimpeded access either.

⁵⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis of the different nuances of these terms, see e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *Synonymik der griechischen Sprache*, vol. I, Leipzig, Teubner, 1876, 333ff. and P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 242ff.

⁵⁴¹ In this sense, the verb has a certain resemblance to several particles constantly used in the dialogues with the purpose of mitigating the strength of an assertion (e.g. γε, σχεδόν, που, πως). The translation of these particles is often difficult, because they do not intend to restrict the content of the affirmation (as is suggested when one renders them as “at least”, “in a way”), but rather the conviction one has about it or the assertiveness with which one affirms it.

even a strong suspicion and fear that one might be wrong.⁵⁴² The degree of conviction or doubt may vary according to the situation and one's reflection about it – but even in the cases in which the doubt is stronger, there is still an adherence or commitment (even if accompanied by the awareness of the possibility that what one has is no more than a opinion). The matter is settled. One is not unsure to the point of undertaking a full inquiry of examination. In sum, οἴεσθαι is always more than a mere academic hypothesis – but at the same time less than an effective or full εἰδέναι (whether one is aware of it or not).

This conviction or certainty of the verb οἴεσθαι is then particularly emphasized by the use of οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι in the corpus. When someone has a knowledge claim, he takes his view as absolutely certain and clear – so much so that it is virtually indiscernible from the conviction that characterizes knowledge. This is what motivates the characters to answer Socrates' questions and what causes them to roam about or ramble (πλανᾶσθαι) when they attempt to define something.⁵⁴³

2.3. The meaning of “εἰδέναι”

Let us now consider the second component of οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι. The verb εἰδέναι means “to know”. Now, Plato's analysis of knowledge is very complex, and we will have to see it in more detail later, while considering the cognitive nature of our soul.⁵⁴⁴ However, there are some aspects that we can anticipate in order to obtain a better understanding of the notion of “knowledge claim”. We can start by considering the verb εἰδέναι itself. As the infinitive form of the perfect tense of the verb εἶδω, which means “to see”, εἰδέναι conveys the idea of acquisition – of having seen something, having become acquainted with it and perhaps even having gained mastery over it. Seeing tends indeed to be regarded as the perfect access to something and all forms of appropriate access to something (whether sensible or not) tend to be compared to the act of seeing.⁵⁴⁵ This is all the more so in a culture which praises and

⁵⁴² Precisely what is expressed in *Sophist* 268a3-4: one has “πολλὴν ὑποψίαν καὶ φόβον ὡς ἀγνοεῖ τὰτα ἃ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ὡς εἰδὼς ἐσχημάτισται”. This hesitation or restriction of one's commitment to a view is expressed in many other ways in the dialogues. One can for instance use “ἴσως”, “τάχ' ἂν”, “κινδυνεύει” or some form of “so it seems” (as φαίνεται or ἔοικεν).

⁵⁴³ For more on this last point, see Chap. 7, Sect. 1.2 a) and Chap. 8, Sect. 1.5 below.

⁵⁴⁴ Cp. Chap. 11, Sect. 2.2 c).

⁵⁴⁵ This is not exclusive of Greek culture. For instance, we find an expression of the same in Augustine's *Confessiones*. In X.35.54, Augustine says: “ad oculos enim proprie videre pertinet, utimur autem hoc verbo etiam in ceteris sensibus, cum eos ad cognoscendum intendimus. neque enim dicimus, ‘audi quid rutillet,’ aut, ‘olefac quam niteat,’ aut, ‘gusta quam splendeat,’ aut, ‘palpa quam fulgeat’: videri enim dicuntur haec omnia. dicimus autem non solum, ‘vide quid luceat,’ quod soli oculi sentire possunt, sed etiam, ‘vide quid sonet,’ ‘vide

privileges αὐτοψία (i.e., to the witnessing of something, to having direct, first-hand knowledge), in contrast with having heard something from others or having made a conjecture based on signs (which provides us only an indirect knowledge, at best). In courts, history, science, and life in general, having been present and having had something in front of one's eyes is a guarantee of having a good access to something. The thing revealed itself as it is.⁵⁴⁶

Several features of vision contribute to this protagonism. In the *Phaedrus*, vision is considered the keenest sense and Aristotle says that vision, “most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things”.⁵⁴⁷ Vision has indeed a great scope, covers many things and can be very refined. In ideal conditions it can sweep an entire object or scene, without leaving out things and without failing to notice what is in front of it. In sum, it can grasp something. Of course it requires some conditions, and chief amongst them is light, which plays an important role in the appearing of things to us and, consequently, in the conception of knowledge and being.⁵⁴⁸

It is true that this privilege of seeing and praise of αὐτοψία is not without opposition. Seeing with our physical eyes is also subject to many limitations and we find in Greek culture an elaborate criticism of seeing.⁵⁴⁹ Our eyes are not entirely reliable and can deceive us in

quid oleat,’ ‘vide quid sapiat,’ ‘vide quam durum sit.’” Cp. L. VERHEIJEN (ed.), *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1981. It is true that one can also use images from other forms of αἴσθησις to express the idea of knowledge. We often find, inclusively in Plato, the image of touching, having contact, to express knowledge (in particular the full grasp of something). Hearing or listening can be used to the same effect (insofar as they correspond to an access to sounds, words and meaning in general). Later the Romans will resort to the metaphor of taste and use *sapere* for knowing. But seeing, with its emphasis on both presence and distance (insofar as the subject is separated from the object, but somehow reaches it), is by far the most natural and most used image for knowledge.

⁵⁴⁶ For more on the notion of αὐτοψία, see e.g. G. NENCI, Il motivo dell'autopsia nella storiografia greca, *Studi Classici e Orientali* 3 (1953), 15-46.

⁵⁴⁷ See *Phdr.* 250d2-4: “ὄψις γὰρ ἡμῖν ὄξυτάτη τῶν διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἔρχεται αἰσθήσεων”. See also *Metaphysica* 980a21-27: “ (...) μάλιστα ποιεῖ γνωρίζειν ἡμᾶς αὕτη τῶν αἰσθήσεων καὶ πολλὰς δηλοῖ διαφοράς”. I follow Ross and Smith's translation. See W. ROSS & J. SMITH (eds.), *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 8, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

⁵⁴⁸ Cp. in particular *Rep.* 507d ff. For discussions of this passage and the relation of light with knowledge and being, see e.g. A. FERGUSON, Plato's Simile of Light. Part I. The Similes of the Sun and the Line, *The Classical Quarterly* 15 (1921), 131-152; IDEM, Plato's Simile of Light. Part II. The Allegory of the Cave, *The Classical Quarterly* 16 (1922), 15-28; N. MURPHY, The “Simile of Light” in Plato's *Republic*, *The Classical Quarterly* 26 (1932), 93-102; A. FERGUSON, Plato's Simile of Light Again, *The Classical Quarterly* 28 (1934), 190-210; J. NOTOPOULOS, The Symbolism of the Sun and Light in the *Republic* of Plato I, *Classical Philology* 39 (1944), 163-172; IDEM, The Symbolism of the Sun and Light in the *Republic* of Plato II, *Classical Philology* 39 (1944), 223-240; R. BULTMANN, Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum, *Philologus* 97 (1948), 1-36; H. BLUMENBERG, Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung, *Studium Generale* 10 (1957), 432-447; J. FERGUSON, Sun, Line, and Cave Again, *The Classical Quarterly* 13 (1963), 188-193; W. LUTHER, Wahrheit, Licht, Sehen und Erkennen im Sonnengleichnis von Platons *Politeia*, *Studium Generale* 18 (1965), 479-496.

⁵⁴⁹ Plato himself alludes to this criticism of seeing (and also of hearing) in Greek culture at *Phd.* 65b, when Socrates asks: “ἄρα ἔχει ἀλήθειάν τινα ὄψις τε καὶ ἀκοή τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἢ τά γε τοιαῦτα καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ ἡμῖν ἀεὶ

many ways. Sometimes, the conditions for seeing are not the best, other times, something (or someone) is disguised as something else, and there also many optical illusions. All this will lead to the philosophical criticism of seeing, which we also find throughout Plato's works.⁵⁵⁰ We considered before how seeing or sensation (αἴσθησις) in general is not enough to discern what beings are (nor to make mistakes about it). Beings are not purely sensible and the access to them thus requires an inner activity or an activity of the soul. It is on this other level that there can be a true seeing, a true insight into beings. This then leads to the Platonic idea of the soul's eye and to the characterization of one's intellect (νοῦς) as a spectator.⁵⁵¹ It is here and not in the senses that we can find a perfect access to what things truly are.

These are just some aspects of Plato's analysis of knowledge. However, we have to bear in mind that εἰδέναι is only one of the several expressions that Plato uses to express the idea of knowledge. We also find γινώσκειν, ἐπίστασθαι, ἐπαίειν, σοφία, τέχνη, συνιέναι, μανθάνειν, φρονεῖν, νοεῖν, among others. In Plato's writings, most of these expressions are no less frequent and no less important than εἰδέναι, and they are also used for knowledge claims as such. Much could be (and has been) said about the different contexts from which these expressions are taken.⁵⁵² Γινώσκειν and νοεῖν are also originally connected with vision and denote the adequate discernment of something (of who someone is or what is the meaning of a situation). Συνιέναι and μανθάνειν emphasize our understanding of something – i.e., our ability to perceive the meaning of what is before us, what we hear or what we think about. Terms such as ἐπίστασθαι, ἐπαίειν, σοφία, τέχνη include a practical or productive component and the idea of mastering something. Φρονεῖν was originally referred to a organ of consciousness (φρήν) that was responsible for our awareness or lucidity and our appropriate reaction (emotional and active) to things around us.

θρυλοῦσιν, ὅτι οὐτ' ἀκούομεν ἀκριβῆς οὐδὲν οὔτε ὀρώμεν;" One good example of this can be found in EPICHRMUS, DK B12, which says: "νοῦς ὀρήϊ και νοῦς ἀκούει· τᾶλλα κωφὰ και τυφλά."

⁵⁵⁰ Heraclitus, for instance, says: "κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ και ὅτα βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἐχόντων" (DK B107). Plato himself points out the insufficiencies of seeing several times. Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 65b-66a, 79a, 79c, 83a-b, *Rep.* 523a ff., *Phlb.* 38d ff. The whole discussion of the thesis that knowledge is sense-perception (*Tht.* 151e ff.) can also be read as a criticism of seeing. See *Tht.* 151 ff.

⁵⁵¹ See *Rep.* 533d and *Phdr.* 247c7-8, respectively. Cp. also *Phd.* 83b, where Socrates explicitly says that the ψυχή sees something.

⁵⁵² We will briefly return to these terms later, in Chap. 11, Sect. 2.2 c). For an analysis and comparison of their respective meanings, see e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *Synonymik der griechischen Sprache*, vol. 1, Leipzig, Teubner, 1876, 282ff.; IDEM, vol. 3, 621ff.; B. SNELL, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie*. Σοφία, γνώμη, σύνεσις, ἱστορία, μάθημα, ἐπιστήμη, Berlin, Weidmann, 1924; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 219-230, 236-242, 278-313; B. SNELL, Wie die Griechen lernten, was geistige Tätigkeit ist, *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 93 (1973), 172-184; W. SCHADEWALDT, *Die Anfänge der Philosophie bei den Griechen*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1978, 162-169, 171, 173-4, 177-180.

Based on this, we can get a better picture of what constitutes knowledge. At the center of the idea of knowledge there is the idea of reaching or grasping something fully. It is something that happens within us, but somehow allows an access to what is or exists. This allows for degrees – even if only a perfect access can be considered knowledge proper. This perfect knowledge includes different aspects, of which we normally only have a hazy notion. First, it must exclude any distortions and include all aspects of the thing. In other words, it must be acute and complete. It must also understand what it has access to. Its object cannot be an unsolvable mystery, for that would still be a form of eluding one’s grasp. Knowledge proper must also be certain and effectively exclude the possibility of things being otherwise. It also contains a claim to universality: whoever wants to know things, must see them the same way. Knowledge must therefore be adequate, complete, clear and definite. This allows one to master one’s object and deal properly with it.

But despite all this, we also seem to admit the possibility of a weaker form of knowledge. Plato himself often uses qualifications as εὖ, σαφώς, ἀκριβῶς to designate a superior form of knowledge, which suggests that there are other lesser forms. These are defective forms that fail to achieve the ideal of knowledge in some respect. They must contain some share of perfect contact with something in order to be taken as knowledge. There must be some component of hitting the mark, of what Plato calls δόξα ὀρθή.⁵⁵³ But there is also something that eludes this cognitive access and makes it imperfect and precarious. In a sense, it is even problematic whether it can be regarded as knowledge at all. On the other hand, it is also not certain that we can ever achieve anything more than this. In fact, when it is revealed that one does not possess perfect knowledge, one may still think one has correct δόξαι (as is illustrated by the characters in the dialogues). But this raises the question of how can the correctness of one’s views be verified, since such forms always include a degree of confusion or of uncertainty (or both).

Plato is very attentive to these intermediate forms of cognitive access, but their meaning always depends on what knowledge proper is. One must primarily inquire what is contained in a perfect and full access to something and how can anyone reach it. At first, it is not easy to say more than what has just been said, and this is still very vague. Moreover, it is unclear whether we can ever conceive (much less reach) such an optimal cognitive state. Notwithstanding, we possess some formal notion of perfect knowledge (both of a particular

⁵⁵³ The notion of δόξα ὀρθή, already mentioned above (see Sect. 1.6), will be analyzed in Chap. 7, Sect. 2.3 below.

being or of all beings altogether) and we are in fact often convinced of having such a perfect knowledge, as we shall see. It is precisely this that corresponds to the notion of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι. Therefore, despite all difficulties in conceiving perfect knowledge (and despite all particularities of Plato's conception of it), we always have some hazy relation to this notion. This is what makes it indispensable for us.

2.4. The meaning of “οἶσθαι εἰδέναι”

Philosophical examination is not simply an examination of presumptions or of knowledge, but rather of presumed knowledge or knowledge claims. In the dialogues, this presumption of knowledge (one's οἶσθαι εἰδέναι) is often exposed as vain or baseless, as we will see.⁵⁵⁴ When submitted to the pressure of examination, the characters cannot explain and justify their views. This shows they did not have knowledge proper (and probably no knowledge at all). But nonetheless they had a conviction of possessing knowledge, which allowed them to mistake their false or inadequate views for knowledge. This is why they answer resolutely and why they end up falling into contradiction. From their subjective standpoint, the empty knowledge claim is indiscernible from knowledge. It is a conviction or belief as strong as knowledge. But it is still a presumption, an οἴησις. It is a kind of access or awareness that is fallible or exposed to defects. It determines something in a certain way and determines our access to it as appropriate (as a cognitive access in the fullest sense of the word). The self-diagnosis is here decisive. We believe we know. We determine our own access (and the content that it gives access to) as being perfect, as reaching its object. We do not regard our representation as indeterminate or a mere conjecture. It is a perfect access, it has completely revealed how something is and the matter is settled. However, this self-diagnosis is itself precarious. It is no more than an οἶσθαι – i.e., an imperfect access. In sum, the terms of the expression οἶσθαι εἰδέναι are thus at odds with each other. Insofar as it is a form of οἶσθαι, the knowledge claim is exposed to the possibility of it being otherwise (of us not knowing and thus of the object we think we know not being as we represent it). But to the extent that what we presume is the fact that we know, we do not experience any doubt nor any fear of being wrong. The restrictive component is not experienced as such. We are not astonished by something. We can determine it and what results from this act of determining it is regarded as absolutely valid, as corresponding to what the thing is. This does

⁵⁵⁴ Cp. in particular Chap. 7, Sect.1.2 below.

not exclude that in certain cases we may be aware of the frailty of our views – and have some weaker form of knowledge claim. But Plato calls our attention particularly to those forms of knowledge claim in which there is no shadow of a doubt.

Regardless of whether it is true or false, a knowledge claim is a form of conviction or belief and this conviction or belief is at the center of all knowledge claims. We could conceive a certain view without regarding it as knowledge, we could be cognitively humble, but we end up being rash and becoming convinced that we are perfectly aware of things, and that they are exactly as we represent them.⁵⁵⁵ This is by itself a form of defect, even if the view is not false, and it opens to door to the possibility of us missing what things are.⁵⁵⁶ A knowledge claim is different from perfect knowledge (which completely coincides with its object), although it is experienced as being precisely such a knowledge. As a result, the value of its content (what it determines or represents, the “thus” it posits and whose positing is taken to be knowledge) is intrinsically problematic. It can somehow correspond to what something is, but it can also be a deviation and deceive us. This indeterminateness with respect to its truth value is thus what justifies and calls for philosophical examination.

It is important to bear in mind that our knowledge claims and their possible defects can fundamentally be of two sorts.⁵⁵⁷ They correspond roughly to the difference between attributing a predicate and understanding it. On the one hand, one can attribute a certain predicate to something and be certain that this attribution is correct, that it cannot be otherwise. For instance, one can be convinced that death is a bad thing. This attribution, however, may be wrong or we may have insufficient reasons for making it. One may have a baseless or unjustified certainty. On the other hand, one can be sure one understands what a certain predicate is (for instance, what is justice or goodness). This corresponds to the notion of οἶεσθαι συνιέναι (sc. claim to understanding) and Plato often stresses its importance. All attribution of predicates depends on a previous understanding of what these predicates mean. We must be convinced we understand the alphabet of reality in order to read it. However, our claim to understanding some notion does not preclude the possibility that we do not really understand it. One can misunderstand it, one’s notion may even be self-contradictory, or one

⁵⁵⁵ This does not require us to explicitly think about it and clearly say to ourselves that we know something. We often do not think about whether our belief is actually knowledge or not and this lack of reflection actually helps one’s conviction. One is simply absorbed in the version of things one is convinced of and takes it for what things really are.

⁵⁵⁶ For a discussion of this, cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 1.1 below.

⁵⁵⁷ It is important to have some idea of this fundamental difference right from the start, but we will have to return to it in the following chapter and consider these forms of knowledge claims (as well as their subdivisions) in more detail.

may have but a hazy understanding of what a certain predicate is, which is still incompatible with the nature of knowledge, since the latter requires a perfect and clear access to something.

If we consider these two forms of knowledge claim, we can better understand how much our life is marked by them. But a knowledge claim as such raises the question of whether we effectively know or not know (i.e., if things really are as we think and if we really have reasons to think so). From an external and informed standpoint, the value of a knowledge claims is indeterminate. This should make us wonder how we can become convinced of knowing something when we may very well not know it. The perplexity is all the greater if we consider (as we will do in what follows) that most, if not all, of our life and our being is based on knowledge claims.⁵⁵⁸ In fact, their omnipresence and their defectiveness is a decisive factor in determining the importance of philosophical examination, as we shall see.

3. The unitary object of examination

As was said, δόξα and οἶσθαι εἰδέναι are two designations for the object of examination in the corpus. They designate fundamentally the same and complement each other. The analysis of their meaning thus reveals different important aspects of the object of examination. We saw how δόξα is connected with cognitive decisions or judgments, which have their own content or intentionality and may be true or false. The expression “οἶσθαι εἰδέναι”, in turn, stresses the conviction one has in a certain way of seeing things, which is regarded as a cognitive access to something. At their core, both notions refer to a certain way of seeing or determining something, a certain view, a version of things. This view or version, however, is frail and questionable in both cases – and it is precisely because of this that our judgments and knowledge claims warrant examination. Each of them can be a merely subjective version of things, without any objective or real basis. They may distort things, including others and ourselves. Anything and everything may be different from how it is conceived in a δόξα or a knowledge claim.

⁵⁵⁸ It is true that the dialogues often present characters that have a superlative form of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι – namely, the claim of possessing a superlative knowledge (οἶσθαι σοφὸς εἶναι). So one could think that only some people that pretend to be wise (and therefore stand out in the community) would be full of knowledge claims and all others would be much humbler. However, we will see that, deep down, we are all full of knowledge claims. The only possibility of having less knowledge claims is if one submits one’s views to philosophical examination and refutes them – as the Platonic Socrates supposedly does.

But this is not the only relevant aspect of the object of examination. It is also important to bear in mind that there is a fundamental ambivalence in the way it was described in this chapter. There are many possible views – many possible judgments or knowledge claims. In other words, there are many incompatible versions of the same events. The domain of views is a domain of relativity. However, some views are installed in us. We are deeply persuaded of them and hold them for certain. They constitute our beliefs. Our relation to them is one of trust (πίστις).⁵⁵⁹ Other views, in turn, are regarded by us as false or, at most, as having an indeterminate truth value.⁵⁶⁰

If we consider the notions of δόξα and οἶσθαι εἰδέναι, we notice that they are described in the first person. Δόξα is the judgment made by a soul and the way things appear to it. Knowledge claims are the versions of events to which a soul is deeply committed. However, one can also be aware of views that one does not presently subscribe. They may be possessed by others, one can have endorsed them in the past or simply recognize them as valid alternatives to one's own. These other views are thus simply hypothetical. They still refer to one's beliefs, in the sense that they may become one's beliefs and they are possible beliefs. But they are also different from these beliefs, insofar as one's relation to them is concerned.

Views are thus mainly of two kinds. Both of them may be submitted to examination and there is indeed a certain tendency to equate all views and regard them in abstract. However, some views actually mould our gaze and experience. They are always present. All the other views are an abstraction, the projection of a possible conviction. Considering them is imagining ourselves (or someone in general) adopting them and seeing things through them.

This heterogeneity of views is also reflected in the corpus. Despite the myriad of views that could be examined, there is a strong tendency to privilege those in which someone actually believes, with the highest degree of conviction, setting aside or neglecting all other

⁵⁵⁹ In *Sophist*, for instance, the Visitor mentions that some δόξαι are very stiff (σκληρά). See 230c. In the *Republic*, in turn, Socrates describes the process of education of children as an attempt to permanently dye the soul of children with certain δόξαι, so that they are not easily cast away later in life. See 429c ff. These and other similar passages express precisely the awareness that we may have a very strong relation with certain views.

⁵⁶⁰ In other words, there are personal views (namely, the one's we endorse) and impersonal views (which we do not endorse). The latter may in turn be views that we reject or views about which we have no definite position. Things are even more complex, because there are also views we regard as implausible or plausible, without definitely deciding about their truth value. There are indeed different degrees of doubt and conviction, but the fundamental difference is the one between the views we are convinced of and all others to which we may relate in different ways.

possible or hypothetical views. If we look at the dialogues, we often see Socrates asking other characters to produce their own views on a certain topic and stand by them. They are to answer what they believe and render account of it.⁵⁶¹ The examination has an extremely personal character and in this sense we could also say that the person is being examined together with the matter at hand. The examination is not primarily an examination of impersonal views in an impartial domain. Many decisions are already made and we cannot simply suspend our assent in order to critically evaluate all possible views. The convictions we have prevent us from adequately appraising other views. The examination must therefore begin with these beliefs and only afterwards, as one's beliefs have been rendered problematic or even refuted, does the examination broaden its scope. It can then consider all views in general, evaluate different hypotheses, explore different indications, and possibly adopt better views (views that are objectively grounded, that effectively give us access to reality). This is not the starting-point, but rather a stage of the examination that already requires much examination in order to be attained.⁵⁶²

But this privilege of someone's beliefs is not the only criterion when it comes to decide which views are to be examined. As it happens, not all personal beliefs are at the same level. There is also a marked privilege of those that are more important for one's life – i.e., those that determine the situation one is in, how one lives and what is to be done. These beliefs may be more or less directly connected with the practical sphere. Some of them may be theoretical, but still have a decisive impact on how one lives. In fact, the privilege of the beliefs relevant for life raises the question of what exactly is relevant for how we live. But whatever the answer to this question may be, philosophical examination is always primarily concerned with one's life and because of this it can also be conceived as an examination of one's life (an ἔλεγχος τοῦ βίου).⁵⁶³

In sum, the examination does not take place in an ethereal domain of possible views nor does it consider all matters with the same attention. It focuses above all on the surest and

⁵⁶¹ Cp. footnote 480 above.

⁵⁶² As we will see, this is associated with the primacy of the negative or elenctic examination. The fact that many δόξαι or knowledge claims are installed in our way of seeing things determines our contact with the any particular view and conditions its examination. This means that any distortion in them creates a distortion in the whole examining process – and Plato constantly calls our attention to the fact that they do carry many distortions. Therefore, we must start by examining the views of which we are convinced and expel all those that are wrong. Only then can we properly consider hypotheses and try to assess their strength. We will return to this in Chaps. 8 and 9, when we discuss the two sides of philosophical examination: namely, the negative or destructive examination and the positive or constructive examination. We will have to consider how each of them is constituted and how they relate to each other.

⁵⁶³ The expression appears in *Ap.* 39c7. Cp. *La.* 187e-188a.

most relevant views. These are the ones we are most concerned with and if they happen to be overturned, we will be more unsettled and will feel a greater need to inquire and seek out answers.

With all this we can thus understand what characterizes the object of examination, how it works as the unifying factor of the whole examination and also how this unity is compatible with the privilege of some questions. The examination is an examination of views and these are primarily the views we are committed to – i.e., our beliefs or convictions – and especially those beliefs of ours that are most relevant for how we live. It is important to recall, however, that this is far from being a restriction of philosophical domain to a very confined domain of reality. The views that are examined are not simply something in our head nor just one more thing among many other things. Our views determine everything else – or at least the way we experience all things, the whole of reality. From our own standpoint, there is nothing that is completely isolated from them. Consequently, philosophical examination concerns the whole of reality.

This description, however, still does not let us see how everything is mediated by our views. Therefore, we will consider in the next chapter the indications given by Plato about the complexity of our beliefs.

CHAPTER 6

The different kinds of belief. Their modes of presence and the structures that determine their content

“Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée: car chacun pense en estre si bien pouruû, que ceux mesme qui sont les plus difficiles a contenter en toute autre chose, n’ont point coustume d’en desirer plus qu’ils en ont.”

Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*⁵⁶⁴

The analysis of the notions “δόξα” and “οἶσθαι εἰδέναι” in the previous chapter was still quite abstract. We considered the general structure of our views and the fact that many of them are adopted by us and constitute our beliefs, but we did not discriminate the different kinds of belief we may have, which is also an important question. We must therefore try to differentiate our beliefs, and this is not an easy thing to do. In fact, there is a strong chance that we do not immediately recognize the quantity and complexity of our beliefs. To correct this is the purpose of this chapter. We will not carry out a full inventory. Instead, we will present a basic typology of our beliefs, identifying their main kinds according to two criteria of classification. The first criterion is their mode of presence or our awareness of them. The second criterion concerns the main structures of our beliefs or their modes of interconnection, which determine the particular content of these beliefs and make them much more complex than what we tend to think. With this we will better understand the challenges that a full examination of our beliefs must face.

1. The different modes of presence of our beliefs. Explicit and implicit beliefs

We will first consider the mode of presence of our beliefs – i.e., how manifest they are for us, how aware we are of them or what kind of contact we have with them. In brief, our beliefs can be explicit or express, but they can also be tacit or implicit. This is a fundamental distinction and, although Plato does not formulate it in such terms, he reveals an acute

⁵⁶⁴ See R. DESCARTES, *Œuvres*, edited by C. Adam & P. Tannery, vol. 6, Paris, Vrin, 1973.

awareness of it – so much so that this distinction determines both the dramatic presentation and the conception of philosophical examination we find in his writings. This does not mean that this distinction is absolutely clear and without problems. The tacit dimension in particular is not easy to identify and raises many questions about its nature and its contents. The interrelation and interchanges between both dimensions are also problematic. Therefore, we must consider this distinction in some detail, see what it entails and how it affects the project of philosophical examination.

1.1. Our tendency to only recognize explicit beliefs

The description of δόξα and οἶσθαι εἰδέναι can easily suggest that Plato has in mind the views or beliefs we identify when we explicitly think about something. These beliefs are in the spotlight of our mind. They are the focus of our attention. We are aware of their presence and content, as well as of our commitment to them. These beliefs, however, tend to be loose or unconnected. There are many things about which we have no explicit beliefs present in the spotlight. Thus, it may seem that the scope of examination is very limited. However, our perspectives are not confined to our explicit reflection about something. This is something we can easily recognize. We admit that our beliefs do not simply disappear when they are not under focus. There is some memory of them (or at least of many of them). In other words, it is as if there was a depository or storehouse where we keep the beliefs that come out of the spotlight. This is something normally out of sight, but we can still bring the beliefs back to the spotlight. In this sense, they are still our beliefs.

However, this idea of a depository of beliefs beneath the surface of our mind or out of the spotlight raises several questions. First, it is not clear what role these tacit or implicit beliefs play when they are tacit or implicit. Are they completely inert or do they still affect us in some way? As we will see, Plato is very aware of how deeply they can determine us. We can still be committed to them and see things according to them. Moreover, this model presupposes that they were once clearly formulated and then they were stored in some place where they are more or less easily accessible. We remember them, we remember the process that led to them and we can promptly bring them back in the spotlight. Even if in some cases we may need some time, these tacit views can be reconstructed in the explicit domain. However, things are actually more complicated. In many cases we cannot reconstruct these subterranean beliefs. More than that, there is even the possibility that some (if not many) of

our tacit beliefs were not originated by rigorous examinations done in the spotlight of our mind. If we have beliefs we are not aware of, it is possible that they had different sources. But this is a question we will leave aside for now. What we must consider is how there are beliefs in us that affect us even when we are not aware of them – or more precisely, how does Plato conceive of these kind of beliefs and how this determines Plato's understanding of the philosophical examination. By calling attention to one's tacit beliefs, Plato shows how we normally think we know much more than what we immediately think we know. Our beliefs are much more voluminous than what we tend to think. If this is not borne in mind, one introduces a strong deviation in the project of examination and leaves out what is actually the greatest and firmest part of our beliefs.

But how exactly is the existence of this kind of beliefs demonstrated and conceived in the corpus? And how does this affect Plato's notion of philosophical examination?

1.2. Plato's indirect demonstrations of the existence of tacit beliefs

In the dialogues Socrates often calls his interlocutors' attention to certain facts that indicate that they have more knowledge claims than they would immediately admit. These facts concern the characters' attitudes or behaviors, sc. their deeds (ἔργα) in the broadest sense. Socrates points to the practical domain (i.e., to something more than one's logical arguments and theoretical reflections) and argues that much (if not all) of what happens in this domain is only possible because one has certain beliefs. These beliefs, however, are often not in the spotlight of one's mind. One was not thinking about them, although one's attitude is an expression of them. In this sense, our attitude (or behavior) reveals that we have tacit beliefs and that these beliefs influence us. They are not just stored on our mind, but they can also be causing or underpinning our behavior.⁵⁶⁵

This demonstration of the existence of implicit knowledge claims, however, has an indirect character. It does not immediately reveal which implicit knowledge claims one has and what their exact content is. It only aims at showing that these behaviors cannot be explained without beliefs and the explicit beliefs one has are often not enough to account for them. Thus, one discovers a different mode of belief present in one's everyday life. Of course, this does mean that our implicit knowledge claims are restricted to those identified in

⁵⁶⁵ In general, Socrates tries to show this in order to elicit assertions from his interlocutors, who are thus prompted to express the tacit knowledge claims that justify their behavior and submit them to examination. In this way, he makes the examination all the more personal for them.

these indirect demonstrations. The latter only prove that in many occasions we have implicit beliefs which determine our way of seeing, our behavior and how we live. However, these beliefs may be much more numerous and in many cases they may not find such a direct expression.

Let us then take a brief look at the several attitudes that betray the occurrence in us of an implicit modality of belief.

a) Resolute action

One of the most common ways in which Socrates demonstrates that someone has beliefs he may not be immediately aware of is by interrupting this person on the course of doing something and pointing to the very action he is about to undertake.⁵⁶⁶ In the *Alcibiades I*, the characters agree that we only attempt to do something when we think we know what we are doing.⁵⁶⁷ Our actions are based on knowledge claims and are not possible without it. If there were no knowledge claims, we would not know what to do and we would either be quiet or entrust the matter to others.⁵⁶⁸ This is particularly clear when something important is at stake or when one's action involves a serious risk.⁵⁶⁹ But the presence of knowledge claims characterizes all our actions, as can be seen by the fact that we usually act without hesitation and when we hesitate or experience some fear, this seems to be confined to very particular aspects. Most things are known (or so we think) and this is why we act.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ This is the case in *Alcibiades I*, *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, as we saw in Chap. 4, Sect. 1.1. In a way, it is also what happens in the *Theaetetus*, since Socrates questions Theaetetus about something essential for his usual occupation – namely, learning. In other texts, Socrates puts to test someone's claim to competence (as in *Ion*, *Protagoras* or *Gorgias*, for instance) – which is also a way of interrupting one's actions to see what one is doing and why.

⁵⁶⁷ See 117d11-13: “[ΣΩ.] Τότε που επιχειροῦμεν πράττειν, ὅταν οἰώμεθα εἰδέναι ὅτι πράττομεν; [ΑΛ.] ναί.” Cp. *Laws* 727a-b: “αὐτίκα παῖς εὐθὺς γενόμενος ἄνθρωπος πᾶς ἡγεῖται πάντα ἰκανὸς εἶναι γιγνώσκειν (...) καὶ προθυμούμενος ἐπιτρέπει πράττειν ὅτι ἂν ἐθέλη”.

⁵⁶⁸ See e.g. *Alc. I*, 117c9-d3: “[ΣΩ.] Τί δ' εἰ ἐν νηὶ πλείοις, ἄρα δοξάζοις ἂν πότερον χρῆ τὸν οἶακα εἶσω ἄγειν ἢ ἔξω, καὶ ἅτε οὐκ εἰδὼς πλανῶ ἂν, ἢ τῷ κυβερνήτῃ ἐπιτρέψας ἂν ἡσυχίαν ἄγοις; [ΑΛ.] τῷ κυβερνήτῃ.”

⁵⁶⁹ On the matter of there being a risk (i.e., of κινδυνεύειν or παρακινδυνεύειν), cp. e.g. *Euthyphr.* 15d7 and *La.* 187b1-3.

⁵⁷⁰ The way one's actions depend on one's knowledge claims is emphasized in several dialogues. *Euthyphro*, for instance, would not accuse his father of impiety if he did not think he knew for sure what is piety and impiety. See *Euthyphr.* 15d4-e2: “εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἤδησθα σαφῶς τό τε ὄσιον καὶ τὸ ἀνόσιον, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως ἂν ποτε ἐπεχείρησας ὑπὲρ ἀνδρὸς θητὸς ἀνδρα πρεσβύτην πατέρα διωκᾶσθαι φόνου (...)· νῦν δὲ εὖ οἶδα ὅτι σαφῶς οἶε εἰδέναι τό τε ὄσιον καὶ μή.” Laches and Nicias would not advise his friends on the good and bad occupations for a young man if they were not convinced of knowing it adequately (cp. *La.* 186c8-d3). *Alcibiades* would not want to talk in the Assembly if he did not assume he knows something better than the other members of the Assembly (see *Alc. I* 106c4-d1). Indeed, the fact that this is someone who played such a decisive role in the history of Athens shows how, according to Plato, the destiny of an entire people may be decided based on someone's knowledge claims.

Plato's dialogues develop this idea that our action and our life in general are guided by our knowledge claims.⁵⁷¹ The set of knowledge claims that guide our actions is very complex and if we were cross-examined about it we would not be able to immediately produce everything that leads us to act in a certain way. Plato normally focus on central elements of this set of knowledge claims, especially the knowledge claims relative to what the good is or what excellence (ἀρετή) is. But we require much more to act. We need to determine our present circumstances, the courses of action available, how they can be pursued, what their worth is, how they relate to goodness and excellence, and so on. Certain actions or courses of action may even require expert or superlative knowledge (τέχνη or σοφία). But even the simplest acts presuppose many beliefs. They are what allows us to act with confidence and not stay frozen in ἀπορία, without knowing what to do.

This does not imply, however, that we must be reflecting on all that is necessary to determine our action. In fact, most relevant beliefs are automatically and silently active in us. Only in rare occasions are we forced to really think through what we are about to do (and even then we may simply assume many things). Normally we just act and do not need to think about what we think we know. The knowledge claims are simply expressed in our actions and demonstrated by them.⁵⁷²

b) Emotions

Not only are our active moments influenced by undeclared knowledge claims. Also our passive moments (our affects or emotions) are often grounded on knowledge claims of which we may not be expressly aware. We find a good illustration of this in the *Apology*, when Socrates discusses one of the strongest emotions we are exposed to: the fear of death. He argues that such a fear is not something instinctive, but rather based on knowledge claims about the nature and worth of life and death. This is why one can also desire to die (for

⁵⁷¹ For more on this, see Chap. 12 Sect. 5 below. Cp. also Chap. 13 Sect. 6.2, and Chap. 16 Sect. 2.1.

⁵⁷² It is interesting to note that Aristotle likewise resorts to this kind of argument in his demonstration of what was later to be called the principle of contradiction. According to him, any definite perspective cannot at the same time posit and remove (assert or deny) a particular reality. In other words, our views are determined in a certain way and not another. This is then demonstrated (among other things) by the fact that we act in a certain manner. See *Metaphysica* 1008b14-23: “διὰ τί γὰρ βαδίζει Μέγαράδε ἀλλ’ οὐχ ἡσυχάζει, οἰόμενος βαδίζειν δεῖν; οὐδ’ εὐθέως ἔωθεν πορεύεται εἰς φρέαρ ἢ εἰς φάραγγα, ἐὰν τύχη, ἀλλὰ φαίνεται εὐλαβούμενος, ὡς οὐχ ὁμοίως οἰόμενος μὴ ἀγαθὸν εἶναι τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν καὶ ἀγαθόν; δῆλον ἄρα ὅτι τὸ μὲν βέλτιον ὑπολαμβάνει τὸ δ’ οὐ βέλτιον. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄνθρωπον τὸ δ’ οὐκ ἄνθρωπον καὶ τὸ μὲν γλυκὺ τὸ δ’ οὐ γλυκὺ ἀνάγκη ὑπολαμβάνειν. οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἴσου ἅπαντα ζητεῖ καὶ ὑπολαμβάνει, ὅταν οἰηθεὶς βέλτιον εἶναι τὸ πιεῖν ὕδωρ καὶ ἰδεῖν ἄνθρωπον εἶτα ζητῇ αὐτά· καίτοι ἔδει γε, εἰ ταῦτόν ἦν ὁμοίως καὶ ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος.”

instance, to save someone else, because one does not want to live, etc.) or be serene in face of death (as Socrates is in *Crito* and *Phaedo*).⁵⁷³ Everything hinges on our beliefs. If we regard death as evil and life as good, then we think it is better to live than to die and we fear death. Likewise, someone who believes that death is good and life is evil will gladly die. But if these matters are undetermined, one does not know how to react to the possibility of dying and will likely only suffer the disturbance caused by this very indeterminacy.⁵⁷⁴

The relation between our views and our emotions is also made explicit in several other passages in the *corpus*. Most decisive in this respect are the analyses of false pleasures in *Philebus*.⁵⁷⁵ In them Socrates shows how our pleasures (and also our pains or sufferings) are based on three kinds of δόξαι: the δόξαι about the reality in which we take pleasure (especially the ones about what we expect will happen), the δόξαι about the comparative intensity of our emotions (how they relate to other emotions we remember or expect to have) and also the δόξαι about what pleasure is.⁵⁷⁶ All these judgments determine how we actually feel – but we do not need to think about them to feel what we feel. Usually none of these judgments is in the spotlight of the mind. We are just immersed in the emotions that result from them.⁵⁷⁷

c) Using language

Our knowledge claims are also revealed by our use of language. In *Alcibiades I*, Socrates is sure that, as a child, Alcibiades already thought he knew what justice was, since

⁵⁷³ See e.g. *Cri.* 43b, *Phd.* 58e-59a, 115c-116a.

⁵⁷⁴ It is an indeterminacy of this sort that is expressed in the final words of the *Apology*. Socrates says in 42a: “ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἦδη ὥρα ἀπιέναι, ἐμοὶ μὲν ἀποθανομένῳ, ἡμῖν δὲ βιωσομένοις· ὁπότεροι δὲ ἡμῶν ἔρχονται ἐπὶ ἄμεινον πρᾶγμα, ἄδηλον παντὶ πλὴν ἢ τῷ θεῷ.” However, Socrates’ view is supposedly much more determined. He believes he is going to a better place – and hence his peaceful relation with death (his ῥαδίως καὶ πράως φέρειν, as it is said in *Cri.* 43b8).

⁵⁷⁵ See 36c ff.

⁵⁷⁶ To this we must still add the kind of δόξα which is mentioned in *Phlb.* 21c4-5, which allows us to be aware of the pleasure we are feeling as such. How this δόξα relates to the three mentioned, however, is not made clear in the dialogue.

⁵⁷⁷ Sometimes these feelings are even totally unexpected from the standpoint of our explicit views and seem to go against what we think we should be feeling. This does not mean they are not the result of our beliefs. What happens is that we have two kinds of beliefs which in this case are in conflict and have different degrees of strength, so that one of them overcomes the other. At least this is what we might conclude from what is said in the texts. Plato’s conception of our emotions provides us with an interesting framework to interpret them and it also raises some interesting questions. For instance, are all our emotions dependent on our knowledge claims? And what kind of dependency are we talking about? Do they depend on knowledge claims to appear to us as emotions or to constitute themselves as emotions? Or are the emotions themselves a knowledge claim, namely a knowledge claim regarding what we feel? On the other hand, is it the case that only some knowledge claims produce emotions, or do they all have an emotional dimension (though we often do not notice it)? We find some indications in Plato’s texts about these questions, but this is not the place to discuss them in depth.

he would sometimes accuse other children of “doing injustices” or “cheating” (the verb is ἀδικεῖν) – and this could only happen if he thought he understood what these words meant (or more precisely, what ἀδικία and δική mean).⁵⁷⁸ This claim to understanding (οἶσθαι συνιέναι) is also something that the questioner (usually Socrates) evokes at the outset of some examinations, asking if his interlocutor understands something by this or that term, if it has some particular and definite meaning for him, or if he uses that term to designate some specific thing.⁵⁷⁹ This points to the fact that words or ὀνόματα in our mother tongue do not appear to us as simple noise, lacking all meaning (as is the case when we hear an unknown language).⁵⁸⁰ They mean something and refer to some particular reality. Better still, we think we understand what they mean. Otherwise, language and our capacity of conversing with each other would be annihilated.⁵⁸¹

Language is thus based on many beliefs (or many claims of understanding) that define the meaning the terms have for us. This does not mean, however, that we are constantly thinking about their meaning nor does it imply that we can easily define these words. We do not require a transparent and articulate understanding of all that is implied in the meaning of a word in order to use it. This is due to the fact that the cognitive claim that supports it is usually implicit. We understand tacitly what words mean and simply use them. This tacit understanding is precisely what is invoked at the beginning of some examinations, when someone refers to our use of a word. This does not mean that the matter being examined only concerns language. What is at issue is not a linguistic problem, but rather an ontological and epistemological one, which concerns the reality in question and the views we have of it. This is so because the understanding that enables us to use language is also what enables us to interpret what appears to us. Our claims to understanding the meaning of general predicates

⁵⁷⁸ See 110a-b: “(...) [ΣΩ.] ἀλλὰ μὴν τό γε πρὸ τοῦ παῖς ἦσθα. ἦ γάρ; [ΑΛ.] ναί. [ΣΩ.] τότε μὲν τοῖνυν εὖ οἶδα ὅτι ᾧ εἰδέναι. [ΑΛ.] πῶς εὖ οἶσθα; [ΣΩ.] πολλάκις σοῦ ἐν διδασκάλων ἤκουον παιδὸς ὄντος καὶ ἄλλοθι, καὶ ὁπότε ἀστραγαλίζοις ἢ ἄλλην τινὰ παιδιὰν παίζοις, οὐχ ὡς ἀποροῦντος περὶ τῶν δικαίων καὶ ἀδίκων, ἀλλὰ μάλα μέγα καὶ θαρραλέως λέγοντος περὶ ὅτου τύχοις τῶν παίδων ὡς πονηρός τε καὶ ἄδικος εἶη καὶ ὡς ἀδικοῖ· ἢ οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγω;”

⁵⁷⁹ We find formulations such as: “καλεῖς τι ἀληθῆ λέγειν καὶ ψευδῆ;” (*Cra.* 385b2), “σωφροσύνην τι καλεῖς καὶ δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἀνδρείαν καὶ εὐμαθίαν καὶ μνήμην καὶ μεγαλοπρέπειαν καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα;” (*Men.* 88a7-88b1), “ἐπιστήμην που καλεῖς τι;” (*Grg.* 495c3-4), “ὄν καλεῖτέ τι;” (*Sph.* 244b12), “Ἄρ’ οὖν λέγομέν τι δόξαν εἶναι;” (*R.* 477b3).

⁵⁸⁰ In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates actually uses the example of language to try to show that our access to things is more than simple αἴσθησις. We hear known and unknown languages alike, but the former we can understand, whereas the latter we cannot. It is therefore manifest that our contact with a known language includes a component of discerning its meaning. Cp. 163b f.

⁵⁸¹ The passage in *Prm.* 135b5ff. also alludes to this, if we bear in mind that this understanding of terms is associated with what Plato calls εἶδη. For this association, see Sect. 2.2 below.

affect and shape everything we see and come in contact with. In this sense, they are also decisive in determining our actions and feelings, as was indicated above.

d) Profession of knowledge (φάσκειν εἰδέναι)

Our actions, feelings and language demonstrate that our beliefs are much more pervasive and voluminous than what we usually think. Many of them are tacit and exert a tacit influence on our life without requiring that we think about them. But this does not mean that we cannot ever be aware of them. It is possible for us to relate to them in a hazy manner, without having them clearly articulated in our mind. This is illustrated in the dialogues, when the characters explicitly claim or affirm that they possess knowledge (φάσκειν or φάναι εἰδέναι) – especially when they profess having some extraordinary competence they want to display.⁵⁸² In a first moment, they have not yet put forward any views and are not yet explicitly thinking about all they profess to know – but they already have some explicit relation to it. They are in the antipodes of Socrates' usual attitude of disclaiming any knowledge.⁵⁸³ These characters feel they have authority to speak about a subject, they speak bravely about it, and after doing so they are convinced of having spoken well.⁵⁸⁴

This boasting, however, is not limited to the moments when a character thinks he has spoken well. Even when these characters do not seem to be able to answer a question and their knowledge is thereby rendered doubtful, they can still feel confident. They can keep affirming that they know and that all that is required is to keep inquiring. The difficulty seems to be circumstantial and it is not enough for one to be convinced of one's ignorance. Thus, one finds oneself in the curious and paradoxical situation of affirming to know without being able to articulate this knowledge.⁵⁸⁵ One has an explicit relation with an alleged

⁵⁸² For the notions of φάσκειν εἰδέναι and φάναι εἰδέναι, cp. *Euthphr.* 13e, *Rep.* 338a, 344e. The profession of competence is the basis of dialogues such as *Laches*, *Ion*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*.

⁵⁸³ Cp. *Rep.* 337e4ff.: “Πῶς γὰρ ἄν, ἔφην ἐγώ, ὃ βέλτιστε, τις ἀποκρίναιτο πρῶτον μὲν μὴ εἰδῶς μηδὲ φάσκων εἰδέναι (...)· ἀλλὰ σὲ δὴ μᾶλλον εἰκὸς λέγειν· σὺ γὰρ δὴ φῆς εἰδέναι καὶ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν”. See also *Chrm.* 165b5ff.: “Ἄλλ’, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὦ Κριτία, σὺ μὲν ὡς φάσκοντος ἐμοῦ εἰδέναι περὶ ὧν ἐρωτῶ προσφέφει πρὸς με, καὶ ἔαν δὴ βούλωμαι, ὁμολογήσοντός σοι· τὸ δ’ οὐχ ὄντως ἔχει, ἀλλὰ ζητῶ γὰρ μετὰ σοῦ αἰεὶ τὸ προτιθέμενον διὰ τὸ μὴ αὐτὸς εἰδέναι. σκεπνόμενος οὖν ἐθέλω εἰπεῖν εἴτε ὁμολογῶ εἴτε μή.”

⁵⁸⁴ They are in a condition similar to the one of Meno's slave, about whom Socrates says (referring to what initially happened when the slave was questioned about geometry): “(...) τότε δὲ ῥαδίως ἄν καὶ πρὸς πολλοὺς καὶ πολλάκις ᾤετ’ ἄν εὖ λέγειν περὶ τοῦ διπλασίου χωρίου, ὡς δεῖ διπλασίαν τὴν γραμμὴν ἔχειν μήκει.” See 84b.

⁵⁸⁵ This does not imply that we do not have any knowledge claims when there is no φάσκειν εἰδέναι and we humbly acknowledge our ignorance and incapacity to talk about some matter. The disavowal of knowledge or profession of ignorance can be deceitful (either with intent to deceive the others or because we deceive

knowledge that cannot be articulated. This shows that we can have an explicit diagnosis of our perspective that goes beyond what we already formulated for ourselves or others. We are not totally distracted from our implicit knowledge claims – though we normally do not pay much attention to them.

This explicit awareness of implicit knowledge claims can manifest itself in several ways, but often it seems to imply a general conviction of knowledge that does not specify all its elements. This is certainly the case in the profession of expert knowledge. Many views may be contained therein, but one is not aware of each one of them at all times. The same may happen with any particular belief of ours that is supported by other beliefs. We may be aware of it as a conclusion without having in mind all the other beliefs that contribute to it. As we will see, this kind of distraction plays a very important role in our life and Plato's writings often denounce it.⁵⁸⁶

e) Not inquiring

Despite all these beliefs, we often undergo the experience of thinking we do not know something or thinking we might be wrong about it. In such cases, we are not necessarily condemned to ignorance. Our views may be corrected and expanded. This can happen either by finding something out by ourselves or by learning it from someone else.⁵⁸⁷ But neither of these two things happen of its own accord, without us doing something to cause them. This is what Socrates points to when he asks Alcibiades: “Could you ever have learned or found out anything without wanting to learn it or work it out (ζητεῖν) for yourself?”⁵⁸⁸ Perhaps we can discover errors without taking any initiative, but listening to someone or trying to see new angles to a problem requires an effort from us. We must inquire into the matter, seek out answers. In turn, this effort (the attempt to discover or learn) is not possible if we are already

ourselves). We may still have implicit knowledge claims. This also makes Socrates' disavowal of knowledge highly problematic. However, this is not the place to tackle this question.

⁵⁸⁶ See in particular the analysis of the notion of ὑπόθεσις in Sect. 1.3a) below.

⁵⁸⁷ Plato sometimes mentions discovery and learning as two possibilities of acquiring knowledge, but they are also two ways of acquiring knowledge claims. See e.g. *Alc.* I 106d: “[ΣΩ.] Οὐκοῦν ταῦτα μόνον οἶσθα, ἃ παρ' ἄλλων ἔμαθες ἢ αὐτὸς ἐξηῦρες; [ΑΛ.] Ποῖα γὰρ ἄλλα;” See also *La.* 186a-187a, where this alternative is repeatedly referred to. This disjunction does not imply that discovering and learning cannot be combined. But they are nonetheless two different sources of views.

⁵⁸⁸ See 106d: “Ἔστιν οὖν ὅπως ἂν ποτε ἔμαθές τι ἢ ἐξηῦρες μήτε μανθάνειν ἐθέλων μήτ' αὐτὸς ζητεῖν;” I follow D. Hutchinson's translation (see *PCW*).

convinced we know.⁵⁸⁹ It is necessary that we stop thinking we know in order to feel the need to inquire something. Otherwise, there is no pressure to seek something out.⁵⁹⁰

This lack of pressure to inquire (or, as we could also say, to examine) is what normally characterizes us. Even if we admit that we do not know and then make some inquiries, it is easy to recognize that we could be much more engaged in the search for knowledge than we actually are. For the most part, we renounce the search for more knowledge. This could mean that we are totally indifferent about knowing or not knowing the things we do not inquire about. However, as was said above, our action, feelings and even our speaking require many knowledge claims. We need elucidation about many things and yet, in many cases, we have no explicit beliefs about them. If all our beliefs were explicit, then it seems we would long for knowledge in all these matters and, consequently, spend much time inquiring them. But we do not. This means we do not regard ourselves as indigent in cognitive matters. We have some cognitive wealth that is hidden from sight. In other words, we already think we know enough (i.e., we have a claim of *ικανῶς εἰδέναι*).⁵⁹¹ It is enough for our practical needs. This is why we do not consume our lives inquiring everything we need to know or searching for someone to teach us.⁵⁹² We have many tacit knowledge claims and they effectively render any inquiry otiose or moot in our own eyes.⁵⁹³ It does not even occur to us that we could examine these matters.

⁵⁸⁹ See *Alc.* I 106d: [ΣΩ.] “ἠθέλησας ἂν ζητῆσαι ἢ μαθεῖν ἢ ἐπίστασθαι ὧν;” [ΑΛ.] Οὐ δῆτα.” Cp. likewise *Meno* 84c: “Οἶει οὖν ἂν αὐτὸν πρότερον ἐπιχειρῆσαι ζητεῖν ἢ μαθάνειν τοῦτο ὃ ὧρετο εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδῶς, πρὶν εἰς ἀπορίαν κατέπεσεν ἠγησάμενος μὴ εἰδέναι, καὶ ἐπόθησεν τὸ εἰδέναι.”

⁵⁹⁰ As Plato says in *Smp.* 204a, while discussing what philosophizing (*sc.* desiring to be σοφός) consists in: “οὐκ οὐκ ἐπιθυμεῖ ὁ μὴ οἴομενος ἐνδεῆς εἶναι οὐδ’ ἂν μὴ οἴηται ἐπιδεισθαι.” Indeed, the act of seeking out (*ζητεῖν*) mentioned in *Alcibiades* I is only possible if one recognizes a lack, if one thinks there is something missing. This is what put us on the track of what is lacking, what mobilizes and guides us – and consequently this is what opens the possibility of finding out what is missing.

⁵⁹¹ Cp. *La.* 186d.

⁵⁹² If we did not already have many knowledge claims, we would be required to search everything we need to know as exhaustively as Socrates advises his friends to do in *Phd.* 78a, regarding the need to convince themselves that the *ψυχή* is immortal. Socrates says: “Πολλὴ μὲν ἡ Ἑλλάς, ἔφη, ὧ Κέβης, ἐν ἧ ἔνεισί που ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ τὰ τῶν βαρβάρων γένη, οὐς πάντας χρὴ διερευνᾶσθαι ζητοῦντας τοιοῦτον ἐπὶ δόξῃ, μῆτε χρημάτων φειδομένους μῆτε πόνων, ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν εἰς ὅτι ἂν εὐκαιρότερον ἀναλίσκοιτε χρήματα. ζητεῖν δὲ χρὴ καὶ αὐτοὺς μετ’ ἀλλήλων· ἴσως γὰρ ἂν οὐδὲ ραδίως εὔροιτε μᾶλλον ὑμῶν δυναμένους τοῦτο ποιεῖν.” Such an expedition throughout Greece and all other lands, without caring about the cost and energy required, is something we considered ourselves exempt or excused from. We feel entitled to act or think because we already possess everything we need. We already think we know enough.

⁵⁹³ This also expresses the paradoxical condition of the Platonic *ἐξέτασις* itself as a form of inquiring. The philosophical examination tests our knowledge claims and this means that such an examination has as its object what usually renders most examination useless in our own eyes. Our knowledge claims are indeed the basis of the unexamined life and without them this life would not be sustainable. For more on this, cp. Chap. 16 below.

g) A life without implicit knowledge claims

The facts of our life just considered reveal the importance of tacit beliefs. At any given moment, we have only a small raft of explicit beliefs to hold on to (to use the metaphor from *Phaedo*) and we require much more.⁵⁹⁴ Thus, if all we had were the views that are in the spotlight of our mind, everything would be very different for us. We would hesitate much more in our actions and be often paralyzed. We would be much more uncertain about how to feel. We would also have many more doubts about the language we speak and the terms we use. We would need much more reflection to act, to feel, and to speak. We would also be more unsure about our own knowledge and qualifications. Consequently, we would have to inquire or examine much more than we do.

This shows how explicit beliefs are insufficient for us to live as we do. We need to have other beliefs actively shaping our way of seeing things and affecting that of which we are most immediately aware. The precise way in which these tacit beliefs interfere in what happens in the spotlight of the mind may not be easy to explain, but we can notice the effects of these beliefs in our life nonetheless.

1.3. The Platonic understanding of the tacitness and explicitness of our beliefs

What we just saw shows how the discussions in the Platonic corpus refer not only to explicit, but also to implicit beliefs. Our beliefs can be present in us in two different ways or we can relate to them in two different ways – or perhaps even more, if we consider that there can be many intermediate or mixed forms between these two extremes (namely, the absolutely tacit and the fully explicit). We will, however, focus our attention on the extremes. To a certain extent, they have a similar structure. They both correspond to the description made above of our δόξαι and our knowledge claims. They both correspond to a certain way of seeing things or determining them. But despite their similarity, they also have a different constitution, which raises the question of whether this difference also affects their content (i.e., the representation of things as being “thus and not otherwise”) in some way. Moreover, this difference also makes us wonder how these two forms of belief are combined within us and how their combination constitutes our whole experience of things and ourselves.

⁵⁹⁴ See 85d1-2.

In order to define both these kinds of belief and their interrelation, we will consider some important indications given in Plato's writings and see what we can infer from them. We will begin by defining with greater precision the nature of the tacit or implicit beliefs, which considerably differ from our most immediate conception of what a belief is, and then we will reconsider the explicit beliefs in light of this background of tacit beliefs. Finally, we will define the continuity and the interactions between both domains.

a) The tacit or implicit beliefs in light of Plato's notion of ὑπόθεσις in the *Republic*

As was shown, we have δόξαι or knowledge claims that are implicit, tacit, inarticulate or athenatic. At any given moment, there are many beliefs active in us of which we are not clearly aware. Their presence, quantity and content are essentially unclear (ἀσαφής) to us. However, this does not detract anything from their effectiveness. On the contrary, the lack of awareness can even make them more firm, since it prevents us from seeing them in detail, putting them in question, and comparing them with alternative perspectives. For the most part they remain unopposed in the way they shape our experience and how we see things. They determine us in a silent, compact, and hazy manner. However, their effectiveness also gives us the possibility of gaining some form of awareness of them (as was just seen) and even the possibility of reflecting about their structure. The latter is what we must now consider.

Despite all the arguments that can be found in the corpus to show that there are beliefs in us of which we may not be immediately aware, we find no express notion of tacit belief as such in the texts. In some passages Plato speaks of silent δόξαι, but the description only implies that one does not speak them out loud.⁵⁹⁵ One can still be fully aware of them and of their content. However, despite the lack of an express concept of tacit belief, the dialogues are constantly aware of this kind of belief. This can be seen in the moments in which Socrates requests his interlocutors to express their actual views, to bring them to light and not hide them – especially after failing to do so at a first attempt.⁵⁹⁶ Although Socrates in many cases interprets the situation with some irony and acts as if the others were purportedly withholding these views from him, his demand for honesty raises the possibility that they are also somehow hiding these views from themselves and have to make an effort to focus them, in

⁵⁹⁵ See e.g. *Sph.* 264a and *Phlb.* 38e.

⁵⁹⁶ See e.g. *Euthphr.* 11b and 15e.

order to submit them to examination. It is precisely in this context that appear most of the arguments considered above for the existence of tacit knowledge claims in us.

There is, however, one notion in the Platonic corpus that does not refer exclusively to tacit beliefs, but still lets us better understand not only the nature of our tacit beliefs, but also the way they are normally presented during the examinations portrayed in the dialogues. This notion is the notion of *ὑπόθεσις* as it is used and defined in the analogy of the divided line in the *Republic*. Although this usage of the word is rarely found in other passages (indeed, Plato normally uses *ὑπόθεσις* and *ὑποτίθεσθαι* in a different sense), it actually designates something which is found throughout the corpus.

Let us start with the general meaning of the word *ὑπόθεσις*. There are two main nuances in the term, both deriving from the prefix. A *θέσις* is the positing of a certain view, a certain version of things, a way of determining them as being thus and not otherwise. A *ὑπόθεσις* is then a view that underpins or is a basis for another view. In this sense, it is particularly used in deductive contexts to designate premises from which something results (*συμβαίνει*). It may also designate a general principle from which a whole system of knowledge is unfolded. More broadly, it may simply designate something that is presupposed in something else or relevant for determining it, even if this something else is not entirely derived from it. The latter possibility is particularly relevant if we consider the complexity of our views and how they are often intertwined, affecting each other (even if in many cases we do not notice this intertwinement and take things as being simple).⁵⁹⁷ In addition to this function of support for another positing or view, the notion of *ὑπόθεσις* can also be associated with a defective kind of positing – a positing that is uncertain, that is not yet sufficiently justified. Things may be otherwise.⁵⁹⁸

This basic meaning can then be applied to two different things. On the one hand, it can designate explicit assumptions, especially in a deductive context. These *ὑποθέσεις* are something of which one is fully aware and which one decides to posit. Often they are also acknowledged as uncertain and only provisionally posited. Consequently, the Greek term can correspond to the usage of “hypothesis” in English. It is something provisionally admitted and thus it implies no conviction or knowledge claim. It allows one to explore possibilities, see the consequences of a certain view, assess its strength and eventually decide the matter at

⁵⁹⁷ We will see in detail this intertwinement of our views or beliefs in Sect. 2 below.

⁵⁹⁸ The definition of *ὑπόθεσις* we find in the pseudo-Platonic *Definitiones* (415b10) expresses these two aspects by saying that a *ὑπόθεσις* is an *ἀρχὴ ἀναπόδεικτος*.

hand. Plato also employs the term in this sense.⁵⁹⁹ But the term is not confined to this sense and Plato also uses it to designate what we may call implicit or tacit assumptions – i.e., ὑποθέσεις of which we are not aware (which we did not decide to posit, whose content is not something we have thought about), but nonetheless underpin something else. In contrast with the explicit assumptions, the tacit assumptions are not recognized as such and thus also not recognized as uncertain and provisional, despite all the errors or defects they may conceal. They are taken as absolutely evident and can therefore be described as tacit or implicit beliefs.

This usage of the term designates something that we find throughout the corpus. When reflecting on a question and articulating a belief, the characters often presuppose many things. These presuppositions determine both how they understand a particular view and also how convinced they are of it. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the presuppositions in order to fully determine what is being discussed. Socrates tries to do precisely this. He wants to expose these tacit assumptions and asks about them, thereby eliciting admissions from his interlocutors. In other words, he is committed to seeing all that is being presupposed by someone when defending a view.⁶⁰⁰ One could perhaps argue that these assumptions are revealed during a discussion and may therefore be the result of an explicit reflection about some particular question, but their existence need not be (and normally is not) restricted to the moments of reflection. They are often beliefs that permanently shape the characters' (and in many cases also our) way of seeing or understanding things.

Considering the way they are revealed in the corpus would therefore render more visible how this is a permanent and deep-lying structure of our way of seeing things. We will, however, follow another line of inquiry. We will consider the way the notion of ὑπόθεσις is defined in the simile of the divided line, in the *Republic*.⁶⁰¹ The ὑποθέσεις mentioned therein are not necessarily tacit (at least they admit a degree of awareness of their existence), but they share several key features with those tacit ὑποθέσεις that affect both our explicit views and our behaviors. Let us then briefly consider some of main aspects of the simile (without

⁵⁹⁹ In *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Parmenides* we find different presentations of a method of examination based on such hypotheses. For a consideration of these presentations, see Chap. 9, Sect. 3.1.

⁶⁰⁰ In fact, a full list of all the presuppositions identified by Socrates in the course of the dialogues would be very long.

⁶⁰¹ See *Rep.* 509d ff. and 532a ff. The pages that follow are vastly influenced by the analyses in M. CARVALHO, Μέθοδος ε ὑπόθεσις. O problema do pressuposto na fundação platónica da ciência, in: D. FERRER (ed.), *Método e Métodos do Pensamento Filosófico*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 2007, 9-69, and F. SERRANITO, *Lovers and Madmen*. The Μανία-Φρονεῖν Opposition in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Diss. Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015, 337-378.

entering into much detail about all that is implied in it), in order to determine the role played by the notion of *ὑπόθεσις* within this framework.

First of all, the divided line represents a scale of modes of being, as well as of the affections (*παθήματα*) of the soul (i.e., the cognitive states, the modes of access to beings) that correspond to them. In other words, the line has both an objective (or ontological) and a subjective (or epistemological) sides, mirroring the correlation between being and knowledge in the end of book V (see 476e ff.). However, it is important to bear in mind that in book V this correlation implies a subordination of one side to the other – and in fact a subordination that is inverted in the course of the analysis. In a first moment, Socrates starts by discussing different kinds of objects or beings and then he tries to determine the forms of access that correspond to the different kinds of being. In a second moment (477b ff.), Socrates inverts the relation and focus on the forms of access before considering the kinds of being they reveal in themselves.⁶⁰² This kind of inversion also happens in the simile of the line. Socrates starts by describing domains of reality, but then talks about how they depend on the form of access to them or on how the soul understands things.

Let us see how this is so. The line is first cut in two segments, distinguishing visible and intelligible beings (which are later identified with the distinction between *δόξα* and *νόησις*, as well as the difference between coming to being and being). Each segment is in turn divided in two subsegments. There are, therefore, four different modes of being. The first counting from the bottom corresponds to all kinds of images or *εἰκόνες* (shadows, reflections in water or other surfaces, etc.).⁶⁰³ They have no intrinsic identity. Their being is constitutively referred to something else which they resemble, but of which they fall short. The second subsegment encompasses the things themselves (be they natural or artificial beings) which these images resemble.⁶⁰⁴ When we see the description made by Socrates, this seems to be the place where we find ourselves or the reality we normally recognize: the world of concrete things around us, of which we are a part. But this is only the second subsegment. So how is the segment beyond it conceived?

The passage to the third and fourth subsegments happens when the soul is compelled to inquire (*ζητεῖν ἀναγκάζεται*) or when it performs an investigation or pursuit (*μέθοδος*).⁶⁰⁵ This happens because the things themselves or our access to them is revealed as defective.

⁶⁰² We will discuss this passage in more detail in Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 below.

⁶⁰³ See 509e-510a.

⁶⁰⁴ See 510a.

⁶⁰⁵ See 510b. For the meaning of *μέθοδος*, cp. Chap. 4, Sect. 2.5.

But the defect at stake here is not just any defect – and this will determine the kinds of inquiry it gives rise to. Things in the second subsegment, which were taken to be things themselves, are revealed as problematic. One cannot understand and define them by themselves. They have properties, but these are not clearly seen when we are focusing these things as such. In this sense, these things that seem maximally real are also images somehow. They refer to something else that explains them, but they fall short of it. Therefore, one needs to inquire (or is forced to do so). The crisis of the second subsegment mobilizes the soul to search for what things really are or for the true beings. These will not correspond to a kind of reality that completely transcends the way we normally experience this second subsegment, taking it as all that there is. The new beings that will come into focus were already somehow present and shaped this second subsegment. The latter already referred to them or it pretended to be them. We thought we were before all that there is, and now we discover that what we thought we had before us is “somewhere” else, so we have to seek it.

But there are still two subsegments to go, and this means that there are two forms of pursuit. The first kind of pursuit, which opens up the third subsegment, corresponds to those sciences that occupy themselves with non-sensible beings – especially arithmetic and geometry (although in a sense we could include here even the sciences or τέχνη directed to sensible beings, insofar as they are forms of inquire that try to correct our way of seeing things).⁶⁰⁶ These sciences give us an understanding of certain properties of beings and allow us to see what immediately appears in a different light. However, they also have limitations and it is precisely these limitations that must be overcome in order to achieve the fourth subsegment. The limitations are of two kinds, according to Plato. One of them is the fact that they use visible images to represent intelligible beings (for instance, mathematics uses images a square or a diagonal in their inquiry, though these are not its true objects).⁶⁰⁷ This can cause some confusion in the inquiry, but it is not the decisive limitation.

Decisive is rather the fact that these forms of knowledge are based on ὑποθέσεις.⁶⁰⁸ This does not mean that they consciously employ a tentative or hypothetical method. What Plato means is that they presuppose many notions that are relevant for their researches. The examples given concern mathematics. Although this science is supposed to be the most certain and most clear, it presupposes the meaning of many things: odd and even, the figures,

⁶⁰⁶ Socrates mentions geometry and arithmetic as examples in 510c2-3 and then continues referring to them during the course of the discussion. In 533b-c, he contrasts these and other sciences (or alleged sciences, as we will see), which are directed at something intelligible, with the τέχνη that are concerned with sensible beings.

⁶⁰⁷ See 510d5 ff.

⁶⁰⁸ See 510c2 ff and 511a3 ff.

the three forms of angles and so on.⁶⁰⁹ This form of inquiry employs these notions without rendering account of them, because they are taken to be manifest to everybody.⁶¹⁰ They are seen as well-known or self-evident, and the ones doing the inquiry regard themselves as knowing them (ὡς εἰδότες, 510c6). The relation with the basic notions of the field is marked by knowledge claims that disregard the possibility of there being any mistake or haziness in one's access to these contents. In other words, one is as convinced of one's access to these notions as one was of one's access to reality in the second subsegment. Hence, one leaves these notions untouched (ἀκίνητα) or unexamined.⁶¹¹ There is no mobilization to inquire into them. But this does not mean they are fully known. On the contrary. Plato is very aware that our relation with these kind of notions is not one of full knowledge or full insight. We are not able of rendering account of them.⁶¹² Our awareness of them is still imagetic. We do not have access to the thing itself. In relation to them, we are still left behind in the second subsegment – i.e., in our usually defective access to them.

This has consequences for the entire field of study, since the latter is based on these ὑποθέσεις. As Plato says, the entire science has an unknown beginning or principle and “the end and what comes in between are woven out of what isn't known”.⁶¹³ Any defects in these notions will affect the entire domain in question, which is based on these assumptions and agrees with them. It is not as if in some respects science would achieve full knowledge and in others it would still be imagetic. The unexamined aspects contaminate everything and because of this Plato says that these sciences do not deserve the name of “science” (ἐπιστήμη), for they not only include, but are even based on nescience. As he says, these sciences dream about being – i.e., they mistake an image of the main ontological notions for the real thing.⁶¹⁴ This is the major limitation of the form of inquire that constitutes the third

⁶⁰⁹ See 510c2-c5.

⁶¹⁰ See 510c6-8: “(...) οὐδένα λόγον οὔτε αὐτοῖς οὔτε ἄλλοις ἔτι ἀξιοῦσι περὶ αὐτῶν διδόναι ὡς παντὶ φανερῶν (...)”.

⁶¹¹ Plato uses in 532c2 the expression “ταύτας [namely, the ὑποθέσεις] ἀκινήτους ἔωσι”. This is a reference to the expression κινεῖν τὰ ἀκίνητα. In this context, the verb κινεῖν means not simply “setting in motion”, but rather “stirring up”, “shaking”, “disturbing” or even “waking up”. It also has a connotation of danger, since its object is something that should probably be kept alone and asleep. It is in this sense that the verb is used in expressions such as “μὴ κινεῖν εὐ κείμενον” (cp. *Phlb.* 15b). The expression “ἀκίνητα”, in turn, does not simply denote something motionless, but rather something that should not be moved – for instance, customs or the constitution. Κινεῖν τὰ ἀκίνητα has thus the sense of “poking the bear” or “knocking off a hornets' nest”. It is used for violent political changes (see e.g. *Lg.* 684d-e). By referring to this expression here, Socrates is also implying that one tries to avoid the troubles (and the changes) that would result from questioning one's basic beliefs. For more on κινεῖν and κινεῖν τὰ ἀκίνητα (and for further bibliographical references), see M. CARVALHO, *op. cit.*, 58ff.

⁶¹² Cp. 533c2-3.

⁶¹³ See 533c3-4: “(...) τελευτη δὲ καὶ τὰ μεταξὺ ἐξ οὗ μὴ οἶδεν συμπλέκεται (...)”.

⁶¹⁴ See 533b8-c1. For more on Plato's notion of dreaming (ὄνειρῶσθαι), see Chap. 4, Sect. 2.4 below.

subsegment of the line. In a sense it overcomes the second subsegment, but in a fundamental sense it still remains in it. In some fundamental respects it shares the same limitations and these spread over the entire domain. Thus a new kind of investigation is required, which will bring about a fourth and final subsegment.

The fourth subsegment is formally defined as knowledge – as perfect clarity (σαφήνεια) or that which gives us perfect access to being. But what exactly is knowledge in the fullest sense? Plato associates it with the notion of ἀνυπόθετον (510b7, 511b6) and says that this new form of inquiry must uproot the assumptions (ἀναρῆν τας ὑποθέσεις, 533c8). This means it does not leave them undisturbed, but rather converts them in points of attack (ἐπιβάσεις) or assaults (ὀρμαί).⁶¹⁵ They become true principles of investigation, in the sense that one inquires into them. The direction is the opposite from the one in the so-called sciences. One sees the content of one's assumptions, see if they in turn presuppose something, and leads the examination towards something that does not presuppose anything.

This lack of presuppositions can be understood in two senses. First, one can suspend the knowledge claims corresponding to the ὑποθέσεις. This will stop the distortion caused by them and one will no longer dream about being. In a sense, this would already allow one to overcome the limitations of the second and third subsegment. But Plato also understands the lack of presuppositions as referring to a first principle of knowledge (an ἀρχή) on which all reality is based. This first principle seems to be the form of the good, on which all other forms or εἶδη are based. But let us leave that aside for now.⁶¹⁶

This brief consideration of the simile of the line lets us better understand the central aspects of Plato's notion of ὑπόθεσις. In the *Republic*, the notion refers primarily to notions presupposed in scientific inquiries. These notions can be explicit or implicit, they can come from the second subsegment (our usual understanding of things) or they can be innovations of the scientific inquiry. At any rate, they are taken as obvious and as not needing any inquiry. This obviousness is their most important feature. Despite not having a full insight into them, they are nonetheless taken for granted. Moreover, our relation to them also determines the way we see and understand other things. This can be understood in a deductive sense, as sometimes is suggested in the simile of the line, or in a broader sense. Things may be directly derived from these notions or simply affected by them, but in both cases one's way of seeing things would be very different without these assumptions. Finally, although Plato uses the

⁶¹⁵ See 511b.

⁶¹⁶ For more on this matter, see Chap. 9, Sect. 3.2, and Chap. 12, Sect. 6.3.

term “ὑπόθεσις” to designate a structural moment of sciences and especially mathematics, the notion can be applied not only to all forms of inquiries, but also to what happens outside of any inquiry. When we are still in the second subsegment and do not inquire into things, we still presume to know many things. We are always full of assumptions, even if we only rarely think about them. This is what is illustrated in the dialogues – both when Socrates points out that someone’s behavior would not be possible without tacit assumptions and also that someone’s argument presupposes other views that are were not formulated.

The notion of ὑπόθεσις plays thus a very important role in Plato’s understanding of the tacit dimension. It shows how this dimension is populated with convictions similar to the ones we express in our moments of reflection.⁶¹⁷ There is a structural resemblance between the two domains. One could perhaps be tempted to think of this as an abusive projection of the explicit domain into the immediate contact with life, which would have a very different structure. However, it actually shows that what happens at the heart of our being has fundamentally the same structure as what happens in our reflection. Both are understood by Plato as thinking. Both are logical or rational, although in different degrees.⁶¹⁸ The difference is one of awareness and clarity, as we shall see, not of form. Both explicitly and implicitly, we are convinced of knowing things as they are. We have many more knowledge claims than we would immediately recognize and the fact that we do not recognize them does not minimize their effectiveness. We can be totally ignorant of this tacit dimension or even argue that it does not exist. It will nonetheless affect all our being (or, more precisely, all our ἔργα and all our λόγοι).

The structural resemblance between the two forms of knowledge claim also means that we can render (or at least try to render) them explicit. Expressing them is, in fact, absolutely necessary for their examination. But this expression is not an automatic process. It requires us to focus and identify their content, which is primarily unclear to us and, in some cases more than others, may resist becoming explicit.⁶¹⁹ Thus, we have to exert ourselves and

⁶¹⁷ In this sense, Plato’s understanding of the tacit dimension is different from what this term is usually associated with in the contemporary analyses – especially the ones from M. Polanyi. Cp. e.g. M. POLANYI, *The Tacit Dimension*, Garden City (NY), Doubleday, 1966. Plato is not referring to a kind of knowledge, usually of a performative nature (a know-how), which one cannot explain. The tacit dimension is also something very different from the unconscious as a domain of pure drives, totally different from our conscious thoughts. Even if there are such raw drives, they are also accompanied by views or beliefs.

⁶¹⁸ Expression or verbalization is thus not a condition of thinking (and thus of determining something) according to Plato. There is a form of non-verbal or proto-linguistic thinking and also a non-verbal or proto-linguistic belief – which have nevertheless the same structure as our verbalizations.

⁶¹⁹ And as we shall see, their resistance to our attempts at expressing them can itself be very meaningful. Cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 1.2 b).

often make several attempts. But at least there is the possibility of rendering our tacit views explicit. The two domains are not totally heterogeneous.

b) The express or explicit beliefs in light of Plato's definition of λόγος in the *Theaetetus*

By introducing the idea of tacit beliefs, we get a better notion of just how extensive the set of beliefs that is to be examined is. In light of this expansion, we can now reconsider the limited domain of our explicit beliefs and what characterizes it. We described it initially as a kind of spotlight in which the contents are fully present to our mind. This is achieved by means of speech or λόγος.⁶²⁰ These beliefs are articulated, formulated, verbalized or put into words and, as a result of it, they are much clearer to us. We can better understand how it is so if we quickly consider the three definitions of λόγος given at the end of *Theaetetus*.⁶²¹

According to the first definition, λόγος has the sense of “making one's thought apparent vocally, by means of words and verbal expressions – when a man impresses an image of his judgment upon the stream of speech, like reflections upon water or in a mirror”.⁶²² *Theaetetus* later reformulates it as “a vocal image of thought”.⁶²³ The emphasis is thus on the use of voice, with its linguistic structure, but also on how it allows us to reveal (ἐνδείξασθαι) how we see things – both to others (who have no direct access to our thoughts) and also to ourselves (if we happen to be unmindful of them).⁶²⁴ One's thoughts become more visible.

The idea of clarity is further developed in the other two definitions. The second one describes λόγος as “the way to the whole through the elements”.⁶²⁵ One must consider everything that composes a certain being and go through it all. This changes one's relation to the whole and gives us a better understanding of it. Λόγος brings clarity to our access to

⁶²⁰ The term λόγος is indeed extremely complex and it can mean many different things: word, statement, calculation, account, reason, thought, proportion, and so on. Here, however, we will have in mind primarily the sense of speech or of something said (either silently to ourselves, in our own mind, or vocally to someone else). For more on the term and for some bibliographical references, cp. Chap. 4, Sect. 2.2 above.

⁶²¹ See 206c ff. In this passage, Socrates and *Theaetetus* are exploring the possibility of knowledge being a δόξα ὀρθή accompanied by λόγος. Initially, λόγος seems to mean something as an account or justification, but as the characters try to define it, they use a more general sense of the word.

⁶²² See 206d: “τὸ μὲν πρῶτον εἶη ἂν τὸ τὴν αὐτοῦ διάνοιαν ἐμφανῆ ποιεῖν διὰ φωνῆς μετὰ ῥημάτων τε καὶ ὀνομάτων, ὥσπερ εἰς κάτοπτρον ἢ ὕδωρ τὴν δόξαν ἐκτυπούμενον εἰς τὴν διὰ τοῦ στόματος ῥοήν”. I follow M. J. Levett's translation, revised by Myles Burnyeat, in *PCW*.

⁶²³ See 208c.

⁶²⁴ See 206d7-9.

⁶²⁵ See 208c: “(...) διὰ στοιχείου ὁδοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ὅλον (...)”.

something. The same holds for the third definition, which presents λόγος as the ability “to tell some mark by which the object you are asked about differs from all other things.”⁶²⁶ Λόγος brings differentiation and distinctness – and thus a clearer view about what something is.⁶²⁷

These senses of λόγος may be applied to things in general, but also to our views. Λόγος allows us to define our views and see what characterizes them. One becomes aware of them and is no longer distracted about their presence and content. This awareness or clarity is therefore what characterizes our explicit beliefs (as well as explicit views in general, whether we endorse them or not). Their content is stated and thus clearer to us. We see a reflection of it, identify its elements and can distinguish it from other contents.

But this is not all. Our explicit beliefs are also connected with λόγος in the sense of rational discussion and account or justification of something.⁶²⁸ In other words, our explicit beliefs are often the result of a process akin to what we see in the dialogues. Questions are explicitly asked, answers are expressly given and they must then be rationally justified. In other words, these explicit beliefs usually arise in a process of examination – be it an ordinary examination or a philosophical examination. This dialectical process can indeed be more or less rational, more or less demanding, but it is always something we follow and up to a point control. It may end up producing theories (either philosophical or not) that we adopt. But these theories are also open to questions, doubts and corrections. Many of them are thus regarded as more or less probable conjectures. However, despite all the doubts the dialectic process may induce, it is nonetheless a precious instrument in reviewing and developing our set of beliefs, as well as in considering new views.

This instrument is something to which we can relate in different ways. We can have different degrees of dedication to it and regard its results with in different manners. The two opposites extremes are what Plato designates μισολογία and φιλολογία.⁶²⁹ One can avoid all reflection or one can dedicate oneself to it with passion, follow all the dictates of logic (or as Plato says, follow λόγος like a wind, in whichever direction it leads).⁶³⁰ But one way or the

⁶²⁶ See 208c: “(...) τὸ ἔχειν τι σημεῖον εἰπεῖν ὅ τῶν ἀπάντων διαφέρει τὸ ἐρωτηθέν.”

⁶²⁷ The two latter senses of λόγος also correspond to the notion of “definition”. They are not simply the verbalization of something, but the grasping of it. However, even when it is not a definition, λόγος makes us more aware of the elements and the distinctive marks of something.

⁶²⁸ This was probably the sense Theaetetus (or at least the people he refers to) had in mind when he first introduced the notion in 201c-d.

⁶²⁹ Cp. e.g. *La.* 188c-e, *Phd.* 89d ff., *Rep.* 411c-e. For the notion of φιλολογία, see e.g. G. NUCHELMANS, *Studien über φιλόλογος, φιλολογία und φιλολογεῖν*, Zwolle, Tjeenk Willink, 1950.

⁶³⁰ See *Rep.* 394d8-9.

other, we all become aware of some of our beliefs at some points and these explicit beliefs can affect in different ways how we see things and how we act.

The explicit beliefs may then become (or return to being) tacit, and at that point we may have different degrees of recollection of their existence and content. This recollection is then what determines the way we tend to understand the Platonic notions of δόξα and οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι. There are some views of which we are better aware, which we can more easily articulate, and these are the ones we most immediately notice and identify. However, this is only a small part of our overall beliefs. Our explicit beliefs coexist with our tacit beliefs and we are not directly aware of most of the latter. We must bear this in mind, or else our conception and performance of philosophical examination will be wholly inadequate.

c) The interrelation of both modalities of belief

Finally, let us consider a little bit better the coexistence or correlation between explicit and tacit beliefs. These two modes of presence of beliefs are very important and without any of them our life would be very different. It is very hard to imagine a life composed solely of implicit knowledge claims, in which we would never reflect or our reflection would never produce any results. On the other hand, a life in which all our beliefs were express and fully present in the spotlight of our mind is also very different from our own experience. We have the possibility of thinking about our own beliefs (as well as other possible beliefs), but we cannot contemplate everything at the same time. We must use a cursor or moving focus, which attends to something while losing sight of everything else. In some cases, it may be more difficult to identify and focus on a belief – but at least there is the possibility of doing so.

It must be remarked that these two modalities of belief do not exist side by side, totally indifferent to each other. They are actually entangled and affect one another. Our implicit knowledge claims often guide our reflection, determine what we accept or refuse, and they can also stimulate or inhibit the very act of reflecting on (or examining) something. In turn, our reflection and the beliefs that are present or developed in it may also affect our other beliefs and change them (at least in part). But this is not all. The boundaries between what is tacit and what is explicit is not always easy to draw. This is particularly clear if we recall that our explicit beliefs are often (if not always) based on tacit ὑποθέσεις. The explicit

domain contains in itself something tacit – and the tacit domain is likewise something we experience from within some domain of awareness.

But this continuity between the two modalities of belief goes only to a point. We can still distinguish the two basic forms – and this raises the question of what kind of interchanges between them can there be. First, it is not clear to what extent our implicit knowledge claims can be translated into explicit ones. This is required for examining them, but it is not easy to do, because of our hazy awareness of what lies in our storehouse of beliefs. Moreover, the possibility of such a translation also raises the question about whether it only changes the mode of presence of the contents or whether it can also transform the contents in some way – and even the conviction we have about them. By introducing a different degree of clarity, the contents may be seen differently. On the other hand, it is also not clear how our explicit reflections and beliefs can pass into the storehouse and become tacitly effective in us. Some of them may be installed in us, but it is not easy to determine what enables this installation in some cases and not in others.

The question about the interchanges of the two modes of belief points to yet another interesting aspect of how we see things. We saw that we can reflect or be directly aware of some beliefs and have many others stored in our mind. This immediately suggests that all these beliefs have different contents. But it is possible to have different tacit and explicit views about the same thing. In other words, our theories may not coincide with how we immediately see things. We may be in inner dissonance and this dissonance can be direct (in the sense that both views concern the same object) or indirect (in so far as the consequences of some belief we have contradict another belief or its consequences). In fact, such contradictions need not be between what is in the tacit and what is in the explicit domain. They can also occur within one of the domains. Due to the lack of clarity of the tacit domain, we can adopt tacit views whose consequences are in conflict. Likewise, our explicit reflections can also be too superficial and fail to notice that different beliefs have consequences that disagree with each other. We may be full of contradictions without realizing it, without even realizing that this is possible. This is possible because our contact with our beliefs (even when they are explicit) is imperfect. They are in general compartmentalized. We do not bring them together and compare them side by side. Even in reflection we do this only up to a point. But it is the role of philosophical examination to try to annul that. It must consider all our beliefs and their implications, compare them, and identify any conflicts. This is what Socrates often does in the dialogues. He steers the

examination towards the revelation of these contradictions and forces the characters to choose between their beliefs. They must say which view they are more certain of – or acknowledge that they actually do not know.

2. The contents of our beliefs. Their morphology and intricate syntax

In Chapter 5 we considered the general or formal notion of belief (i.e., of adopting a δόξα or holding a knowledge claim). In the first section of this chapter, we considered how our beliefs can be either implicit or explicit and how philosophical examination must take this into account. But there is another important principle of variation of beliefs that we must bear in mind. Our beliefs may also differ with respect to their content. Not only can there be different kinds of beliefs about the same thing, but there are also many things about which we may have beliefs. What is determined or posited by them varies greatly and Plato's dialogues provide us a rich (though far from exhaustive) description of this diversity and complexity.

It is important to bear in mind that the characters' beliefs are not always expressly identified as δόξαι or knowledge claims. But even if we confine ourselves to the passages in which Plato uses the notion of δόξα or οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι (as well as any of their equivalents), we can easily see how diverse the objects our beliefs refer to are. The characters' beliefs concern what concrete beings are, what happens, where one is, the features someone has, practical matters, distinctions and resemblances between beings, instrumental or technical matters, professions, physics, biology, arithmetic, geometry, medicine, literature, formal ontology, life's greatest questions (τὰ μέγιστα – which encompass political, religious, eschatological matters, what is happiness, how can one be the best possible) – and the list goes on.⁶³¹ These contents can be more or less general, more or less abstract and more or less important.

Our beliefs may thus have different forms or shapes. But this is not the most important question. In fact, such a morphological analysis (as we could call it) gives the impression that our beliefs are all simple and concern independent objects. Plato, however, strongly emphasizes how our beliefs are intertwined or entangled. They co-determine each other, exert influence over one another and thus what seems to be a simple belief often (if not always) turns out to be a bundle of beliefs. This was already expressed by the notion of

⁶³¹ For a more precise idea of the particular contents of beliefs discussed in the corpus, see for instance the list of passages in which οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι and equivalent expressions appear (presented in Chap. 5, Sect. 2.1).

ὑπόθεσις, as we saw above. Our views often presuppose other views. But they can also be interconnected or synthesized in other, more specific ways – and Plato actually discusses several different kinds of intertwinement. To use once again a grammatical metaphor, there is a syntax of beliefs, with its own rules. There are general structures of beliefs that pervade all individual beliefs and their contents. No moment is simple or atomic. All our views are intrinsically complex. Therefore, any analysis of the contents of our beliefs must first of all consider these intertwinements of beliefs or their contents, since everything else depends on them. However, the different kinds of intertwinement are not easy to identify. Our attention is normally focused on the result of the intertwinements or on some separate component of the whole. All the rest tends to be tacitly present, so we do not clearly see the main structures of our beliefs.

Plato, however, tries to identify and describe these structures. Although the dialogues do not provide us a treatise on the relations between our beliefs, Plato points to them in many moments and in different ways – sometimes by using them in the discussions, other times by explicitly discussing and defining them. Moreover, the relevant discussions are mainly of two kinds. In some cases, the characters are discussing how we see things or how knowledge is constituted. In other cases, they are considering the structure of reality as such. In fact, knowledge and being are usually regarded as intrinsically connected, so many analyses hold for both. But one may also raise the question of whether these structures are primarily subjective and, as such, themselves the result of some belief. This would mean that they could perhaps be subjective illusions that do not correspond to any reality outside our minds. It would also imply that they could perhaps be revised and changed. But, whether things are really so or not, and whether this is a necessary way of seeing things or not, our spontaneous way of seeing and conceiving things may still be marked by these intertwinements identified by Plato. They can be interpreted as a description of the structure of our beliefs – and it is as such that we will now consider them.

2.1. The difference between what something is (τί ἐστίν) and how something is qualified (ποιόν τι)

Plato often distinguishes in the dialogues between two kinds of questions or two kinds of perspective over something. On the one hand, it is possible to determine the identity of something, what something is (τί ἐστίν/ὅπερ ἐστίν). On the other hand, it is also possible to

determine how something is qualified or what sort of thing something is (ποῖόν τι). This difference is an expression of the basic structure or basic intertwinement of cognitive contents. Everything we see (as well as every belief of ours) is determined by this structure or matrix. Plato conceives it as an alternative to other ontological models which caused many difficulties and could not account for how we see things. The characters in the dialogues not only discuss this ontological model, but they often invoke it during other discussions, either to call our attention to the complexity of a certain being (how it cannot be reduced to a simple identity) or to denounce the way we can lose sight of this identity altogether and focus only a secondary aspect of something.⁶³² But the model itself applies to all we see and conceive – i.e., to all individual beings and all general modes of being (the so-called universals). Let us then see what characterizes it.

First, it seems natural to think that each moment of reality must have its own identity, different from any other. This is what one inquires about when one asks “τί ἐστίν;” One searches for the definition of something, for what distinguishes it from everything else. The answer then is that which something is (ὅπερ ἐστίν).⁶³³ This is its identity and it has a tautological character: something is what it is and nothing else. It is itself by itself (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό).⁶³⁴ In other words, it is self-contained, simple, atomic, monadic and monoeidetic.

However, the notion of identity raises several problems. First of all, if we associate it with the idea of simplicity (of something being only itself and nothing else), we must deal with the problem that it is not easy to conceive something entirely simple, and even if we admit that such a thing exists, it is not easy to say what relation we could have to it. We find a complex discussion of the question in *Theaetetus*. Socrates argues therein that it is impossible to describe and define a simple moment. We can only have a direct apprehension of it and name it. However, this raises many aporias.⁶³⁵ Moreover, it goes against the structure of

⁶³² See in particular *Euthphr.* 11a-b, *La.* 189e, 190b, *Prt.* 360e-361a, *Grg.* 448e, 462c-d, 463c, *Men.* 71a-b, 86d-e, 100b, *Rep.* 354b-c, 437d ff., *Sph.* 262e f., *Phlb.* 37b ff., *Ep. VII* 342e f. Cp. also *Ti.* 49d-50b.

⁶³³ The expressions τί ἐστίν and ὅπερ ἐστίν appear often in the Platonic corpus. See e.g. *Euthphr.* 13e, *Smp.* 199e, *Rep.* 505e, 524c, *Tht.* 203a, 204e, 210a, *Prm.* 163b, *Phlb.* 54a.

⁶³⁴ For this expression, see e.g. *Phd.* 64c, 66a, 78d, 83b, 100b, *Tht.* 205c, *Sph.* 238c, *Phlb.* 53d.

⁶³⁵ See *Tht.* 201d ff. The passage seems to refer to Antisthenes’ arguments about the impossibility of predicating, defining or contradicting (ἀντιλέγειν) something. If something is simple and we can only name it, then we cannot qualify it, present a description of it (a λόγος) nor can we say anything other than what it is. There can only be qualification and λόγος (both true and false) of composites. For more on Antisthenes’ views, cp. e.g. C. GILLESPIE, *The Logic of Antisthenes*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 26 (1913), 479-500; G. GRUBE, *Antisthenes Was No Logician*, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 81 (1950), 16-27; H. RANKIN, *Irony and Logic. The ἀντιλέγειν Paradox and Antisthenes’ Purpose*, *L’antiquité classique* 43 (1974), 316-320.

δόξαι and knowledge claims. As we saw, our beliefs require us to define things as being in a certain way and not otherwise.

Leaving that aside, it is also very difficult to find a simple moment of pure identity. Things around us are all composed of multiple moments of reality, as it were, and even if we try to reduce these moments to points or atoms, these points or atoms will still be complex – in the sense that they will still have multiple properties (color, dimension, and so on), and each of them will still be next to other points or atoms. This means that there are always some relations that would not be found in a simple identity. Moreover, these moments are integrated in more complex realities (what we normally call things), and the latter determine the whole group of moments subordinated to them. Besides, these complex realities or things are likewise integrated in a complex system of relations with one another.⁶³⁶

This is just a very brief and vague description of how everything we come in contact with is composed of multiple relations. We must assume these complex realities are composed of simple moments with their own identity (their own being thus and not otherwise). If it were not so, everything would be jumbled together. There would only be an indistinct mixture.⁶³⁷ However, any moment of reality we can identify is still part of a system of relations in which the different moments of reality communicate with each other, interact and determine each other, thus producing something more than simple identities. If it were not so, if we only had simple moments of reality deprived of any relation with each other, reality as we know it would collapse. The different moments need to be somehow synthesized, put together or intertwined.

Thus, each moment of reality is not only composed of itself, but of something else too – something extrinsic, non-definitional, that comes in contact with a particular identity and further qualifies it.⁶³⁸ It thus becomes an identity qualified in a certain manner. It has the

⁶³⁶ We could even wonder if all moments of reality are somehow integrated in a global system as the one we see described in Leibniz, Spinoza or the German Idealism, in which all moments are deduced from a first principle and are thus constitutively intertwined. Plato never expressly says this, though at some points he seems to point in this direction – especially when he talks of a ἀρχὴ ἀνυπόθετος in the *Republic* (see 510b and 511b).

⁶³⁷ This would correspond to the Anaxagoras' notion of “ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα” (DK B1), which describes a reality very different from the one we experience. Aristotle emphasizes precisely this in *Metaphysica* Γ, when discussing the so-called principle of contradiction (1005b19 ff.). If what we say and think did not exclude not only its opposite, but also anything whatsoever that differs from it, then we would not be able to posit anything, because any positing would simultaneously imply not positing the same thing. We would say that something is simultaneously “thus and otherwise” – which goes against the structure of our mind and of reality as we experience it. Only by saying that something is “thus and not otherwise” can we mean something (σημαίνειν ἔν) or think something (νοεῖν ἔν). This is the core of Aristotle's analysis, though it involves many other aspects which we will not consider here.

⁶³⁸ In order for this to be possible, the principle of contradiction as presented in the previous footnote must be restricted. In its absolute form, it would be impossible for something not to be itself. But now there is a moment

sphere of its own identity and also a sphere of additional qualification, on account of which it becomes an identity qualified in a certain manner, of some sort, such and such – and it is precisely about this additional qualification that the question “ποῖόν;” inquires.

What was just said applies to all kinds of relations between moments of reality, but Plato usually singles out a particular kind of relation – namely, the relation of predication, in which a particular reality becomes a predicate or an attribute of another reality. The relation between the two moments of reality is thus asymmetric. The attribute is subordinated to that which has the attribute. The latter constitutes thus the central moment of the relation. It establishes the identity of something, whereas the predicate qualifies this identity in a particular way. But the predicate itself must have its own identity. In other words, both terms of the relation must have their own identity in order for one to be predicated of the other and thus qualify it (or render it such and such).

According to Plato, this is how we see things and how the reality around us is structured, and therefore he often calls attention to the fact that identity must precede qualification (or, as we could also say, the question “τί ἐστίν;” precedes the question “ποῖόν ἐστίν;”). If we do not know what something in itself is, we also cannot know how it is qualified.⁶³⁹ This does not mean that we cannot know the identity (i.e., the “τί ἐστίν;”) of the moment of reality that qualifies it. In fact, we need to know it in order to see something as qualified. What we cannot know is the relation of qualification (i.e., that such a predicate qualifies such a reality). Without the reality that is qualified, we have only a free-floating predicate, which is not even a predicate, since we cannot relate it to anything.

Now, it may seem that Plato is arguing that we need to have a perfect definition of something (i.e., we need to fully know its identity) in order for us to know (or even to believe in) any of its predicates. But if that is the case, then his thesis seems to be manifestly false. We do not need to have a perfect knowledge of an entity in order to know (or at least to believe) something about it. Our knowledge of entities is often defective, and yet we can know some of their predicates.⁶⁴⁰ But Plato does not deny this. What Plato does say is that

of reality (i.e., a particular entity) that is somehow within another, as something that accrues to its identity. Aristotle designates this structure as *τι κατὰ τινός*: something that is in relation to or with respect to something else (and consequently is not by itself, *καθ' αὐτό*). See e.g. *Metaphysica* 1041a23 and 1043b31.

⁶³⁹ See in particular *Men.* 71b: “[ΣΩ] (...) ὁ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστίν, πῶς ἂν ὁποῖόν γέ τι εἰδείην; ἢ δοκεῖ σοι οἷόν τε εἶναι, ὅστις Μένωνα μὴ γινώσκει τὸ παράπαν ὅστις ἐστίν, τοῦτον εἰδέναι εἴτε καλὸς εἴτε πλούσιος εἴτε καὶ γενναῖός ἐστιν, εἴτε καὶ τὰναντία τούτων; δοκεῖ σοι οἷόν τ' εἶναι; [ΜΕ] οὐκ ἔμοιγε.”

⁶⁴⁰ The question resembles what is at issue in the so-called Socratic fallacy, which has been object of much discussion in the secondary literature. Socrates defends in Plato's dialogues that one must know a term before applying it to particular instances, but this has been interpreted as meaning that one must possess a full definition of a term in order to recognize its instances. But this likewise seems to be manifestly false – and

when we think about something we tend to subvert the priority of definitional knowledge (or at least definitional belief) by neglecting the identity of the thing we are thinking about and instead focusing on some particular qualification of it, which does not clarify what this thing is. This is what often happens in the dialogues. The discussion tends to gravitate towards whether an entity has a certain predicate or not, and the characters neglect what the entity in question is – as well as the identity of the predicate.⁶⁴¹ The terms of the relation are not considered in detail and so one's contact with the relation between them is itself hazy (since the relation of predication is based on the identity of both terms).

Such a neglect of the identity of beings is only possible because we have at least a tacit knowledge claim about the identity of something – and this means a knowledge claim about both what the subject of predication is and what the predicate in itself is. Even if we do not possess a perfect definition of something, there is an apparent satisfaction of the identity-question and therefore we can concern ourselves with the predication or qualification.⁶⁴² This apparent satisfaction is what Plato criticizes. We have many tacit views about the identity of things and this is what allow us to focus on particular predicates of anything without thinking about the rest. But any predication or qualification presupposes identities. This is how we see any being or how any moment of reality is structured. More precisely, the structure of identity and qualification determines all our views of individual beings – and this is what enables them to be qualified by any predicates.

2.2. The alphabetic structure of reality. Our understanding of particular εἶδη

The description just made fails to consider an essential feature of the predicates that normally qualify individual beings – namely the fact that these predicates are not absolutely unique, but each of them qualify many different beings and still remains the same across all

hence a fallacy. For more on the “Socratic fallacy”, see e.g. P. GEACH, Plato's *Euthyphro*. An Analysis and Commentary, *Monist* 50 (1966), 369-82 (especially 371-373); G. SANTAS, The Socratic Fallacy, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10 (1972), 127-141; J. BEVERSLUIS, Does Socrates Commit the Socratic Fallacy?, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24 (1987), 211-22; G. VLASTOS, Is the “Socratic fallacy” Socratic?, *Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1990), 1-16; W. PRIOR, Plato and the “Socratic Fallacy”, *Phronesis* 43 (1998), 97-113; D. WOLFSORF, The Socratic Fallacy and the Epistemological Priority of Definitional Knowledge, *Apeiron* 37 (2004), 35-67.

⁶⁴¹ This is the case for instance in *Meno*, when discussing ἀρετή (see 71a-b, 86d-e, 100b), or in the *Republic*, when discussing justice (cp. *Rep.* 354b-c).

⁶⁴² In other words, we must believe we know who Meno is (i.e., we must have some, however vague, belief about him) in order to know something about him – otherwise the thing we know would not be a predicate of Meno. Something similar happens in the case of the “Socratic fallacy”. We can recognize instances of a particular term not because we can fully define it, but because we have some (however tacit) claim to understanding it.

its instances. We could therefore say that these predicates are abstract or universal entities, although Plato does not use this language. In this sense, they correspond to the letters of the alphabet, with which the “text” of reality is written. Just as the discovery of the alphabet is based on the perception that the extraordinary vastness of a language can be traced back to very few elements and their different combinations, the discovery of general predicates traces back all complexity of reality to a limited number of predicates. These simple elements are the atoms of reality or the identities (the moments of ὅπερ ἐστίν) that compose the individual beings. They have their own essence, distinct from each other and they are what determines all individual beings. The characters on the dialogues are usually focused on these predicates and try to define them, based on the understanding (or the claim of understanding) that they have of them. Plato designates this object of our understanding in different ways, but the most common and meaningful designation is εἶδος (usually translated as idea or form, but it could also be translated as type, as we will see).⁶⁴³ Plato’s analyses of this notion and what it refers to are very complex and have given rise to many discussions, especially about whether there is a particular theory of the εἶδη and what its main features are. We will leave aside these discussions for now and rather consider the aspects of Plato’s analyses that are more directly relevant for our purpose of defining the kinds of beliefs that we have.

The most central aspect was already mentioned and can be better understood if we consider the other uses of the term εἶδος. The word can be used to designate the outward appearance of something and by extension its inner constitution. It can also be a kind of mental image of something – for instance, the image an artisan has in mind while producing something. In all these usages, it refers to a clear, distinct and well-determined pattern. But the term has also an important meaning in the scientific language, especially in the Hippocratic texts. It designates the different classes, types or sorts of natural constitution or of disease. In this sense, εἶδη are the correlate of a typification or an inventory of the alphabet of reality, which is an essential component of any τέχνη. One’s intervention in reality must be based on knowledge or insight and this requires the identification of repeated configurations or patterns, which will make it possible for one to know what to do in different circumstances. If it were not so, any new reality would be completely unpredictable and the τέχνη would have no knowledge of how it would behave. Therefore, in order for one to

⁶⁴³ Other designations that Plato uses include: ἰδέα, μορφή, γένος, οὐσία, φύσις, δύναμις, παράδειγμα, αὐτὸ τὸ x, and so on.

possess τέχνη, reality must be ordered in some way and one must be able to trace back that order to a few elements that account for it.⁶⁴⁴

Plato's notion of εἶδος refers to something similar. It is a clear pattern or a type of being that can be present in many different individual beings. The contrast between the one pattern and the many instances is essential. As is said in the *Republic*, an εἶδος is something unitary and at the same time something distributed throughout many things, that appears everywhere in connection with bodies or actions.⁶⁴⁵ Different εἶδη constitute the predicates of individual beings, what makes them such and such. The εἶδη are that in virtue of which things are as they. In this sense, they are the causes of individual beings.⁶⁴⁶ Things partake in different εἶδη and are a combination of them. This participation (μέθεξις) makes the individual beings images (εἰδωλα) or imitations (μιμήματα) of the εἶδη.⁶⁴⁷ Individual beings are constitutively referred to εἶδη.

This description, however, is vague and can be understood in different ways. The εἶδη can be regarded as a structure of our subjective way of seeing things or as a structure of reality in itself. The latter raises many questions, some of which Plato himself discusses in the beginning of the *Parmenides*.⁶⁴⁸ What seems to be a fact is that our own mind is constitutively related to these general predicates. This relation is the core of our claims to understanding (οἶεσθαι συνιέναι). Normally we think we understand these predicates (they have some meaning for us) and this is what determines the way we see everything. It is because we have already some understanding of what these predicates are that things can

⁶⁴⁴ For more on the notion of εἶδος, see e.g. C. RITTER, Εἶδος, ιδέα and verwandte Wörter in den Schriften Platons, in IDEM, *Neue Untersuchungen über Platon*, München, Beck, 1910, 228-326; A. TAYLOR, The Words εἶδος, ιδέα in Pre-Platonic Literature, in IDEM, *Varia Socratica*, Oxford, James Parker, 1911; C. GILLESPIE, The Use of εἶδος and ιδέα in Hippocrates, *Classical Quarterly* 6 (1912), 179-203; G. ELSE, The Terminology of Ideas, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 47 (1936), 17-55; H. BALDRY, Plato's "Technical Terms", *The Classical Quarterly* 31 (1937), 141-150; K. von FRITZ, *Philosophie und sprachlicher Ausdruck bei Demokrit, Plato und Aristoteles*, New York/etc., Stechert, 1938, 43-53; C. J. CLASSEN, *Sprachliche Deutung als Triebkraft platonischen und sokratischen Philosophierens*, München, Beck, 1959, 43-71; H. DILLER, Zum Gebrauch von εἶδος und ιδέα in vorplatonischer Zeit, in H.-H. EULNER et al. (eds.), *Medizingeschichte in unserer Zeit*, Stuttgart, Enke, 1971, 23-30; H.-D. SAFFREY, Origine, Usage et Signification du mot ιδέα jusqu'à Platon, in: M. FATTORI & M. BIANCHI (eds.), *Idea*, Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1991, 1-11; A. MOTTE et al. (eds.), *Philosophie de la Forme*. Eidos, Idea, Morphè dans la philosophie grecque des origines à Aristote, Louvain-la-Neuve/etc., Peeters, 2003.

⁶⁴⁵ See *Rep.* 476a: "καὶ περὶ δὴ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν εἰδῶν περὶ ὃ αὐτὸς λόγος, αὐτὸ μὲν ἐν ἑκάστῳ εἶναι, τῆ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἑκάστῳ."

⁶⁴⁶ See the whole discussion about αἴτιον in *Phd.* 95e-102, especially 100c: "φαίνεται γάρ μοι, εἴ τί ἐστιν ἄλλο καλὸν πλὴν αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, οὐδὲ δι' ἐν ἄλλο καλὸν εἶναι ἢ διότι μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ· καὶ πάντα δὴ οὕτως λέγω. τῆ τοιᾶδε αἰτία συγχωρεῖς; συγχωρῶ, ἔφη."

⁶⁴⁷ For individual beings described as εἰδωλα or μιμήματα, see e.g. *Phdr.* 250d5, *Rep.* 520c4, *Ti.* 48e6, 50c5. He also talks about them as things that bear the same name (ὁμώνυμα) as the εἶδη (cp. e.g. *Phd.* 78e2, *Prm.* 133d3, *Ti.* 52a5).

⁶⁴⁸ See 130b-135b.

appear to us as being such and such. Each thing we come in contact with is actually the intertwinement of an individual being and some εἶδη. A pure individual entity, with totally original predicates, is something we cannot represent. Individuality for us is a particular combination of general predicates. In addition, these claims to understanding are also the basis of language, as was seen above.⁶⁴⁹ They allow us to speak about things and understand what others say. But none of this requires us to have an explicit notion or an explicit definition of these εἶδη. In fact, most of our notions are tacit and we do not have an acute relation with them. But without them, things would not appear as they do. Without our (however deficient) understanding of the letters that compose each reality, we would not be able to read the words (i.e., we would not understand what each individual being is – and we would also not be able to talk about it). In this sense, the εἶδη are not an invention of Plato – but rather a fundamental structure of our way of seeing things.

The fact that we can have a deficient understanding of εἶδη points to yet another important feature of Plato's understanding of them. The εἶδη are not simply notions, but the “reality” these notions refer to. Indeed, our notions may vary from person to person or from a moment in our life to the other. But an εἶδος is something permanent that transcends each particular view about it. It is what a general predicate truly is (or a true being, as Plato calls it) and, to this extent, it has a certain kind of objectivity.⁶⁵⁰ But this objectivity raises many questions. The εἶδη are not concrete beings within the world. Plato's presentations may, however, suggest that the εἶδη are part of a different kind of reality – namely, a metaphysical world of forms. But it is not clear how such a world is to be understood. Moreover, these presentations are usually mythical and have a very problematic status, so their meaning is not entirely clear. What is clear, though, is that according to Plato we are always referred to these predicates. Even if our understanding of them is defective, we have already some relation to the perfect understanding of them and an εἶδος is the objective correlate of such an understanding.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁹ See Sect. 1.2c).

⁶⁵⁰ In *Phaedrus*, for instance, Socrates speaks of the εἶδη as οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα (247c7), ὃ ἐστὶν ὄν ὄντως (247e2), τὰ ὄντα ὄντως (247e3), thereby calling the attention to their reality and ontological status, which in a way surpasses even the reality of the beings we normally acknowledge. For more on this, see Chap. 11, Sect. 2.5 below.

⁶⁵¹ Plato expresses this constitutive relation by saying that we have always some recollection of having contemplated the true beings and that this is constitutive of us. No soul could become a human being without this recollection. See *Phdr.* 249b: “οὐ γὰρ ἢ γε μήποτε ἰδοῦσα τὴν ἀλήθειαν εἰς τὸδε ἤξει τὸ σχῆμα [sc. ἄνθρωπος]. δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναιρούμενον (...).”

2.3. The intertwinement of εἶδη and of our beliefs about them

We have already seen two different ways in which Plato denies the atomic character of beings and also of our beliefs. Different moments of reality are intertwined in individual beings and these beings are determined by general predicates. Still, it seems there is one last remnant of simplicity, which in itself is not affected by any intertwinement. If we look at the dialogues, Plato often presents the εἶδη as monoeidetic. They are atomic or self-contained. Each of them has its own identity and as such exists only by itself or in respect of itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό). The complex beings are so in virtue of the participation of εἶδη, but the εἶδη themselves would have no participation in each other. As the young Socrates says in *Parmenides*, it would be wondrous if there could be mixture of predicates in the εἶδη and if they could have contradictory predicates.⁶⁵² However, the Platonic corpus does explore the possibility that the εἶδη may contain different moments or predicates, which differ from the εἶδη they determine and from each other. In this sense, the εἶδη themselves are not simple and Plato's denial of the atomic character of our views and of reality goes still further than what was previously seen. There is also an intertwinement or entanglement of moments at the level of the εἶδη. They interfere in each other's identity. Each of them is not simply itself, but in a way it is also the other. This brings back the problem of how to connect the identity and the qualification of something, now at the level of the general predicates or εἶδη. The moments that were supposed to be the simple identities on which everything is based are now revealed as complex – and this raises the problem of whether there is anything monoeidetic at all that can function as the basis of all reality. Plato, in fact, hints at the possibility that there is an irreducible synthesis or intertwinement even at the core of how we see things or at the core of reality – although it is not clear how such a core synthesis could be understood without presupposing atomic moments of reality, with their own identity. The alternative seems to be something like a systematic identity, but Plato does not develop this possibility in full. What he does is counteract the illusion of simplicity in our way of seeing things, thereby revealing how each of our beliefs is always part of a very complex system.

⁶⁵² See *Prm.* 129b-c: “εἰ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὰ τὰ ὁμοία τις ἀπέφαιεν ἀνόμοια γιγνόμενα ἢ τὰ ἀνόμοια ὁμοια, τέρας ἂν οἶμαι ἦν· εἰ δὲ τὰ τούτων μετέχοντα ἀμφοτέρων ἀμφοτέρα ἀποφαίνει πεπονθότα, οὐδὲν ἔμοιγε, ὦ Ζήνων, ἄτοπον δοκεῖ, οὐδέ γε εἰ ἐν ἅπαντα ἀποφαίνει τις τῶ μετέχειν τοῦ ἐνός καὶ ταῦτα ταῦτα πολλὰ τῶ πλήθους αὐ μετέχειν. ἀλλ' εἰ ὁ ἔστιν ἓν, αὐτὸ τοῦτο πολλὰ ἀποδείξει καὶ αὐτὰ πολλὰ δὴ ἓν, τοῦτο ἤδη θαυμάσομαι. καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ὡσαύτως· εἰ μὲν αὐτὰ τὰ γένη τε καὶ εἶδη ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀποφαίνοι τὰναντία ταῦτα πάθη πάσχοντα, ἄξιον θαυμάζειν· εἰ δ' ἐμὲ ἓν τις ἀποδείξει ὄντα καὶ πολλὰ, τί θαυμαστόν (...).”

We must now consider how this intertwinement of identities is present in the εἶδη themselves, and thus also in our beliefs about them (or our claims of understanding them). The latter aspect is the most important for our analysis. But it is not something of which we can become easily aware, since we tend to be distracted about the alphabet of general predicates and, even we become aware of some of the letters of reality, we tend not to notice the reciprocal relations between these letters. Plato, however, tries to invert this. He discusses how different εἶδη can be intertwined and presents in fact two models of such an intertwinement, which are discussed in more detail in *Philebus* and *Sophist*, respectively.

a) The inner division or unfolding of a single εἶδος in a multiplicity of εἶδη

In *Philebus* 14c ff., Socrates mentions various levels of the problem of the one and many (which in fact works as a matrix for all forms of intertwinement, as we will see below) and then focus on a particular one, which is particularly relevant for determining the value of what is being discussed in this text – namely, pleasure and knowledge or intelligence. Socrates says he will not be considering how a particular being can have many predicates, or how one of the general predicates can be in many individual beings. He is rather concerned with how one of the general predicates can by itself be many, before being instantiated in the potentially infinite individual beings that share this predicate. The unity of a general predicate considered by itself and its infinite instances are thus the two extremes between which Socrates now tries to find some intermediate. He finds such an intermediate at least in some cases. There are εἶδη that admit inner variation, can assume different shapes, despite being always the same. In other words, some classes of being contain subclasses. They are a genus that encompasses different species. Consequently, between unity and the unlimited instances, there is number, which corresponds to the different inner variations of a particular εἶδος.

Socrates says that it is thus necessary to identify how many instances and which sorts can there be of a particular εἶδος (or as he says: ὅποσα ἐστὶ καὶ ὅποῖα, 17b7-8) – or, in other words, which subclasses can there be within a particular class of beings. The identification of these subclasses is, to a certain extent, something we often deal with, but Socrates focus on the fact that it is also necessary to have a τέχνη or an expert knowledge of a certain domain of reality. Socrates provides the example of the letters and sounds.⁶⁵³ In both cases, there is not only the εἶδος “letter” or “sound” and all its instances, but there are also different kinds of

⁶⁵³ See 17a-18d.

letters and sounds, which can themselves be instantiated in many individual beings. We can even identify several intermediate levels, insofar as there are different groups of letters (vowels, semi-vowels, mutes) and also the particular letters within each group. Our knowledge is only complete when we know all these layers and all the diversity. Each subclass refers to the others and to the main class, which in turn includes in itself all this diversity.

A similar kind of inner diversity of an εἶδος is the basis of the method of dichotomies which we find discussed and illustrated throughout the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Each εἶδος is divided or cut into two, in an effort to see all possible specifications, until one can localize an entity and thus define it.⁶⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, this kind of distinction is often found in the dialogues, even when there is no reference to a particular method. For instance, the notion of ἀρετή can be divided into particular ἀρεταί.⁶⁵⁵ Notions such as ἔρωσ and μανία can also be divided into different modalities.⁶⁵⁶ There are many other examples. Divisions are used throughout the corpus and discussed in the passages above mentioned – even if that discussion also leaves some questions unanswered. Plato never indicates, for instance, what constitutes the distinctive mark between the different subclasses. He also never specifies how many chains of classes and subclasses are there and whether they are all part of a single chain or not. However, he does not seem to point in this direction. In *Philebus* he applies the method only to letters, sounds, pleasures and sciences. In *Sophist* and *Statesman* he aims to define two different activities or occupations (which are already very complex εἶδη) and he never applies this method to the most general predicates, as we will see in the following. Hence, the validity of this kind of division seems to be circumscribed.

Regardless of any of this, it still seems to be the case that we often do not think of general predicates in isolation, but rather associate them with other general predicates that are of higher, equal or lower rank within the ontological hierarchy. Plato alludes precisely to this. Although in the dialogues above mentioned (especially in *Philebus*) he is discussing a scientific method that is supposed to bring clarity to how we see things, he is also referring to a structure of general predicates that is reflected in our beliefs. We all have a notion of classes and subclasses of beings, we have beliefs about them (even if mostly tacit), and this is an important element of the syntax of our beliefs.

⁶⁵⁴ For a discussion of this method, see Chap. 6 Sect. 3.3 below.

⁶⁵⁵ Cp. e.g. *La.* 190b ff. and *Prt.* 329c ff.

⁶⁵⁶ See *Smp.* 180c ff., *Phdr.* 244a ff., 265a.

b) The entanglement of the highest genera in the *Sophist*

The fact that many general predicates belong to a system of classes and subclasses does not preclude that some general predicates are still autonomous. However, we find in the *Sophist* a different model of intertwinement of common predicates. This model is put forward in the discussion of the highest genera (the μέγιστα γένη).⁶⁵⁷ According to Plato, these genera are predicates that are present in everything else.⁶⁵⁸ They are like vowels, that are present in every word and bind the letters together.⁶⁵⁹ They are intertwined with the whole of reality. This means that they are the common predicates of the common predicates, and characterize individual beings in many different ways. The relation between these universal predicates and the chains of classes and subclasses, however, is not entirely clear. Plato does not specify whether these are the highest classes or something that lies beyond the entire system of classes and subclasses. It is also not clear whether these highest genera are the basis of all other predicates, which are then deduced from them, or an abstraction derived from the more immediate common predicates. However, they seem to be more than an abstraction. More precisely, they seem to be the matrix for all other predicates and for the whole of reality (even if we admit that the other moments of reality are not entirely derived or deduced from them).

But regardless of their precise relation with the other predicates and the whole of reality, Plato considers the possibility that not even these most general moments of reality (and also of our beliefs) can be understood as simple and monoeidetic. They are intertwined or entangled with each other and none of them can be conceived in isolation. The discussion we find in the text is actually quite elaborate and we will only focus on some of the main aspects. What interests us is not so much the precise identification of the highest genera and their intertwinement, but rather the possibility of there being such an intertwinement in the way we see things. In order to consider this, there are several things we should examine. In the text, the Visitor and Theaetetus are discussing what an image is and how it seems to imply a strange intertwining (συμπλοκή) between being and non-being.⁶⁶⁰ To be sure, an image is something, it exists, but at the same time it includes a negative component that distinguishes it from the thing itself whose image it is. But this raises a complex problem, insofar as non-being seems to be unconceivable by itself. It cannot be pronounced, thought or

⁶⁵⁷ See 251a-259e.

⁶⁵⁸ They correspond to the possibility the Visitor admits in 254b9-c1: “(...) τὰ δὲ καὶ διὰ πάντων οὐδὲν κωλύειν τοῖς πᾶσι κεκοινωνηκέναι (...).”

⁶⁵⁹ See 253a, 253c.

⁶⁶⁰ See 240c: “Κινδυνεύει τοιαύτην τινὰ πεπλέχθαι συμπλοκὴν τὸ μὴ ὄν τῷ ὄντι, καὶ μάλα ἄτοπον.”

accounted for if no predicate accrues to it, especially if it does not exist at all in any way.⁶⁶¹ It thus seems that the predicates “being” and “non-being” must be forced together, which implies that “being” in a way is not and “non-being” in a certain respect is.⁶⁶²

This renders the notion of “non-being” more intelligible, but the problems do not stop here, for the predicate “being” is itself more problematic than it appears to be. Plato discusses several theories about being and ends up focusing on two in particular: the one that reduces it to concrete being (i.e., the sphere of becoming) and the theory that identifies it with eidetic contents that are absolutely permanent and at rest. He then integrates both theories and shows how being always implies movement and rest.⁶⁶³ Regardless of how the argument is developed, what is most relevant for us here is the fact that being is clarified by two other general predicates (namely, movement and rest) and, as the Visitor highlights, these other predicates are themselves different from being (otherwise they would both be being and not two different predicates).

The Visitor and Theaetetus then discuss which degree of mixture should we admit between the different predicates: either a complete mixture of everything, no mixture whatsoever or some things mixing and others not. The Visitor then compares the relation between predicates with the relation between the letters of the alphabet and, as was said, expressly identifies the highest genera to vowels that pervade everything and compose all mixtures. They are in everything – and, in a way, they are also in each other. In order to demonstrate this, the Visitor introduces two further predicates: “same” (ταὐτόν) and “another” (τὸ ἕτερον, which is later identified with “non-being”).⁶⁶⁴ He then shows how these five predicates (being, movement, rest, same, another) are present in one another. In particular, each of them is the same as itself and something other than the others. “Same” and “other” are thus predicated even of “being”, though they cannot be identified with it. In sum, despite their heterogeneity, they are also intrinsically intertwined. The identity of any of them is pervaded by the identity of the others. This breaks up the complete isolation of being and non-being. In themselves, they are also something else. This brings about the absurdity (τέρας) that Socrates considered impossible in *Parmenides*. An εἶδος seems to contain within it a predicate that is different from itself – and in this sense it contradicts itself. It is itself and not itself. This is highly problematic, but we seem to be unable to conceive things in any

⁶⁶¹ For the aporias of non-being, see 237b-239c.

⁶⁶² See 241d: “Τὸν τοῦ πατρὸς Παρμενίδου λόγον ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν ἀμυνομένοις ἔσται βασανίζειν, καὶ βιάζεσθαι τό τε μὴ ὄν ὡς ἔστι κατὰ τι καὶ τὸ ὄν αὖ πάλιν ὡς οὐκ ἔστι πη.”

⁶⁶³ Cp. 246a-249d.

⁶⁶⁴ See 254d ff.

other way. Though the predicates cannot be fused together to the point of becoming indistinct, they cannot be thought in complete isolation either.

Plato characterizes the interrelation between the μέγιστα γένη in this way, and in so far as they are spread through all other predicates and all reality, they reproduce this intertwinement in all things. But Plato's characterization also raises important questions. One of them is whether there are other highest genera that pervade all other predicates and all individual beings. In other texts, predicates such as "one", "many", and "good" seem to apply to all other predicates.⁶⁶⁵ Moreover, one must also wonder in what way these and other predicates (even those that are not highest genera) are intertwined not only with the μέγιστα γένη identified in the *Sophist*, but also with one another. Plato does not develop this, but his analyses suggest that the syntheses between εἶδη are more intricate than we would immediately think. At any rate, this is not just a theoretical problem. This intricateness is also reflected in our beliefs or, more precisely, in the way we understand (or claim to understand) the meaning of the general predicates. Whether we are aware of it or not, our understanding of any notion may imply many other notions and this is something we must be aware of when examining our beliefs.

2.4. The extremely intricate system of beliefs and the eternal disease of discourse, according to the *Philebus*

We saw how, according to *Philebus*, there are at least some εἶδη that are organized in classes and subclasses. However, this is not put forward as an isolated fact. On the contrary, it is presented as a particular modality of a general structure of reality (and also of our views or beliefs, though this is not expressly said in the text). This structure is said to cause many problems and perplexities, which Socrates and Protarchus briefly consider before coming to what we saw above.⁶⁶⁶ In fact, their discussion of this general structure of reality can be read as a summary of all the intertwinement of beliefs we just identified and it also allows us to determine how we normally relate to our beliefs and why we tend not to recognize their complexity.

⁶⁶⁵ For instance, in *Philebus* 14c ff. (a passage we mentioned above and which we will consider in more detail in the following pages) the predicates "one" and "many" seem to be applied to everything. According to the *Republic* (506c-509b), the good illuminates and nurtures all intelligible beings (just like the sun, which is the offspring of the good, and illuminates and nurtures all sensible beings), and this means that it is the cause of truth and knowledge, as well as the source of being for all objects of knowledge. Consequently, even if the formulations are vague, the good seems to somehow pervade all other εἶδη and all reality.

⁶⁶⁶ See 14c ff.

The general structure identified by Socrates is expressed by the assertion that “the many are one and the one many” (and in fact “indefinitely many”, as is said afterwards).⁶⁶⁷ This means that we never come into contact with a multiplicity that is not somehow integrated in an encompassing unity, and likewise we never find a unity or a simple moment of reality that is not in itself composed of multiple moments. Each predicate (one and many) turns out to be in itself its opposite. This structure pervades all things and it can be iterated many times over. The encompassing unity may itself be part of a multiplicity that is comprised by a higher unity. Likewise, any member of a multiplicity can be itself composed of a multiplicity whose elements are themselves multiple. There are, therefore, many levels and the matrix of intertwinement is present in all of them.

When Protarchus hears Socrates’ description of the structure, he immediately thinks of the many predicates that he himself has – especially those that are relative and opposite to each other (tall and short, heavy and light). Socrates adds how one is also composed of different limbs and parts of a body. In both these cases, one being (i.e., one particular identity) is composed of many moments or predicates. But Socrates also says that the difficulties or puzzles caused by these intertwinements are commonplace, childish and trivial.⁶⁶⁸ In other words, they are easy to identify. There are other that are not so accessible, though – namely, those that concern the unities that are not sensible or individual beings (or as Plato says, that “do not come to be and do not perish”). He seems to be referring to the εἶδη (the common predicates or common modes of being) and the examples provided confirm it: he talks of “man as one”, “ox as one”, “the beautiful as one”, and the “good as one”.⁶⁶⁹ Some of these are empirical (man and ox) and more clearly composed of multiple moments, others (such as the beautiful and the good) are sometimes identified in other dialogues as simple and fundamental εἶδη. Socrates is thus referring to all kinds of general modes of being, which raise several questions – especially, whether they really exist (and in what way), whether they are always the same, and how they can be scattered in many instances of the same.⁶⁷⁰ Still, it seems to be a fact that each of them, despite their unity, is also many (and in

⁶⁶⁷ See 14c: “(...) ἐν γὰρ δὴ τὰ πολλὰ εἶναι καὶ τὸ ἐν πολλὰ (...).” See also 14e: “(...) τό τε ἐν ὡς πολλὰ ἐστὶ καὶ ἄπειρα, καὶ τὰ πολλὰ ὡς ἐν μόνον.”

⁶⁶⁸ See 14d: “σὺ μὲν, ὦ Πρωταρχε, εἴρηκας τὰ δεδημευμένα τῶν θαυμαστῶν περὶ τὸ ἐν καὶ πολλὰ, συγκεχωρημένα δὲ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ὑπὸ πάντων ἤδη μὴ δεῖν τῶν τοιούτων ἄπτεσθαι, παιδαριώδη καὶ ῥάδια καὶ σφόδρα τοῖς λόγοις ἐμπόδια ὑπολαμβάνοντων γίνεσθαι (...).”

⁶⁶⁹ See 15a: “(...) ὅταν δέ τις ἕνα ἄνθρωπον ἐπιχειρῇ τίθεσθαι καὶ βούν ἕνα καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἐν καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐν (...).”

⁶⁷⁰ See 15b: “πρῶτον μὲν εἴ τις δεῖ τοιαύτας εἶναι μονάδας ὑπολαμβάνειν ἀληθῶς οὐσας· εἶτα πῶς αὖ ταύτας, μίαν ἐκάστην οὐσαν ἀεὶ τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ μῆτε γένεσιν μῆτε ὄλεθρον προσδεχομένην, ὅμως εἶναι βεβαιότατα μίαν ταύτην; μετὰ δὲ τοῦτ’ ἐν τοῖς γιγνομένοις αὖ καὶ ἀπείροις εἶτε διεσπασμένην καὶ πολλὰ γεγονυῖαν θετέον, εἴθ’

fact indefinitely many), insofar as it can be instantiated many times. But there is more. Socrates proceeds to show how εἶδη by themselves can be multiple, before being instantiated, as we considered above. They can be divided in subordinated εἶδη. The only thing Socrates does not consider is how εἶδη can themselves be predicated of each other, as was shown in the *Sophist*, which also constitutes a form of inner multiplicity.

For all these reasons, everything we ever represent is complex and involved in many intertwinements. Any particular moment of reality brings with it all others – and the same applies to our beliefs. When we represent something, we are always representing much more than that. Everything is part of a very complex system with many layers. Consequently, if we want to expressly think about some particular moment, we have to follow its multiple connections (or at least be tacitly aware of them). But precisely here lies the problem. Socrates talks of an “immortal and ageless condition [πάθος]” of discourse (λόγος).⁶⁷¹ When we try to articulate something or expressly think about something, we tend to focus only on a part and abstract from the rest. We see it as autonomous, though it is still part of the system of which we lose sight. In order to counteract this, we must shift the focus to what was left out. But then we may also absolutize this new focus. According to Socrates, this is precisely what the young like doing in order to cause difficulties. They roll and unroll every statement, and transform the one into many and the converse.⁶⁷² They isolate a moment and then convert it into the opposite. Both moments are always interconnected, but one can de-emphasize one or the other – and if one confronts the two abstract statements of something (one emphasizing unity and the other multiplicity), then there seems to be a contradiction and a particular thing seems inconceivable.

Express beliefs tend to be abstract in this way. They generally do not include the whole system of which we are tacitly aware. This is why it is important to determine as exactly as possible the complexity of things, the number and identity of moments that compose them – in order to have as much as possible an expert knowledge of a particular moment or domain of reality.⁶⁷³ One cannot simply see a unity or an indefinite multiplicity. It

ὅλην αὐτὴν αὐτῆς χωρὶς, ὃ δὴ πάντων ἀδυνατώτατον φαίνοιτ' ἄν, ταῦτόν καὶ ἐν ἅμα ἐν ἐνί τε καὶ πολλοῖς γίγνεσθαι.”

⁶⁷¹ See 15d: “καὶ τοῦτο οὔτε μὴ παύσηται ποτε οὔτε ἤρξατο νῦν, ἀλλ' ἔστι τὸ τοιοῦτον, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνεται, τῶν λόγων αὐτῶν ἀθάνατόν τι καὶ ἀγήρων πάθος ἐν ἡμῖν (...).”

⁶⁷² See 15e: “(...) πάντα κινεῖ λόγον ἄσμενος, τοτὲ μὲν ἐπὶ θάτερα κυκλῶν καὶ συμφύρων εἰς ἓν, τοτὲ δὲ πάλιν ἀνεκλίττων καὶ διαμερίζων (...).”

⁶⁷³ This is precisely what Socrates goes on to illustrate, when talking about such τέχναι as γραμματική and μουσική, in which one must identify all the classes and subclasses of letters and sounds. Cp. Sect. 2.3 a) above.

is necessary to determine the precise composition of something if we are to have some sort of appropriate access to it.

2.5. The special place and role of our beliefs about how to act and how to live

The whole presentation up to this point, by focusing on individual beings and their predicates, may suggest that the intricate system of beliefs that shape our way of seeing things is only concerned with things insofar as they are objects of knowledge or contemplation. However, this does not exhaust the whole of our reality. We also have to act and live, and there is something like a domain of action and life. This domain is not something juxtaposed to the domain of knowledge. They are not two domains side by side. Rather, they are also intertwined and this intertwinement determines our system of beliefs in its entirety. All beliefs (as well as the things they refer to) are located in our life, as it were, and this is reflected in all of them. We will consider this in detail in Parts III and IV, but there are some aspects that we can anticipate, in order to complete the picture we drew in the previous pages.

To begin, the practical domain in the broadest sense (which includes not only our actions, but also our desires and all our life) is underpinned by many beliefs, as was already pointed out before. There are many δόξαι or knowledge claims about what to do and these are also part of a complex system that requires us to determine many other things. For one, we must determine our circumstances and the things around us – which is done on the basis of the complex system of beliefs just considered. But we must also determine what life is all about. We must have an understanding (however tacit it might be) of life's structure and requirements. This also involves common predicates or εἶδη of a practical or ethical kind, that not only determine the practical nature of particular acts or circumstances (for instance whether they are just or not, brave or not), but also constitute the identity or perfect pattern of what we pursue in particular instances. In other words, our understanding of these ethical predicates guides us in life. Amongst them, the form of the good is central, and it always requires a particular identification in the context of our life, as we will see.⁶⁷⁴ This core of practical or life-related beliefs (which constitutes the most important matters or τὰ μέγιστα often mentioned in the dialogues) is then unfolded in a complex system of practical beliefs that determine our course in life and the practical relevance of the individual beings around

⁶⁷⁴ Cp. Chap. 9 Sect. 5.

us.⁶⁷⁵ These practical predicates are an additional layer of qualification of things. They are added to their identity and their non-practical predicates, and they determine our interest in each thing and how we deal with it.

Reality and the beliefs through which we see it are thus composed of cognitive and practical moments. Their coexistence, however, raises several questions about how they relate to each other and to what extent they influence the content of one another. We will discuss this in detail later, but for now we can already see some of the more patent relations of dependence. For one, some practical beliefs directly depend on how we represent our circumstances and things around us, as was said. But they also affect how we see things at large, especially by guiding our interest. This then affects how we look at things, what we pay attention to and how much attention we pay to it. Consequently, it influences the non-practical beliefs we have about these things. For instance, if something is regarded as irrelevant, we will look at it only superficially and we will not focus on it in order to properly ascertain its properties. If a thing is just a little relevant, we may pay some attention to its general aspect, but not to the details (which may well lead us to miss something important about it).

To be sure, this still presupposes a strict separation between practical and non-practical beliefs, as if they were two autonomous domains. But it is also possible that they coincide in some way (for instance, in the sense that some inner property of things may be already understood as related to life). Furthermore, it is not clear whether one kind of belief can generate the other (instead of just affecting or influencing it). The precise relation between our life as a practical task and our way of seeing things is very difficult to define, but we must pay special attention to it if we are to understand the real content and the real extent of our beliefs.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that, from the standpoint of philosophical examination, the beliefs that are related to our life and to how we are to live it are not just some beliefs among others, but they often play a central role – so much so that the examination is sometimes described as an examination of one's life or βίος.⁶⁷⁶ This reflects not only the way the life-related beliefs determine all others, but also how our primary interest is our own life and how to live it (though the fact that we are interested in this may itself be the result of a belief or set of beliefs).

⁶⁷⁵ For the notion of τὰ μέγιστα, see e.g. *Ap.* 22d, *Alc.* I 118a-b, *Grg.* 451d, *Lg.* 688c-d.

⁶⁷⁶ See *Ap.* 39c and *La.* 187e-188a. Cp. Chap. 5, Sect. 3.

3. The vastness of our beliefs and the project of a global examination

In the previous chapter, we considered how philosophical examination is an examination of views, and primarily of those views we endorse or which constitute beliefs of ours. The notion of belief is indeed central and even the views we do not subscribe at a given moment are seen by us as possible beliefs. However, saying that the examination is an examination of beliefs does not ensure that we identify exactly what is at issue. Therefore, we turned our attention to the complexity of our beliefs and considered how diverse and numerous they can be. In a first moment, we considered how most of our beliefs are tacit and thus not in the spotlight of our mind. This makes it all the more difficult to identify and determine them. In a second moment, we considered how most of our beliefs (if not all) are far from being simple or autonomous. They are not juxtaposed to other beliefs, but are combined and intertwined with them. Different beliefs determine each other and we can even talk of a global system of beliefs, in which each particular moment is somehow determined by many (if not even all) others.

The result of these considerations is that philosophical examination as Plato conceives it is much more difficult than we may immediately think, since its object is much more vast and complex than what might be suggested when we talk about views or beliefs. The analyses just made offer a glimpse into this vastness and complexity, but nothing more. Most of the work of identifying our beliefs is still to be done – and this is indeed a necessary stage of philosophical examination. The verification of our beliefs requires us to first identify them or and make an inventory of them. We need not only to verify all our beliefs, but also to identify them all.

To be sure, Plato also identifies some beliefs as playing a special part in our system of beliefs. On the one hand, some beliefs are presuppositions of many others and have a vast influence in the whole system. The beliefs about εἶδη, for instance, determine all their particular instances, and the beliefs about the highest genera determine all εἶδη and all individual beings. In this sense, one should perhaps start with these more general beliefs, since they affect everything else. On the other hand, the practical or life-related beliefs also play a very important role, insofar as they determine our relation with everything, even with our beliefs and the examination of them. These two kinds of belief (the main presuppositions and the life-related beliefs) have thus global influence in our system of beliefs and the

consequences of their examination may likewise be global. Therefore, it seems obvious that we should start with them. But this will not yet conclude the examination, not only because there are more beliefs beyond these (which may also have some importance), but also because our beliefs may contain many defects, which will require us to examine alternate views and perhaps even all possible views about the same matters.⁶⁷⁷ It is difficult to anticipate how extensive the whole process will be, but what we saw in this chapter allows us to understand how naive and inadequate our immediate representation of philosophical examination usually is.

⁶⁷⁷ We will consider this question in Chapters 8 and 9.

CHAPTER 7

The possible defects of our beliefs. The pejorative sense of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι and δόξα

“γνώσει δὲ σαυτὸν ὡς ἀμαθῆς εἶ καὶ παχύς.”

Aristophanes, *Nubes*⁶⁷⁸

We saw that philosophical examination is intrinsically referred to our views or beliefs, which can be very complex and difficult to identify. We do not know exactly how we see things and this complicates the examination. But now we have to consider a different question. As a result of our distraction, our views may contain many limitations or defects of which we are not aware. The task of philosophical examination is to counteract this distraction and detect any limitations or defects in our views, as well as in any views at all we can conceive. For this reason, the conception of the defects of our views (i.e., of our cognitive frailty or finitude) is very important. It is intrinsically connected with the project of philosophical examination and guides it.⁶⁷⁹ In order to properly examine, we must be aware of the kinds of defects we are looking for.

We can determine Plato’s conception of our cognitive defects by returning to the notions of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι and δόξα, and completing the analysis of Chapter II. As was said, both notions can be used in a more neutral sense, to characterize the object being examined, without anticipating the outcome of the examination; but they can also be used, in a pejorative sense, to say that some view of ours is nothing more than a mere οἶσθαι εἰδέναι or a mere δόξα. In this case, these notions are contrasted with actual knowledge and denote a deviation or distortion in our access to things, which is ascertained precisely by philosophical examination. We will now discuss this negative sense of both notions and what it entails. We will consider and systematize the different contexts in which these notions are used in the negative sense, starting with οἶσθαι εἰδέναι, whose usage is more generic. Afterwards we will see the usage and analysis of the term δόξα in Plato, which points in a more definite

⁶⁷⁸ See v. 842.

⁶⁷⁹ The conception of our cognitive defects will likewise play an important role in the description of the unexamined life, which is precisely characterized by these defects, as will be shown in Chap. 16 Sect. 5.

direction and gives us a more precise idea of the kind of defects that usually characterize our views.

1. The description of the cognitive defects associated with the notion of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι

As we have seen, our being is pervaded by innumerable knowledge claims. They shape our relation to everything. However, these knowledge claims can be (and in many cases are) unfounded or false. They can be no more than a knowledge claim without actual knowledge – or, as Plato says, a οἶσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς.⁶⁸⁰ In that case, we only think we know, but we actually do not. We have only a vain or empty semblance of knowledge (a μάταιος δοξοσοφία), which does not allow us to see things as they are.⁶⁸¹ On the contrary, it distorts things. The fact that this is possible – that one may be convinced of something that is not the case – requires elucidation. Beings that are ignorant of everything and have no idea of anything whatsoever are unable to believe that they know something when they do not. Likewise, an omniscient being would be impervious to false knowledge claims. The possibility of false knowledge claims lies somewhere in between. It is an intermediate state between these two extremes. But what does it amount to?

If one tries to imagine an intermediate state between the two possibilities just mentioned, one will probably think of a state in which one knows some things (either explicitly or implicitly) and does not know others, in such a way that the relation with any particular content is unambiguous – one either knows it or not. But this absolute separation of knowledge and ignorance cannot account for the mistake that is at the center of any false knowledge claim. In order to make such a mistake, we need to have a diagnosis of our cognitive state. This self-diagnosis is something we often make (either expressly or tacitly)

⁶⁸⁰ Plato uses many formulations to express this. Aside from οἶσθαι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς (*Ap.* 21d), we can also find expressions such as: “δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφὸς ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, εἶναι δ’ οὐ” (*Ap.* 21c); “οἴοιτο μὲν εἶναι σοφός, εἶη δ’ οὐ” (*ibidem*); “οἰομένων καὶ τᾶλλα σοφωτάτων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἃ οὐκ ἦσαν” (22c); “οἰομένων μὲν εἰδέναι τι ἀνθρώπων, εἰδόντων δὲ ὀλίγα ἢ οὐδέν” (23c); “οἰόμενος σοφὸς εἶναι οὐκ ὦν” (29a); “δοκεῖν σοφὸν εἶναι μὴ ὄντα” (*ibidem*); “δοκεῖν εἰδέναι ἔστιν ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν” (*ibidem*); “οἰόμενος μὲν τι εἰδέναι, εἰδὼς δὲ μὴ” (*Chrm.* 166d); “οἶεται μὲν εἰδέναι, οἶδεν δ’ οὐ” (167a); “ἠγούμενοι μὴ εἰδέναι ἃ μὴ ἴσασιν” (*Ly.* 218b); “οἶσθαι νοῦν ἔχειν (...) οὐκ ἔχοντα” (*Cra.* 406c); “οἰησόμεθα εἰδέναι ὃ μὴδαμῆ ἴσμεν” (*Tht.* 187c); “οὐκ οἰόμενος εἰδέναι ἃ μὴ οἶσθα” (*Tht.* 210c); “τὸ μὴ κατειδόμενα τι δοκεῖν εἰδέναι” (*Sph.* 229c); “δοξάζωμεν μανθάνειν μὲν τὰ λεγόμενα παρ’ ἡμῶν, τὸ δὲ τούτου γίγνηται πᾶν τούναντίον” (244a-b); “οἱ περὶ τὰ πολιτικά κατ’ οὐδὲν γιγνώσκοντες ἠγούνηται κατὰ πάντα σαφέστατα πασῶν ἐπιστημῶν ταύτην εἰληφέναι” (*Plt.* 302b); “οὐκ εἰδότες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν οὐδέν, οἰόμεθα τὰ πάντα εἰδέναι” (*Lg.* 732a-b); “ὡς εἰδὼς παντελῶς περὶ ἃ μὴδαμῶς οἶδεν” (863c).

⁶⁸¹ The expression appears in *Sph.* 231b6, in a passage that will be analyzed in Chap. 8. For the notions of δοξοσοφία or δοξοσοφός, see also *Phdr.* 275b, *Phlb.* 42a, 42d.

with respect to many things. We regard ourselves as knowing or as not knowing things.⁶⁸² In the case of a knowledge claim, we regard ourselves as being in a good cognitive state (i.e., as a state of knowledge) with respect to something. However, this diagnosis (which is in most instances automatic) is not infallible and so it can make us think we know something when we do not. We are then related to something and take this relation to reveal the thing as it is, but it eludes our grasp nonetheless.

There are, thus, three possible forms of ignorance. First, there is the one initially mentioned – namely, not having any idea whatsoever of something (i.e., not being aware of its existence at all). Secondly, one can have some notion that there is something and, at the same time, be aware that one does not know it. In this case, we have some relation to the object we are ignorant of, but we regard this relation as one of ignorance. We recognize the thing is hidden from us.⁶⁸³ Finally, there is the possibility of having a false knowledge claim. We then think we know and are totally wrong about it. This is a very particular form of ignorance, since it disguises itself as its opposite. As Plato says in the *Laws* (863c-d), it is a form of double ignorance (in contrast with the other forms of ignorance, which are simple). One is ignorant of something and one is ignorant of this ignorance too, instead experiencing it as knowledge.⁶⁸⁴ This in turn increases the distance from what things are. One is twice removed from them.

We find a more precise discussion of the matter in *Sophist* 226b-231b. We will analyze the whole passage in the following chapter, but we can briefly anticipate some central aspects here. Plato says that the soul sets for itself as a target the truth about beings, and he also says that the soul makes different assaults (ὄρμαί) to try to reach them. These assaults can hit the target (and thus produce knowledge) or they can swerve away from the

⁶⁸² These are in fact only two extreme possibilities. We can also regard ourselves as having a more or less doubtful view about something or we can be unsure about our cognitive state. These other possibilities, however, are not our usual cognitive state nor are they essential to explain what a false knowledge claim is and for that reason we will not consider them here.

⁶⁸³ This is the state we find ourselves with respect to many things that we recognize as being beyond our understanding – especially technical matters. Cp. e.g. *Alc. I* 117b-c, where Socrates says to Alcibiades that, with respect to these matters, “οὐκ οἶει αὐτὸ ἐπίστασθαι οὐκ ἐπιστάμενος”, “ἂ μὴ ἐπίστασαι, γινώσκεις δὲ ὅτι οὐκ ἐπίστασαι”, “οἶσθα δὴπου ὅτι οὐκ οἶσθα”. This is also the state characters are often reduced to after being submitted to Socrates’ cross-examination. It is, for instance, the state the slave in *Meno* finds himself in after being cross-examined, according to Socrates: “ὥσπερ οὐκ οἶδεν, οὐδ’ οἶεται εἰδέναι” (84b). He and other characters are no longer deluded about themselves, they are no longer ignorant of themselves, they become aware of their actual state. In this sense, they come to resemble Socrates, who in the *Apology* describes his general attitude as “οὗτος μὲν οἶεται τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἶομαι” (21d) or “ἂ μὴ οἶδα οὐδὲ οἶομαι εἰδέναι” (*ibidem*).

⁶⁸⁴ Or, in Plato’s formulation, such ignorance happens “ὅταν ἀμαθαίνῃ τις μὴ μόνον ἀγνοίᾳ συνεχόμενος ἀλλὰ καὶ δόξῃ σοφίας, ὡς εἰδώς παντελῶς περὶ ἂ μηδαμῶς οἶδεν”.

target and miss it.⁶⁸⁵ In the case of such a deflection (παραφορά), one is ignorant of things or does not reach them. However, it is possible for one to miss and still believe that the target was hit.⁶⁸⁶ In such a case, one loses sight not only of what the thing is, but also of the fact that one lets it escape. One does not see one's state and this produces an obstruction of the thing itself far greater than if one had simply missed it. Plato carries the idea of deflection even further and associates false knowledge claims with παραφροσύνη. The word means madness, which is understood as a losing of one's mind (*dementia*). According to Plato, a false knowledge claim is a form of madness – i.e., of living in an illusory reality.⁶⁸⁷

Also particularly telling in this passage is the fact that Plato designates this form of ignorance as ἀμαθία. In Greek, this word is a strong insult. It means something like stupidity, folly, thickheadedness, slow-wittedness or boorishness. It refers to a form of ignorance that is due to one's incompetence or ineptitude. One should know the matter in question – either because it is easy or because it is very important and one should have made the effort to know it.⁶⁸⁸ Not knowing it is disgraceful, and Plato even increases this component of reproach by adding the adjective ἐπονείδιστος. False knowledge claims are a blameworthy stupidity.⁶⁸⁹ This does not imply that one should know the objects to which the knowledge claims refer. What one should know is that one has merely a knowledge claim and no actual knowledge (or at the very least one should doubt whether one actually knows the thing in question). The very fact that we are convinced of knowing it is what constitutes this stupidity.⁶⁹⁰ Stupid

⁶⁸⁵ See 228c: “ὅς’ ἂν κινήσεως μετασχόντα καὶ σκοπόν τινα θέμενα πειρώμενα τούτου τυγχάνειν καθ’ ἑκάστην ὁρμὴν παράφορα αὐτοῦ γίγνηται καὶ ἀποτυγχάνη (...)”. See also 228c-d: “τό γε μὴν ἀγνοεῖν ἐστὶν ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὁρμωμένης [228δ] ψυχῆς, παραφόρου συνέσεως γιγνομένης, οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν παραφροσύνη.” This idea of the soul setting for itself a target is in keeping with the description of δόξα as a shooting directed at what things are. See Chap. 5 Sect. 1.5.

⁶⁸⁶ This is what corresponds to the notion of τὸ μὴ κατειδότα τι δοκεῖν εἶδέναι, which appears in 229c.

⁶⁸⁷ For more on this, see Chap. 8 Sect. 1.2 below.

⁶⁸⁸ In some passages, stupidity is referred to the most important things in life – which are precisely those whose ignorance is more censurable. See e.g. *Alc. I* 118a-b and *Prt.* 358c4-5. The passage in *Alc. I* is also relevant for another reason. Socrates hesitates to tell Alcibiades that he is in a state of extreme ἀμαθία because of the very negative charge of the word. For more on the notion of ἀμαθία, see e.g. A. VERRALL (ed.), *The Medea of Euripides*, London, Macmillan, 1881, ad 223; R. ARCHER-HIND (ed.), *The Timaeus of Plato*, London, Macmillan & Co, 1888, ad 86b; F. CORNFORD, *Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato* Translated with a Running Commentary, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937, re-ed. 1956, 346f.; E. DODDS (ed.), *Plato – Gorgias*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, ad 477b7; M. J. O'BRIEN, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1967, 24, 26, 186-197; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 278f.; F. HIERONYMUS, *Μελέτη. Übung, Lernen und angrenzende Begriffe*, vol. 2, Basel, Kung und Ochsé, 1970, 12; D. TARRANT, *The Hippias Major*. Attributed to Plato, New York, Arno Press, 1976, ad 290e; C. GOODEY, Mental Disabilities and Human Values in Plato's Late Dialogues, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 74 (1992), 26-42.

⁶⁸⁹ See *Ap.* 29b and *Alc. I* 118a.

⁶⁹⁰ Indeed, although it is not experienced as such, our false knowledge claims have a component of pretense or of giving oneself airs. They are a pretense or affectation of knowledge (a προσποιεῖσθαι εἶδέναι, as Plato says

ignorance or ἀμαθία is thus a very specific cognitive state, which differs greatly both from simple ignorance (either conscious or unconscious) and from knowledge. When we have false knowledge claims, we do not suspect at all that we might not know. A false knowledge claim is experienced as knowledge, though it is in fact ignorance – and, in this sense, it is a form of qualified or aggravated ignorance.

This is the most central aspect of the notion of false knowledge claim, but now we must determine in more detail the kind of defects that are associated with this notion and how it can characterize our way of seeing things.

1.1. The formal or structural defect of οἶσθαι εἰδέναι

To begin with, the very structure of a knowledge claim (of thinking one knows) is defective. This structural defect is not what Plato primarily stresses when he talks about knowledge claims, but it is always implied in his analyses, so it is important to isolate and define it.

We saw that in and out of itself, a knowledge claim is neutral regarding its truth or falsehood. From the standpoint of philosophical examination, we can either be ignorant of the thing we think we know or we can actually know it. The only sure thing is that we have a claim. We proclaim our representation of something (sc. the way we determine it, the “thus” we posit) as a perfect access to what this thing is. However, this proclamation by itself is neutral with respect to its truth value. It may well be false.

Plato, by emphasizing that it is a claim (something we think or believe), strongly dissociates it from actual knowledge, which would exclude the possibility of any defect. If we know something, this something cannot be different from what we know it to be. But a knowledge claim cannot guarantee that the way it sees things is appropriate. It cannot justify its claim in the way effective knowledge is supposed to be able to do. In fact, usually none of our knowledge claims is the result of the most stringent rational process. We are not aware of the reasons for things being as they are, we do not possess a full insight into them, and so we cannot really justify any of our claims. We cannot justify that it is thus and not otherwise. We are not even sure of what such a justification would amount to. Our knowledge claims have

for instance in *Ap.* 23d and *Chrm.* 173b). One passes oneself off for something one is not (namely, knowledgeable). One may do so consciously (as in *Chrm.* 155b), but it can also be (and often is) an unconscious act, which includes a component of self-deception that we will discuss later – see Chap. 17, Sect. 3.2 c).

an insufficient basis or a deficient foundation and this means they have a deficient contact with their object.

It is true that a knowledge claim may be right – i.e., the thing may be as we represent it. In this sense, we may have knowledge. But this is not knowledge in the fullest sense of the word. It is not something of which we can be completely sure without adding something else to the claim. Moreover, in our normal state we cannot distinguish knowledge from mere knowledge claims. We cannot draw the boundary between what we actually know and what we only think we know. This means that even if we have some kind of knowledge (if we get something right), we relate to it in the mode of a knowledge claim. This knowledge claim may get it right and somehow know something, but not in the proper sense of the word. We do not have enough reasons to be sure about the way we see things. Objectively seen, what we have is no more than a conjecture – but we take it as knowledge. This is a hasty or rash judgment. We are satisfied with it and need not inquire any further. We accept some uncertain view as knowledge, which requires us not to see or to forget the possibility of it being otherwise. At the very least we must not take this possibility seriously. We do not experience it as a weakness – otherwise, if we were conscious of its frailty, we would probably lose our conviction. But we do not. We are fully convinced and need no sufficient proof.

Our representation of things may thus be full of errors or distortions, even if we normally do not think about this possibility. The defective form of knowledge claims (i.e., the fact that they have false credentials) opens the door to this. The formal defect can translate into many material defects.⁶⁹¹ Our views can be mere subjective views, valid only for ourselves, but having no contact with reality. All our way of seeing things may be wrong from top to bottom. This is a possibility that our knowledge claims, on account of their formal limitation or defect, cannot exclude.

The problem, however, can be even more serious. The formal defect is a defect in how we determine our cognitive condition. We do not notice the lack of grounds for our belief.

⁶⁹¹ The distinction here mentioned between a formal and a material component of our knowledge claims (and thus the distinction between formal and material defects) is inspired by Kant's analysis of judgment or knowledge, especially by his discussion of prejudices (*Vorurtheile*). In his reflections on logic (I. KANT, *Logik*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16, Berlin/Leipzig, De Gruyter, 1924), Kant uses several times the distinction between formal and material in this sense. See in particular reflections 1971, 2152, 2562, 2677. Reflection 2562 is of particular interest. Kant says: "Praeiudicium est vitium cognitionis formale." This is precisely what is at issue in Plato. Knowledge claims are prejudices or prejudgements, since the latter are what happens "[w]enn aus einem unzureichenden Grunde ohne Untersuchung etwas vor wahr gehalten wird" (see Reflection 2515). For Kant's analysis of prejudices or "prejudgments", see Reflections 2515ff.

But does this also of necessity imply a defect in our representation of the object? The modal defect raises the question of whether we can have an imperfect access to something that is somehow right – or whether this modal imperfection (the unjustified certainty of a thesis or notion) is by itself a form of deviation. What precisely does a knowledge claim lack in comparison with simple and perfect knowledge? What results from the lack of justification? And what changes when we confirm a belief and exclude the possibility of it being false?

But perhaps we cannot just ask these questions in general, about all knowledge claims. Indeed, it must be borne in mind that knowledge claims can be mainly of two kinds, as we already mentioned. They can concern either the attribution of predicates or εἶδη (whether we distribute them correctly or not) or the way we understand these predicates. In the first kind, we think we attribute a predicate correctly (that there is a διανεμειν ὀρθῶς), whereas in the second kind we believe we comprehend clearly what some predicate is (what Plato calls οἶσθαι συνιέναι). This means that there are also two kinds of distortion or deviation. On the one hand, we may make an error (ἀμαρτάνειν) in attributing a predicate, but fully understand the predicate we are attributing; on the other hand, we may either have no more than a hazy understanding of some notion (i.e., it may be unclear or ἀσαφής to us) or we may misunderstand it altogether. Conversely, one may be right about the attribution of a predicate without having sufficient grounds for it (in which case the only problem is that we cannot exclude that it is otherwise). As to the claim to understanding, things are more complicated. Being right about the meaning of a predicate without having a full access to it (without being absolutely clear about it) seems to necessarily imply some form of deviation. We do not fully understand the eidetic content at issue.⁶⁹² This is particularly important if we consider that this second kind of knowledge claims (the claims to understanding) are what Plato has primarily in mind, not only because they affect all attributions, but also because we have many strong beliefs in this domain and they often have very little justification.

At any rate, it seems to be certain that our beliefs often (if not always) contain a formal defect, which corresponds to the tendency to be certain about our views without having sufficient grounds for it. This tendency is what philosophical examination is supposed to invert. It must ask for the credentials of our knowledge claims, confirm the true ones and disavow the false ones (either because things are not as they represent them or because we cannot confirm them as actual knowledge), thus bringing us to a state in which we only think

⁶⁹² We will see this problem in more detail when we discuss the pejorative sense of δόξα, which is associated precisely with this kind of defect. See Sects. 2.3 and 2.4 below.

we know what we actually know.⁶⁹³ This overcomes the formal defect and closes the door to any material defect (to any false knowledge claims). Our knowledge claims can then become more than claims, they can become effective knowledge, and we also become aware of our ignorance with respect to that we do not fully know. This may entail the loss of many beliefs, but it is important to remark that the state of conscious ignorance also implies a reduction of our deviation from what things are and thus brings us closer to them.⁶⁹⁴ But let us leave this question aside for now.

1.2. The material defect of our οἶσθαι εἰδέναι. The way of exposing false conceit of knowledge in the Platonic corpus

According to Plato's writings, the problem with our knowledge claims is not only that we have no reason to exclude that they are false (which, by itself, would be enough to raise suspicion about them). If this were the case, it could very well happen that examination would confirm that we all our beliefs (whether they refer to the attribution of predicates or the understanding of them) get it right and are true. But this is not what we find in the dialogues. The defects presented and discussed in them are not simply formal or modal. Plato documents many errors and much confusion or incomprehension. The characters' beliefs collapse under close inspection and are revealed as nothing more than vain conceit of knowledge. One is ignorant of many things and one is also ignorant of the fact that one is ignorant.

What we must now consider is how false or baseless knowledge claims are identified, displayed or documented in the dialogues, and what this display reveals about our knowledge claims and their possible defects.⁶⁹⁵ This will also give us a better idea of how the examination is performed. Particularly relevant in this context are the characters' reactions to

⁶⁹³ Plato points explicitly to this in several passages. For instance, in *Sph.* 230c3-4 he describes the result of the examination as a state of “ταῦτα ἡγούμενον ἅπερ οἶδεν εἰδέναι μόνα, πλείω δὲ μή”. For this, however, one needs to absolutely disavow one's defective views and abandon all commitment to them, even at the tacit level, which may prove to be more difficult than we think (as we will see in Chap. 8, Sects. 3.3 and 3.4).

⁶⁹⁴ It is true that there is also the risk of abandoning correct beliefs only because we cannot prove them. This is a problem we will have to return later, when considering the usefulness and the risks of philosophical examination – see Chap. 20, Sect. 3.5 below. But in any case the fact that they are beliefs (i.e., knowledge claims) already implies some defect, and by putting them in question we can achieve a better and more solid view about the matters at issue.

⁶⁹⁵ The documentation of material defects in our knowledge claims (i.e., of the fact that we have at least some vain conceit of knowledge) is not something to which we as readers should be indifferent. These defects affect the characters' views, but they can likewise affect ours, either because our views are similar to theirs or because, despite all the differences, they are likewise defective. This is something we have to verify in ourselves.

their apparent displays of ἀμαθία. In general, there are two parties involved. On the one hand, we have the examiner (usually Socrates), who elicits statements, guides the examination and often reflects about its course and its outcome. On the other hand, there is the examinee, who gives answers and reacts to what is happening – often resisting the apparent result of the examination (i.e., the refutation of one’s view and the way this appears to expose one’s stupid ignorance or ἀμαθία). Thus, Socrates and the examinee may have different interpretations of the course of examination and its results. This suggests that what is revealed by examination is actually ambiguous. But is it really so? How should we interpret what happens in these examinations? What is the value of the supposed displays of stupid ignorance and of the examinee’s reaction to these displays?

a) Ways of exposing false knowledge claims in the *corpus*

We find in the *corpus* different ways of exposing (or attempting to expose) that someone possesses false knowledge claims. The different processes employed are not equally successful in displaying someone’s lack of knowledge (especially from the standpoint of the characters being refuted), but they all strongly suggest that there is something seriously wrong with the characters’ views. We will discuss afterwards what these attempts appear to prove and what they actually prove. But for now we will consider the very attempts to expose someone’s false conceit of knowledge.

One possible way of exhibiting or exposing someone’s false conceit of knowledge is related to one’s actions (one’s πράξεις or ἔργα) or one’s way of life. This is mentioned or alluded to in the texts several times. Some limitations or defects in the practical domain betray the fact that there are defects or distortions in our knowledge claims. This is possible because our actions and the way we lead our life are based in knowledge claims, as we considered before.⁶⁹⁶ This means that these knowledge claims are accompanied by a claim to practical efficiency and, consequently, any mistake or failure (ἀμάρτημα) in our action (i.e., any missing the target of action) must therefore be due to our lacking the knowledge or insight we thought we had.⁶⁹⁷ In other words, practical errors refute one’s knowledge claims.

⁶⁹⁶ See Chap. 6, Sect. 1.2a).

⁶⁹⁷ This is emphasized by Plato in many occasions. See e.g. *Alc. I* 117d ff. and *Rep.* 505d ff. In *Laws* 863c-d, it seems to be admitted that some practical errors can be owed to simple ignorance (probably because one was forced to act despite lacking any conviction), but these are nonetheless very small errors. All the major blunders are caused by the double ignorance or the vain conceit of knowledge. Furthermore, Plato emphasizes several times that if one had true insight into a certain reality or domain of reality (in particular if one had a τέχνη

This description, however, is somewhat imprecise. According to the corpus, the ways of exposing one's false conceit of knowledge by referring to what happens in the practical domain are actually diverse and complex. Sometimes Socrates points to the possibility of one not being able to present the credentials of one's knowledge: the works one has done, one's teacher, and one's students.⁶⁹⁸ Other times we may come to realize that we have concerned ourselves with the wrong things (i.e., we may have a wrong view about what matters in life) and have thus neglected what matters the most – in particular, ourselves.⁶⁹⁹ The result of this neglect is that we lack excellence or virtue (ἀρετή). Cowardice, injustice, lack of restraint and stupidity can therefore be interpreted as a result of false knowledge claims. In other words, our whole character may prove our cognitive competence or incompetence, according to Plato.⁷⁰⁰ But the proof of our incompetence may also concern what happens in a particular moment. We may notice an inner conflict in our action and we may be pulled by different drives. We may even seem to act against our better judgment and lack any control of our actions. According to Plato, this apparent ἀκράτεια implies that there are different beliefs in us (either in different moments or at the same time), forcing us in different directions. Consequently, at least one of these beliefs must be wrong.⁷⁰¹ Finally, even if nothing goes manifestly wrong in what we do, we may still face difficulties if we are called to account for our action and everything that is relevant for determining it.⁷⁰² At best, we possess a correct δόξα about it, without full knowledge – and this is problematic, because it is equivalent to a form of divine inspiration or madness, of which one has no control. One gets it right but one does not know how. In some cases, one cannot even be sure. Getting it right might have been a matter of chance and not of correct judgment.⁷⁰³ The inability to explain one's actions thus reveals that there is some defect in our knowledge claims, some degree of not grasping things as they are.

regarding something), one would not be able to fail in this respect (at least if one would act according to the precepts of this τέχνη). See e.g. *Chrm.* 171d ff. and *Rep.* 340d ff.

⁶⁹⁸ Cp. in particular *La.* 185b ff.

⁶⁹⁹ This is what Socrates says he usually shows others (cp. *Ap.* 29d ff.) and it is what Alcibiades comes to realize in *Alc. I* 118a ff.

⁷⁰⁰ This association between all forms of κακία and false knowledge claims is implied in the equation of ἀρετή with knowledge (cp. e.g. *La.* 199c-e, *Men.* 86d ff., *Prt.* 329c ff.) and in the fact that we can only act defectively (κακῶς) if we have defective knowledge claims (as is said for instance in *Alc. I* 117a ff.).

⁷⁰¹ Cp. e.g. *Prt.* 352b ff. We will not discuss here whether or not Plato changed his understanding of the phenomenon at issue. For a discussion of Plato's analysis of ἀκράτεια, cp. Chap. 12, Sect. 5.5 and Chap. 13, Sect. 5.3 below.

⁷⁰² The whole *Euthyphro*, for instance, is an illustration of how difficult it may be to explain one's intended action.

⁷⁰³ For more on the notion of correct δόξα, see Sect. 2.3 below.

All these practical problems demonstrate (or at least strongly suggest) that we do not know exactly what we are doing. But all these demonstrations are problematic, since our practical shortcomings can be more or less easy to identify (and usually we identify them only in retrospect). In addition, even if we identify them, we may not see exactly where we failed (i.e., which particular view was wrong). We can only know that something must be wrong with our views. Besides, we depend on the “theoretical” reflection (i.e., the explicit consideration or focusing of things) in order to identify and interpret the practical moments that expose one’s false knowledge claims. This means that the theoretical domain and the way one’s stupid ignorance is exposed therein are absolutely decisive.

So how are our defective knowledge claims exposed in the “theoretical” domain – i.e., the domain of rational discussion (λόγος)? If we look at the dialogues, we see that usually someone is required to present and explain his view about something. Before being questioned, one perhaps did not think about whether one knew something or not. Usually we all have the idea that we know enough, without being fully aware of all the elements we know. We are not concerned with searching for more. This is also the state the characters are often in. But when they are questioned about something, they are confident they can articulate their views and explain them. As we have seen, this intellectual bravado is a consequence of the claim to knowledge as such. One acts as knowledgeable, and this implies mastering the knowledge one has and being able to prove one has it. If we cannot prove it then something may be rotten in our set of knowledge claims.

But before discussing the meaning of this failure, let us see how it is illustrated in the corpus. The characters’ ἀμαθία is often exposed and the process of doing so has a general pattern, which does not exclude some important differences, especially between the way of examining one’s attribution of predications and the way of examining the understanding one has of these predicates. We will pay some attention to these differences, but since the examination in the texts often concerns the claims to understanding (insofar as the characters are usually called to define some important notion, either from the start, or because some other discussion leads them to this), we will pay special attention to the particular features of this second kind of examination.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰⁴ This does not mean that attributions are not important. In fact, from the standpoint of life, the attribution of predicates is essential, since it allows to define things and what to do. Plato recognizes this, but he is well aware of how these attributions always hinge on our understanding of the notions we attribute to particular beings in order to define them.

When examining a claim to understanding, the first problem usually is the examinee's inability to comprehend the question that is being posed to him. He does not comprehend that Socrates is asking for a definition of a particular notion and not an enumeration of the different things it applies to.⁷⁰⁵ The examinee may even be unaware that he has a notion (i.e., a certain understanding) of a particular predicate – despite the fact that he is constantly employing it. Other times, someone uses the term that is to be defined in the definition itself.⁷⁰⁶ So the examination (and in particular the examination of one's notions) requires some clarification. Once one understands the question, one tries to identify and articulate one's view.⁷⁰⁷

After identifying and presenting one's understanding (or the attribution of a particular predicate to something), one may be convinced that one's view is adequate and clear enough. The examiner, however, does not easily accept it. He resists and asks further questions. He requires clarification about what was said, and inquires especially about the presuppositions (ὑποθέσεις) and the consequences (τὰ συμβαίνοντα) of a particular view. He inquires likewise about the examinee's views in other matters closely related to these (either about different things or notions or about some particular thing being an instance of a concept or not – which will actually test the extension of the definition put forward). He can then examine these other views and their precise content. This is important since our first and usual contact with our views is distracted and unaware of their precise content – and given the interconnection of our views, it is not possible to have an appropriate access to any of them without seeing other views with which they are intertwined.

Throughout the whole process, the examiner requires the assent of the examinee. They must establish agreements (ὁμολογία) and the examinee must stand by them, since the subsequent examination will be based on these previous agreements. The affirmation of views and their unfolding ends up revealing inconsistencies or contradictions either within a particular knowledge claim (regarding its content and what is presupposed or entailed by this content) or between different knowledge claims one holds at the same time and their respective implications. In many cases, this implies the presentation of occurrences of a notion that do not fit the definition put forward, or also things that fit the definition, but are not accepted as instances of the notion – thus implying that one actually has a different

⁷⁰⁵ Cp. e.g. *Men.* 71d ff., *Th.* 146c ff.

⁷⁰⁶ See e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 287e. The last attempted definition of knowledge in *Theaetetus* also turns out to imply the same kind of mistake. Cp. 209d ff.

⁷⁰⁷ In comparison, the examination of the attribution of predicates seems simpler. One presupposes the understanding of one or several notions and simply has to affirm or deny the attribution.

understanding of the notion, which is either broader or narrower.⁷⁰⁸ In other cases, the conflict is between views in different matters that have incompatible consequences.⁷⁰⁹ At any rate, as the Visitor says in the *Sophist* (in a passage we will consider in detail in the following chapter), one subscribes views that “are simultaneously contrary to themselves about the same things in regard to the same things in the same respects”.⁷¹⁰ This is what exhibits the falsity of one’s views. The impossibility of contradiction seems to be a constitutive structure of our mind.⁷¹¹ Any view must define things as being in a particular way and not otherwise. Knowledge requires a clear and unambiguous content. When this is not the case, when the views put forward turn out to posit incompatible contents, one is not thinking anything precise by them. They lack inner harmony or συμφωνεῖν – i.e., they are in dissonance (διαφωνεῖν) or disharmony and this turns one’s statements into a meaningless talk. This is what is revealed by the discussion. By focusing on the views presented, the examination cancels out the confusion and compartmentalization of someone’s mind. It puts someone’s different views side-by-side and renders their interrelations intuitive.⁷¹² Thus the contradictions that were hidden in these views are brought to light, much to the surprise of the examinee – which only goes to prove how vague his contact with these views was.

The scope of what is thus exhibited or brought to light is not clear, though. Does this mean there is a contradiction in our own views or in our formulation of them? The characters tend to reaffirm their conviction and insist that they know. Their tacit conviction and the profession of knowledge stands. They disregard the failure and try to state their views differently, presenting them from a different angle. They start again, as if from the beginning, but often this does not cause them to completely review the beliefs initially put forward. In general, they simply replay some move (as if in a game of strategy) – i.e. recant their answer to one of the previous questions.⁷¹³ In other words, their correction generally involves the least amount of variation possible. They stand by as many of the views previously stated as possible. Some things may change considerably, but often many of the ὑποθέσεις remain untouched. At any rate, the characters put forward different formulations and different

⁷⁰⁸ For the first kind of counterexamples, see e.g. *La.* 190e-191e. As for the second, cp. e.g. *Rep.* 331c-d.

⁷⁰⁹ See e.g. *Phd.* 92c-e.

⁷¹⁰ *Sph.* 230b7-8: “(...) αὐτὰς [sc. τὰς δόξας] αὐταῖς ἅμα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταῦτα ἐναντίας”. I follow Bernardete’s translation (see S. BERNARDETE, *The Being of the Beautiful. Plato’s Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁷¹¹ Plato formulates it as a general principle in *Rep.* 602e: “οὐκοῦν ἔφαμεν τῷ αὐτῷ ἅμα περὶ ταῦτα ἐναντία δοξάζειν ἀδύνατον εἶναι; – καὶ ὀρθῶς γ’ ἔφαμεν.” See also 436b and 436e f.

⁷¹² Cp. *Sph.* 230b, where the Visitor (referring to one’s δόξαι) speaks precisely of a “τιθέναί παρ’ ἀλλήλας”.

⁷¹³ See e.g. *Chrm.* 164c-d, *Grg.* 461d and 462a.

explanations and they seem to be equally satisfied with all of them at the time they present them. This fact, by itself, is rather suspicious (especially because it implies a contradiction between the different answers that are put forward and accepted). But this is not the only problem. The examination of the new answers actually tends to produce the same result: contradiction and rejection of one's answers.

The process of revising one's views and seeing them being refuted one more time can be repeated several times. One constantly changes one's accounts – or, as Plato says, one roams about from one version to the other.⁷¹⁴ There is no stability or fixedness in one's accounts. The different attempts to answer contradict each other and one was equally convinced of their respective truth. This ends up producing a state of ἀπορία (of being blocked, not being able to come across) and aphasia.⁷¹⁵ One is no longer able to state what one thinks. One is at a loss, perplexed and astonished. The discussion tends to end in silence – or Socrates may then try to introduce a new line of inquiry.

b) The value of the failures to justify one's knowledge claims

The characters' failure to justify their knowledge claims is not univocal and the dialogues illustrate how there can be different interpretations of this failure. The course of the examination strongly suggests that they have no knowledge and Socrates often insinuates as much. But the examinees are often not convinced and tend to insist. They formulate new answers, as was just said, and when these are refuted they still downplay their inability to explain or justify themselves and their knowledge claims. They tend not to interpret this as a symptom of not knowing – at least at first. They assume that there is some sort of gap between what they are able to say and what they know. Their conviction tends to remain unscathed. They simply cannot voice what they think.⁷¹⁶ They are indeed surprised they cannot explain themselves, but they easily think that Socrates played some sophistical trick

⁷¹⁴ Plato's in fact expresses this constant change of view with several different images. For instance, he talks of a wandering around or rambling (πλανή) – see in particular *Alc. I* 116e ff., and also *Ly.* 213e, *Hp. Mi.* 372d-e, 376c, *Hp. Ma.* 304c, *Sph.* 230b. In other instances, Plato compares it to a going around round in circles (see *Euthphr.* 15b and *Tht.* 200a) or a labyrinth (*Euthd.* 291d). One is like Proteus, constantly changing the shape of one's views (cp. *Euthphr.* 15d, *Ion* 541e, *Euthd.* 288b-c). The examiner himself (namely, Socrates) is compared to Daedalus, who built statues that could move. Likewise, the examiner can make the different attempts at a definition run away. See *Euthphr.* 11b ff., 15b. In addition, the whole discussion can be compared to a tempest at sea (cp. e.g. *La.* 194c).

⁷¹⁵ Cp. e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 298c, *Me.* 79e ff., *Sph.* 244a.

⁷¹⁶ See e.g. *Euthphr.* 11b and *La.* 194a-b.

on them.⁷¹⁷ They blame the examiner and the way he examines – not themselves. When Socrates is not present, they do not find it difficult to talk about these matters.⁷¹⁸ Sometimes they say that they will be able to correct their mistakes afterwards, either by their own reflection or with the aid of someone else.⁷¹⁹ The present ἀπορία pales in comparison with their past and future εὐπορία, and so they maintain their knowledge claims. As a result, the characters may simply dismiss the question or they may even respond vigorously.

However, as was said, this is not the only possible reaction. Some characters seem to recognize, at least after being refuted several times, that the failure may be an expression of more than a superficial inability. They do not assign the blame to Socrates, but rather to themselves and their ignorance. They get angry at themselves and at the fact that they were previously convinced that they knew. They lose confidence, recognize that they really do not know and, as a result, their beliefs are dispelled.⁷²⁰

These different interpretations raise the question of how should we as readers interpret these failures to justify one's knowledge claims. What do the failures suggest about the characters' knowledge claims and what do they actually reveal? What is the significance of the characters' frequent resistance to them and how legitimate are they?

If we look at the examinations performed, they are all based on the understanding that if one knows how to talk and one has true knowledge, one should be able to articulate, explain and justify this knowledge.⁷²¹ Even if one is caught unprepared and needs to think

⁷¹⁷ The latter is indeed a frequent accusation throughout the Platonic corpus, formulated in different manners. Cp. e.g. *Me.* 79e ff., *Grg.* 482c ff., 489b-c, *Rep.* 338d. See also the Adeimantus' description of what Socrates' interlocutors often feel, in *Rep.* 480b-c: “ἀλλὰ γὰρ τοιόνδε τι πάσχουσιν οἱ ἀκούοντες ἐκάστοτε ἃ νῦν λέγεις· ἡγούνται δι' ἀπειρίαν τοῦ ἐρωτᾶν καὶ ἀποκρίνεσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου παρ' ἕκαστον τὸ ἐρώτημα μικρὸν παραγόμενοι, ἀθροισθέντων τῶν μικρῶν ἐπὶ τελευτῆς τῶν λόγων μέγα τὸ σφάλμα καὶ ἐναντίον τοῖς πρώτοις ἀναφαίνεσθαι, καὶ ὡσπερ ὑπὸ τῶν πεττεῦν δεινῶν οἱ μὴ τελευτῶντες ἀποκλείονται καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὅτι φέρωσιν, οὕτω καὶ σφεῖς τελευτῶντες ἀποκλείεσθαι καὶ οὐκ ἔχειν ὅτι λέγωσιν ὑπὸ πεττείας αὐτῆς τινὸς ἐτέρας, οὐκ ἐν ψήφοις ἀλλ' ἐν λόγοις· ἐπεὶ τὸ γε ἀληθές οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον αὐτῆ ἔχειν.”

⁷¹⁸ This is in fact the reason why Meno compares Socrates to a torpedo ray. Cp. in particular *Men.* 80a-b: “καὶ δοκεῖς μοι παντελῶς, εἰ δεῖ τι καὶ σκῶσαι, ὁμοιότατος εἶναι τὸ τε εἶδος καὶ τᾶλλα αὐτῆ τῆ πλατεία νάρκη τῆ θαλαττία· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ τὸν αἰετὸν πλησιάζοντα καὶ ἀπτόμενον ναρκᾶν ποιεῖ, καὶ σὺ δοκεῖς μοι νῦν ἐμὲ τοιοῦτόν τι πεποηκέναι, ναρκᾶν· ἀληθῶς γὰρ ἔγωγε καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ στόμα ναρκῶ, καὶ οὐκ ἔχω ὅτι ἀποκρίνωμαί σοι. καίτοι μυριάκις γε περὶ ἀρετῆς παμπόλλους λόγους εἶρηκα καὶ πρὸς πολλοὺς, καὶ πάνυ εὖ, ὥς γε ἐμαυτῶ ἐδόκουν· νῦν δὲ οὐδ' ὅτι ἐστὶν τὸ παράπαν ἔχω εἰπεῖν.”

⁷¹⁹ Cp. *Hp. Ma.* 295a, 297e, and *La.* 200b-c.

⁷²⁰ The matter of who the characters blame for the refutation is decisive, as Plato himself stresses in *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. One can assign blame to the examiner and so one will resist him or the blame may be assigned to oneself and one's ignorance, and this renders one docile to the examiner. On this matter, compare *Ap.* 23c, 39d, *Tht.* 149a, 150c-151a, 210c, and *Sph.* 230b.

⁷²¹ The characters say that much in *La.* 190c: “[ΣΩ] φαμέν ἄρα, ὃ Λάχης, εἰδέναι αὐτὸ ὅτι ἐστίν. [ΛΑ] φαμέν μέντοι. [ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν ὃ γε ἴσμεν, κἂν εἴπομεν δήπου τί ἐστίν. [ΛΑ] πῶς γὰρ οὐ;” In *Phd.* 76d, they go even further, and say: “ἀνὴρ ἐπιστάμενος περὶ ὧν ἐπίσταται ἔχει ἂν δοῦναι λόγον ἢ οὐ; πολλὴ ἀνάγκη, ἔφη, ὃ Σώκратες.” See also *Chrm.* 159a: “οὐκοῦν τοῦτό γε, ἔφη, ὃ οἶε, ἐπειδήπερ ἐλληνίζειν ἐπίστασαι, κἂν εἴποις δήπου αὐτὸ ὅτι σοι φαίνεται; ἴσως, ἔφη.”

about it for a moment, one should be able to put it forward sooner or later. But if the views expressed end up being refuted, this strongly suggests that these views contain some serious defect. The account was provided and accepted by the examinee. Even if the examiner used some fallacy, the examinee accepted it and was unable to solve it. He accepted any small deviations that may have lead to contradictions. The problem is not simply that a particular person has no practice in dialectical discussions. Philosophical examination is not a type of game for which one may be more or less prepared, and which would be no serious indicator of anything else than one's ability for theoretical games. The examination is directly concerned with one's cognitive state and this is what is under scrutiny. Therefore, any failure in explaining them shows that these views are not absolutely clear for the examinee. There is at least some confusion, and he does not fully understand what he thinks he knows. He does not have knowledge in the fullest sense of the word. Even if there is something right in the views he has articulated, he has no clear notion and cannot dissociate it from what is wrong.⁷²² And exactly how much knowledge (in a weaker sense of the word) can he still have in these circumstances? If it were just a small degree of haziness, some small imprecision, the examinee would not time and again accept contradictory statements about the matter at issue and replace them with other considerably different formulations. But the characters in the dialogues do precisely this.

This does not necessarily mean that they have no contact whatsoever with what is being discussed. Especially in the case of their understanding of notions, the characters (just like everyone of us) seem to have at least some hints (some glimpses or inklings) about what something is. But they cannot avoid contradictions when they try to develop and explain them, and once all the explicit knowledge claims they put forward are refuted, they can notice that they have no more than a hazy contact with the reality at hand. This is what Plato shows in particular discussions about particular notions. He shows likewise that many important attributions of predicates are wrong or baseless. But this is not all. The dialogues also raise the suspicion that this kind of defect is actually much greater than what is revealed in the texts. It can affect many other notions and many other attributions. It may likewise be much more than an idiosyncratic feature of some characters. It can be the state we all find ourselves in. We may all think we know many things that we do not.

⁷²² Cp. *Chrm.* 165b: “(...) ἴσως μὲν γάρ τι σὺ ἔλεγες περὶ αὐτῶν ὀρθότερον, ἴσως δ' ἐγώ, σαφὲς δ' οὐδὲν πάνυ ἦν ὧν ἐλέγομεν (...).”

1.3. The different kinds of false knowledge claims and their possible range

After seeing how false knowledge claims are revealed in the *corpus*, it is important to see the full spectrum of possibilities that is opened by philosophical examination – not only the different kinds of false knowledge claim (to which we already alluded several times) but also their interrelation and the range they may have – i.e., how far the empire of ἀμαθία may reach.

Let us start by reviewing some of the indications given above about ἀμαθία or false conceit of knowledge and its different forms. We saw that ἀμαθία is opposed to simple ignorance. One must be convinced of knowing what one does not. It involves an error of cognitive self-diagnosis. In this sense, it is different from not being aware of something or simple incompleteness of knowledge. This does not involve an error (unless one wrongly believes one already knows everything there is to know in a certain domain).

We also saw that our knowledge claims as such are characterized by a formal or modal defect. We regard a certain view as absolutely certain or apodictic and yet have no sufficient grounds to exclude the possibility of things being otherwise. This incorrect formation of beliefs or knowledge claims does not necessarily imply an objective error (i.e., things may actually be as we think), but it opens the door to material defects. Without knowledge claims, there would be no cognitive errors. We would only accept what was fully given to us or, at the most, adopt some view because of practical necessity, but still being fully aware of its insufficient grounds. But this is not what we normally do – so our way of seeing things may come to have many defects.

The defects are of two kinds. One of them corresponds to the error in attributing a predicate to something, which constitutes an error in the narrow sense. One attributes a predicate to something to which it does not belong (or one fails to attribute it to something to which it belongs). However, in this case, the predicates being employed are taken as non-problematic or self-evident. The problem is only the relation of attribution or non-attribution.

A different form of false conceit of knowledge is the pseudo-understanding of a notion that is being predicated of other things. We may think we have a clear understanding of what some predicate is and yet have no more than a hazy or a fully inconsistent notion. Plato usually emphasizes this kind of defect and for good reasons. The comprehension of predicates or notions (i.e., of each letter of the alphabet with which reality is written) is

presupposed in all attributions and all entities. A deviation in this respect has therefore the most serious consequences for our access to things. Moreover, we tend not to think about this when we think about cognitive defects. We think about errors in the narrow sense, but this is also a kind of error, since it involves a judgment that excludes that things (or more precisely, the notions we think we understand) may be otherwise than we think. This judgment wrongly assumes the truth of its content and the fact that it understands it.

However, the possible scope of defects in our knowledge claims are not restricted to particular attributions or particular predicates (along with all the attributions that depend on them). The intricate syntax of our understanding means that we can misunderstand not only each particular notion in itself (justice, beauty, and so on), but also the more general notions that qualify this notion (for instance, a particular class in which it is included or even the highest kinds presented in the *Sophist*, which qualify all notions). If we misunderstand these more generic notions, then all other notions which are determined by them will be distorted, as well as all particular entities that of which they are predicated.

There are thus different ways in which a false knowledge claim may affect many others. Many knowledge claims (if not all) imply in themselves, as their assumptions or ὑποθέσεις, other knowledge claims. This means that, even if the defect does not concern the core of a knowledge claim, it may still affect it insofar as any of the knowledge claims implied therein may be false. It may also happen that several or even all knowledge claims that are relevant for a particular moment of reality (or for a particular notion) are wrong, which will produce a heightened form of deviation in our way of seeing this moment of reality. In sum, the complex syntactic relations of our beliefs make it possible for any knowledge claim to be defective in multiple regards.

The false conceit of knowledge may thus have very different amplitudes, according to all these different factors. It may affect part of our knowledge claims and, in that case, the defect will be confined to some particular attributions and perhaps some particular notions. But even some false knowledge claims may have serious impact in our way of seeing things, if they happen to be some of the basic assumptions that determine all others. They may also fully derail our life, if they perchance concern decisive moments or the most important matters. In addition, one may have false views about all other matters – i.e., all other beings and all other notions, even the most irrelevant ones. The defects may be cumulated and thus it may happen that most of our knowledge claims, if not all, are false – either directly (because

all knowledge claims are false) or indirectly (because there is no knowledge claim that is not affected by some false knowledge claim).

The range of deviation in one's way of seeing things may change from person to person. In the dialogues, it seems to be greater in the case of those that regard themselves as having an extraordinary knowledge (i.e., as being σοφοί), in comparison to laypeople. This seems to be the case in the *Apology*, where Socrates says he has been focused on those that are publicly recognized as having some sort of superlative knowledge or σοφία. These people are then revealed as being full of false conceit of knowledge. But the same may be true of everybody else. All of us have many views that determine the whole of reality in a certain way and identify what matters and what is irrelevant. But these views may be false and we may be full of false conceit of knowledge.

The discussion of possible ranges of ἀμαθία thus raises the question about ourselves and our own cognitive condition. How many knowledge claims do we have and how many of them are false? How much deviation is there in our way of seeing or understanding things? This is not something we can immediately determine. Usually we are not aware of our cognitive condition nor of how bad it can be.⁷²³ This means that at first we can only outline the map of the possible diagnoses of our cognitive state. To find out our actual state, we need to undertake a deep examination of our knowledge claims – and not only of some of them, but of all (or at least the most relevant).

2. The description of the cognitive defects associated with the notion of δόξα

After considering the cognitive defects that are associated with the notion of οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι in the Platonic corpus (and particularly in the so-called aporetic dialogues), we must now turn our attention to the description of the limitations of our views which is intrinsically tied with Plato's concept of δόξα and which can be mostly found in more doctrinal dialogues (such as *Meno* or the *Republic*). This will allow us to develop and complete the description made in Section 1 of this chapter, thereby achieving a better understanding of the cognitive limitations to which we are exposed.

⁷²³ We are exposed to the possibility of being surprised by how bad our cognitive state is, just like Alcibiades when he is first examined by Socrates. See in particular *Alc. I* 127d, when he starts realizing how bad his cognitive state is and says: “ἀλλὰ μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς, ὦ Σώκратες, οὐδ’ αὐτὸς οἶδ’ ὅτι λέγω, κινδυνεύω δὲ καὶ πάσαι λεληθῆναι ἐμαυτὸν ἀσχιιστα ἔχων.” This happened to Alcibiades and other characters, but it is also an indication of what could happen to us if some Socrates were to appear and start cross-examining us.

It was mentioned in Chapter 5 that, just like οἶσθαι εἰδέναι, the term δόξα has a neutral and a pejorative sense in Plato. On the one hand, it designates a judgment (or a view of things) that can be either right or wrong (i.e., that can either hit the target of truth or swerve away from it). On the other hand, δόξα can also designate a false view as such, a subjective way of seeing things with no real objective content – or as we could also say, a mere opinion. In this sense, it may refer to a view that happens to be false, but it can also denote a mode of seeing things that is constitutively defective and false – i.e., marked by distortion and illusion. Such a usage of δόξα mirrors the colloquial usage of the word. We saw that δόξα means not only judgment, but also appearance or semblance, and this second meaning points to the kind of defect that we will now consider. Both in the colloquial and in the Platonic sense, δόξα is characterized by its relative passivity. It corresponds to a certain immediate impression of things that is confined to the subjective sphere, and one's decision about what things are does not go beyond this sphere. Δόξα loses sight of what things really are beyond our impressions and it is not truly concerned with it. It is satisfied with what things seem to be and accepts this semblance as their truth. In sum, δόξα is a limited form of activity of the mind.

Plato considers in detail this limited activity and points out that it is the cause of the main kind of cognitive defect in our way of seeing things. According to him (or, more precisely, according to certain passages in the corpus) all our views are affected by a critical distortion which constitutes an aggravated or extreme form of ἀμαθία. It is the result of an extreme neglect and, as such, blameworthy in the highest degree. It does not only happen that some judgments are wrong. In a way, all of them are wrong. The defect in question tends to pervade everything and to constitute a distorted picture of the whole of reality. In other words, the whole world as we experience it may be nothing more than δόξα in the negative sense.⁷²⁴ This will most probably come as a surprise to us, since normally we are not aware of any constitutive defect in our way of seeing things. Plato, however, is adamant about its occurrence and also about the fact that our lack of awareness of it is an essential requirement for it to take place. Moreover, by stressing the constitutive defectiveness of our way of seeing things, Plato's analysis of δόξα also points to the possibility of a different and superior way of seeing things – one that will overcome the limitations that characterize δόξα. But this is also something of which we normally have no idea. We do not know how to achieve it nor

⁷²⁴ This has the most severe consequences for one's life, since the latter will then be marked by a series of cognitive mistakes. We will, however, leave aside these practical consequences for now and focus only on the cognitive defect as such. For a discussion of the practical side of the question, cp. Chaps. 15, 16, and 18.

what it may amount to (i.e., how this new way of seeing things may be constituted and what it may reveal about reality).

All these questions take us to the core of the perspectives outlined in the Platonic corpus. But before considering them in more detail, it is important to consider some moments of the Pre-Platonic history of the notion of δόξα that may have influenced Plato's analysis and that help us better understand all that is involved therein.

2.1. The pre-Platonic conception of δόξα as a intrinsically defective way of seeing things

Plato is not the first thinker to use the notion of δόξα to express a constitutive defect in our way of seeing things or in our access to reality. The term is also used in this sense by some of the so-called Pre-Socratics – in particular Xenophanes, Parmenides and Heraclitus. Their usage of δόξα – as well as of δοκεῖν – and the questions they associate with it provide the background to Plato's understanding of the notion. In fact, their own analyses reverberate in Plato's words. He often refers to them (especially Parmenides and Heraclitus) and we find thought patterns that are similar to theirs in Plato's own conceptions. It is therefore important to determine these authors' own conception of δόξα, in order to better understand what Plato says.

However, this is not an easy task. We have a very limited (and perhaps somewhat distorted) access to these authors' views. We possess only some quotes of their works and some testimonials from later authors. Moreover, the very way in which these authors expressed themselves also contributes to rendering their thought particularly ambiguous and obscure. Xenophanes and Parmenides wrote poems and Heraclitus wrote what seem to be aphorisms, and both these forms of expressions are hardly the most straightforward way of conveying ideas. But this fact did not discourage interpreters from analyzing and discussing the thought of these authors. There have been many interesting attempts at reconstructing their doctrines by integrating the different fragments into a coherent whole. In what follows, we will not do such an attempt. We will not discuss in full these authors' philosophies and their interpretative problems. We will only try to outline the way they talk about δόξα and its cognates, in order to determine the general thought patterns associated with the notion. This will certainly involve some interpretative decisions, but we will try to minimize them and their consequences.

Let us then start with Xenophanes. His thought is marked by theological concerns. He criticizes many aspects of the traditional representation of the divine. He often speaks of a single god (indeed, the concern with unity will mark all these authors, including Plato) and he describes it as being extremely superior to human beings in essence, knowledge, and power.⁷²⁵ The absolute heterogeneity between human beings or mortals and the one god is indeed one of the most important features of Xenophanes' thought and it determines his conception of δόξα, which is used to describe the way human beings represent reality or how they think about it. Xenophanes describes how the human way of seeing things is strongly limited – especially with respect to the most important being, god. He explains that human beings anthropomorphize the divine and in this context he uses precisely the verb δοκεῖν. He says that “(...) mortals think (δοκέουσι) gods are begotten/ and have the clothing, voice, and body of mortals.”⁷²⁶

These limitations then extend to all things, and so he claims in B34 that: “(...) the plain truth (τὸ σαφές) no man has seen nor will any know concerning the gods and what I have said concerning all things. For even if he should completely succeed in describing things as they come to pass, nonetheless he himself does not know: opinion (δόκος) is wrought over [or: comes to] all.”⁷²⁷ In this fragment, Xenophanes starts by stressing that we have no clearness or certainty about things. We may get something right somehow, but still this is not knowledge in the proper sense, since it is not a perfect access to things. There is still a cognitive imperfection or distance in our access to things, and this is what is expressed by δόξα. A δόξα may have some validity, but it is intrinsically limited and human beings are intrinsically marked by this cognitive limitation. This is also expressed by fragment 35, which says “Let these things be believed (δεδοξάσθω) as being like true things”.⁷²⁸ The content of δόξα may have some resemblance to truth, but falls short of it.

At first sight, it is not entirely clear whether Xenophanes is describing a mere fact (i.e., the fact that human beings happen to have these limitations) or a constitutive limitation that cannot be overcome. Xenophanes does admit, in fragment B18, the possibility of

⁷²⁵ See DK B23-25.

⁷²⁶ See DK B14: “ἀλλ’ οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεοῦς,/ τὴν σφετέρην δ’ ἐσθῆτα ἔχειν φωνὴν τε δέμας τε.” On this matter, see also DK B11, 12, 15, 16. Here and in the following I will use D. Graham’s rendering of the fragments. See D. GRAHAM (ed.), *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁷²⁷ “Καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφές οὔτις ἀνὴρ ἴδειν οὐδέ τις ἔσται/ εἰδὼς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων-/ εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπών,/ αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε· δόκος δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.”

⁷²⁸ “Ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν εὐκότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι.”

cognitive progress – i.e., of expanding our views and achieving better ones.⁷²⁹ But it is not clear whether he thinks we can ever achieve perfect views. The status of Xenophanes’ own doctrines is also unclear. He seems to present them as a form of σοφίη and he himself as a σοφός.⁷³⁰ He thus seems to distinguish his extraordinary knowledge from the views human beings at large. But apparently the limitations he describes would also have to apply to him, and the above mentioned fragment 35 may well be referring to his own doctrines. In that case, these doctrines would admittedly be a kind of δόξα and only resemble truth, without granting a perfect access to it. Xenophanes’ own understanding of these questions would be limited, and his σοφίη would include recognizing the limits of his own perspectives, as well as of any other human perspective.

Let us now turn our attention to Parmenides. His thought has several features in common with Xenophanes (thus raising similar questions), although it also introduces significant changes. The mode of discourse itself is somewhat different, since it includes allegorical elements, especially at the beginning of the poem, when he describes his own inquiry as a journey in a chariot, guided by the daughters of the sun, to the gates of paths of Night and Day, where he meets a goddess that reveals to him all things (πάντα).⁷³¹ What is communicated to him is thus a perfect understanding of things and it does not have a human origin. It seems completely heterogeneous to our own access to things. In this sense, Parmenides (like Xenophanes) contrasts the usual way of seeing things with a superior understanding. This superior understanding, communicated by a goddess, has the status of a revelation. However, the goddess also takes pains to present it with rational elements and give a full insight into the truth.⁷³² The teaching imparted by the goddess is comprised of two parts: what she calls “the unshaken heart of persuasive Truth” and “the opinions of the mortals, in which there is no true reliance”.⁷³³ This raises the vexed question of how these two parts relate to one another and of what is the status of the second part, dedicated to δόξαι. The goddess says the traveler must learn the latter too as acceptable, which seems to assume that there is some validity in them, unreliable though they are.

⁷²⁹ See DK B18: “οὔτοι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖσ’ ὑπέδειξαν, ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον.”

⁷³⁰ See DK B2, vv. 11-12: “ρόμης γὰρ ἀμείνων/ ἀνδρῶν ἦδ’ ἵππων ἡμετέρη σοφίη.”

⁷³¹ See DK B1.

⁷³² In this regard, Parmenides seems to differ greatly from Xenophanes, who – judging from the fragments we possess – is not concerned with demonstrating his views.

⁷³³ See DK B1, vv. 28-30: “χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι/ ἡμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμῆς ἦτορ/ ἦδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθείης.”

The case is very different in the first part. There the goddess emphasizes the contrast between falsity and truth, and allows no middle ground. Falsity is associated with non-being, which cannot actually be known or said.⁷³⁴ People (or mortals) in general assume that non-being is and for this reason the goddess describes them as being two-headed, says that they have a wandering mind and qualifies them as blind, dazed and undiscerning.⁷³⁵ Truth, in turn, is intrinsically connected with being. Parmenides' analysis of being is very complex and there have been many discussions about it – especially about the senses of being he is referring to.⁷³⁶ But regardless of how being is here understood, the goddess does present an ontological truth in a rational manner, arguing and deducing the predicates being must have. She shows that being must be ungenerated and imperishable, whole, homogeneous, motionless and complete, for anything other than this would imply non-being and thus be false.⁷³⁷ Our usual way of seeing things, since it assumes there is generation, death, parts, heterogeneity, motion and void, is according to Parmenides' goddess full of errors and illusion.

But what about the second part of the poem? It is dedicated precisely to the kind of predicates that were rejected in the first part.⁷³⁸ Parmenides puts forward a full-blown cosmology, which tries to encompass and explain the whole sensible world. It is initially qualified as unreliable, as we saw, but it is also the result of much examination and testing (περᾶν).⁷³⁹ It is a “deceptive order of words”, but also a likely arrangement.⁷⁴⁰ It is not something one can fully explain (and in this sense it is far from the reliability of the rational doctrine about being), but it seems to be presented as the best cosmology that could be developed. It is somewhat valid (i.e., more valid than other versions), though it is still no more than a δόξα. If in a way it seems to be refuted by the first part of the poem, in another way it seems to complement it. It is therefore difficult to determine what exactly Parmenides has in mind, but it seems that his notion of δόξα would apply not only to views that are

⁷³⁴ See DK B8, vv. 8-9: “(...) οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητόν/ ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι.” For the rejection of non-being, see also DK B7: “Οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆ εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα· /ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ' ἀφ' ὁδοῦ διζήσιος εἶργε νόημα·

⁷³⁵ See DK B6, vv. 3-9: “πρώτης γὰρ σ' ἀφ' ὁδοῦ ταύτης διζήσιος <εἶργω>/ αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ' ἀπὸ τῆς, ἦν δὴ βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν/ πλάττονται, δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν/ στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλακτὸν νόον· οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται/ κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοὶ τε, τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φύλα,/ οἷς τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταῦτόν νενόμισται/ κοῦ ταῦτόν, πάντων δὲ παλίντροπός ἐστι κέλευθος.”

⁷³⁶ See e.g. C. KAHN, The Thesis of Parmenides, *The Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969), 700-724; L. BREDLOW, Parmenides and the Grammar of Being, *Classical Philology* 106 (2011), 283-298.

⁷³⁷ See DK B8, vv. 1-49.

⁷³⁸ Cp. DK B19: “Thus you see according to opinion these things arose and now are./ and hereafter when they have been nurtured, will they pass away./ And on them men imposed a distinguishing name for each.”

⁷³⁹ See DK B1, v. 32: “ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεται, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα/ χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.”

⁷⁴⁰ DK B8, vv. 52 (“κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλόν”) and 60 (“τόν σοι ἐγὼ διάκοσμον εὐοικότα πάντα φατίζω.”)

outright false and wholly unlikely, but also to views that may not be entirely invalid, but are still unreliable and lack the surety that characterizes the rational arguments about being. In this sense, δόξα seems to correspond to an intermediate form of access similar to the one that was suggested in Xenophanes' fragments.

What we find in Heraclitus' fragments is not very different either. He seems to use the notion of δόξα to denote an intrinsically defective form of access to beings. We are told that he compared human δόξαι to children's toys.⁷⁴¹ This is a very meaningful comparison, because it constitutes an instance of the Heraclitean thought pattern identified and analyzed by H. Fränkel.⁷⁴² In several fragments, Heraclitus identifies and compares three elements or terms. The latter possess a certain quality (for instance, beauty or wisdom) in different degrees. Human beings are the middle term. The inferior term are animals or children (who possess very little or even nothing of the quality at issue), whereas god is the superior term (insofar as god is supposed to possess this quality in its highest degree). Heraclitus then establishes a comparison of two comparisons. He says that the relation between human beings and the superior term is just like the relation between the inferior term and human beings. This allows us to represent something that surpasses us in the same way that we surpass something that we acknowledge as inferior in some respect, and at the same time it makes us realize how precarious or questionable our own position is (in spite of what we might usually think).

Thus, when Heraclitus compares our δόξαι to children's toys he is declaring how childish and insignificant they are. What is usually regarded as knowledge is very far from it. We can understand this better if we consider fragment B17, which says: "many do not understand such things as they encounter, nor do they learn by their experience, but they think they do (έωυτοῖσι δὲ δοκέουσι)".⁷⁴³ In other words, many have false knowledge claims about everything they encounter. Their views are no more than opinions and appearances. But Heraclitus' words also admit the possibility of a different kind of access. In fact, he distinguishes between the many (οἱ πολλοί) and some distinguished human beings, who are superior in terms of wisdom and have access to some transcendent truth. This does not mean that all distinguished human beings possess perfect knowledge. Heraclitus admits that

⁷⁴¹ See DK B70: "παίδων ἀθύρματα νενόμικεν εἶναι τὰ ἀνθρώπινα δοξάσματα"

⁷⁴² See in particular DK B79, 82 and 83. Cp. H. FRÄNKEL, A Thought Pattern in Heraclitus, *American Journal of Philology* 59 (1938), 309-337; IDEM, Eine heraklitische Denkform, in: IDEM, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*. Literarische und philosophiegeschichtliche Studien, München, Beck, 1968³ (1955¹) 252-283; H. FRÄNKEL, *Dichtung und Philosophie* des frühen Griechentums. Eine Geschichte der griechischen Epik, Lyrik und Prosa bis zur Mitte des fünften Jahrhunderts, München, Beck, 1976³ (1962¹), 434ff.

⁷⁴³ "οὐ γὰρ φρονέουσι τοιαῦτα πολλοί, ὀκόσοι ἐγκυρεῦσιν, οὐδὲ μαθόντες γινώσκουσιν, έωυτοῖσι δὲ δοκέουσι."

distinguished persons are full of illusions or possess distorted forms of knowledge, such as erudition (πολυμαθίη).⁷⁴⁴ These are still δόξαι or false knowledge claims, and for Heraclitus all δόξαι or knowledge claims are a form of sacred disease (i.e. a disease not caused by anything physical).⁷⁴⁵ This disease seems to consist mainly in the fact that we are often deceived by the senses.⁷⁴⁶ We usually follow them, but cannot correctly interpret what we see. As Heraclitus says, if our soul is barbarian, it cannot use the senses and cannot understand the λόγος of reality.⁷⁴⁷ Reality is indeed conceived by Heraclitus as a sort of discourse or text, and our reason (our own λόγος) is what makes us able to understand it and achieve φρόνησις – or it is what makes us be awake, lucid and fully present, as Heraclitus says.

However, most human beings are as if asleep, deaf and absent.⁷⁴⁸ They have only a private version of things and no access to what is common to everything (τὸ ξυνόν) – namely, the universal λόγος.⁷⁴⁹ Their access to things is limited and distorted. More specifically, they see things in motion, coming to being and perishing, changing into their opposites, in conflict, and they absolutize each moment or consider it separately, thus failing to see how things belong together – i.e., how there is a hidden harmony or a law underlying all contraries. There is a common element that encompasses the whole, constitutes a unity out of it and brings order to the permanent flux or conflict – and wisdom consists precisely in knowing this.⁷⁵⁰ But normally we are very far from being wise. Although everybody has some contact with this truth or this λόγος, most people do not understand it and have

⁷⁴⁴ See DK B28: “δοκέοντα γὰρ ὁ δοκιμώτατος γινώσκει, φυλάσσει (...).” For the contrast between πολυμαθίη and νόος, see DK B40: “πολυμαθίη νόον οὐ διδάσκει· Ἡσίοδον γὰρ ἂν ἐδίδαξε καὶ Πυθαγόρην αὐτίς τε Ξενοφάνεα καὶ Ἐκαταῖον.” Cp. also DK B129 and 81.

⁷⁴⁵ See DK B46: “τὴν τε οἴησιν ἱερὰν νόσον ἔλεγε καὶ τὴν ὄρασιν ψεύδεσθαι.”

⁷⁴⁶ Cp. DK B56: “ἐξητάτηνται, φησίν, οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν φανερῶν παραπλησίως Ὀμήρωι, ὃς ἐγένετο τῶν Ἑλλήνων σοφώτερος πάντων. ἐκεῖνόν τε γὰρ παῖδες φθειρας κατακτείνοντες ἐξηπάτησαν εἰπόντες· ὅσα εἶδομεν καὶ ἐλάβομεν, ταῦτα ἀπολείπομεν, ὅσα δὲ οὔτε εἶδομεν οὔτ’ ἐλάβομεν, ταῦτα φέρομεν.”

⁷⁴⁷ See DK B107: “κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ὅσα βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἐχόντων.”

⁷⁴⁸ See DK B1: “τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ’ ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπειροῖσιν εἰκόασι, πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκόων ἐγὼ διηγέυμαι διαιρέων ἕκαστον κατὰ φύσιν καὶ φράζων ὅκως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὐδόντες ἐπιλανθάνονται.” See also DK B34: “ἀξύνετοι ἀκούσαντες κωφοῖσιν εἰκόασι· φάτις αὐτοῖσιν μαρτυρεῖ παρεόντας ἀπειναί.”

⁷⁴⁹ See DK B2: “διὸ δεῖ ἔπεσθαι τῷ ξυνῶι, τουτέστι τῷ κοινῶι· ξυνὸς γὰρ ὁ κοινός. τοῦ λόγου δ’ ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζῶουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν.”

⁷⁵⁰ See in particular DK B41: “εἶναι γὰρ ἓν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτι ἐκυβέρνησε πάντα διὰ πάντων.” For more on the notion of unity or hidden harmony, cp. e.g. DK B10, B30, B50, B51, B53, B54, B72, B80, B102, B123. On the topic of conflict between the different moments of reality and its importance, see e.g. DK B8, B23, B32, B48, B67, B88.

therefore only a partial vision or understanding of things.⁷⁵¹ This is precisely what characterizes human δόξαι and what makes humans resemble children (or apes) in terms of knowledge, by contrast with god and his perfect knowledge.⁷⁵² There are, however, some exceptions. Heraclitus also contrasts human δόξαι with the views of the few wise persons, who are aware that there is an underlying unity of things (even if they cannot fully grasp it).

In sum, δόξα designates once more the usual way of seeing things, which is referred to appearances, multiplicity and movement, and fails to see the unity that underlies this changing multiplicity. This carries with it a failure to understand the multiple beings themselves. It is true that one may try to overcome this perspective (i.e., to overcome δόξα), but the perspective one achieves afterwards is very different from the one we normally have. Normally, we have no more than δόξαι, which may give us some access to what really exists, but are always marked by a constitutive defect, insofar as one is ignorant of the general structure of reality.

The conception of δόξα we find in Xenophanes, Parmenides and Heraclitus has thus important common traces. They all stress the limitations of our regular access to things and how it is very different from a perfect way of seeing things. This is the most important feature of the pre-Platonic understanding of δόξα. All these authors see δόξα as something constitutively defective, and it is in this sense that they probably influenced Plato. As will be shown, Plato also sees δόξα as being intrinsically defective and his discussion of its defects has some points of contact with what we just considered. Although we will not explore the relations between Plato and these authors nor discuss how conscious Plato was of their doctrines, we can at any rate understand his own conception better if we bear in mind what was thought before him.

2.2. Plato's criticism of δόξα as a social version of truth

Plato's analysis of the defective nature of δόξα contains several distinct aspects and we will consider them separately. We will start with the most peripheral aspects and then move towards the center.

⁷⁵¹ Heraclitus emphasizes the universal contact with this truth. According to DK B113, he said: “ζυγόν ἐστι πᾶσι τὸ φρονεῖν.” In DK B116, it is said: “ἄνθρωποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἑωυτοὺς καὶ φρονεῖν”. See also DK B72: “ὅτι μάλιστα διηλεκτῶς ὁμιλοῦσι λόγοι τῶι τὰ ὅλα διοικοῦντι, τούτῳ διαφέρονται, καὶ οἷς καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐγκυροῦσι, ταῦτα αὐτοῖς ξένα φαίνεται.”

⁷⁵² See DK B102: “τῶι μὲν θεῶι καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια, ἄνθρωποι δὲ ἃ μὲν ἄδικα ὑπελήφασιν ἃ δὲ δίκαια”.

One important aspect of δόξα that Plato criticizes is its usually social character and how it tends to correspond to a social representation of truth or reality. We find many references to this question throughout the Platonic corpus. It is directly associated with the meaning of δόξα in Greek. As was said above, the word δόξα can designate a public view or public opinion about something. It can refer to the good or bad repute of someone and also to what a community decides or deems good. In fact, the verb δοκεῖν played a central role in the language of decrees and the public decisions about important matters. In sum, our δόξαι often have a social component. This component was not entirely absent from the philosophical analyses we considered in the previous section. Xenophanes, Parmenides and Heraclitus speak of δόξα as something that is shared by almost everybody or at least the majority of people, and it is opposed to a superior way of seeing things that is the prerogative of the divine and perhaps some wise human beings. We find a similar idea in Plato. The views shared by the majority of human beings are defective and the defect is not incidental, but rather the result of the very process of forming and sharing of these views. Let us see this in more detail.

First, it is manifest that each one of us has many δόξαι, and we are aware not only of our own δόξαι (or at least of some of them), but also of the fact that others have their own δόξαι, which may agree or disagree with our own. Usually we are not indifferent to these agreements or disagreements. We feel a certain pressure to be in agreement with others, either by conforming ourselves to their views or by trying to conform them to ours. This seems to be the basis of the traditional education process, as Plato himself suggests several times. People instill δόξαι in children through several complex mechanisms.⁷⁵³ First it is the family and those closest to a particular child (including the slaves).⁷⁵⁴ They define awards and punishments and pass on certain basic δόξαι and values. Then teachers and literature will instill more refined δόξαι.⁷⁵⁵ But one continues to be pressured throughout life, even as an adult. One is pressured by one's social class, by the many or the majority (οἱ πολλοί), by the πόλις in general (or any other political body) and even by everybody (in cases where there is – or at least one thinks there is – a universal consensus).⁷⁵⁶ In some cases force may be

⁷⁵³ For the idea of instilling δόξαι, cp. e.g. *Rep.* 429d-430b, where Socrates compares the process to education to the process of dying wool.

⁷⁵⁴ This is what we find in the description of the degeneration of the ideal πόλις in *Republic* VIII and IX. Socrates describes the development of young boys as being deeply influenced by one's family, servants and companies. See e.g. 549c ff.

⁷⁵⁵ For a complex description of the whole process of education, cp. *Prt.* 325c ff.

⁷⁵⁶ In the *Republic* there is even a discussion of how οἱ πολλοί are the greatest sophists, since they influence and educate children through the many processes that control people's views and their way of living. See 492a ff.

involved, in others it may be simply a matter of persuasion. But the fact is that public opinion and the πόλις carry weight and have power over us.⁷⁵⁷ It is only the degree of pressure exerted over us that varies. One may try to keep to himself and avoid problems with others (with requires just a basic level of conformity) or one can be a “friend of the people” (δημεραστής) and be more deeply regulated by others.⁷⁵⁸ These different degrees of pressure may in turn be due to various reasons, but we will not consider the latter here. The important thing now is that we are not indifferent to differences of opinion. Our δόξαι and the δόξαι of others interact.

The corpus talks about different forms of interaction between people’s δόξαι, but it also shows us how during the very course of the examinations one is often concerned with what others think. There are several references to others – either to authorities (such as poets or philosophers), or to the majority of people (οἱ πολλοί) or even to a universal consensus (for instance, in the sense that anybody can see that things are so, even a child).⁷⁵⁹ Others are invoked as witnesses to testify on one’s behalf.⁷⁶⁰ Even the young Socrates is no exception. He pays attention to what others think and thereby limits his philosophical impulse.⁷⁶¹

All these instances reflect the same tendency to identify and subscribe a shared version of things or a shared truth – which defines what every sane person will see and think (as well as what forms of σοφία are acknowledged).⁷⁶² This corresponds to the notion of νόμοι – i.e., the practices and values of a certain community, which are the result of a collective agreement and yet are not experienced as such, but rather as the best practices and values or what everybody should do and think. They have a universal claim and are taken as being φύσει.⁷⁶³ This is possible because the process of conforming to a public version of things is often a latent process. One is not aware of it or one has forgotten it. As a matter of fact, we often cannot explain where our views come from or why we adopted them. They are

⁷⁵⁷ Cp. e.g. *Alc. I* 135e: “[ΑΛ] ἀλλὰ οὕτως ἔχει, καὶ ἄρξομαι γε ἐντεῦθεν τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἐπιμέλεσθαι. [ΣΩ] βουλοίμην ἄν σε καὶ διατελέσαι· ὀρρωδῶ δέ, οὐ τι τῆ σῆ φύσει ἀπιστῶν, ἀλλὰ τὴν τῆς πόλεως ὀρῶν ῥώμην, μὴ ἐμοῦ τε καὶ σοῦ κρατήσῃ.”

⁷⁵⁸ Cp. *Grg.* 481d-482a and *Alc. I* 132a.

⁷⁵⁹ See e.g. *Alc. I* 110d ff., *Hp. Ma.* 248a, *Grg.* 470c, 484b, *Rep.* 331d.

⁷⁶⁰ For the image of others being used as witnesses, cp. *Grg.* 471e ff.

⁷⁶¹ See *Prm.* 130e: “νέος γὰρ εἶ ἔτι, φάναι τὸν Παρμενίδην, ὃ Σώκρατες, καὶ οὐπω σου ἀντείληπται φιλοσοφία ὡς ἔτι ἀντιλήπεται κατ’ ἐμὴν δόξαν, ὅτε οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἀτιμάσεις· νῦν δὲ ἔτι πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀποβλέπεις δόξας διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν.”

⁷⁶² We will return to this notion of social truth in Chap. 11, Section 2.3.

⁷⁶³ In other words, the opposition between φύσις and νόμος usually emphasizes how different communities have different customs and how these customs are not grounded on nature, but are rather the result of a social agreement. However, this does not express how the νόμοι themselves are experienced by the community for which they are valid. In this community, a νόμος is simply the natural or right way of living and doing things – and it is in this sense that νόμος comes close to the notion of δόξα and to the shared truth we are now considering.

simply the way we see things. However, at their root lies our passivity. We receive views from others and give them weight. We guide ourselves by what other people think.

Plato often refers to these processes of conforming one's views to the views of others – especially if they are shared by many. But Plato also deconstructs and criticizes them, as well as their assumptions. There are indeed several problems with these processes and the views that result from them, and this is what we must now briefly consider.

To begin, the very act of transmitting one's views is problematic. As we saw in the Introduction, Plato criticizes not only the written word as a vehicle for knowledge, but also orality.⁷⁶⁴ His criticisms are particularly relevant when it comes to philosophical views, but they apply to any view whatsoever. Our contact with a particular view is always determined not only by our knowledge and our intellectual talent in general, but also by our interests or psychic disposition (which we will consider below). This means that there can be important distortions in the process of transmitting one's views, which render the whole process of conforming oneself to others problematic.

But the problems are not confined to whether or not there is a real conformity. Plato also criticizes the sources of the views being transmitted. For instance, he often stresses the lack of authority of οἱ πολλοί. The term οἱ πολλοί has in itself a pejorative sense and is marked by aristocratic overtones. It is not merely a matter of statistics, but it refers to the rabble or populace – i.e., the uneducated or laypeople. In this sense, the many are opposed to the best (ἄριστοι) or, in scientific contexts, to the expert (τεχνίτης), who has cognitive competence.⁷⁶⁵ The expression οἱ πολλοί has therefore a connotation of inferiority and ignorance – and so they are not a good source for one's beliefs.⁷⁶⁶

Another problem with these views shared by many (or allegedly by all) is the fact that they often have an opaque origin. We cannot say who has originally determined that things are so – and perhaps we will not even be able to say who has taught it to us. Popular views are the views of everybody, but also of no one in particular. They are like Socrates' fame as it

⁷⁶⁴ See e.g. *Smp.* 175d: “καὶ τὸν Σωκράτη καθίζεσθαι καὶ εἰπεῖν ὅτι εὖ ἂν ἔχοι, φάναι, ὃ Ἀγάθων, εἰ τοιοῦτον εἴη ἢ σοφία ὥστ' ἐκ τοῦ πληρεστέρου εἰς τὸ κενώτερον ρεῖν ἡμῶν, ἐὰν ἀπτώμεθα ἀλλήλων, ὥσπερ τὸ ἐν ταῖς κύλιξιν ὕδωρ τὸ διὰ τοῦ ἐρίου ῥέον ἐκ τῆς πληρεστέρας εἰς τὴν κενωτέραν.” It is also important to bear in mind that the criticism of language's imprecision in *Ep. VII* 342a ff. also applies to orality.

⁷⁶⁵ Cp. in particular *Cri.* 47a ff.

⁷⁶⁶ For more on the notion of οἱ πολλοί, see e.g. H.-D. VOIGTLÄNDER, *Der Philosoph und die Vielen*. Die Bedeutung des Gegensatzes der unphilosophischen Menge zu den Philosophen (und das Problem des Argumentum e consensum omnium) im Philosophischen Denken der Griechen bis auf Aristoteles, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1980, and V. ROSIVACH, *Hoi Polloi* in the *Crito* (44b5-d10), *The Classical Journal* 76 (1981), 289-297.

is described in the *Apology*.⁷⁶⁷ They are no more than a rumor, which one received perhaps even as a child, but one does not know exactly when and why. This makes it all the more difficult to examine or criticize these views. One does not know how they came about and one does not consider alternatives. One simply accepts the popular views.

However, people do not always agree. Often people disagree with each other – and this renders their views particularly problematic. One may invoke them in some question for which many other people have a different view.⁷⁶⁸ According to Socrates, this is a feature that distinguishes them from the experts, who always agree with respect to the matters of their expertise.⁷⁶⁹ So it seems we can only trust others in questions in which everybody seems to agree. When that is the case, one may appeal to the universal consensus. However, this appeal is itself questionable, because generally when one appeals to the views of everybody, one did not actually consult everybody. There was no process of voting. One simply assumed that everybody would agree, since one took one's views to be evident to everybody. Its universality is thus nothing more than a prediction, a projection or a construct – though an important one, since in turn it gives more weight to one's view. In *Gorgias*, Polus invokes such a kind of consensus as a way of refuting Socrates. Socrates, however, rejects the validity of such an appeal. He says that they cannot refer to the multitude, but they must rather examine the question by themselves and see if they actually agree with each other.⁷⁷⁰ Later, in the conversation with Callicles, Socrates will even say that the most important thing is to agree with oneself and not to be in inner contradiction.⁷⁷¹

This contrast between the appeal to others and examining by oneself actually points to what is perhaps the main problem of δόξα as a social version of truth. When considering the way we seem to be pressured by others into seeing things in a certain way, Plato discusses the motivation behind the process that leads one to adopt other people's views. He stresses that there is no real pressure coming from the outside. One is not forced to accept the public views. When one does accept them, the motivation to do so is rather internal. One may for instance desire to be admired or to have power, or one may want to escape punishments or

⁷⁶⁷ See *Ap.* 18b ff.

⁷⁶⁸ This is what Alcibiades does with respect to justice (see *Alc. I* 110e ff.). He says he learned what justice is from the many, but Socrates then argues that the many have strong divergences about its meaning and about how it applies to particular circumstances.

⁷⁶⁹ See *Alc. I* 111b: “[ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν τοὺς εἰδότας ὁμολογεῖν τε ἀλλήλοις καὶ μὴ διαφέρεισθαι; [ΑΛ] ναί.”

⁷⁷⁰ See *Grg.* 470c ff., especially 471e-472c, 473e-474b and 475e-476a. For a detailed analysis of this passage, cp. M. de CARVALHO, “Les témoins malgré eux”. Socrates' Unwitting Witnesses in Plato's *Gorgias*, in: M. de CARVALHO & T. FIDALGO (eds.), *Plato's Gorgias. Labyrinth and Threads*, Coimbra, Instituto de Estudos Filosóficos, 2016, 67-124.

⁷⁷¹ See *Grg.* 482b-c.

pain. Whatever the reason, the source of the others' power over us lies within us.⁷⁷² In fact, our passivity or receptivity is a way of exonerating ourselves from deciding difficult or controversial matters. We take the others as an authority in those matters and thus we make our life easier. The others help with cognitive decisions and with avoiding doubts. We do not have to examine things. We can simply adopt the views of others (especially if they agree with our inner inclinations).

Plato, however, strongly opposes this “cognitive exoneration”. It is an intrinsically defective way of adopting views and, to make matters worse, the views shared by many or by all also tend to be characterized by particular defects. Indeed, there is a certain kind of views that is more easily accepted, since they themselves involve more passivity. These views are closely related to the sensible world and to individual beings therein. This is the domain of the πόλις and it corresponds to the bottom of the cave. In this domain, one is guided primarily by one's body and the pursuit of satisfaction (or pleasure) and honor.⁷⁷³ Therefore, one transmits and adopts the views that are associated with these interests. This constitutes the ordinary way of seeing things, which is actually inferior to what it could be, if one were really concerned with truth. The views of the many (or the views of the πόλις) are a mere δόξα and they are opposed to the views of the few – i.e., the best or the true elite. This opposition is very important in Plato, as was said, but it is not implied therein that we can easily identify who the best are and what their views are. It may in fact be very unclear. Those that were traditionally regarded as the best may also fail to overcome the limitations of δόξα. But by referring to the figure of the those that are truly best, Plato at any rate stresses the intrinsic limitation of δόξα as a shared view of reality.

2.3. The Platonic critique of ὀρθὴ δόξα

More decisive in the discussion of δόξα's constitutive defect is Plato's treatment of the concept of correct or true judgment (δόξα ὀρθή or δόξα ἀληθής). This notion refers to a judgment that hits the mark (i.e., hits reality, things as they are), that has some contact with what things are, or that is in a state of ἀληθεύειν – and yet it is something other than

⁷⁷² For a more detailed discussion of this, see Chap. 17, Sect. 4.2 below.

⁷⁷³ In *Phaedo*, for instance, Socrates argues that the many are only concerned with sensual pleasures and therefore cannot understand and appreciate a philosophical life. See in particular 64d-65a.

knowledge.⁷⁷⁴ Such a thing seems to go against all logic. We are tempted to think that our views are either true or false – and so we either know something or are in error. It is indeed possible for us to be convinced that a certain view is true and provides us with knowledge when that is not the case. A knowledge claim can be false, but it does not seem possible to have a view that is true and still does not allow us to know something. How can a correct δόξα be something other than knowledge? A correct δόξα seems to be without cognitive fault. Plato, however, clearly identifies it with a defective way of seeing things, just because it is a δόξα. It is not a perfect access to something or a perfect contact with it. It includes some significant deviation or defect. The problem then is how can a δόξα be defective, if it is correct or true. How can truth not be knowledge – or, as we could also say, how can truth not be truth? What exactly is the defect of an ὀρθή δόξα and how does it fall outside the dichotomy of falsehood and truth?

There are several references to the notion of ὀρθή δόξα in the corpus.⁷⁷⁵ The most developed treatment of it is found in *Meno*, though it is also lacking in some respects and must be supplemented with other considerations. But let us first briefly consider what is said in *Meno*. Socrates and Meno are discussing how human beings come to achieve excellence or virtue (ἀρετή) – more particularly, whether they become excellent by teaching, by practice, or by nature.⁷⁷⁶ At a certain point in the dialogue, it appears that ἀρετή is knowledge and as such it would admit (and even require) teachers. But are there such teachers? And are all excellent men able to transmit their excellence? Both things are questionable. It is difficult to identify such teachers and it seems that men that were recognized as excellent (insofar as they seemed to guide the πόλις' affairs with success) were not able to impart excellence to their children.⁷⁷⁷ This seems to prove that ἀρετή is not knowledge. But Socrates admits that there might be another way of achieving practical success (and thus of being excellent, according to the common conception of ἀρετή which Socrates is not questioning at this point). One can

⁷⁷⁴ As it is said in *Tht.* 202c1-2: “(...) ἀληθεύειν μὲν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν περὶ αὐτό, γινώσκειν δ’ οὐ”. Cp. *Smp.* 202a: “τὸ ὀρθὰ δοξάζειν καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ἔχειν λόγον δοῦναι οὐκ οἶσθ’, ἔφη, ὅτι οὔτε ἐπίστασθαι ἔστιν – ἄλογον γὰρ πρᾶγμα πῶς ἂν εἴη ἐπιστήμη; – οὔτε ἀμαθία – τὸ γὰρ τοῦ ὄντος τυγχάνον πῶς ἂν εἴη ἀμαθία; – ἔστι δὲ δήπου τοιοῦτον ἡ ὀρθὴ δόξα, μεταξὺ φρονήσεως καὶ ἀμαθίας.”

⁷⁷⁵ The notion (or any equivalent) is mentioned e.g. in *Smp.* 202a, *Rep.* 430b, 431c, 602a, *Tht.* 187b ff., *Plt.* 390c, *Phlb.* 11b, 37d-38a, 64a, *Ep.* VII 336e.

⁷⁷⁶ See 70a: “ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἄρα διδασκτὸν ἡ ἀρετή; ἢ οὐ διδασκτὸν ἀλλ’ ἀσκητὸν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητὸν οὔτε μαθητὸν, ἀλλὰ φύσει παραγίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἄλλῳ τινὶ τρόπῳ;”

⁷⁷⁷ For all these questions, see 86e-96d.

guide one's action or affairs correctly not because one has knowledge, but because one has a correct opinion.⁷⁷⁸

The focus on the practical domain is very important here, since it provides a criterion for judging the correctness of one's views. We have a correct δόξα when our action is effective or successful. But this does not apply to random acts or lucky guesses. One must guide one's action consciously and this requires some form of awareness or representation of what one is doing and why.⁷⁷⁹ In the example provided by Socrates of a successful act, one reaches Larissa not by accident, but because one tried to reach it and steered oneself towards it, guided by some idea of what one should do. However, one had never gone there before and did not know the path.⁷⁸⁰ In other words, one did not have first-hand knowledge of the path. One probably learned it from others or made some conjecture based on what one knew. The text is indeed unclear about how one attains a correct δόξα. It seems to be somewhat random. This is also what is suggested in *Theaetetus*, where Plato gives another example of what corresponds to a correct δόξα. He speaks of judges in court and says that, although they have no knowledge of what actually happened (since they were not eye witnesses), they can still accept the true version of events and judge the matter correctly.⁷⁸¹

However, the idea of a correctness deprived of knowledge is very problematic. In *Meno*, Socrates stresses its problematic character by comparing actions based on correct δόξαι to what soothsayers, diviners and poets supposedly do (and Socrates indeed compares the statesmen that lead the state successfully to all these figures). Their actions are not the result of knowledge. They are not fully aware of things as they are. Rather, they are inspired or possessed (ἐνθουσιῶντες). Some higher power acts in them and guarantees the correctness of their views and of what results from them – but they are not fully lucid. They are out of their minds, in trance (ἔπιπνοι, κατεχόμενοι).⁷⁸² This means that they receive a divine

⁷⁷⁸ See e.g. 97b-c: “δόξα ἄρα ἀληθῆς πρὸς ὀρθότητα πράξεως οὐδὲν χειρῶν ἡγεμῶν φρονήσεως· καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶν ὃ νυνδὴ παρελείπομεν ἐν τῇ περὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς σκέψει ὁποῖόν τι εἶη, λέγοντες ὅτι φρόνησις μόνον ἡγεῖται τοῦ ὀρθῶς πράττειν· τὸ δὲ ἄρα καὶ δόξα ἦν ἀληθῆς.”

⁷⁷⁹ Cp. 99a: “(...)τὰ γὰρ ἀπὸ τύχης τινὸς ὀρθῶς γιγνόμενα οὐκ ἀνθρωπίνη ἡγεμονία γίνεταί – ὧν δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἡγεμῶν ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τὸ ὀρθόν, δύο ταῦτα, δόξα ἀληθῆς καὶ ἐπιστήμη.”

⁷⁸⁰ See 97a-b: “[ΣΩ] (...) εἰ εἰδῶς τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν εἰς Λάρισαν ἢ ὅποι βούλει ἄλλοσε βαδίζοι καὶ ἄλλοις ἡγοῖτο, ἄλλο τι ὀρθῶς ἂν καὶ εὖ ἡγοῖτο; [ΜΕΝ] πάνυ γε. [ΣΩ] τί δ' εἰ τις ὀρθῶς μὲν δοξάζων ἦτις ἐστὶν ἡ ὁδός, ἐληλυθὼς δὲ μὴ μὴδ' ἐπιστάμενος, οὐ καὶ οὗτος ἂν ὀρθῶς ἡγοῖτο; [ΜΕΝ] πάνυ γε.”

⁷⁸¹ See *Th.* 201b-c: “[ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν ὅταν δικαίως πεισθῶσιν δικασταὶ περὶ ὧν ἰδόντι μόνον ἔστιν εἰδέναι, ἄλλως δὲ μὴ, ταῦτα τότε ἐξ ἀκοῆς κρίνοντες, ἀληθῆ δόξαν λαβόντες, ἄνευ ἐπιστήμης ἔκριναν, ὀρθὰ πεισθέντες, εἴπερ εὖ ἐδίκασαν; [ΘΕΑΙ] παντάπασι μὲν οὖν.”

⁷⁸² For all this, see 99b-d: “[ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ ἐπιστήμη, εὐδοξία δὴ τὸ λοιπὸν γίνεταί· ἢ οἱ πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες χρώμενοι τὰς πόλεις ὀρθοῦσιν, οὐδὲν διαφερόντως ἔχοντες πρὸς τὸ φρονεῖν ἢ οἱ χρησμοδοὶ τε καὶ οἱ θεομάνταις· καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι ἐνθουσιῶντες λέγουσιν μὲν ἀληθῆ καὶ πολλὰ, ἴσασι δὲ οὐδὲν ὧν λέγουσιν. [ΜΕΝ] κινδυνεύει οὕτως ἔχειν. [ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν, ὦ Μένων, ἄξιον τούτους θεῖους καλεῖν τοὺς ἄνδρας, οἵτινες νοῦν μὴ

dispensation (θεία μοῖρα).⁷⁸³ They are suffering from a form of beneficial *μανία* similar to the ones mentioned in *Phaedrus*.⁷⁸⁴ It allows them to do something (and this is taken to imply that it gives them some glimpse of how things are), but they cannot fully see or understand things as they are. They have a diminished awareness of things (and in this sense they are just like flitting shadows in Hades).⁷⁸⁵ They are in a way blind, and having a correct *δόξα* is actually described as blindness in the *Republic*.⁷⁸⁶ But this is a strange form of blindness. They are not absolutely blind (otherwise their actions would be the result of pure chance), but they are not completely lucid either. In sum, the forms of efficient action based on a correct opinion presuppose some contact with things and thus some truth.⁷⁸⁷ There is some correctness, some *ὀρθοῦν*, but it bears significant limitations. Full truth is more than getting it right. A correct *δόξα* is not knowledge. It is a deficient grasp of what things are or an inferior way of seeing them.⁷⁸⁸

But then Meno wonders: if a correct *δόξα* has the same practical success, if it does not fail, why is it inferior to and less precious than knowledge?⁷⁸⁹ In fact, one can take Meno's question even further and wonder why is it different from knowledge at all? We all assume knowledge must be correct and correspond to how things are, but if this is all knowledge is, then the idea of a correct form of access to things that is not knowledge is absurd. Consequently, knowledge must imply additional requisites that are not being fulfilled in the case of a correct *δόξα*. But what are the additional requisites of knowledge that an *ὀρθή* *δόξα* lacks and that renders it somehow blind to what things are?

ἔχοντες πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα κατορθοῦσιν ὧν πράττουσι καὶ λέγουσι; [MEN] πάνυ γε. [ΣΩ] ὀρθῶς ἄρ' ἂν καλοῖμεν θεῖους τε οὓς νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν χρησιμφοδούς καὶ μάντις καὶ τοὺς ποιητικούς ἅπαντας· καὶ τοὺς πολιτικούς οὐκ ἦκιστα τούτων φαῖμεν ἂν θεῖους τε εἶναι καὶ ἐνθουσιάζειν, ἐπίπνους ὄντας καὶ κατεχομένους ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅταν κατορθῶσι λέγοντες πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα πράγματα, μηδὲν εἰδότες ὧν λέγουσιν.”

⁷⁸³ See 99e: “(...) ἀρετὴ ἂν εἴη οὔτε φύσει οὔτε διδακτόν, ἀλλὰ θεία μοῖρα παραγινομένη ἄνευ νοῦ οἷς ἂν παραγίγηται (...).” See also 100b.

⁷⁸⁴ Cp. *Phdr.* 244a ff.

⁷⁸⁵ In 100a, Socrates contrasts those that have only a correct *δόξα* about ἀρετή with someone that would possess ἀρετή along with νοῦς, and says about the latter that “(...) σχεδὸν ἂν τι οὗτος λέγοιτο τοιοῦτος ἐν τοῖς ζῶσιν οἷον ἔφη Ὅμηρος ἐν τοῖς τεθνεῶσιν τὸν Τειρεσίαν εἶναι, λέγων περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι οἷος πέπνυται τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου, τοὶ δὲ σκιαὶ ἀίσσουσι. ταῦτόν ἂν καὶ ἐνθάδε ὁ τοιοῦτος ὡσπερ παρὰ σκιάς ἀληθῆς ἂν πρᾶγμα εἴη πρὸς ἀρετήν.”

⁷⁸⁶ See 506c: “οὐκ ἦσθησαι τὰς ἄνευ ἐπιστήμης δόξας, ὡς πᾶσαι αἰσχραὶ; ὧν αἱ βέλτισται τυφλαὶ – ἢ δοκοῦσιν τί σοι τυφλῶν διαφέρειν ὁδὸν ὀρθῶς πορευομένων οἱ ἄνευ νοῦ ἀληθῆς τι δοξάζοντες; οὐδέν, ἔφη.”

⁷⁸⁷ This is precisely what is said in the passage from *Symposium* quoted above in footnote 774.

⁷⁸⁸ This is emphasized by the very term “δόξα”, which is associated with the idea of appearance and semblance (i.e., a form of awareness that hides the true being of something). A correct *δόξα* is in a way a correct semblance.

⁷⁸⁹ See 97c-d: “[ΣΩ] (...) ὁ αἰεὶ ἔχων ὀρθὴν δόξαν οὐκ αἰεὶ ἂν τυγχάνοι, ἕωσπερ ὀρθὰ δοξάζοι; [MEN] ἀνάγκη μοι φαίνεται· ὥστε θαυμάζω, ὃ Σώκρατες, τούτου οὕτως ἔχοντος, ὅτι δὴ ποτε πολὺ τιμιωτέρα ἢ ἐπιστήμη τῆς ὀρθῆς δόξης, καὶ δι’ ὅτι τὸ μὲν ἕτερον, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον ἐστὶν αὐτῶν.”

Socrates says that correct δόξαι differ from knowledge insofar as they are not tied down. They are a way of seeing things that somehow reaches being, but is at the same time characterized by a lack of security or stability. Correct δόξαι as such are infallible (and as long as we have a correct opinion, we will always guide our action correctly), but they are like Daedalus' statues, who were able to move by themselves and escape if they were not fastened with chains.⁷⁹⁰ This characterization suggests that although we have a correct view in one moment, we may lose it in the next – i.e., we may become convinced of something else or we may regard things from a different angle and no longer be able to determine them correctly. We may lose these δόξαι. Nothing guarantees us that our perspective will remain correct. But this is only part of the problem. If the only criterion for the correctness of our views is external and concerns the outcome of our action, we have no way of discerning the quality of our views beforehand. We have no control over the value of our views. There is no guarantee that they are correct, we cannot know for sure that things are the way we think they are, unless we are successful.⁷⁹¹ Thus, the problem is not simply that our beliefs may run away, but it affects the very way we see things. When our δόξαι are correct, we still do not have a perfect access to things (and hence we cannot confirm our δόξαι). We fail to really see things as they are. But what would “seeing things as they are” amount to? What do correct δόξαι lack? What could fasten them and give them assurance? And how much would they change if they were to be fastened?

In *Meno*, Socrates associates the fastening of δόξαι with a reasoning about the cause of something – i.e., about what is responsible for it, what makes it what it is.⁷⁹² Something similar is implied in *Theaetetus* and *Symposium*. The limitations of a correct δόξα are overcome if one is able to render account or justify one's view, which implies explaining what something is and why something is as it is.⁷⁹³ Instead of seeing things as simple facts,

⁷⁹⁰ See 97d-98a: “[ΣΩ] (...) τοῖς Δαιδάλου ἀγάλμασιν οὐ προσέσχηκας τὸν νοῦν· ἴσως δὲ οὐδ’ ἔστιν παρ’ ὑμῖν. [ΜΕΝ] πρὸς τί δὲ δὴ τοῦτο λέγεις; [ΣΩ] ὅτι καὶ ταῦτα, ἐὰν μὲν μὴ δεδεμένα ᾖ, ἀποδιδράσκει καὶ δραπετεύει, ἐὰν δὲ δεδεμένα, παραμένει. [ΜΕΝ] τί οὖν δὴ; [ΣΩ] τῶν ἐκείνου ποιημάτων λελυμένων μὲν ἐκτῆσθαι οὐ πολλῆς τινοῦ ἄξιόν ἐστι τιμῆς, ὡσπερ δραπέτην ἄνθρωπον – οὐ γὰρ παραμένει – δεδεμένον δὲ πολλοῦ ἄξιον· πάνυ γὰρ καλὰ τὰ ἔργα ἐστίν. πρὸς τί οὖν δὴ λέγω ταῦτα; πρὸς τὰς δόξας τὰς ἀληθεῖς. καὶ γὰρ αἱ δόξαι αἱ ἀληθεῖς, ὅσον μὲν ἂν χρόνον παραμένωσιν, καλὸν τὸ χρῆμα καὶ πάντ’ ἀγαθὰ ἐργάζονται· πολλὸν δὲ χρόνον οὐκ ἐθέλουσι παραμένειν, ἀλλὰ δραπετεύουσιν ἐκ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὥστε οὐ πολλοῦ ἄξια εἰσιν (...).”

⁷⁹¹ This is a problematic criterion, because in many cases there may be no sure test, or it may turn out that reaching Larissa was after all not the best thing for us. But Socrates does not follow this line of inquiry.

⁷⁹² See 98a: “(...) οὐ πολλοῦ ἄξια εἰσιν, ἕως ἄν τις αὐτὰς δῆσῃ αἰτίας λογισμῶ. τοῦτο δ’ ἐστίν, ὃ Μένων ἐταῖρε, ἀνάμνησις, ὡς ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἡμῖν ὡμολόγηται. ἐπειδὴν δὲ δεθῶσιν, πρῶτον μὲν ἐπιστήμαι γίγνονται, ἔπειτα μόνιμοι· καὶ διὰ ταῦτα δὴ τιμώτερον ἐπιστήμη ὀρθῆς δόξης ἐστίν, καὶ διαφέρει δεσμῶ ἐπιστήμη ὀρθῆς δόξης.”

⁷⁹³ See *Tht.* 201c-d: “(...) τὴν μὲν μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι, τὴν δὲ ἄλογον ἐκτὸς ἐπιστήμης· καὶ ὧν μὲν μὴ ἐστὶ λόγος, οὐκ ἐπιστητὰ εἶναι, οὕτως καὶ ὀνομάζων, ἃ δ’ ἔχει, ἐπιστητὰ.” See also the passage from *Symposium* quoted in footnote 774.

we will know what makes them what they are. This is what provides assurance and genuine knowledge. When we are aware of what explains things, we can fully see them, and this will also allow us to act successfully and be excellent or virtuous, not because our views are correct, but because we are fully aware of what we are doing.

But what exactly does this reasoning about the cause consist in? In *Meno*, Plato does not say exactly what kind of causes he has in mind. In *Phaedo* Socrates defends that the forms or εἶδη are what really accounts for things being as they are.⁷⁹⁴ In other words, the general modes of being, which are the predicates of things, are what ultimately explains what things are. Even if they are not the only factors, they are the main ones.⁷⁹⁵ This is closely connected with something we already mentioned. All attributions of predicates presuppose an understanding of these predicates. As a result, we may attribute a certain predicate correctly, but if we do not have a full insight into it, our access to a thing with this predicate will still be defective. This is precisely the defect of a correct δόξα. Though one can have many correct judgments about what particular beings are (in the sense that one attributes the right predicate and not wrong ones), one may still be far from having a perfectly clear understanding of what one is dealing with. One may not be able to render account of one's judgment because one cannot fully explain what is being judged.

This is very important to understand the kind of defect a correct δόξα involves. When we think about cognitive defects, we may think only of errors in the attribution of a predicate. But we can also have a defective understanding of predicates. An appropriate access to things presupposes correctness and intelligibility, but we may not realize that it may be correct (i.e., it may attribute the right predicates to things) without us understanding properly what these predicates are. In that case, we have an intermediate form of access to things (i.e., a form that can be characterized as μεταξύ, to use the terminology we will consider in the following subsection). There is a certain correctness in this way of seeing something, but it is also in a way incorrect, insofar as it involves a deviation. It does not attribute the wrong predicate, but it has an inadequate understanding of the correctly attributed predicate. In other words, the claim to understanding that accompanies a δόξα is false. Plato's criticism of correct δόξαι is thus associated with how our views tend to be directed to particular beings and disregard our

⁷⁹⁴ See *Phd.* 95e-103a, especially 100c ff.

⁷⁹⁵ We can actually apply here a distinction Socrates makes in *Phaedo*, shortly before talking about the εἶδη as the real causes or agents responsible for what things are. In 97c-99c, Socrates had distinguished between the real responsible for something and that without which the responsible would not be the responsible for something. See especially 99b: "(...) ἄλλο μὲν τί ἐστι τὸ αἴτιον τῷ ὄντι, ἄλλο δὲ ἐκεῖνο ἄνευ οὗ τὸ αἴτιον οὐκ ἂν ποτ' εἴη αἴτιον (...)."

understanding of their common predicates. It points in this direction, even if it does not render it fully explicit.⁷⁹⁶

In sum, Plato's analysis of a correct δόξα reveals how knowledge and non-knowledge (as well as truth and untruth) do not exclude one another. There can be intermediate forms, which are not genuine knowledge, but still contain some truth. This is possible because knowledge has several requirements (such as correctness, practical efficiency, assurance, full insight) and a particular view (or a particular set of views) of ours may fulfill some of them without fulfilling the others. The word δόξα thus expresses the fact that we decide things are in a certain way and regard them as being so without having a real assurance of this version of things and a full insight into its content. It may be correct, but it is nonetheless an intrinsically defective form of access to things.

2.4. Δόξα as a power or capacity that lies between ignorance and knowledge. The characterization of this “in between” (μεταξύ) in *Republic V*

At the end of *Republic V* we find an analysis of δόξα's constitutive defectiveness that takes what we just saw much further. Once more, δόξα is defined as being something more than absolute ignorance and something less than perfect knowledge. In this sense, it corresponds to what we saw when considering the notions of knowledge claim and correct δόξα. The question then is how this intermediate position is now conceived and what it says about our usual way of seeing things.

The passage that interests us comes in a very particular context, which we must briefly consider. The whole discussion about δόξα is prompted by Socrates' claim that philosophers should be kings or kings should be philosophers.⁷⁹⁷ This leads Socrates to define what philosophers are. He explains that philosophers are people who desire all forms of knowledge or learning. They have an unrestrained philosophical urge, directed at all beings.⁷⁹⁸ However, such a characterization immediately suggests that philosophy is simply

⁷⁹⁶ As we will see, the same idea is also at the center of Plato's third form of criticism of the notion of δόξα, which is directly connected with our understanding of εἶδη.

⁷⁹⁷ See 473c-e.

⁷⁹⁸ Cp. 475b-c: “οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον σοφίας φήσομεν ἐπιθυμητὴν εἶναι, οὐ τῆς μὲν, τῆς δ' οὐ, ἀλλὰ πάσης· ἀληθῆ. τὸν ἄρα περὶ τὰ μαθήματα δυσχεραίνοντα, ἄλλως τε καὶ νέον ὄντα καὶ μήπω λόγον ἔχοντα τί τε χρηστὸν καὶ μὴ, οὐ φήσομεν φιλομαθῆ οὐδὲ φιλόσοφον εἶναι, ὥσπερ τὸν περὶ τὰ σιτία δυσχερῆ οὔτε πεινῆν φαμεν οὔτ' ἐπιθυμεῖν σιτίων, οὐδὲ φιλόσιτον ἀλλὰ κακόσιτον εἶναι. καὶ ὁρθῶς γε φήσομεν. τὸν δὲ δὴ εὐχερῶς ἐθέλοντα παντὸς μαθήματος γεύεσθαι καὶ ἀσμένως ἐπὶ τὸ μαθάνειν ἰόντα καὶ ἀπλήστως ἔχοντα, τοῦτον δ' ἐν δίκῃ φήσομεν φιλόσοφον (...).” We will return to this definition of the philosopher and see it in more detail in Chap. 13, Sect. 3.

concerned with expanding our cognitive horizons. A philosopher wants to see more things, hear more things, and so on – i.e., he wants to experience more things similar to the ones we already experience. Glaucon then points out that if it is so, then Socrates seems to be identifying the philosopher with strange fellows, such as lovers of sights (or lovers of spectacles – φιλοθεάμονες), lovers of hearing, lovers of arts (φιλότεχνοι) and practical men (πρακτικοί).⁷⁹⁹ The philosopher apparently desires a full contemplation (an absolute θέα) of reality. He wants to fully watch the spectacle of reality. Socrates, however, vehemently denies such an interpretation and says he means something entirely different. These lovers of spectacles (φιλοθεάμονες) are just similar to philosophers (i.e., an image thereof), but they are no genuine philosophers. According to Socrates, genuine philosophers are the “lovers of the sight [or spectacle] of truth”.⁸⁰⁰ They want to have access to the truth, which means that all the other people just mentioned are concerned with something other than truth. But how is truth here conceived and why is it directed at something other than what one would immediately think?

Socrates defines truth by reference to the forms or εἶδη. He asks Glaucon whether there is something like beauty, ugliness, justice, injustice, goodness, badness – and everything akin to them. These are general modes of beings or general predicates that appear everywhere, in many guises.⁸⁰¹ They constitute the alphabet of things and our understanding of it allows us to read the text of reality. In other words, we must have some contact with them in order to see things as determined in some way. However, Socrates says that there can be two different modes of relation to the εἶδη, which are also two modes of relation to everything in which they appear. He uses as an example the form of beauty (which is in keeping with the previous references to spectacles) and says that one is either able to see it, delight in it, approach it, follow it – or not.⁸⁰² If one is aware of beauty itself, one will hold

⁷⁹⁹ The two last designations are introduced by Socrates in 476a, but they correspond to what Glaucon says. See 475c-e: “πολλοὶ ἄρα καὶ ἄτοποι ἔσονταί σοι τοιοῦτοι. οἳ τε γὰρ φιλοθεάμονες πάντες ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσι τῷ καταμανθάνειν χαίροντες τοιοῦτοι εἶναι, οἳ τε φιλήκοοι ἀτοπώτατοί τινές εἰσιν ὡς γ’ ἐν φιλοσόφοις τιθέσθαι, οἳ πρὸς μὲν λόγους καὶ τοιαύτην διατριβὴν ἐκόντες οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλοιεν ἐλθεῖν, ὡσπερ δὲ ἀπομεισθώκοτες τὰ ὄσα ἐπακοῦσαι πάντων χορῶν περιθέουσι τοῖς Διονυσίοις οὔτε τῶν κατὰ πόλεις οὔτε τῶν κατὰ κώμας ἀπολειπόμενοι. τούτους οὖν πάντας καὶ ἄλλους τοιούτων τινῶν μαθητικούς καὶ τοὺς τῶν τεχνυδρίων φιλοσόφους φήσομεν;”

⁸⁰⁰ See 475e: “οὐδαμῶς, εἶπον, ἀλλ’ ὁμοίους μὲν φιλοσόφοις. τοὺς δὲ ἀληθινούς, ἔφη, τίνας λέγεις; τοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, φιλοθεάμονας.”

⁸⁰¹ See 475e-476a: “ἐπειδὴ ἔστιν ἐναντίον καλὸν αἰσχυρῶ, δύο αὐτῷ εἶναι. πῶς δ’ οὐ; οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ δύο, καὶ ἐν ἑκάτερον; καὶ τοῦτο. καὶ περὶ δὴ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν εἰδῶν περὶ ὃ αὐτὸς λόγος, αὐτὸ μὲν ἐν ἑκάστῳ εἶναι, τῆ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἑκάστῳ. ὀρθῶς, ἔφη, λέγεις.”

⁸⁰² See 476b-c: “οἳ μὲν που, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, φιλήκοοι καὶ φιλοθεάμονες τάς τε καλὰς φωνὰς ἀσπάζονται καὶ χροῶς καὶ σχήματα καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων δημιουργούμενα, αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ καλοῦ ἀδύνατος αὐτῶν ἢ διάνοια τὴν

that it exists. But if one is not aware of it, one will either be completely distracted from it or one will even defend that it does not exist.⁸⁰³ Consequently, one will either regard individual beings as self-contained and as lacking any reference to general predicates, or one will look at them as particular instances of general predicates or εἶδη. Given that the latter alternative is what these beings actually are, the fact that one is unaware and unable to focus the εἶδη as such implies that there is a defect in one's contact with individual beings.

This is how Socrates begins to explain what truth is and how we frequently fail to achieve it. It may suggest that the problem with non-philosophical lovers of spectacles is that they do not pay attention to how we see things (i.e., to how we always have some understanding of the εἶδη and everything is referred to them). However, since one must still be tacitly aware of εἶδη in order to see things as determined in a certain way, it is not clear what the limitation of their way of seeing things is and how they differ from philosophers. But at this point it is important to distinguish two things that are conflated in Plato's analysis. One thing is the fact that there are εἶδη (i.e., the fact that reality is not as nominalists claimed, but rather composed of general contents or predicates that are present in different things) and that we may be aware of them or not – i.e., their existence and effect in how we see things may be hidden from us or not. However, this is something different from the fact that there can be defects in our way of understanding εἶδη and, since one does not focus on the εἶδη themselves (in fact, one is not expressly aware of them at all), one is not able to identify and correct these defects. In this second case, the problem is the fact that one ultimately does not understand the content of the εἶδη – and Plato tries to show that this is actually what happens with us. We do not really know the alphabet of reality – and so, by not focusing on the alphabet and not correcting our understanding of it, any expansion of our knowledge at the “empirical” level (i.e., at the level of particular beings) is only illusory – or, as Plato says, it is a form of becoming rich only in dreams.⁸⁰⁴

This kind of defect is precisely what is expressed in the Platonic notion of dreaming. Plato talks of dreaming as something that may occur both when one is asleep and when one is awake, and says that it consists “in believing a likeness of something to be not a likeness, but

φύσιν ἰδεῖν τε καὶ ἀσπάσασθαι. ἔχει γὰρ οὖν δὴ, ἔφη, οὕτως. οἱ δὲ δὴ ἐπ' αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν δυνατοὶ ἰέναι τε καὶ ὀρᾶν καθ' αὐτὸ ἄρα οὐ σπάνιοι ἂν εἶεν; καὶ μάλα.”

⁸⁰³ Cp. 479a: (...) ὁ χρηστός ὃς αὐτὸ μὲν καλὸν καὶ ἰδέαν τινὰ αὐτοῦ κάλλους μηδεμίαν ἠγεῖται ἀεὶ μὲν κατὰ ταῦτα ὡσαύτως ἔχουσαν, πολλὰ δὲ τὰ καλὰ νομίζει, ἐκεῖνος ὁ φιλοθεάμων καὶ οὐδαμῆ ἀνεχόμενος ἂν τις ἔν τὸ καλὸν φῆ εἶναι καὶ δίκαιον καὶ τᾶλλα οὕτω.”

⁸⁰⁴ Cp. *Ly.* 218c and *Tht.* 208b.

rather the thing itself to which it is like”.⁸⁰⁵ This is different from our concept of dreaming, which defines it as a state in which one is surrounded by mere images that are not real, regardless of how one relates to these images (i.e., of whether one is aware of their imagetic status or not). In our sense, one only stops dreaming when one has access to reality. For Plato, however, dreaming implies that one mistakes an image for the real thing. The mistake or confusion is an essential part of this experience. As such, dreaming is a state of extreme hiddenness. The thing itself is hidden, but so is the image as such. We do not recognize the image and think we are seeing the thing itself, and so we are ignorant of both, as well as of our own cognitive state. Moreover, if this is the case, we do not need to see reality (i.e., the things themselves) in order to stop dreaming in the Platonic sense of the word. We only need to realize we are seeing images. This is enough for us to be “awake” according to Plato – even if we still have to search for the things themselves.

In the case of εἶδη, dreaming means not only that we take particular beings as autonomous (though not fully, since εἶδη are still presupposed in our access to them), but also that we fail to see what the εἶδη are (i.e., we cannot understand them) and still think we understand them. It is in this sense that we dream about being.⁸⁰⁶ Our understanding is deviated. We have just an image of the εἶδος, which is then primarily determined by particular beings, or at least is strongly affected by them – i.e., by something incidental to the εἶδος as such. This is the core of dreaming for Plato. It may correspond to some pockets of reality, but when we dream about one particular εἶδος, this is reflected in everything that partakes of it. In addition, if we dream about many or all εἶδη, this will correspond to a state of aggravated or absolute dream.⁸⁰⁷

What is then the opposite of dreaming in this sense? In order to be awake, we must focus on the εἶδος as such. We must be aware of it – and this is possible in two ways. We may either grasp its content and be fully aware of it, or, given the fact that we often do not really understand the εἶδη (i.e., we somehow relate to them, but still fall short of a full insight), we may be fully aware of our cognitive limitations and of how the εἶδη present a problem for us. If this happens, we will no longer concentrate on particular beings and our views will not be characterized by the defect that results from this concentration. We become

⁸⁰⁵ See 476c: “τὸ ὄνειρώττειν ἄρα οὐ τόδε ἐστίν, ἔαντε ἐν ὕπνῳ τις ἔαντ’ ἐγρηγορῶς τὸ ὁμοίον τῷ μὴ ὁμοίον ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ ἠγγῆται εἶναι ᾧ ἔοικεν;” Here and in the following I use Bloom’s translation (see A. BLOOM, *The Republic of Plato*, New York/etc., Basic Books, 1968).

⁸⁰⁶ Cp. 476c-d. For the notion of dreaming about being (ὄνειρώττειν περὶ τὸ ὄν), see *Rep.* 533b.

⁸⁰⁷ It may even correspond to what is said by the Visitor in *Plt.* 277d: “κινδυνεύει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οἷον ὄναρ εἰδὼς ἅπαντα πάντ’ αὖ πάλιν ὥσπερ ὕπαρ ἀγνοεῖν.”

aware of the εἶδος as a problem, we reach a deeper insight into it, even if it still falls short of a perfect understanding of it – and so we are, in a way, already awake.

But, according to Plato, this is not the state people (and especially the lovers of sensible spectacles) usually find themselves in. In general, people's relation to the general modes of being is different. They have some knowledge of them, but they are also ignorant of them to a certain extent. The εἶδη are somehow revealed and somehow hidden – and not in the sense that we fully know some aspects and are fully ignorant of others, but both things are completely intertwined, as we shall see. Our access to them is something through and through intermediate (μεταξύ) and this affects our contact with everything else (i.e., with all particular beings which partake of them). Our access to all beings is marked by this defect – and it is in this sense that Plato characterizes it as a δόξα. Plato's analysis of δόξα is thus a revision of the opposition of knowledge and non-knowledge. He shows that there is something intermediate that is neither genuine knowledge nor a complete absence of knowledge. This was already implied in the notion of ὀρθὴ δόξα, as we saw, but in the *Republic* Plato develops the idea further. He identifies δόξα as something that lies between knowledge (γνώσις) and non-knowledge or ignorance (ἄγνωσία), and its own content or what it refers to is identified as something that lies between pure being and absolute non-being.

Let us see how Plato presents this idea in the text and what is implied therein. The whole discussion is marked by the correlation between subjective or mental states and the objects they refer to.⁸⁰⁸ Plato considers them together, but still puts the emphasis on one of the sides. In fact, he first approaches the correlation from the objective side and then changes his perspective and starts focusing on the subjective side. This change is very meaningful and we must consider it in detail.

In a first moment (477a2-b11), Socrates considers different kinds of realities and their characterization, and then he tries to determine what they require in cognitive terms. He speaks of absolute being (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν) and says that it is entirely knowable. The access to it requires knowledge, and the latter must indeed be referred to being in order to be knowledge.⁸⁰⁹ Socrates also speaks of absolute non-being (τὸ μηδαμῆ ὄν), which is entirely unknowable, and it enables nothing in terms of knowledge but complete ignorance.⁸¹⁰ Being and non-being are thus entirely different and enable entirely different things. If there were

⁸⁰⁸ As was said above, a similar correlation is presupposed in the simile of the line. See Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3a). The resemblance between the two passages is not surprising, since the simile of the line is in fact an elaboration of what we are now considering.

⁸⁰⁹ See 477a: “(...) τὸ μὲν παντελῶς ὄν παντελῶς γνωστόν (...). οὐκοῦν ἐπὶ μὲν τῷ ὄντι γνώσις ἦν (...).”

⁸¹⁰ See *ibidem*: “(...) μὴ ὄν δὲ μηδαμῆ πάντη ἄγνωστον (...).” and “(...) ἀγνωσία δ' ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐπὶ μὴ ὄντι (...).”

only these two modes of reality, then there would always be either knowledge or ignorance, and no intermediate. But Socrates also admits the possibility of something that lies between being and non-being – and this intermediate reality is then what makes a mixture of knowledge and non-knowledge possible.⁸¹¹ In fact, it requires such a mixture, and δόξα is precisely this mixed form of cognition. It resembles knowledge in a way, but it also includes ignorance. In itself, δόξα is at the same time knowledge and ignorance (and therefore it is not absolute ignorance nor absolute knowledge). But how is this possible?

In order to explain what δόξα is, Plato changes his perspective and adopts the subjective side as a point of reference (477c1 ff.). This change coincides with the introduction of the notion of power or capacity (δύναμις). Plato considers various cognitive powers and the different subjective mental states they are associated with. He also sees what they are related to – i.e., what they show or what they let appear, but this is no longer the primary focus. It is in this sense that we can say that Plato now changes everything. Whereas in the first moment the objects were primarily considered by themselves (i.e., as absolute ontological contents), now they are seen from the standpoint of our mental representation or of how we have access to them.

What is then a power? According to Socrates, powers make us capable of something, but they are not sensible realities. They cannot be seen. They have no color or shape.⁸¹² They are only determined (and distinguished from one another) by two things. One of these things is that on which they depend or to which they are subordinated – their ἐφ’ ᾧ or their object. This is not simply a thing in itself, but it is the correlate of the δύναμις – what it lets appear. In addition, a δύναμις is also determined by what it accomplishes or brings about (ὁ ἀπεργάζεται) – i.e., the subjective state that the δύναμις originates when it lets something appear.⁸¹³ Socrates says that different powers have different objects and produce different mental states. He also suggests that the two factors of each δύναμις are always correlate and inseparable. A particular power has always the same kind of object and always produces the

⁸¹¹ See 477a-b: “εἰ δὲ δὴ τι οὕτως ἔχει ὡς εἶναι τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι, οὐ μεταξὺ ἂν κέοιτο τοῦ εἰλικρινῶς ὄντος καὶ τοῦ αὐτῷ μηδαμῆ ὄντος; μεταξὺ. (...) ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ μεταξὺ τούτῳ μεταξὺ τι καὶ ζητητέον ἀγνοίας τε καὶ ἐπιστήμης, εἴ τι τυγχάνει ὄν τοιοῦτον; πάνυ μὲν οὖν.”

⁸¹² See 477c: “δυνάμεως γὰρ ἐγὼ οὔτε τινὰ χροῖαν ὀρώ οὔτε σχῆμα οὔτε τι τῶν τοιούτων οἶον καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν, πρὸς ἃ ἀποβλέπων ἕνια διορίζομαι παρ’ ἐμαυτῷ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα εἶναι, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα (...).”

⁸¹³ See 477c-d: “(...) δυνάμεως δ’ εἰς ἐκεῖνο μόνον βλέπω ἐφ’ ᾧ τε ἔστι καὶ ὁ ἀπεργάζεται, καὶ ταύτη ἐκάστην αὐτῶν δυνάμιν ἐκάλεσα (...).”

same mental state.⁸¹⁴ This is the fundamental structure of δυνάμεις – and it is in this framework that Socrates discusses the notion of δόξα.

Δόξα is clearly different from ignorance and Socrates does not even feel the need to dissociate them, but he and Glauco carefully distinguish knowledge from δόξα. They stress that knowledge never makes mistakes and is thus an absolutely efficient cognitive power. Δόξα, in turn, makes mistakes and is essentially fallible.⁸¹⁵ This difference is very meaningful and it proves that they are not the same thing and do not coincide. Consequently, they must also be referred to different things. One opines some things and one knows different things. Now, knowledge lets appear what absolutely is (which is not a qualified or mystical form of being, but rather something that contains nothing of its opposite).⁸¹⁶ Δόξα must therefore let something else appear, especially since it also differs from ignorance, which is relative to nothing and has an empty correlate.⁸¹⁷ So what is there between nothing or non-being and simple being? Socrates calls it τὸ δοξαστόν and goes on to define it as something that wanders about between non-being and being.⁸¹⁸

But before discussing this question, Socrates also distinguishes the different powers (namely, ἀγνοεῖν, δοξάζειν and γινώσκειν) in terms of what they bring about – namely, ἄγνοια, δόξα and γνῶσις. In order to distinguish the last two from one another, Plato introduces the criterion of clearness (σαφήνεια) and non-clearness, obscurity, or confusion (ἀσάφεια). He says that δόξα cannot be clearer than knowledge or more obscure than ignorance.⁸¹⁹ Knowledge is indeed the extreme form of clearness. It gives a complete access

⁸¹⁴ Cp. 477d: “(...) και τὴν μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτῷ τεταγμένην και τὸ αὐτὸ ἀπεργαζομένην τὴν αὐτὴν καλῶ, τὴν δὲ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ και ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένην ἄλλην.”

⁸¹⁵ See 477e-478a: “ἀλλὰ μὲν δὴ ὀλίγον γε πρότερον ὠμολόγεις μὴ τὸ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐπιστήμην τε και δόξαν. πῶς γὰρ ἂν, ἔφη, τό γε ἀναμάρτητον τῷ μὴ ἀναμαρτήτῳ ταυτόν τις νοῦν ἔχων τιθεῖ; καλῶς, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, και δῆλον ὅτι ἕτερον ἐπιστήμης δόξα ὁμολογεῖται ἡμῖν.”

⁸¹⁶ Cp. 478a-b: “εἴπερ ἐπ’ ἄλλῳ ἄλλῃ δύναμις πέφυκεν, δυνάμεις δὲ ἀμφοτέραί ἐστων, δόξα τε και ἐπιστήμη, ἄλλη δὲ ἑκατέρα, ὡς φαμεν, ἐκ τούτων δὴ οὐκ ἐγχωρεῖ γνωστόν και δοξαστόν ταυτόν εἶναι. οὐκοῦν εἰ τὸ ὄν γνωστόν, ἄλλο τι ἂν δοξαστόν ἢ τὸ ὄν εἴη; ἄλλο.”

⁸¹⁷ Cp. 478b: “ἄρ’ οὖν τὸ μὴ ὄν δοξάζει; ἢ ἀδύνατον και δοξάσαι τό γε μὴ ὄν; ἐννόει δέ. οὐχ ὁ δοξάζων ἐπὶ τί φέρει τὴν δόξαν; ἢ οἷόν τε αὐτὸ δοξάζειν μὲν, δοξάζειν δὲ μηδέν; ἀδύνατον.”

⁸¹⁸ See 478e: “ἐκεῖνο δὴ λείπειτ’ ἂν ἡμῖν εὐρεῖν, ὡς ἔοικε, τὸ ἀμφοτέρων μετέχον, τοῦ εἶναι τε και μὴ εἶναι, και οὐδέτερον εἰλικρινές ὀρθῶς ἂν προσαγορευόμενον, ἴνα, ἐὰν φανῇ, δοξαστόν αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐν δίκη προσαγορευόμενον, τοῖς μὲν ἄκροις τὰ ἄκρα, τοῖς δὲ μεταξύ τὰ μεταξύ ἀποδιδόντες.” For the idea of wandering about between being and non-being, see 479d: “ἠυρήκαμεν ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὅτι τὰ τῶν πολλῶν πολλὰ νόμιμα καλοῦ τε πέρι και τῶν ἄλλων μεταξύ που κυλινδεῖται τοῦ τε μὴ ὄντος και τοῦ ὄντος εἰλικρινῶς. ἠυρήκαμεν. προωμολογήσαμεν δέ γε, εἴ τι τοιοῦτον φανεῖ, δοξαστόν αὐτὸ ἀλλ’ οὐ γνωστόν δεῖν λέγεσθαι, τῇ μεταξύ δυνάμει τὸ μεταξύ πλανητὸν ἀλίσκόμενον.”

⁸¹⁹ See 478c: “ἄρ’ οὖν ἐκτός τούτων ἐστίν, ὑπερβαίνουσα ἢ γνῶσιν σαφηνεῖα ἢ ἄγνοια ἀσαφεία; οὐδέτερα.”

to something. It lets it appear as it is.⁸²⁰ Ignorance, in turn, is not a way of letting non-being appear. It does not show anything. It is a very peculiar form of power – a negative power. In ignorance, things are nothing to us or nothing exists for us. So what about δόξα? It cannot go beyond these extremes, because there is nothing more revealing than knowledge nor anything more concealing than ignorance. Hence, it must lie between them – not as something entirely different from them, but as something that is intrinsically conceived by reference to them. It participates in both extremes (which are absolutely opposed to one another), but it cannot be reduced to any of them. In order to conceive it, we must go beyond the dual logic of knowledge and ignorance. Δόξα is darker than knowledge or brighter than ignorance.⁸²¹ This means that it has a certain clearness and a certain obscurity. It reveals and hides something at the same time – i.e., it must hide what it reveals and reveal what it hides. In this sense, it corresponds to what is expressed in the Platonic notion of dreaming. As we saw at the beginning of this subsection, dreaming is the state in which the thing itself is hidden behind the image and the image as such is also hidden behind the supposed thing (i.e., the image is seen as the thing and its imagetic character is concealed). As we will see, it is precisely in this sense that δόξα is something that lies in-between (μεταξύ).⁸²²

This is how Plato determines what the act or power of δοξάζειν accomplishes or brings about. But the description of its intentional object or its ἐφ’ ᾧ – namely, τὸ δοξαστόν – is still too vague at this point, so Plato returns to it in order to define the kind of reality that lies between being and non-being. This definition is very important for the question we are discussing, since it completes the analysis of the constitutive defect that characterizes δόξα and it also shows how this defect translates into our ordinary experience of things. So how does Plato explain the intermediate reality or object that is τὸ δοξαστόν? In a first moment, he resumes the distinction initially introduced between individual beings and

⁸²⁰ In this sense, it seems to correspond to what exists independently of ourselves, even if the idea of “independent existence” is still something that we ourselves represent. More precisely, we represent it as that which we have access to when we have knowledge. Plato, however, does not engage in these discussions.

⁸²¹ Cp. 478c-d: “ἀλλ’ ἄρα, ἣν δ’ ἐγώ, γνώσεως μὲν σοι φαίνεται δόξα σκοτωδέστερον, ἀγνοίας δὲ φανότερον; καὶ πολὺ γε, ἔφη. ἐντὸς δ’ ἀμφοῖν κεῖται; ναί. μεταξύ ἄρα ἂν εἴη τούτοις δόξα.”

⁸²² The notion of “in-betweenness” (μεταξύ) plays indeed a central role in Plato’s thought and especially in his description of human condition, both in its cognitive and in its practical side. We will return to it later, but some of its traits can already be seen here. In-betweenness describes a state or a being that is characterized entirely by this intertwining of two extremities. It cannot be conceived without an intrinsic reference to both extremities. These extremities may be something we never experienced in their pure state (and this seems to be the case here, since our entire way of seeing things is defined by Plato as δόξα). However, we are always experiencing them in their mixture and have thus a certain relation to them. Moreover, the extremities have different values. One is bad or inferior, the other superior. As a result, the being that lies in-between is also marked by the tension to move away from one and towards the other. We will not consider the latter aspect here, but for more on it see the more extensive analysis of the notion of μεταξύ in Chap. 12, Sect. 3.3.

εἶδη, as well as the distinction between two different ways of relating to εἶδη – either by focusing on the eidetic contents or predicates present in individual beings or by reducing one’s focus to individual beings (which are only an instance of these eidetic contents).⁸²³ As we considered, the problem these distinctions allude to is not only the possibility of us not realizing that individual beings as we experience them are dependent on general or common predicates, but also that by having no explicit awareness of them we do not realize the limitations of our way of understanding these predicates, and thus we cannot correct them.

But Plato now adds a new layer of complexity to the description by comparing both kinds of reality with respect to ontological stability or firmness and shows that individual beings are marked by a particular kind of ambiguity, whereas the εἶδη are absolutely and fixedly what they are. The problem lies therefore in the way beings are determined or how they are what they are. Individual beings simultaneously are and are not what they are. They may be beautiful, but they are also non-beautiful or ugly.⁸²⁴ This can mean that they can change or are in flux (which is then contrasted with the constancy of the εἶδη), but also that they are not absolutely beautiful, because they also have other predicates that are different from “being beautiful”. In other words, they can be seen in several respects. This idea of different respects is then further developed by the reference to relative determinations. The same thing that is double is at the same time half, whereas what is big is also little.⁸²⁵ Individual things can be seen from different angles and they result from the synthesis of all these respects or all these sides. But normally we are not clearly aware of all this complexity – nor do we have a perfect understanding of the synthesis itself and how something can be different things. This is what Plato has in mind when he speaks of the children’s riddle about the eunuch.⁸²⁶ Something is and is not what it is. Individual beings have a particular kind of instability, and Plato uses the verb ἐπαμφοτερίζειν (479b11 and

⁸²³ Cp. the passage from 479a quoted above (footnote 803).

⁸²⁴ See 479a-b: “(...) ‘τούτων γὰρ δὴ, ὧ ἄριστε, φήσομεν, τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν μῶν τι ἔστιν ὃ οὐκ αἰσχρὸν φανήσεται; καὶ τῶν δικαίων, ὃ οὐκ ἄδικον; καὶ τῶν ὁσίων, ὃ οὐκ ἀνόσιον;’ οὐκ, ἀλλ’ ἀνάγκη, ἔφη, καὶ καλά πως αὐτὰ καὶ αἰσχρὰ φανῆναι, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐρωτᾷς.”

⁸²⁵ See 479b: “τί δὲ τὰ πολλὰ διπλάσια; ἥττον τι ἡμίσεια ἢ διπλάσια φαίνεται; οὐδέν. καὶ μεγάλα δὴ καὶ μικρὰ καὶ κοῦφα καὶ βαρέα μὴ τι μᾶλλον ἢ ἂν φήσωμεν, ταῦτα προσρηθήσεται ἢ τάναντία; οὐκ, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ, ἔφη, ἕκαστον ἀμφοτέρων ἕξεται. πότερον οὖν ἔστι μᾶλλον ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν τοῦτο ὃ ἂν τις φῆ αὐτὸ εἶναι;”

⁸²⁶ See 479b-c: “τοῖς ἐν ταῖς ἐστιάσεσιν, ἔφη, ἐπαμφοτερίζουσιν ἔοικεν, καὶ τῷ τῶν παίδων αἰνίγματι τῷ περὶ τοῦ εὐνούχου, τῆς βολῆς περὶ τῆς νυκτερίδος, ἧ καὶ ἐφ’ οὗ αὐτὸν αὐτὴν αἰνίττονται βαλεῖν (...).” According to the *Scholia in Platonem*, the enigma Plato is referring to runs as follows: “αἶνος τίς ἔστιν ὡς ἀνὴρ τε κοῦκ ἀνὴρ/ ὄρνιθα κοῦκ ὄρνιθ’ ἰδὼν τε κοῦκ ἰδὼν/ ἐπὶ ξύλου τε κοῦ ξύλου καθημένην/ λίθω τε κοῦ λίθω βάλοι τε κοῦ βάλοι”. See W. GREENE (ed.), *Scholia Platonica*, Haverford (PA), American Philological Association, 1938. According to Jowett and Campbell, the solution of the enigma is as follows: “a eunuch aimed at a bat which he saw imperfectly sitting upon a reed with a pumice-stone and missed him”. See L. CAMPBELL & B. JOWETT(eds.), *Plato’s Republic*, vol. 3, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894, ad 479b.

479c3) to describe it. The verb means to be double or ambiguous – and so play a double game or be of two minds. The object of δόξα is thus marked by this duality of incompatible predicates. We cannot conceive it clearly, we cannot discern its content and how its different parts relate to each other. They are jumbled together, as it were, and do not produce a clear identity. They negate each other and render this object something that is and is not what it is. All individual beings are determined in this way, according to Plato, and he also says “we cannot think of them fixedly as either being or not being”. Each individual being “rolls around somewhere between being and non-being”.⁸²⁷

The εἶδη, in turn, are the opposite of this. They are absolutely what they are or, as Plato says, they “are always the same in all respects”.⁸²⁸ They do not change and do not have different sides. Therefore, it is possible to fixedly think them (παγίως νοῆσαι). They determine themselves and are not determined by something else. In other words, they are simple elements and do not involve a problem of synthesis.⁸²⁹ This makes it possible for us to see them clearly and have knowledge of them. Knowledge is indeed marked by clearness and so it must fully determine the identity of what it deals with. This being so, and since the source of all determinateness are the εἶδη, one must focus on the latter in order to actually have knowledge.

Δόξα, in turn, is marked by confusion or obscurity. It cannot breakdown the beings it deals with and identify their “parts” or “sides” (i.e., their predicates), as well as how they relate to each other. It is a hazy access to beings and to their predicates. It must indeed have some contact or some understanding of these predicates, but it does not see them clearly or it misunderstands them. In sum, δόξα consists in a defective understanding of the εἶδη and also of the individual beings as a synthesis of εἶδη. It has no true access to anything, but it is also far from being an absence of access or complete ignorance. It sees things that refer to εἶδη, but is not fully aware of this reference and cannot properly follow it. As such, δόξα is

⁸²⁷ See 479c: “(...) καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα ἐπαμφοτερίζειν, καὶ οὐτ’ εἶναι οὔτε μὴ εἶναι οὐδὲν αὐτῶν δυνατὸν παγίως νοῆσαι, οὔτε ἀμφοτέρα οὔτε οὐδέτερον.”

⁸²⁸ See 479e: “(...) τοὺς αὐτὰ ἕκαστα θεωμένους καὶ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ὡσαύτως ὄντα (...).”

⁸²⁹ This characterization of the εἶδη works as a contrast to the characterization of individual beings. It emphasizes the need for having simple elements that are the basis of all composition. However, such characterization of the εἶδη may itself be more problematic than Plato suggests in this passage. If we consider the discussion of the μέγιστα γένη in the *Sophist* (see 251a-259e, and for an analysis of the passage cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 2.3b above), we see that εἶδη are also conceived as involving a synthesis. Such a synthesis is problematic, not only because one must also try to understand how an εἶδος can be and not be something, but also because it raises the possibility that there are no simple elements at the basis of all composition. The whole of reality may be intrinsically synthetic. If it is so, the distinction between individual beings and the εἶδη will not be as marked as the *Republic* suggests – which in turn raises the question of how we can achieve knowledge of them. But this is too complex a question for us to discuss here.

somehow in contact with everything, but it falls short of fully grasping anything. It is retained in an image of things, which it takes to be what really exists, and in this sense it corresponds to a state of dreaming. This last point is essential. Δόξα implies a false claim to understanding or a false claim of knowledge. We must think we are seeing things as they are, but this is only possible if we pay no attention to the εἶδη – otherwise we would realize all that is missing in our access to things. So we (i.e., our δόξα) stay bound to sensible beings and their subjective appearing. It becomes more passive and closer to an αἴσθησις, even if it always implies more – namely, a decision of what something is and attribution of predicates, as well as their understanding. But a doxastic way of seeing things is not clearly aware of these predicates, and even if it becomes aware of them, it only considers the question of their attribution and not the question of their content, which is always presupposed in each attribution. We have some glimpse or some vague remembrance of what each predicate is, but we do not focus on this glimpse or remembrance of ours, so we do not realize how defective it is. We are rather absorbed by what appears and therefore δόξα is primarily referred to appearances – even though it is also in its essence a particular mode of relation to the εἶδη.

In sum, δόξα falls short of true being, and so it does not reach what it thinks it reaches. This does not mean that its problem is failing to reach another domain of reality or a metaphysical plain of existence. It is the understanding of the predicates of the very things we deal with that is distorted or missing – and this affects our experience of all individual beings. Therefore, Plato says that people in this state “opine all these things but know nothing of what they opine”.⁸³⁰ Δόξα is a universal way of seeing things and the whole of reality as we normally experience it.

But is it possible to overcome the state of mind that corresponds to δόξα? Can we reach knowledge? What would it amount to? What kind of δύναμις does it imply and what transformations does it bring? The description in the *Republic* provides some indications, though it is far from a full description of this state. Δόξα is indeed overcome if one loses the belief that things are as we normally see them – i.e., if we realize the problems with their predicates. But this is still something very different from having a full knowledge of these predicates or a clear insight into them, and there may actually be several stages of development of our views between our ordinary way of seeing things and genuine knowledge. In book V, Plato does not consider this intermediate space between δόξα and full knowledge, but it will play an important role in book VI and VII. In the simile of the line,

⁸³⁰ See 479e: “(...) δοξάζειν φήσομεν ἅπαντα, γινώσκειν δὲ ὧν δοξάζουσιν οὐδέν.”

Plato will identify two states above δόξα and in the allegory of the cave there will be many intermediate stages between our regular way of seeing and perfect knowledge. At any rate, we start overcoming δόξα when we start questioning things as we normally see them. Philosophical examination is the way to overcome δόξα and, as such, it can bring about a profound and even global change of our way of seeing things.

The changes philosophical examination can make and how it makes them is what we must now consider.

CHAPTER 8

The destructive side of philosophical examination. The project of casting away all δόξα (ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης) in the *Sophist*

“Opinari autem, duas ob res turpissimum est: quod et discere non potest, qui sibi iam se scire persuasit, si modo illud disci potest; et per se ipsa temeritas non bene affecti animi signum est.”

Augustine of Hippo, *De utilitate credendi*, XI.25⁸³¹

After considering the nature, complexity and defectiveness of the object of examination, we are now prepared to tackle the question of the unity of philosophical examination in Plato’s writings. As was mentioned, different passages seem to point to different directions and at first sight it is not clear how we can integrate them all in a single project. Plato does not explicitly discuss how all forms of examination belong together. This is particularly valid for the negative (or destructive) and the positive (or constructive) kinds of examination. In some passages and texts, the examination refutes the views one holds, while in others it seems to bring about and develop new views. The fact that both kinds of examination are referred to views already produces a certain unification, but we will also consider how they complement each other and how they are both required by the same project. Although the texts do not discuss it explicitly (which led some interpreters to attribute the different forms of examination to different periods in Plato’s philosophical career), we can see their potential unity if we consider what is implied in each kind (or, as we will show, on each side or stage) of examination.

We can pick up the trail that leads to the unity of philosophical examination by considering a very important passage in the *Sophist*. Between 226b and 231b, Plato outlines the project of an ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης – i.e., of casting away all δόξα in the pejorative sense of the word (or all false knowledge claims, as we could also say). He presents this casting away as a purge or cleansing (καθαρός) and a refutation, exposing or shaming (ἔλεγχος in the negative sense). Although this passage has a purpose that differs from our own (insofar as the

⁸³¹ See A. AUGUSTINUS, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 8, Paris, Migne, 1863.

characters are trying to define what a sophist is), the project therein described largely coincides with the kind of examination performed by Socrates in the so-called aporetic dialogues (a kind of examination that many interpreters also call “elenchus”).⁸³² In these dialogues, the characters undergo refutative examination (ἐλεγχος), come to realize their ignorance, and end up disowning false judgments or knowledge claims. Socrates’ ultimate goal is to restrict their knowledge claims to what they actually know, as he himself does. This kind of examination is thus primarily negative or destructive. It is an examination of this kind that is described in the *Sophist*. Plato is trying to define what a sophist is, but in doing so he outlines a formal project that can be interpreted as a reflection about the nature, motivation and purpose of this negative or destructive examination.

We will thus consider this passage as a description of a formal project of negative examination, and we will try to understand the role of this kind of examination within the global project of philosophical examination. At first, it is not clear whether the elenctic examination is merely a preparation for the examination or rather a central part of philosophical examination itself. However, we will see that the cathartic or elenctic examination (the ἐκβολή) is not a different project alongside philosophical examination proper. It is rather a reformulation of the project of philosophical examination that takes into consideration the circumstances in which this examination occurs and the particular state of those that undergo it. We saw how we have always adopted many judgments or knowledge claims and how these are often (if not always) unjustified, wrong or distorted. Philosophical examination unmasks these defects and cleanses our mind of them. This constitutes a preliminary, inevitable and potentially permanent side of philosophical examination. It plays a central role in the entire project, though its importance hinges on how much cognitive defect there is in our way of seeing or understanding things. Plato does not discuss the question in this passage. He does not specify how much defect we have and in what degree we need this kind of examination. It may vary from person to person. However, even if all our views were good (and their only defect was lack of confirmation), the project of pursuing

⁸³² There are indeed many analyses and discussions of the elenctic method we find in Plato’s aporetic dialogues. Cp. for instance B. WALDENFELS, *Das sokratische Fragen*. Aporie, Elenchos, Anamnesis, Meisenheim, Anton Hain, 1961; G. VLASTOS, The Socratic Elenchos, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), 27-58; P. WOODRUFF, The Skeptical Side of Plato’s Method, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 40 (1986), 22-37; H. MAY, Socratic Ignorance and the Therapeutic Aim of the Elenchos, *Apeiron* 30 (1997), 37-50; H. BENSON, A Note on Eristic and the Socratic Elenchos, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989), 591-599; G. SCOTT (ed.), *Does Socrates have a Method*. Rethinking the Elenchos in Plato’s Dialogues and Beyond, University Park (PA), Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002; C. KING, Wisdom, Moderation, and Elenchos in Plato’s *Apology*, *Metaphilosophy* 39 (2008), 345-362; G. MATTHEWS, Whatever Became of the Socratic Elenchos? Philosophical Analysis in Plato, *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009), 439-450.

and expelling all cognitive defects could still be useful, since it would confirm the validity and clarity of our judgments or knowledge claims. Regardless of our cognitive state, elenctic examination changes our relation to the object of examination and, consequently, to ourselves (insofar as we are beings committed to their own views and whose lives are based on them). This is one effect of this modality of examination, but it can also have other effects – and this is what we now have to consider.

The passage in the *Sophist* helps us understand how the examination of our views is much more than an inventory of what we actually know and what we only think we know. It is not simply an innocuous diagnosis of our epistemic condition. It is also a treatment of this condition – and a potentially violent one, insofar as it is a removal of something to which we are committed and even attached. In addition, refutative examination can also open us up to a new kind of examination. By reducing our convictions and making us more neutral, it frees us to explore different solutions to the problems. In fact, it forces us to examine them and try to adopt new beliefs. This positive or constructive side of philosophical examination is something we will consider in the following chapter. We must see how this positive kind of examination, which tries to establish answers to the problems without previous judgments and conceptions, is not the starting point of philosophy (as we might be tempted to think), but rather something that must be preceded by a refutative kind of examination. We will thus consider how the negative side determines the positive side and also how the two are to be linked.⁸³³

But before anything else, we have to focus on the negative side and see what we can learn about philosophical examination when we conceive the ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης described in the *Sophist* as one of its moments. What kind of intervention in the object of examination does it entail, how is it performed, what problems are associated with it and what can its results be?

1. The terms in which the project of an ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης is described in the *Sophist*

The passage we find in 226b-231b is very complex. It includes many different aspects, but since our main interest is to understand the negative side of philosophical examination, we will focus on those aspects that are more directly relevant for this goal.

⁸³³ I will talk throughout these two chapters of two sides, designating them as negative or destructive and positive or constructive. This is not Plato's language, but I will try to show that it appropriately describes what we find in the texts, and also that it helps us understand Plato's conception of philosophical examination.

Other related questions will be merely mentioned or very briefly discussed. Some moments of the analysis will be directly related to what we saw in our previous analyses, which will thus help us better understand what is at issue here. Other moments will anticipate important questions we will tackle later, but we will not enter into much detail here, since these questions require many other considerations. Moreover, they are not essential for our present goal.

1.1. Defining the τέχνη of the sophist. The τέχνη of casting away the κακία of the “soul”

The first important thing to have in mind is the context in which the project of the ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης is presented. This project is presented as one of several attempts of grasping and defining what a sophist is. The sophist reveals himself to be very elusive and it is not clear how the different attempts at a definition are to be understood or how they relate to each other. Are they alternate views or compatible and complementary? And do they all refer to the same thing? The first four definitions (or five, since one is subdivided – see 221c-226a) are rather superficial and the last one (232b ff.) is more elaborate and decisive. As for the one we will be considering, it ends up mixing up the sophist with the philosopher – which raises the question of the boundaries between the two. This is particularly important for our problem. By presenting a sort of sublimated sophist (the “sophistry of noble descent”, as it is said in 231b), this definition can also be read as a description of philosophical examination, and this is how we will read it.⁸³⁴

All the definitions result from applying the method of dichotomies. They start from a major division within a class of beings and progress through further divisions until no more distinctions can be made. The full path of specification constitutes a definition.⁸³⁵ Given that the theme of the investigation is a vocation or a practitioner (the sophist), the first distinction is thus the one between being τεχνίτης or ἄτεχνος.⁸³⁶ The sophist clearly has a τέχνη (a specialized and expert knowledge) – i.e., an insight on what constitutes a class of beings or an operation – and this τέχνη qualifies him to intervene in a certain reality and insert, change or

⁸³⁴ Here and in the following I adopt Benardete’s translation, with a few changes. See S. BENARDETE, *The Being of the Beautiful. Plato’s Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

⁸³⁵ The method was briefly considered above (Chap. 4, Sect. 1.5) and we will discuss it in more detail below (see Chap. 6, Sect. 3.3).

⁸³⁶ See 219a.

remove something, in order to achieve a certain end.⁸³⁷ Τέχνη is indeed associated with an insufficiency of nature (either in itself, according to an immanent criterion, or for us, in reference to our desires or needs). There is something beings cannot achieve by themselves or which they can miss if they are left to their natural course. So a qualified intervention is required, and such an intervention involves above all correctness or appropriateness (ὀρθότης) – both with respect to the insight in a certain domain of beings and to the results one will produce.

All this is from the very beginning presupposed in the presentation of the refutative or cathartic examination viz. the ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης. But what is the particular τέχνη of the sophist? In order to approach this particular τέχνη, the Visitor invokes some trivial household chores. They do not constitute a special job in the πόλις, but rather something women or slaves would do. This emphasizes the secondary or auxiliary character of this kind of work. The Visitor mentions filtering, sifting, winnowing, separating, carding, spinning, combing.⁸³⁸ All these tasks have in common the act of dividing (διαίρειν), separating (διακρίνειν) or setting apart (ἀποχωρίζειν). This presupposes that reality is complex and that we find associated beings that can (and perhaps should) be dissociated. This may require more or less strength or violence – and it also requires an insight capable of producing it: a διακριτική τέχνη.⁸³⁹

This separative expertise may separate either the like from the like or the better from the worse.⁸⁴⁰ In the first case, the things separated are homogeneous, they have the same value and they are both preserved. In the second case, they are heterogeneous, they have a different value and only some of them (the better) are preserved or left behind, whereas the worse are cast away.⁸⁴¹ It is this latter kind of separation that is called καθαρός or κάθαρσις – a purge, purification, cleansing in the broadest sense.⁸⁴² This is only possible because there are differences of value between beings. We are sensitive to many qualitative

⁸³⁷ To use Aristotle's expression, the sophist has an access to things that lies beyond our usual access to things, (παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις). Cp. Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 981b13-17.

⁸³⁸ In Greek: διηθεῖν, διατταν, βράττειν, διακρίνειν, ζαίνειν, κατάγειν, κερκίζειν. See 226b.

⁸³⁹ For this notion, see 226c.

⁸⁴⁰ See 226d: “καὶ μὴν ἔν γε ταῖς εἰρημέναις διακρίσεις τὸ μὲν χεῖρον ἀπὸ βελτίονος ἀποχωρίζειν ἦν, τὸ δ' ὅμοιον ἀφ' ὁμοίου.”

⁸⁴¹ See *ibidem*: “(...) τῆς δὲ καταλειπούσης μὲν τὸ βέλτιον διακρίσεως, τὸ δὲ χεῖρον ἀποβαλλούσης (...).”

⁸⁴² The term καθαρός and its cognates are used in different domains (in particular the magical, religious and medical domains) and Plato presents here a philosophical version of it in the form of a cathartic examination. For more on this notion, see Section 1.4 below.

differences, even though the criterion of differentiation may not be clear at first (and there may in fact be several different criteria).⁸⁴³

A cathartic τέχνη thus requires several kinds of insight in order to produce an adequate separation: one has to discern the beings that are connected and their difference, one also has to discern their different value, and one must know how they can be separated (i.e., one must be able to perform the separation). The two first components (knowing the beings at issue and their different value) are essential, since they will determine if there is any need for a separation. But the correctness or appropriateness of the operation (of the purification) requires a correct insight into these three things.

After defining what characterizes a cathartic τέχνη, the Visitor goes on to identify two domains in which it can be applied. The first domain is the body. Here he distinguishes between animate or ensouled bodies and inanimate or soulless ones. The first kind of bodies can be purified or cleansed on the inside, by gymnastics and medicine, or on the outside, by bathing. As for the τέχνηαι that cleanse inanimate bodies, the Visitor provides the example of fulling.⁸⁴⁴ All these technical interventions in the concrete domain of the body separate the good from the bad in a visible way. They can affect us more or less, but are still somewhat external to our being.

A different kind of κάθαρσις is the one applied to the ψυχή – our “soul” or “inner being”. It is something much more difficult to identify and define. It lies beyond the body, is intangible, but no less real. We will consider Plato’s use of this notion in detail in Part III, but for now it is important to bear in mind that the Visitor is referring to everything in us that cannot be immediately reduced to the body (regardless of whether it must have some form of physical basis or not). Later in the passage, he will also speak of διάνοια (thought, intellect, mind), thus pointing to the central place of thinking in our inner being. It is at any rate clear that he does not have in mind something otherworldly, but rather a constitutive component of our being.

This component is also complex. It has its own components, which can have different values. Some of them may be good and others bad. In other words, the soul may contain defective elements (forms of πονηρία or κακία, i.e., evil or badness in a functional, not necessarily moral sense) and excellent or perfect elements (marked by ἀρετή). In addition, the

⁸⁴³ Some criteria may be intrinsic to the beings being separated, others may be external and refer either to something else or even to ourselves (as when beings are evaluated according to their usefulness, pleasantness or beauty).

⁸⁴⁴ See 226e-227a.

different elements are not just something within us, but they define the quality of our being and thus the quality of our life (i.e., if it is a happy or a miserable life).⁸⁴⁵ It is therefore important to identify some sort of cathartic τέχνη that could cleanse the soul – i.e., isolate and preserve the good parts, casting away all that is worthless (φλαῦρον). This will make it healthier and holier – i.e. more perfect. Otherwise, if left to its natural course, the soul will be found lacking and unable to reach its best state.⁸⁴⁶

The Visitor must thus determine what kind of τέχνη will be able to correct the nature of the soul. As seen above, this τέχνη has several requirements. It must have an insight into the nature of the soul, what its best condition is, what elements are connected in it, what is their respective quality or value, how they affect the goodness or badness of the soul – and then it must know how to separate the good from the bad and cleanse the soul of the latter. The following discussion will try to do precisely this.

1.2. The description of the soul's defects (κακία) and the focus on its deformity (αἴσχος)

The first question then is which κακία or κακίαι can there be in the soul. In this context, it is necessary to keep in mind that the word κακία does not primarily mean “evil” in a moral sense. It rather has a functional sense. It designates a defect that prevents something from being or performing in accordance with some kind of standard, which may be internal or external. In the case of the soul, the standard is internal to the soul itself, engraved in its own constitution, as we shall see. When the soul meets the standard, it reaches its excellent or optimal condition. When it does not, it is defective. But the standard is not the only thing that is internal. As we shall see, the source of the defect is likewise internal. The soul's defects are not caused by things, people or events around oneself, as we may think. They result from an internal corruption of the soul – i.e., from a form of disturbance, debility or powerlessness of the soul itself. In short, they come from the soul itself.

Now, according to the Visitor, there is not just one kind of κακία in the soul, nor are there infinitely many, all different from each other. All defects of the soul can be reduced to

⁸⁴⁵ We will not discuss here whether or not these forms of defectiveness and excellence within the soul are the sole factor in determining our εὐδαιμονία, but they do not seem to be entirely irrelevant either, as will become clear in the following discussion. For a more detailed discussion of this matter, see Chap. 18 below.

⁸⁴⁶ The description of a cathartic τέχνη actually raises the possibility that the soul is constitutively infected with bad elements and naturally requires such a τέχνη. This is not what we usually think. We do not tend to regard it as defective and requiring a specialized knowledge in order for it to achieve a good condition. We think this may happen in certain circumstances, but not by default. Plato, however, will point in a different direction.

two modalities, and the analysis of these two forms of κακία is very important. It presents a schema we find in many other moments of Plato's writings and which is decisive for our main question. We will return to it later.⁸⁴⁷ For now we will only consider the main aspects of this distinction and some of the questions it raises. The main objective is to isolate the kind of κακία that the refutative or cathartic examination has to deal with.

The Visitor does not describe these two forms of inner defect directly. He rather compares them to two things that happen to the bodies, namely illness (νόσος) and deformity (αἰσχος).⁸⁴⁸ These two concepts are then at the center of the whole analysis. The Visitor focus on them and identifies their essential features. He argues that illness is a form of στάσις (of sedition or dissent) and deformity is a form of ἀμετρία (disproportion or inadequacy). We have thus two levels of metaphors that are used to explain the defects in our intangible inner being.⁸⁴⁹

Let us then start with the notion of στάσις. This word is a political term: it designates the sedition, rebellion of a class or group and the resulting civil war. Civil war itself is often compared to an illness, which is only natural, given the fact that Greek medicine often described illness as a form of conflict between different elements in the body.⁸⁵⁰ Plato is alluding precisely to this. The term στάσις is here defined as the “variance (διαφορά) of the naturally akin that comes from some kind of corruption”.⁸⁵¹ This kinship is the result of the fact that our organism is composed of different parts that belong together. However, these parts can have different relations to each other. When there is a sedition, each part pulls in a different direction and they no longer work together. There is no harmony and no concord. The organism becomes dysfunctional. It is subjected to a sort of civil war, in which those that live together and have close ties try to destroy each other.

Something of the kind happens in an ill body and also in an ill soul. In the latter, Plato says that there are “opinions at variance with desires, anger with pleasures, speech with pains,

⁸⁴⁷ This will actually provide the basis for the appraisal of the unexamined life in Chap. 18 below.

⁸⁴⁸ The meaning of the term αἰσχος in this passage seems to be primarily aesthetic, but the word also has a strong moral connotation, implying that something is unsightly, unbecoming or even turpid.

⁸⁴⁹ For these comparisons, see 227d-228a.

⁸⁵⁰ For more on the word στάσις and the relation with medicine, see e.g. G. GROSSMANN, *Politische Schlagwörter aus der Zeit des Peloponnesischen Krieges*, Zürich, Leemann, 1950, 43ff., especially 53ff.; R. BROCK, *Sickness in the Body Politic. Medical Imagery in the Greek Polis*. in: V. HOPE & E. MARSHALL (eds.) *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, London, Routledge, 2000, 24-34; C. KOSAK, *Polis nosousa. Greek Ideas About the City and Disease in the Fifth Century BC*, in: V. HOPE & E. MARSHALL (eds.), *op. cit.*, 35-54; J. PRICE, *Thucydides and Internal War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁸⁵¹ See 218a: “[ΞΕ] Πότερον ἄλλο τι στάσιν ἠγοούμενος ἢ τὴν τοῦ φύσει συγγενοῦς ἕκ τινος διαφθορᾶς διαφορᾶν; [ΘΕΑΙ] Οὐδέν.”

and all these with each other”.⁸⁵² These are conflicts we experience in ourselves. Different parts of us pull us in different directions and this inner laceration renders the soul bad. This badness is then translated in our behavior and way of being, producing cowardice, lack of restraint and injustice (“δειλίαν μὲν καὶ ἀκολασίαν καὶ ἀδικίαν”, 228e). These have an endogenous nature, just as sickness and sedition in general.⁸⁵³ On the other hand, harmony of the different internal elements brings about excellence, health and concord.

But the decisive kind of κακία is the second one, which is compared to deformity. Deformity in turn is defined as a form of ἀμετρία – which implies that beauty or shapeliness is a form of συμμετρία.⁸⁵⁴ Συμμετρία and ἀμετρία require a relation between two elements. This may be a mathematical relation of proportion or lack thereof – or a broader relation of correspondence, of being functionally adequate or inadequate (fit or unfit) to something. At any rate, it implies an agreement or disagreement.⁸⁵⁵ In bodies, this produces beauty and ugliness (understood as proportion or disproportion). In the soul, it will likewise produce fitness and unfitness (or adequacy and inadequacy). This means that in the case of the soul’s deformity, the soul will fail to correspond to something.

But what does the soul fail to correspond to? One could perhaps be tempted to think of some sort of moral norm, but the Visitor has something else in mind. He talks of things that partake of motion and that, despite setting for themselves a target and trying to hit it, end up straying off and missing the target at every try or every assault (καθ’ ἐκάστην ὀρμήν).⁸⁵⁶ In these cases, there is a disproportion or lack of correspondence between the movement of a particular thing and the target that was set (or the aiming at it). If, on the other hand, the projectile happens to hit the target, then both things agree with each other and the movement is appropriate.

⁸⁵² See 228b: “[ΞΕ] Τί δέ; ἐν ψυχῇ δόξας ἐπιθυμίας καὶ θυμὸν ἡδοναῖς καὶ λόγον λύπαις καὶ πάντα ἀλλήλοις ταῦτα τῶν φλαύρως ἐχόντων οὐκ ἠσθήμεθα διαφερόμενα; [ΘΕΑΙ] Καὶ σφόδρα γε.”

⁸⁵³ Plato points to an internal origin of any sedition or illness of the soul insofar as they result from an internal imbalance. However, in this passage he does not explain how the internal imbalance can come about in the first place – whether it is incited or even forced by some external element or rather caused by any of the internal parts (or even all of them). For a discussion of Plato’s possible answer (or at least the one we can infer from his writings), see Chap. 17 below.

⁸⁵⁴ This brings to mind the association of the opposite of αἴσχος – namely, κάλλος – with συμμετρία in *Philebus*. See 64e. A comparison of the two passages would be interesting, but we will have to leave it for another time.

⁸⁵⁵ The notions of agreement and disagreement can indeed be applied to describe both forms of κακία of the soul and their opposites, which points to a fundamental relation between both phenomena. We will, however, leave this aside for now, for Plato does not explicitly discuss the question of their relation in the *Sophist*. For more on this topic, see in particular Chap. 18 below.

⁸⁵⁶ See 228c: “[ΞΕ] Τί δ’; ὅσ’ ἂν κινήσεως μετασχόντα καὶ σκοπὸν τινα θέμενα πειρώμενα τούτου τυγχάνειν καθ’ ἐκάστην ὀρμήν παράφορα αὐτοῦ γίγνηται καὶ ἀποτυγχάνη, πότερον αὐτὰ φήσομεν ὑπὸ συμμετρίας τῆς πρὸς ἄλλα ἢ τοῦναντίον ὑπὸ ἀμετρίας αὐτὰ πάσχειν; [ΘΕΑΙ] Δῆλον ὡς ὑπὸ ἀμετρίας.”

According to the Visitor, the soul is supposedly characterized by a motion of this kind. It sets for itself the target of truth, which it tries to hit – that is, it tries to know beings as they are (more specifically, what predicates can be attributed to them and what the meaning of these predicates are). The soul is not enclosed in its own domain, but it is rather directed to other entities, has some idea of them (and of itself), wonders about what they are and tries to determine them. These attempts at determining are the tries or assaults (ὄρμαί) Plato is talking about. The soul mobilizes itself towards the truth (ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὀρμωμένης ψυχῆς).⁸⁵⁷ This idea is closely related to something we considered before in the analysis of the δόξα – namely, the fact that Plato sometimes describes δόξα as some sort of projectile, such as a dart or an arrow.⁸⁵⁸ In the *Sophist*, the use of the terms target (σκοπός), hitting (τυγχάνειν) and missing (ἀποτυγχάνειν) also bring to mind the throwing of a projectile. The soul is a sort of archer or spearman that tries to have access to things as they are – and precisely this constitutes our many δόξαι or knowledge claims.⁸⁵⁹

At any given moment, we have already many shots. This in turn raises the problem of their quality and how they reflect on the soul. Our beliefs can hit the target or swerve off and this affects the soul and its quality. Knowledge is then the act of one’s perspective coinciding with beings as they are, whereas ignorance is defined as a deflection or a going astray. The latter is, moreover, identified with παραφροσύνη, which constitutes a word-play. Παρα-φροσύνη denotes a deviation or derangement of one’s mind and the Visitor says that it happens when the soul swerves away from understanding (σύνεσις).⁸⁶⁰ Derangement or madness is primarily a deflection (a moving or being lead away, a παραφορά) of our soul insofar as it tries to know beings as they are.⁸⁶¹ This can mean the soul does not hit anything (i.e., that things remain indeterminate for it) or it can mean that it hits the wrong target (thereby acquiring a false view of things).⁸⁶² At any rate, the soul is ἀνόητος (mindless or thoughtless). It has no comprehension or understanding. It is therefore deformed and

⁸⁵⁷ See 228c.

⁸⁵⁸ Cp. Chap. 5, Sect. 1.6.

⁸⁵⁹ In fact, the metaphor is somewhat imprecise, because the soul is both the shooter and the object shot (i.e. the particular δόξαι and knowledge claims). The soul is in tension and flies towards things, trying to grasp them and coincide with them. In a way, it becomes what it hits (whether that was its target or not) – though it cannot be reduced to it. We will see this better in Chap. 11 below.

⁸⁶⁰ See 228c-d: “τό γε μὴν ἀγνοεῖν ἐστιν ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὀρμωμένης ψυχῆς, παραφόρου συνέσεως γιγνομένης, οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν παραφροσύνη.”

⁸⁶¹ This is in consonance with what we find in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, where Socrates is said to have equated μανία with ἀμαθία and with believing one knows what one does not know. See 1.2.50 and 3.9.6-7.

⁸⁶² This difference will be very important and we will return to it in the following section.

disproportionate (αἰσχρὰ and ἄμετρος).⁸⁶³ It does not know things and this means there is no correspondence between the target set by the soul, to which it is directed, and the actual movement of trying to hit it and establish what things are.

The possibility of this lack of correspondence requires our inner being to have a target “in sight”. In other words, the soul must relate to it in some way, must have a notion of this target in general, or it must aim at hitting it. Indeed, the soul has some constitutive relation to truth insofar as it aims at finding it. This is what enables each particular target and each particular shot (i.e., each particular try or assault), each corresponding to a particular being or a particular truth. In fact, these particular targets are included in the general target. The permanent shot towards the truth is divided midflight, as it were, into multiple shots. This multiplicity of shots (of impulses or assaults) suggests that the soul can be deformed in some respects and well-proportioned in others. It may hit its target sometimes and miss other times. But when the Visitor mentioned that there are beings that move towards a target, he also explicitly talks of missing it at every assault (καθ’ ἐκάστην ὀρμήν), which raises the possibility of the same happening with us. Our soul can be a completely deformed soul and resemble a bad archer that cannot hit his mark not even once.⁸⁶⁴ All its shots regarding the distribution of predicates and the understanding of them would be deviated or off target.

However, regardless of how frequently the soul misses its target, the entire structure of aiming at a target must be present when the soul misses it. A deviation is only possible if there is a target from which something deviates.⁸⁶⁵ The relation to the target must remain. The soul cannot lose sight of it. Anything else would be very difficult (if not impossible) to represent or conceive. It would imply that the soul was no longer directed to beings as they are. This does not mean that we would regard them as indeterminate or even indeterminable. We would completely lose the notion of these beings and of there being something. There would be no cognitive decision (no δόξα) whatsoever and no expectation of it. There would simply be either indetermination or nothing (no manifestation) at all.

This is not the case. We have a relation to truth (to determining things as they are) – at least in the form of a tension towards it. The movement towards the truth is not incidental to our being or to the soul, but rather its essence (or at least a very important part of it). The soul is always trying to hit the target or targets (i.e., trying to see things as they are or to have

⁸⁶³ See 228d.

⁸⁶⁴ For the image of a bad archer, see *Tht.* 194a.

⁸⁶⁵ This does not necessarily entail that one recognizes the miss as a miss. The text up until now does not say anything about it, but we will see there is the possibility of mistaking a miss for a hit.

access to them). This means that its cognitive success or failure is also essential to characterize the soul. In itself, the soul is either deformed or shapely (i.e., well-proportioned). Not knowing is not a simple fact that accompanies the soul. It is a corruption of the soul, a deviation from itself, a lack of self-agreement – insofar as it is in conflict with its own inner tension and direction.⁸⁶⁶

The soul is constitutively directed to truth (whatever that means and whatever the consequences that has – or should have – for our lives). As the Stranger says and Theaetetus promptly accepts, “every soul is unwillingly ignorant of everything”.⁸⁶⁷ In other words, each one of us is marked by a negative non-indifference (or an aversion) to ignorance and a positive non-indifference (or attachment) to knowledge. Moreover, this non-indifference seems to concern everything (i.e., all beings or the entire truth). We do not want to be mistaken or deceived in any respect. We have an intrinsic desire for knowledge (i.e., we have φιλοσοφία). We are directed toward the target of truth, we want to determine things as they are. Even those that deny it need to presuppose this relation to the target in order to deny it. This is an essential thesis of Plato – one that may very well strike us as surprising. It does raise many questions. It is not clear whether each soul has a compulsive need to know absolutely everything or just what it comes in contact with. It is also unclear whether this is a tacit or an express need and what kind of knowledge it requires about everything (whether a complete knowledge or only generic). These and other questions are essential to determine the soul’s attachment to truth (to the target it sets for itself), which in turn defines both what the soul is (how essential this setting the target is for it) and how important the alternative between deformity and its opposite is (i.e., how serious a defect deformity is). We must however leave the discussion of the soul’s need for truth for a later stage of this investigation.⁸⁶⁸ At this point, what matters is the fact that ignorance can be conceived as a form of defect of the soul. At least in some cases, we require or try to know something, we

⁸⁶⁶ The Visitor says that ignorance is not normally regarded as a κακία (a defect or an “evil”) of the soul. See 228d. It is easier to identify seditions in the soul as an evil, since they are expressed in cowardice, lack of restraint, insolence, or injustice, which constitute clear forms of defect or vice (πονηρία). As for ignorance, people tend not to recognize it as a defect of the soul in itself. Not knowing something is not considered a weakness of the soul, but rather something incidental to it. The Visitor, however, tries to show that ignorance by itself is always an inner corruption of the soul. Ignorance goes against the soul’s nature and is therefore intrinsically undesirable and even reprehensible.

⁸⁶⁷ See 228c: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ψυχὴν γε ἴσμεν ἄκουσαν πᾶσαν πᾶν ἀγνοοῦσαν.”

⁸⁶⁸ It is indeed crucial for the argument about the value of philosophical examination and it will be discussed in detail in Chap. 13 Sect. 3.3, Chap. 18 Sects. 3.2, 4.2, and Chap. 19, Sect. 2.2.

are not indifferent to truth. This means we may reach it, but we may also fall short of the truth, in which case we will fall short of our own intrinsic standard.⁸⁶⁹

1.3. The forms of ignorance (ἄγνοια) and the preminence of the false knowledge claims (μὴ κατειδόμενα τι δοκεῖν εἰδέναι)

Plato is trying to determine the cathartic τέχνη insofar as it applies to human beings and in order to do this he distinguished two forms of defectiveness or κακία in the body and in the soul. He then identifies all forms of cleansing us of these defects.⁸⁷⁰ First, he identifies a τέχνη that corrects bodily deformity, to wit gymnastics (γυμναστική), and one that corrects bodily illness, namely medicine (ιατρική). He also identifies a τέχνη of chastisement (κολαστική) that is concerned with the inner seditions of the soul and the defects that result from it (insolence, injustice, cowardice).⁸⁷¹ As for ignorance or the deformity of the soul, the τέχνη that corrects it is the instructive (διδασκαλική) τέχνη. However, these cathartic τέχναι are not all equally relevant for the definition of the sophist and Plato will indeed focus solely on one: the instructive τέχνη, which is supposed to remove the deformity of the soul – its ignorance or παραφροσύνη. But ignorance is not uniform. There are different forms of ignorance and therefore we have to determine whether the cathartic τέχνη Plato has in mind (and which will turn out to be the cathartic or elenctic examination) casts away all forms of ignorance or one in particular.

As we will see, cathartic examination purifies only a particular form of ignorance – so in order to understand it, we need a more detailed understanding of ignorance, its different modalities and their respective weight and importance. The Visitor does precisely this. He outlines a sort of anatomy of ignorance, though it is still somewhat imprecise, as we will see. He calls the attention to the prominence of one form of ignorance and contrasts it with many

⁸⁶⁹ Our inner being is thus exposed to these two kinds of defect (of “evil”): the one that is like an illness and the one that resembles deformity. We will consider them in more detail later (see Chapter 18). We will see how they are something of which we can be more or less aware (to the point that we may even speak of a latent and a patent illness or deformity of the soul), and we will also discuss the relation between these two forms of κακία of the soul – whether they are completely independent from one another or not. There is some connection between them, but we find no discuss of this in the *Sophist*. The Visitor and Theaetetus focus solely on the second form of psychic κακία, for this is the only one that seems to be relevant for the definition of the sophist. The cathartic or refutative examination performed by the latter only acts (at least directly) on this form of κακία.

⁸⁷⁰ See 228e-229a.

⁸⁷¹ We will later have to consider if chastisement is the only (or even the best) means to bring about peace and harmony between the different elements of the soul. It is possible that philosophical examination, and in particular elenctic examination, also play an important role with respect to this. But for now we will follow the Visitor’s scheme, which is in many aspects very conventional, except for the elenctic examination itself, as we will see.

others, which he gathers and brings under one heading, without specifying what characterizes this one heading and what all these other forms of ignorance have in common. This raises several questions, but let us first consider the form of ignorance to which the Visitor gives all the prominence. He says that this is a big and difficult (or hard to handle) kind of ignorance and acts as a counterweight to all other kinds.⁸⁷² This decisive kind of ignorance is here designated as τὸ μὴ κατειδότα τι δοκεῖν εἰδέναι. It is a variation of the forms used throughout the *corpus* to designate what we considered in the previous chapter: the false or baseless knowledge claims (οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι, εἰδέναι δ' οὐ).⁸⁷³ In this passage, the Visitor uses the verb κατειδέναι to express the idea of knowing something well or fully. This is not the state one is in, but still one thinks one knows. In 231b6 the Visitor uses the expression μάταιος δοξοσοφία to denote the same thing: a vain semblance or conceit of wisdom. One is convinced of having a superlative knowledge, a perfect access to something, but this is a wrong conviction. One has merely a δόξα in the negative sense – i.e., a subjective judgment that has no objective grounds and thus distorts what something is.

In this passage, the Visitor does not say much about this form of ignorance. He simply says that it is responsible for πάντα ὅσα διανοία σφαλλόμεθα (228c5-6). The dative here is not clear. It may have an instrumental, an explanatory or a locative sense. In other words, the translation can be: all that we fail “through thought”, “due to thought” or “in thought”. Be that as it may, the baseless knowledge claims are nonetheless associated with mental errors and these are not necessarily simple theoretical lapses. They also cause many practical mistakes. In other texts, Plato often emphasizes that every failure in action is due to false knowledge claims and the imprudence that results from them.⁸⁷⁴ This is particularly true of everything that depends on our planning and our conception (and perhaps everything or almost everything does). Independently of whether there are other sources of failure, false knowledge claims seem to be particularly associated with it – and this derives from their own constitution. Baseless knowledge claims are a special kind of deformity. As is said in the *Laws*, in a passage mentioned above, they constitute a compound or double ignorance.⁸⁷⁵ One does not know something, one strays off the target, and in addition one also misses the kind of relation one has to the target (i.e., whether one hits or misses the mark). One swerves off

⁸⁷² Cp. 229c: “ἀγνοίας γοῦν μέγα τί μοι δοκῶ καὶ χαλεπὸν ἀφωρισμένον ὄρᾶν εἶδος, πᾶσι τοῖς ἄλλοις αὐτῆς ἀντίσταθμον μέρεσιν.”

⁸⁷³ See Chap. 7, Sect. 1.

⁸⁷⁴ See for instance *Alc. I* 117e-118a.

⁸⁷⁵ See *Laws* 863c-d, especially 863c4-6: “(...) τὸ δὲ διπλοῦν, ὅταν ἀμαθαίνη τις μὴ μόνον ἀγνοία συνεχόμενος ἀλλὰ καὶ δόξη σοφίας, ὡς εἰδῶς παντελῶς περὶ ἃ μηδαμῶς οἶδεν (...)”. Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 1 above.

with respect to the shot itself and misdiagnoses one's cognitive shot. One misfires in respect both to the object of the knowledge claim (since one has no true cognitive access to it) and to the quality of one's access to it (i.e., the quality of one's knowledge claim). One does not know something and one does not know that one does not know it. This constitutes a deviation within the deviation or an intensified deviation. It is the maximal distance one can be from truth. The soul does not simply fail to hit its target and it does not simply hit something else. It hits something other than what it believes it has hit. Things appear as something else. There is a kind of alienation from reality and from the soul's condition. The soul has a kind of private or deviated version of things (a kind of dream) and does not realize it. In sum, one's relation with the target is wholly subverted. One is still related to it (indeed it does not disappear or stop being the target), but because one thinks one has hit it, one fails to see the reality one is directed to and also fails to understand what one has and how it is no more than a missed shot. One does not see the missed shot as a missed shot nor the target as something one missed. One is therefore dreaming in Plato's sense, insofar as one mistakes an image (something that wants to be like something else) for the thing itself.⁸⁷⁶

This enhanced form of ignorance is very different from simply not knowing something and having no claim to having knowledge of it. One knows even less and this is why the Visitor says that only this compound ignorance is called ἀμαθία. As was said, ἀμαθία is a very strong word. It means "stupidity" or "folly", and contains a strong component of censure or reprehension.⁸⁷⁷ It is implied that the thing one is ignorant of is something that is within one's grasp, something everyone should know, not something transcendent or difficult – and yet we fail to reach it. This thing that should be within our grasp is not necessarily the object of the knowledge claim, but the fact that we do not know it and have an empty knowledge claim about it. It is the soul's own incompetence or ineptitude that makes the false knowledge claim possible. In other words, the error of thinking one knows is not a chance event, but rather something that could and should be avoided. It is the result of a particular lack of discernment and, as such, it constitutes the most extreme form of

⁸⁷⁶ For Plato's notion of dreaming, see in particular Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 above.

⁸⁷⁷ As was said, Plato even stresses the component of censure and reprehension by qualifying this form of ignorance as a blameworthy stupidity (ἐπονείδιστος ἀμαθία). See *Ap.* 29b and *Alc. I* 118a. For more on this notion, see Chap. 7, Sect. 1 above.

insanity or παραφροσύνη. One is out of one's mind and one has no notion of it. The defect comes from within and is intrinsically one's own fault.⁸⁷⁸

This is the form of ignorance singled out by the Visitor. In contrast, the other forms of ignorance must entirely lack any empty conceit of knowledge. When affected by them, one does not suppose one knows when one does not know. All these other forms of ignorance are therefore simple (to use once again the distinction taken from the *Laws*). The soul does not reach the being to which it is directed. As we said, the target must remain in sight, the movement towards it must take place (otherwise one would be like a rock, of which we cannot not say in the proper sense of the word that it is ignorant of something), but in this case there is no presumption of hitting it. A failed shot is not mistaken for a perfect one.

But what exactly are the different forms of ignorance that the Visitor opposes to the false knowledge claims? The text is vague in this respect and the only explicit indication we find is given by Theaetetus. When talking about the τέχνη that would correct these other forms of ignorance, he mentions the δημιουργικαί διδασκαλῖαι (i.e., the different forms of instruction in particular handicrafts), and he opposes them to the τέχνη that is supposed to correct false knowledge claims, which he says is called παιδεία (and seems therefore to coincide with the formation of free citizens).⁸⁷⁹ But why does Theaetetus emphasize the handicrafts? There are many things we may be ignorant of and the handicrafts are just one more thing. It is perhaps important that they are a vulgar form of knowledge. They do not have a special social status and one is not disturbed by the fact of not possessing this kind of knowledge. Moreover, it is relatively easy to ascertain whether someone possesses this knowledge or not, and one is normally not mistaken about it. The other form of ignorance would then concern things that are not very important and which people normally do not claim to know.⁸⁸⁰ We do not make mistakes about knowing these things or not. We are aware of our lack of technical knowledge – in contrast with what happens with the other things that are related to παιδεία. They are things that all human beings need to know in order to acquire a respectable status both within the community and in one's own eyes – and we usually think we know them, even if we do not.

Theaetetus thus seems to identify the other forms of ignorance with different kinds of know-how. But we could make a different and more complete identification of these other

⁸⁷⁸ We will return to the question of the soul's own fault in ἀμαθία when discussing the responsibility of the soul in the formation and preservation of the unexamined life and of all the knowledge claims that underpin it. See Chap. 17 below.

⁸⁷⁹ See 229d.

⁸⁸⁰ In this respect, cp. *Alc. I* 117b-d.

forms of ignorance that are opposed to the empty knowledge claims. The simple ignorance can indeed refer to three different things, to which we alluded above. First, it can concern something of which we have no idea whatsoever (of which we have no perception, no memory, no thought), something to which we are totally oblivious. This constitutes a form of unconscious ignorance. We have no clear notion of this particular target and of our impulse towards it. It is simply contained in the global target of truth. This is what allows us to talk of missing this particular being. Secondly, one may have some idea that a being exists, but lack any knowledge claim about its particular features or even about its exact identity (though in some cases, if not all, we may already have some tacit assumptions about this being and its features). In such a case, we would be aware of our ignorance, we would have an explicit notion of the target and our motion towards it, and we would be aware of not reaching it. It is something of this sort that happens in the case of the handicrafts we are not trained in. Finally, the simple ignorance may also pertain to matters about which we once had knowledge claims that were in the meanwhile refuted, thus making us realize our ignorance. The structure of this form of ignorance is similar to the second form. Both are conscious and both correspond to a form of interrogative presentation of something. One has some access to a being, but this access is very indeterminate. It may correspond to a state of uncertainty in which one doubts whether something is like one thinks. It may also correspond to a state of hesitation between two or more alternatives, or even to a state of complete perplexity and confusion about something. All these possibilities are very different from having a knowledge claim and are thus simple forms of ignorance.

The Visitor, however, does not specify any of this. He is mainly concerned with identifying and highlighting the vain conceit of knowledge. The other forms of ignorance are not very problematic. We all acknowledge their existence and it seems that we may even be seriously affected by them without suffering any serious consequences. The case is very different with baseless knowledge claims. We tend to be distracted from this form of ignorance and the place it occupies in our life. The Visitor, however, not only identifies it, but he also puts it at the center of his analysis. He says that, despite our distraction from it, it is a counterweight to all other forms of ignorance. We may have as much double ignorance as we have ignorance – or even more. But quantity is not the main problem here. Even if there are millions of things that we are simply ignorant of, our knowledge claims can still pervade all those things and make us presuppose something about them or attribute predicates to them (either some general features, or the fact that they are irrelevant for our life, or anything else).

The complex syntax of our knowledge claims makes it possible that knowledge claims about one thing may infect our ignorance regarding something else. Knowledge claims (and mainly the tacit ones) have the power to give some context to what we do not know and thus they can pervert simple ignorance.⁸⁸¹ This reduces the weight of of the latter and makes double ignorance all the more severe. Double ignorance is therefore the one that contributes the most to whether our soul is marked by deformity or shapeliness.

1.4. The ways of correcting our ἄγνοια and the need for an ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης

Let us now consider the kinds of τέχνη used to correct these forms of ignorance. We already mentioned that the Visitor attributes a τέχνη to each form of κακία and the deformity of the soul is corrected by διδασκαλική (the instructive τέχνη). This form of expertise corrects the deviated assault of the soul towards its target and brings a new direction to the soul's cognitive access to things. But we have seen that there are two kinds of deviation or ignorance. One is simple and the other (namely, the vain conceit of knowledge) is double. Accordingly, there must also be two forms of instructive τέχνη.

As was said, it is Theaetetus who identifies these two forms and his identification (although conventional and not as precise as the one the Visitor would probably make) reveals some interesting aspects regarding the correction of ignorance. The simple form ignorance is to be corrected by the instruction in handicrafts.⁸⁸² This kind of instruction imparts a very specific knowledge, which we normally do not think we have. Since we have no knowledge claims in this respect, the transmission of this knowledge seems to be pretty straightforward. One needs only to have contact with a master, who already possesses this knowledge and then transfers it to the apprentice, who can easily receive it. Though some can have greater skill than others, the basics of a particular handicraft is something almost everyone can learn with proper training and for this reason it is also not the object of great admiration.⁸⁸³ These are the domains emphasized by Theaetetus, but the same holds for all

⁸⁸¹ Unconscious ignorance, in which we have no explicit idea about something, may be the result of a knowledge claim, since we may think that there is nothing to know in a certain domain (which means that this ignorance is not just simple ignorance, but already contains a portion of double ignorance). As for ignorance regarding what something is or the kind of ignorance that results from refutation, both can coexist with different knowledge claims regarding the object at issue – i.e., we may not know exactly what something is, but we may already have some beliefs about it.

⁸⁸² Cp. 229d.

⁸⁸³ The knowledge of handicrafts, though certain (in the *Apology* these are indeed the only kind of σοφοί acknowledged by Socrates – see 22c-d) and relatively simple, is vulgar and confined to a relatively unimportant domain. It is necessary for someone in the πόλις to know how to do it, but we do not all need to know it.

those things in relation to which we do not have any special knowledge claim. The lack of supposed knowledge allows us to receive a direct instruction.

The case of the instruction that is supposed to correct our false knowledge claims is very different. According to Theaetetus, this instruction is called παιδεία. As was said above, the primary sense of this word is education. It is what allows one to overcome the childish condition and become a fully-fledged member of the tribal community, sharing in the duties and privileges that come with such a condition. In other words, this is the process of acquiring the superior condition – i.e., the process of becoming a man (ἄνθρωπος) in the pre-eminent sense the word had in Ancient Greek culture. In a culture with no notion of intrinsic human dignity, dignity had to be conquered and such a conquest required competence, skill, and knowledge. One had to share the community values and one also had to be able to act and partake in common deliberations. All this was acquired through παιδεία, which encompassed the different processes and activities that were required to abandon the childish condition and acquire the manly condition.⁸⁸⁴

This was often regarded as a somewhat automatic process. Children would learn what they needed from their elders and the transmission of the necessary knowledge would be relatively simple. But when the Sophists proposed a new kind of education, things changed. This implied there were important limitations in the traditional education, which prevented men from acquiring the superior condition. The community in which they grew up and of which they are a part was unable to provide the education needed. It was necessary to resort to a specialist, the sophist, who possessed a superior form of wisdom and was able to transmit it. Only this new wisdom and the education provided by it could overcome the limitations of the traditional education. The young needed the services of the sophist, but so did the grown-up, for in a way they were still children. They lacked proper education and were therefore unable to lead their lives in a correct manner. This is the outrageous accusation that is implicit in the sophistic project – and it is also characteristic of Plato's conception of παιδεία.⁸⁸⁵

Theaetetus confusedly alludes to this framework. Παιδεία is supposed to correct our empty knowledge claims and the increased kind of deformity that results from them. It must

⁸⁸⁴ Indeed, the process of education has both a negative and a positive side. One must put away childish things (i.e., one must stop speaking as a child, understanding as a child, thinking as a child), grow up and acquire new ways of acting, speaking and thinking. For more on the notion of παιδεία, cp. Chap. 1, Sect. 2.2.

⁸⁸⁵ The Sophists have indeed an important relation with the notion of παιδεία, and we must keep in mind that the reference to this notion comes in a text in which the characters are trying to define precisely what a sophist is. For more on the notion of παιδεία, see Chap. 1, Sect. 2.2 above.

counteract the cognitive tries or assaults (ὄρμαί) of the soul towards things and replace them with new tries or assaults. But here the Visitor feels the need to introduce a new distinction. Education – or as the Visitor also says, instruction in λόγοι (words, speeches or conversation) – is twofold. He speaks of two paths (ὁδοί) and says that one is rougher and the other smoother.⁸⁸⁶ The first path (i.e., the first mode of παιδεία) is the traditional way of educating children through admonishments, which may be more or less forceful (i.e., harsher or softer). The parents may angrily or severely reprimand their children when they do something wrong or they may otherwise exhort them.⁸⁸⁷ This constitutes the νοουθητική – the τέχνη of admonishments, of talking sense into someone.⁸⁸⁸ With this τέχνη, the parents produce a direct correction of the deviation of the soul and bring it to its proper course (i.e., to its target: the truth). It is a form of positive education, in which one directly transfers or inculcates the correct understanding of something.⁸⁸⁹ In other words, one uses speech (λόγος) to directly communicate a new access to things.⁸⁹⁰ This kind of instruction (just like the instruction in handicrafts) follows the model of nourishment (of τρέφειν). One ingests knowledge, which is like food for the soul.⁸⁹¹ One acquires more access or a better access and this knowledge is integrated into one's set of views. Thus one's inner being or soul becomes less deformed and shapelier.

The Visitor, however, is very skeptical about the effectiveness of this positive education as a form of correcting one's false knowledge claims. It seems to work well in cases of simple ignorance (like the instruction in handicrafts) or when one is not so committed to a view (when one's δόξαι are not stiff). But the case is much more complicated when people are convinced of possessing a superior form of knowledge (when they think they are σοφοί or δεινοί about something). In that case, because they think they already possess a superlative knowledge, the admonitory τέχνη would have to spend a lot of effort and it would accomplish little. Their condition resists any change. Indeed, this condition is not the result of an explicit decision and is not something one can simply choose to correct.

⁸⁸⁶ See 229e.

⁸⁸⁷ See 229e-230a. This vague description seems to correspond to the description of the first phase of the educational process made by Protagoras in the eponymous dialogue. See 325c ff.

⁸⁸⁸ The word νοουθητική itself seems to suggest that this is a matter of inserting (τιθέναι) νοῦς in someone.

⁸⁸⁹ At least this is the understanding one has when one admonishes someone. It presupposes one already has a correct understanding of things and is thus in a position to transfer it to someone else.

⁸⁹⁰ As is said in *Smp.* 175d, knowledge would then be “ὡσπερ τὸ ἐν ταῖς κύλιξιν ὕδωρ τὸ διὰ τοῦ ἐρίου ῥέον ἐκ τῆς πληρεστέρας εἰς τὴν κενωτέραν.” In this model, what is transmitted goes from one side to the other without suffering any change during the process.

⁸⁹¹ We find the metaphor of ingesting knowledge for instance in *Protagoras* (see 313c ff.) and *Phaedrus* (246e ff.). It is promptly suggested by the verb τρέφειν, which means to nourish both in the sense of feeding and rearing (or educating) someone.

As the Visitor says, “all stupidity (ἀμαθία) is unwilling” (or “not of one’s own accord”, ἀκούσιον). The stupidity sees itself as something completely different and this makes correcting it all the more difficult. “No one who believed he was wise would ever be willing to learn anything of those things in which he believed he was dreadfully clever”.⁸⁹² These words express just how powerless a positive education is to correct all our vain conceit of knowledge. The soul’s views of reality (its assaults on the target of truth) are firmly set and they are simply seen as corresponding to what things are. There is no uncertainty or instability – and thus no search (no ζητεῖν). One is in a sedentary cognitive position (just like the prisoners in the cave). The admonitory τέχνη, which tries to directly impart new views, would only be able to produce very small corrections or additions, most probably limited or even distorted by what one already believes to know. All learning is blocked because of one’s supposed knowledge. There is no neutral recipient, no pure passivity. The contact with all new views (or all new δόξαι) is determined by the ones that are already installed in the soul of the person being educated.

In order to better explain this idea, the Visitor employs a physiological image.⁸⁹³ He describes the soul as an organism and, although he does not say it explicitly, it is implied that this organism is swollen with all its false knowledge claims and is thus marked by a kind of cognitive ὄγκος (a term which means bulk, but also has the connotation of pride, arrogance, conceit, exaltation). The soul is inflated with all its δόξαι. It is overweight, stuffed up with unwholesome, unprofitable elements, and does not even realize it. In other words, the soul is ill. In fact, given the abundance of false knowledge claims, the soul is a very sick organism – possibly even entirely sick, if it turns out that the soul actually fails all its shots and there is deviation in each impulse.⁸⁹⁴ This is all the more serious since it prevents any direct intervention. The Visitor talks about administering teachings (προσφέρειν μαθήματα) as if they were remedies. These remedies are supposed to correct the deformity of the soul. But the false knowledge claims block these remedies as they block any incoming views. The δόξαι are impediments to the absorption of anything new. They prevent the organism from benefitting (ἀπολαύειν) from any sustenance it may receive. The soul cannot digest, assimilate – and so it is impossible to correct any cognitive shortcoming simply by nourishing

⁸⁹² For all these ideas, see 230a: “τὸ δὲ γε, εἴξασί τινες αὐτὸν λόγον ἑαυτοῖς δόντες ἠγγήσασθαι πᾶσαν ἀκούσιον ἀμαθίαν εἶναι, καὶ μαθεῖν οὐδὲν ποτ’ ἂν ἐθέλειν τὸν οἰόμενον εἶναι σοφὸν τούτων ὧν οἴοιτο πέρι δεινὸς εἶναι, μετὰ δὲ πολλοῦ πόνου τὸ νοουθητικὸν εἶδος τῆς παιδείας σμικρὸν ἀνύτειν.”

⁸⁹³ See 230c-d.

⁸⁹⁴ The use of this image actually points to a certain structural similarity between the soul’s deformity and the understanding of disease we considered in Section 1.2 above.

one's soul with new views. All positive education is neutralized. This can mean that every remedy (every new view) is simply rejected, but it can also cause that these new views are absorbed by the disease and used as means to attend or nurture it. Instead of curing the organism and freeing it from harmful elements, they would only prolong the problem, insofar as they would be transformed by the soul's main presuppositions (ὑποθέσεις) and thus integrated in the system of δόξαι that is already present in the organism.⁸⁹⁵

This is the paradoxical situation that results from the vain conceit of knowledge. Although we do not want to be ignorant, we also do not want to learn. Learning is only possible if we clear up the way and somehow remove the conceit of knowledge. It is necessary that we stop thinking we are wise or clever when we are not. This is what the other form of education (the one that is rougher and different from the traditional form of education) is supposed to do. It has a negative character and it is precisely this negativity that is conveyed by the expression ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης (230b1). As is the case throughout this passage, δόξα has a negative sense here and coincides with the expression “τὸ μὴ κατειδότα τι δοκεῖν εἶδέναι”. Ἐκβολή in turn designates any form of casting away, expelling, discarding – like jettisoning or throwing one's cargo overboard, or vomiting, evacuating, having an abortion, etc. But in this context, given the image of an organism swollen up and intoxicated by its false knowledge claims, the ἐκβολή seems to be what results from the action of a purgative or a laxative. It evacuates the intellectual bowels, and thus removes or takes out of commission the δόξαι that block learning.⁸⁹⁶ This is described by the Visitor as an ἀπαλλαγή (230c2) – i.e., as an act of getting rid of something or a release from something, with the further implication that this something oppressed us and was an evil. He also calls it καθαρός – and this brings us back to the beginning of the analysis. The ἐκβολή is the act of casting away the defect or κακία that is the false conceit of knowledge. This is what has to be separated from our cognitive organism. We have to purge or cleanse our soul of this unwholesome element or this spiritual pollution. The term καθαρός has indeed a medical and religious sense, as was said above, and the καθαρός Plato has in mind here is what can bring our soul to a good condition and allow it to be happy.⁸⁹⁷ The ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης is thus supposed to cure or save our soul. It constitutes a form of sublimated καθαρός, which

⁸⁹⁵ This would constitute a kind of νοσοτροφία, to use an expression from the *Republic* (407b1).

⁸⁹⁶ See 230d: “(...) τὰς τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἐμποδίους δόξας ἐξέλων (...).”

⁸⁹⁷ The notion of happiness (εὐδαιμονία) appears at 230e. The Greek meaning of the word is in some essential respects different from our contemporary conception of happiness. For a discussion of this question, see Chap. 12, Sect. 3.2 below.

redeems us from our cognitive faults and gives us sound-mindedness (σωφροσύνη).⁸⁹⁸ According to the Visitor, this is the most pleasant and most stable release.⁸⁹⁹

The Visitor thus outlines the project of a complete psychic purge or cleansing, which would produce a state of believing only the things we actually know and nothing more.⁹⁰⁰ All our soul's shots or assaults towards the truth would be reduced to those that are effectively knowledge and we would recognize our ignorance in all other matters. We would achieve a mindful ignorance and thereby remove the double ignorance or double deformity of the soul. This second kind of education is thus the opposite of a transmission of knowledge. It involves a reduction, a loss of weight. It corresponds to a diet and a getting rid of the diseased parts. In other words, it is a form of negative παιδεία. We must unlearn what we wrongly think we know. We lose the supposed education and instruction we had (what gave us our wrong views), we are returned to a childish condition or rather discover we have been a child all this time. We cancel the views of which we were wrongly convinced and, as a result, things become more indeterminate for us. The presentation of them becomes interrogative. The soul's old tries or assaults are cancelled and the soul is remobilized. It must try to hit things (i.e., the truth) again. It must redefine things and produce new δόξα.

This is the cathartic τέχνη the Visitor had in mind all along. The other corrective τέχναι (medicine, gymnastics, chastisement, instruction in handicrafts and admonishment) could expel κακία by modifying or inserting something. The ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης, in turn, is solely concerned with removal. It removes the soul's deformity by removing its false

⁸⁹⁸ The state we achieve is appropriately described by Theaetetus (at 230d) as the best and most “moderate” (or “sensible”, σώφρων) condition (ἔξις). It produces sound-mindedness insofar as it avoids cognitive excesses or cognitive ὕβρις, which can have bad consequences and itself produces a state of inner disorder (the illness of the soul the Visitor talked about). In this sense, the state that results from the ἐκβολή is much better than the one corresponding to the double deformity. The Visitor emphasizes this idea by saying that even the Great King, who is supposed to have the most sumptuous and most desirable life, is simply uneducated (a child) and deformed if he has not gone through such a purge, i.e. through the process of refutation (see 230d-230e). He is unpurified with respect to the things that matter the most (τὰ μέγιστα). What seems to be the most admirable condition is thus to be despised or pitied if it is full of vain conceit of knowledge. The Great King is not in a better condition than someone like Socrates, who has much fewer possessions, but also much fewer knowledge claims. A happy or fortunate condition indeed requires one's soul to be shaped and not infected with deformity.

⁸⁹⁹ See 230c: “καὶ τοῦτο δὴ τῷ τρόπῳ τῶν περὶ αὐτοὺς μεγάλων καὶ σκληρῶν δοξῶν ἀπαλλάττονται πασῶν τε ἀπαλλαγῶν ἀκούειν τε ἡδίστην καὶ τῷ πάσχοντι βεβαιοτάτα γιγνομένην.” In *Phaedo* we also find the project of a κάθαρσις of the soul (see in particular 65e-69d and 80d-83e), but in that case the thing one must get rid of is the body. This admits of different interpretations, but as we will see in Part III and IV, the body in *Phaedo* corresponds primarily to a way of life which values the pleasures of the body and a certain way of seeing things that is primarily focused on our sensations and particular things. It is precisely this way of life and the somatic views that are associated with it that must be purged. Insofar as these views are also intrinsically defective, there is a clear connection between the two conceptions of cleansing – although in the *Sophist* the description is more neutral and does not specify what the content of the δόξαι that are to be expelled is and what way of life is outlined by them. For more on the *Phaedo*, see in particular Chap. 13 Sect. 2.2.

⁹⁰⁰ See 230d: “(...) καθαρὸν ἀποφύγη καὶ ταῦτα ἡγούμενον ἅπερ οἶδεν εἶδέναι μόνα, πλείω δὲ μή.”

knowledge claims. This removal is in itself a gain, because it reduces the ignorance and brings us closer to knowledge.⁹⁰¹ It intensifies our relation to truth. Achieving a state of simple ignorance is already a progress, insofar as it produces what Kant calls a negative expansion (*negative Erweiterung*).⁹⁰² This is what then allows us to receive knowledge or search for it.

The purge of baseless knowledge claims has therefore a therapeutic character. It removes something and gives us the possibility of health – i.e., it gives the cognitive organism the possibility to grow. One can now receive cognitive sustenance, i.e., new views: One can create new beliefs, which will be correct or at least better than the previous ones. This positive moment is indeed very important, as we shall see. Plato's conception of a negative examination does not intend to do away with philosophical problems, but it lets them appear in their true form, perhaps for the first time. The ἐκβολή turns the soul's eye from its usual direction and gives it the possibility to see something new. Therefore, philosophical examination is not concluded with the ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης. The expulsion of the empty conceit of knowledge has an auxiliary character and presupposes a second technical intervention. One must also expand one's knowledge, nurture it somehow. The passage of the *Sophist* we are considering does not specify how. We only find references to conventional forms of expansion: the instruction in handicrafts and parental admonishment. There is no reflection about a particular method and a particular kind of examination that allows one to find answers. We must search for it in other passages of the Platonic corpus and this is what we will do in the following chapter. But it is important to bear in mind that, given all the false knowledge claims we have, any positive examination must be preceded by the cathartic examination described in the *Sophist*. The ultimate goal is to achieve knowledge and have a shapely soul. The ἐκβολή itself aims at this. But we cannot simply pursue or acquire it, since there is (or at least there might be) much deflection in our soul. We must first examine our own cognitive state and the knowledge claims we have, and only then are we in condition to properly acquire new knowledge.

⁹⁰¹ On this idea of losing knowledge claims as a gain, cp. in particular *Men.* 84a-c.

⁹⁰² Cp. I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, Berlin, Georg Reimer, 1904, 212 (A256/B312).

1.5. The method of the ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης

The question now is how the cathartic examination is to be carried out. The Visitor briefly describes the method or process of the ἐκβολή. By considering his description, we can better understand the nature of this project of negative education – as well as its difficulty and insufficiency (i.e., how it needs to be supplemented by a positive form of examination). The description largely coincides with the method we find in many dialogues (the so-called Socratic elenchus). We considered some aspects of this method above, when we saw how one's vain conceit of knowledge is exhibited or revealed in the dialogues.⁹⁰³ However, some interpreters seem to contest this identification and rather discuss which sophist and which method the Visitor has in mind. They focus particularly on the ἀντιλογική, the δισσοὶ λόγοι, and how it can be used to expose the frailty of any position.⁹⁰⁴ But there is a certain ambiguity in the whole passage. The Sophists used such methods or techniques often as mere eristics – i.e. as a set of tricks meant to persuade or refute anyone and take advantage of them. As a result, these methods had a bad reputation and the word “sophist” itself acquired a negative sense.⁹⁰⁵ The Visitor himself is aware of this. After describing the cathartic examination, he fears he has described something more admirable than sophistry.⁹⁰⁶ The description seems rather to correspond to the philosopher and what we see Socrates doing in the corpus. This means that we can distinguish what the Sophists actually did and a formal project, which would outline something like an ideal sophist – and this is what the Visitor does, calling it the noble sophistry (ἡ γένει γενναία σοφιστική, 231b7-8).

Let us then see the description of the method of ἐκβολή in the *Sophist*. As was said, some aspects were already mentioned and discussed in the previous chapter, when we considered the nature of false or baseless knowledge claims and also how they are unmasked in the dialogues. Now, however, the question is how to remove these false knowledge claims. This is not something that can be done from the outside, simply by pointing out to someone that they have false knowledge claims. The person that has false knowledge claims must understand that they have them and this understanding is supposed to provoke a strong reaction of rejection.

⁹⁰³ Cf. Chap. 7, Sect. 1.2 a).

⁹⁰⁴ For a discussion of this question, see in particular G. KERFERD, Plato's Noble Art of Sophistry, *The Classical Quarterly* 4 (1954), 84-90; J. TREVASKIS, The Sophistry of Noble Lineage (Plato, *Sophistes* 230a5-232b9), *Phronesis* 1 (1955), 36-49; J. SOLANA, Socrates and 'Noble' Sophistry (*Sophist* 226b –231c), in: B. BOSSI & T. ROBINSON (eds.), *Plato's Sophist Revisited*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2013.

⁹⁰⁵ For more on this, cp. Chap. 1, Sects. 2.1 and 2.2 above.

⁹⁰⁶ See 230a.

One important clue about how this is done comes from the fact that Plato calls this form of examination ἔλεγχος.⁹⁰⁷ We saw in Chapter 4 that this term conveys the act of submitting someone to a test or a challenge, and it also denotes the act of refuting, exposing or shaming someone.⁹⁰⁸ The τέχνη the Visitor is describing does precisely this. It refutes people, shows that they do not have the knowledge they thought they had, but are rather uneducated and childish. It attacks the examinees' self-love and sense of honor, and shames them (εἰς αἰσχύνην καταστήσας).⁹⁰⁹ They were convinced they possessed a superior form of wisdom and are now confronted with the fact that they know nothing and are stupid for thinking they do. In other words, they are forced to confront the double deformity of their soul and cannot but feel ashamed of their own condition. As the Visitor says, “those who are being examined, on seeing this, are harsh on themselves and grow tame before everyone else”.⁹¹⁰ The elenctic examination changes everything and converts the double ignorance in simple ignorance, thus leading us to search for (and pay attention to) other possibilities of conceiving things.

But how exactly is this to be done? According to the Visitor, it is necessary to question or cross-examine someone thoroughly (διερωτᾶν, 230b4). The ἐκβολή takes place in λόγος and deals with λόγοι. The one being questioned, having strong knowledge claims, will produce assertions which he believes are meaningful, either by putting forward his own views or by giving assent to what the questioner says. The examinee thus thinks he “says something” – or more precisely, something meaningful or true (τι λέγειν, 230b4). However, one's assertions often say nothing (insofar as one does not have actual knowledge) and it is this that the questioner must show (ἐνδεικνύειν, 230b7) and the respondent must see (ὁρᾶν, 230b8). This lack of meaning or truth of one's assertions will be revealed by the cross-examination itself. By being demanded answers and clarifications, the respondent will end up wandering or roaming about (πλανᾶσθαι) with respect to his judgments (δόξαι).⁹¹¹ The image of wandering is also connected with the idea of rambling, saying things without connection, and it expresses here the state of the one who has no real knowledge. In the case

⁹⁰⁷ See 230d and 231b.

⁹⁰⁸ See Chap. 4, Sect. 2.2.

⁹⁰⁹ See 230d.

⁹¹⁰ See 230b-c. The irritation with oneself is presented as an essential condition for learning. It makes one mild and receptive to an intervention from the outside (i.e., to learning from someone else). Otherwise, our stiff δόξαι render us equally stiff and impervious to any external contribution. So by changing the relation to oneself and to how we see ourselves, we can change our relation to others – or, more precisely, our relation to the views they may try to impart us.

⁹¹¹ See 230b.

of this cross-examination, the one who wanders in his judgments pronounces statements that “are simultaneously contrary to themselves and about the same things, in relation to the same, in the same respect.”⁹¹² The conflict here may be between views one was already fully aware of before examining them but had not yet brought together; some of these views may have been tacit until this point and are now revealed as being in conflict with other express views or other previously tacit views. At any rate, the questioner puts the respondent’s judgments side by side (τιθέασι παρ’ ἀλλήλας, 230b6-7) and calls his attention to the contradictions – thus revealing the respondent’s ignorance.

The Visitor does not specify how exactly this contradiction is found, but if we consider the dialogues, we see that it can be found in two ways. First, the examiner must elicit statements concerning different topics that are not entirely unconnected. He inquires directly about something and then requests admissions about other matters. These answers may coincide with the popular views or the views of some intellectual, but the person being examined must agree with them, they must be his own views. The questioner must then demand elucidations. He must analyze the presuppositions of what is being said and what results from it. This will produce chains of argument which, in case someone possesses false knowledge claims, are bound to lead to contradictory statements about the same topic.⁹¹³ One will find oneself attributing different and incompatible predicates to the same thing or defining some notion in an inconsistent manner.

But this is not all. As it is often seen in the dialogues, it is not enough to reveal inconsistencies in one’s knowledge claims. One tends to hold on to one’s beliefs. But there is a different kind of contradiction that is shown in the dialogues and that results from this first one. After failing to give a meaningful answer to a question, the characters tend to try again and give a different answer – which will in turn lead to a new contradiction. This process can be repeated several times and in the end the examinee has presented several different answers about the same topic. He is completely lost and wanders from one statement to the next about the same thing. He is not able to say something concrete and stable. This other kind of wandering or roaming about (πλανᾶσθαι) is indeed essential. One is adrift, unable to explain,

⁹¹² See 230b: “(...) αὐτὰς αὐταῖς ἅμα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταῦτα ἐναντίας.”

⁹¹³ It is not exactly clear if this happens every time that one has false knowledge claims, and so one could doubt the validity of the method. But it seems that in many cases, especially concerning our understanding of notions, we end up being incoherent due to our lack of clarity about them. And even if that is not always the case (i.e., if in some cases there is no actual disagreement), the method of revealing one’s bad cognitive shape through such disagreement can still be the only (or at least the most effective) method of removing one’s knowledge claims – so it is important to develop it and consider its potential.

and precisely this leads to a change of attitude. One loses confidence in one's cognitive ability.⁹¹⁴

The Visitor's words are thus a fair description of what we find Socrates doing in the elenctic dialogues. The great strength of this whole process is that it turns our own δόξαι against each other.⁹¹⁵ This is what makes (or at least what can make) the process effective in removing our vain conceit of knowledge. We have an instinctive understanding of the principle of contradiction and we need harmony and concordance between our views. The ἔλεγχος cancels the compartmentalization of our views and shows how their contents, presuppositions and implications relate to one another. The resulting increase in clarity shows the incoherence of our views and how we are unable to put forward answers that can resist the elenctic examination.⁹¹⁶ This is what shames us and what reveals our conceit of knowledge or our incompetence in cognitive matters. It is not an irrelevant or dispassionate matter. It is the quality of one's access – and therefore of one's inner being or soul – that is being put into question. Our shame regarding this is what can free us from great and stiff δόξαι that are deeply embedded in our way of seeing and understanding things. One cannot accept them and gets angry at oneself for not being able to say something coherent about the matter.

It is indeed possible to doubt the effectiveness of this process. In the dialogues we see many characters resisting the demonstration of their ignorance, as we considered above.⁹¹⁷ They may blame a particular formulation of their beliefs or say that they will find the right formulation if they continue searching. But even if they do not capitulate straightaway, their conviction is already starting to waver. If the process continues long enough, they will probably admit their uncertainty or their confusion about something, because of the πλάνη just described.

One could also wonder whether the person refuted will abandon all the conflicting views or will try to save some by denying others. The first reaction to the patent contradiction

⁹¹⁴ We see this very clearly in *Alcibiades I*. Socrates' questions are initially met with haughtiness, but as the dialogue proceeds, Alcibiades gradually makes more and more concessions and ends up fully conscious of his state and its meaning. Cp. in particular 128d.

⁹¹⁵ To use Socrates' formulation in the *Gorgias*, one bears witness against oneself and this is what produces the most effective refutation (in contrast with the "arithmetic refutation", which shows that many people disagree with something). See in particular 472b-c. We can also use a formulation by the Visitor later in the text: one is a sort of ventriloquist and can do another voice that refutes oneself, thus having the enemy inside oneself. See 252c.

⁹¹⁶ This incoherence actually constitutes a form of sedition or illness within our δόξαι. They are in conflict with each other – and in this respect the soul's deformity again comes to resemble the description of the soul's illness. Cp. Section 1.2 above and Chapter 18, Section 2.2.

⁹¹⁷ Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 1.2 b).

of one's views is trying to rescue all that can be rescued. This raises the question of which of the two or more opposing views is right. But the fact that we initially have the two or more δόξαι and that they say different things about something should already be sufficient to prove that we are not as knowledgeable as we supposed, for we cannot distinguish truth from falsehood. The process should at least bring some instability and doubt – much more than any admonishment or any positive communication. We only need to continue long enough for someone to realize the meaning of their inability to provide a solid answer. Whether or not the other person will endure the examination during this time is a different question, though.

Finally, it is not clear how much knowledge one must have to perform the elenctic examination. Must the one who undergoes the examination have a knowledge of what is happening or how it is being done? Is it more or less effective if he is not quite aware of what is happening? How important is it to know exactly what this elenctic examination is? At first, it might seem irrelevant whether one knows what is happening (and why it is happening) or not. But given the possibility of misunderstanding the meaning of this ἔλεγχος and running away from what it tries to show, it is probably more effective if one is aware of what one is going through. It is perhaps because of this that Socrates often reflects about the meaning of the situation when he performs this kind of examination – although his reflections are often partial and somewhat dissimulated. This may be due to the fact that it is not easy to explain what exactly is taking place and how important it is. The process must be gradual and one must actually undergo ἔλεγχος and the ἐκβολή to be able to fully appreciate its importance.

The cross-examiner, on the other hand, must have knowledge. He must possess a specialized knowledge (a τέχνη) that allows him to appropriately intervene in a particular domain of reality (in this case, in the soul of the examinee). He must not only be able to discern false knowledge claims, but he must be able to ask the right questions and lead the examination in the right way, to show to the respondent the inconsistencies their views contain. But exactly how much τέχνη is required? How does one acquire it? And can one examine oneself in this way? Is that any different from submitting others to this elenctic examination? Are we perchance more lenient with ourselves than others would be? Or less capable of identifying hidden implications? Perhaps it is necessary to first suffer this kind of examination and cast away some of our beliefs in order to be able to see its importance and be able to examine ourselves. And perhaps this period of passive examination can be replaced by the reading of the dialogues. At any rate, elenctic examination does not seem to be something we can perform without any preparation – but when we have it, then in principle

nothing prevents us from applying it to ourselves, as Socrates would probably do in order to remain fully aware of his ignorance.

2. The different possible magnitudes of the ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης and their consequences

The cathartic or elenctic examination aims at expelling all our baseless knowledge claims. We are to reduce our views to the ones that are effectively knowledge. However, the terms of the project do not specify how much of a reduction is to take place. The passage we considered is indeterminate and somewhat ambiguous. When the Visitor talks about a puffed up organism, it seemed to be a matter of reducing the excessive fat. There would be something left, which would then be the basis for the assimilation of new views. But the Visitor also raises the possibility that the movement of the soul towards things fails every assault or deviates from the target καθ' ἐκάστην ὁρμήν (228c). In this case, we would have to cleanse our soul of all its cognitive assaults on things and there would not be any knowledge claim left. But it is not clear what exactly the Visitor has in mind and everything hinges on how many false knowledge claims we have. In the previous chapter we outlined a map of different possible diagnoses of our knowledge claims – i.e., of different possible degrees of presence of stupidity or vain conceit of knowledge in us.⁹¹⁸ We have seen the different kinds of defect our knowledge claims are exposed to (namely, modal defect, error in the attribution of predicates, and pseudo-understanding of predicates) and we have also seen how the particular syntax or intertwining of our knowledge claims also means that each of our views may contain several different defects. These defects may affect different things, different notions, and even our entire representation of reality.

The magnitude of the ἐκβολή correlates directly with this. If all our knowledge claims are tenable (i.e., if we do not make any false distribution of predicates and have no false understanding of these same predicates), then the ἐκβολή will only remove the modal defect (i.e., the unjustified certainty that we had) and add absolute certainty to our beliefs (thus rendering them knowledge in the full sense of the word). This is the result we naturally tend to expect, since we are usually convinced that most of our cognitive body is healthy. There may be some gaps in our views, some inaccuracies, some mistakes, some views may have to be discarded, but no great change would come from the process of expelling all our cognitive defects. At the most, we would have some doubts and feel confused about some particular

⁹¹⁸ See Chap. 7, Sect. 1.3.

things. This could perhaps mobilize us to search for answers, but it would be a very limited mobilization, and the gain that could come from it would also be limited.

This is a possibility we must admit. At first we do not know exactly what our cognitive state is. But if we look at Plato's writings, we see that they point in a very different direction. As we have seen, the dialogues suggest that we have many more baseless knowledge claims than we could ever suppose (not only because we have many knowledge claims of which we normally have no idea, but also because the proportion of those that are false is much higher than we would expect). This raises the question of how it is possible that we do not notice such a great distortion in our access to things. We seem to have access to beings as they are – and yet, according to Plato, this is far from being an appropriate access to them. If this is the case and a high number of our knowledge claims is false, then the cleansing required will be much more extensive than we tend to think, and it would actually bring about a state of great doubt and confusion about what things are.

When we admit this possibility, we tend to presume that there would still be some healthy tissue in our body of knowledge claims, something that would withstand the elenctic examination. But, in several moments, Plato puts forward – and even seems to defend – the possibility that all our knowledge claims are erroneous and that we actually know nothing. A good example of this can be found in the *Statesman*, when the Visitor says that “it's probable that each of us knows everything as if in a dream and then again is ignorant of everything as it is in waking”.⁹¹⁹ We have indeed seen how there can be a constitutive defect in our way of seeing things. We may have no more than δόξαι in a negative sense: mere opinions, subjective standpoints, with no objective correspondence. What reality is for us may be no more than a world of δόξα, illusion, dream, in which all things and all notions are distorted and nothing is as it seems. This would mean that our body of knowledge claims is wholly sick. We would be in a state of absolute disproportion, deformity, ignorance or παραφροσύνη. Our way of seeing things could not be furthest from the truth.

This is possible in two ways. First, we tend to think of an examination of atomic moments and in that case an absolute deviation would imply that we have absolutely no knowledge and every predicate we attribute to things, as well as all our understanding of these same predicates, is wrong. Secondly, there is the possibility of only some of our views being wrong, but in virtue of the intricate syntax of our knowledge claims, they may

⁹¹⁹ See 277d: “κινδυνεύει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οἷον ὄναρ εἰδῶς ἅπαντα πάντ' αὖ πάλιν ὅσπερ ὕπαρ ἀγνοεῖν.” I follow the translation in S. BENARDETE, *op. cit.*

contaminate all other views. In that case, there would be no component that would not be affected by some distortion. In both cases, we would have to be cleansed of our entire way of seeing and understanding things. It is precisely a cleansing or κάθαρσις of this dimension that is suggested in the *Phaedo*, for instance. Socrates is not just talking about getting rid of one's body, but also of the way of life that is build around it, pursuing the bodily pleasures, and the entire way of understanding things within this way of life. We will return to this in more detail below, but for now we have to keep in mind that the outcome of the ἐκβολή may be something of the sort. We may have to cleanse us of all our views.⁹²⁰

A cleansing of these proportions would be extremely violent – in fact, much more so than what we immediately think when we try to conceive this possibility. Due to the fact that many of our knowledge claims are tacit, we are not clearly aware of how many doubts and how much confusion we would have. When we try to represent the *terminus ad quem* of a global cleansing, we tend to be very naive. We can, for instance, imagine we would not be able to say if we are awake or dreaming, if anything is real, but still assume the categorial system we use is clear and meaningful. In a global purge, however, all notions would become problematic, even the notions of dreaming and being awake. The result of a global cleansing would thus be a state of utter doubt and confusion – something we cannot conceive clearly, but which would certainly be very difficult to endure.⁹²¹

As we shall see, a cleansing of such a dimension raises serious difficulties. It is a sort of total amputation and we do not know what would be left. It can result in the complete collapse of our life. The δόξαι that were blocking the ingestion of new views could also be what was sustaining us in life. On the other hand, it is also necessary to admit the possibility that the project of expelling all our cognitive defects is likewise based on knowledge claims which could be cast away by the execution of the project, thus cancelling the process itself or rendering it meaningless.

When we admit such a degree of deviation in our mind, the whole project of an ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης becomes problematic. However, even if we were to cast away our whole body of views, it seems we would still have a relation to the target – i.e., to truth. The idea of truth and our aiming at it is a *fundamentum inconcussum* for Plato and can never be cast

⁹²⁰ The result would then be what Socrates said of himself (regardless of it being true or not), according to Diogenes Laertius: that he knew nothing, expect this very thing – namely, the fact that he knew nothing. See DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Vitae Philosophorum*, II, 32: “ἔλεγε δὲ (...) εἰδέναι μὲν μηδὲν πλὴν αὐτὸ τοῦτο [εἰδέναι]”.

⁹²¹ In fact, we can experience a great agony even if not all our views are defective. We only need to find out that some of the most important views (especially the most important for how we live) are inadequate and we will immediately lose our footing and become greatly concerned.

away. It is what makes the cognitive defects possible and after cleansing us of them we would still have a relation to truth. But we could also ask if this notion of truth is not itself something that may be based on knowledge claims that can be refuted and expelled from our soul. It is indeed extremely hard to imagine what a complete elimination of the idea of target would correspond to. It is perhaps the greatest possible change that could result from the elenctic examination. We would realize not only that we do not know the truth (i.e., what its content is) or what the notion of truth means, but that the notion of truth is itself inconsistent and makes no sense.⁹²²

However, the entire discussion is no more than guesswork at this point. Before performing the elenctic examination, we do not know exactly how defective our views are. We cannot predict how long the examination will take, what its exact results will be and whether this project is at all feasible. This can only be determined if we actually submit ourselves to examination. Even if other people were to go through the entire process and communicate the results, it would not be clear if they were in the same state as we are and required the same amount of ἐκβολή. What someone else did, as well as Plato's pronouncements on the matter, are no more than an indication that we must verify ourselves. Plato might be right and we know nothing – and it is this possibility of it applying to us that makes his analyses relevant for us.

All these considerations help us understand that the process of a full ἐκβολή is very arduous and slow. One could perhaps try to accelerate it by questioning the main assumptions of our way of seeing and understanding things, in the hope all others would collapse.⁹²³ But one must be cautious with such a procedure for several reasons. First, there is the risk of misidentifying the main presuppositions of everything. One may also fail to see all the implications. Finally, it is not clear that there are some basic views on which all others depend. Some or even many of our beliefs may have their own autonomous content, which would still remain active if one were already full of doubts or confusion in relation to the mainstays of our view of reality. Thus, in order to know what we must be cleansed of and

⁹²² For a discussion of the latter possibility, see Chap. 20, Sect. 3.4.

⁹²³ This is, for instance, how Descartes performs his suspension of assent in *Meditationes*, I, 2: “Ad hoc autem non erit necesse, ut omnes esse falsas ostendam, quod nunquam fortassis assequi possem; sed quia jam ratio persuadet, non minus accurate ab iis quae non plane certa sunt atque indubitata, quam ab aperte falsis assensionem esse cohibendam, satis erit ad omnes rejiciendas, si aliquam rationem dubitandi in unâquâque reperero. Nec ideo etiam singulae erunt percurrendae, quod operis esset infiniti; sed quia, suffossis fundamentis, quidquid iis supraedificatum est sponte collabitur, aggrediar statim ipsa principia, quibus illud omne quod olim credidi nitebatur.” See R. DESCARTES, *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, in: IDEM, *Œuvres*, edited by C. Adam & P. Tannery, vol. 7, Paris, Vrin, 1973, 18.

how, we require a complete map of our knowledge claims and their relations with one another.

3. The difficulties of a full ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης

After considering the different magnitudes that the casting away of our δόξαι in the negative sense may have and how it depends on how extensive our vain conceit of knowledge is, it is important to consider the difficulties that this undertaking may involve, especially to avoid an excessively naive understanding of what is implied in it. The ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης, if carried out to the end, is far from being an easy and straightforward act. It has to face multiple difficulties that are illustrated in the Platonic corpus and that derive from the inner constitution of our inner being or “soul”. These difficulties are not necessarily insurmountable, but require much skill, practice and commitment in order to be overcome. It is important to pay close attention to this. By doing so, we will also get a better idea of the feasibility and the possible outcomes of this “psychic cleansing”.⁹²⁴

The resistance to the complete ἐκβολή of our δόξαι is of two orders. On the one hand, there are factors that make it difficult to verify whether or not there is deviation in one’s knowledge claims – and how much deviation there is. On the other hand, the very removal of the false knowledge claims can be obstructed in different ways. We will consider both orders of difficulty in turn, but it is important to keep in mind that the following analysis has a provisional or hypothetical character. It tries to anticipate what may make the elenctic examination more complicated, but after undertaking the examination one may find ways to overcome them (though one may also find other difficulties that were not anticipated). In sum, we can only know exactly how difficult it is after starting to examine – and even then the degree of difficulty may differ from person to person and from epoch to epoch, in virtue of many different factors.

3.1. The difficulty in focusing on and identifying our beliefs

We considered how the ἐκβολή is a form of instruction in λόγοι, and that it requires the examinee to articulate the precise content of their beliefs, as well as the presuppositions

⁹²⁴ This will give important indications that we will develop later, when we come to discuss not only the possible outcomes of abandoning the unexamined life and fully embracing the philosophical examination, but also the risks that this abandonment may involve. For this discussion, see Chap. 20.

and consequences of these beliefs. Only thus can they be compared and rendered problematic. However, we saw in Chapter 6 that a very large part of our beliefs are tacit and hidden from us (or better still, hidden from our explicit thought). The beliefs that immediately come to mind when we start examining are only the tip of the iceberg. There are many others whose existence tend to go unnoticed – and even when we notice any of them, we may still fail to see their content, as well as the other knowledge claims with which it may be intertwined. The last aspect is particularly relevant. The complex syntax of our body of views makes any access to what we actually think we know very difficult. Our contact with our beliefs is usually hazy or confused, and in many cases we cannot render them immediately clear. For instance, we may know a belief is referred to a particular identity, but this identity can be further qualified by other beliefs. It may imply different modes of being (εἶδη) and these in turn may have other modes of being implied in them. Moreover, all this may be determined by how we understand and live our life. In sum, a particular knowledge claim may contain a cluster of knowledge claims and this cluster is not easy to perceive and break down.

This makes it more difficult to cleanse our soul of all baseless knowledge claims. In order to perform such a cleansing, we need a complete inventory of our beliefs, which is something we do not have. We notice some of them, but we can easily fail to see that we only grasped a small part of our knowledge claims. The inconspicuous nature of most of them and of their syntax, along with our usual lack of awareness of this tacit dimension, makes us think we have already identified all. Moreover, if we are expressly warned about this and are faced with a description of our tacit knowledge claims and their complex structure, we may still have strong doubts about their existence and their intertwining, given how opaque this domain is.

But if this is the case, the elenctic examination will then be applied only to a small portion of our views and, as a result, the identification of contradictions and the casting away of contradictory views will be severely limited. The examination and the ensuing cleansing will be quick, but they will not comply with the program of full sanitization of our body of beliefs. Most of our baseless knowledge claims may still remain in commission due to their tacit character. We will not notice it, but assuming there are false beliefs in us that are tacit, our soul will remain deformed and our access to new views (as well as the possibility of assimilating them) will remain blocked. In fact, this deformity and the obstruction of new views will be all the more severe if we do not notice them.

However, if we become aware of all these problems and try to correct our limited access to our tacit knowledge claims, we may still face many difficulties. The attempts to focus on this domain of conviction will probably miss a good part of it at first. It may take many attempts. This makes it very difficult to determine when the task of fully cleansing us of our baseless knowledge claims will be complete. We may be convinced that everything was checked despite the fact that there are still many tacit beliefs that escaped the elenctic examination. We need therefore something similar to the maieutics that is described in the *Theaetetus*.⁹²⁵ Among several other things, the psychic maieutics Socrates claims to have gives birth and puts forward the views that one has – i.e., it brings them to λόγος. In other words, Socrates extracts someone’s views about a certain matter in order to examine them. This is possible because we always have some idea of what we think we know. It may be a hazy idea that we cannot formulate clearly by ourselves, but it is at least enough to recognize and agree with certain formulations (as the characters often do in the dialogues, when they are examined by Socrates).

3.2. The difficulty in ascertaining which knowledge claims are baseless

After identifying our knowledge claims, it is necessary to ascertain their quality and see whether they are actually knowledge or not. More specifically, it is necessary to determine whether the attributions of predicates to things are right or wrong, and also whether the understanding we have of these predicates is sound or not. The first problem, however, is that when we ask questions about some particular view, we tend to find that everything is fine. We adhere to what we already believe. Therefore, the Visitor insisted (as the dialogues in the corpus also do) on the identification of inconsistencies or contradictions that one is not immediately able to solve. The fact that we cannot find an inconsistency does not mean that our views are correct, but the fact that we find it proves that there is something wrong with our body of views. However, is it enough to reveal that there is some inconsistency or contradiction in our views? We already mentioned that this does not produce an immediate disavowal of one’s views, but let us consider the question in more detail.

We saw that one of the things that may happen in this context is that one may very well dismiss the contradiction as irrelevant. The unavailable character of most of our knowledge claims makes it particularly difficult to determine which of our knowledge claims

⁹²⁵ See 148e ff.

are sound and which are not. Since we often do not have a clear notion of them, when one is unable to articulate a coherent view, one can blame the way one tried to articulate them, instead of blaming one's own cognitive state. Due to the opacity of our convictions, it is not easy to see whether we are actually being refuted or whether we still have the solution within us, as we initially thought we had. This makes the cleansing more difficult and it is therefore necessary to insist. Usually one only starts to accept the fact one does not know after a few failed attempts (i.e., when one roams about from one failed attempt to the other). But even then one may blame the examiner or the examination itself.

If we look more closely at what happens during the course of the examination, however, and disregard the fact that one may not take it very seriously, we find some other problems. For instance, we may find some inconsistency or contradiction in our views, but may also immediately deny one of the sides of the contradiction in order to solve the problem. This raises the question of which of them is wrong (whereby one assumes they are not both wrong), and since we usually have different degrees of conviction, it tends to be easy to choose. But this choice (and the greatest adherence to a particular view) does not necessarily imply that that this view is correct. It may simply be more central to our body of beliefs. How can we distinguish? It seems that we have to know the truth to be able to say which one is wrong or whether or not they are both wrong. Moreover, regardless of which one (if any) is true, the very fact that there was a contradiction already reveals that there is something wrong with our views. It demonstrates (or at least raises a strong suspicion) that we do not know exactly what we are talking about.

A different problem is whether untruth is something absolute or whether it can admit different degrees. Some unsound knowledge claims may contain true elements intertwined with the false ones. The syntax of our beliefs makes this possible. There is thus the risk of rejecting everything in block and cleansing us of too much. One could argue that some views should not be wholly rejected. However, even if we cast away our conviction in them, we do not condemn them to oblivion and may still think about them and try to identify any moment of truth they may contain.

There may still be many other difficulties which we have not considered here, but this brief consideration is already sufficient to illustrate how difficult it may be to determine which beliefs are to be cast away and which ones should remain.

3.3. The difficulty in letting go of our baseless knowledge claims

Assuming we can correctly identify our knowledge claims and we can properly establish their ungrounded character, we must admit that they may not be as easy to expel as the Visitor seems to presuppose in the *Sophist*. We already considered that it is necessary to insist and cause one to roam about from one view to the other, but even this may be insufficient. The elenctic examination is supposed to show contradictions and these contradictions are ultimately what will make us dispel or disavow our knowledge claims. Through them, we realize we actually do not know something. However, we may still hold on to our beliefs after discovering that there are contradictions in them. In other words, our knowledge claims may be stubborn and resilient. It all depends on the reasons they are installed in us in the first place. Furthermore, even if we are somehow able to remove them, what guarantees that they do not get reinstalled after a while, either because we forget the results of the examination or because we started giving it less importance? It is not as if they disappeared at the first sign of incoherence, never to be seen again.

But what makes this resistance and this return possible? Based on Plato's writings, there are two possible answers to this question. One results from many things we have already considered, the other requires us to anticipate some aspects we will only analyze in Part III and Part IV. The interrelation of the two possible explanations is a problem and we will only be able to discuss it later.

Let us then see the first answer. We have seen that there is a sort of solidarity between our different knowledge claims. They are often interrelated and their interrelation is determined by the complex syntax of knowledge claims we considered in Chapter 6. This means that they influence each other in many ways and the strength of a belief may actually come, for the most part, from other beliefs to which it is connected. Therefore, when we try to expel a particular δόξα, the others that are still installed in us may disturb the refutation. If its presuppositions or consequences (and even all views with which it is interrelated) remain valid for us, then they can cause the resistance or possible reinstallation of said δόξα.

This can easily happen because often we do not adequately focus on our knowledge claims and do not see all that is implied in them (i.e., we do not examine all their implications and whether they themselves are incoherent or not). We leave many relevant aspects out of consideration and this can render the entire process ineffective. A combined examination of all these moments seems then to be required. We must remove the compartmentalization of

our views and try to see the whole picture. In the final analysis, the examination is always a matter of global verification (despite the fact that it must be done by installments). If we only consider some relations or instances of intertwining (i.e., some presuppositions or consequences), we may fail to truly expel a knowledge claim. It will perhaps remain with us in the tacit dimension, despite our explicit admission that it is not correct. Or we may indeed expel a knowledge claim, but leave within us beliefs that will bring it back. This reappearance or atavism of our knowledge claims may happen when we are not looking (i.e., when we are not explicitly thinking about it) and reinstall the knowledge claim in the tacit domain. It may also result from a dismissal of the previous examination and its results. We may think there was some fault with the process, that it was not sufficiently considered, or that it was our incompetence that allowed it to be revealed as contradictory and refuted.

This is one possible account for the resistance of our knowledge claims. But this resistance may also be caused by our psychological motivations or inner drives, which are not exclusively (and in most cases not predominantly) philosophical (i.e., concerned with knowledge). As we will see, we have other drives, other interests, which contaminate and weaken our interest in rational arguments. The balance of our inner drives is indeed decisive in many respects and also with respect to elenctic examination. Our relation to this examination, the way we perform it, the role it has in our life are all guided by our motivations. They may limit the efficiency of the examination or distort it. For instance, we may fear the disorientation that could come from a more thorough examination. We may also more easily depreciate the results of an examination. If we are not deeply committed to it, we can attribute the refutation to factors other than our lack of knowledge. Therefore, our relation to the examination and what determines it is very relevant. It may be necessary for us to experience a great amount of indetermination or problematicity for us to take any examination seriously – and this is also what we see illustrated in the dialogues.

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that our relation to our knowledge claims is one of commitment and perhaps even affection. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates alludes to the affection one may have for one's intellectual children – i.e., the explicit knowledge claims one puts forward in an examination.⁹²⁶ This also applies to our implicit beliefs. In addition, our self-love is also involved in our relation with our knowledge claims. Our inner being (our soul) is qualified by the quality of these beliefs and if they are put in question, so

⁹²⁶ Cp. 151c: “καὶ εἰάν ἄρα σκοπούμενός τι ὄν ἂν λέγῃς ἡγήσωμαι εἰδῶλον καὶ μὴ ἀληθές, εἴτα ὑπεξαιρῶμαι καὶ ἀποβάλλω, μὴ ἀγρίαινε ὥσπερ αἱ πρωτοτόκοι περὶ τὰ παιδιά. πολλοὶ γὰρ ἤδη, ὃ θαυμάσιε, πρὸς με οὕτω διετέθησαν, ὥστε ἀτεχνῶς δάκνειν ἔτοιμοι εἶναι, ἐπειδὴν τινα λῆρον αὐτῶν ἀφαιρῶμαι (...).”

is the shapeliness of our soul.⁹²⁷ Besides, our life is defined by the knowledge claims that we have, and we may fear losing them and becoming someone else. There is a sort of “death” in changing one’s views or losing them – as it is emphasized in the *Euthydemus*, when becoming wise is equated with being destroyed, since one will then become someone else.⁹²⁸

However, this attachment to our δόξαι is also what can make the ἔλεγχος effective. By failing to justify our views, we lose face or are shamed – both in the eyes of the others and in our own eyes. The elenctic examination has a strong impact in us. It attacks one’s self-image and self-love, which could be very important in our resistance to the refutation. It also affects our feelings, our inner drives, and the way we regard what matters in life. It can change our priorities and make the philosophical examination more important, as well as its results.

This is not all. Besides determining our relation to philosophical examination and to particular beliefs, our inner drives may also be the mechanism that renders a knowledge claim evident. As we shall see, the inner system of our drives is not totally independent from our knowledge claims, but in a way it may even be responsible for creating and sustaining them. It is actually a problem how these interests or drives are constituted and how they relate to our knowledge claims. It may be the case that they are themselves based on or affected by knowledge claims, but they also determine the latter in turn – and if that is true, then they may also be able to bring them back once they are refuted (at least if the drives continue to be as strong as they were before the refutation).⁹²⁹

It seems thus that our inner motivations or drives can influence the course of examination and limit or pervert its course. This raises the question of whether it is in our power to overcome this kind of inner resistance and how we can do it. But we are not in a position to discuss this question at this point.⁹³⁰

3.4. The difficulty in performing a complete ἐκβολή of our vain conceit of knowledge

There is still one last possible resistance to the purge of all δόξαι. We have talked mainly about expelling some or even many beliefs, but what if all (or almost all) our

⁹²⁷ Cp. *Laws* 731c-732b, where Plato mentions the relation between an excessive self-love (which tends to make one blind to oneself) and one’s ἀμαθία or false knowledge claims.

⁹²⁸ See 283c-e.

⁹²⁹ We find an allusion to this possibility at the end of *Alcibiades I*. Socrates fears that the progresses made by the elenctic examination in the course of the dialogue will be annulled by the power of the πόλις over Alcibiades, which is in fact the result of Alcibiades’ concern with how he is seen by others. Cp. 135d-e.

⁹³⁰ For a discussion of this, see Chapter 17 below.

cognitive commitments are defective? A complete or almost complete deviation in our way of seeing things (either because each belief by itself is defective or because it is intertwined with defective moments which distort it) raises serious questions. Let us begin by admitting the possibility that there might be a complete deviation. What does it entail and how is it possible? Does this affect absolutely all our views (even the view that there must be a target, i.e. true beings)? Furthermore, what would a complete cleansing of all our δόξαι amount to? We tend to think of this in an abstract manner and without paying attention to the possible consequences, but it seems that such a cleansing, being a complete disavowal of knowledge, would result in a state of absolute instability and unrest. We would have complete uncertainty, complete indetermination (no attribution of predicates), and complete confusion (no notion of a predicate with clear meaning). This would also be a state of complete astonishment – and probably of absolute horror. We would lose any basis to act, think or feel.

However, such a crisis of meaning can take place even if not all our beliefs are unjustified and false. We may have many correct beliefs, but if the most essential ones are put into question or refuted, we will become disoriented. In other words, if our basic assumptions (which determine most or all our other beliefs) become questionable, then we will become perplexed with everything. For instance, most of our attributions of predicates to beings may be right, but if we do not understand these predicates and they become mysterious, we will be unable to understand anything else. Likewise, if our basic practical beliefs are overturned, we will be rudderless.

But this is still very vague and insufficient to represent a state in which all or our most important δόξαι are suspended or expelled. We do not know what it would amount to and how it is to be in such a “place”. If, as we have seen, our δόξαι are not something separate, discontinuous, but rather a world, then an ἐκβολή of the most important or of all would be the same as losing the world we inhabit. But how can we go outside this domain and exist there? A life (or a moment in life) without our basic δόξαι seems unbearable, if not impossible. A purely interrogative presentation of the most important things, in complete indetermination about what they are, is extremely aggressive.

But let us assume we could cleanse us of all our beliefs or even of the most central ones. Would this be the end of our conscious being? Or would there still be something to sustain it, other than these beliefs? Could we have some dim intuitions? Or some provisional views? In a sense, we would still have the same contents as before, but now they would not be something we believe in, but rather something entirely questionable. We could also

conceive new alternatives to our previous beliefs – so in a sense we could have even more contents. Moreover, our relation with everything would be more intense. But at the same time we would not be able to determine anything and we would feel much more lost and exiled. The indetermination could perhaps even apply to the very notion of cognitive target or truth. The latter could become incomprehensible, which would perhaps produce an even greater state of despair.

All this is something we cannot adequately represent from the outside, but it seems clear that it would not be easy to bear. This raises a new problem. Faced with such a collapse of our beliefs, we could try to renounce all examination and all its results. We could try to reinstall our old beliefs or create new ones as quickly as possible, without properly examining them (and thus falling back into the unexamined life).⁹³¹ We have indeed a strong impulse to decide or determine what things are. We want clarity and certainty, and it is very difficult to endure a purely negative result of examination. We strive to find new solutions and often promptly accept the ones that require the fewest changes – or we simply adopt one of the alternatives at hand, without considering that they may share a presupposition that is not being questioned and may itself be wrong. But can we do any of these things – i.e., can we come back to our views or promptly accept new ones – if there is indeed a complete refutation of our beliefs? Or is such a complete refutation a point of no return? It is difficult to tell.

It is also difficult to conceive how such a radical cleansing could be performed. Where do we stand when we perform the expulsion either of all δόξαι or of all the basic ones? Which Archimedean point or fulcrum do we use to lift our world of beliefs? The expulsion of δόξα is carried out in the middle of our life, in the middle of δόξαι. It seems thus that a radical cleansing would be a kind of self-amputation, in which the hand that is operating must amputate the whole body, including itself. This may be impossible, if only for the fact that the project of ἐκβολή is itself based on cognitive claims, which determine how and why the ἐκβολή is performed. It may thus be necessary that at least some knowledge

⁹³¹ We would be a sort of Anti-Penelope, insofar as we would rebuild all the chains we had undone. For the image of an Anti-Penelope, cp. *Phd.* 84a. We would also resemble the prisoner in the Allegory of the Cave, who is tempted to come back to his seat after being released. See 515d-e: “οὐκοῦν κἂν εἰ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς ἀναγκάζοι αὐτὸν βλέπειν, ἀλγεῖν τε ἂν τὰ ὄμματα καὶ φεύγειν ἀποστρεφόμενον πρὸς ἐκεῖνα ἃ δύναται καθορᾶν, καὶ νομίζειν ταῦτα τῷ ὄντι σαφέστερα τῶν δεικνυμένων;” For more on this, cp. Chap. 17, Sect. 5.3.

claims are left untouched to avoid a state of complete paralysis and complete ἀπορία – or even of complete madness.⁹³²

In other words, our body of beliefs may be just like Neurath's ship, whose reconstruction must be carried out on sea, while sailing, which means that all repairs must be partial and gradual. One must rebuild the rotten planks while using the others as support.⁹³³ In the case of an elenctic examination, this would entail that we can only cast away some of our beliefs at a time, because we need the others to sustain the process. The full execution of the project would have to be gradual. But such a gradual procedure, however, is not without problems. In fact, what is the validity of an operation that is still based on defective views? Can one fully correct the defects of our views by performing only small corrections at a time?

This whole problem requires a difficult choice from us. On the one hand, the ἐκβολή is performed for the sake of our life, to prevent the possibility of it being based on false knowledge claims, but at the same time it must be done from within life itself, with which it is on a collision course. This renders the Platonic project of a full ἐκβολή problematic and perhaps this is why we do not find any attempt of a full ἐκβολή in the dialogues. There are only partial ἐκβολαί, confined to a certain question or domain, and this may indeed be the only way to proceed.

Finally, we must still ask what happens if we try (even if gradually) to remove all basic δόξαι and there is nothing or very little left. Would this be a permanent state or could there be a way out of it, and which one? This touches upon a problem that is independent of how defective our beliefs are – namely, whether the identification and casting away of this defect is all that there is to the Platonic examination, or whether there is some kind of examination beyond the cathartic examination – and if so, what this may be, when it may start and how it may be performed. This is the question we will now tackle. As for all others just mentioned, they are difficult (if not impossible) to answer *a priori*. Only the examination

⁹³² In this context, we could ask if it makes any difference whether the examination is being carried out by the examinee or by someone else. The difficulty in achieving and maintaining a completely purified state is perhaps greater if the examiner and the examinee are the same person, because one will more easily become soft and lose heart, thus vitiating the process. But one can also stop hearing the external examiner and stop submitting oneself to examination – and for this reason it is not decisive whether one is examining oneself or rather being examined by another.

⁹³³ Neurath says: "We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood, the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction." See M. NEURATH, *Anti-Spengler*, in: IDEM & R. COHEN (eds.), *Empiricism and Sociology*, Dordrecht/Boston, D. Reidel, 1973, 199.

itself could tell what could happen and what the consequences of a full-blown ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης could be.⁹³⁴

⁹³⁴ In fact, most of these questions do not just concern the elenctic examination, but the whole philosophical project. We will have to return to them when we discuss the imperative of philosophical examination, to determine what impact they may have on said imperative. See Chap. 20 below.

CHAPTER 9

The problem of the positive or constructive side of philosophical examination

“(…) τὸ δὲ ζητούμενον
άλωτόν, ἐκφεύγει δὲ τὰ μελούμενον.”
Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*⁹³⁵

The prominence given in Plato's writings to the negative (i.e., elenctic or cathartic) side of philosophical examination raises the question of whether we can also find in his writings a positive or constructive side and how it is conceived. The question is all the more relevant if we consider that philosophy is often understood as an activity of building theories, creating concepts, and providing answers. Even assuming it always contains a negative moment, the emphasis is often laid on the expansion of our knowledge. However, given all that we considered before, it is easy to understand that philosophy cannot be simply reduced to its positive side. Philosophical examination is an examination of views (i.e., of ways of seeing or understanding things) and we can have different relations to these views. They can be regarded as mere possibilities, they can also be regarded as something that is more or less probable, or we can have adopted them as our own views. We are indeed deeply committed to many views and think that they provide us with knowledge of what things are. But this does not mean that we fully examined these views. Many are left unexamined or under-examined. As a result, they may be largely incorrect or hazy without us noticing. We may have a distorted access to things. But if this is the case, then any new examination we may undertake in order to expand our knowledge may be vitiated. Our contact with any new view being examined will be shaped by our defective beliefs and the results of its examination will be equally defective. This is why Plato the negative kind of examination is so important. We can only be sure of acquiring sound views and actually expanding our knowledge when we confirm and correct the views we started with. In order to enrich our way of seeing things, we need to disavow our false knowledge claims. This disavowal cannot be rhetorical; we must be fully conscious of our ignorance. Elenctic examination is thus necessary. We must test all our

⁹³⁵ See vv. 110f.

attributions of predicates and also our entire understanding of these same predicates. In case many of them (and all the decisive ones) pass the test, we can then be fully assured of their validity. If, however, they are full of decisive lacunae, errors and confusion (an outcome which, according to Plato, is far more likely), then philosophical examination will have to overturn these cognitive claims and reduce our way of seeing things to those beliefs (if any) that are effectively true.

We find good illustrations of this process in any of the so-called aporetic or Socratic dialogues. They lay a great emphasis on the negative side of philosophical examination and may even suggest to the reader that the examination being performed is only concerned with stripping us of our false views. But matters are much more complex. Although there is a certain tendency to absolutize the elenctic side of philosophical examination and to lose sight of its positive side, the project of philosophical examination also includes the attempt to overcome the limitations of our views and to reach actual knowledge (regardless of whether we are able to do so or not). The latter is indeed a central part of philosophical examination. We must therefore consider how Plato conceives this positive side, or else our description of philosophical examination will be one-sided and insufficient. The elenctic side is only a preliminary and insufficient stage that needs a complement in order to reach positive results (or answers) and overcome the indetermination and disorientation that may ensue from cleansing us of our vain conceit of knowledge. Plato does warn us against the dangers of relativism, cynicism and misology.⁹³⁶ The elenctic examination is supposed to mobilize and bring us to a new form of examination. It brings about an inquisitive skepticism or a zetetic form of examination. We are to seek out the truth of the matter being examined and explore new possibilities, now freed from the confinement of one's beliefs. We try to redetermine things and reach new, better and more solid beliefs – or even effective knowledge and full insight.

Philosophical examination thus includes both sides, which are actually two moments of the same project – the project of attaining the truth or possessing knowledge. This requires us to confirm that the views we start with are solid, in order to avoid any deviations in the starting point of examination. We must also acquire any knowledge we may lack, either by correcting the views we already had or by finding completely new views. Both tasks belong together. Although the destructive and the constructive forms of examination are different moments, the project is always the same. To be sure, our usual cognitive state may require a

⁹³⁶ See e.g. *Phd.* 89c ff., *Rep.* 538d ff.

special focus on the negative side. However, philosophical examination cannot be reduced to it.

Plato's writings reflect precisely this complexity. If we consider the dialogues, we see that, besides the aporetic texts, there are also dialogues in which the leading characters put forward and develop positive doctrines that seem to resist any refutation. Even if we cannot be sure whether Plato himself endorsed any of these doctrines (as we saw in the Introduction), they nevertheless reveal an effort to go beyond a simple refutation. What we must now consider is how these positive doctrines are supposed to be achieved, according to Plato. How is the positive examination conceived? What is the method or methods that characterize it? How different is this examination from the elenctic examination? How are we to search and explore new possibilities? How can we reach new views? More importantly, how can we find out the truth and achieve knowledge?

The answers to these questions help us define Plato's conception of philosophical examination. However, we must bear in mind that these questions concern only the method we find illustrated and discussed in Plato's works and not its possible or actual outcome. We will not consider here whether it is at all possible to reach full knowledge (or even any positive knowledge whatsoever).⁹³⁷ Even if we cannot truly know anything, we may still try to do so – and it is this attempt and the way it is conceived by Plato that we are now going to consider. We will likewise leave aside the question of whether Plato is trying to convey any positive teaching. The status of the views put forward in his dialogues is a different problem. Finally, we will also leave out the question of how Socrates achieved the deep commitments or certainties he seems to have at some points, despite his frequent disavowal of knowledge. We will rather focus our attention on the presentation of a positive method in the texts. We want to see what the dialogues say about the kind of examination that would allow new and better views to be reached, since this is an essential part of Plato's concept of philosophical examination and, as such, it is likewise an important part of what is missing in the unexamined life.

We will briefly consider the different indications Plato provides about the positive side of philosophical examination and try to define it. A full discussion of all the relevant passages and their interrelation is too extensive a task to be undertaken here. Instead, we will just consider some of the most important aspects of a positive form of examination, in order to have a general idea of what it might entail. This will then allow us to reconsider the

⁹³⁷ For some discussion of this, see Chap. 20 below.

relation between the negative or elenctic side of examination and the positive or constructive side. We will see what these two sides have in common, what their differences are, and how they interact. In doing so we will finally be able to outline a unitary and full concept of philosophical examination.

1. The positive side of elenctic examination

Before considering the strictly positive side of philosophical examination, it is important to see to what extent its negative side, which is presented as a refutation or a cleansing, can itself contain something positive. Is elenctic examination simply destructive or does it also allow us to reach some knowledge?

There is an obvious sense in which the elenctic examination could yield positive results: it could confirm the validity of our beliefs. Our knowledge claims or δόξαι may be right and their deficiency may be solely modal. Before examining them we could not be absolutely sure they were right (all certainty would be merely subjective), but after the examination there would be no more room for doubt. We would know for sure that our way of seeing things contains no serious defect, since the examination would prove the validity of our views.

However, it is not clear whether elenctic examination can ever confirm the truth of our beliefs (both of our attributions of predicates and our understanding of them). According to the description in the *Sophist*, the method of elenctic examination establishes the consistency or inconsistency of our knowledge claims, but the fact that at a certain point we have not yet found any inconsistency does not allow us to exclude the possibility that we are in error or confused about something.⁹³⁸ We must examine things thoroughly, but how can we know whether we carried out the process to the end?

Moreover, in one important passage of *Cratylus*, Plato raises the possibility of there being a completely consistent system based on a false principle, which forces everything else to agree with it.⁹³⁹ Our views may be distorted in a coherent way and, if this is the case, it will be hard (or even impossible) to find inner inconsistencies and refute our views. The

⁹³⁸ Cp. Chap. 8, Sect. 1.5 above.

⁹³⁹ See *Cra.* 436c-d: “εἰ γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον σφαλῆς ὁ τιθέμενος τᾶλλα ἤδη πρὸς τοῦτ’ ἐβιάζετο καὶ αὐτῷ συμφωνεῖν ἠνάγκαζεν, οὐδὲν ἄτοπον, ὥσπερ τῶν διαγραμμάτων ἐνίοτε τοῦ πρώτου μικροῦ καὶ ἀδήλου ψεύδους γενομένου, τὰ λοιπὰ πάμπολλα ἤδη ὄντα ἐπόμενα ὁμολογεῖν ἀλλήλοις. δεῖ δὴ περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς παντὸς πράγματος παντὶ ἀνδρὶ τὸν πολὺν λόγον εἶναι καὶ τὴν πολλὴν σκέψιν εἴτε ὀρθῶς εἴτε μὴ ὑπόκειται· ἐκείνης δὲ ἐξετασθεῖσης ἰκανῶς, τὰ λοιπὰ φαίνεσθαι ἐκείνη ἐπόμενα.”

question then is whether this is possible. Can there be an entirely coherent distortion of views? Or are there always some views (either true or false) that resist such a coherent distortion and are able to cause disagreements? For the most part, Plato seems to defend that there are always some inconsistencies in us that can be found and will then reveal our false beliefs. The distortions in our way of seeing things tend to cause contradictions. Moreover, he also defends that we always have some relation to truth – if only as the target to which we aspire, as is said in the *Sophist* (228c). Whether we also must have a minimum of correct beliefs or not is not clear. But at least it seems possible to see the incongruence between our system of beliefs and the truth we aim at.

There are other problems concerning elenctic examination and its ability to confirm our beliefs. For instance, assuming that we have some false beliefs that are in disagreement with our true beliefs, we cannot simply refute those that are false and confirm the ones that are true. When two beliefs are inconsistent we cannot tell (at least using just the kind of examination we described above) whether any of them is true – and, in case one of them is true, we cannot tell which one. We may be tempted to accept whichever belief seems to be more plausible to us and reject the other, but in doing so we may end up accepting a false belief and rejecting the one that is true – or we may simply accept one of two false beliefs and reject the other. In principle, nothing prevents this from happening. Elenctic examination only shows there is a cognitive defect, but it does not seem able to establish any truth. It does not say which (if any) of two conflicting judgments is correct and, by itself, it does not bring forth any new beliefs. The only possible outcomes of this procedure seem to be either non-refutation (which does not necessarily mean the views are true) or puzzlement (*ἀπορία*) and astonishment (*θαυμάζειν*), which may lead one to disown one's knowledge claims, but will not confirm any of them.

But does this mean that all the positive contributions from the elenctic examination are reduced to the provisional confirmation of our views? Are there no other positive contributions? It seems that it either provides a provisional confirmation or reveals a great margin of cognitive defect. If this is so, it cannot make us absolutely sure of anything. But does this mean that it produces no gain? Or can there be another kind of gain? In fact, elenctic examination can produce a substantial gain. By testing our knowledge claims, it gives us an increased clearness about our knowledge claims, their presuppositions and their implications – and this clearness may give important clues for subsequent examinations. But this is not all. Elenctic examination also increases our self-knowledge or, more precisely, our

knowledge of our own cognitive condition. In particular, we become aware of what we do not know and thereby reduce our ignorance (i.e., we reduce our double ignorance to a simple ignorance).⁹⁴⁰ In other words, this increase in self-knowledge involves an expansion of our cognitive access to beings – more precisely, a negative expansion (*negative Erweiterung*), to use once more Kant's expression.⁹⁴¹ By setting the boundaries of our actual knowledge, elenctic examination makes us more aware of what we do not know, which is itself a form of coming closer to the truth. We stop mistaking our defective view of something with what this thing actually is (or we stop dreaming about this thing) and develop an increased recollection or ἀνάμνησις of it. The real thing is evoked or brought to mind. However, such a recollection is at first still vague and problematic. It does not constitute a full insight into the being in question. It does not produce a new belief. It is a blocked recollection, which provides no more than a direction for further examination. We need other means in order to determine what something really is. But it is already a gain to know that there is something that escapes us, even if we still do not know it. Moreover, knowing that something eludes our grasp is an important condition for ever finding out the truth about it. The ἀνάμνησις produced by elenctic examination opens up the possibility of searching (ζητεῖν) for something – and, according to Plato, it is also what allows us to recognize the answer when we come upon it.⁹⁴²

It is now clear that, despite its negative character, elenctic examination can also bring about positive results. We must, however, bear in mind that these results are not produced at a single stroke. They increase as long as the cathartic process continues. One gives an answer, sees it refuted and tries again. It is not clear when this process is complete or even sufficiently performed. But by performing it we attain an ever sharper awareness of the questions we deal with and of the need to inquire further into them. Ideally, we would be cleansed of all false knowledge claims at some point (though it is difficult to determine when). At that point, the cleansing will reconfigure the examining process as such and bring about a positive version of it that is already protected from any false beliefs we might have had. This positive version or positive side of philosophical examination is what we must now consider.

⁹⁴⁰ For the notions of simple and double ignorance, cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 1 and Chap. 8, Sect. 1.3.

⁹⁴¹ See I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, Berlin, Georg Reimer, 1904, 212 (A256/B312).

⁹⁴² This is precisely the point of the paradox of inquiry in the *Meno*. See 80d ff. For more on the notion of ἀνάμνησις, see Chap. 11, Sects. 3.2 and 3.4 below.

2. The zetetic examination as a modification of the elenctic examination

The elenctic examination motivates a new kind of examination, which is primarily concerned with acquiring the knowledge one lacks. Plato describes this examination as a form of pursuit and hunt. The term most often used to designate it is ζητεῖν and hence we could call it zetetic examination.⁹⁴³ It is a form of examination that lacks something, desires to reach it, mobilizes itself towards it and tries to attain it.

Zetetic examination can occur without being preceded by an elenctic examination, but we will only be fully aware of our ignorance (and thus fully mobilized to search for the truth about something) after cleansing us of all our false knowledge claims. Zetetic examination will be more genuine and intense in those conditions. Moreover, it will also be protected from any distortions caused the one's defective beliefs.

The transition to this new kind of examination brings about some meaningful changes. The examination is no longer centered on one's knowledge claims. It is not primarily a matter of verifying one's cognitive status. It does not have the same personal character as elenctic examination. Zetetic examination is less subjective or more impersonal. To be sure, one is still required to accept or reject views, but the examination is now primarily directed at the being under scrutiny and to the different views one can conceive of it. These views can also be called δόξαι, in the sense that they determine a certain way of seeing or understanding – and may be adopted as beliefs. But at first they are not installed in us. One tries to ascertain their validity without being committed to them. So one tries to focus on the being to which these δόξαι refer (and to which we are already related by being aware of views about it) and see what it really is.⁹⁴⁴

In addition, zetetic examination entails a different relation with the explicit or rational discussion of something (λόγος). One will not refer one's λόγοι to tacit beliefs that one may not be able to clearly formulate. One will only consider what appears in the spotlight of the mind and one will require sufficient grounds or a sufficient justification (a λόγος) to accept something. In other words, one will only follow what is established in rational discussion. This is how one comes closer to the object being examined and how one may come upon new and better views.

⁹⁴³ For more on this term and on the ideas of pursuit and hunt, cp. Chap. 4, Sect. 2.5.

⁹⁴⁴ This does not imply that one will not pay attention to the subjective conditions of knowledge and to how knowledge is produced and structured, but such an inquiry will also have an objective character and (as far as possible) it will not be conditioned by one's subjective and unexamined beliefs.

The whole process is directed at the answers we want to find. For this, two things are necessary. First, we need to expand our set of views, find new possibilities of conceiving things, and then we have to choose between them and decide the matter rationally. But let us start with the first moment. Elenctic examination calls our attention to the fact that we do not know and that things can be otherwise. So we start considering alternate ways of seeing things. We could be already aware of some alternatives and now we take them seriously. We also start searching for new possibilities. As Plato stresses, we can learn them from others or discover them by ourselves.⁹⁴⁵ At any rate, we increase the set of views at our disposal and are now free to correctly appraise them and decide between them.

But how exactly do we decide? How do we establish the truth about something, after being faced with different possibilities of determining it? If we are still ignorant of the object, will we not be totally lost in the multiplicity of alternate views of which we are now aware? What may be the criterion for accepting one of them and rejecting the others?

In the previous section, we saw how elenctic examination allows us to better understand the terms of a problem (especially when we are examining a particular notion) and somehow better recollect the being in question. This may then guide our zetetic examination. But the indications we collected must be developed. We must see what they point to. But how can we do this? How do we pursue the truth about something and how can we find it out?

If we look at the Platonic corpus, we see that often characters present positive results without mentioning how they came to them. These results may be presented as definitive or as something likely or plausible (as in the *Timaeus*).⁹⁴⁶ In some cases, they are assigned to a sudden divine inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός), which means that they are the result of a fortuitous element that is not under our control.⁹⁴⁷ It may therefore seem that achieving results is something that happens randomly and is out of our hands. However, even in the case of inspiration, one must still think about it and interpret what is said. It includes a rational process which depends on us. As for the simple presentation of results, it never implies that one did nothing to achieve them. They may be the result of an elaborate process, but this process is not presented in the texts.

⁹⁴⁵ Plato speaks of these two possibilities as two ways of reaching truth, but they also apply to how we can obtain new views. Cp. *La.* 186c-e, *Alc. I* 106d ff., *Phd.* 78a.

⁹⁴⁶ See *Ti.* 29c-d, 30b, 48d, 59c-d.

⁹⁴⁷ See e.g. *Cra.* 396d-e, 399a, 428c-d, and *Phdr.* 241e ff.

What we must now discuss is what this process may be and which principles may guide it. In other words, we have to discuss which method or set of methods may be employed in order to achieve positive results.

3. The method(s) for the constructive side of examination

Plato's dialogues present some reflections about what method could be used to discover the truth about something. We mentioned some of these positive methods above, when we listed the different configurations philosophical examination assumed in the dialogues.⁹⁴⁸ Now we will consider (even if briefly) the terms in which these positive methods are presented. Their presentation is often determined by the context in which they are introduced, but we will try to isolate them and ascertain their possible role in the positive or constructive examination. This is not an easy task, since their multiplicity raises several questions. One wonders whether they are all equally important and effective, or whether some of them are better than others. It is also not clear how they relate to each other. Are they mutually exclusive or complementary? And does Plato present a definite version of what the positive method of examination should be, or does he rather leave it undetermined? Moreover, does the Platonic corpus present the most decisive kinds of positive method or is it possible to find others that are better than these? We find no direct answer to these questions in the *corpus*. Therefore, all we can do is identify the different positive methods and then reflect about their interaction, in order to better understand what a positive and constructive examination may consist in.

3.1. The hypothetical method(s)

One positive form of investigation can be found in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*. In all these texts, the characters describe and employ a method that uses ὑποθέσεις in order to move the examination forward despite one's lack of knowledge. As was said above, the term ὑπόθεσις can denote any view that is uncertain or insufficiently justified and that in turn underpins (or somehow affects) some other view that is being focused. It is an assumption and a presupposition, of which we may be more or less aware. We saw that in the *Republic* the term designates all the views presupposed or taken for

⁹⁴⁸ See Chap. 4, Sect. 1.

granted in a particular inquiry. One assumes they are clear and one does not examine them. They may be express or tacit, though they are often tacit.⁹⁴⁹ However, the term ὑπόθεσις can also be (and often is) used in the same sense as the English word “hypothesis”. It then denotes an explicit view that is regarded as precarious and provisional. One is aware of its fallibility and its lack of grounds. It is not something one believes in. It is rather something one provisionally accepts to see the implications it may have. It is precisely in this sense that the term is used in the texts we will now consider (with the exception of the *Republic*).

The hypothetical method presented in these texts generally works in the following manner. The characters have a problem that they cannot easily solve, but they can conceive of several possible answers that have their own consequences. They then adopt one of these answers provisionally, as a ὑπόθεσις, and see what results from it.⁹⁵⁰ This is a conditional and tentative analysis. Their relation with the ὑποθέσις is centrifugal. They assume something and are mainly concerned with what results from it. As a result, they will supposedly be able ascertain both the content and the strength of the assumption. They will also better understand the problem. The hypothetical method can thus contribute to solve a problem, though it does not guarantee a solution.

These are the general features of the method presented in the four texts mentioned above. However, despite these common features, the several presentations also contain significant differences, which raises the question about the unity of this particular method. Is there only one hypothetical method or are there several? Do the different presentations refer to the different applications of the same method or to different methods altogether? In order to answer these questions, we will first briefly consider the most important aspects of each presentation, and then we will try to determine how they may relate to each other.

a) The hypothetical method in the *Meno*

The hypothetical method is presented in the *Meno* as a solution to bypass the characters’ lack of knowledge and proceed with the examination. The lack of knowledge is here twofold. It concerns both what something is and how it is qualified. In other words, Socrates and Meno do not know the identity of something (in this instance, ἀρετή) and so they do not know if a certain predicate (namely, being teachable) corresponds to it or not.

⁹⁴⁹ Cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3 a) above.

⁹⁵⁰ They inquire “τί γρὴ συμβαίνειν;” – to use a formulation from *Parmenides* (see 136a5, 137b4, 142c3, 160b5).

Socrates underscores that the latter depends on the former. We must first know what something is and only then can we see how it is qualified.⁹⁵¹ But since Meno insists on asking if ἀρετή is teachable or not, Socrates suggests a different method, similar to the one employed in geometry, that circumvents one's ignorance about the core of the problem. He suggests they consider the matter on the basis of assumptions or suppositions (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως αὐτὸ σκοπεῖσθαι).⁹⁵² They will make assumptions about ἀρετή and then compare them with other connected questions, in order to see what are the consequences of these assumptions.

Let us see more in detail how this is done in the text. The basic assumption Socrates makes concerns the question of whether or not ἀρετή is knowledge. Based on how one answers this question, one will be able to find the solution to the main question – namely, whether or not ἀρετή is teachable.⁹⁵³ After showing that the questions are interconnected, Socrates considers more closely whether ἀρετή is knowledge, in order to find a definite answer to the main the question. This seems to be the main advantage of employing this method. By showing that two questions are intrinsically connected in a way that the answer to one determines the answer to the other, one can find the answer to both just by finding the answer to one of them. For instance, if one confirms that ἀρετή is knowledge, then one will also have confirmed that it is teachable. On the other hand, if one confutes the hypothesis that it is knowledge, then one will also confute the thesis that it is teachable. This seems to be the sense in which the method is used in geometry.⁹⁵⁴ One associates a complex question with other questions that are perhaps easier to answer – or even with questions about which one can have an intuitive knowledge. Thus, when one confirms a hypothesis, one will have the answer for all associated questions. The problem is how one can reach certainty at any point – but if one does, then everything else will be determined.

It is important to stress that the method that is described in *Meno* can establish a relation between more than two questions. An important question may be connected to a second one, which may then be connected to a third one, and so on. This is also what happens in the case of ἀρετή. Ἀρετή will be teachable if it is knowledge, and it will be knowledge if

⁹⁵¹ Cp. 86d-e: “ἀλλ’ εἰ μὲν ἐγὼ ἤρχον, ὃ Μένων, μὴ μόνον ἐμαντοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ σοῦ, οὐκ ἂν ἐσκεψάμεθα πρότερον εἴτε διδακτὸν εἴτε οὐ διδακτὸν ἢ ἀρετή, πρὶν ὅτι ἐστὶν πρῶτον ἐζητήσαμεν αὐτό· ἐπειδὴ δὲ σὺ σαυτοῦ μὲν οὐδ’ ἐπιχειρεῖς ἄρχειν, ἵνα δὴ ἐλεύθερος ἦς, ἐμοῦ δὲ ἐπιχειρεῖς τε ἄρχειν καὶ ἄρχεις, συγχωρήσομαι σοι – τί γὰρ χρὴ ποιεῖν; – ἔοικεν οὖν σκεπτέον εἶναι ποῖόν τί ἐστὶν ὃ μήπω ἴσμεν ὅτι ἐστίν.” For more on the distinction between what something is (τί ἐστίν;) and how it is qualified (ποῖόν τί;), see Chap. 6, Sect. 2.1.

⁹⁵² See 86e: “εἰ μὴ τι οὖν ἀλλὰ σμικρὸν γέ μοι τῆς ἀρχῆς χάλασον, καὶ συγχώρησον ἐξ ὑποθέσεως αὐτὸ σκοπεῖσθαι, εἴτε διδακτὸν ἐστὶν εἴτε ὅπως οὖν.”

⁹⁵³ See 87c: “εἰ δέ γ’ ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη τις ἢ ἀρετή, δῆλον ὅτι διδακτὸν ἂν εἴη.”

⁹⁵⁴ Cp. the description in 86e-87b.

all good things involve knowledge. But if good things do not all involve knowledge, then ἀρετή (which is itself a good thing) might not be knowledge.⁹⁵⁵ Socrates then confirms that all good things depend on knowledge – and so ἀρετή must be knowledge.⁹⁵⁶

This is not all. The hypothetical method also allows one to refute a particular assumption if one of its consequences is rejected – and in the cases when one has only two possibilities, it allows one to confirm the alternative. Socrates does precisely this to strengthen the view that ἀρετή is knowledge. He considers what the consequences would be of ἀρετή not being knowledge and just occurring by nature. According to him, it would require communities to identify and protect the good natures. But no such thing happens, so the facts refute these consequences and also the assumption that ἀρετή occurs by nature.⁹⁵⁷

However, Socrates is also suspicious of these conclusions and examines the matter from yet another angle. He argues that if ἀρετή is knowledge, then there must be teachers and students of it – but it is not easy to find such teachers and students, which would mean that ἀρετή is not in fact knowledge, and thus not teachable.⁹⁵⁸

These are the different lines of argumentation that Socrates and Meno follow using the hypothetical method and they allow us to identify not only the most important traits of the method as it is conceived in *Meno*, but also its limitations. As was shown, the method is based on the intrinsic interconnection of different questions. Because of this interconnection, one can assume something about the main question and then shift the focus from it to one of the associated questions. If one reaches some conclusion regarding the associated question, one can then infer the answer to the main question (and thus confirm or rebut a particular assumption). However, the answer to the main question hinges on its connection to other questions and the answers one finds for them. If one fails to identify the correct connection between questions and their correct consequences, then all conclusions will be wrong. Moreover, if any answer to an associated question is wrong, then the confirmation or rebuttal of the initial assumption will also be wrong. Finally, the way the method is presented also

⁹⁵⁵ See 87d: “οὐκοῦν εἰ μὲν τί ἐστιν ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἄλλο χωριζόμενον ἐπιστήμης, τάχ’ ἂν εἴη ἡ ἀρετὴ οὐκ ἐπιστήμη τις· εἰ δὲ μηδὲν ἐστιν ἀγαθὸν ὃ οὐκ ἐπιστήμη περιέχει, ἐπιστήμην ἂν τιν’ αὐτὸ ὑποπεύοντες εἶναι ὀρθῶς ὑποπτεύομεν.”

⁹⁵⁶ See 87e-89a, and especially 88c-d: “εἰ ἄρα ἀρετὴ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τί ἐστιν καὶ ἀναγκαῖον αὐτῷ ὠφελίμω εἶναι, φρόνησιν αὐτὸ δεῖ εἶναι, ἐπειδὴ περ πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτὰ μὲν καθ’ αὐτὰ οὔτε ὠφέλιμα οὔτε βλαβερὰ ἐστίν, προσγενομένης δὲ φρονήσεως ἢ ἀφροσύνης βλαβερὰ τε καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίνονται. κατὰ δὲ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὠφέλιμόν γε οὐσαν τὴν ἀρετὴν φρόνησιν δεῖ τιν’ εἶναι.”

⁹⁵⁷ See 89b: “καὶ γὰρ ἂν που καὶ τόδ’ ἦν· εἰ φύσει οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ἐγίνοντο, ἧσάν που ἂν ἡμῖν οἱ ἐγίγνωσκον τῶν νέων τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς τὰς φύσεις, οὓς ἡμεῖς ἂν παραλαβόντες ἐκείνων ἀποφηνάντων ἐφυλάττομεν ἂν ἐν ἀκροπόλει, κατασημνήμενοι πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ χρυσίον, ἵνα μηδεὶς αὐτοὺς διέφθειρεν, ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ ἀφίκοντο εἰς τὴν ἡλικίαν, χρήσιμοι γίνοντο ταῖς πόλεσι.”

⁹⁵⁸ See 89d ff.

allows for another source of error. If one fails to identify all possible assumptions with respect to a particular question, then the refutation of one or some of them may falsely lead us to conclude that the remaining hypothesis is true (since the others we identified were refuted) when that is not the case.

Nevertheless, despite all these possible sources of error, the hypothetical method lets us overcome the paralysis that resulted from trying to solve a particular problem. One makes the problem easier by identifying particular answers and not requiring a full justification of them. In the example given in *Meno*, one does not have to determine what exactly ἀρετή is, but only some aspects of it. One sees questions that are connected with the initial question, explores possibilities, sees their implications, and attempts to find a solution for one of the questions and all those connected with it. If one finds such a solution, one will still be far from possessing a perfect knowledge of the question under discussion. In the case of ἀρετή, for instance, one will still not know exactly what it is and how it can be taught. All one will know is that it can be taught.⁹⁵⁹

b) The hypothetical method in the *Phaedo*

The presentation of the hypothetical method in *Phaedo* is in several respects more explicit and more complex. Plato connects it with one of his most emblematic and problematic doctrines, the doctrine of the εἶδη – whose existence is precisely what will be assumed here. Socrates is trying to answer one of the most important and most difficult questions – namely, what happens to us when we die – and he will try to find an answer by employing this method.

The passage starts with Socrates describing his attempts at understanding the causes of things. He first tried a direct method of investigation, which he identifies with the natural sciences of the time. However, he ended up understanding nothing, so he turned to a different method, which he declares to be a second sailing.⁹⁶⁰ This second method examines things by

⁹⁵⁹ For more on this passage from *Meno*, see e.g. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Ithaca/New York, Cornell University Press, 1941, 118-127; H. ZYSKIND & R. STERNFELD, *Plato's Meno* 89C. 'Virtue Is Knowledge' a Hypothesis?, *Phronesis* 21 (1976), 130-134; J. MEYERS, Plato's Geometric Hypothesis. *Meno* 86e-87b, *Apeiron* 21 (1988), 173-180; H. BENSON, The Method of Hypothesis in the *Meno*, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 18 (2003), 95-126; D. WOLFSDORF, The Method ἐξ ὑποθέσεως at *Meno* 86e1-87d8, *Phronesis* 53 (2008), 35-64; L. FRANKLIN, Investigation from Hypothesis in Plato's *Meno*. An Unorthodox Reading, *Apeiron* 43 (2010), 87-115; N. IWATA, Plato on Geometrical Hypothesis in the *Meno*, *Apeiron* 48 (2015), 1-19.

⁹⁶⁰ See 99c-d: "ἐπειδὴ δὲ ταύτης ἐστερήθην καὶ οὐτ' αὐτὸς εὐρεῖν οὔτε παρ' ἄλλου μαθεῖν οἷός τε ἐγενόμην, τὸν δεύτερον πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν ἢ πεπραγμάτευμαι βούλει σοι, ἔφη, ἐπίδειξιν ποιήσωμαι, ὦ Κέβης;"

means of λόγοι (i.e., in rational discussions, using arguments which defend certain views).⁹⁶¹ In a particular question, one may be aware of different possible arguments or views and hesitate between them. One is not sure about which one is correct and so one must either be paralyzed or choose between them. Socrates says that he chooses the λόγος that he judges most robust (ἔρρωμενέστατον) and makes an assumption of it (ὑπόθεσις). Then he provisionally accepts as true whatever agrees or harmonizes with it (i.e., whatever does not contradict it).⁹⁶² Later he also says that he considers the consequences of this (τὰ ὀρμηθέντα), to see if they agree with each other or not.⁹⁶³

The method thus requires one to see everything that is implied in a certain view or argument, which includes not only everything that can be directly deduced from it, but also the way it may affect or determine other things. By considering the implications of a particular λόγος, one achieves a clearer understanding of its content and, at the same time, one also becomes more aware of the questions connected with it. This will make it easier to find inconsistencies or contradictions and refute the initial ὑπόθεσις. If this does not happen, then one will grow more confident that one's assumption is true.

This is the first stage of the process. One clings to the best ὑπόθεσις and focuses on what results from it, without giving an account of the ὑπόθεσις itself. In a second stage, however, one will have to justify or ground one's ὑπόθεσις. In order to do so, the same method will be employed. One will once again choose the best available view and make an assumption of it – thus using it as the basis for the first assumption. If one finds no inconsistencies after making this second assumption, then one can search for a third assumption, which is supposed to justify the second one, and the process continues until one reaches “something sufficient” (τι ἰκανόν).⁹⁶⁴ Socrates, however, does not specify what would render a certain view or λόγος sufficient. He may very well be thinking of a view that would be absolutely certain. One would not be able to put it into question and it would serve

The notion of “second sailing” refers to the use of oars instead of the wind, which implies greater exertion and also a longer time to attain one's destination or goal. Likewise, the method Socrates will describe is longer and much more arduous, since it will not directly determine how things are (which, according to Socrates, would ruin one's vision, as when one looks directly at the sun), but rather use a more indirect route (which Socrates compares with looking at the sun through its reflection in water). Cp. 99d-e.

⁹⁶¹ See 99e: “ἔδοξε δὴ μοι χρῆναι εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα ἐν ἐκείνοις σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν.”

⁹⁶² See 100a: “ἀλλ’ οὖν δὴ ταῦτα γε ὄρμησα, καὶ ὑποθέμενος ἐκάστοτε λόγον ὃν ἂν κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον εἶναι, ἃ μὲν ἂν μοι δοκῆ τούτῳ συμφωνεῖν τίθημι ὡς ἀληθῆ ὄντα, καὶ περὶ αἰτίας καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ὄντων, ἃ δ’ ἂν μὴ, ὡς οὐκ ἀληθῆ.”

⁹⁶³ See 101d: “εἰ δέ τις αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἔχοιτο, χαίρειν ἐώης ἂν καὶ οὐκ ἀποκρίναιτο ἕως ἂν τὰ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ὀρμηθέντα σκέψαιτο εἴ σοι ἀλλήλοις συμφωνεῖ ἢ διαφωνεῖ (...).”

⁹⁶⁴ See 101d-e: “(...) ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐκείνης αὐτῆς [sc. τῆς ὑποθέσεως] δέοι σε διδόναι λόγον, ὡσαύτως ἂν διδοίης, ἄλλην αὖ ὑπόθεσιν ὑποθέμενος ἣ τις τῶν ἄνωθεν βελτίστη φαίνοιτο, ἕως ἐπὶ τι ἰκανόν ἔλθοις (...).”

as the basis for the entire system of assumptions. But how does one determine the certainty of this basic assumption? Is it simply a matter of the whole system being consistent or does it require something else?

This is not the only question raised by Socrates' description of the method. We also need to ask about the status of any results that are still not fully grounded by a "sufficient assumption". Most of the inquiry takes place before reaching a solid ground for the whole system. While one is inquiring and making one's assumptions, it is not at all clear that one will reach such a ground. One may find inconsistencies at any turn and therefore any results of such an examination are only provisional. The initial *ὑποθέσις* (and in fact all of them until a sufficient basis is reached) is merely plausible or likely and, as such, fallible. So the results are likewise precarious. They are like a raft we hang on to in high sea, to use an image that appears earlier in the dialogue.⁹⁶⁵ This image evokes Odysseus lost at sea – i.e., in an absolutely unstable and unsafe element. It is, however, different from interrupting one's journey, drowning, or having to swim one's way through. It is a basis and allows one to proceed, even if in a precarious way.⁹⁶⁶ Before reaching something sufficient, the entire examination is indeed always liable to collapse. One may find contradictions in the first stage of the process, while seeing the consequences of an *ὑπόθεσις*, or perhaps later, when seeking the bases for the first hypothesis.

But if this is the case, why should we start with the consequences of an assumption, given the fact that these consequences, as well as the assumption itself, depend on what will ground this assumption? The text does not answer the question, but one possible reason is that we need to be clear about what an assumption is in order to search for its grounds. If we are not able to determine everything directly, we can start exploring what is contained in a more plausible view and then search for what could support it.

⁹⁶⁵ See 85c-d, where Simmias – referring to the question of soul's survival after death – anticipates some aspects of the hypothetical method by saying: "δεῖν γὰρ περὶ αὐτὰ ἔν γε τι τούτων διαπράξασθαι, ἢ μαθεῖν ὅπη ἔχει ἢ εὐρεῖν ἢ, εἰ ταῦτα ἀδύνατον, τὸν γοῦν βέλτιστον τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λόγων λαβόντα καὶ δυσεξελεγκτότατον, ἐπὶ τούτου ὀχοῦμενον ὥσπερ ἐπὶ σχεδίας κινδυνεύοντα διαπλεῦσαι τὸν βίον, εἰ μὴ τις δύναιτο ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ ἀκινδυνότερον ἐπὶ βεβαιότερου ὀχήματος, ἢ λόγου θείου τινός, διαπορευθῆναι."

⁹⁶⁶ The passage about the raft also points to an important aspect: the examination concerns, among others, matters that are extremely important for us and regarding which a decision is needed. The hypothetical method also allows us to establish something about these matters, even if only provisionally, and in doing so it may give us some guidance in life – although one may wonder how effective such a guidance can be if one is fully aware of its provisional (i.e., questionable) character.

But be that as it may, one thing is clear: the hypothetical method as it conceived in *Phaedo* involves two distinct directions of inquiry.⁹⁶⁷ Socrates is adamant about the separation of the different stages and not mixing everything together.⁹⁶⁸ Considering the consequences of an assumption is different from grounding it and one cannot do both things at the same time.

Finally, there is one other question for which we find no clear indication in the passage. The question concerns the choice of the ὑποθέσεις. Socrates says one should choose the most robust, but how does one determine the degree of robustness of a ὑποθέσις? Does it require a careful examination of all possible views and the comparison of their merits (and if so, how is this examination to be performed)? Or is it something more intuitive? And if that is the case, what determines this intuition and how reliable is it? These questions are not answered in the text. Nevertheless, the idea that we should be guided by the views that seem most robust (and thus most probable) to us while employing the hypothetical method is one of the most important indications given in *Phaedo*.⁹⁶⁹

c) The hypothetical method in the *Parmenides*

A different version of the hypothetical method is discussed and illustrated in *Parmenides*. This version differs from the others in intent and scope. It is introduced by Parmenides as a form of mental gymnastics that will allow the young Socrates to define each of the things grasped by the mind (ἃ μάλιστα τις ἂν λόγῳ λάβοι) – i.e., the εἶδη.⁹⁷⁰ These were invoked by Socrates as the solution to the problems caused by multiplicity, which Zeno had discussed in his book.⁹⁷¹ When cross-examined about them, Socrates faltered and was

⁹⁶⁷ In this respect, this version of the method comes very close to what we will find in the *Republic*. Cp. Sects. 3.1d) and 3.2 below.

⁹⁶⁸ See 101e: “(...) ἅμα δὲ οὐκ ἂν φύροιο ὥσπερ οἱ ἀντιλογικοὶ περὶ τε τῆς ἀρχῆς διαλεγόμενος καὶ τῶν ἐξ ἐκείνης ὠρμημένων, εἶπερ βούλοιό τι τῶν ὄντων εὐρεῖν;”

⁹⁶⁹ For other discussions of the hypothetical method as it is conceived in *Phaedo*, see e.g. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Ithaca/New York, Cornell University Press, 1941, 128-150; R. BLUCK, ὑποθέσεις in the *Phaedo* and Platonic Dialectic, *Phronesis* 2 (1957), 21-31; P. PLASS, Socrates' Method of Hypothesis in the *Phaedo*, *Phronesis* 5 (1960), 103-115; T. ROSENMEYER, Plato's Hypothesis and the Upward Path, *The American Journal of Philology* 81 (1960), 393-407; L. ROSE, The *deuteros plous* in Plato's *Phaedo*, *The Monist* 50 (1966), 464-473; J. BEDU-ADDO, The Role of the Hypothetical Method in the *Phaedo*, *Phronesis* 24 (1979), 111-132; T. EBERT, Sokrates Über Seinen Umgang mit Hypotheseis (*Phaidon* 100A). Ein Problem und ein Vorschlag zur Lösung, *Hermes* 129 (2001), 467-473; M. BYRD, Dialectic and Plato's Method of Hypothesis, *Apeiron* 40 (2007), 141-158.

⁹⁷⁰ Cp. 135c-d: “πρὸ γάρ, εἰπεῖν, πρὶν γυμνασθῆναι, ὃ Σώκρατες, ὀρίζεσθαι ἐπιχειρεῖς καλόν τε τι καὶ δίκαιον καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἐν ἑκάστων τῶν εἰδῶν.” See also 135e: “οὐκ εἷας ἐν τοῖς ὀρωμένοις οὐδὲ περὶ ταῦτα τὴν πλάνην ἐπισκοπεῖν, ἀλλὰ περὶ ἐκεῖνα ἃ μάλιστα τις ἂν λόγῳ λάβοι καὶ εἶδη ἂν ἡγήσαιο εἶναι.”

⁹⁷¹ See 128e ff.

unable to give a full account of them (i.e., of what exactly an εἶδος is and how it relates to the beings that partake in it). Parmenides then suggests a program of exercises that will allow him to “discern the truth with authority”.⁹⁷² The first formulation of the program only expresses the idea of exploring the ὑπόθεσις that something is the case or exists (e.g., the εἶδη) and also the ὑπόθεσις that the same thing is not – seeing in both cases what are the consequences of each assumption (τὰ συμβαίνοντα ἐκ τῆς ὑποθέσεως).⁹⁷³ One should see both sides of the question and see all that results from it. This may not seem very difficult, but when asked to clarify the task, Parmenides reveals just how difficult it is. He gives as example Zeno’s assumption that there is multiplicity (πολλά) and says that one should see the consequences of this assumption both for what is assumed (sc. multiplicity) in relation to itself, and for its opposite (namely, unity) in relation to itself and in relation to multiplicity – and likewise with the opposite assumption, that multiplicity is not.⁹⁷⁴ Moreover, this is to be done with respect to these and to all other notions. Parmenides mentions similarity, dissimilarity, movement, rest, coming to being, corruption, being and non-being.⁹⁷⁵ In relation to any of these notions, one must assume both that it is (i.e., that it exists, is something definite and applies to reality) and that it is not and see what are the consequences for the notion itself and for all other notions. One is to see all relations between all notions. Moreover, this does not only concern their being (their existing and being something definite), but also any particular predicate they may have (any πάθος). One must also see the consequences of each attribute for the notion that is qualified by it and for all others.⁹⁷⁶ In sum, one must consider all possibilities of each particular εἶδος being and of it not being, and then one must see all the ways the εἶδη relate to each other. This way one will be fully aware of the alphabet of reality – instead of having some vague notion of it, which is unable to determine the identity and the combination of the different letters.

⁹⁷² See 136c: “(...) εἰ μέλλεις τελέως γυμνασάμενος κυρίως διόψεσθαι τὸ ἀληθές.” I follow A. Hermann’s translation. See A. HERMANN (ed.), *Plato’s Parmenides*, Las Vegas/etc., Parmenides Publishing, 2010.

⁹⁷³ See 135e-136a: “χρῆ δὲ καὶ τόδε ἔτι πρὸς τούτῳ ποιεῖν, μὴ μόνον εἰ ἔστιν ἕκαστον ὑποτιθέμενον σκοπεῖν τὰ συμβαίνοντα ἐκ τῆς ὑποθέσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰ μὴ ἔστι τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ὑποτίθεσθαι, εἰ βούλει μᾶλλον γυμνασθῆναι.”

⁹⁷⁴ See 136a-b: “οἷον, ἔφη, εἰ βούλει, περὶ ταύτης τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἦν Ζήνων ὑπέθετο, εἰ πολλά ἐστι, τί χρῆ συμβαίνειν καὶ αὐτοῖς τοῖς πολλοῖς πρὸς αὐτὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἓν καὶ τῷ ἐνὶ πρὸς τε αὐτὸ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πολλά· καὶ αὐ εἰ μὴ ἐστι πολλά, πάλιν σκοπεῖν τί συμβήσεται καὶ τῷ ἐνὶ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα (...).”

⁹⁷⁵ See 136b: “(...) καὶ αὐθις αὐτὸ ἐὰν ὑποθῆ εἰ ἔστιν ὁμοιότης ἢ εἰ μὴ ἔστιν, τί ἐφ’ ἑκατέρας τῆς ὑποθέσεως συμβήσεται καὶ αὐτοῖς τοῖς ὑποτεθεῖσιν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα. καὶ περὶ ἀνομοίου ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος καὶ περὶ κινήσεως καὶ περὶ στάσεως καὶ περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι (...).”

⁹⁷⁶ See 136b-c: “(...) καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ, περὶ ὅτου ἂν αἰεὶ ὑποθῆ ὡς ὄντος καὶ ὡς οὐκ ὄντος καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἄλλο πάθος πάσχοντος, δεῖ σκοπεῖν τὰ συμβαίνοντα πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ πρὸς ἓν ἕκαστον τῶν ἄλλων, ὅτι ἂν προέλη, καὶ πρὸς πλείω καὶ πρὸς σύμπαντα ὡσαύτως· καὶ ἄλλα αὐτὸ πρὸς αὐτὰ τε καὶ πρὸς ἄλλο ὅτι ἂν προαιρῆ αἰεὶ, ἐάντε ὡς ὄν ὑποθῆ ὁ ὑπετίθεσο, ἄντε ὡς μὴ ὄν (...).”

This version of the hypothetical method is thus very different from the previous ones. It aims at removing all one-sidedness from one's reflections and also all simplification. One would see what is contained in each notion and all possible relations between all notions. The task is one of extreme extension and difficulty and Parmenides describes it as a run through and a roaming about that leave nothing out (or more precisely, a *διὰ πάντων διέξοδος καὶ πλάνη*).⁹⁷⁷ He also compares it to swimming across “a hard and vast ocean of *λόγοι*”.⁹⁷⁸ The image of swimming emphasizes the difficulty and danger of the task. On the one hand, there is no boat one can use to make the passage easier, and so one must make the greatest effort in order to move. On the other hand, the sea was seen as unpredictable and extremely dangerous, so one is always exposed to the possibility of drowning or failing. Moreover, the association of the ideas of swimming and roaming about also brings to mind Odysseus and his almost endless labors.

Parmenides discusses the formal project and describes its difficulty – and then he goes on to provide a small illustration of it, which occupies the rest of the dialogue. He discusses eight hypotheses and the discussion gives us a glimpse of what the project would correspond to. It helps to get things started. But Socrates (and we the readers) are left with the task of continuing the exercises in order to find out the truth. We must wonder what should come after the discussions we find in the text.

We must also wonder what (if anything) should follow the training once it is complete. The exercises are supposed to prepare one for something (namely, to discern the truth), but it is not clear what should come after them. It is also not clear how one can decide which *ὑποθέσεις* are right. Do we become fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses after going through them all in such an exhaustive manner? That might well be the case. Many of the *ὑποθέσεις* would probably be rejected for entailing contradictions. But what would then be left at the end? Only one possible version? Different coherent versions? Parmenides does not say and there might be a good reason for that. Perhaps we cannot predict what will happen without going through the whole process.

Finally, it is important to note that there is a very serious limitation in the way the project is formulated in the text. More precisely, the project is marked by a tacit assumption that is never discussed and may render any results questionable. Parmenides seems to assume

⁹⁷⁷ See 136e. The description of this exercise as a roaming or wandering about is very expressive, because the latter correspond to a form of aimless movement, in which one goes to and fro – and it is precisely a examining movement of this kind that is being described.

⁹⁷⁸ See 137a: “(...) *κἀγὼ μοι δοκῶ μεμνημένος μάλα φοβεῖσθαι πῶς χρή τηλικόνδε ὄντα διανεῦσαι τοιοῦτόν τε καὶ τοσοῦτον πέλαγος λόγων (...)*”

that we already know or can easily have access to the framework of εἶδη that is to be submitted to the exercise. It would only be a matter of making assumptions about their existence or non-existence, and then seeing their interrelations. However, the framework of εἶδη that determines the way we see things may be very difficult to identify and we may have a naive identification of it that leaves out many important εἶδη. Parmenides does not consider how we could identify them with full certainty. In fact, the entire discussion between Zeno and the opponents of Eleatism is a good example of this problem. It assumes that either there is multiplicity or there is unity, and *tertium non datur*. However, it may be possible to conceive other possibilities that in some way conciliate both possibilities. The same can be said about any other identification of εἶδη, and therefore any exercise based on an immediate identification of εἶδη will be just a first stage in one's pursuit of truth. In fact, it may even be used as a negative form of examination, in order to show the inconsistencies and untenability of our usual identification of εἶδη. Parmenides may be describing a negative method – or at least something that can also be used as a negative method, in order to cleanse us of our views. At any rate, he is describing something that may not lead us immediately to truth and may indeed require further consideration of possibilities and perhaps even a different method.

d) The hypothetical method in the *Republic*

One final instance of a method of examination that involves ὑποθέσεις can be found in a passage of the *Republic* that we already considered above.⁹⁷⁹ In the simile of the line – and more precisely in its third subsegment – Plato describes something that has some similarity to the hypothetical method, though it also differs in several important respects from the other presentations we just considered. In the *Republic*, the ὑποθέσεις are not necessarily explicit and the ones employing them do not necessarily regard them as questionable. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case. Their contents are taken for granted and they are seen as being evident for everybody – so much so that one does not think one needs to give an account of them.⁹⁸⁰ But this does not mean that one fully understands them. As Socrates says,

⁹⁷⁹ See Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3 a).

⁹⁸⁰ See 510c: “οἶμαι γάρ σε εἶδέναι ὅτι οἱ περὶ τὰς γεωμετρίας τε καὶ λογισμοὺς καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πραγματευόμενοι, ὑποθέμενοι τό τε περιττὸν καὶ τὸ ἄρτιον καὶ τὰ σχήματα καὶ γωνιῶν τριττὰ εἶδη καὶ ἄλλα τούτων ἀδελφὰ καθ’ ἐκάστην μέθοδον, ταῦτα μὲν ὡς εἰδότες, ποιησάμενοι ὑποθέσεις αὐτά, οὐδένα λόγον οὔτε αὐτοῖς οὔτε ἄλλοις ἔτι ἀξιοῦσι περὶ αὐτῶν διδόναι, ὡς παντὶ φανερῶν (...).” See also 511a: “ὑποθέσει δ’ ἀναγκαζομένην ψυχὴν χρῆσθαι περὶ τὴν ζήτησιν αὐτοῦ, οὐκ ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν ἰοῦσαν, ὡς οὐ δυναμένην τῶν ὑποθέσεων ἀνωτέρω ἐκβαίνειν, εἰκόσι δὲ χρωμένην αὐτοῖς τοῖς ὑπὸ τῶν κάτω ἀπεικασθεῖσιν καὶ ἐκεῖνοις πρὸς ἐκεῖνα ὡς ἐναργέσι δεδοξασμένοις τε καὶ τετιμημένοις.”

one is actually unable to give an account of them and does not really know them.⁹⁸¹ They are insufficiently understood and insufficiently grounded. As a result, any inquiry that is based on them, as well as its results, is wholly problematic. Plato wants to stress precisely this. The third subsegment of the line is still a constitutively defective way of seeing things. Although Socrates identifies it with particular sciences, such as geometry, which are thus a form of hypothetical examination, he is not simply trying to present a positive method of finding out the truth. This inquiry may provide some true results and it involves a progress in our understanding of things, but it is also constitutively defective and must be overcome by a different form of inquiry.

Let us consider all this in a little more detail. We saw earlier how the third subsegment of the line implies a departure from our normal way of seeing things. What we take to be real (namely, the sensible objects of which we find many sensible images) is revealed to be problematic, as was already shown at the end of book V.⁹⁸² This forces us to inquire and brings about different pursuits (μέθοδοι) of what things are.⁹⁸³ According to Socrates, the different lines of inquiry opened correspond to different particular sciences (though in a way it may apply to any form of inquiry that shares the main features, and the main defects, of the sciences). However, despite changing our regular way of seeing things, these forms of inquiry are still defective, since they are based on views or notions which are not accounted for – i.e., in ὑποθέσεις. For instance, mathematical knowledge (which is often taken to be the most certain science) uses notions as odd and even, the figures, the forms of angles, without defining them.⁹⁸⁴ It simply assumes they are evident, without being able to fully explain them. This introduces a form of defect that limits this kind of inquiry and its ability to give us an understanding of what things really are. Scientific inquiries move away from their ὑποθέσεις. They only consider implications and consequences of these ὑποθέσεις (which may be something deduced from the ὑποθέσεις, or simply the way they affect questions that are associated with them). They move towards the end, and not the beginning (i.e. what grounds the entire system).⁹⁸⁵ More precisely, they do not inquire into the εἶδη, the

⁹⁸¹ Rep. 533c: “(...) ἕως ἄν ὑποθέσῃσι χρώμεναι ταύτας ἀκινήτους ἐῶσι, μὴ δυνάμεναι λόγον δίδόναι αὐτῶν.”

⁹⁸² For an analysis of this passage, see Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 above.

⁹⁸³ Plato expresses the idea of being forced to inquire in 510b: “ἤ τι τὸ μὲν αὐτοῦ τοῖς τότε μιμηθεῖσιν ὡς εἰκόσιν χρωμένη ψυχῇ ζητεῖν ἀναγκάζεται ἐξ ὑποθέσεων (...).” For the notion of μέθοδος, see Chap. 4, Sect. 2.5.

⁹⁸⁴ See 510c, quoted in footnote 980 above.

⁹⁸⁵ See 510b: “ἤ τι τὸ μὲν αὐτοῦ τοῖς τότε μιμηθεῖσιν ὡς εἰκόσιν χρωμένη ψυχῇ ζητεῖν ἀναγκάζεται ἐξ ὑποθέσεων, οὐκ ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν πορευομένη ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τελευτῆν (...).”

main constituents of reality, which are essential to their entire investigation.⁹⁸⁶ It is in this sense that sciences are said by Plato to dream about being.⁹⁸⁷ They do not consider the εἶδη that shape their way of seeing things, they do not see the limitations of their understanding of these εἶδη, but they believe they are already seeing things themselves or reality as it is.

Plato is thus emphasizing the way these hypothetical examinations have an intermediate status. They overcome the limitations of δόξα (i.e., of the immediate perspective, focused on individual beings), but they fall short of providing actual knowledge (or even of becoming fully aware of all that they lack and thus fully awake). This is why these hypothetical examinations are called thought (διάνοια), which is more than an immediate access, but not intellectual apprehension (νοῦς).⁹⁸⁸ They do not have full contact with reality. They take an insufficient view as a perfect access to what things are. More specifically, they do not see how problematic their ὑποθέσεις are and how this affects their entire progress. They are ways of pursuing knowledge that are based on non-knowledge – and this makes them wholly problematic.⁹⁸⁹ The limitations are not restricted to the basic principles of these inquiries, but the whole way of seeing things that is brought about by them is defective and, at best, only approximate.

This means that such inquiries are dependent upon a different kind of inquiry, which will uproot their basic assumptions and give them a firm footing. We will consider this other direction of inquiry or examination afterwards (in Section 3.2). Now we are just considering Plato's presentations of a hypothetical method and how the particular sciences constitute a form of hypothetical method (even if they are not aware of their ὑποθέσεις as ὑποθέσεις). Moreover, by associating hypothetical examination with the particular sciences, Plato seems to admit that these forms of examination can actually produce true results, although by themselves they always fall short of knowledge. One wonders then what would change with the other form of inquiry (which must move towards the ὑποθέσεις and go beyond them).

⁹⁸⁶ In this sense, they are like the inquiry in the *Meno*, which also does not try to determine the notion of ἀρετή as such. Likewise, what is being hypothesized in the *Phaedo* (and, to a certain extent, also in the *Parmenides*) are the εἶδη. They are assumed to exist and to account for what things are, even if one does not have a complete insight into them.

⁹⁸⁷ See 533b-c: “αἱ δὲ λοιπαί, ἅς τοῦ ὄντος τι ἔραμεν ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι, γεωμετρίας τε καὶ τὰς ταύτη ἐπομένας, ὀρῶμεν ὡς ὄνειρώττουσι μὲν περὶ τὸ ὄν, ὕπαρ δὲ ἀδύνατον αὐταῖς ἰδεῖν, ἕως ἂν ὑποθέσῃς χρώμεναι ταύτας ἀκινήτους ἕως, μὴ δυνάμεναι λόγον διδόναι αὐτῶν.”

⁹⁸⁸ See 511d: “διάνοιαν δὲ καλεῖν μοι δοκεῖς τὴν τῶν γεωμετρικῶν τε καὶ τὴν τῶν τοιούτων ἕξιν ἄλλ’ οὐ νοῦν, ὡς μεταξὺ τι δόξης τε καὶ νοῦ τὴν διάνοιαν οὕσαν.”

⁹⁸⁹ As Plato says in 533c, “ὅ γὰρ ἀρχὴ μὲν ὃ μὴ οἶδε, τελευτὴ δὲ καὶ τὰ μεταξὺ ἐξ οὗ μὴ οἶδεν συμπλέκεται, τίς μηχανὴ τὴν τοιαύτην ὁμολογίαν ποτὲ ἐπιστήμην γενέσθαι;”

Would it also correct the results of hypothetical examinations, or simply see these results in a different light, integrating them into a more complex view of things?

Finally, there is still one relevant point that must be considered. The sciences that may be identified with this third subsegment are not simply something opposed to the examination of the εἶδη, but they are presented by Plato as devices for purifying our gaze from sensible reality and for giving access to the intelligible beings.⁹⁹⁰ Indeed, our ordinary way of seeing things focuses on concrete beings, but has a hazy contact with the predicates that constitute them, and so does not see the problems that affect them. The particular sciences overcome this limitation and point us towards non-sensible structures that are present in them. By doing so, they also make it easier for us to identify and examine the εἶδη or our notions of them.⁹⁹¹

e) The relation between the different presentations of the hypothetical method

The versions of the hypothetical method we just considered share some common features, which are mostly related to the notion of ὑπόθεσις. We have considered these features above. In short, there is some question about which we do not have knowledge and so we assume something about it and see the consequences of this assumption. The process may lead to contradictions (either internal to the assumption itself or between the assumption and other views we hold for certain) and thus refute the initial assumption.

However, there are also significant differences between the four versions of the method. One of these differences concerns the amplitude of the method. In *Meno* (and to some extent also in *Phaedo*) the method is used to examine a particular question, while in the *Parmenides* it is a matter of considering all possible ὑποθέσεις and see how they relate to each other. The status of the ὑποθέσεις themselves also varies. In *Phaedo* one hypothesizes some view that seems more plausible, whereas in the *Meno* and the *Parmenides* it is rather a

⁹⁹⁰ See 521c-532c.

⁹⁹¹ For more on the presentation of the hypothetical method in the *Republic*, see e.g. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Ithaca/New York, Cornell University Press, 1941, 151-162; T. ROSENMEYER, Plato's Hypothesis and the Upward Path, *The American Journal of Philology* 81 (1960), 393-407; V. KARASMANIS, The Hypotheses of Mathematics in Plato's Republic and his Contribution to the Axiomatization of Geometry, in: P. NICOLACOPOULOS (ed.), *Greek Studies in the Philosophy and History of Science*, Dordrecht/etc., Kluwer, 1990, 121-135; M. HEUM, The Relationship between Hypotheses and Images in the Mathematical Subsection of the Divided Line of Plato's *Republic*, *Dialogue* 44 (2005), 285-312; M. CARVALHO, Μέθοδος e ὑπόθεσις. O problema do pressuposto na fundação platónica da ciência, in: D. FERRER (ed.), *Método e Métodos do Pensamento Filosófico*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 2007, 9-69; L. FRANKLIN, Particular and Universal. Hypothesis in Plato's Divided Line, *Apeiron* 44 (2011), 335-358; F. SERRANITO, *Lovers and Madmen*. The Μανία-Φρονεῖν Opposition in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Diss. Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015, 337-378.

matter of seeing all the different alternatives. Another relevant distinction lies in the number of stages the method involves. Plato identifies different stages in *Phaedo* and the *Republic*: the first one makes an assumption and then the second stage requires one to justify this assumption. The introduction of this second stage renders the value of any progress made in the first stage problematic. In the *Republic*, given the association of the hypothetical inquiry with particular sciences, the first stage of the inquiry seems to have a certain validity, despite its constitutive limitation. In *Phaedo* the matter is not so clear. It will probably depend on the value of the ὑποθέσεις that will ground the first one. As for the other texts, we find no reference to this question. In *Meno* there is no mention of grounding one's ὑποθέσεις with further ὑποθέσεις or with something else (something ἀνυπόθετον, as is said in the *Republic*). The confirmation of an assumption appears to come from a related question or even an empirical fact. In *Parmenides*, in turn, there is no clear indication of how one could ever confirm any ὑπόθεσις.

However, despite all these differences, the similarities are still striking and we could say that the four versions of the method correspond to four different possibilities of using ὑποθέσεις to examine something. They are four different kinds of hypothetical thinking, which are in part determined by their context and by what one expects to achieve. They may also have different relations to the elenctic examination and the casting away of false beliefs. In *Parmenides*, the hypothetical examination is supposed to help Socrates overcome the limitations he showed in the preliminary discussion, in which some beliefs were still holding him back. In *Phaedo* and *Meno* (and up to a point also in *Parmenides*) it seems to be rather a solution to escape the impasse created by the examination of a particular matter. This is actually the main virtue of the hypothetic examination. It avoids the paralysis created by the cathartic examination. Instead of remaining undecided, we start examining possibilities and seeing what they entail, which allows us to achieve a greater clarity about these possibilities, eliminate those that contain or bring about contradictions, and thus prepare a better decision.

However, none of the texts specifies how exactly we can find the ὑποθέσεις that we will use and whether we can actually identify all possible ὑποθέσεις. We might leave out important possibilities, thereby rendering the entire examination inconclusive or invalid. Moreover, given the fact that the method may involve a very long process, it is not exactly clear where we should start and how we should proceed after starting. In *Phaedo*, Socrates talks about starting with the most robust ὑπόθεσις, but that is not always a straightforward criterion. In some cases, they may all seem equally plausible. Consequently, the method may

contain (at least at times) a chaotic element, which makes the examination all the more difficult. Finally, it is also not clear if such a method could ever actually determine how things are. The lack of contradiction (or the fact that we are not able to find any) does not mean that a *ὑπόθεσις* is true. The method seems to require something to complement it – and we must now consider what this complement may be according to Plato.

3.2. The second form of inquiry in the *Republic*, directed at the first, non-hypothetical principle

In the *Republic*, Plato gives some important indications about how to overcome the limitations of a hypothetical method. These indications have some resemblance to the second stage of hypothetical examination in *Phaedo*, which required one to find new *ὑποθέσεις* to ground the first one, until reaching something sufficient. The description in the *Republic* goes in the same direction, but it contains some differences and is much more developed. Let us then consider what is said in the text and what are its implications for the positive side of philosophical examination.

We saw how *ὑποθέσεις* are views characterized by a defective understanding or a defective justification of their content. They determine other things, but are not sufficiently determined. This is what must be overcome – and it is by overcoming such a defect that we come to the fourth subsegment of the line. When one understands that the hypothetical examinations are based on assumptions that are not properly understood or properly justified (i.e., they are based on mere knowledge claims), one is required to examine these assumptions and try to clarify and ground them, in order to achieve actual knowledge.⁹⁹² Instead of moving away from them towards their consequences, they become the center of one's inquiries. They are now points of approach or attack (*ἐπιβάσεις καὶ ὀρμαί*).⁹⁹³ The goal is to uproot (*ἀναρῆν*) these *ὑποθέσεις* – not by annulling them completely, but rather by

⁹⁹² Just like in the transition from the second to the third subsegment, this transition requires one to understand the intrinsic limitations of what is taken to be a superior form of understanding things – i.e., one must realize that what was taken to be an appropriate access to things is in fact a form of dreaming (of mistaking mere images with things themselves).

⁹⁹³ The term *ἐπιβάσις* can mean something as stepping stone, but it can also express the movement towards something, and it seems to be in that sense that it is used here. Both *ἐπιβάσις* and *ὀρμή* express the idea of advancing towards something, attacking it, instead of having a static or distracted relation to it, as is characteristic of an hypothetical inquiry with respect to its *ὑποθέσεις*.

annulling their hypothetical or precarious character.⁹⁹⁴ One will no longer fail to understand or justify them. One will clarify and ground them, thereby reaching a firm footing.

This new kind of examination, which opens the fourth subsegment, concerns the εἶδη and only the εἶδη – or, as we could also say, it concerns our understanding of the general predicates that constitute the alphabet of reality.⁹⁹⁵ One tries to fully understand what these εἶδη are and how they affect all things. However, the εἶδη are not necessarily independent from each other. They may still presuppose other εἶδη – for instance in the sense we find in the *Sophist*, where it is said that some predicates pervade all others and even each other. In the *Republic*, Plato points to the idea of there being a first principle (ἀρχή) on which all εἶδη and all reality depend, and which in turn does not depend on anything else. The examination that corresponds to the fourth subsegment of the line is ultimately concerned with this first principle – which Plato qualifies as ἀνυπόθετος.⁹⁹⁶ The adjective ἀνυπόθετος expresses several things here. First, the adjective ἀνυπόθετος indicates that this principle is unconditioned or absolute. It does not presuppose anything else and is not based on anything else. Moreover, by presenting it as the ultimate goal of inquiry, Plato points out that the access to this principle would not involve any ungrounded or unclear assumptions. In other words, the contact with the first principle would not be provisional in any way, it would not presuppose anything, it would not lack any intelligibility, it would be fully self-evident. This is the goal. But in fact there is still another way of reaching something ἀνυπόθετον – namely, by suppressing all ὑποθέσεις (i.e., all our knowledge claims) and fully pursuing knowledge. As we saw, one can wake up from a dream in the Platonic sense either by coming into contact with reality (or the thing themselves to which one's images refer) or by realizing that one has mistaken a dream image for reality.⁹⁹⁷ If one realizes the mistake, then one is already turned to the thing itself, even if one does not have a full and clear access to it. So if one is able to suspend all ὑποθέσεις that ground not only scientific inquiries, but also the sensible world, then one will already reach something ἀνυπόθετον – though one still has to search for what things really are.

Both senses of ἀνυπόθετον are relevant here, though Plato does not make a mere negative description of it. As was said, he talks of a first principle from which all εἶδη and all

⁹⁹⁴ See 533c-d: “οὐκοῦν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἡ διαλεκτικὴ μέθοδος μόνη ταύτη πορεύεται, τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀναιροῦσα, ἐπ’ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀρχὴν ἵνα βεβαιώσῃται (...).”

⁹⁹⁵ See 510b: “(...) τὸ δ’ αὖ ἕτερον – τὸ ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν ἀνυπόθετον – ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ἰοῦσα καὶ ἄνευ τῶν περὶ ἐκεῖνο εἰκόνων, αὐτοῖς εἶδεσι δι’ αὐτῶν τὴν μέθοδον ποιουμένη.” See also 511c: “(...) αἰσθητῶ παντάπασι οὐδενὶ προσχρόμενος, ἀλλ’ εἶδεν αὐτοῖς δι’ αὐτῶν εἰς αὐτά, καὶ τελευτᾷ εἰς εἶδη.”

⁹⁹⁶ See 510b and 511b.

⁹⁹⁷ Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4.

particular beings are somehow derived. This would be the ultimate foundation of all knowledge. Indeed, Plato seems to be describing what is implied in the idea of knowledge. Given the system of reciprocal influence of our views and of the things that correspond to them, one would need to reach something that underpins everything and does not depend on anything else. This is what would allow us to avoid the false, though coherent, system of views which is invoked in *Cratylus*.⁹⁹⁸

However, this is only a formal description and Plato does not go into much detail about the ultimate foundation of knowledge and the kind of foundation it implies. In the context of the *Republic*, the first principle seems to be ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα, which is designated as the greatest study (μέγιστον μάθημα).⁹⁹⁹ But Plato does not specify what exactly should we understand by “the good”. The analyses in the *Republic* are indirect (as Socrates himself declares) and no more than allusions.¹⁰⁰⁰ It is not clear if it is to be understood in a more abstract sense (as a structure of formal ontology) or in a more practical sense (in which case it would coincide with the individual good and the cosmic good).¹⁰⁰¹ Moreover, this passage in the *Republic* seems to be at odds with other texts. Even if there are other passages in the corpus where the good seems to be the key to understanding reality (such as in *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*), there are also other passages that seem to point in a different direction.¹⁰⁰² The most striking instance is the *Sophist*, where the ultimate foundation of reality seem to be the μέγιστα γένη, which are not even susceptible of being reduced to one principle. One thus wonders how to harmonize the different texts.

As for the kind of foundation involved in this model, Plato’s description is also vague. Before introducing the simile of the line, Socrates had said that the good is the source of knowledge and being for all other things (just as the sun is the source of knowledge and being for sensible reality), but it is not clear what this means.¹⁰⁰³ He says that the good illuminates everything as the sun does in the sensible domain, so it seems that if we have access to the

⁹⁹⁸ See 436d.

⁹⁹⁹ See 505a: “(...) ὅτι γε ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα μέγιστον μάθημα, πολλάκις ἀκήκοας (...).”

¹⁰⁰⁰ Socrates first declares he does not know what the good is (see 506b-c) and then he presents an image to clarify the thing itself – more precisely, he discusses what he calls “the child of the good” – namely, the sun – and says it is analogous to the good. See 506d-e and especially 508b-c: “ἄρ’ οὖν οὐ καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ὄψις μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, αἴτιος δ’ ὧν αὐτῆς ὀραῖται ὑπ’ αὐτῆς ταύτης; οὕτως, ἢ δ’ ὅς. τοῦτον τοίνυν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, φάναι με λέγειν τὸν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐκγονόν, ὃν τὰγαθὸν ἐγέννησεν ἀνάλογον ἑαυτῷ, ὅτιπερ αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ τόπῳ πρὸς τε νοῦν καὶ τὰ νοούμενα, τοῦτο τοῦτον ἐν τῷ ὀρατῷ πρὸς τε ὄψιν καὶ τὰ ὀρώμενα.”

¹⁰⁰¹ For a discussion of what is said in the *Republic* about the good, see in particular Chap. 12, Sect. 6.3 below.

¹⁰⁰² Cp. *Phd.* 97b ff., *Ti.* 28a ff.

¹⁰⁰³ See 509b-c: “τὸν ἥλιον τοῖς ὀρωμένοις οὐ μόνον οἶμαι τὴν τοῦ ὀρᾶσθαι δύναμιν παρέχειν φήσεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὐξὴν καὶ τροφήν, οὐ γένεσιν αὐτὸν ὄντα. πῶς γάρ; καὶ τοῖς γινωσκομένοις τοίνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γινώσκεισθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ’ ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.”

good, we will understand all other things. They may in a way be contained in the good itself or be part of its identity, which would thus be a systematic identity. But Plato's analysis is very far from showing that it is so or explaining how can this be.

A different problem is how exactly are we to identify the first principle. Plato only indicates a direction of investigation and does not say how we are to proceed. He talks of separating the form of the good from everything else and going through every test (ἐλεγχος).¹⁰⁰⁴ But how is it to be separated and tested? The only clues we find point to a deductive system, which we can understand better if we examine the ὑποθέσεις of hypothetical examinations and focus exclusively on εἶδη. But this is still far from being a clear indication of method. It is also not clear whether philosophical examination is supposed to be concluded with the inquiry of the first principle or if there is still some kind of inquiry that is supposed to follow it. In the *Republic*, one will be required to legislate and regulate all life in the πόλις in light of this knowledge, so this may still require some sort of examination. Finally, the connection with the inquiries that constitute the third subsegment is also problematic. Must all views one had acquired previously (especially in the particular sciences) be reformulated on this new basis or is it rather a matter of reviewing them, to see if they contained any defects that escaped notice? Plato does not say. It does seem that philosophical examination is not entirely concluded once one determines the source of all intelligibility and all being, but it is not entirely clear what else should be done and how.¹⁰⁰⁵

3.3. The method of division

There is one more kind of method in the corpus that seems to be able to produce positive results. Its relation and possible combination with the methods previously considered is not clear, but it appears to complement them. This method employs divisions – in particular dichotomies – in order to determine things. It seems to concern exclusively εἶδη. It

¹⁰⁰⁴ See 534b-c: “οὐκοῦν καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ὡσαύτως· ὅς ἂν μὴ ἔχη διορίσασθαι τῷ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων ἀφελῶν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν, καὶ ὥσπερ ἐν μάχῃ διὰ πάντων ἐλέγχων διεξιῶν, μὴ κατὰ δόξαν ἀλλὰ κατ’ οὐσίαν προθυμούμενος ἐλέγχειν, ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις ἀπῴπι τῷ λόγῳ διαπορεύηται, οὔτε αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸν φήσεις εἶδέναι τὸν οὕτως ἔχοντα οὔτε ἄλλο ἀγαθὸν οὐδέν (...).”

¹⁰⁰⁵ For other discussions of these questions, cp. the texts mentioned in footnote 991 and, in addition, see also e.g. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Ithaca/New York, Cornell University Press, 1941, 162-191; D. BALTZLY, “To an unhypothetical first principle” in *Plato's Republic, History of Philosophy Quarterly* 13 (1996), 149–65; D. BAILEY, *Plato and Aristotle on the Unhypothetical*, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 30 (2006), 101-126.

establishes contrasts between them and derives some of them from more general εἶδη, thus allowing one to better understand their content and determinations.¹⁰⁰⁶

The method is briefly described in *Phaedrus* (265d ff.) and exhaustively employed in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. In *Philebus* (14c ff.), Socrates outlines a method (which we discussed above) that closely resembles it.¹⁰⁰⁷ Once more, it is difficult to determine how the different presentations relate to each other and whether they correspond to the same method or to different ones which are nevertheless very similar.

In *Phaedrus*, Socrates talks of a method of collection and division. He says that one must see the resemblances between things, but also their differences. This is necessary for speaking and thinking well.¹⁰⁰⁸ One starts with the resemblances. The same predicates are scattered through many different things and one must bring them together and isolate the εἶδος they correspond to.¹⁰⁰⁹ However, similarity is a slippery thing, as is said in the *Sophist*, and so one must be on the lookout for significant differences.¹⁰¹⁰ In other words, one must separate things from one another. After collecting them and grouping them under one heading, one must see if some distinctions can be made and then one must divide them by their natural joints.¹⁰¹¹ This allows one to see how complex certain realities can be.

The idea is further developed in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, where two specific entities (namely, the sophist and the statesman) are to be defined by dividing a general εἶδος or γένος into two different ones and repeating the process until one reaches something uncuttable or atomic, in which one can find no more distinctions.¹⁰¹² While doing so, one cannot be too hasty and skip any division, even if they have no name. The division must be as

¹⁰⁰⁶ The method follows the Greek tradition of identifying polarities in order to determine things, as well as Prodicus' διαίρεσις ὀνομάτων, which was used to clarify the meaning of words. Some of the distinctions we find in the corpus even imitate the traditional model of distinguishing the good and bad form of something, as when Hesiod distinguishes a good ἔρις and a bad ἔρις (see *Opera et dies*, 11-26). But we will not consider here the particular distinctions made in the corpus and how they relate with other distinctions in Greek culture. We will only consider Plato's presentation of a method of division and how it may help to find out the truth about things.

¹⁰⁰⁷ For a discussion of this passage, cp. Chap. 6, Sects. 2.3a) and 2.4.

¹⁰⁰⁸ See *Phdr.* 266b: “τούτων δὲ ἔγωγε αὐτός τε ἐραστής, ὦ Φαῖδρε, τῶν διαιρέσεων καὶ συναγωγῶν, ἵνα οἷός τε ᾧ λέγειν τε καὶ φρονεῖν (...).”

¹⁰⁰⁹ See 265d: “εἰς μίαν τε ἰδέαν συνορῶντα ἄγειν τὰ πολλαχῆ διεσπαρμένα, ἵνα ἕκαστον ὀρίζομενος δῆλον ποιῆ περὶ οὗ ἂν αἰεὶ διδάσκειν ἐθέλη.”

¹⁰¹⁰ See 231a: “τὸν δὲ ἀσφαλῆ δεῖ πάντων μάλιστα περὶ τὰς ὁμοιότητας αἰεὶ ποιεῖσθαι τὴν φυλακὴν· ὀλισθηρότατον γὰρ τὸ γένος.”

¹⁰¹¹ *Phdr.* 265e: “τὸ πάλιν κατ' εἶδη δύνασθαι διατέμνειν κατ' ἄρθρα ἧ πέφυκεν, καὶ μὴ ἐπιχειρεῖν καταγνύναι μέρος μηδέν, κακοῦ μαγεῖρου τρόπῳ χρώμενον (...).”

¹⁰¹² Cp. *Sph.* 229d: “ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἡμῖν ἔτι καὶ τοῦτο σκεπτέον, ἄρ' ἄτομον ἤδη ἐστὶ πᾶν ἢ τινα ἔχον διαίρεσιν ἀξίαν ἐπωνυμίας.”

small as possible, in order to establish all possible contrasts and identify all intermediate principles of distinction.¹⁰¹³

In *Philebus*, as we saw, Socrates speaks of a method that allows one to develop a τέχνη: namely, by identifying all inner divisions of a particular unity (i.e., all classes of being within a general class or domain of reality) that have, in turn, infinite instances in sensible reality.¹⁰¹⁴ The whole system resulting from division (the number and specification of all intermediate classes) is what actually supplies a perfect knowledge of a certain domain of reality – as in the case of letters and sound, which Socrates uses as an example.¹⁰¹⁵

But what exactly is the status of this method of divisions? And what can we reach through it? Is it universally valid? Or is its validity restricted to a certain domain? As was said, the method appears to be exclusively concerned with εἶδη and their relations. Does this mean it cannot, at least directly, be applied to particular beings? Perhaps that is the case, but it is always indirectly relevant, insofar as particular beings depend on the εἶδη in order to be determined. It is also uncertain whether the method can be applied to all εἶδη. If we look at the *Sophist*, we notice that the identification and discussion of the μέγιστα γένη is not connected with the method of division in any way. They are not obtained through this method nor are they used as material for other divisions. This raises another question – namely, whether or not the method can be used to determine the very starting-point of the division. In the *Sophist*, the whole tree of divisions starts with the division between possessing a τέχνη or not and goes on to define the sophist through several subdivisions. But what is the status of the initial division and why does it start there? Is it arbitrary? Is it supposed to be a self-evident beginning? And what is it a division of? How is the overarching εἶδος to be defined? By its own division or through some other means? In fact, here (as well as in the *Philebus*) the highest elements to be divided seem to be unexamined assumptions. Their meaning is taken for granted and the characters simply proceed by dividing them. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of a collection that precedes the division, but he does not explain how this is to be performed.

The method seems therefore to have a limited validity. But this is not its only problem. It is also unclear how the differences within each γένος or εἶδος are to be identified.

¹⁰¹³ Cp. *Plt.* 262a-b: “μη μικρὸν μόριον ἐν πρὸς μεγάλα καὶ πολλὰ ἀφαιρῶμεν, μηδὲ εἶδους χωρὶς· ἀλλὰ τὸ μέρος ἅμα εἶδος ἐχέτω. κάλλιστον μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων εὐθὺς διαχωρίζειν τὸ ζητούμενον, ἂν ὀρθῶς ἔχη, καθάπερ ὀλίγον σὺ πρότερον οἴηθεις ἔχειν τὴν διαίρεσιν ἐπέσπευσας τὸν λόγον, ἰδὼν ἐπ’ ἀνθρώπους πορευόμενον· ἀλλὰ γάρ, ὦ φίλε, λεπτοῦργεῖν οὐκ ἀσφαλές, διὰ μέσων δὲ ἀσφαλέστερον ἵεναι τέμνοντας, καὶ μᾶλλον ιδέαις ἢ τις προστυγχάνοι.”

¹⁰¹⁴ See 16d-17a and 18a-b.

¹⁰¹⁵ See 17a-17e and 18b-d.

They seem to be intuitive, and sometimes this causes problems and ends up leading to several different routes of definition (and thus several different definitions), as is the case of the sophist.¹⁰¹⁶ It is not clear whether or not there is a way to be sure that one is identifying the aspects that should be distinguished. The method seems to be characterized by a certain degree of uncertainty – and this raises another problem. It is indeed questionable whether the result of the whole process is a full insight into a particular being or simply a greater clarity about it. By identifying a system of genera and species, and by and locating something therein, one is able to see this reality more clearly. One prevents confusions – or more specifically, one avoids thinking that dissimilar things are similar and the converse.¹⁰¹⁷ But it is uncertain whether one can reach a true definition or λόγος of something (i.e., a view that really grasps what something is) by employing this method.¹⁰¹⁸

3.4. The combination of the positive methods as a problem

The different methodological reflections just discussed complement Plato's project of an ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης. They present a more positive and constructive examination. Instead of focusing on whether or not we actually know what we think we know, they explore views we are not convinced of and try to determine how things actually are. While employing them, we may discover new views, adopt new beliefs and perhaps even find out the truth about things. However, the different presentations of a positive method point in different directions and this divergence raises the question of how they relate to each other. Are they alternate ways of conducting a more positive examination? Or are they complementary and in some way sequential? Plato gives no clear indication about this. In fact, the different methods are discussed in different contexts and their relation never becomes an explicit problem. There is

¹⁰¹⁶ Cp. *Sph.* 231b-232b, where the Visitor and Theaetetus recapitulate the results of the first attempts at defining the sophist and prepare for the last attempt.

¹⁰¹⁷ Cp. *Phdr.* 262a: “δεῖ ἄρα τὸν μέλλοντα ἀπατήσῃν μὲν ἄλλον, αὐτὸν δὲ μὴ ἀπατήσεσθαι, τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῶν ὄντων καὶ ἀνομοιότητα ἀκριβῶς διειδέναι.”

¹⁰¹⁸ For more on this method, cp. e.g. A. LLOYD, Plato's Description of Division, *The Classical Quarterly* 2 (1952), 105-112; H. KOLLER, Die dihäretische Methode, *Glotta* 39 (1961), 6-24; J. PHILIP, Platonic Diairesis, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 97 (1966), 335-358; J. TREVASKIS, Division and Its Relation to Dialectic and Ontology in Plato, *Phronesis* 12 (1967), 118-129; S. COHEN, Plato's Method of Division, in: J. MORAVCSIK (ed.), *Patterns in Plato's Thought*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1973, 181-91; J. MORAVCSIK, Plato's Method of Division, in: IDEM (ed.), *Patterns in Plato's Thought*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1973, 158-180; D. De CHIARA-QUENZER, The Purpose of the Philosophical Method in Plato's *Statesman*, *Apeiron* 31 (1998), 91-126; M. GILL, Division and Definition in Plato's *Sophist* and *Statesman*, in: D. CHARLES (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 172-99; L. FRANKLIN, Dichotomy and Platonic Diairesis, *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 28 (2011), 1-20.

no unitary description of a positive method in the corpus and no presentation of a royal road to truth either.

One may even wonder whether these methods and their presentations are definitive or only provisional. Perhaps we can find other methods, either alluded in the texts or completely neglected. These other methods may be based in a similar understanding of ourselves (namely, that we have views, that they affect the examination, and so on) or they could stem from a very different conception of who we are and what are the circumstances in which the examination takes place. The history of philosophy offered us many other methods – and it is not clear that the ones considered by Plato are the best or most effective. So what is the meaning of this disconnection and incompleteness? What is the status of the methods conceived by Plato?

It is not easy to answer these questions, which goes to show just how complicated it is to establish a positive method of philosophical examination. Perhaps this method is not something we can decide beforehand. Perhaps we have to experiment with different methods, set out exploring in different directions, and examine the results of our exploration. At least this is what is suggested in the corpus. The definition of the positive or constructive side of examination is itself a problem and a task. Plato gives us some instruments to make some progress, but our relation with these instruments must be critical and we must be open to changes of direction, based on the progresses we make. The road to reaching perfect knowledge (assuming there is one) is complex and shifting. We may take different paths and there is no method to determine which ones we are to take and in what order. We must go forward and explore. We are in a labyrinth of possibilities and we have no map. In fact, we do not even have a guarantee that we can get out of the labyrinth and find truth. All possibilities are still open.¹⁰¹⁹

We have thus no easy way of determining the role each positive method conceived by Plato is to play in discovering the truth – and this renders all these methods problematic. But one thing is certain, though: the way Plato describes them lets us see some of the most important components that characterize the idea of knowledge. Knowledge involves agreement or coherence (ὁμολογία, συμφωνία) among our views; it requires our views to be grounded and to have a solid foundation; it implies an exhaustive analysis of each reality; and most importantly, it is primarily concerned with εἶδη and requires us to have a clear

¹⁰¹⁹ In this respect, the positive side of philosophical examination is no easier than the negative side, which demanded us to be exhaustively cleansed of our views, without fully explaining how this was to be done and whether it was at all possible (and at what cost). Cp. Chap. 8, Sect. 3.

understanding of them. In general, these methods aim at achieving these goals and in the process they clarify all the views we examine. They define their content and implications, what grounds them and how they relate to each other.

Seen from this angle, the positive side of philosophical examination bears a close resemblance to its negative side, which was also concerned with clarifying our views, in order to let us see their inconsistencies. But how exactly do the two sides relate to each other?

4. The interrelation between the destructive and the constructive sides of philosophical examination

It is not difficult to see that there is a certain continuity between the two kinds of examination. They both require us to articulate and rationally discuss views (or, in other words, they both employ *λόγος*) and through this they check the agreement or disagreement of views, as well as their grounds. They both try to see and assess a system of views. But the negative and the positive examinations have different purposes. The former reviews the views (or beliefs) we endorse, while the latter tries to determine what are the correct views about something. Their relation to the object of examination (namely, the different views) is thus different in both cases. As a result, the scope of each form of examination is also different. Elenctic examination is more focused on one's individual beliefs, while zetetic examination refers to all possible views.

Despite this important difference, the two kinds of examination are not completely impervious to each other. On the one hand, elenctic examination may very well include constructive elements. While trying to identify and articulate our own views or beliefs (which, as we saw, are mostly tacit), we may change them in some way and add new views. We may also contemplate other possible views of which we are not convinced, and consequently we may start focusing our attention on the thing itself and not just on what we believe about it. On the other hand, zetetic examination also refutes false views and therefore it may help us to cast away false beliefs. Perhaps we could even say that the two kinds of philosophical examination are never completely separated from one another, but they rather coexist in different degrees and usually one of them prevails over the other. This is why it is better to talk of two sides of philosophical examination.

Elenctic examination and zetetic examination are to a certain extent entangled, and we may even wonder whether they are to be conceived as two stages that come one after the

other. Plato presents the ἐκβολή as a propaedeutic stage, but it is not clear if we must be absolutely done with the cathartic examination in order to start the positive and constructive examination. It seems that ideally that should be the case, but the elenctic process is very difficult to conclude. Moreover, it may be very difficult to deal with our lack of knowledge in some matters (especially the most important ones) – and so we may need the constructive examination long before being done with the cathartic process. On the other hand, it is also not certain that elenctic examination is something we may ever be done with and leave behind, especially because we may acquire new and potentially false convictions after starting the constructive examination. We have to keep examining our beliefs. In sum, philosophical examination seems to require a constant to and fro movement and its division in two stages is somewhat artificial. While examining, we may always have beliefs that require ἔλεγχος and we may always need to acquire new views.

The two kinds of philosophical examination constitute a unity and in a way this unity comes close to what Plato calls διαλεκτική. The term dialectic is somewhat plastic and Plato uses it to designate different methods.¹⁰²⁰ However, at its core it describes a τέχνη that knows how to use conversations (and more precisely cross-examinations) in order to rationally discuss what is said, put it to test and ascertain its truth. In other words, it uses λόγος as a verbalization that at the same time has to render account of what is being said, justify it, in order to fully grasp the truth about something. The conversations brought about by this τέχνη are therefore very demanding and productive. They let us see the relations between things, let us realize our ignorance, and let us find out new possibilities – and even new truths. Philosophical examination is precisely this movement of rational discussion, and the configuration it assumes at each stage is only determined by our cognitive state and the progress we already made.

¹⁰²⁰ For more on this, see Chap. 4, Sect. 2.6 above (especially footnote 462).

CONCLUSION OF PART II

As was said, the main goal of this Part II is to define the kind of examination that unexamined life lacks and without which it is not worth living, according to the *Apology*. There are indeed many ordinary forms of examination, but Plato has a particular form of examination in mind, which we labeled philosophical examination. The Platonic corpus provides many illustrations and discussions of this special kind of examination. However, these illustrations and discussions are scattered through many different passages and they might often appear to be inconsistent and incompatible (as was shown in Chapter 4). But we took the different elements from their immediate context and attempted to conciliate them in a single methodological reflection. Although this made us lose sight of many particularities of the different passages, it also gave us a more complex notion of what is required in order to lead an examined life and what its challenges are.

We started by looking at the most important traits of Plato's portrayal of philosophical examination in the corpus, which consists of many different images whose common structure is not immediately clear (Chapter 4). We then tried to determine the object of philosophical examination and saw that it is always applied to the views we adopted (our beliefs) or which can be adopted by us (Chapter 5). Afterwards, we considered the complexity and intricacy of our beliefs (Chapter 6), as well as their possible defects (Chapter 7). Finally, we considered what philosophical examination does to our views or beliefs – namely, how it tries to expel all our defective beliefs (Chapter 8) and find new and better ones (Chapter 9). These two moments or directions of examination are not two different projects, but rather two constitutive parts of the project of attaining knowledge, which requires us to avoid any distortions in our way of seeing things and also to acquire all knowledge we lack.

We have thus determined a unitary concept of philosophical examination. This is not explicitly presented as such by Plato, but it results from putting together all the indications he gives throughout his writings. The result is not definitive and it seems to require some further indications, especially with respect to the positive method of philosophical examination. But what we saw already gives us a pretty good idea of what an unexamined life is lacking. However, there are several questions that are still open. For instance, it is not clear what shape our life will take once philosophical examination is correctly and fully carried out. In

other words, it is not clear how philosophical examination will affect our life and what its outcome will be.¹⁰²¹ Moreover, the formal description of the project does not yet let us realize the full importance of embracing philosophical examination. We still have to consider how our life is structured and what the consequences of leading an unexamined life are.¹⁰²² We also failed to consider the elaborate protreptic techniques Socrates uses throughout the corpus in order to convince both his interlocutors and the reader to examine – since they too require a consideration of our life structure.¹⁰²³ Despite the importance of these questions for a full definition of philosophical examination, we will only be able to discuss them at a later stage.

¹⁰²¹ We will briefly discuss this question at the end, in Chapter 20, after determining the structure of our life and the main features of an unexamined life, which will be deeply modified by this kind of examination.

¹⁰²² These questions will require a long discussion. See Chaps. 10-18.

¹⁰²³ For a brief analysis of this question, see Chap. 19, Sect. 4.

PART III

The inner constitution of human life according to Plato

“L’œil de l’esprit ne peut trouver nulle part plus d’éblouissements ni plus de ténèbres que dans l’homme; il ne peut se fixer sur aucune chose qui soit plus redoutable, plus compliquée, plus mystérieuse et plus infinie. Il y a un spectacle plus grand que la mer, c’est le ciel; il y a un spectacle plus grand que le ciel, c’est l’intérieur de l’âme. [...] La conscience, c’est le chaos des chimères, des convoitises et des tentatives, la fournaise des rêves, l’antre des idées dont on a honte; c’est le pandémonium des sophismes, c’est le champ de bataille des passions. À de certaines heures, pénétrez à travers la face livide d’un être humain qui réfléchit, et regardez derrière, regardez dans cette âme, regardez dans cette obscurité. Il y a là, sous le silence extérieur, des combats de géants comme dans Homère, des mêlées de dragons et d’hydres et des nuées de fantômes comme dans Milton, des spirales visionnaires comme chez Dante. Chose sombre que cet infini que tout homme porte en soi et auquel il mesure avec désespoir les volontés de son cerveau et les actions de sa vie!”

Victor Hugo, *Les misérables*¹⁰²⁴

Before analyzing the structure of a life defined by the lack of philosophical examination (ἐξέτασις), we must consider what characterizes a way of life (a βίος) as such. The term βίος expresses a particular contraction of life’s possibilities. It often refers to one’s singular destiny in life, but it can also denote a life pattern that can be shared by many different people, and it is precisely the latter that is at issue when we talk of an unexamined life.¹⁰²⁵ In order to determine what is a βίος, we have therefore to consider the basic structures of life and see how they allow for different βίοι.

But when we talk of life’s structures we must bear in mind how problematic the term life is. Putting aside Greek terminology for a moment, life is something we can understand in a biological or in a biographical sense. Moreover, there are many lives and so it seems life is a regional and very circumscribed phenomenon. Each life is one among many. But at the same time, life as we experience it is something that somehow encompasses the whole of

¹⁰²⁴ See V. HUGO, *Œuvres complètes*. Roman, vol. 5, Paris, Hetzel-Quantin/Houssiaux, 1881, 394-395.

¹⁰²⁵ Cp. Chap. 3, Sect. 2.

reality. We are aware of other things and other people, and they are all part of our life. This life, in turn, is always lived in the first person. It is someone's life, and for this someone it is not something incidental. It constitutes their being. Consequently, asking about our life is asking about our own being. What kind of being are we? What is our own constitution? What differentiates us from all other beings?

We must then examine ourselves – and not just in the sense of examining our own views at large. We must examine our own being, or our views about ourselves (i.e., about the being that can devote itself to examination or neglect it). We must carry out an examination in which we will be simultaneously the examiners and the object of examination. This may seem simple, since we are absolutely familiarized with the being in question. However, despite the familiarity with ourselves, we often surprise or puzzle ourselves, which raises the suspicion that we may be partially (or even completely) deluded about ourselves. Turning our gaze to ourselves may indeed be everything but simple. It may be an extremely hard task, with many steps and subject to many limitations, errors and illusions. Moreover, we are usually unprepared for it, since such a self-examination is something we normally do not carry out – at least in such a developed form as we see in the Platonic corpus.

So how can we determine our own being? We are complex beings, composed of many different elements. Does this mean that we must make an inventory of all that composes us? No. We must rather see what pervades all these particular moments and brings them all together. We must find the unity or principle underlying everything in us, and then we will be able to consider the different elements that compose us and how they relate to each other. In other words, we must determine our identity or our self – viz. that which pervades all moments and makes them part of the same being. Moreover, the identity we are seeking is a very specific kind of identity. It is not simply a matter of personal identity – i.e., of what determines a particular person. It is also not a particular tribal identity (that determines people of a certain group or kind). We are asking about the identity of all people – of the species, as it were. This raises many epistemological problems. It is indeed not clear how we can know that we all have a similar identity. But regardless of that, we all have a notion of others and we constantly refer to this notion. We understand that despite the fact that our individual life somehow encompasses everything, there are other lives that have a structure similar to ours. We have something in common with others and the question then is how this common identity is to be conceived. In Greek terms, what exactly is the human nature (the ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις) – i.e., that which transcends individuals, circumstances and epochs?

The Greek notions of φύσις and ἄνθρωπος (which are very important in Plato, but whose meaning was in part already defined by previous thinkers) can help us better understand the problem we will be discussing in this Part III.

Let us first see what is involved in the notion of φύσις.¹⁰²⁶ The word seems to refer originally to living beings and is associated with the ideas of birth, growth and manner of growth. It also designates the result of this growth and even the physical appearance of something or its characteristics.¹⁰²⁷ With respect to persons, these characteristics may correspond to one's temperament, endowment, aptitude or character. Φύσις is, at any rate, conceived as something innate, which is present from the start or develops automatically.¹⁰²⁸ Moreover, the characteristics in question also point to one's origin or provenance, especially insofar as the features of a living being tend to reflect the beings that generated it. From all these usages, we can easily see that the word can have both a dynamic sense (according to which φύσις is something that unfolds and actualizes itself) and a static sense (in which case it is understood as the composition, inner constitution or essence of something – i.e., that which makes something what it is). In fact, φύσις is most properly the essence that determines the range of possibilities available to a particular entity. It opens up some possibilities and closes off others. It sets the boundaries of what a particular being is and, as such, it is a kind of pre-established identity. In addition, it determines what the most

¹⁰²⁶ What follows is just a very brief synopsis of the word's meaning. For more on φύσις, see e.g. R. BURY, Δύναμις and φύσις in Plato, *The Classical Review* 8 (1894), 297-300; A. BENN, The Idea of Nature in Plato, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 9 (1896), 24-49; A. LOVEJOY, The Meaning of φύσις in the Greek Physiologists, *The Philosophical Review* 18 (1909), 369-383; P. SHOREY, Φύσις, Μελέτη, Ἐπιστήμη, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 40 (1909), 185-201; J. BEARDSLEE, *The Use of φύσις in Fifth-Century Greek Literature*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1918; W. VEAZIE, The Word φύσις, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 33 (1921), 3-22; H. KÖSTER, φύσις, φυσικός, φυσικῶς, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; O. THIMME, Φύσις, τρόπος, ἦθος. Semasiologische Untersuchung über die Auffassung des menschlichen Wesens (Charakters) in der älteren griechischen Literatur, Diss. Tübingen, 1935; F. HEINIMANN, *Nomos und Physis. Herkunft und Bedeutung einer Antithese im griechischen Denken des 5. Jahrhunderts*, Basel, Reinhardt, 1945; M. POHLENZ, Nomos und Physis, *Hermes* 81 (1953), 418-438; D. HOLWERDA, Φύσις. Vi atque usu praesertim in Graecitate Aristotele Anteriore, Groningen, Wolters, 1955; P. JOOS, *Τύχη, φύσις, τέχνη*. Studien zur Thematik frühgriechischer Lebensbetrachtung, Winterthur, Keller, 1955; M. MICHLER, Die Praktische Bedeutung des Normativen Physis-Begriffes in der Hippokratischen Schrift *De Fracturis – De Articulis*, *Hermes* 90 (1962), 385-401; D. MANNSPERGER, *Physis bei Platon*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1969; F. MARZOA, Εἶναι, φύσις, λόγος, ἀληθείη, *Emerita* 42 (1974), 159-175; H. PATZER, *Physis*. Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte des Wortes, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 1993; G. NADDAF, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 2006.

¹⁰²⁷ This seems to be the sense of the oldest occurrence of the word, in the *Odyssey*, where it is used of a plant. See X.302-303: ὦς ἄρα φωνήσας πόρε φάρμακον Ἀργεϊφόντης/ ἐκ γαίης ἐρύσας, καί μοι φύσιν αὐτοῦ ἔδειξε.”

¹⁰²⁸ In some cases the notion may be broad or indeterminate enough to include some features that are the result of one's upbringing, though this upbringing was still seen as almost hereditary, insofar as it was intrinsically associated with the fact of belonging to a certain family and with growing up in a certain environment. For more on this, see e.g. K. DOVER, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, Berkeley/L. A., University of California Press, 1974, 83ff.

meaningful possibilities for this being are or what its most proper possibility is (i.e., that which it will naturally tend to).¹⁰²⁹

Φύσις is thus opposed to the notion of pure chance (τύχη). The existence of a certain φύσις implies that a particular being is constituted in a certain manner and the course of its being follows a certain rule or set of rules. Its occurrence is ordered and constant, not random. However, this order and constancy do not exclude a certain degree of variation. First, a being may not be pre-determined in some respects and therefore may be free to be determined in different ways. Consequently, beings with a similar structure may differ – and the differences may even go to the point of allowing one to talk of different natures. This is for instance what happens with human beings. Although there is something like a human nature, different persons may also have different natures (in the above mentioned sense of having different temperaments, characters, and so on). Moreover, some beings may be unable to achieve their proper condition by themselves (i.e., they may be unable to fulfill their potential because of external factors or due to their own weakness) and this allows for further variation. But if some being is weak (or perhaps not good enough), it may also be object of care (θεραπεία) and even technical intervention, in order to improve it. We may intervene in what something is and try to change it, and we can do this even when there is no constitutive debility. Our intervention may then lead to a strong variation and to the transgression of a being's natural boundaries.¹⁰³⁰ This possibility is particularly relevant in the case of human beings, as we will see. The Sophists in particular were very aware of our possibilities of variation – and so was Plato. Many things in our life are not determined by nature, but rather by custom (νόμος), although the latter tends to be regarded or experienced as nature.¹⁰³¹ We can determine our life to a point and we may even resort to τέχνη in order to do it.

We may therefore change, and change deeply. But what does this mean for the notion of φύσις? It may seem that in such a case there is no stable φύσις. However, the being in question and its variation may still be limited by some constitutive principles – i.e., by a

¹⁰²⁹ The concept of φύσις may thus assume a normative or prescriptive sense and designate the normal, healthy or perfect condition of something. This is a sense we often find in medicine. Here the body and its parts may move from or towards (παρά or κατά) their natural constitution. In this sense, a dislodged bone is something that is against “nature” and its reposition is a movement towards “nature”. For more on this and for bibliographical references, cp. M. MICHLER, *op. cit.*

¹⁰³⁰ In this sense, φύσις is opposed to the idea of an expert knowledge (τέχνη) that intervenes in the natural course of things, and changes, adds or removes something in them. Φύσις is precisely associated with the immediate course of things, which may or may not contain limitations that require a technical intervention. As such, the word φύσις is also opposed to the ideas of practice, training or learning (μελέτη, άσκησις, πόνος, διδασχή, and so on), insofar as the latter always involve an artificial manipulation of things or of ourselves.

¹⁰³¹ Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.2.

particular φύσις. In fact, the possibility of variations raises the question about whether or not there is a possible range of variation allowed by our inner constitution. We may doubt that there is such a thing as a “nature” (in particular a human nature), in the sense of a formal structure that can be found in different beings and determines their possibilities – and in particular the possibilities it should actualize in order to be a fulfilled being (to achieve its perfect condition). However, we must bear in mind that this nature may be understood in a very specific and closed sense (especially in what regards the perfect condition of something) or in a more open and less restrictive sense. Furthermore, the nature of a particular being or kind of beings is not necessarily something that can be easily identified. Often, if not always, the opposite is the case. As Heraclitus says, “nature is wont to hide herself”.¹⁰³² It is constitutively problematic and determining it requires much effort and examination.

This is all the more valid for the kind of being that we are. There are many individual and cultural differences between human beings, so it is not clear what is our common nature – i.e., what makes us what we are or what determines our range of possibilities. At first it is not even clear that there is such a thing as a human nature, or that it is not something vague and unspecific. So what exactly is a human being and how can we determine it? We may find some meaningful indications for this problem if we briefly consider the Greek understanding of the term ἄνθρωπος and how it relates to the discovery of the unity of all humankind. The definition of human being played an important role in pre-Platonic thinking and it strongly resonates in Plato. So let us then see the most important traits of the notion of ἄνθρωπος.

As a term for the species, ἄνθρωπος is opposed to the regular identification of an individual as a member of a social group or a tribe. In the Ancient world, the fundamental distinctions were the ones between tribes, between an “us” and a “them”, and not so much those between human beings and other beings. One was primarily a member of a tribe, and the latter determined how one should think and how one should live. One had to conform to a shared way of thinking and living. Only by doing so could one be acknowledged and deemed worthy. There was no idea of all human beings having an intrinsic dignity. Dignity was restricted to the tribe.¹⁰³³ However, even the tribe was not regarded as homogeneous and the main category of identification was in fact restricted to a particular kind of member of the tribe: the ἀνὴρ, i.e., the free male, the full citizen, who shares the common understanding of

¹⁰³² See DK B123: “φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ.”

¹⁰³³ One could perhaps recognize dignity in some strangers (ξένοι), although this is only guaranteed by the individuals who receive them in the πόλις (i.e., by their φίλος). As for other categories, such as one’s race or Greek identity, they were rather vague and, at any rate, weaker than the identity of the πόλις.

what matters in life and is thus qualified to partake in common deliberations and common undertakings.¹⁰³⁴ Moreover, one can still establish a difference of social standing between the so-called better and the vulgar men (the ἄριστοι and the φαῦλοι), and only the former are men in the most proper sense. The notion of man in this pre-eminent sense is thus very far from the notion of a universal condition. Most people (including women, children or slaves) are excluded from the most important category. There are the highest representatives of the tribe and all others are inferior. In this sense, the default Greek understanding of human beings was male, aristocratic, and elitist. It was not concerned with the unity of all humankind and much less with the idea of all human beings having an intrinsic dignity. It was, therefore, very different from our modern understanding.

However, this does not mean that the Greeks did not have a specific notion of human nature. We find in Greek literature, ever since Homer, some passages that recognize a shared identity that binds everybody together and constitutes a kind of community of all human beings. This common identity corresponds to a condition that is essentially marked by vulnerability and suffering. We find a striking illustration of this in the dialogue between Achilles and Priam in book XXIV of the *Iliad*.¹⁰³⁵ Their condition as enemies is overcome by their shared suffering. Human beings are indeed mortals (θνητοί, βροτοί) and essentially defined by their mortality. They fall like leaves.¹⁰³⁶ They are weak, feeble, frail and transient. Their life is shadowy and insubstantial. They are ἐφήμεροι, which means both that they live but a day (i.e., are short-lived, can die at any second) and also that they are exposed to what the day brings, to all changes of fortune, which they cannot make “unhappen” (in fact, not even the gods are able to change what happened).¹⁰³⁷ Their life is uncertain and they roam about aimlessly. Their condition is one of helplessness (ἀμηχανία). They must fight for their survival; they must take many pains (πόννοι) in supplying for their needs; and they are always subject to the possibility of loss. Human life is full of pains and evils. As is said in the *Iliad*, “the gods [have] spun the thread for wretched mortals, that they should live in pain; and

¹⁰³⁴ The ἀνὴρ is recognized by the others as being lucid or having φρόνησις – i.e., as sharing the socially accepted version of truth. For more on this, cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 2.2 and Chap. 11 Sect. 2.3.

¹⁰³⁵ See vv. 485ff.

¹⁰³⁶ This was indeed a common topos. Cp. e.g. HOMER, *Iliad* VI.146-149 and ARISTOPHANES, *Aves*, 685-687. Although the term used in both passages is ἀνὴρ, the identification in question is the one associated with the term ἄνθρωπος.

¹⁰³⁷ See e.g. PINDAR, *Pythia* 8.95f.: “ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις; τί δ’ οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ/ ἄνθρωπος.” For the meaning of ἐφήμερος, see e.g. H. FRÄNKEL, Man’s “Ephemeros” Nature According to Pindar and Others, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 77 (1946), 131-145, and M. DICKIE, On the Meaning of ἐφήμερος, *Illinois Classical Studies* 1 (1975) 7–14. As for the idea of not even a god being able to change the past, see the verses of Agathon quoted by Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 1139b10-11): “μόνου γὰρ αὐτοῦ καὶ θεὸς στερίσκεται, ἀγέννητα ποιεῖν ἄσσο’ ἂν ἢ πεπραγμένα.”

themselves are sorrowless”.¹⁰³⁸ In the *Odyssey*, it is said that “nothing feebler does earth nurture than man, of all things that on earth are breathing and moving”.¹⁰³⁹ Our condition is pitiable, and we may even come to the point of desiring never having being born (μη φῦναι).¹⁰⁴⁰

In sum, human beings are characterized by their limitations. Their power and reach is limited and they can achieve almost nothing of what they want. Their knowledge is also very limited. Human beings see to no avail, they cannot discern many things.¹⁰⁴¹ They do not know the past, they do not know the present, and they cannot anticipate the future.¹⁰⁴² Their supposed knowledge is no more than conjecture or opinion.¹⁰⁴³ As a result, they commit many mistakes and are condemned to much roaming. To be sure, one can counteract these cognitive and practical limitations up to a point. We saw above that the self-presentation of the τέχναι in the 5th century BCE emphasizes precisely how human beings can in a sense invent themselves, create a new and better life, by findings new insights into things and constituting new τέχναι. This was so both in primitive times and at the time of the Sophists. Innovations bring better material conditions and allow human beings to live peacefully in πόλεις. It distinguishes human beings from beasts and savages. However, progress is still

¹⁰³⁸ See XXIV.525f.: “ὡς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι/ ζῶειν ἀχνυμένοις· αὐτοὶ δὲ τ’ ἀκηδέες εἰσί.” I use A. Murray’s translation – see HOMER, *The Iliad*, 2 vols., Cambridge (MA)/London, Harvard University Press/William Heinemann, 1924.

¹⁰³⁹ Cp. HOMER, *Odyssey*, XVIII.130-137: “(...) οὐδὲν ἀκιδνότερον γαῖα τρέφει ἀνθρώπιον,/ πάντων ὅσσα τε γαῖαν ἐπι πνείει τε καὶ ἔρπει./ οὐ μὲν γὰρ ποτέ φησι κακὸν πείσεσθαι ὀπίσσω,/ ὄφρ’ ἀρετὴν παρέχῃσι θεοὶ καὶ γούνατ’ ὀρώρη-/ ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ καὶ λυγρὰ θεοὶ μάκαρες τελέσωσι,/ καὶ τὰ φέρει ἀεκαζόμενος τετληότι θυμῶ-/ τοῖος γὰρ νόος ἐστὶν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων/ οἷον ἐπ’ ἡμᾶρ ἄγῃσι πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε.” I followed once again A. Murray’s translation – see HOMER, *The Odyssey*, 2 vols., Cambridge (MA)/London, Harvard University Press/William Heinemann, 1919.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Cp. e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus at Colonus*, vv. 1225ff.: μη φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νι/κᾶ λόγον· τὸ δ’, ἐπεὶ φανῆ/, βῆναι κείθεν ὅθεν περ ἦ/κει, πολὺ δεύτερον, ὡς τάχιστα.”

¹⁰⁴¹ Cp. e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Prometheus vinctus*, vv. 447-450: “οἱ πρῶτα μὲν βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην,/ κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον, ἀλλ’ ὄνειράτων/ ἀλίγκιοι μορφαῖσι τὸν μακρὸν βίον/ ἔφυρον εἰκῆ πάντα (...).” Although Prometheus is referring to the primitive human beings, the description also applies in a way to human beings in general (especially when one has no particular knowledge of τέχναι).

¹⁰⁴² Knowing the past, the present and the future was indeed a proverbial form of expressing a knowledge of things far superior to the one human beings normally have (such as the knowledge of a soothsayer or of the Muses). Cp. e.g. HOMER, *Iliad*, I.70, and HESIOD, *Theogonia*, v. 38.

¹⁰⁴³ See ALCMAEON, DK B1: “(...) περὶ τῶν ἀφανέων, περὶ τῶν θνητῶν σαφήνειαν μὲν θεοὶ ἔχοντι, ὡς δὲ ἀνθρώποις τεκμαίρεσθαι (...).” See also XENOPHANES, DK B34: “καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὐτις ἀνὴρ γέενε’ οὐδέ τις ἔσται/ εἰδὼς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων-/ εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπῶν,/ αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε· δόκος δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.” For a brief analysis of the latter passage, cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 2.1 above. For more on the limitations of human knowledge in comparison with the gods, see e.g. B. SNELL, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen, Hamburg, Claassen, 1955³ (1946¹), 184-202.

limited by things that cannot be overcome – in particular sickness and death. One is still very far from living a life of ease, as the one the gods have.¹⁰⁴⁴

All this outlines a scale of beings and determines the particular place of human beings in the cosmos. Humans are contrasted with animals, which are very limited by their lack of τέχνη. A human being is thus a risen animal.¹⁰⁴⁵ This superiority is often expressed by the idea that human beings alone of the animals possess a certain important characteristic – such as justice or intelligence.¹⁰⁴⁶ On the other hand, human beings are also contrasted with the gods, who are taken as the ideal mode of being or the standard of perfection. The gods are immortal (ἀθάνατοι) and live at ease (ῥεῖα ζώντες).¹⁰⁴⁷ Human beings are separated from them by an abyss. This is so in Archaic times and even later, when both conditions come closer and the rigid boundaries between humans and gods are somewhat undone. Pindar, for instance, emphasizes their common origin and how humans can resemble gods.¹⁰⁴⁸ Human beings will even be regarded as fallen gods, who desire to become divine again. One may perhaps overcome one's human condition. However, the latter is still seen as something intrinsically limited.¹⁰⁴⁹

Human beings are thus something in between animals and gods, and their relation to their own condition is one of dissatisfaction. They long for much more. They desire to be like the gods, which only makes matters worse. Not only can such high ambitions be the cause of much frustration, but if one becomes confident of being able to achieve all one wants, one may awake divine ill-will (φθόρος), or simply commit errors that cause great damage. In other words, one may overreach and thereby become the cause of one's undoing. Hence we find in Greek culture many warnings against high expectations and overconfidence. One is

¹⁰⁴⁴ For a consideration of these praises of the τέχνη and for bibliographical references, see Chap. 1 Sect. 2.2 above.

¹⁰⁴⁵ At this stage of Greek culture there is no exaltation of animals as we find in many animist cultures, in which animals are seen as equals or even as having a superior condition. The animals for the Greeks are usually the brutes. For more on this, see e.g. R. RENEHAN, *The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man*, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 85 (1981), 239-259, especially 244.

¹⁰⁴⁶ See e.g. HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, vv. 276-280: “τόνδε γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι νόμον διέταξε Κρονίων/ ἰχθύσι μὲν καὶ θηρσὶ καὶ οἰωνοῖς πετεηνοῖς/ ἔσθην ἀλλήλους, ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ’ αὐτοῖς-/ ἀνθρώποισι δ’ ἔδωκε δίκην, ἢ πολλὸν ἀρίστη/ γίνεται (...).” Cp. also ALCMAEON DK B2: “ἄνθρωπον γὰρ φησι τῶν ἄλλων διαφέρειν ὅτι μόνον ζυγήσει, τὰ δ’ ἄλλα αἰσθάνεται μὲν, οὐ ζυγήσει δέ.” For more on this, see e.g. R. RENEHAN, *op. cit.*, and S. NEWMYER, *The Animal and the Human in Ancient and Modern Thought*. The “Man Alone of the Animals” Concept, Abingdon/New York, 2017.

¹⁰⁴⁷ See e.g. *Iliad* III.298, 3.308, 6.138, *Odyssey* IV.805, V.122.

¹⁰⁴⁸ See *Nemea* 6.1-2: “ἐν ἀνδρῶν, ἐν θεῶν γένος· ἐκ μιᾶς δὲ πνέομεν/ ματρὸς ἀμφοτέρου (...).”

¹⁰⁴⁹ The continuation of Pindar's ode confirms precisely this. See vv. 2-7: “(...) διείργει δὲ πᾶσα κεκριμένα/ δύναμις, ὡς τὸ μὲν οὐδέν, ὁ δὲ/ χάλκεος ἀσφαλὲς αἰὲν ἔδος/ μένει οὐρανός. ἀλλὰ τι προσφέρομεν ἔμπαν ἢ μέγαν/ νόον ἦτοι φύσιν ἀθανάτοισι,/ καίπερ ἐφαμερίαν οὐκ εἰδότες οὐδὲ μετὰ νύκτας/ ἄμμε πότμος/ ἄντιν’ ἔγραψε δραμεῖν ποτὶ στάθμαν.”

rather encouraged to be aware of one's limitations (γνῶθι σαυτόν) and avoid excesses (μηδὲν ἄγαν).¹⁰⁵⁰

In sum, the Archaic Greek understanding of human being was very pessimistic. Human condition was not characterized by dignity. In fact, ἄνθρωπος is a disparaging or offensive term.¹⁰⁵¹ It indicates the lowliness or weakness of our condition. Despite all the differences that may exist between different human beings, one is always nothing more than a human being – and one should be very aware of it. This is, in its most fundamental traits, the Archaic understanding of what characterizes a human being as such, and we will find strong echoes of it in Plato's anthropology.

However, this is not the whole story. In the 5th century, with the development of τέχναι and new forms of knowledge, a new vision of the human being emerged. History, medicine and other disciplines began to consider human being in a more neutral way. The idea of humanity will no longer be essentially defined by its frailty, which to a certain extent can be overcome. Human beings are rather defined by having a particular inner constitution. Human physiology and psychological motivations became more important in defining the unity of humankind. It is also something of the sort that we will find in Plato. He analyzes human beings from a neutral standpoint, even if the Archaic understanding of our own frailty and our longing for more also resonate in his analyses.¹⁰⁵²

So what is then common to all human beings according to Plato? What is human nature? What constitutes it? And how does this determine the contraction of possibilities that corresponds to the notion of βίος? How does it outline different ways of life?

¹⁰⁵⁰ This is precisely what characterizes the wisdom of Delphos and tragic wisdom, as we saw above. Cp. Chap. 2, Sects. 1.1 and 1.3. We should accept our condition and think mortal thoughts. On the idea of thinking mortal thoughts (θνητὰ φρονεῖν), cp. e.g. SOPHOCLES, fr. 590, EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 773-804 and *Bacchae* 386-401.

¹⁰⁵¹ This resonates in its use as a vocative, which is actually pretty common in the Platonic corpus (see e.g. *Ap.* 28b, *Prt.* 330d, *Smp.* 206c).

¹⁰⁵² For more on this, see e.g. H. BALDRY, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought*, Cambridge, University Press, 1965.

CHAPTER 10

The problematic conception of human being as ψυχή

“ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο, πᾶσαν ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδόν·
οὔτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει”.
Heraclitus, DK B45

What is a human being (ἄνθρωπος)? We find precisely this question in *Alcibiades I*, along with some suggested answers. Socrates inquires whether the human being is the body, the ψυχή or the two of them together (συναμφότερον), i.e., the whole thing (τὸ ὅλον).¹⁰⁵³ This formulation of the question shows that we have some kind of relation both to the σῶμα and to the ψυχή, and that they constitute some kind of whole. It is not a question of having or not having a body, nor is it a matter of having or not a non-bodily element. It is an established fact that we have them. But this fact is not sufficient to account for our being, because it does not show how these elements are constituted, interconnected and what exactly is the center that holds everything together. Socrates goes on to identify the human being with the ψυχή.¹⁰⁵⁴ This does not mean that there is no body or that we have no relation to it, for precisely what proves that we are a ψυχή is the fact that the latter uses and controls the body.¹⁰⁵⁵ In other words, the ψυχή is intrinsically referred to the body. But let us leave aside Socrates' arguments for now. The important thing here is how, according to this conception, the body does not lie at the center of our being, but is rather on the periphery of ourselves. This may be surprising. The body is something we seem to know very well. We can touch it, feel it, and it is normally not mistaken for something else or seen as particularly mysterious. Thus, we tend to identify ourselves with it. But here there is a different protagonist: that which Plato calls ψυχή. We are something that surpasses or transcends the body. Each human

¹⁰⁵³ Cp. 129e-130a: “[ΣΩ] τί ποτ’ οὖν ὁ ἄνθρωπος; (...) [ΣΩ] καὶ μὴν τόδε γ’ οἶμαι οὐδένα ἂν ἄλλως οἰηθῆναι. [ΑΛ] τὸ ποῖον; [ΣΩ] μὴ οὐ τριῶν ἓν γέ τι εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον. [ΑΛ] τίνων; [ΣΩ] ψυχὴν ἢ σῶμα ἢ συναμφότερον, τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο. [ΑΛ] τί μὴν;”

¹⁰⁵⁴ See 130c: “ἐπειδὴ δ’ οὔτε σῶμα οὔτε τὸ συναμφότερόν ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος, λείπεται οἶμαι ἢ μηδὲν αὐτ’ εἶναι, ἢ εἴπερ τί ἐστι, μηδὲν ἄλλο τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχὴν.”

¹⁰⁵⁵ Cp. 129b-130c.

being is a ψυχή. This is our essential self. It makes us what we are and everything else is subordinated to it.¹⁰⁵⁶

However, such a way of determining our own being or our φύσις is very far from settling the question, because ψυχή is not something that can be easily identified and defined.¹⁰⁵⁷ It is not immediately accessible. Rather, it is essentially invisible.¹⁰⁵⁸ Then how can such a thing be discerned and understood? What is Plato referring to? At first, it is not easy to say, and the question is even more complicated for us nowadays, because of the subsequent history of philosophy. We tend to regard the opposition between body and ψυχή as a metaphysical dualism, whereby we imagine ourselves looking at the body and the ψυχή from the outside, as two different things, clearly distinguishable from one another. Such a dualism is full of problems and if this is what Plato has in mind, then we will be tempted to promptly dismiss it as naive and outdated. However, things may not be that simple. Plato may very well have something else in mind, and we will try to show how that is precisely the case. Plato understands ψυχή primarily as an inner component of our own being, which means that it is something we experience from within, in the first-person perspective. Moreover, it is not easy to dissociate our ψυχή from the body, as we will see. Thus, Plato's analyses cannot be reduced to a clear-cut dualism.

In order to understand this, we may perhaps begin by considering the problem of how to translate ψυχή. It is indeed difficult to find a proper rendering of the word in English because its semantic field does not entirely coincide with any of the words normally used to translate it. In fact, the usual renderings tend to obstruct our access to what Plato has in mind, but a consideration of their limitations may help put us in the right track.

The most common translation of ψυχή is “soul”, which is a word with strong religious and metaphysical connotations. When we talk about soul we tend to think of a simple, unitary substance that cannot be destroyed. It is divine and at least potentially in contact with god. It is also connected with our ultimate destiny or with what happens after dying. It can thus come close to the meaning of spirit or ghost. It is true that the word soul can also be linked with the idea of ethical value and moral judgment, and in this sense our soul is our moral self. Likewise, the word can be associated with feeling and with our emotional self. But what is

¹⁰⁵⁶ Cp. *Lg.* 959a-b: “(...) ψυχήν σώματος εἶναι τὸ πᾶν διαφέρουσαν, ἐν αὐτῷ τε τῷ βίῳ τὸ παρεχόμενον ἡμῶν ἕκαστον τοῦτ' εἶναι μηδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ τὴν ψυχήν, τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἰνδαλλόμενον ἡμῶν ἑκάστοις ἔπεσθαι (...).”

¹⁰⁵⁷ We considered the notion very briefly above (cp. Chap. 2, Sect. 2.3), but now we have to consider it in more detail.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 79b: “τί δὲ ἡ ψυχή; ὁρατὸν ἢ αἰδέες; οὐχ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων γε, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἔφη. ἀλλὰ μὴν ἡμεῖς γε τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ μὴ τῆ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσει ἐλέγομεν· ἢ ἄλλη τι οἶει; τῆ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. τί οὖν περὶ ψυχῆς λέγομεν; ὁρατὸν ἢ ἀόρατον εἶναι; οὐχ ὁρατόν. αἰδέες ἄρα; ναί.”

more promptly suggested by the word (especially in a philosophical context) is its religious and metaphysical sense – and ψυχή in this sense is something whose existence is uncertain, to say the least.

Now, although Plato at times considers the ψυχή from these angles, the religious and metaphysical questions do not determine the primary layer of meaning of the word, but are rather something secondary and derivative, as we will see. Other aspects of ψυχή are more decisive, and these aspects can perhaps be better rendered by other words. For instance, ψυχή also designates that with which we think and know, and, in this sense, it is close in meaning to the notions of δίανοια or νοῦς. Bearing this in mind, we could translate it as “mind”. But such a rendering tends to over-intellectualize the term ψυχή, which is not only the seat of our conscious thoughts, but also the bearer of our perceptions, feelings and desires. Moreover, even if we take “mind” in a broader sense, to denote all our inner life, it still suggests the contemporary problematic of the mind-body relation, which usually adopts a materialistic approach and is therefore very far from the Platonic perspective and concerns.

At any rate, the ψυχή is essentially characterized by having some notion or even some sensation of things. Something appears to it, and to this extent we could perhaps render it as consciousness or wakefulness. However, this is once again a very unilateral way of translating the term, as it conceals a central component of ψυχή. For us, words such as soul, mind or consciousness do not designate something intrinsically necessary to be alive or animated. Ψυχή, in turn, is first and foremost what enlivens or animates us. Ψυχή is life itself.¹⁰⁵⁹ This may be taken in a primarily biological sense, but our life is not only something biological. It also has a biographical or existential character. We are interested in our life, we determine it in a certain way, and it has a certain content. Ψυχή may then refer to this. It may also denote our own character or personality. It is what justifies our behavior, and as such we could even translate it as “person” (at least if we put aside the philosophical and theological sense of the word and focus solely in its colloquial sense).

However, in other cases the term has a more impersonal or abstract sense, and designates the entity that relates itself to itself – i.e., the self. There is indeed a constitutive splitting up of our being that provides us with self-awareness and reflexivity, and ψυχή can designate this reflexive structure. In this sense, it can be used as a noun to replace the

¹⁰⁵⁹ Sometimes the term has this meaning, as can be seen in expressions such as δρόμος περὶ ψυχῆς or φιλοψυχία. The ψυχή is also what is responsible for life. Plato emphasizes this several times. Cp. *Cra.* 399d and *Phd.* 105d. In this sense, it seems to be something concrete, non-metaphysical, organic or biological. It is what makes something a living being (a ζῶον), and the latter is then qualified as being ἔμψυχος (i.e., something that has a ψυχή).

personal pronoun (ἐγώ) and the reflexive pronoun (αὐτός).¹⁰⁶⁰ It is the “thing” that we are. It differs from other things by being reflexive, though this does not mean that it is something to which we have a full access in introspection. It is not simply a correlate of an explicit self-reflection, but it is also present in our regular awareness of things or in the way we act and feel, so it not easy to fully isolate it and consider it by itself.

In sum, ψυχή is the bearer of mental functions (such as thinking, perceiving, desiring, feeling), the bearer of our character, the principle of life, and our own self. Ψυχή condensates all these functions and is not reduced to any of them. Furthermore, these are all facets of our being that we can easily recognize, so we can already see that ψυχή is not simply a metaphysical entity whose existence we may doubt. It is a structural component of our being that accounts for the way we are and how we relate to ourselves and to other things. This is what Plato tries to determine. However, one may still not be convinced by all this. Hence, in order to better follow Plato’s analyses of our being and also to understand why he called this essential part of our being “ψυχή”, we will start by briefly considering the pre-Platonic history of the word.

1. The pre-Platonic uses of the term ψυχή

The history of the term ψυχή requires us to consider texts from fields as diverse as literature, religion, science and philosophy. Each of these areas has its own perspective or set of perspectives on life, and we will find echoes of all of them in Plato’s analyses of ψυχή. Hence, we must consider what is characteristic of each one, even if in a very brief and schematic manner. Our aim is indeed to identify some important aspects of the word ψυχή, which will later help us better understand Plato’s view of the human being.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁶⁰ For a consideration of the reflexive character of ψυχή, cp. in particular E. HAVELOCK, *The Socratic Self as it is Parodied in Aristophanes’ Clouds*, in: A. PARRY (ed.), *Studies in Fifth-Century Thought and Literature*, Cambridge, University Press, 1972.

¹⁰⁶¹ Much more detailed analyses of each stage of the Pre-Platonic history of ψυχή can be found in the secondary literature on the theme, which is very vast and complex. See C. KEARY, *The Homeric Words for “Soul”*, *Mind* 6 (1881), 471-483; E. ROHDE, *Psyche. Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen*, 2 vols., Freiburg, Mohr, 1890-4; M. AQUINAS, *The Pre-Socratic Use of ψυχή as a Term for the Principle of Motion*, Diss. Washington D.C., 1915; J. BURNET, *The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul*, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 7 (1915-16), 235-259; E. BICKEL, *Homerischer Seelenglaube. Geschichtliche Grundzüge menschlicher Seelenvorstellungen*, Berlin, Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1926; J. BÖHME, *Die Seele und das Ich im homerischen Epos*, Leipzig/Berlin, Teubner, 1929; M. HALBWACHS, *La représentation de l’ame chez les Grecs. Le double corporel et le double spirituel*. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 37 (1930), 493-534; A. DIHLE, *Ψυχή in Greek World*, in: *TWNT, sub voce ψυχή, ψυχικός, ἀνάψυξις, ἀναψύχω, δίψυχος, ὀλιγόψυχος*; R. ONIANS, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 1951; D. FURLEY, *The Early History of*

1.1. Ψυχή as a shade and the contrast with other psychic agents (Homeric poems)

The word ψυχή plays an important role in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These works are not theoretical or conceptual, but they nonetheless express a certain understanding of ψυχή and other related terms. This understanding is partly based on primitive beliefs, but it may also include poetical innovations, and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between them. In fact, there are some important differences not only between the *Iliad and Odyssey*, but also between different passages within the same work (which may well mean that they correspond to different stages of composition). However, there is a fundamental coherence (at least with respect to ψυχή and the psychological vocabulary at large) and this is what we will try to identify now.

The most important aspect of Homer's usage of the word ψυχή is its restricted meaning. The ψυχή is just one component of our being among many others and much of what is later encompassed by the word is here attributed to other inner entities. Thus, in order to comprehend the later developments, we must also consider the complex psychological vocabulary we find in the Homeric texts. But let us start with ψυχή. It designates something that is lost or leaves the body at the moment of death, and that is at risk in moments of peril.¹⁰⁶² It does not seem to perform any particular role in life. In general, it is not noticed as

the Concept of Soul, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London* 3 (1956), 1-18; E. HARRISON, Notes on Homeric Psychology, *Phoenix* 14 (1960), 63-80; A. ADKINS, *From the Many to the One. A Study of Personality and Views of Human Nature in the Context of Ancient Greek Society, Values and Beliefs*, London, Constable, 1970; H. INGENKAMP, Inneres Selbst und Lebensträger. Zur Einheit des ψυχή-Begriffs, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 118 (1975), 48-61; S. DARCUS, A Person's Relation to ψυχή in Homer, Hesiod, and the Greek Lyric Poets, *Glotta* 57 (1979), 30-39; D. CLAUS, *Toward the Soul. An Inquiry into the Meaning of ψυχή before Plato*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1981; J. BREMMER, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1983; T. JAHN, Zum Wortfeld "Seele-Geist" in der Sprache Homers, München, Beck, 1987; M. FRAMPTON, Psyche in Ancient Greek Thought, *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 31 (1988), 265-284; I. KALOGERAKOS, *Seele und Unsterblichkeit. Untersuchungen zur Vorsokratik bis Empedokles*, Stuttgart/Leipzig, Teubner, 1996; G. KATONA, The Evolution of the Concept of Psyche from Homer to Aristotle, *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 22 (2002), 28-44; W. BURKERT, "Seele", *Mysterien und Mystik. Griechische Sonderwege und aktuelle Problematik*, in W. JENS & B. SEIDENSTICKER (eds.), *Ferne und Nähe der Antike*, Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2003; H. LORENZ, Ancient Theories of Soul, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/ancient-soul/>, October 2003, rev. April 2009 (last consulted August 2017); D. FREDE & B. REIS (ed.), *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy*, Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2007; M. DAVIS, *The Soul of the Greeks. An Inquiry*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

¹⁰⁶² The ψυχή is described as leaving the body in passages such as *Iliad* V.196, 5.696, 14.518f., *Odyssey* XIV.134, etc. In *Odyssey* XXII.467 it is exhaled. Other times, it is said to be destroyed (see e.g. *Iliad* XIII.763). It is mentioned in contexts of danger in *Iliad* XXI.569, 22.161, and so on. It is thus intrinsically associated with the difference between life and death – which is also what is expressed by its possible etymologies. The word is either connected with breathing (which is essential for life) or with coldness or cooling (which characterizes the corpse). Cp. *Cra.* 399d-e. For more on the etymology, see e.g. E. BENVÉNISTE, Grec Ψυχή, *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique* 33 (1932), 165-168; J. JOUANNA, Le souffle, la vie et le froid. Remarques sur la

such. After leaving the body, it is described as smoke, a shade or a dream image.¹⁰⁶³ It resembles the person who died, it is a sort of double or a counterperson, but it has a considerably lesser degree of reality.¹⁰⁶⁴ The real person is the body.¹⁰⁶⁵ The ψυχή by itself has no vitality and is usually witless or deprived of understanding.¹⁰⁶⁶ It flutters and shrieks like a bat.¹⁰⁶⁷ It is an unsubstantial and fading image of the dead. It may appear in dreams (as Patroclus to Achilles) and it is visible in Hades (as when Ulysses visits it), but it cannot be embraced.¹⁰⁶⁸ The Underworld is indeed the place where it normally resides, but Homer's description of it is rather gloomy. It is a realm of shadows and much wailing.¹⁰⁶⁹ Some ψυχαί seem to keep doing what they did in life, but only Tiresias, an exceptional figure, retains his wits.¹⁰⁷⁰ It is true that some other exceptional figures seem to avoid going to Hades and are rather taken to the Elysian Fields (which seems to correspond to the Isles of the Blessed), where they retain their body and thus the vitality and lucidity associated with it. In other words, they escape death. But this only applies to some heroes.¹⁰⁷¹ For most people, death is inevitable and the only way to partially defeat it is through immortal fame (κλέος ἀθάνατος), though the latter is no more than an echo of one's life.

Ψυχή is thus something unsubstantial and almost irrelevant. We may need it in order to be alive, but nothing more. The particular functions of our psychological life are attributed to other psychic agents, which do not seem to have any clear relation to it. Hence, many have distinguished two different kinds of soul: the free soul (corresponding to ψυχή) and the body soul. The latter may still be divided into life soul (which sustains one's life) and ego soul (which performs the functions associated with conscious life). The ego soul, in particular,

famille de ψύχω d'Homère à Hippocrate, *Revue des Études Grecques* 100 (1987), 203-224; P.-A. MUMM & S. RICHTER, Die Etymologie von griechisch ψυχή, *International Journal of Diachronic Linguistics and Linguistic Reconstruction* 5 (2008), 33-108.

¹⁰⁶³ For its description as smoke, see e.g. *Iliad*, XXIII.100f. For its comparison to a shade (σκῆ), cp. e.g. *Odyssey* X.495 and XI.207. In the latter passage it is also compared to a dream.

¹⁰⁶⁴ In this sense, it is also described as a εἶδωλον – i.e., an image, a simulacrum or a ghost. See e.g. 23.104. Apollodorus says in this respect that Homer “[ὑ]ποτίθεται γὰρ τὰς ψυχὰς τοῖς εἰδώλοις τοῖς ἐν τοῖς κατόπτροις φαινόμενοις ὁμοίας, καὶ τοῖς διὰ τῶν ὑδάτων συνισταμένοις, ἃ καθάπαξ ἡμῖν ἐξεΐκασται καὶ τὰς κινήσεις μμεῖται, στερεμινιώδε δ' ὑπόστασιν οὐδεμίαν ἔχει εἰς ἀντίληψιν καὶ ἀφήν, ὅθεν αὐτὰς βροτῶν εἴδωλα καμόντων λέγει.” See fr. 10 in: K. MÜLLER, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, vol. 1, Paris, Didot, 1853.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Cp. the contrast in *Iliad* I.1-5 between the ψυχαί Achilles sent to Hades and the persons themselves (αὐτοί) that were left as spoils for dogs and birds.

¹⁰⁶⁶ See e.g. *Iliad* XVI.856f., 23.104.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Cp. *Odyssey* X.495 and XXIV.1-9.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See *Iliad* XXIII.97-100, *Odyssey* XI.207f.

¹⁰⁶⁹ See e.g. Achilles' lamentation at *Odyssey* XI.482-491.

¹⁰⁷⁰ See *Odyssey* X.490-495.

¹⁰⁷¹ See *Odyssey* IV.561-569. Cp. HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, 167-173.

corresponds to the self that is active in the embodied life.¹⁰⁷² This self is referred to different agents, which have different features, but are to a certain extent interchangeable with respect to the functions they perform. Some of these agents correspond to soul organs and have both a physiological and a mental side – though the distinction between these two sides was not very rigorous. Similarly imprecise was the differentiation between cognitive, practical and emotional functions. The three kinds of function were seen as constitutively intertwined and therefore not strictly distinguished. But still the Homeric texts distinguish multiple inner agents. This does not mean (as some have defended) that the human being is conceived as a mere aggregate of entities that do not constitute a real unity.¹⁰⁷³ They are always part of the same individual. However, there is a sensitivity to inner differences that goes far beyond the dualism of body and soul. Instead of identifying just two components of our being, Homer identifies many, thereby showing that there can be other ways of looking at what we are.

Some of the agents identified by Homer (or the Homeric texts) will also play an important role in Plato, though in the texts of the latter these agents will be understood in a more restricted sense. In Homer, they have many uses and it is difficult to systematize them. Θύμος, for instance, is one of the most important terms in this context. Sometimes it is described as leaving the body, just like ψυχή. It seems to be material, though it does not seem to have a specific location in the body. It is also unclear whether it is blood-like or breath-like. At any rate, it appears to be intrinsically associated with one's emotions and also with deliberation. It manifests itself especially when one goes through intense experiences. It has energy, it must be nourished, and it can have knowledge or even forebode something. It is often personified and one can relate oneself to one's own θυμός.

Another important psychological term is φρήν. It designates both a bodily organ (though it is not clear which one) and a function.¹⁰⁷⁴ As a function, φρήν seems to correspond to one's wits. It is associated with emotions, plans, behavior, moral character and language. In a more specific sense, it can designate one's capacity to think clearly or to deliberate, and also one's capacity to think in a prolonged sense. Νόος, in turn, is not conceived as something material and denotes only a function – particularly the function of thinking.

¹⁰⁷² For more on this nomenclature, see E. ARBMAN, Untersuchungen zur primitiven Seelenvorstellungen mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Indien, *Monde Oriental* 20 (1926) 85-222, and 21 (1927) 1-185. Cp. also J. BREMMER, *op. cit.*, 9ff.

¹⁰⁷³ Cp. B. SNELL, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen, Hamburg, Claassen, 1955³ (1946¹), 17-42.

¹⁰⁷⁴ The φρήν has indeed been associated with the chest, the pericardium, the lungs, and the diaphragm. For more on this, see e.g. S. SULLIVAN, *Psychological Activity in Homer. A Study of Phren*, Ottawa, Carleton University Press, 1988, 21ff.

However, it does not designate an ethereal thinking. It is mainly the perception or understanding of the meaning of a situation. It can also designate a plan of action. It is usually instantaneous, but it can also refer to a permanent perspective (such as one's attitude, way of thinking or customs).¹⁰⁷⁵ In contrast, the other psychic agents identified in the Homeric texts do not seem to have an intellectual content. ἦτορ, κῆρ and κραδίη designate the heart, and especially the two latter can also designate one's strength or courage. We could perhaps also include in this list the term μένος, which denotes one's force or even warrior rage, but it does not seem to designate a psychic agent as such.¹⁰⁷⁶

As can be seen, these different agents are intrinsically associated with one's experience of the world and one's intervention in it. They usually become manifest in more intense moments, probably because that is when our inner life becomes more patent to us. They seem to be to a great extent reactive and that, along with their multiplicity, has led some interpreters to wonder if Homer had any conception of individual will or of a capacity to make decisions.¹⁰⁷⁷ The problem is all the more complicated if we consider the influence the gods may have in human life, though this influence does not seem to entirely remove one's merit and the responsibility for one's action.¹⁰⁷⁸ Both things appear to be somehow compatible – precisely because what characterizes the Homeric view of mental or psychic life is the constitutive intertwinement of different elements that were seen as distinct at a later time. In Homer, the human being is seen as a system of forces that encompasses the different inner agents and also the external influences. One component may predominate in a particular case, but none of them is ever fully isolated.

¹⁰⁷⁵ For more on the Homeric sense of νοῦς, see in particular K. von FRITZ, Νόος and νοεῖν in the Homeric Poems, *Classical Philology* 38 (1943), 79-93, and IDEM, Νοῦς, Νοεῖν, and their Derivatives in Pre-Socratic Philosophy (Excluding Anaxagoras). Part I: From the Beginnings to Parmenides, *Classical Philology* 40 (1945), 223-242.

¹⁰⁷⁶ For more on these terms and their use in Homer, see the already cited works of J. Böhme, R. Onians, D. Furley, E. Harrison, D. Claus, J. Bremmer, and T. Jahn.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Cp. e.g. B. SNELL, Das Bewußtsein von eigenen Entscheidungen im frühen Griechentum, *Philologus* 85 (1930), 141-158. For a different view, see e.g. A. SCHMITT, *Selbstständigkeit und Abhängigkeit menschlichen Handelns bei Homer*. Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Psychologie Homers, Mainz/Stuttgart, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur/Franz Steiner, 1990.

¹⁰⁷⁸ For more on this, see e.g. A. ADKINS, *Merit and Responsibility*. A Study in Greek Values, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960 (repr. 1975), 1-60.

1.2. New conceptions of life and death (Pythagoras, Empedocles and the Mysteries)

In Homer, our real self was the embodied self and death was conceived as a diminished form of being. But later the conceptions of life and death changed considerably, in connection with a new kind of religiosity or a new spirituality. We find an expression of these changes in Pre-Socratic thinkers like Pythagoras and Empedocles, as well as in the Eleusinian, Dionysian and Orphic Mysteries. We do not know much about these thinkers and these religions. The sources are sparse, and our access is often indirect and mediated by later authors (including Plato). Although in many cases the term *ψυχή* is not employed to designate the part of our being that survives death, the developments introduced nevertheless had an effect on the concept of *ψυχή*, and therefore it is important to consider them.

Pythagoras is very important in this context, because of his belief that the soul transmigrates and reincarnates.¹⁰⁷⁹ Xenophanes tells in one of his fragments that Pythagoras recognized the *ψυχή* of a dear friend in the yelp of a dog being beaten.¹⁰⁸⁰ He was also said to remember his past lives.¹⁰⁸¹ One's being is therefore not restricted to the present embodied existence. Empedocles too speaks of having lived many different lives and remembering them.¹⁰⁸² He describes himself as a wandering spirit and a fallen deity (*δαίμων*) which was cast out or exiled as a punishment for an old crime.¹⁰⁸³ A similar conception seems to be at the center of the Mysteries.¹⁰⁸⁴ The soul or our inner being committed a sin and is now incarcerated in the body, which is a sort of prison that restricts the soul's activity or vitality. The body is also compared to a tomb in which the soul is buried.¹⁰⁸⁵ Life is thus an inferior form of being and, in this sense, a kind of death.¹⁰⁸⁶ It is subordinated to something else, to a different and superior state one should be looking forward to.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Herodotus is probably referring to him and his followers in *Historiae*, II, 123 (which is also fr. DK 1).

¹⁰⁸⁰ See DK B7: “καὶ ποτὲ μιν στυφελιζομένου σκύλακος παρίοντα/φασὶν ἐποικτῖραι καὶ τότε φάσθαι ἔπος-/᾿παύσαι μὴδὲ ράπιζ’, ἐπεὶ ἦ φίλου ἀνέρος ἐστὶν/ψυχή, τὴν ἔγνω φθεγξαμένης αἰών.’”

¹⁰⁸¹ Cp. DK 8.

¹⁰⁸² See DK B117 and B129.

¹⁰⁸³ See DK B115.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Cp. PINDAR, fr. 133: “οἷσι δὲ Φερσεφόνα ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος/δέξεται, ἐς τὸν ὑπερθεὶν ἄλιον κείνων ἐνάτω ἔτει/ἀνδιδόη ψυχᾶς πάλιν, ἐκ τᾶν βασιλῆες ἀγαυοί/καὶ σθένει κραιπνοὶ σοφία τε μέγιστο/ἄνδρες αὔξοντ’· ἐς δὲ τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἦροες ἀγνοὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων καλ-<έον>ται.”

¹⁰⁸⁵ We find in Plato several echoes of the idea that the body is a prison or a tomb. Cp. *Cra.* 400c, *Grg.* 493a, *Phd.* 62b, 82e, 92a.

¹⁰⁸⁶ We find an expression of a similar idea in EURIPIDES, fr. 638 (quoted in *Grg.* 492e): “τίς δ’ οἶδεν εἰ τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἐστὶ κατθανεῖν, τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν κάτω νομίζεται;”

This other state and the elevation of our being that it entails is up to a point something one can experience (or something we can catch a glimpse of) during life. In certain states, the soul seems to detach itself from the body and exist only by itself. This is the case of sleep and dreams.¹⁰⁸⁷ Something similar seems to happen when one is in a state of trance or ecstasy. There are multiple examples of this, from shamans to the Dionysian initiates. The latter, for instance, have an experience of intoxication and delirium in which they seem to come into contact with their delivering god. This and other similar experiences thus allowed to bridge the abyss that separated human beings from the divine. At the same time, they were interpreted as revealing the presence in us of an occult self, which is normally not active in life, and which will be fully released at death.

However, one is not guaranteed to reach a free and superior condition after dying. One's "salvation" depends on whether one purifies oneself during life. The purification is here conceived in ritualistic and ascetic terms. It requires mortification and stripping off of one's personality. This is an essential part of the initiation in the mysteries. Additionally, initiation will include an experience or an affect (a παθεῖν, as Aristotle says).¹⁰⁸⁸ It brings about an altered state of mind, which will change one's attitude towards life and death. One is then supposed to remember this experience, even after death.¹⁰⁸⁹ Those who do so will have a lot different from those who did not go through initiation or did not remember.¹⁰⁹⁰ A better destiny after death is reserved only to a few, but one can become one of these few if one follows the precepts of one's sect or religion.

After dying, the initiated will be in a state of happiness or bliss, although it is not clear what such a state amounts to. It is also not clear just how personal or individual this post-mortem state is. In the process of purification one gets rid of much of one's individuality

¹⁰⁸⁷ Cp. PINDAR, fr. 131b: "σῶμα μὲν πάντων ἔπεται θανάτῳ περισθενεῖ, ζῶν δ' ἔτι λείπεται αἰῶνος εἶδω/λον· τὸ γάρ ἐστι μόνον/ ἐκ θεῶν· εὐδαί δὲ πρασσόντων μελέων, ἀτὰρ εὐ/δόντεσσιν ἐν πολλοῖς ὄνειροις/ δεῖκνυσι τερπνῶν ἐφέροισαν χαλεπῶν τε κρίσιν."

¹⁰⁸⁸ See fr. 15 from Aristotle's *Περὶ φιλοσοφίας*, in: V. ROSE (ed.), *Aristotelis qui ferebantur librorum fragmenta*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1886 (re-ed. Stuttgart, Teubner, 1967): "καθάπερ Ἀριστοτέλης ἀξιῶ τὸς τελουμένους οὐ μαθεῖν τι δεῖν ἀλλὰ παθεῖν καὶ διατεθῆναι, δηλονότι γενομένους ἐπιτηδείους." For more on this, see e.g. Y. USTINOVA, *To Live in Joy and Die With Hope. Experiential Aspects of Ancient Greek Mystery Rites*, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 56 (2013), 105-123.

¹⁰⁸⁹ On the topic of keeping memory after death, cp. ORPHEUS, fr. DK B17: "εὐρήσεις δ' Αἴδαο δόμων ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ κρήνην,/ παρ' δ' αὐτῇ λευκὴν ἐστηκυῖαν κυάρισσον· ταύτης τῆς κρήνης μηδὲ σχεδὸν ἐμπελάσειας./ εὐρήσεις δ' ἑτέραν, τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης/ ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον· φύλακες δ' ἐπίπροσθεν ἕασιν/ εἰπεῖν· Ἰῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος,/ αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τόδε δ' ἴστε καὶ αὐτοί· δίψῃ δ' εἰμ(ι) αὐτῇ καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλλὰ δότ' αἴψα/ ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης·/ καὶ τοῖ σο>ι δώσουσι πιεῖν θεῆς ἀπ<ὸ κρήν>ης,/ καὶ τότ' ἔπειτ' ἄ<λλοισι μεθ'> ἠρώεσσι ἀνάξεις."

¹⁰⁹⁰ Cp. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, vv. 480-2: "ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων·/ ὃς δ' ἀτελής ἱερῶν ὃς τ' ἄμμορος, οὐ ποθ' ὁμοίων/ αἴσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ εὐρώεντι." The edition used here is T. Allen et al. (ed.), *The Homeric Hymns*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936² (1904¹).

and humanity. So what is left? And exactly what role does this relatively impersonal part of ourselves play in our life? The extant texts do not say much about this, but we can see that the way they conceive of our being is very different from what we may more immediately think about ourselves. We are not our body, but rather something more, something imprisoned within us, on whose release we must work, thereby abandoning much of our normal state and our normal life.

1.3. Ψυχή, matter and κόσμος (Pre-Socratics and Medical Writers)

A very different perspective on the ψυχή (and whose development is to a large extent contemporary to the views we just considered) can be found in the fragments of the so-called Pre-Socratics. They developed physical and cosmological speculations, and their inquiries are usually concerned with the first principle (ἀρχή) of everything. They strived to reach an all-encompassing view of the whole of reality, and ψυχή is then considered as one more thing within this whole. It is primarily conceived in physical terms, as a life force or as what animates and sustains the body. It is what makes the body ἔμψυχος (ensouled – i.e., animated, alive). Some thinkers even associated all kinds of movement in nature with some sort of ψυχή and regarded many things (perhaps even the entire κόσμος) as a psychic entity.¹⁰⁹¹ In other cases, the ultimate principles of reality were conceived in psychological terms. Anaxagoras, for instance, speaks of a cosmic νοῦς, which orders and governs everything.¹⁰⁹² Empedocles, in turn, considers love and strife the main principles of everything.¹⁰⁹³ The boundaries between physical and psychical features become thus somewhat blurry.

Leaving this aside and considering only the human ψυχή, we see that the latter is here conceived as a kind of matter (following the general materialistic tendency of this kind of inquiry) and hence as something homogeneous to the κόσμος at large. Some thinkers argue that it is made of air, fire, blood, or atoms.¹⁰⁹⁴ One could then say that this material ψυχή is in a way immortal, insofar as its elements are eternal, but its existence as a ψυχή depends on a

¹⁰⁹¹ Thales, for instance, apparently considered that the magnet has a ψυχή, since it can move something else. See DK A22.

¹⁰⁹² Cp. DK B12, B13.

¹⁰⁹³ Cp. DK B16-36.

¹⁰⁹⁴ For the conception of ψυχή as being made of air, cp. fr. DK B2 of Anaximenes and fr. DK B4-5 of Diogenes of Apollonia. See also fr. DK B29 of Anaximander. Heraclitus and others seem to have associated ψυχή with fire. Cp. e.g. HIPPASUS, DK 9. For the idea that ψυχή is related to water, see HIPPON, DK A3, and for its association with blood, cp. CRITIAS, DK A23. Democritus, in turn, appears to have believed that it was composed of atoms. See DK A1, sect. 44. The sources for these conceptions are somewhat questionable, but it seems clear that there was a strong tendency to conceive the ψυχή in material terms.

certain arrangement of bodily factors. According to some sources, one's soul or one's mind seems to be described precisely as a particular blending of material elements. Philolaus is supposed to have conceived it as an attunement (ἁρμονία) of opposite elements.¹⁰⁹⁵ Parmenides emphasizes how the mixture of the bodily members determines one's mind.¹⁰⁹⁶ The dependence of one's mental states on the body is also an important feature of the medical understanding of human beings. Mental disorders (which affect one's sensations, emotions and intelligence) are the result of internal bodily disorders.¹⁰⁹⁷ In general, the balance or imbalance of elements determine one's ψυχή, which is no longer an occult self. The Homeric ghost is now intrinsically linked with the body, and through the body it is also related to everything else in the κόσμος. It can be directly affected by things and it can become aware of them or perceive them in virtue of having a constitution similar to theirs.¹⁰⁹⁸

This will influence Plato's analyses. Although he does not conceive the ψυχή in material terms, he will also consider the connection between ψυχή and things in general. But before returning to the Platonic corpus, there is still one last stage in the history of the term ψυχή that we must consider.

1.4. Ψυχή as the seat of all mental life (lyric, tragedy, comedy, historiography, etc.)

We find a different and meaningful understanding of ψυχή in lyric, tragedy, comedy, as well as in the historians and orators. Ψυχή now incorporates all the Homeric inner agents and their functions. It becomes the seat or bearer of all elements of our personality and of our conscious life in general. Our feelings, our actions and our knowledge are all attributed to ψυχή, and the latter constitutes our individuality. Our ψυχή is what we are; it is the core of our being. The term can even be used along with a genitive of person as a periphrasis for the person itself.¹⁰⁹⁹ It is also something one can address or by which one can be

¹⁰⁹⁵ Cp. DK A23.

¹⁰⁹⁶ See DK B16.

¹⁰⁹⁷ See, for instance, the arguments presented in HIPPOCRATES, *De morbo sacro*. For more on this, see e.g. B. GUNDERT, Soma and Psyche in Hippocratic Medicine, in: P. POTTER & J. WRIGHT (ed.), *Psyche and Soma*. Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000, 13-35.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Indeed, the conception of the ψυχή and its ability to know things is sometimes expressly based on the like-to-like principle. For more on this principle, see e.g. C. MÜLLER, *Gleiches zum Gleichen*. Ein Prinzip frühgriechischen Denkens, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1965.

¹⁰⁹⁹ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Hecuba*, 87-89.

addressed – especially in moments of extraordinary tension.¹¹⁰⁰ Unlike what we saw in Homer, the term no longer has a connotation of danger, but it still seems to designate an obscure part of us, whose presence is particularly felt in moments of grief, distress, lamentation, or rejoicing and delight.¹¹⁰¹ In general, the ψυχή is strongly connected with the practical domain. It is marked by desires – especially those that aim at material gratification (such as food, drink and sexual pleasure).¹¹⁰² It is something that makes plans and deliberates.¹¹⁰³ It is also that by which we one acts. It can mean heart, spirit, courage, and in general it designates what exerts itself in action.¹¹⁰⁴ It can even correspond to one’s personality, and in this sense it can be qualified in different ways.¹¹⁰⁵ In particular, it can be virtuous or excellent.¹¹⁰⁶ Finally, the term ψυχή can come to have a less practical and more intellectual sense. Ψυχαί not only deliberate, but they have knowledge and intelligence, and they desire to know.¹¹⁰⁷

In this context, ψυχή is something over which one has some control, that can be guided, kept away from things and trained. One can manipulate the ψυχή or care for it. Medicine will thus consider how different therapeutic regimens affect one’s ψυχή, Damon will try to shape one’s moral character through music, and Gorgias will determine how to influence one’s ψυχή through λόγος.¹¹⁰⁸ But the ψυχή (and, more precisely, its habits and its character) can also have effects on the body. In fact, it may even be regarded as what determines one’s destiny. Democritus, for instance, said that the ψυχή is the dwelling of the δαίμων – i.e., of the principle that determines the course of one’s life and its value.¹¹⁰⁹ The notion of ψυχή had thus acquired a new meaning, which is indeed decisive for the understanding of ψυχή we find in the corpus, as we shall see.

¹¹⁰⁰ Cp. e.g. PINDAR, *Pythia* 6.60f.

¹¹⁰¹ Cp. e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 63-64, and PINDARUS, *Pythia* 4.121-123.

¹¹⁰² See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Persae*, 840-842; EURIPIDES, *Cyclops*, 340f., and fr. 323.

¹¹⁰³ See e.g. ANTIPHON, *Tetralogia* 3, 1.7, in: L. GERNET (ed.), *Antiphon – Discours*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1923 (repr. 1965).

¹¹⁰⁴ Cp. e.g. EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 108-110.

¹¹⁰⁵ For instance, the ψυχή can be said to be chaste (παρθένος – see EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 1006) or stubborn (σκληρά – see SOPHOCLES, *Ajax*, 1361).

¹¹⁰⁶ See e.g. HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 7.153.

¹¹⁰⁷ See e.g. ARISTOPHANES, *Pax*, 1068, EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 173, and *Orestes*, 1180.

¹¹⁰⁸ For more on this, see e.g. D. CLAUS, *Toward the Soul. An Inquiry into the Meaning of ψυχή before Plato*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1981, 147ff.

¹¹⁰⁹ See DK B171: “εὐδαιμονίη οὐκ ἐν βοσκήμασιν οἰκεῖ οὐδὲ ἐν χρυσῶι· ψυχή οἰκητήριον δαίμονος.”

1.5. Assessment

The different lines of development of the concept of ψυχή raise the question about their unity. How can the Homeric ghost become an occult self which has to be released? How can this self be the source of movement and a part of the κόσμος? And how can all this be the seat of our emotions, desires, acts perceptions, thoughts – in short, of our whole personality? In other words, how can the eschatological soul (or the shade) incorporate all these functions? What exactly is this entity that we are supposed to be? How is it constituted and how do all its functions relate to one another? Moreover, how does everything in our life depend on it?

Plato deals with all these problems. He tries to determine the unity of our ψυχή and the interrelation of its different functions. He also considers how one's ψυχή relates to other things. But before considering in more detail his analyses of ψυχή, a few general remarks about his use of the notion are in order.

2. The main aspects and problems of Plato's use and analysis of the term ψυχή

Plato's conception of ψυχή is based on the perspectives we just considered, although several other important aspects are introduced in the corpus.¹¹¹⁰ We must, however, bear in mind that the analyses of the notion of ψυχή are scattered throughout the texts, and they have very different features. The characters consider the notion of ψυχή from different angles, and some of their assertions may even contradict each other. Moreover, the analyses are often provisional, abbreviated, or even metaphorical, which raises the question about what a proper description of ψυχή would correspond to.¹¹¹¹ In a sense, this whole Part III is an attempt to develop a description of the ψυχή in Platonic terms. We will try to combine and unify the different aspects of Plato's analyses and see in what direction they point. But first let us better

¹¹¹⁰ Many of these innovations may be due to the historical Socrates. It is indeed difficult to make a precise distinction between both – and we will not attempt to do it. In line with our general approach, we will rather consider the treatment of the concept of ψυχή in the Platonic corpus. In doing so, we will regard the different texts not as different phases of Plato's thought, but as analyses of the same reality from different angles.

¹¹¹¹ In *Phaedo*, for instance, Socrates stresses that one must continue to examine the questions about the soul's nature and immortality (see e.g. 77e f., 90e ff., and 107a-b). In *Timaeus*, the description of the ψυχή is part of a cosmological narrative that is no more than likely (see 29b-d). At times, Plato emphasizes that the discussion of the ψυχή will be short and incomplete. See *Rep.* 435c-d and 504a-c. Cp. also *Phdr.* 246a, where the shorter version is also said to be an image or comparison: “περὶ δὲ τῆς ἰδέας αὐτῆς ὧδε λεκτέον. οἷον μὲν ἐστὶ, πάντη πάντως θείας εἶναι καὶ μακρᾶς διηγήσεως, ᾧ δὲ ἔοικεν, ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ ἐλάττονος· ταύτη οὖν λέγωμεν.” Several important aspects of the ψυχή are indeed described in imagetic or mythological terms. The myths of *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic X* are particularly relevant, but their imagetic character render all analyses very problematic.

consider some general aspects and problems associated with the word ψυχή in the Platonic corpus.

First of all, the very choice of the term ψυχή to describe the essence of what we are is very meaningful. As we saw, the term has strong eschatological connotations, and this makes it particularly suitable for an analysis of our own being. Ψυχή reminds us of our mortality and raises the question of what happens to us after we die. This question naturally follows from our identity and our interest in ourselves. We are at risk of ceasing to be, and we need to somehow tame death and give it meaning. In other words, we need to understand death, in order to determine how much time we have and what the meaning of our existence is. To this extent, our interest in the question of death does not concern something remote, but rather something that determines our entire life.

Moreover, by expressly raising the question of our death, we can adopt a different viewpoint on ourselves. Normally we tend to be distracted about ourselves and our life as a whole. However, by facing death, life itself becomes clearer and more present.¹¹¹² In this sense, reflecting about death is not very different from what happens when we experience the death of someone close to us. Faced with their absence, we can better notice all that was present and is now lost. As for our own death, although we cannot witness it as we may witness the death of someone else, we may try to imagine it. It is true that we cannot really imagine ourselves as being entirely absent, but in trying to do so we may increase our awareness of ourselves and of our own being. We may start to think about what it is to be alive, what we achieved in life, and what to expect after our life ends. In this sense, the eschatological experience is an intrinsically philosophical experience and it stimulates us to examine ourselves.¹¹¹³

One could perhaps argue that the eschatological reflections tend, however, to focus on the question of the hereafter, which is indeed a metaphysical question, in the sense that it refers to something that surpasses all that is immediately available to us. In order to determine whether and in what way one continues to exist after death, one must resort to

¹¹¹² For more on this, see in particular K. KERÉNYI, Die religiöse Idee des Nichtseins, in: IDEM, *Die Religion der Griechen und Römer*, München/etc., Droemer-Knauer, 1963, 269-287.

¹¹¹³ The last day of Socrates' life in the *Phaedo* is a good illustration of this. The particular circumstances he found himself in led him and his companions to discuss the nature of ψυχή and whether it dies along with the body or not. Also relevant in this context is the passage in the *Republic* where Cephalus confides to Socrates that the proximity to death makes him think not only about what will come after, but also about how he lived and whether he was unjust to someone. See 330d-e. In fact, not only does death stimulate a kind of philosophical examination of one's life, but philosophy itself is described in the *Phaedo* as a kind of death or as the practice of death (see 67d-e). It requires us to become more ensouled or to relate to our ψυχή differently.

elaborate arguments.¹¹¹⁴ But such arguments are not entirely unconnected with our own being. We must indeed pay attention to the kind of being that we are in order to determine what happens when we die. The metaphysical arguments about the immortality of the soul must be based on a certain description of what we are and, as such, they can also contribute to a better understanding of the kind of being that we are (even if in themselves they are highly questionable).¹¹¹⁵ This is valid also for the myths that consider the pre-natal state of the ψυχή and what happens after death. Some of the myths, for instance, have an etiological character and try to explain how we came to the state we find ourselves in. But along with the explanation for our present state, these myths also contain a description of the state that is supposed to be explained, and we can isolate such a description.¹¹¹⁶ Likewise, when the myths about the hereafter try to isolate the psychic component, they still refer to a certain understanding of what characterizes our own being during life.

Thus, the metaphysical and mythological components of Plato's analyses of the ψυχή are always underpinned by a descriptive or phenomenological component. Ψυχή is primarily an undeniable fact or something we experience in our life, and then we may use myths or arguments to try to define it better and see its precise traits. The eschatological reflections are therefore important to better understand us and they must be brought together with all other passages in which Plato tries to describe or define the ψυχή. The description or definition of the ψυχή is actually the central moment of all these analyses. However, this description or definition is never fully clear. There is always a deficient grasp of what ψυχή is, and this is not incidental. The nature of ψυχή is intrinsically problematic – so much so that it is not even clear at first whether ψυχή is what we are or something that we have. Sometimes it may seem an obscure part of us – a kind of second being that is within us and to which we are for the most part unrelated. But, as we will see, Plato is rather pointing to a structural component of our ordinary consciousness. The ψυχή is indeed the correlate of a different perspective on our normal self – or, as we could also say, the correlate of a way of seeing ourselves that goes beyond the most immediate surface of our being and considers all its depth. It is in this sense

¹¹¹⁴ The question of immortality is indeed intricate. For instance, assuming that the soul continues to exist after death, one must still determine whether it survives in its entirety or just in part (and if the latter is the case, we must also determine whether it is connected with our personality or not). Likewise, it is necessary to establish whether the soul's immortality is static or rather kinetic (i.e., whether it involves the passing of time or not). These and other questions are not easy to answer, and hence the need for complex arguments.

¹¹¹⁵ For instance, the argument for the soul's immortality in *Phdr.* 245c-e is based on the description of the soul as self-moving, whereas the argument in *Rep.* 608d ff. presupposes an understanding of the soul's badness and of what it does to the soul.

¹¹¹⁶ This is precisely the strategy we will follow below in our analysis of Aristophanes' myth in *Smp.* 189d ff. and Socrates' myth in *Phdr.* 246a ff. Cp. Chap. 12, Sect. 4.

our innermost or truest being. We may very well overlook it or misinterpret it, but it is not something different from what we normally think we are. It constitutes and sustains our whole experience of ourselves and things. It is a structural moment of our being, and in fact the center of what we are.

The term ψυχή thus refers to something. Yet, Plato's description of it is primarily negative. The ψυχή is first of all incorporeal (ἄσώματος).¹¹¹⁷ The principles of the body do not apply to it, and so it cannot be conceived in bodily terms. Moreover, the ψυχή is described as invisible, as was said above. It is inaccessible to sight, and also to all other senses.¹¹¹⁸ In this sense, our own φύσις is wont to hide herself. The ψυχή is something elusive or occult. It is the mystery that we are, and this mystery is not just a small detail of our life, but it is at the centre of our life and affects (or locates) everything we come in contact with. Our body, things in general and other ψυχαί are all mediated by our ψυχή.¹¹¹⁹

But how can we have access to the ψυχή in order to determine it in some way? By describing the ψυχή as a mysterious inner being, it may seem that we can only have access to it through introspection. We must close our eyes to everything else and just look within. However, things are not so simple. The soul is not an abstract being, completely closed in itself. It communicates or relates itself with other things, and in fact it is essentially characterized by its own corporality and spatiality. The body locates the soul and brings it into a particular relation with other people, a political community and even the κόσμος at large. The connection with the body is indeed an essential aspect of the soul. However, this is also a problem. As was mentioned, we tend to conceive the body and the soul or ψυχή in light of a metaphysical dualism, according to which they are the completely opposite from one another. In Cartesian terms, body is sheer extension or materiality and soul is pure thought. Such a strict separation then raises the question about the relation or commerce between the two domains. One may be tempted to reduce everything to matter and explain the spirit in material terms – or instead one may try to reduce everything to consciousness.

This way of putting the question, however, is not only unsatisfactory, but also incompatible with most of what we find in Plato (even if at some moments he may suggest something similar, especially when he describes the soul in mythological terms). To begin,

¹¹¹⁷ Cp. *Phdr.* 85e, where the ψυχή is compared to the lyre's attunement, insofar as both are “ἄορατον καὶ ἄσώματον καὶ πάγκαλόν τι καὶ θεϊόν”.

¹¹¹⁸ See *Phd.* 79b. Cp. also *Grg.* 523b-e and *Rep.* 611b-612a, where access to the soul is said to be obstructed by the body and bodily things.

¹¹¹⁹ This view is not something completely alien to us. In religion, poetry, psychology we are used to think about something mysterious within ourselves, with which we are in contact and of which we may be more or less aware (be it a moral soul, the heart or the unconscious), and this mysterious entity is also often called “soul”.

such a dualism presupposes that body and soul are two domains we can easily compare and distinguish. We look at them as if from the outside and see their particular features. However, Plato is very aware that body and ψυχή are not two things or two objects that we may easily contemplate. They are both experienced in the first person, as a constitutive part of us, and thus as a constitutive part of our own gaze. In addition, they are intrinsically mixed with one another and we can only experience them in the mixture itself. We are not only composed of them, but we are precisely this composition. In other words, being composed of them is previous to our contact with any of them. The relation between the two elements is constant.¹¹²⁰ Any attempt to isolate one of them may try to abstract from the other, but it cannot really remove it from consideration. This means that when we try to consider what the ψυχή is, our gaze is still obstructed by the body – both in the objective pole (insofar as we cannot see them separately) and in the subjective pole (insofar as our way of seeing is also affected by the body and this renders our access to things intrinsically defective). This obstruction is actually related to an important question. Among other things, Plato regards the body as a way of seeing things and this bodily perspective outlines a certain understanding of ψυχή which differs from other possible ways of seeing it. There can indeed be many different ways of understanding ψυχή (and also the body), and the question then is how can they be correctly conceived.

Plato tries to determine many things about the ψυχή. He discusses whether the ψυχή is simple or complex. He tries to distinguish different kinds of ψυχαί and see what they have in common. He talks not only of human ψυχαί, but also of animal ψυχαί and divine ψυχαί, and tries to establish a relation between them. The relation of the human ψυχή with the divine is in fact essential, especially insofar as the εἶδη themselves are described as divine and the ψυχή is the place of contact with them, as we will see. In *Phaedo*, Plato suggests that its two main features are δύναμις and φρόνησις.¹¹²¹ This means that the soul is somehow in movement and it is also somehow lucidly aware of things. In other words, it has a practical and a cognitive side.

Power in particular is a very important feature. The soul is explicitly defined as that which moves itself.¹¹²² It can change itself and become something else. This raises the

¹¹²⁰ However, this does not mean that the relation with them is static. We may relate to them in different ways or they may have different relations to one another, in the sense that one of them may predominate over the other, as is shown in *Phaedo*. For more on this, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 2.2 below.

¹¹²¹ Cp. *Phd.* 70b. Socrates wonders whether these are features the ψυχή preserves after dying, which presupposes that they are essential features of it during life.

¹¹²² Cp. *Phdr.* 245c-246a and *Lg.* 895c-896b.

question of its own freedom. Its movement is in part spontaneous, but the soul also seems to be moved by something or someone else – such as λόγος, the examiner or its beloved.¹¹²³ In short, the soul is characterized both by its ἔργα and its πάθη.¹¹²⁴ So what causes us to move? What accounts for our behavior? And to what extent are we passive or active?

In order to answer these questions about the soul's movement, we must also consider the soul's φρόνησις. Its acts are indeed not separable from its way of seeing things. The ψυχή moves with purpose and this purpose is determined by its own perspective on things. The ψυχή determines its own targets, and it may reach them or not. Its success or failure is thus an expression of the cognitive quality of the soul. In fact, its own inner state in general determines the value of the ψυχή and of its life. As we considered in Part I, the soul can have different modalities and they may correspond to a state of excellence (ἀρετή) or of badness (κακία). This all depends on oneself and one's relation to one's own ψυχή. One may attend to it, care for it (and thus train it or exercise it), but one can leave it as it is or neglect it. The latter possibility will cause it to be bad, because by itself the human soul is deficient or lacking. We need to intervene in it, and this intervention will be all the more effective if we have some insight into how the soul is constituted. In other words, in order to care for ourselves (i.e., for our ψυχή), we need to know what this self is, we need to know ourselves, and how defective we are. But what exactly are we? As was said, at first our ψυχή is a mystery or an *implicatissimum aenigma*, and we need to decipher this mystery that we carry within us and that expresses itself in everything that we are. We have already considered some problems connected with the ψυχή, but now we have to see in more detail how Plato defines it and how he answers to the questions just mentioned and any other questions that may be raised by his conception of ourselves as a ψυχή.

3. The Platonic identification of the ψυχή through the contrast with the σῶμα

All the problems associated with the notion of ψυχή stem from how difficult it is to identify and to define what the ψυχή is. Our access to our ψυχή is obstructed, and so we may

¹¹²³ Cp. e.g. *Phdr.* 261a, for the definition of ῥητορικὴ as a ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων. This is just one way of moving others. Socrates also moves or provokes others by asking them questions and pointing out contradictions, and he even tries to convert them to philosophy and thus change their whole life. Moreover, the palinode in *Phaedrus* describes in detail the effects on one's ψυχή of seeing the beloved and how this vision moves one's ψυχή. See in particular 250d ff. In all these moments, the ψυχή seems to be passive (although this also raises some questions which we will have to discuss later – see Chap. 17 below).

¹¹²⁴ Cp. *Phdr.* 245c: “δεῖ οὖν πρῶτον ψυχῆς φύσεως περὶ θείας τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης ἰδόντα πάθη τε καὶ ἔργα τᾶληθῆς νοῆσαι (...).”

completely misunderstand what it is or we may even fail to notice that there is such a thing as a ψυχή. To this extent, what Plato calls ψυχή seems to be very different from the body, as was said. The body is always present, mediating our relation to many other things. It occupies a central position in our life and in a way everything turns around it. As a result, we may be easily tempted to reduce our being to it. Plato, however, will try to show how inconceivable such a reduction is. We are composed of body and ψυχή, and both of them are decisive components of our experience. The fact that they are distinct from each other, however, does not mean that they are separated by clear boundaries or that we can easily distinguish them. Our experience of them is rather an experience of their synthesis.¹¹²⁵ They are radically intertwined or mixed, and this mixture is what we primarily deal with.

Plato is very aware of this and of how the body is not just an obstacle to the identification of our ψυχή, but also something from which the latter must be dissociated. In other words, the conception of the body and the contrast with it are essential to identify and define the ψυχή. One must first define the body as such, imagine it by itself, and then see how it is insufficient to account for the complexity of our being. The consideration of the body shows indeed that our experience of ourselves and of things in general requires more than a body, and the additional component in question is precisely what corresponds to the ψυχή. This is the strategy followed in several passages of the Platonic corpus. The characters establish a more or less explicit contrast between the body and the ψυχή, and this lets us see several important sides or components of the latter. It still does not present the ψυχή in all its complexity, but it allows us to gain a better access to it. We will thus try to identify and organize the most important aspects of this contrast, and then we will be able to consider how these aspects can belong to the same entity – the ψυχή. But before anything else, we must start by considering Plato's conception of body.

3.1. The complexity of Plato's conception of the body

The body may seem to be more immediate, conspicuous and evident than the ψυχή, but this does not mean that the former is absolutely free from problems or ambiguity. On the contrary: the body can be seen from different angles and it can even be conceived in different ways. This is precisely what happens in the Platonic corpus. The characters speak of body in

¹¹²⁵ In *Phaedo*, for instance, Plato uses expressions such as κοινωνεῖν (or κοινωνία), ὁμιλεῖν and συνουσία. See e.g. *Phd.* 65a, 66a, 67a, 80e, 81c.

different ways and they identify different traits of it. But what exactly lies at the heart of this entity? Why does it seem so diverse? And does this diversity affect the concept of ψυχή, given how closely connected the two concepts are?

We can better understand how complex the notion of body is if we briefly consider the pre-Platonic language used to designate the body. In Homer, the body is often conceived as an aggregate of limbs (as μέλεα or γυῖα) which are responsible for our acts. One can also focus one's attention on the bodily structure or frame (which is what is implied in δέμας). Moreover, the body can be designated as χρώς, which means skin, complexion, color. It can also be seen as a corpse (νεκρός) and this is possibly also what is implied in the word Plato uses to designate it: namely, σῶμα. Whether or not this word is linked with the verb σήπομαι (and thus with the idea of being rotten or putrid), σῶμα seems to designate the body as something compact, which is precisely the perspective we have of a dead body. We can therefore see how the body can be conceived in different ways, and we find something similar in the Platonic corpus.¹¹²⁶ Plato puts forward different perspectives on the body and these perspectives are actually interconnected. In a way, they focus on different layers of the same entity. But it is important to determine their differences, especially because they are intimately connected with different layers of the term ψυχή.

The first and most simple way of conceiving the body is as a lump of matter, composed of different elements. This may apply to any solid, and the human body may also be considered from this angle. Plato speaks of an earthen body (σῶμα γήϊνον) in *Phaedrus*.¹¹²⁷ In other texts, he associates it with hair, flesh, bones, blood, limbs and sinews.¹¹²⁸ The body in this sense is all that is left when one dies – though it does not last for long, because it is corruptible and, when one dies, it quickly decomposes.¹¹²⁹ But while it

¹¹²⁶ For more on the Pre-Platonic understanding of body, see e.g. E. SCHWEITZER, σῶμα, σωματικός, σύσσωμος, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; B. SNELL, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen, Hamburg, Claassen, 1955³ (1946¹), 21ff.; H. KOLLER, Σῶμα bei Homer, *Glotta* 37 (1958), 276-281; R. RENEHAN, The Meaning of σῶμα in Homer. A Study in Methodology, *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 12 (1979), 269-282.

¹¹²⁷ See *Phdr.* 246c.

¹¹²⁸ These are the components mentioned in *Symposium*, when the body and the soul are being contrasted. See 207d-e: "(...) οὗτος μέντοι οὐδέποτε τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχων ἐν αὐτῷ ὅμως ὁ αὐτὸς καλεῖται, ἀλλὰ νέος αἰεὶ γιγνόμενος, τὰ δὲ ἀπολλύς, καὶ κατὰ τὰς τρίχας καὶ σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα καὶ αἷμα καὶ σύμπαν τὸ σῶμα."

¹¹²⁹ Cp. *Phd.* 80c-d: "ἐννοεῖς οὖν, ἔφη, ἐπειδὴν ἀποθάνῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, τὸ μὲν ὄρατὸν αὐτοῦ, τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ἐν ὄρατῷ κείμενον, ὃ δὴ νεκρὸν καλοῦμεν, ᾧ προσήκει διαλύεσθαι καὶ διαπίπτειν καὶ διαπνεῖσθαι, οὐκ εὐθὺς τούτων οὐδὲν πέπονθεν, ἀλλ' ἐπιεικῶς συχνὸν ἐπιμένει χρόνον, ἐὰν μὲν τις καὶ χαριέντως ἔχων τὸ σῶμα τελευτήσῃ καὶ ἐν τοιαύτῃ ὥρᾳ, καὶ πάνυ μάλα· συμπεσὼν γὰρ τὸ σῶμα καὶ ταριχευθὲν, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ταριχευθέντες, ὀλίγου ὄλον μένει ἀμήχανον ὅσον χρόνον, ἔνια δὲ μέρη τοῦ σώματος, καὶ ἂν σαπῇ, ὀστέα τε καὶ νεῦρα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, ὅμως ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀθάνατά ἐστιν (...)."

exists, it is visible and tangible, and when we conceive it in this way, it is just one more material or physical body, completely free from ψυχή.¹¹³⁰

However, the body can also be understood as a living organism, in which the different elements (such as earth, water, air, fire – or the hot, the cold, the dry and the wet) are properly blended.¹¹³¹ In other words, this body is a mixture (κρᾶσις) and an attunement (ἁρμονία).¹¹³² It is in a state of flux and it can move away from and back to its proper condition or φύσις.¹¹³³ More importantly, body in this sense already implies a certain degree of animation and thus a certain degree of ψυχή. It is alive, it moves itself, and it can die – i.e., it can be reduced to a decomposing corpse, in which the elements are still all present, but no longer producing any life or any movement.

This is the basis for an even more complex notion of body, which actually coincides with the domain of sensations (αἰσθήσεις). The body in this sense is not simply a self-moving thing, but rather something that has access to things or to which other things appear. The appearing of things (or simply of sensations) is normally seen as derivative from sensory organs (conceived as external objects), which can be affected by other external things and reveal something like a sensible world – even if in a way our sensory organs are also something that appears to the body, and are thus internal to the domain in question.¹¹³⁴ At any rate, the body is essentially characterized by having sensations, and the close connection between the body and sensations can be further developed in a concept of body as a particular way of seeing things – namely, one that is essentially determined by sensations and consequently only recognizes the existence of sensible beings. In this sense, the body's way of seeing things can be opposed to thinking as the capacity to identify the general modes of being (εἶδη), which is an essential feature of the soul.¹¹³⁵

Finally, the body can also be regarded as a sphere of desire that tries to avoid pain and attain pleasure. This desire can even become one's main desire in life and thus produce a particular way of live, characterized by the love of the body. Socrates describes this βίος

¹¹³⁰ As said in the *Phdr.* 245e, it is a σῶμα ἄψυχον.

¹¹³¹ Cp. *Phlb.* 29a: “τὰ περὶ τὴν τῶν σωμάτων φύσιν ἀπάντων τῶν ζώων, πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ πνεῦμα καθορῶμένον καὶ γῆν καθάπερ οἱ χειμαζόμενοι, φασίν, ἐνόητα ἐν τῇ συστάσει.”

¹¹³² Both these concepts are used for a materialistic explanation of the ψυχή in *Phaedo* (cp. *Phd.* 85e ff.), which Socrates goes on to refute, but they can nevertheless be applied to the body as such.

¹¹³³ Cp. *Phlb.* 31d: “[ΣΩ] λέγω τοίνυν τῆς ἁρμονίας μὲν λυομένης ἡμῖν ἐν τοῖς ζώοις ἅμα λύσιν τῆς φύσεως καὶ γένεσιν ἀλγηδόνων ἐν τῷ τότε γίνεσθαι χρόνῳ. [ΠΡΩ] πάντῃ λέγεις εἰκόσ. [ΣΩ] πάλιν δὲ ἀρμοττομένης τε καὶ εἰς τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ἀπιούσης ἡδονῆν γίνεσθαι λεκτέον, εἰ δεῖ δι’ ὀλίγων περὶ μεγίστων ὅτι τάχιστα ῥηθῆναι.”

¹¹³⁴ For more on this, see Chap. 12, Sect. 1 below.

¹¹³⁵ This contrast is particularly relevant in *Phaedo*. See in particular 65d-66a and 78d-79d.

φιλοσώματος in the *Phaedo*.¹¹³⁶ It is only concerned with one's sensations, it produces the particular way of seeing things we considered above (which only recognizes a sensible reality) and it is completely closed to other possibilities of seeing and being.¹¹³⁷ In this sense, the body also constitutes a kind of prison. It restricts our ability to move and confines us to a certain domain of reality.¹¹³⁸

These are the multiple senses of body in the Platonic corpus. In its most basic form, it corresponds to the earthen body, which is actually an abstraction or something we reconstruct theoretically, because we do not have any direct experience of it (at least as being our body). In order for us to experience the body (as sensation or desire, for instance), it must already be intertwined with ψυχή, and this is what we must now consider. We must see how these different layers (apart from the first) are associated with ψυχή and how ψυχή makes them possible.¹¹³⁹ We will also discuss how we can have access to more than what is described above and how this surplus is also associated with ψυχή. Normally we tend to attribute many (if not all) of these things to the body and thus we regard ourselves as being primarily a body. But, as we said, Plato discusses the intrinsic limitations of the body as such and tries to show how we need more than a body to be what we are. In doing so, he calls the attention to the central role the ψυχή plays in our being and also to how we must revise our most immediate conception of ourselves as a material being among others.

3.2. The practical limitations of the body

Several limitations of the body in the strictest sense of the word concern the practical domain. Plato points out that we can identify and discern the ψυχή in the way we act or behave. To begin with, ψυχή is the source of movement in general. A non-animated body can only be moved by something else, whereas the soul itself is defined as self-movement.¹¹⁴⁰ This means that the soul is not simply something in movement, but movement itself. In other words, it is intrinsically kinetic, and as such it is open to change and also the agent of this

¹¹³⁶ The qualification “φιλοσώματος” appears in 68b-c. For the way of life in question, see e.g. 66b-67a.

¹¹³⁷ Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 83c-d.

¹¹³⁸ We will not consider here whether the soul's imprisonment is to be attributed to the material component of the body or whether it is somehow the fault of the ψυχή itself. For a discussion of this, see Chap. 17, Sects. 3 and 4.

¹¹³⁹ In a way, even the first layer is associated with the ψυχή insofar as it is contrasted with it. The ψυχή is what is absent from the earthen body and what distinguishes it from the body as we experience it.

¹¹⁴⁰ Cp. *Phdr.* 254c ff. and *Lg.* 895c-896b. See also *Cra.* 400a.

very change. This description also implies that the ψυχή has power (δύναμις).¹¹⁴¹ In fact, this power to move itself is life in the broadest sense, and therefore ψυχή is constitutively life or what brings life to the body.¹¹⁴² We may be tempted to think the body moves itself or is the source of motion, but the real source lies beyond it.¹¹⁴³ It is the ψυχή that moves the body and, through the body, it can also move other things. It can even move other ψυχαί, insofar as it can guide them, provoke them or lead them to change their ways.¹¹⁴⁴

But the ψυχή does not just cause movement in the body. It also controls the body, governs it, is in charge of it.¹¹⁴⁵ In *Alcibiades I*, Socrates points out that the ψυχή uses the body, both to act and to talk.¹¹⁴⁶ In fact, the ψυχή is superior and relates to the body as a master to a slave.¹¹⁴⁷ In the *Republic*, Socrates even says that the function (ἔργον) of the soul is to manage, rule, and deliberate – in sum, to live, and to live better or worse, according to how it manages itself and the body.¹¹⁴⁸ As a result, the body is not only a slave of the ψυχή, but it can also be conceived as a sign (a σημά) of it, insofar as its movements are an expression of the ψυχή’s wishes.¹¹⁴⁹

Particularly relevant in this context is the argument in *Phaedo* against the view that soul is no more than the mixture and harmony of bodily elements, as the attunement of a lyre.¹¹⁵⁰ If it were so, the ψυχή would not be able to oppose the body. But Socrates argues that the soul is constitutively free and it can either resist (ἐναντιοῦσθαι) or yield (συγχωρεῖν) to the tensions and desires of the body. This means that although the body may somehow move the soul, insofar as it can lead it to pursue bodily desires, this movement is nonetheless based in a surrender of control or an abdication on the part of the soul, and it is, as such, an act of the ψυχή.¹¹⁵¹ In sum, the body and the ψυχή do not necessarily agree, they can be in conflict, but the soul is not automatically dragged by the body, and therefore it must be something different from it. The ψυχή is a principle different from the body and it is in fact

¹¹⁴¹ Cp. *Phd.* 70b and *Lg.* 892a.

¹¹⁴² In the *Cratylus* it is said that the ψυχή is the cause of a body being alive (399d-e) and that it makes it live and move around (ζῆν καὶ περιεῖναι, 400a). In the *Phaedo*, the ψυχή is said to bring with it life (105c-d).

¹¹⁴³ Cp. *Phdr.* 246c: “(...) σῶμα γήϊνον λαβοῦσα [sc. ἡ ψυχή], αὐτὸ αὐτὸ δοκοῦν κινεῖν διὰ τὴν ἐκείνης δύναμιν (...)”

¹¹⁴⁴ Cp. footnote 1123 above.

¹¹⁴⁵ Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 79e-80a, 94b ff., *Lg.* 896c.

¹¹⁴⁶ Socrates speaks of using or employing (χρηῖσθαι) the body in conversing with another, and also in making shoes or playing the cithara. See 129b ff. On the question of who or what converses with another, cp. *Phd.* 115c.

¹¹⁴⁷ He uses verbs such as δεσπόζειν and δουλεύειν to describe the roles played by the ψυχή and the body. See *Phd.* 79e and *Tim.* 34b-35a.

¹¹⁴⁸ See 353d-354a.

¹¹⁴⁹ See *Cra.* 400b-c.

¹¹⁵⁰ See 85e-86d and, especially, 92e ff.

¹¹⁵¹ We will consider this better below, in Chap. 17, Sects. 3 and 4.

what determines whether the body is attended to or neglected. All the goods and evils come from the ψυχή, as is stressed for instance in *Charmides*, and even headaches are said to result from it.¹¹⁵² In *Gorgias*, Socrates ends up implying that it is the soul's desire that causes one's body to be oversized and sick.¹¹⁵³ Alternatively, the ψυχή may also maintain and exercise the body, thereby strengthening it.

But this is not all. The ψυχή does not only control the movement of the body, but it also determines what the body wants. Plato several times shows that our desires do not have their origin outside of us. They are not the result of something absolutely fascinating appearing before us and awakening a completely new desire in us. Instead, our desires are primarily the result of immanent conditions that actually let something appear as desirable. The basic condition is lack (ἔνδεια or κένωσις), which may occur at the level of the body.¹¹⁵⁴ But as it is shown in the *Philebus*, lack by itself is insufficient to mobilize us and make us pursue something. It is necessary to anticipate the filling up or satisfaction of this lack (its πλήρωσις), and in order to do so, we need to have some memory of filling a similar lack and also of that with which we filled it. This memory, according to Plato, is what guides the body to something and makes it desire this thing. But memory is not something bodily. It is intrinsically psychic. Therefore, Socrates says that there is no bodily desire in the strict sense. In order for our body to desire, we need to have a ψυχή and it is the ψυχή itself that makes bodily desires possible.¹¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the ψυχή has its own desires, which do not refer to any specific bodily condition. The best example of this is probably the desire of knowledge.¹¹⁵⁶ Thus all kinds of desire are rooted in this non-bodily component of our being.

It is likewise in virtue of the ψυχή that we relate ourselves to the good (be it only an apparent good or the real good). The ψυχή is the part of us that is concerned with the so-called final cause or the end that is to be achieved. In *Phaedo*, Socrates argues that it is not because of his body and its parts that he is sitting in prison, but because he has a δόξα about what is best and this is what guides him.¹¹⁵⁷ He then distinguishes between what is the real cause and what is required by the real cause to be a cause.¹¹⁵⁸ The body and its parts are only

¹¹⁵² See 156e ff., and especially 156e: “πάντα γὰρ ἔφη ἐκ τῆς ψυχῆς ὠρμηθῆναι καὶ τὰ κακὰ καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ τῷ σώματι καὶ παντὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ (...).”

¹¹⁵³ Cp. 517a ff.

¹¹⁵⁴ We will discuss the question of the inner conditions of desire in Chap. 12 below.

¹¹⁵⁵ See *Phlb.* 34e-35d.

¹¹⁵⁶ For more on the desire of knowledge (φιλοσοφία), see Chap. 13, Sect. 3.3.

¹¹⁵⁷ See 98b ff.

¹¹⁵⁸ See 99b: “(...) ἄλλο μὲν τί ἐστι τὸ αἴτιον τῷ ὄντι, ἄλλο δὲ ἐκεῖνο ἄνευ οὗ τὸ αἴτιον οὐκ ἂν ποτ' εἴη αἴτιον (...).”

something we need in order to act, whereas our mind or intellect (the νοῦς) is what really guides us. We need a δόξα and νοῦς to have some conception of what we should pursue and both of them are essential components of the ψυχή, as we shall see.

It is thus clear that for Plato our actions depend on the ψυχή. But there is more. The ψυχή also determines the moral value of our actions. Our doing things well or badly and becoming good or bad depends on the ψυχή, as is said in *Protagoras*.¹¹⁵⁹ This idea is also expressed in *Sophist*, when the Visitor points out that there would be no excellences (ἀρεταί) and their opposites if there was only the body and what is visible.¹¹⁶⁰ In other passages, the excellence and poor condition of the soul is characterized as a kind of harmony or disharmony different from the one of the bodily elements.¹¹⁶¹ The soul must be kept in good shape. In other words, we need to take special care of it, exercise it, and improve it – which requires us to educate ourselves (or, what is the same, educate our ψυχή).¹¹⁶²

3.3. The cognitive limitations of the body

Several of the practical limitations of the body (and especially the last one) already pointed to its cognitive limitations, but now we have to consider them in more detail. The ψυχή is at times characterized by Plato as that part of us that desires and receives knowledge. It “ingests” knowledge (even if Plato also criticizes the model of receiving knowledge from the outside, as we saw above) and learns.¹¹⁶³ Moreover, it is the part of us that may be affected or even bewitched by λόγος, and it then leads our actions according to it.¹¹⁶⁴ But the cognitive role of the ψυχή is actually much more complex. Its relation with knowledge is very important, and this is why in *Phaedo* Socrates associates it not only with δύναμις, but also with φρόνησις – i.e., with intelligence, lucidity or some knowledge of what things are.¹¹⁶⁵ The two things are intrinsically connected. In *Sophist*, ψυχή’s knowledge (φρόνησις or νοῦν

¹¹⁵⁹ See 313a: “(...) ὁ δὲ περὶ πλείονος τοῦ σώματος ἡγή, τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ ἐν ᾧ πάντ’ ἐστὶν τὰ σὰ ἢ εὖ ἢ κακῶς πράττειν, χρηστοῦ ἢ πονηροῦ αὐτοῦ γενομένου (...).”

¹¹⁶⁰ See 246e ff.

¹¹⁶¹ See e.g. *Phd.* 93b-c.

¹¹⁶² For more on this, cp. Chap. 2, Sect. 2.3.

¹¹⁶³ Cp. e.g. *Prt.* 313c ff. For criticism of the idea of ingesting knowledge, see in particular *Smp.* 175d-e, and cp. Intro., Sect. 4.1.

¹¹⁶⁴ Hence Socrates defines rhetoric itself as a ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων (*Phdr.* 261a-b).

¹¹⁶⁵ See 70b: “(...) ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δὴ ἴσως οὐκ ὀλίγησ παραμυθίας δεῖται καὶ πίστεως, ὡς ἔστι τε ψυχὴ ἀποθανόντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τινα δύναμιν ἔχει καὶ φρόνησιν.” As was said in footnote 1121, although Socrates is talking about what might characterize the ψυχή after death, the characteristics he is referring to also apply to the period before death and are in fact the ψυχή’s essential features.

ἔχειν) is marked by movement and life.¹¹⁶⁶ In *Laws*, the inventory of movements attributed to the ψυχή include both practical and cognitive movements – such as wishing, reflecting, caring, counseling, correct and false judgments, pleasure, pain, confidence, fear, hate and love.¹¹⁶⁷

Let us then consider more closely the specifically cognitive role the ψυχή plays in our experience of things. The most basic form of ψυχή's intervention is at the level of sensation (αἴσθησις), which one may be tempted to regard as a strictly bodily moment. However, αἴσθησις itself requires ψυχή. In *Philebus*, Socrates argues that the sensation requires a shaking or disturbance (σεισμός) in the body, but the latter is not enough for us to feel anything. The bodily shaking or disturbance must reach the ψυχή in order to be noticed.¹¹⁶⁸ In the same dialogue, Socrates also distinguishes between small changes in the body that do not produce any feeling of pleasure or pain, and great changes, of which we become emotionally aware.¹¹⁶⁹ What happens purely in the body is thus not enough to produce a sensation or feeling. Αἴσθησις does not consist in the passivity of the body, but it requires an ability to be affected at a different level (a δύναμις εἰς τὸ παθεῖν, as said in the *Sophist*).¹¹⁷⁰ By itself, the body has no sensitivity. In *Phaedo*, Socrates points out that he will not suffer at all while his dead body is being burned.¹¹⁷¹ But the same applies to a living body. Without the ψυχή one will not know that one is going through something. The role of a non-bodily principle in our emotions seems therefore clear, and it becomes even clearer if we consider that there are many feelings of pleasure and pain that are not directly connected with bodily states. In *Philebus*, Socrates considers the pleasures and pains that imply both the body and the soul, as

¹¹⁶⁶ See *Sph.* 248c ff.

¹¹⁶⁷ See 896e-897a: “ἄγει μὲν δὴ ψυχή πάντα τὰ κατ’ οὐρανὸν καὶ γῆν καὶ θάλατταν ταῖς αὐτῆς κινήσεσιν, αἷς ὀνόματά ἐστιν βούλεσθαι, σκοπεῖσθαι, ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, βουλευέσθαι, δοξάζειν ὀρθῶς ἐψευσμένως, χαίρουσαν λυπούμενην, θαρροῦσαν φοβουμένην, μισοῦσαν στέργουσαν, καὶ πάσαις ὅσαι τούτων συγγενεῖς ἢ πρωτουργοὶ κινήσεις (...).”

¹¹⁶⁸ See *Phlb.* 33d-e: “[ΣΩ] θὲς τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα ἡμῶν ἐκάστοτε παθημάτων τὰ μὲν ἐν τῷ σώματι κατασβεννύμενα πρὶν ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν διεξελθεῖν ἀπαθῆ ἐκείνην ἐάσαντα, τὰ δὲ δι’ ἀμφοῖν ἰόντα καὶ τινα ὡσπερ σεισμὸν ἐντιθέμενα ἴδιόν τε καὶ κοινὸν ἐκατέρῳ. [ΠΡΩ] κείσθω. [ΣΩ] τὰ μὲν δὴ μὴ δι’ ἀμφοῖν ἰόντα ἐὰν τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν φῶμεν λανθάνειν, τὰ δὲ δι’ ἀμφοῖν μὴ λανθάνειν, ἄρ’ ὀρθότατα ἐροῦμεν; [ΠΡΩ] πῶς γὰρ οὐ;”

¹¹⁶⁹ See *Phlb.* 43a-c: “[ΣΩ] ταῦτα μὲν τοίνυν οὕτως ἔστω, φῶμεν πρὸς τούτους· σὺ δ’ ἀπόκριται πότερον αἰεὶ πάντα, ὅποσα πάσχει τι τῶν ἐμψύχων, ταῦτ’ αἰσθάνεται τὸ πάσχον, καὶ οὐτ’ ἀξανάμενοι λανθάνομεν ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς οὔτε τι τῶν τοιούτων οὐδὲν πάσχοντες, ἢ πᾶν τοῦναντίον. [ΠΡΩ] ἅπαν δὴπου τοῦναντίον· ὀλίγου γὰρ τὰ γε τοιαῦτα λέληθε πᾶνθ’ ἡμᾶς. [ΣΩ] οὐ τοίνυν καλῶς ἡμῖν εἴρηται τὸ νυνδὴ ῥηθέν, ὡς αἱ μεταβολαὶ κάτω τε καὶ ἄνω γιγνόμεναι λύπας τε καὶ ἡδονὰς ἀπεργάζονται. [ΠΡΩ] τί μήν; [ΣΩ] ὧδ’ ἔσται κάλλιον καὶ ἀνεπιληπτότερον τὸ λεγόμενον. [ΠΡΩ] πῶς; [ΣΩ] ὡς αἱ μὲν μεγάλαι μεταβολαὶ λύπας τε καὶ ἡδονὰς ποιοῦσιν ἡμῖν, αἱ δ’ αὖ μέτριαί τε καὶ σμικραὶ τὸ παράπαν οὐδέτερα τούτων.”

¹¹⁷⁰ Cp. 247d-e.

¹¹⁷¹ See 115e.

well as those that come solely from the soul.¹¹⁷² His entire analysis thus demonstrates that the ψυχή is the source of all αἴσθησις.

A more precise explanation of this can be found in *Theaetetus*, where Socrates argues that the sensory organs (αἰσθητήρια) are not that with which (ᾧ) we sense or perceive something, but rather that through which (δι' οὗ) we sense or perceive it.¹¹⁷³ They are the instruments or the means employed by the sensing or perceiving agent in us. The perception as such is not performed by them, but rather by something that lies beyond them. More precisely, it is the ψυχή that senses or perceives. Furthermore, Socrates points out in the same passage that our sensations are not isolated from each other. They are not atoms of consciousness or, as Socrates says, they are not sitting inside us as if they were within a wooden horse – i.e., as if they were in a container. They are not a mere aggregate. They are all part of the same domain or they all converge on the same thing.¹¹⁷⁴ This means that all sensations and all sensory fields refer or belong to one global domain. All sensations belong to the same entity, which pervades them and reaches them all. There is a constitutive unity that precedes all parts and holds everything together – and the ψυχή is precisely this unity.

Socrates then goes on to show that the ψυχή is not simply a unification of sensible contents, but it also performs its own operations. It compares and makes calculations or reflects about the sensitive contents, which allows the soul to determine what they are. This operation is called δοξάζειν and Socrates describes it as being at the core of the ψυχή.¹¹⁷⁵ We have considered this before.¹¹⁷⁶ The soul is in dialogue with itself, asking questions and giving answers about what things are. It tries to determine things and the truth. It is directed to this target, though it is also subject to the deviation that corresponds to ignorance (be it a simple ignorance, or the double ignorance of having false knowledge claims).

The body by itself would not be able to do any of this. In *Gorgias*, Socrates describes a bodily way of seeing things (which would be closely related to one's sensations) as relatively indeterminate and unable to discern important features of things, which can only be

¹¹⁷² See 47c ff.

¹¹⁷³ See 184c: “[ΣΩ] (...) σκόπει γάρ· ἀπόκρισις ποτέρα ὀρθότερα, ᾧ ὀρώμεν τοῦτο εἶναι ὀφθαλμούς, ἢ δι' οὗ ὀρώμεν, καὶ ᾧ ἀκούομεν ὅσα, ἢ δι' οὗ ἀκούομεν; [ΘΕΑΙ] δι' ὧν ἕκαστα αἰσθανόμεθα, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες, μᾶλλον ἢ οἷς.”

¹¹⁷⁴ See 184d: “δεινὸν γάρ που, ὃ παῖ, εἰ πολλαί τινες ἐν ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ἐν δουρείοις ἵπποις αἰσθήσεις ἐγκάθηται, εἰς μίαν τινὰ ιδεάν, εἴτε ψυχὴν εἴτε ὅτι δεῖ καλεῖν, πάντα ταῦτα συντείνει, ἢ διὰ τούτων οἷον ὀργάνων αἰσθανόμεθα ὅσα αἰσθητά.”

¹¹⁷⁵ See *Tht.* 185a ff., especially 187a: “[ΣΩ] ἀλλ' οὐ τι μὲν δὴ τούτου γε ἔνεκα ἠρχόμεθα διαλεγόμενοι, ἵνα εὐρωμεν τί ποτ' οὐκ ἔστ' ἐπιστήμη, ἀλλὰ τί ἔστιν. ὅμως δὲ τοσοῦτόν γε προβεβήκαμεν, ὥστε μὴ ζητεῖν αὐτὴν ἐν αἰσθήσει τὸ παράπαν ἀλλ' ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ ὀνόματι, ὅτι ποτ' ἔχει ἡ ψυχή, ὅταν αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν πραγματεύηται περὶ τὰ ὄντα. [ΘΕΑΙ] ἀλλὰ μὴν τοῦτό γε καλεῖται, ὃ Σώκρατες, ὡς ἐγῶμαι, δοξάζειν.”

¹¹⁷⁶ See Chap. 5, Sect. 1.3.

discerned by τέχνη. He says that in this respect the perspective of the body corresponds to Anaxagoras' “ὄμοῦ πάντα χρήματα ἦν”.¹¹⁷⁷ He is actually talking about the body in a sense that already involves some ψυχή and even some δοξάζειν – but what he says is a particularly apt description of a body completely deprived of δοξάζειν. Such a body would have no discernment whatsoever, because it is by judging about things that we become aware of what they are. But this is not all. It is also by judging that we become aware of having the sensations that we have.¹¹⁷⁸ Without judgment we would not know what we are feeling. In fact, we would not even know that we are feeling at all.

But the soul's activity does more than determine the sensations we have at each moment. It can also determine experiences of which we have no sensation at the present moment, because our body is not being affected in any way. For instance, the ψυχή is able to retain or remember past experiences, and it can also anticipate future experiences, through calculation (λογισμός) and expectations (ἐλπίδες).¹¹⁷⁹ In the case of the future, there is still no sensation of what will happen, but the ψυχή is able to imagine it by employing that part of it that is like a painter.¹¹⁸⁰ Thus, the ψυχή illuminates our sensations and it also extends its own awareness towards the past and the future. This is then what distinguishes us from a mollusk.¹¹⁸¹ Human life is much more complex than what we imagine the life of such sea creatures to be, and this complexity of ours must be attributed to the workings of the ψυχή.

Finally, there is still one more decisive aspect in Plato's identification of the ψυχή. Plato highlights in several passages (including the one from *Theaetetus* we just considered) that we are not only directed towards sensible and individual contents, but are also aware of what we might call intellectual predicates. These intellectual or general predicates cannot be given as such by any sensible experience. The sensory organs give specific kinds of content (visible, audible, and so on), but we can also reflect about our sensations and determine them

¹¹⁷⁷ Cp. *Grg.* 465c-d: “καὶ γὰρ ἄν, εἰ μὴ ἡ ψυχή τῷ σώματι ἐπεστάτει, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ αὐτῷ, καὶ μὴ ὑπὸ ταύτης κατεθεωρεῖτο καὶ διεκρίνετο ἢ τε ὀψοποιική καὶ ἡ ἰατρική, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα ἔκρινε σταθμώμενον ταῖς χάρισι ταῖς πρὸς αὐτό, τὸ τοῦ Ἀναξαγόρου ἂν πολὺ ἦν, ὃ φίλε Πῶλε – σὺ γὰρ τούτων ἔμπειρος – ὄμοῦ ἂν πάντα χρήματα ἐφύρετο ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ, ἀκρίτων ὄντων τῶν τε ἰατρικῶν καὶ ὑγιεινῶν καὶ ὀψοποικῶν.”

¹¹⁷⁸ This is expressly said in the *Phlb.* 21c: “(...) δόξαν δ' αὖ μὴ κεκτημένον ἀληθῆ μὴ δοξάζειν χαίρειν χαίροντα (...).”

¹¹⁷⁹ For soul's memory, see Chap. 11 Sect. 3.2, and for its anticipations, cp. e.g. *Phlb.* 39a ff.

¹¹⁸⁰ On this point, see Chap. 5 Sect. 1.5 above.

¹¹⁸¹ See *Phlb.* 21b-c: “[ΣΩ] νοῦν δέ γε καὶ μνήμην καὶ ἐπιστήμην καὶ δόξαν μὴ κεκτημένος ἀληθῆ, πρῶτον μὲν τοῦτο αὐτό, εἰ χαίρεις ἢ μὴ χαίρεις, ἀνάγκη δήπου σε ἀγνοεῖν, κενόν γε ὄντα πάσης φρονήσεως; [ΠΡΩ] ἀνάγκη. [ΣΩ] καὶ μὴν ὡσαύτως μνήμην μὴ κεκτημένον ἀνάγκη δήπου μὴδ' ὅτι ποτὲ ἔχαιρες μεμνήσθαι, τῆς τ' ἐν τῷ παρακρήμα ἡδονῆς προσπιπτούσης μὴδ' ἡντινοῦν μνήμην ὑπομένειν· δόξαν δ' αὖ μὴ κεκτημένον ἀληθῆ μὴ δοξάζειν χαίρειν χαίροντα, λογισμοῦ δὲ στερόμενον μὴδ' εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον ὡς χαίρήσεις δυνατὸν εἶναι λογίζεσθαι, ζῆν δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπου βίον, ἀλλὰ τινος πλεῦμονος ἢ τῶν ὅσα θαλάττια μετ' ὀστρεῖων ἐμψυχά ἐστι σωμάτων.”

with general or universal predicates such as being, identity, similitude, and so on. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates calls these predicates κοινά, because they are common not only to different objects, but also to the different sensory fields.¹¹⁸² Usually, they are called εἶδη and defined as something invisible, that we can reach only through our understanding, intellect or mind (διάνοια or νοῦς).¹¹⁸³ We have some insight into them or, as Plato also says, a recollection of them, which cannot be derived from our sensible experience. Thus, we can only reach them through our own ψυχή.¹¹⁸⁴ We must have a non-sensitive eye or an eye of the soul (τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα).¹¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the body cannot account for these kind of contents. It even hinders our access to them.¹¹⁸⁶ We can only see or hear individual things, and the contents or predicates in question transcend any particular instance. The soul must therefore reflect by itself about the sensible beings and determine their intellectual predicates. It must have some access to them that is entirely unrelated to the body. This is decisive, because it deeply affects the way we see everything. In *Phaedrus*, this remembrance of general predicates is even presented as the essential feature of the human being, without which no one could be human.¹¹⁸⁷ A purely sensitive experience of reality would be completely different from our own. We are not even able to imagine it. We must always see things according to εἶδη or in light of them.

3.4. Assessment

We have considered the way Plato proves the existence and importance of what he calls ψυχή. Our life would be very different without all these components and the body cannot account for them. The problem then is how the different manifestations of ψυχή are intertwined and what is at the core of this entity. In order to determine the ψυχή, we need a more precise identification of its features. We have hitherto seen that the soul is something irreducible to the body, and although it is invisible, it is that in virtue of which we are able to experience not only the body, but reality in general. Up to a point, the soul is fully

¹¹⁸² See *Tht.* 185b ff.

¹¹⁸³ See e.g. *Phd.* 65d ff.

¹¹⁸⁴ This is precisely what is said in *Tht.* 184d ff.

¹¹⁸⁵ Cp. *Rep.* 533d.

¹¹⁸⁶ Cp. once more *Phd.* 65dff.

¹¹⁸⁷ See *Phdr.* 249b-c: “(...) ἔνθα καὶ εἰς θηρίου βίον ἀνθρωπίνῃ ψυχῇ ἀφικνεῖται, καὶ ἐκ θηρίου ὅς ποτε ἄνθρωπος ἦν πάλιν εἰς ἄνθρωπον. οὐ γὰρ ἢ γε μήποτε ἰδοῦσα τὴν ἀλήθειαν εἰς τόδε ἤξει τὸ σχῆμα. δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναιρούμενον· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις ἐκείνων ἃ ποτ’ εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἢ ψυχῇ συμπορευθεῖσα θεῶ καὶ ὑπεριδοῦσα ἃ νῦν εἶναι φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακόψασα εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως.”

independent from the body and in order to understand the former we need to conceive it in terms very different from the ones we use to conceive the body, even if there may still be some affinity and proximity between our ψυχή and our body. Indeed, we will see how there is something body-like in the soul or how the two moments are often closely linked.¹¹⁸⁸

The nature of our ψυχή is thus a complicated problem, and this is not without consequences for the body. In a sense, the body and the ψυχή depend on each other and so the concept of body must also be reconsidered in light of the concept of ψυχή. Actually, the whole structure of our being must be reconsidered. The body and the soul are mixed and unified, and we are the result of this mixture or union. So we cannot conceive ourselves apart from them, and they cannot be conceived in a pure state. They are constitutively mixed and, as such, they can only be experienced in the mixture. Analyzing them is therefore a matter of better understanding the union between them. This is something we must do from the inside, since we ourselves are this union. This does not mean that both elements are equally important. In fact, the ψυχή is the more complex and more decisive component, and this means that the definition of the whole will be deeply marked by how the ψυχή is conceived. So we must focus our attention on the latter and its main structures, in order to see how our whole experience (including the experience of the body) is possible. This inverts our usual perspective. The entire reality and our entire life will be seen as being primarily psychic. But how can this be? What is the structure of our soul?

¹¹⁸⁸ See in particular Chap. 11, Sect. 3.1, and Chap. 13, Sect. 3.1.

CHAPTER 11

The cognitive dimension of the ψυχή

“(...) ἐν βυθῶι γὰρ ἡ ἀλήθεια.”

Democritus, DK B117

We saw in the previous chapter that according to Plato the ψυχή is the central component of our being and also that it is essentially characterized by power or movement and awareness or knowledge. These two features are at the center of the ψυχή’s two dimensions. Indeed, according to Plato, the ψυχή has a practical and a cognitive dimension, although he also sees them as being intimately connected with one another. However, before we can determine their connection and the structure of our ψυχή as a whole, we must consider each of these two dimensions separately – at least to the extent to which it is possible to separate them from one another. We shall start by isolating the cognitive dimension of the ψυχή – i.e., the way it relates to knowledge and how it is defined by this relation.¹¹⁸⁹ We saw that the soul’s movement is not completely blind and now we will try to determine what this non-blindness consists in. The soul is not absolutely closed to other things and to itself. It is rather open to beings in general. It has some kind of access to beings or is somehow aware of them (even if this access or awareness might be in part – or perhaps even entirely – fictitious, as we saw in Chapter 7). We must then try to determine the nature or structure of this access to things in general and see how it is at the heart of what we are. More precisely, we will try to determine how Plato conceives of our cognition in general.¹¹⁹⁰ In order to do so, we will first consider the simplest forms of access to something, and then we will consider knowledge as such. In doing so, we shall pay special attention to the fact that knowledge cannot be conceived apart from the reality that is known, and the correlation

¹¹⁸⁹ The word “knowledge” is here used in a broad sense. It refers to any form of “seeing” or having access to something. It includes therefore knowledge in the proper sense (as a perfect access to reality) and its defective forms. The latter are also part of the cognitive dimension of the soul insofar as they constitute different modes of awareness and are somehow related (or to be more precise, are intrinsically referred) to knowledge in the proper or fullest sense.

¹¹⁹⁰ This will allow us to complement our analyses of knowledge claims and δόξαι (both in their neutral and in their negative sense), insofar as we will now integrate these particular modes of cognition in the cognitive structure of our being.

of both things constitutes the inner structure of truth. Finally, we must also consider the subjective or cognitive powers (δυνάμεις) that constitute or affect our relation to truth.

The analysis of all these aspects will allow us to see the complexity of the ψυχή's cognitive dimension. But, as was said, this is just one side of the ψυχή, and in order to focus on it we will have to abstract from the practical dimension of the ψυχή (namely, from its desires, the way it acts and how it lives). This does not mean that the soul can be conceived as having a purely cognitive dimension, deprived of any practical tension. As we will consider later, even the soul's relation with knowledge is intrinsically determined by desire (and in particular by its love of knowledge or φιλοσοφία).¹¹⁹¹ But for now we will leave aside the question of our interest in truth. We will not discuss how much we need to know the truth and whether this need is based on practical ends or on a purely theoretical or speculative interest, which is concerned with truth for its own sake. We will rather see that our ψυχή is always somehow related to knowledge or truth and we will try to determine the nature and structure of this relation. The analysis will therefore be very abstract, but it will nevertheless provide an important contribution to our main problem. Both our life in general and philosophical examination in particular are intrinsically marked by knowledge and truth, so it is important to understand the meaning of these notions. In order to do so we will try to dismantle the unified whole that corresponds to the cognitive dimension of our being and see how it is constituted. But where can we start? How does Plato approach the problem?

1. The appearing (φαίνεσθαι or non-λήθη) of something as the basic layer of our ψυχή

One way in which Plato tries to determine the structure of truth is by contrasting it with conscious states that are still not characterized by truth. These are not the states we normally find ourselves in, but they let us better see what must be added to them in order to bring about our normal way of relating to things. In other words, they constitute the basic layer of the ψυχή – and this is what we will now try to determine. We will see how Plato conceives of the minimal or simplest form of access to (or contact with) something, and then we will see what must be added to it.

What is then the ultimate basis of the ψυχή? We could say that the ψυχή, at its core, is a kind of being that is not locked up in itself and closed to everything else. It is open to other things and to itself, and this openness is essential to it. It is awake or conscious. Something

¹¹⁹¹ See Chaps. 12-14.

presents itself to it or appears to the ψυχή. There is an appearance or an appearing (a φαίνεσθαι, φαντάζεσθαι, or *Erscheinen*) – not in the sense of an illusion that hides something (*Schein*), but rather in the sense that something (in the broadest sense of the word) shows, presents or manifests itself. The soul takes something in. It notices or witnesses something. This vague “something” is not necessarily an external object, nor does it need to be regarded as such. It may be something internal or even indeterminate with respect to its status – and the sphere we are trying to isolate is precisely indeterminate, as we shall see.

The “appearing” is an absolute fact. However illusory or wrong our way of seeing things might be, the appearance of something (the existence of an appearance) is absolutely undeniable. Its certainty resembles the certainty characteristic of Descartes’ *cogito*. But let us leave this aside for the moment. What is important is that the appearing as such is an essential component of our being. It is the stuff we are made of. Without it, there would be no awareness at all. We would be like a stone – completely senseless and mindless. Likewise, appearing as such is an essential component of everything else we come into contact with. Despite all the differences between things in general, they must all somehow appear and they appear in the same domain – the domain of subjective appearance. This means that things in general are not isolated or scattered. They are all in relation with each other, insofar as they all appear in the same domain.

However, our experience or our life is not reducible to the simple fact of something appearing. If we isolate this structural component of our being and identify its specificity, we will see that it cannot account for our ordinary experience of things. The appearance is always part of a more complex structure. This means that any analysis of the basic layer of the ψυχή must be artificial, insofar as it dismantles something that is normally part of a compound. Indeed, it is not clear that this sphere may ever exist (or even be clearly conceived) in isolation. But we can try to imagine it as a means of contrast in order to better determine the inner structure of our being. This is what Plato does at some points. He tries to identify the primary or fundamental layer of our being, and he refers to it in different ways. Sometimes he tries to outline the threshold of consciousness – i.e., he tries to draw the boundaries between complete absence of awareness (i.e., the complete ignorance characteristic of a stone) and the minimal form of awareness.¹¹⁹² Other times, he rather focuses on the distinction between the forms of awareness that are no more than pure

¹¹⁹² The moment which is now at issue is also opposed to the vanishing of something (ἀφανίζεσθαι) or to its being hidden (κρύπτεσθαι). The appearing is the uncovering or laying bare of something, making it apparent.

appearing and what transgresses it (thus reaching in some way the reality beyond the appearing). These two kinds of boundary are then what circumscribes the domain of appearance.

Let us start with the threshold of consciousness. In *Philebus*, Plato identifies the basic level of the soul as a level of non-λανθάνειν or non-λήθη. We considered this in the previous chapter. In order for us to have some sensation, there must be a stirring or a shaking in the body, but it must also reach the ψυχή, in order for it not to escape our notice. This reaching the soul is thus opposed to the absolute nothingness of λήθη (concealment, unmindfulness, or oblivion) or ἀναισθησία (senselessness).¹¹⁹³ This still does not constitute ἀλήθεια in the strict sense, but it is different from an absolute hiddenness.

In *Theaetetus*, Plato discusses in depth the nature of αἰσθάνεσθαι and αἴσθησις, and he comes to identify it with φαίνεσθαι and φαντασία.¹¹⁹⁴ In a first moment, however, he isolates the moment of something appearing, coming into view, becoming visible or being shown. Something is brought to light. But what is the status of this appearing? How is it to be understood? In *Theaetetus*, Socrates starts by following our natural tendency to think that there is some being that appears and that is beyond the fact of appearing as such – i.e., that exists independently of its appearing or not. We also think that there is someone to which something appears. The eye sees and something is seen. There is a subject and an object in the broadest sense: i.e., two poles that constitute the appearing but are independent of it. The appearing is something in between these two things, delimited by them.¹¹⁹⁵

However, the discussion in *Theaetetus* goes on to show that this is still a naive conception. For instance, being will be identified with what appears or seems to someone,

¹¹⁹³ See 33d-34a: “[ΣΩ] θεὸς τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα ἡμῶν ἐκάστοτε παθημάτων τὰ μὲν ἐν τῷ σώματι κατασβεννόμενα πρὶν ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν διεξελθεῖν ἀπαθῆ ἑκείνην ἐάσαντα, τὰ δὲ δι’ ἀμφοῖν ἰόντα καὶ τινα ὥσπερ σεισμὸν ἐντιθέντα ἴδιόν τε καὶ κοινὸν ἐκατέρω. [ΠΡΩ] κείσθω. [ΣΩ] τὰ μὲν δὴ μὴ δι’ ἀμφοῖν ἰόντα ἐὰν τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν φῶμεν λανθάνειν, τὰ δὲ δι’ ἀμφοῖν μὴ λανθάνειν, ἅρ’ ὀρθότατα ἐροῦμεν; [ΠΡΩ] πῶς γὰρ οὐ; [ΣΩ] τὸ τοῖνον λεληθέναι μηδαμῶς ὑπολάβης ὡς λέγω λήθης ἐνταῦθά που γένεσιν· ἔστι γὰρ λήθη μνήμης ἔξοδος, ἢ δ’ ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ νῦν οὐπω γέγονε. τοῦ δὴ μήτε ὄντος μήτε γεγονότος πῶ γίγνεσθαι φάναι τινὰ ἀποβολὴν ἄτοπον. ἢ γάρ; [ΠΡΩ] τί μήν; [ΣΩ] τὰ τοῖνον ὀνόματα μετάβαλε μόνον. [ΠΡΩ] πῶς; [ΣΩ] ἀντὶ μὲν τοῦ λεληθέναι τὴν ψυχὴν, ὅταν ἀπαθῆς αὕτη γίγνηται τῶν σεισμῶν τῶν τοῦ σώματος, ἦν νῦν λήθην καλεῖς ἀναισθησίαν ἐπονόμασον. [ΠΡΩ] ἔμαθον. [ΣΩ] τὸ δ’ ἐν ἐνὶ πάθει τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ σῶμα κοινῇ γιγνόμενον κοινῇ καὶ κινεῖσθαι, ταύτην δ’ αὐτὴν κίνησιν ὀνομάζων αἰσθησιν οὐκ ἀπὸ τρόπου φθέγγοι’ ἄν.”

¹¹⁹⁴ See in particular 152b-c: “[ΣΩ] πότερον οὖν τότε αὐτὸ ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τὸ πνεῦμα ψυχρὸν ἢ οὐ ψυχρὸν φήσομεν; ἢ πεισόμεθα τῷ Πρωταγόρα ὅτι τῷ μὲν ῥιγῶντι ψυχρὸν, τῷ δὲ μὴ οὐ; [ΘΕΑΙ] ἔοικεν. [ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν καὶ φαίνεται οὕτω ἐκατέρω; [ΘΕΑΙ] ναί. [ΣΩ] τὸ δὲ γε ‘φαίνεται’ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἔστιν; [ΘΕΑΙ] ἔστιν γάρ. [ΣΩ] φαντασία ἄρα καὶ αἴσθησις ταῦτόν ἐν τε θερμοῖς καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς τοιούτοις.” In the course of the discussion, the appearing also comes to be associated with δοκεῖν and τὸ δοκοῦν (what seems to us), especially in the passages in which it is argued that “τὸ δοκοῦν ἐκάστῳ τοῦτο καὶ εἶναι τῷ δοκοῦντι”. Cp. e.g. 162c-d, 167c, 168b. As we saw, these terms may denote semblance in neutral and negative sense, but they also anticipate the component that is added to the sphere of pure appearance, and therefore we will leave them aside for now.

¹¹⁹⁵ See 156a-e.

and this means that if there is something like a subject and an object, they cannot be conceived autonomously from the appearing as such. They are rather structural components of the appearing. The τ (what appears) and the $\tau\iota\upsilon$ (that to which something appears) are part of the appearance, and therefore the actual appearing cannot be located in something beyond it – nor can it locate itself, as if there was not something else.¹¹⁹⁶ In sum, the appearance can be seen from without or from within, and the play of perspectives is important. One always tries to draw the boundaries of appearing from within it, but at the same time one tries to grasp what lies beyond it, and one also tries to situate the appearing therein. The ordinary perspective is indeed always situated beyond the sphere of appearing and cannot easily isolate this immediate sphere. However, we can also attain more refined perspectives, that try to counteract this transgression of the boundaries of appearing. Plato presents these more refined perspectives in *Theaetetus* and also in *Philebus* – and this leads to the identification of important features of the appearing as such, as well as of what lies beyond it.

As was said, Plato also contrasts the appearing with something that is added to it and modifies it. There are, however, different approaches to this identification and they stress different aspects of the problem. Sometimes Plato tries to identify the different components of what appears (as well as the different psychic powers responsible for what appears to us). These components are intrinsically heterogeneous and they vary in their complexity. Some are simpler, other are more complex, and in fact the more complex components depend on the simpler components. We will consider them in more detail in Section 3. One of the components – namely, $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ in a neutral sense – is responsible for determining what appears and establishing the truth about something. So when Plato tries to determine the components that are simpler than $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ (namely $\alpha\acute{\iota}\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ and $\mu\upsilon\eta\acute{\iota}\mu\eta$), he is discussing something that is closer to a simple appearing or an appearing still deprived of the relation to truth.

These discussions (especially when they concern $\alpha\acute{\iota}\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$) are often a sort of thought experiment, in which Plato imagines the components of judgment being removed. He may also discuss attempts to reduce ourselves to this sphere (such as Protagoras seems to do, according to the *Theaetetus*). However, we always have much more, and it is very difficult to conceive what exactly would correspond to a pure sensation. We can only determine certain general features. As we will see later, a pure sensation would be indeterminate and absolutely hazy.¹¹⁹⁷ It would not be able to determine what appears to it. It would not even experience

¹¹⁹⁶ Cp. in particular 159c-160c.

¹¹⁹⁷ See Sect. 3.1 below.

this indetermination as the frustration of an expectation (as we normally do). It would have simple contents and they would be in a state of permanent flux.¹¹⁹⁸ But one would not even be aware of such a flux, since the consciousness associated with it would be momentary. In other words, we are only aware of what is sensed at the present moment. This awareness corresponds to the sphere of senses and inner feelings (ἔξεις) – i.e., the felt or lived body.¹¹⁹⁹ However, it is not something we can locate in physical reality. Any representation of reality already implies something more. At the level of pure αἴσθησις, we have only a subjective, internal or individual plain, to which only the ψυχή in question has access. But we would not even be able to represent this sphere as internal or individual, since that also implies that we determine it in that way. In fact, we would probably not even be aware of it (at least in the sense in which we are normally aware of things), since according to Plato we can only be aware of αἰσθήσεις and relate to them if we have a judgment about them.¹²⁰⁰

We therefore need memory and judgment (δόξα). The former expands the temporal horizon of our consciousness, whereas the latter allows us to overcome the simple appearing of something and relate to truth (which is a relation that deeply transforms the sphere of sensations). But it is important to bear in mind that in a way our memories and even our judgments are also something that appears – and in this respect they are something absolutely certain. The sense of appearing is indeed more complex and goes beyond mere sensations. As was said, everything must somehow appear, including our judgments.

In order to understand this better, we can look at what is said in *Philebus*. When considering the possibility of our pleasures being false, which implies that they are mediated by δόξα, Socrates discusses the properties of our judging (δοξάζειν) and our having pleasure

¹¹⁹⁸ Plato indeed associates this sphere with the Heraclitean view that everything is in flux (cp. 152d ff.). Although this view normally tries to define how things are, the features attributed to reality can be identified in the appearing as such. The latter is in a permanent state of becoming, always changing. It is transient and as such completely indeterminate. There is no permanent or fix content – i.e., no determinate being. Therefore, it cannot be said to be “thus” or “otherwise”. That would require some kind of stagnation. Everything that can be said of it is that it is “not even this”. See in particular 183a-b: “δεῖ δὲ οὐδὲ τοῦτο τὸ ‘οὔτω’ λέγειν – οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἔτι κινοῖτο τὸ ‘οὔτω’ – οὐδ’ αὖ ‘μὴ οὔτω’ – οὐδὲ γὰρ τοῦτο κίνησις – ἀλλὰ τιν’ ἄλλην φωνὴν θετέον τοῖς τὸν λόγον τοῦτον λέγουσιν, ὡς νῦν γε πρὸς τὴν αὐτῶν ὑπόθεσιν οὐκ ἔχουσι ῥήματα, εἰ μὴ ἄρα τὸ ‘οὐδ’ οὔτως’ μάλιστα δ’ οὔτως ἂν αὐτοῖς ἀρμόττοι, ἄπειρον λεγόμενον.”

¹¹⁹⁹ Plato refers to this in *Theaetetus* 167a-b, where he identifies the appearing with the sphere of our private state or condition (ἔξεις), and argues that medicine (and in fact all forms of special knowledge or σοφία) is only concerned with improving our ἔξεις. The word ἔξεις points here to the use of the verb ἔχειν with adverbs to designate how one is faring or feeling. Indeed, even if we cannot determine things as they are, we have different conditions and we can regulate ourselves by them. Although it is not clear which access we could have to this sphere of pure feeling, we can at least refer to it.

¹²⁰⁰ This is what is expressed in the already mentioned passage in *Phlb.* 21b-c, where Socrates argues that our experience of pleasure depends on knowledge. Although Socrates is talking about pleasure, the same applies to all αἰσθήσεις.

(ἤδεσθαι). In particular, he stresses that both judgment and pleasure have a component that does not admit of falsity. Even if what we judge and that with which we have pleasure is false, the act of judging and of having pleasure are absolute (ὄντως). As Socrates says, we really judge and really have pleasure. That cannot be doubted away or lost.¹²⁰¹ In a way, the same applies to what is judged (understood as the immanent content of judgment), as well as to the object in which one takes pleasure (assuming pleasure is always related to some sort of object, as Socrates tries to show). All these things appear to us and hence they are unquestionable and cannot be dismissed. Things may not be as we judge them, but the fact that we judge what we judge is absolutely certain.¹²⁰² In sum, the absolute certainty that characterizes the appearing as such is not restricted to our sensations. It extends to all forms of psychic activity and their intrinsic correlates. All of them are an absolute fact, and belong to a sphere of absolute givenness. Their appearing cannot be doubted away or put in question, and it is in this sense that the sphere of appearing resembles the sphere of the *cogito* identified by Descartes. However much we doubt the truth of our thoughts, it is nonetheless certain that we are thinking them.¹²⁰³ In other words, regardless of how things are (and whether the appearing is a sort of dream and does not correspond to anything in reality, or rather the appearing of something real, that cannot be reduced to its appearance), it is nevertheless a fact that there is an appearance of something.

However, if we isolate this fact as such, we are faced with a serious problem. Its certainty comes from it not being referred to something beyond it. But this also means that the appearance as such is indeterminate with respect to its own status. The mere fact of something appearing does not let us infer in any way if what appears is in any way real or not. Even saying that there is nothing beyond our consciousness and what appears to it already implies an additional component. The fact that something appears does not determine

¹²⁰¹ See *Phlb.* 37a-b: “[ΣΩ] ἔστιν γὰρ πού τι δοξάζειν ἡμῖν; [ΠΡΩ] ναί. [ΣΩ] καὶ ἤδεσθαι; [ΠΡΩ] ναί. [ΣΩ] καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ δοξαζόμενον ἐστὶ τι; [ΠΡΩ] πῶς δ’ οὐ; [ΣΩ] καὶ τό γε ὅ τὸ ἠδόμενον ἤδεται; [ΠΡΩ] καὶ πάνυ γε. [ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν τὸ δοξάζον, ἅντε ὀρθῶς ἅντε μὴ ὀρθῶς δοξάζῃ, τό γε δοξάζειν ὄντως οὐδέποτε ἀπόλλυσιν. [ΠΡΩ] πῶς γὰρ ἄν; [ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸ ἠδόμενον, ἅντε ὀρθῶς ἅντε μὴ ὀρθῶς ἤδηται, τό γε ὄντως ἤδεσθαι δῆλον ὡς οὐδέποτε ἀπολεῖ.”

¹²⁰² This does not mean that we are always expressly aware of our judgments. They may indeed be tacit, as we saw in Chap. 6. However, if we pay attention to them, we will not be able to doubt of their existence once we notice that they appear to our mind.

¹²⁰³ Descartes notoriously goes on to use this absolute fact as a secure or unshakable foundation of the edifice of knowledge, and tries to ground everything else on it. In a way, Husserl identifies also a similar sphere (the sphere of the phenomena, which is the result of a suspension of assent or ἐποχή). Both these philosophical projects are thus based on the sphere of appearing Plato is alluding to. However, Plato does not try to derive a full identification of reality from here. As was said, this is used only as a means of contrast to something else. For more on the passage we are considering and on this “Cartesian” aspect of Plato’s reflections, cp. M. de CARVALHO, O caso do cogito no *Filebo* de Platão, in: A. CAEIRO & M. de CARVALHO (eds.), *Incursoes no Filebo*. Estudos sobre Platão, Porto, Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 2012, 179-318.

anything about it. But this is very different from our normal experience of things, which always involves more. The appearing as such is turned outwards or extroverted, as it were. It determines what appears in one way or the other – or, what is the same, it establishes some truth about it. This is decisive and changes everything. We cannot even represent or conceive what an appearing without this other component would correspond to. To be sure there are some experiences that somehow resemble the pure and indeterminate appearing. In moments of doubt, ἀπορία or wonder, we do not know what is before us. It simply appears to us. However, these experiences are usually circumscribed and located in a larger context that is itself determined in some way. Moreover, our contact with an indeterminate appearance is already affected by the expectation of more. We cannot determine it yet, but we are already directed at something more. Consequently, the appearing as such fades out or is left in an unemphatic position. Our attention is already directed beyond it, to the reality that may be appearing in it and which we are trying to determine.

In fact, even the conception of this sphere as a sphere of certainty is problematic, because in order for us to be certain of it, we would have to judge about it and determine it as a sphere of appearance as such. This already seems to involve the additional sphere we just mentioned. In sum, all attempts to isolate the appearance of something as the basic fact of our being already point to the component that transcends and transforms the simple appearance of something. In other words, although Plato refers to this immediate sphere, he moves immediately past it, and ends up stressing the importance of what is added to it. This addition is what we must now try to define.

2. The relation to truth (ἀλήθεια) as a fundamental trait of the ψυχή

Some references were made to the additional component that transforms the sphere of appearance. The appearance of something is always exceeding itself and referring to something more than the mere fact of its appearance. So we have to determine the nature or structure of what is added to the pure appearance (or the pure φαίνεσθαι) as such. At its core, the added component consists in the fact that the appearance is related to truth (ἀλήθεια). This is what transforms the mere appearing of something into knowledge (or at least supposed knowledge) of some reality. It also opens up the possibility of untruth. The appearance of something is an absolute fact, but the relation to truth admits different modalities. When one tries to determine what appears, one may attain truth or untruth. This is

an essential aspect of Plato's thought. He is very aware of how complex our relation to truth is and of how it raises many questions, and this is what we must now discuss.

In doing so, we will also be able to better determine philosophical examination and its importance, since any examination is also referred to truth and tries to ascertain it. Philosophical examination is all about truth and our need for philosophical examination depends on our need for truth, as we will see. But for now we will not try to determine whether we need truth, or to what extent we need it, or why. We will consider truth in an abstract manner and we will try to understand what it consists in. This does not mean (at least not at first) that we will try to say what is true according to Plato (i.e., how he conceives of reality). Our primary goal is rather to see what the notion of truth means according to Plato, regardless of what contents may correspond to the formal description.

But before exploring Plato's understanding of the notion of truth, it is important to briefly consider the pre-Platonic conceptions of truth, since they will give us a better access to the kind of questions involved in this notion and also let us better understand the angle from which Plato considers the notion.

2.1. Some important aspects of the pre-Platonic conceptions of truth

The pre-Platonic conceptions of truth (and of its opposite, untruth) are varied and can be found in different kinds of sources, such as epic and tragic poetry, history, sophistry, philosophy, and so on. We will restrict our description to some of the most important aspects we can find in these different contexts, which will involve an extraordinary simplification. Still, we will be able to see to what extent Plato's considerations were instigated or already prepared by previous thinkers, and also how he goes further than them in some respects. We will approach the various contexts from two different angles. First we will briefly consider the words used to designate truth and untruth, then we will see some important thought patterns associated with these notions in Greek culture.

a) The language of truth and untruth

Let us start with the way the Greeks talked about truth and its opposite. If we consider Homer, we see that the vocabulary used is much more diversified than at Plato's time. Besides ἀλήθεια (which only becomes the main designation for "truth" at a later time),

Homer uses several other words to denote truth, and this multiplicity is not meaningless, since they actually express different aspects of how truth is experienced.¹²⁰⁴

One important trait shared by several of these words (including ἀλήθεια), is the fact that they designate truth as the negation of something. This suggests that truth is not guaranteed or immediately accessible, but rather something that we must fight for. It must be attained or conquered. One of these negative terms, which is often used in Homer, is ἀτρεκής. It literally means not-crooked or not-deformed. It is generally used with *verba dicendi* and denotes mainly the reliability, preciseness and clearness of some report.¹²⁰⁵ Also frequent is νημερτής, which is related to ἀμαρτάνειν and characterizes something as “faultless”, “not missing the mark”, “unerring”. Just like ἀτρεκής, the term is often referred to assertions.¹²⁰⁶ In both cases, the assertions may be of different kinds. They may simply impart information, or they may be promises or prophecies. In later authors, we will find other negative terms such as ἀψευδής (without deceit) and ἄδολος (without guile). All these terms are similar to ἀλήθεια and they allow us to better understand its meaning. But before considering the term ἀλήθεια, it is important to stress that Homer also uses terms with an intrinsically positive sense to refer to truth. The most important are the ἐτεός, ἔτυμος and ἐτήτυμος.¹²⁰⁷ They qualify something as real, actual, authentic or genuine, and are therefore very close to the verb εἶναι. In other words, these terms have a more objective sense, whereas the other terms previously considered tend to designate subjective states or attitudes (especially insofar as

¹²⁰⁴ The analysis that follows will be, as was said, very brief, but for a more exhaustive consideration of these words, see e.g. R. BULTMANN, ἀλήθεια, ἀληθής, ἀληθινός, ἀληθεύω, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; H. FRISK, “Wahrheit” und “Lüge” in den indogermanischen Sprachen. Einige morphologische Betrachtungen, *Göteborgs Hogskolas Arsskrift* 41 (1935), 1-35; E. MIELERT, *Ausdrücke für Wahrheit und Lüge in der attischen Tragödie*, Diss. München, 1958; W. LUTHER, “Wahrheit” und “Lüge” im ältesten Griechentum, Borna/Leipzig, Noske, 1935; E. HEITSCH, Die nicht-philosophische Ἀλήθεια, *Hermes* 90 (1962), 24-33; P. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Platon*, vol. 1, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1964³ (1928¹), 233-242; T. KRISCHER, ἔτυμος und ἀληθής, *Philologus* 109 (1965), 163-174; W. LUTHER, Wahrheit, Licht und Erkenntnis in der griechischen Philosophie bis Demokrit, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 10 (1966), 1-240; H. HOMMEL, Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit. Zur Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffspaars, *Antike und Abendland* 15 (1969), 159-186, especially 174ff.; B. SNELL, Ἀλήθεια, *Würzburger Jahrbuch für Altertumswissenschaft* 1 (1975), 9-17; J.-P. LEVET, *Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque*. Tome I: Présentation générale – Le vrai et le faux dans les épopées homériques, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1976; T. COLE, Archaic Truth, *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 13 (1983), 7-28; H. BOEDER, Der frühgriechische Wortgebrauch von Logos und Aletheia, in: IDEM, *Das Bauzeug der Geschichte*. Aufsätze und Vorträge zur griechischen und mittelalterlichen Philosophie, Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 1994, 1-30; E. HEITSCH, Der Ort der Wahrheit. Aus der Frühgeschichte des Wahrheitsbegriffs, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, München/Leipzig, Saur, 2001, 89-116; J. WOLENSKI, Aletheia in Greek Thought until Aristotle, *Annals of Pure and Applied Logic* 127 (2004), 339-360.

¹²⁰⁵ Cp. e.g. *Iliad*, II.10, 10.384, and *Odyssey* I.179.

¹²⁰⁶ Cp. e.g. *Iliad*, III.204, 6.376, and *Odyssey*, XVII.549.

¹²⁰⁷ Cp. e.g. *Iliad* I.558, 13.375, 23.440, *Odyssey*, IV.140, XXIII.107.

they qualify things said and ways of behaving). This duality is, as we shall see (and as Plato himself stresses) very important.

In Greek literature, we also find some other adjectives associated with the idea of truth, such as σαφής (which means not only clear and manifest, but also sure, certain, evident), ἀκριβής (exact or accurate), ὀρθός (right, correct) or even εὐθύς (straight, direct) and δίκαιος (right, fitting, exact). But the most important term, given the protagonism it later assumes, is ἀλήθεια. With respect to it, we must bear in mind several aspects. First, there has been a long discussion about its precise etymology. The term also has a negative sense and seems to be related to λήθη and λανθάνω. This relation implies that the term means something like the act or the result of not letting something escape (i.e., of not letting it out of sight or mind). The problem, however, is whether ἀληθής originally means something like “unforgotten” – or rather something like unconcealed or unhidden. In the case it means “unforgotten”, ἀλήθεια is then constitutively related to memory (to something that is retained, kept in mind), whereas if it means “unconcealed” it would refer to a more general experience of uncovering or unveiling something (thus rendering it manifest as what it is).¹²⁰⁸ The first meaning thus rather focuses on the subjective side, whereas the second emphasizes the objective side of truth. We may wonder which one is primary, but they seem to be intrinsically correlated, and this is relevant for the use of the term ἀλήθεια. The word is indeed ambiguous and it can refer both to knowledge (or the assertions that express it) and to reality. This is particularly important to understand Plato’s use of the word, as we will see. But what about its Archaic use?

If we consider Homer, we see that it is usually employed along with verbs of assertion, to qualify speech and reports. People are asked to tell the truth or asseverate that they are telling the truth.¹²⁰⁹ It implies that one has had contact with something (or has acquired knowledge about it), has preserved this knowledge, and is willing to communicate it. It is opposed to lying or holding back. Often it is associated with the idea of completeness,

¹²⁰⁸ Heidegger notoriously defended that ἀλήθεια meant originally “unconcealedness” (*Unverborgenheit*). See e.g. *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 2001¹⁸ (1927¹), 212ff.; *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, in: *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1976, 177-202; *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, *ibidem*, 203-238. Cp. also N. HARTMANN, *Platons Logik des Seins*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1965² (Gießen, Töpelmann, 1909¹), 239. Authors in Late Antiquity, however, rather stressed the connection with forgetfulness (λήθη). Hesychius, for instance, defines ἀληθία as “ἀψευδῆ καὶ τὰ <μη> ἐπιλανθανόμενα” and ἀληθής as “δικαία ἢ δίκαιος. ἢ μνήμων, κατὰ στέρησιν τῆς λήθης.” See K. LATTE (ed.), *Hesychii Alexandrini lexicon*, 2 vols., Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1953-1966, *sub voces*. We find also the following explain of ἀλήθεια in fragment 215g of Plutarchus: “ὅτι καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια τὸ ὄνομα δηλοῖ λήθης ἐκβολὴν εἶναι τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις.” See F. SANDBACH (ed.), *Plutarchi moralia*, vol. 7, Leipzig, Teubner, 1967.

¹²⁰⁹ See e.g. *Iliad*, VII.297, 24.247.

of telling the whole truth, without withholding or leaving anything aside.¹²¹⁰ We will return to this in the next subsection. But for now it seems clear that truth implies the idea of reliability and trustworthiness. Αλήθεια is something that determines one's character.¹²¹¹ Truthful persons say true things and are therefore just or upright. They do not deceive other for their own profit.

This contrast can be better understood if we consider the main designations of untruth. Many of them were already used by Homer, other were used only later. One of the most important and generic terms is ψεύδος. It normally refers to statements, and it can denote either a lie or a false statement in general.¹²¹² Indeed, the falsehood in question may result from an intent to deceive or from an error, and in this sense the term differs thus from ἀμαρτάνειν or ἀμαρτία, which denote a mistake, normally due to one's incapacity or an inner unbalance. The sense of deceit or illusion is rather expressed by ἀπατή and its cognates.¹²¹³ The idea of hiding (expressed by verbs such as κεύθειν, ἐπικεύθειν, κρύπτειν) is likewise opposed to the notion of truth and highlights the active role of the subject in the distortion. Later, the idea of crookedness (as in σκολιός) may characterize the deceit or the deceiver. One may also emphasize the purpose of deceit – in particular the attempt to profit in any way. This nuance can be found in terms such as δόλος (which may also designate the ruse one employs) or κέρδος.¹²¹⁴ Other terms, such as μῆτις, may designate the cleverness one uses to deceive and attain one's personal goals.¹²¹⁵ Finally, there are also terms that focus on the objective side of untruth and express the lack of consistency (or reality) of something, regardless of any intent to deceive. For instance, an untrue thing may be said to be a mere dream (ὄναρ) or something adulterated (κίδβηλος).

These are the main terms used to designate truth and untruth. Their consideration shows some important aspects of the pre-Platonic understanding of truth, but now we have to consider the more express reflections about this notion and what it involves.

¹²¹⁰ See e.g. *Iliad*, XXIV.247, *Odyssey*, XI.507, XVI.61.

¹²¹¹ Cp. in particular *Iliad*, XII.433, where Homer talks of a γυνή ἀληθής. The precise meaning of the word in this context is uncertain. It may mean careful, honest, accurate or reliable. At any rate, it seems to apply to her way of being.

¹²¹² See e.g. *Iliad*, IX.115, 24.222, *Odyssey*, III.20.

¹²¹³ Cp. *Iliad*, II.114

¹²¹⁴ Cp. *Iliad*, III.202, and *Odyssey*, XXIII.140.

¹²¹⁵ An example of this is the qualification of Odysseus as πολύμητις (e.g., *Iliad*, III.200).

b) The pre-Platonic understanding of truth and untruth

The topic of truth and untruth in pre-Platonic thought is very complex and a full discussion of it would take us too far afield. But, as was said, we will confine ourselves to some essential aspects that paved the way for the discussions we find in the Platonic corpus. Some of these aspects are hinted at by the very vocabulary used to express the ideas of truth and untruth. The term ἀλήθεια in particular points to the alternative between something being hidden or manifest (i.e. unconcealed, uncovered). This is indeed an essential distinction that lies at the core of the ideas of untruth and truth. Untruth is associated with covering or hiding something, and thereby disguising it or changing its meaning. Truth, in turn, is the opposite of hiding. It implies that something is brought to light and revealed as what it is.

The alternative in question concerns things, persons and situations, as well as our perception of them. Indeed, grasping the meaning of something or not, and reacting accordingly, is of special importance in human life. We can clearly see this in the context to which several of the terms mentioned above allude. Truth and untruth are usually what one says to others. To put it differently, they are normally experienced in our dealings with others. Truth is a matter of factuality or veracity, of being sincere, frank or straightforward. People are expected to be honest and truthful to each other. Truth is in a way a duty, something we owe each other and expect from each other. This is particularly so in the context of the aristocratic morality, which holds a firm view on the value of truth and lies. Achilles embodies this moral and is presented as a role model of truthfulness. He says he hates lies and is in general characterized as being simple and truthful. This stands in contrast with Odysseus' cleverness and wiliness.¹²¹⁶ It is true that in many contexts we find a praise of cleverness and resourcefulness.¹²¹⁷ But in general truthfulness is more highly valued, including in the social and political domains. The ideal of ἰσηγορία, for instance, implies equality and freedom of speech, which allows the citizens to express their views. The ideal of παρησία, in turn, implies that one can tell everything one thinks without fear of reprisals.¹²¹⁸

¹²¹⁶ Cp. *Iliad* IX.307-313: “τὸν δ’ ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς·/“διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη πολυμήχαν’ Ὀδυσσεῦ/ χρὴ μὲν δὴ τὸν μῦθον ἀπληγέως ἀποσιπῆν./ ἢ περ δὴ φρονέω τε καὶ ὡς τετελεσμένον ἔσται./ ὡς μὴ μοι τρύζητε παρήμενοι ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος./ ἐχθρὸς γάρ μοι κείνος ὁμῶς Αἴδαο πύλησιν/ ὅς χ’ ἕτερον μὲν κεῖθι ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἴπη.”

¹²¹⁷ For more on this, cp. e.g. M. DETIENNE & J. P. VERNANT, *Les ruses de l'intelligence*. La métis des Grecs, Paris, Flammarion, 1974.

¹²¹⁸ For more on the notion of παρησία, cp. e.g. E. PETERSON, Zur Bedeutungsgeschichte von παρησία, in W. KOEPP (ed.), *Reinhold Seeberg Festschrift*, vol. 2, Leipzig, Deichert, 1929, 283-297; H. SCHLIER, παρησία, παρησιάζομαι, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; M. FOUCAULT, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, Paris,

There are thus many positive appraisals of truthfulness, which result from the fact that human beings may be honest or deceitful, and this is especially important because of the role of language in our lives. We can use it to intervene in reality and in the way things. What we say can affect how others see things and our own access to reality is often mediated by what others say. But language can be used both to uncover things and to disguise them, so its value is ambiguous.

This ambiguity and the idea that the same thing can be used in different ways plays an important role in the reflection about truth. Truth and untruth are not just relevant in intersubjective contexts, and they are not just caused by human agents. They can also be caused by the gods, which may help people see things clearly (for instance, by revealing them something) or they may deceive people by driving them mad or creating an illusion. Other times, truth and untruth may be random or the result of natural elements, such as mist or night. The latter in particular, and its contrast with daylight, played an important role in poetry and later even in philosophy. Darkness and light are perhaps the most basic experience of hiddenness and its opposite, and they are often used as a metaphor for all forms of truth and untruth.¹²¹⁹ Moreover, gods and natural elements resemble language insofar as they are ambiguous and can either hide things or reveal things as they are. They can produce truth or untruth. This, in turn, is not without consequences for our life. What results from these agents is very relevant for our circumstances and to determine how to act. We need to see things correctly in order to act properly. Truth and untruth, in all its forms, can thus have a serious impact on our lives. This is particularly clear in the most extreme cases. The degree of untruth or distortion may indeed vary and one may come to the point where one entirely fails to recognize one's situation. It is something of the sort that happened with Ajax or with Oedipus in Sophocles' plays. In both cases, the delusion is circumscribed to something particular, but that was nevertheless enough to completely hide the meaning of their situation, and it ends up having the direst consequences for their lives.

But despite the different possible degrees of untruth, the Greeks were in general very aware of how the space of things revealed to human beings was very confined, especially in the Archaic period. The sphere of ἀλήθεια was regarded as a small domain surrounded by the vast unknown – so much so that Archaic Greeks felt they were exposed to obscure powers and helpless in face of them. They were indeed very conscious of the fact that there were

Gallimard/Seuil, 2008; IDEM, *Le courage de la vérité*, Paris, Gallimard/Seuil, 2009; IDEM, *Discours et vérité*. Précédé de *La parrésia*, Paris, Vrin, 2016.

¹²¹⁹ For bibliographical references on this topic, cp. footnote 548 above.

many things they did not know, even regarding themselves. For instance, they regarded the future as being fundamentally opaque.¹²²⁰ Furthermore, the domain of manifest things as such was seen as being under threat. Night was experienced as a massive invasion of hiddenness, and they were aware that we can very well forget things, make mistakes or be deceived. Indeed, untruth can replace truth. More precisely, mere appearances or semblances can disguise themselves as truth. As Simonides says, “τὸ δοκεῖν καὶ τὴν ἀλάθειαν βιάται”.¹²²¹ Truth can be conquered by its opposite, especially insofar as there is a resemblance between untruth and truth. We find an expression of this in Hesiod’s *Theogonia*, when the Muses say that they know how to say many lies that are similar to the truth.¹²²² It is therefore no wonder that one can easily be persuaded of something untrue – especially given the power of λόγος and the way poetry or rhetoric made use of it.

All this raises the question of what criterion one may use to differentiate truth from any form of untruth. How can one be sure of anything? But this is not our only problem. In addition to the need to confirm the few things we might know, we also need to expand our knowledge and reach a larger and deeper truth. The Greeks tried indeed to overcome the hiddenness of things in different ways, which lead to several different forms of special knowledge or σοφία. We already considered this above, when we discussed the old and new forms of σοφία and their relevance in the framework of Socrates’ trial.¹²²³ But let us consider this again, from a different angle. As M. Detienne shows, there were in Archaic culture several figures that had an important relation with truth.¹²²⁴ The most obvious example is the poet. He is seen as the one that preserves and transmits events and knowledge. But poets themselves point to the Muses, the daughters of Μνημοσύνη, as what guarantees the truth of what they say. The Muses witnessed things first hand and preserved the knowledge of it. Then, they speak to the poet and impart their knowledge to him.¹²²⁵ Truth is thus a report that is not forgotten. The poets are the depositories of knowledge, and this is particularly important in an oral culture. Truth depends on those that communicate it and on their power to preserve it.

¹²²⁰ Simonides, for instance, says: “ἄνθρωπος ἐὼν μὴ ποτε φάσις ὅ τι γίνεται [αὔριον],/ μηδ’ ἄνδρα ἰδὼν ὄλβιον ὅσσον χρόνον ἔσσειται (...).” Cp. fr. 15 (Page).

¹²²¹ See fr. 93 (Page).

¹²²² See v. 27: “ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα”.

¹²²³ Cp. Chap. 1, Sect. 2.

¹²²⁴ See M. DETIENNE, *Les maîtres de la vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*, Paris, Maspero, 1967.

¹²²⁵ Cp. in particular *Iliad*, II.484-487: “ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχουσαι·/ ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα,/ ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν·/ οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν (...).”

However, truth includes more than preservation, and so another figure that appears associated with it is the seer. His prophetic word can fail or, on the contrary, come to fulfillment (i.e., it can hit the target, as a weapon, and become reality). Prophecies refer to something we are deeply concerned with: what will happen and what will become of us. Truth is here experienced as the confirmation of a prophecy.¹²²⁶ Finally, truth is also connected with the figure of the king, insofar as one of his functions is to determine what happened, settle questions, and impart justice. Truth is thus manifest in the correctness of judgment and justice – which will bring back order to the community.

All these forms of expert knowledge were regarded as bringing more truth to human life. But with time they also came to be questioned, especially by the Sophists. The latter developed a new form of knowledge in which rhetoric plays an important role. However, their knowledge and the truth that corresponds to it are particularly problematic. They can be used to manipulate truth or to deceive, in order to attain one's own personal goals. Their worldview is indeed relativistic, and this in turn deeply affects life in the πόλις. But still the development of rhetoric (and the Sophistic revolution in general) was connected with an attempt to better understand the circumstances in which our life takes place, in order to better guide it. It was in a way a cognitive project, even if its application was based on the awareness of how defective human knowledge in general is, and how one can use that in one's favor.

But this is not the only attempt to develop a new form of knowledge and achieve a better or more solid truth. Several other cultural practices developed one's awareness of truth and of the problems it involves. Historiography, for instance, was concerned with how one could determine what happened and whether one could trust reports.¹²²⁷ Tragedy was also very sensitive to matters of truth and illusion (as we can well see in Sophocles' *Ajax* and in *Oedipus Tyrannus*). The same holds for philosophy. Like other cultural practices of the time, it tried to unmask things and reveal what they are.¹²²⁸

¹²²⁶ Seers were indeed regarded as depositaries of an exceptional knowledge. Cp. e.g. *Iliad* I.68-70: “(...) τοῖσι δ' ἀνέστη/ Κάλχας Θεστορίδης οἰωνοπόλων ὄχ' ἄριστος, / ὃς ἤδη τά τ' ἐόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα.”

¹²²⁷ Cp. e.g. THUCYDIDES, *Historiae*, 1.19-20: “τὰ μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα ἡῦρον, χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεῦσαι. οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι τὰς ἀκοὰς τῶν προγεγενημένων, καὶ ἦν ἐπιχώρια σφίσιν ἤ, ὁμοίως ἀβασανίστως παρ' ἀλλήλων δέχονται. (...) οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἐτοῖμα μᾶλλον τρέπονται.”

¹²²⁸ In this sense, there is a strong affinity between all these cultural forms. They have a common concern with truth (whether they express it in these terms or not), though they pursue it in different ways and may even conceive it in different ways.

However, philosophy tends to develop a more complex notion of truth (which is no longer empirical or everyday truth) and to reflect more deeply about what it consists in. In fact, philosophers sometimes even talk of an absolute or divine truth, to which the humans may have more or less access. This is not to be understood as something other than ordinary truth, but what really corresponds to truth, according to them. Indeed, the immediate way of seeing things is discredited as being constitutively deceitful. One is required to think in order to reach the truth of things. Parmenides in particular seems to emphasize that being is something that is reached by thinking (νοεῖν) or reveals itself in it.¹²²⁹ This separates truth (now taken as an absolute reality (τὸ ἕόν)) from the domain of the senses. Heraclitus likewise stresses that most people forget or do not notice the λόγος (i.e., the structure of reality and its expression).¹²³⁰ One needs to pay special attention and make a special effort to find out the truth (or at least to come closer to it). We will see that the same holds for Plato. One must perform a careful inquiry in order to determine the truth that underlies all things we see and that makes them possible.

This may suggest that truth now comes to be viewed as abstract and merely theoretical. However, all these different conceptions of truth (including the philosophical) are intrinsically connected with the practical interest. The question is the same since Homer: where are we and what should we do. But, as we said, we will not consider the practical interests of the ψυχή for now.

2.2. Plato's description of the formal structure of ἀλήθεια

We will now see how Plato conceives of truth as such and how his conception is in fact a development of the aspects just mentioned. We will consider his description of the formal structure of truth. This is different from determining what Plato takes to be true. We will rather try to determine what it means to say of something that it is “true” or what it means to say that there is truth.

In order to determine Plato's notion of truth as such, we will contrast it with what we saw in Section 1 – namely, the appearing as such. Either in its simplest form (which reduces it to a sphere of mere sensations) or in its more complex form (which resembles Descartes' *cogito* and includes all psychic activities), the most important feature of the sphere of

¹²²⁹ See DK B3: “τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι.”

¹²³⁰ For more on this, see Chap. 7, Sect. 2.1 above.

appearance is that its contents are neither true nor false, and hence this sphere cannot determine its own situation – i.e., whether it is an unsubstantial appearance or the appearance of something real. But this is something very different from what we normally experience. We are usually in contact with more than the mere manifestation or showing of something absolutely indeterminate as to its own status. We are always beyond this sphere, in a particular situation, determined by our judgments or knowledge claims. This is so even if one were to believe that the sphere of appearance as such is all reality (for instance, if one advocates some sort of subjective idealism). We determine things and that puts us in relation with a particular truth. So the act of determining things and truth is what we must now consider.

a) Plato’s “proofs” of the impossibility of reducing our experience of things to a pure appearance

First of all, let us look more closely at the contrast between the appearance as such and what is involved in our relation to truth. There are some passages in which Plato tries to conceive simple appearances, but he also shows how our experience is always more complex than that and how we cannot reduce it to that domain, even if we try. Normally these passages try to isolate a sphere of αἴσθησις as such and then show how we cannot entirely conceive it. Our experience is very different and this means not only that we can perform other kind of operations besides sensing or feeling, but also that we always perform these other operations. In fact, we always have many judgments that define things in a certain way and establish something as being true for us. As a result, everything that appears to us is affected by the alternative between truth and untruth, and this is why we are condemned to having more than pure appearances.

We will now briefly consider the different kinds of arguments Plato puts forward, especially in *Philebus* and *Theaetetus*, to prove that we are always irrevocably beyond the sphere of appearing. This will give us some indications about the structure of what is always added to the appearing in our experience of things. Then, in the following subsections, we will consider this structure in more detail.

Let us start with the arguments in *Philebus*. In this dialogue, Plato focus primarily on the most subjective sensations (namely, the sensations of pleasure and pain), which seem to be absolutely immediate. As was said, Socrates argues that without δόξα and similar

cognitive components we would not even be aware of sensing or feeling something.¹²³¹ But this is not all. Socrates determines that our judgments and pleasures as such always appear and this appearance cannot be doubted. Judgments are additionally qualified as true or false. This is something they cannot escape. They refer to something beyond themselves and they can either miss it or hit it.¹²³² But what about our feelings? Socrates says that they too can be true or false, and in order to confirm the possibility of pleasures being false, Socrates goes on to show how our feelings are always intimately intertwined with δόξα. First, he points out that we take pleasure from something. Our emotions refer to some object that is determined by δόξα, and the latter can be either true or false.¹²³³ We may even anticipate that something will happen and experience an anticipatory pleasure.¹²³⁴ Secondly, our emotions are not atoms completely isolated from one another, but we also compare our present emotions (which are closer to us) to our distant past and future (i.e., anticipated) emotions. This includes a decision (or δόξα) about their relative intensity, which helps us define what we are feeling, and this decision goes beyond the mere fact of a subjective appearance.¹²³⁵ Thirdly, we also have a δόξα about what pleasure itself is. We conceive pleasure in a certain way (for instance, as a relief from pain) and we interpret what immediately appears to us in light of such a conception. If it were not so, we would have no determinate feeling.¹²³⁶

¹²³¹ See 21c-d: “[ΣΩ] νοῦν δέ γε καὶ μνήμην καὶ ἐπιστήμην καὶ δόξαν μὴ κεκτημένος ἀληθῆ, πρῶτον μὲν τοῦτο αὐτό, εἰ χαίρεις ἢ μὴ χαίρεις, ἀνάγκη δὴπου σε ἀγνοεῖν, κενόν γε ὄντα πάσης φρονήσεως; [ΠΡΩ] ἀνάγκη. [ΣΩ] καὶ μὴν ὡσαύτως μνήμην μὴ κεκτημένον ἀνάγκη δὴπου μὴδ’ ὅτι ποτὲ ἔχαιρες μεμνήσθαι, τῆς τ’ ἐν τῷ παραχρῆμα ἡδονῆς προσπιπτούσης μὴδ’ ἡντινοῦν μνήμην ὑπομένειν· δόξαν δ’ αὐτὴ μὴ κεκτημένον ἀληθῆ μὴ δοξάζειν χαίρειν χαίροντα, λογισμοῦ δὲ στερόμενον μὴδ’ εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον ὡς χαίρήσεις δυνατὸν εἶναι λογίζεσθαι, ζῆν δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπου βίον, ἀλλὰ τινος πλεῦμονος ἢ τῶν ὅσα θαλάττια μετ’ ὀστρεῖων ἐμψυχὰ ἐστί σωματίων.”

¹²³² See 37a-e, especially 37d-e: “[ΣΩ] τί δ’, ἂν ὀρθότης ἢ τοῦναντίον ὀρθότητι τινὶ τούτων προσγίγνηται; μῶν οὐκ ὀρθὴν μὲν δόξαν ἐροῦμεν, ἂν ὀρθότητα ἴσχη, ταυτὸν δὲ ἡδονήν; [ΠΡΩ] ἀναγκαῖον. [ΣΩ] ἂν δὲ γε ἀμαρτανόμενον τὸ δοξαζόμενον ἦ, τὴν δόξαν τότε ἀμαρτάνουσαν γε οὐκ ὀρθὴν ὁμολογητέον οὐδ’ ὀρθῶς δοξαζούσαν; [ΠΡΩ] πῶς γὰρ ἄν;”

¹²³³ Cp. 37c-40e. It is particularly relevant when Socrates asks (37e): “τί δ’, ἂν αὐτὴ λύπη ἢ τίνα ἡδονήν περὶ τὸ ἐφ’ ᾧ λυπεῖται ἢ τοῦναντίον ἀμαρτάνουσαν ἐφορῶμεν, ὀρθὴν ἢ χρηστὴν ἢ τι τῶν καλῶν ὀνομάτων αὐτῇ προσθήσομεν;” Then, in 38b, he expressly says: “ἔπεται μὴν ταῦταις, ὃ νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν, ἡδονὴ καὶ λύπη πολλάκις, ἀληθεῖ καὶ ψευδεῖ δόξῃ λέγω.”

¹²³⁴ See 39d: “[ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν αἶ γε διὰ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτῆς ἡδοναὶ καὶ λύπαι ἐλέχθησαν ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν ὡς πρὸ τῶν διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἡδονῶν καὶ λυπῶν προγίγνοιντ’ ἄν, ὥσθ’ ἡμῖν συμβαίνει τὸ προχαίρειν τε καὶ προλυπεῖσθαι περὶ τὸν μέλλοντα χρόνον εἶναι γιγνόμενον; [ΠΡΩ] ἀληθέστατα.” Socrates then shows that these anticipatory pleasures and pains are based on ἐλπίδες, which are the work of the soul’s scribe (i.e., the δοξάζειν). See 39d-40a.

¹²³⁵ See 41c-42c, especially 41e-42b: “τί οὖν; ἐν μὲν ὄψει τὸ πόρρωθεν καὶ ἐγγύθεν ὄραν τὰ μεγέθη τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀφανίζει καὶ ψευδῆ ποιεῖ δοξάζειν, ἐν λύπαις δ’ ἄρα καὶ ἡδοναῖς οὐκ ἔστι ταυτὸν τοῦτο γιγνόμενον; [ΠΡΩ] πολὺ μὲν οὖν μᾶλλον, ὃ Σώκρατες. (...) [ΣΩ] νῦν δέ γε αὐτὰ διὰ τὸ πόρρωθεν τε καὶ ἐγγύθεν ἐκάστοτε μεταβαλλόμενα θεωρεῖσθαι, καὶ ἅμα τιθέμενα παρ’ ἀλλήλας, αἱ μὲν ἡδοναὶ παρὰ τὸ λυπηρὸν μείζους φαίνονται καὶ σφοδρότερα, λύπαι δ’ αὐτὰ διὰ τὸ παρ’ ἡδονῶν τοῦναντίον ἐκείναις. [ΠΡΩ] ἀνάγκη γίγνεσθαι τὰ τοιαῦτα διὰ ταῦτα.”

¹²³⁶ For the discussion of this aspect and the kind of false pleasures that result from it, cp. 42c-53c, where Socrates compares two models of understanding pleasure and applies the model he takes to be right to many

These three kinds of judgment correspond to different layers of definition of our feelings and each layer may include many decisions. In fact, each feeling may be associated to (and dependent on) our entire way of seeing things. This may surprise us, since we do not seem to judge things when we feel, but these judgments may be (and often are) tacit. Either way, we must determine what appears and it is precisely this act of determining it that constitutes our emotions as we experience them. Now, the fact that they are determined in this way means that they can be true or false (even if we do not notice that they are essentially marked by this alternative). Consequently, our feelings cannot be conceived as a simple appearance. They are always integrated in a version of things that defines them.

Let us now consider what is said in *Theaetetus* on this topic. Socrates and Theaetetus are trying to define knowledge and Theaetetus' first defines it as αἴσθησις, which is an ambiguous term. It can have the general sense of grasping something or having an appropriate access to it, but Socrates and Theaetetus go on to define it as sensation and thus as an immediate form of appearing.¹²³⁷ They then consider Protagoras' reductionist view of knowledge and interpret it as an attempt to reduce everything to the subjective appearing or to one's own immediate state or ἔξις, which would then be used as a basis for guiding oneself in life.¹²³⁸ This is presented as a novelty, since normally we think we have access to more. Protagoras, however, tries to release us from that illusion – at least up to a point, because this reduction still implies something more than the simple appearance of sensations. Indeed, appearance itself is here defined as knowledge and truth.¹²³⁹

Socrates, however, does not focus on this. He rather tries to show that the way we experience things involves more than a simple appearing, and also that we cannot remove the additional layer without deeply changing our experience of things. Reducing everything to our subjective sphere of appearance (admitting that is possible) would produce an absolute relativism and destroy the notions of knowledge and being as we normally understand them.

instances of pleasure. For our discussion, it is especially relevant what he says in 44a: “[ΣΩ] πότερον οὖν καὶ χαίρειν οἴονται τότε ὅταν μὴ λυπῶνται; [ΠΡΩ] φασὶ γοῦν. [ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν οἴονται τότε χαίρειν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἔλεγόν που. [ΠΡΩ] κινδυνεύει. [ΣΩ] ψευδῆ γε μὴν δοξάζουσι περὶ τοῦ χαίρειν, εἴπερ χωρὶς τοῦ μὴ λυπεῖσθαι καὶ τοῦ χαίρειν ἢ φύσις ἑκατέρου.” This δοξάζειν περὶ τοῦ χαίρειν is indeed a component of our experience of pleasure and it may be either correct or false.

¹²³⁷ Cp. 151d-152c.

¹²³⁸ The practical side of this reduction is particularly stressed in 166d-167d, where Protagoras' views (which imply that what appears to different persons is equally valid) are conciliated with the idea of σοφία, which in this context does not consist in having more true judgments than others, but rather in being able to improve one's subjective state. See in particular 166d: “καὶ σοφίαν καὶ σοφὸν ἄνδρα πολλοῦ δέω τὸ μὴ φάναι εἶναι, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν τοῦτον καὶ λέγω σοφόν, ὃς ἂν τινι ἡμῶν, ᾧ φαίνεται καὶ ἔστι κακά, μεταβάλλων ποιήσῃ ἀγαθὰ φαίνεσθαι τε καὶ εἶναι.”

¹²³⁹ Cp. e.g. 167a-b: “ἐπεὶ οὐ τί γε ψευδῆ δοξάζοντά τις τινα ὕστερον ἀληθῆ ἐποίησε δοξάζειν· οὔτε γὰρ τὰ μὴ ὄντα δυνατόν δοξάσαι, οὔτε ἄλλα παρ' ἃ ἂν πάσχη, ταῦτα δὲ ἀεὶ ἀληθῆ.”

In order to show this, Socrates points to different facts or experiences that evince that we are always beyond the simply subjective sphere. These facts have different meanings and different strengths. Some of them are rather abstract, others more connected with our practical interests. In general, they are associated with δόξαι, but Plato only discusses this notion later in the dialogue. At this point he is only stressing how we need to interpret our life in light of the notions of knowledge, truth and being, and also how these notions cannot be reduced to pure sensations.

The first thing Socrates refers to is the fact that we see things as determined. As we saw above, the sphere of pure sensation would be in permanent flux, and that would prevent any firm conception and any being in a strict sense. In other words, nothing could be said to be thus and not otherwise. All we could say is that things are “not even thus”.¹²⁴⁰ But this is very different from what we normally experience, and in fact we cannot even conceive what such a way of experiencing things would correspond to.

Secondly, Socrates refers to what happens in dreams, diseases and madness, and furnishes the example of thinking we are gods or that we have wings.¹²⁴¹ Although these are exceptional cases, Socrates points to the fact that we all acknowledge we can mishear, missee, misperceive – i.e., we acknowledge we can have false perceptions and false judgments. In some circumstances, we may fail to know things as they are, and what appears to us may be false. But appearances as such cannot account for the difference between illusion and reality, so there must be something more.

Thirdly, we recognize experts and authorities in different domains. There are people that are wiser, know better, and can teach others, whereas other are more ignorant.¹²⁴² We all think so. This is particularly evident in cases of danger, as war, diseases, being at sea. We trust in people that we regard as better qualified to determine our course of action.¹²⁴³ Yet, if there were only appearances, then no one appearance could be considered better or worse than the rest. There would be no difference between laypeople and experts.

Fourthly, our access to language (either spoken or written) also includes an important difference between simple appearance of a sound or a letter and the ability to understand them. This is particularly clear in the case of foreign languages. If we do not know them, then

¹²⁴⁰ See in particular 183a-b.

¹²⁴¹ See 157e-158d.

¹²⁴² See 161c-e, where Socrates stresses that Protagoras himself, although defending that the human being is the standard (μέτρον) of all things, would have to assume that he is a better standard than the others. Otherwise, no one would need to learn from him. He would be as competent as all other people (and also as competent as animals), insofar as they also come in contact with sensations.

¹²⁴³ Cp. 169d-170b.

the simple fact that they appear is not sufficient for us to understand them.¹²⁴⁴ The senses by themselves are alphabet.¹²⁴⁵ The meaning of sounds and letters does not appear immediately, and yet we can understand them in many cases.

Fifthly, the fact that we have memory is itself a form of access different from the immediate appearing. It refers back to a past appearing – and as such overcomes the instantaneous and atomic nature of pure sensation.¹²⁴⁶ However, this is still referred to a sensation (though a past one) – and so in this instance the presence of a different structure is not as clear as in the other facts Socrates alludes to.

The sixth fact concerns the way states legislate – i.e., how they determine what is just, admirable, pious. At the center of their legislation is the concern with what is best or more advantageous. But if we have no more than sensations or appearances, then we cannot account for the fact that states often make mistakes and fail to achieve what is more advantageous. Indeed, such mistakes and failures imply that what appeared to be best turned out not to be so. Thus, what a state aims at is not a matter of appearance, and the way of seeing things that guides the state may be confirmed or denied by reality itself.¹²⁴⁷

Based on this idea, Socrates then considers the whole class of things related with the future and emphasizes how experts (such as the physician, the vine-grower, the musician, the athletic trainer, the chef, the prophet) are those that can better predict what will happen in a certain domain, in virtue of the knowledge they possess. Therefore, appearances do not all have the same status. There is something that distinguishes them and determines their value. In the case of predictions, this something that is beyond them and to which they refer is the future reality or what will come to pass – and the expert is able to determine it beforehand.¹²⁴⁸

Finally, at a later stage, when defining the act of judging (*δοξάζειν*) as that which lies beyond sensation and determines it, Socrates will present another important feature that distinguishes our experience of things from a simple appearing of something. As was already mentioned, Socrates points out that the *ψυχή* not only connects the different sensations, but it also reflects about them and determines them by using general predicates (*τὰ κοινά*), which are not taken from any of our senses. These predicates actually pervade the multiplicity of

¹²⁴⁴ See 163b-c.

¹²⁴⁵ Cp. HERACLITUS DK B107: “κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ὅσα βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἐχόντων.”

¹²⁴⁶ See 163d-164b.

¹²⁴⁷ See 172a-b and 177c-178a.

¹²⁴⁸ See 178a-179a.

sensations or appearances and determine their identity.¹²⁴⁹ Therefore, we always have more than an immediate appearing of something.

All the components of our regular being mentioned by Socrates imply a structure more complex than sensation and simple appearance. In other words, they imply a more complex notion of knowledge and being or a more complex notion of truth, which deeply transforms the simple appearing as such. This is what we must now consider.

b) The truth status as a radical modification of the appearing

How does Plato then conceive of truth and of its relation to knowledge and being? We saw that the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ is more than a simple appearing of something. It always determines what appears in some way and, as a result, the appearance is the appearance of something definite – i.e., something that is more than a simple appearance and that lies somehow beyond the mere fact of appearing and somehow reveals itself in the appearing. In other words, the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ is more than sensations and more than its mental acts in general. It is primarily related to a different domain, and its immediacy is integrated in this different plain, of which we may or may not have a right and clear notion (as we shall see), but that is at any rate different from the simple appearing as such. This is so even if we were to determine that the sphere of pure appearance is all that there is. In that case, the appearance would be defined only as the appearing of itself and of nothing else. This would in a way locate the appearance (insofar as it would be everything that there is), and therefore it would exceed the mere fact that there is an appearance. Indeed, the appearance as a pure fact is undefined with respect to its status. We can only see it as being everything that there is (or at least everything we come into contact with) if we determine it as being precisely that. But we can also determine it in a different manner, and in fact we always determine it in some way (even if only in a tacit manner). Therefore, the appearing is always beyond itself, and this beyond is what defines it.

To put it differently, the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ is primarily related to what lies beyond the simple appearing. As Plato says, it lays out a target and tries to hit it. The target it tries to hit is truth, and so the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ is constitutively directed towards truth.¹²⁵⁰ This is not something occasional or regional. It pervades and transforms the entire appearing, which is never a simple appearing. It is always related to a certain version of things. The appearing as we experience

¹²⁴⁹ See 185a-187a.

¹²⁵⁰ See *Sph.* 228c-d. For an analysis of this passage, cp. Chap. 8, Sect. 1.2 above.

it contains this structure. It is referred to something different from the mere appearance or from the subjective sphere – i.e., it is related to something objective. By itself, the appearing does not determine what things are and because of this it is neither true nor false. It simply appears as it appears. But things for us are never that indeterminate. The absolute givenness of appearing is shaped by something more. We determine what appears in a particular way (or at the very least have the notion that what appears must be determined in a particular way), and this is added to any particular appearance, thereby putting us in relation with more than an appearance.

In other words, the way we determine what appears constitutes a kind of light and a domain of illumination. It makes the appearance more complex. It lets something determinate appear in the appearance or reveals it. It also gives rise to the possibility of there being an appearance in the negative sense (that hides what there is), and which is a presentation of something illusory, that does not correspond to what there is. In any case, the appearing is the appearing of something defined (τινός). It is beyond itself. It shoots towards something, which is somehow manifesting or showing itself. In other words, the appearance is subordinate to something or is grounded in it. It is not strictly subjective or relative only to whom it appears to. It refers to something else that determines its content. There is something appearing to us, revealing itself to us. This may still be to a large extent indeterminate, but we are already related to it as something that calls for definition. To be sure, this definition of what appears is something we are normally not expressly aware of. We only notice it at moments of crisis, when we cannot define things. However, the appearance as such is always referred to a reality and this reality is determined in one way or another. It appears as being thus and not otherwise. Things appear and appear as something specific. They are no longer indeterminate. One has already adopted a version of things, of what appears, and this version may correspond to what things are or not. But it is in all cases taken as true. It receives a special status or a seal that guarantees its quality. It is seen as having good credentials and as a decipherment of what appears. It is experienced as knowledge and its correlate is experienced as being. This is precisely what characterizes δόξαι or knowledge claims in the neutral sense. They are constitutively related to truth and, once adopted as beliefs, they provide more than an appearance. They show (or as taken as showing) what things are.

c) The correlation of being and knowledge as the inner structure of ἀλήθεια

The appearing is radically changed by the notion that there is something more beyond it (namely truth), and our ψυχή is thus not confined to the subjective and indeterminate sphere. Its structure is more complex and this complexity is what we must now consider. As was said, the ψυχή is related to truth, and the main feature of truth is its twofoldness. Truth is both a subjective state (in the sense that it occurs in the ψυχή) and the objective correlate of it.¹²⁵¹ In other words, the term “truth” may designate our access to reality (or, more precisely, the possession of knowledge) and the reality we have access to. Both components refer to each other.

This is made particularly clear in a passage of the *Republic* which we discussed above.¹²⁵² When defining the philosophers and distinguishing them from the lovers of sight or spectacles, Socrates discusses what characterizes knowledge (as well as δόξα and ignorance, which are variations of the same structure). Knowledge is always referred to being (ὄν) and being relates to knowledge, since the latter is the way of having access to being. This correlation is fundamental, and as we saw Plato considers it in two different ways. First, he focuses on being, which is also what we most easily conceive, since we regard ourselves as being surrounded by beings. Plato then determines what is enabled by it: namely knowledge. Knowledge depends on being, and thus ignorance is the result of non-being and the intermediate between the two (δόξα) is the result of the object that lies between being and non-being (namely, what is δοξαστόν).¹²⁵³ However, this starting-point implies that one cannot be ignorant of what really is nor have a δόξα about it. In order to account for these possibilities, Plato changes his approach and adopts a new starting-point. While in the first approach he seems to presuppose a kind of external witness that compares the subjective states and the kinds of object, he now focuses on the subjective states (which he defines primarily as δυνάμεις) and sees what corresponds to them. Each δύναμις is subordinated to something (i.e., it has an objective correlate) and produces something (namely, a particular psychic state).¹²⁵⁴ Knowing depends on being, is referred to it, has it as its own content, and what it produces in the ψυχή is knowledge. Δοξάζειν is referred to a δοξαστόν, sees a

¹²⁵¹ Even if we were to determine that our ψυχή is all that there is, this would still imply looking at it as a sort of object.

¹²⁵² See 474b ff. and cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 above.

¹²⁵³ See 476e-477a.

¹²⁵⁴ See 477c-d: “δυνάμεως γὰρ ἐγὼ οὔτε τινὰ χροῖαν ὀρῶ οὔτε σχῆμα οὔτε τι τῶν τοιούτων οἷον καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν, πρὸς ἃ ἀποβλέπων ἕνια διορίζομαι παρ’ ἐμαυτῶ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα εἶναι, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα· δυνάμεως δ’ εἰς ἐκεῖνο μόνον βλέπω ἐφ’ ᾧ τε ἔστι καὶ ὃ ἀπεργάζεται (...).”

δοξαστόν (which differs from being) and brings about a δόξα. Not knowing is referred to non-being and produces ignorance.¹²⁵⁵

This passage thus shows that the ψυχή is always characterized by the correlation of an objective content and a subjective state. This is the basic structure on which any particular reality and any particular representation of it are based, and it is also what the simple appearing lacks. An appearance as such does not determine any reality and thus it does not have a particular cognitive state (be it knowledge, δόξα in negative sense or ignorance). The objective pole (be it something absolute or just the correlate of an internal δύναμις) is indeed essential and the reference to it deeply changes the appearing as such and the ψυχή. Our soul has a notion of reality and it is characterized by this particular intentionality or directedness. The mental acts are referred to something or they are τινός. This characterizes perceptions, opinions, ἐπιστήμαι, and so on.¹²⁵⁶ The δοξάζειν, for instance, is intrinsically related to a δοξαζόμενον, as we see in *Philebus*.¹²⁵⁷ In the passage of the *Republic* discussed above, Socrates says that knowledge knows something or is subordinated to something.¹²⁵⁸ In sum, all these psychic activities have a content. They are not simple and self-contained, but they rather imply a scission or unfolding. To use phenomenological language, there is an *intentio* (a being directed to something) and an *intentum* (that to which one is directed). The intentional object may be real or unreal, and it may be something other than the mind or not, but the ψυχή is nevertheless referred to it. It tries to know this object and it may or may not be convinced of doing so. In other words, the soul sets reality (or, as Plato says, τὰ πράγματα, τὰ χρήματα or τὰ ὄντα) as its target or it is directed to an objective domain. However, this objective domain as such is not to be understood as a thing in itself – i.e., a reality absolutely independent of the ψυχή. Its precise nature is still to be determined. What is nonetheless implied is the idea of something more than the mere appearing. The ψυχή is related to this something more and bound to it.¹²⁵⁹

¹²⁵⁵ See 477e-478e.

¹²⁵⁶ Cp. *Chrm.* 167c ff., where Socrates considers several psychic operations and how they are always related to something other than themselves.

¹²⁵⁷ See 37a: “[ΣΩ] (...) ἔστιν γάρ πού τι δοξάζειν ἡμῖν; [ΠΡΩ] ναί. (...) [ΣΩ] καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ δοξαζόμενον ἔστι τι; [ΠΡΩ] πῶς δ’ οὐ;”

¹²⁵⁸ See 476e: “ὁ γινώσκων γινώσκει τι ἢ οὐδέν; σὺ οὖν μοι ὑπὲρ ἐκείνου ἀποκρίνου. ἀποκρινούμαι, ἔφη, ὅτι γινώσκει τί.”

¹²⁵⁹ This something more (i.e., objectivity) is normally interpreted as something non-arbitrary, independent from our will, and to a point even independent from how we conceive it. It is something autonomous, self-sufficient, and in this sense “divine” (i.e., more than merely human or subjective). In fact, even if objectivity turned out to be something intra-psychic, its status would still be different from a mere appearance.

However, although the ψυχή is always referred to an objective domain in this sense, this does not mean that the subjective or psychic dimension as such disappears. The latter in fact surpasses or transcends itself and comes therefore to situate itself in an objective sphere (or at the least in the representation one has of such a sphere). It is integrated in reality or has its place there. But truth still contains a subjective pole (even if it is always understood in correlation with the objective side and subordinated to it). Ἀλήθεια involves (and can even be understood as) an activity of the soul. In other words, it involves an ἀληθεύειν in broader sense, which is defined as τὰ ὄντα δοξάζειν (in the neutral sense of δοξάζειν – i.e., as a judging or deciding what really is).¹²⁶⁰ This corresponds to the notion of knowledge, which we briefly considered before, as that which we are often convinced of having or often claim to possess.¹²⁶¹ Ἀλήθεια therefore involves a perfect access, which has contact with or accompanies its object (to use the metaphors from the *Cratylus*).¹²⁶² In other words, truth is something that reaches the object it is referred to and is certain of having reached it. It is infallible and stable, it has full transparency, it lets reality appear as it is, it is lucid or sane, and excludes any subjective distortions.

As mentioned above, Plato uses different notions to designate this – such as εἰδέναι, γινώσκειν, συνιέναι, μανθάνειν, νοῦς, φρόνησις, σωφροσύνη, τέχνη, σοφία, ἐπιστήμη, ὀρθὴ δόξα, λογισμός, γνῶσις, διάνοια, ἐπαίειν.¹²⁶³ These notions complement each other. They were originally taken from different contexts and carry different connotations. They may denote a simple knowledge or some pre-eminent form of knowledge, and some of them may have a stronger relation to the practical sphere, which implies that the knowledge in question enables one to act efficiently or well. We will not consider their precise meaning here, but it is clear that all these forms of access refer basically to the same: the correlation of knowledge and being that constitutes truth. However, this is only a possibility, and our access may also be deficient. There is the possibility of deviation – i.e., of not reaching things and of wrongly thinking we have reached them. This can be denoted with terms as ἄγνοια, ἀφροσύνη, ἀμαθία, ἄνοια, amongst others. However, even these deficient forms of knowledge are referred to the perfect one. They are a variation of the fundamental correlation between knowledge and being, as we will see below. But before we move on to that question, there is one final component of the formal notion of truth that we must briefly consider.

¹²⁶⁰ Cp. *Rep.* 413a: “ἢ οὐ τὸ τὰ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἀληθεύειν δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι;”

¹²⁶¹ Cp. *Chap.* 5, Sect. 2.3.

¹²⁶² Cp. the etymologies of ἐπιστήμη, σύνεσις and σοφία in *Cra.* 412a-b.

¹²⁶³ Cp. once more *Chap.* 5, Sect. 2.3.

d) The truth of λόγος

Truth may also be contained in the λόγοι (i.e., in speech, statements or assertions, which are employed to verbalize one's knowledge). It is then experienced as ἀληθεύειν in the usual sense of the word – namely, as telling the truth, which corresponds to λέγειν τὰ ὄντα (i.e., saying what is the case) or λέγειν τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν (saying things as they are).¹²⁶⁴ This sense of truth can be labeled as an imitation or an image (εἶδωλον) of the truth in the ψυχή.¹²⁶⁵ The former is a derived form of truth and knowledge, whereas the latter is knowledge and truth proper. In this sense, λόγος seems to be an inferior form of truth, although the relation between the two components may actually be more complex. Indeed, when one formulates a truth, one renders it explicit and brings it into the spotlight of one's mind. This truth thus becomes explicit knowledge, which is more present to us, and also clearer or more distinct than tacit knowledge.¹²⁶⁶

One may, moreover, wonder about the precise role of λόγος in the acquisition and possession of knowledge. Do we need elaborate λόγοι to reach truth and does truth consist in what is expressed by these λόγοι?¹²⁶⁷ The question becomes especially relevant if we consider that the soul in general and knowledge in particular are understood as having a logical and perhaps even a verbal structure. One's δόξαι in the neutral sense are conceived as inner λόγοι or assertions that result from an inner conversation of the soul, in which it asks questions and gives answers.¹²⁶⁸ But perhaps one could also say that it is the other way around: assertions are conceived based on what inner or silent thoughts are. The nature and role of λόγος in our ψυχή (and in our experience of ἀλήθεια) is thus somewhat problematic. But we will leave that aside for now.

¹²⁶⁴ Cp. e.g. *Cra.* 385b: “[ΣΩ] φέρε δὴ μοι τόδε εἶπε· καλεῖς τι ἀληθῆ λέγειν καὶ ψευδῆ; [EPM] ἔγωγε. [ΣΩ] οὐκοῦν εἶη ἂν λόγος ἀληθῆς, ὁ δὲ ψευδῆς; [EPM] πάνυ γε. [ΣΩ] ἄρ’ οὖν οὗτος ὅς ἂν τὰ ὄντα λέγη ὡς ἔστιν, ἀληθῆς· ὅς δ’ ἂν ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ψευδῆς; [EPM] ναί. [ΣΩ] ἔστιν ἄρα τοῦτο, λόγῳ λέγειν τὰ ὄντα τε καὶ μὴ; [EPM] πάνυ γε.” This is related with the Homeric use of ἀλήθεια along with verbs of saying (in the sense of ἀληθεύειν) to express the idea of truthfulness.

¹²⁶⁵ Cp. *Rep.* 382b-c, where Socrates says as much about falsehood in λόγοι and falsehood in the soul: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ὀρθότατά γ’ ἂν, ὃ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, τοῦτο ὡς ἀληθῶς ψεῦδος καλοῖτο, ἢ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἄγνοια ἢ τοῦ ἐψευσμένου· ἐπεὶ τό γε ἐν τοῖς λόγοις μίμημά τι τοῦ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἐστὶν παθήματος καὶ ὕστερον γεγονὸς εἶδωλον, οὐ πάνυ ἄκρατον ψεῦδος.” We may infer that the same holds for truth in λόγοι and truth in the soul

¹²⁶⁶ For more on this, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3 b).

¹²⁶⁷ In other words, does knowledge consist in a simple beholding of truth (or some other non-verbal experience), or is it rather a modality of λόγος and something based on speech?

¹²⁶⁸ Cp. Chap. 5, Sect. 1.3.

It is, however, important to consider that Plato also analyzes λόγος separately (i.e., apart from its relation to a particular ψυχί), as a simple statement or assertion. We find some very illuminating indications in *Sophist*, where λόγος is reduced to its simplest form, to better analyze it. The Visitor shows that in order for λόγος to have sense and be more than a mere sequence of words without sense, it must consist of a particular synthesis of elements (and, more precisely, of a subject and a verb) that is able to show something about something.¹²⁶⁹ In other words, λόγος is referred to something or, as Plato says, it is about something (τινός or περὶ τινός).¹²⁷⁰ Λόγος has its own intentionality. But it does not simply name something. It is more than naming something, ὀνομάζειν. It says something about it – i.e., it articulates what this thing is or further defines it. This articulation or definition may correspond to what the thing really is or not (i.e., it may be true or false).¹²⁷¹ But λόγος (like our soul) is nonetheless directed to reality, and as such it mirrors the inner structure of the soul.

2.3. The identification of truth and its usually social character

We have always some notion of truth, and are somehow related to it, but this does not mean that we immediately and automatically know what the truth is. Truth is first and foremost a formal notion. It contains particular features, but these features do not specify what corresponds to it – i.e., what kind of contents are true. The structure of truth and the correlation between knowledge and being still require us to deformalize, specify or identify what the truth is. Only so will we attain a material truth or a version of truth, which will be seen as what fulfills the formal definition.

This identification of truth is complex and composed of many different layers, which are interconnected with one another. We must determine several things: for instance, whether what appears to our mind is all that there is or if there is some reality beyond the appearing of what appears; we must also determine, using certain predicates, what appears or what is real; we must determine the alphabet of predicates we use to determine things; we must determine the status of the alphabet; and so on. The structure of truth requires us to determine these and

¹²⁶⁹ Cp. *Sph.* 261d-262e.

¹²⁷⁰ See *Sph.* 262e: “λόγον ἀναγκαῖον, ὅταν περ ἤ, τινός εἶναι λόγον, μὴ δὲ τινός ἀδύνατον.”

¹²⁷¹ Cp. *Sph.* 263a-b: “[ΞΕ] ποιὸν δὲ γέ τινα φαμεν ἀναγκαῖον ἕκαστον εἶναι τῶν λόγων. [ΘΕΑΙ] ναί. [ΞΕ] τούτων δὴ ποιὸν τινα ἐκάτερον φατέον εἶναι; [ΘΕΑΙ] τὸν μὲν ψευδοῦ, τὸν δὲ ἀληθοῦ. [ΞΕ] λέγει δὲ αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν ἀληθοῦς τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ. [ΘΕΑΙ] τί μὴν; [ΞΕ] ὁ δὲ δὴ ψευδοῦς ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων. [ΘΕΑΙ] ναί. [ΞΕ] τὰ μὴ ὄντ’ ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει.”

many other questions. However, this does not mean that we necessarily have an identification (either explicit or implicit) of all these things. In effect, we may be unsure about many things (or even all of them) and not know the truth about them. But the formal structure as such raises Pilatus' question – *quid est veritas?* This question echoes in the depths of our ψυχή and is a constitutive moment of our being. Normally we do not notice it or concern ourselves with it, but there are some moments in which it becomes clearer – for instance, when we have strong doubts about what something is or when we have no clue whatsoever about what a mysterious apparition is. In that case, the pure φαίνεσθαι is haunted by the lack of truth and, faced with it, we can notice more clearly not only the question concerning truth, but also what we usually have and at that moment lack – namely, a version of truth.

As was said, we will not discuss at this point exactly what need the ψυχή has for truth and for an identification of it. We will not see the scope of our need for truth and whether this is a theoretical or practical need (i.e., whether it is only concerned with truth or rather with some practical end that requires us to know certain things). We will also not discuss here whether the soul only needs to adopt a particular version of things or if it intrinsically desires the correct version – i.e., the one that is not illusory, but corresponds to reality.¹²⁷² There can indeed be multiple versions of truth (both with respect to a particular thing or reality in general) and they may have different values, as we will see in the following subsection. But whatever need we may have for the correct version and whatever its scope, there is no doubt that we often feel the need to decide what things are (i.e., to adopt a particular version of truth). At least in certain domains we are not used to indetermination. We need to determine the truth.

Generally, however, we are not faced with this need to solve conflicts between different versions of truth and determine what things are. But this does not mean that we do not have an answer to Pilatus' question. On the contrary: usually we experience it as being already solved. The truth is already identified and we have no doubts, or they concern only some minor, irrelevant details. There is an established version, which is actually so automatic and self-evident that we do not even think about it. We are occupied with other things, with our life in general, and do not think about the problem of truth. This is why normally we do not notice the relation with truth as something constitutive of our ψυχή, and may even have doubts about it when we come into contact with such a description. We know enough about

¹²⁷² The question assumes that there is something as a correct version of things, which is itself problematic. But we will not discuss this here. What we can say is that normally it is presupposed in our being that there is something as a correct version of things and we are frequently related to this idea.

the truth to not concern ourselves with Pilatus' question. Like him, we do not need to stay for an answer. The truth status is normally attributed, and in fact it tends to be merged with a certain version of things, and as a result any dissociation between the two (the truth status as such and this version of things) seems artificial. We only notice any difference between them when there are problems with the regular version of things. When everything seems to be fine, there is no reflection about what reality, knowledge or truth are. We are (or we think we are) in immediate contact with things, we do not need to concern ourselves, and we can just attend to other matters.

The identification of truth we normally adopt is not just any identification, and this is very important. As we saw above, we normally adopt the socially accepted version of things.¹²⁷³ It does not matter whether it is shared by absolutely everyone, by just a majority (οἱ πολλοί) or by a confined group. The number of subscribers of different truths may vary, but in general the truths we adopt are intrinsically referred to other people. These truths are shared views or shared truths, which are taken to be simply the way things are, or how one is to think and behave. There is something like social values and social normativity – and to be lucid or aware of things (φρονεῖν) is to share in the social values and the social truth.

Many of the views that compose this social truth are received through the educational process (παιδεία). The latter consists in a very complex process which teaches us the right way to think and behave. We come into contact with (or grow into) a set of social views and social values, and in order to be seen as someone lucid and as grown ups, we must share in these views and values. By adopting a shared version of truth one is acknowledged, and becomes autonomous and self-sufficient. One is then qualified to act and share in deliberations. This is an essential component in families and public life. One must be seen as lucid or as having knowledge (φρονεῖν), if one is to be trusted by others, and this φρονεῖν is primarily defined by what people in general think – or, in case one goes beyond the common views and has some special knowledge, one must still conform to what all (or at least most people) recognize as a socially acknowledged form of exceptional knowledge or σοφία. In sum, we are aware of other people's δόξαι and we tend to determine truth in conformity with them. To see things as they are, to be in one's right mind, is to see according to one's group

¹²⁷³ See Chap. 7, Sect. 2.2. We will now return to some of the aspects discussed above and show how they tend to affect the question of truth and actually distract us from it.

or community. People who do not share in this do not have any credit. They are either ignorant, insane, or both.¹²⁷⁴

There is thus a certain prescription or normativity of truth. Truth tends to be something shared. However, as we saw above, Plato puts this social truth in question. It may have many different contents, and there is no guarantee that any shared version of truth is actually true. It may be adopted by many, but the many are also the laypeople. We may also assume it is adopted by all, but this is usually a projection that derives of our own conviction. We do not actually know if there is a universal consensus. Indeed, any social truth depends on us as individuals. But we tend not to think about it, which means that the social truth is usually embraced and left unexamined. It may well be false, but we do not put it in question. We are thus completely exposed to the possibility of falsity or untruth, and this possibility is what we must now consider.

2.4. The possibility of untruth, falsity or illusion

Our relation to truth requires us to identify it or to give it a precise content; otherwise we would be reduced to an indeterminate φαίνεσθαι. But the fact that we take something as true does not guarantee that we reach the actual truth. Plato is very aware of this. There is also the very significant possibility that we adopt a wrong version of true or wrongly attribute the truth status. This possibility helps us better understand what the structure of the truth status is and how truth is something that is difficult to attain and must often (if not always) be conquered in a conflict with its opposite. Indeed, in many cases there are multiple possible versions of truth in conflict with each other. These identifications are either true or false (i.e., they either hit the target or stray from it), but we are not clearly aware of which is which. We may fail to notice that a certain version fails the target. This means we may adopt a false version and take it as true. We may experience truth or untruth. In fact, this may happen even when we are aware only of one possible version. The fact that we aim and shoot at truth

¹²⁷⁴ Indeed, the notion of μανία is normally opposed to social φρόνησις and to the conventional σωφροσύνη (i.e., to having good sense, being of sound mind, thinking straight, which implies self-mastery or not being subdued to one's impulses or desires). It is worth noting that this opposition between a social φρόνησις and μανία plays a central role in the first two speeches in *Phaedrus*, which follow ordinary conceptions about ἔρως. By falling in love, one changes one's way of thinking and behaving, and in the eyes of the community one is no longer in one's senses. For more on the matter, cp. F. SERRANITO, *Lovers and Madmen. The Μανία-Φρονεῖν Opposition in Plato's Phaedrus*, Diss. Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015, especially 200-203, 266-274, 283-285.

opens both possibilities. There can be two relations with the target. Untruth or falsity is a constitutive risk.

But in general untruth is more than a risk or a possibility. We may be aware of false versions without being in a state of untruth or falsity. In order to experience the latter, it is necessary to determine an untrue version as true. Untruth must be taken as knowledge and being. In other words, falsehood must speak the language of truth. This is what produces the state of double deviation we considered above, which corresponds to the notion of blameworthy ignorance or ἀμαθία.¹²⁷⁵ A false version of things, when adopted, violates truth, hides being and produces an increased state of unawareness. It escapes our notice (λανθάνει) that we do not know things or that we do not reach them. We have only a subjective version of things that is no more than a fiction (ἀπάτη). What we see (or how we see) is unreal, non-existent. We are related to something that is not.¹²⁷⁶ It is a deceptive appearance or semblance (i.e., a φαίνεσθαι or a δοκεῖν in negative sense). Its object is illusory. It is not what we are really in relation with or what we are really directed at.

This description may be abstract, but it corresponds to a frequent and trivial experience of ours. We all detect errors and incomprehension in views that seemed solid and of which we were fully convinced. It is true that this tends to be a limited experience, and it tends not to raise serious questions. However, the occasional experience of untruth may also cast a shadow of suspicion over our other views. There can indeed be different ranges of falsity in our way of seeing things, as we considered above.¹²⁷⁷ We may have adopted a few untruths, there may be many, or perhaps all our views are untrue. In the latter case we would then have no knowledge and see no reality, even if we are always referred to them. To be sure, this does not normally seem to be the case. But it is important to bear in mind that there are different kinds of falsity. We may think we know everything about something and there may be gaps. We may also be mistaken in attributing a certain predicate to something (i.e., we may commit an error in the strict sense). Finally, even if we tend not to contemplate this possibility, we may have a muddled or wrong understanding of a predicate, which will affect all attributions of it to particular things. Another complicating factor is the way our views are intertwined, and so one false view may affect many other or even all. On the other hand, a

¹²⁷⁵ Cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 1, and Chap. 8, Sect. 1.3.

¹²⁷⁶ Cp. *Phlb.* 40c: “οὐκοῦν ἦν δοξάζειν μὲν ὄντως ἀεὶ τῷ τὸ παράπαν δοξάζονται, μὴ ἐπ’ οὓσι δὲ μηδ’ ἐπὶ γεγονόσι μηδὲ ἐπ’ ἐσομένοις ἐνίστε.”

¹²⁷⁷ See Chap. 7, Sect. 1.3.

particular view may be affected by many untruths. The distortion in our way of seeing things may thus be extreme, even if some and many views are still somehow correct.

The different degrees of untruth are possible due to our relation to truth. But there is still one possibility that Plato does not consider in detail – and to which Nietzsche in particular calls our attention. It can happen that there is no truth at all (or at least it may not be possible for us to properly identify it). In fact, it may happen that the concept of truth itself is untrue – i.e., it may be a false concept and it may even involve inner contradiction. The project of identifying truth may therefore be false.¹²⁷⁸ It is, however, very difficult to conceive how it can be so, and we must wonder whether it is possible to nullify our relation to truth. What would that correspond to? Would we then be reduced to something like the abstract appearing described in Section 1 (which was itself very problematic), or would we be able to manipulate judgments and create all truths at will (which in a way would still preserve the notion of truth, and would thus raise the question of how we can believe it when we know there is no truth)? Plato never considers these questions – so let us likewise leave them aside for now.

We are discussing the possibility of untruth as such and Plato not only calls the reader's attention to this possibility and to the fact that we adopt views that are false or untrue, but he also discusses two major sources of perplexity associated with this possibility. The first pertains to the very possibility of conceiving untruth or falsehood. What is untruth and what makes it possible? How can we conceive the opposite of knowledge and being (i.e., false views and non-being)? The problem is complex. Plato discusses untruth several times and the attempts to conceive it are affected by the kind of falsity the characters have in mind. It is not the same to discuss the false attribution of predicates and the false understanding of a predicate. The analyses, however, tend to focus on the former. The most conspicuous example is probably the discussion of falsehood in the *Theaetetus*.¹²⁷⁹ In contrast, the discussion in the *Sophist* is more refined, since it considers the general predicates.¹²⁸⁰ An analysis of these passages would take us too far afield, but it is important to at least consider some of their most important aspects.

The main problem is how it is possible to think, judge or say something false. How can that still be an act of thinking, judging or saying? All these acts seem to imply an intentional object. We judge something or say something – i.e., something that is. How can

¹²⁷⁸ For more on this, see Chap. 20, Sect. 3.4 below.

¹²⁷⁹ Cp. 187d ff.

¹²⁸⁰ Cp. 236e ff.

we think or say something that is not or something that is nothing? In doing so, the act in question seems to have absolutely no object, and it would thus be empty and meaningless. There would be no judgment and no assertion. At the most, there would be only noise (assuming the judgment was pronounced out loud).¹²⁸¹ In effect, a false judgment or a false statement judges or thinks that what-is is not or that what-is-not is, and so non-being is involved in both cases.¹²⁸²

Plato then tries to explain that non-being can in some way be. The notions of being and non-being can be intertwined. At least that is how the problem is presented in the *Sophist*.¹²⁸³ Both here and in *Theaetetus*, Plato tries to conceive falsity as a judging or saying things differently from what they are – i.e., as a mistake or misidentification. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates speaks of *ἀλλοδοξία* and *έτεροδοξία*.¹²⁸⁴ But how can this deceive us? How can we experience untruth or falsehood as their opposite? We cannot simply swap one thing for another – because then we would simply be thinking or saying this other thing, and not confusing one with the other. In other words, the alternative in this case seems to be between knowing and not knowing something, or between thinking or not thinking about it, but it is not clear how we can have access to something and at the same time mistake it with something else. Therefore, in order for us to take untruth as truth, it is necessary to assume something as an imperfect access to something. This is what the discussion in *Theaetetus* tries to identify, although it does not clearly express it in those terms. Socrates and Theaetetus consider the examples of seeing someone from afar or not remembering something precisely.¹²⁸⁵ Only so can we convince ourselves that what we are thinking is something else.

¹²⁸¹ Cp. *Cra.* 429c-430a: “[ΣΩ] ἄρα ὅτι ψευδῆ λέγειν τὸ παράπαν οὐκ ἔστιν, ἄρα τοῦτό σοι δύναται ὁ λόγος; συχοῖ γὰρ τινες οἱ λέγοντες, ὃ φίλε Κρατύλε, καὶ νῦν καὶ πάλαι. [ΚΡΑ] πῶς γὰρ ἂν, ὃ Σώκρατες, λέγων γέ τις τοῦτο ὃ λέγει, μὴ τὸ ὄν λέγοι; ἢ οὐ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ψευδῆ λέγειν, τὸ μὴ τὰ ὄντα λέγειν; [ΣΩ] κομψότερος μὲν ὁ λόγος ἢ κατ’ ἐμὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἡλικίαν, ὃ ἐταῖρε. ὅμως μέντοι εἰπέ μοι τοσόνδε· πότερον λέγειν μὲν οὐ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ψευδῆ, φάναι δέ; [ΚΡΑ] οὐ μοι δοκεῖ οὐδὲ φάναι. [ΣΩ] οὐδὲ εἰπεῖν οὐδὲ προσεῖπεῖν; οἷον εἰ τις ἀπαντήσας σοι ἐπὶ ξενίας, λαβόμενος τῆς χειρὸς εἴποι· ‘χαῖρε, ὃ ξένη Ἀθηναῖε, ὑὲ Σμικρίωνος Ἑρμογένες,’ οὗτος λέξειεν ἂν ταῦτα ἢ φαίη ἂν ταῦτα ἢ εἴποι ἂν ταῦτα ἢ προσεῖποι ἂν οὕτω σὲ μὲν οὐ, Ἑρμογένη δὲ τόνδε; ἢ οὐδένα; [ΚΡΑ] ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἄλλως ἂν οὗτος ταῦτα φθέγγασθαι. [ΣΩ] ἀλλ’ ἀγαπητὸν καὶ τοῦτο. πότερον γὰρ ἀληθῆ ἂν φθέγγαιτο ταῦτα ὁ φθεγγάμενος ἢ ψευδῆ; ἢ τὸ μὲν τι αὐτῶν ἀληθές, τὸ δὲ ψεῦδος; καὶ γὰρ ἂν καὶ τοῦτο ἐξαρκοῖ. [ΚΡΑ] ψοφεῖν ἔγωγ’ ἂν φαίην τὸν τοιοῦτον, μάτην αὐτὸν ἑαυτὸν κινουῦντα, ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ τις χαλκίον κινήσειε κρούσας.”

¹²⁸² Cp. *Sph.* 236e-237a: “[ΞΕ] (...) τὸ γὰρ φαίνεσθαι τοῦτο καὶ τὸ δοκεῖν, εἶναι δὲ μὴ, καὶ τὸ λέγειν μὲν ἄττα, ἀληθῆ δὲ μὴ, πάντα ταῦτά ἐστι μεστὰ ἀπορίας ἀεὶ ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν χρόνῳ καὶ νῦν. ὅπως γὰρ εἰπόντα χρῆ ψευδῆ λέγειν ἢ δοξάζειν ὄντως εἶναι, καὶ τοῦτο φθεγγάμενον ἐναντιολογία μὴ συνεχέσθαι, παντάπασιν, ὃ Θεαίτητε, χαλεπόν. [ΘΕΑΙ] τί δή; [ΞΕ] τετόλμηκεν ὁ λόγος οὗτος ὑποθέσθαι τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι· ψεῦδος γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως ἐγγίγνετο ὄν.”

¹²⁸³ Cp. 241d: “τὸν τοῦ πατρὸς Παρμενίδου λόγον ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν ἀμυνομένοις ἔσται βασιανίζειν, καὶ βιάζεσθαι τό τε μὴ ὄν ὡς ἔστι κατὰ τι καὶ τὸ ὄν αὖ πάλιν ὡς οὐκ ἔστι πη.”

¹²⁸⁴ Plato also uses the verbs *ἀλλοδοξεῖν* and *έτεροδοξεῖν*. See 189b, 189d, 190e, 193d.

¹²⁸⁵ See 191b and 193b-c.

In sum, we can only conceive the adoption of a falsehood if we assume that there are different degrees of knowledge (or access to something) and different degrees of being – i.e., there must be an intermediate state between knowledge and ignorance and between being and non-being. It is because we have no perfect access to empirical realities or to eidetic contents that we can make a mistake and think it as being something other than what it is. This implies that we are somehow related to a reality, but we are not absolutely clear about it. There is a target for our judgment, but our relation to it is not perfect. In other words, we are already related to the thing itself, but we have no more than an image of it, i.e., something that refers to it, but still falls short of reaching it. This image may then distort what the thing is and hide it. We may mistake the thing for something else. But for that to happen, the soul must try to determine something – despite the fact that it has only a hazy awareness of it – and it must also become convinced that it has determined it. Falsehood implies an excess over what is given. If one would simply recognize the limitations of one's access, one would still be ignorant, but one would not make a mistake or misunderstand anything.

This applies to all beings, including the εἶδη. Plato defends that we always have some glimpse or partial recollection of them (i.e., that there is always some ἀλήθεια in our soul), and that this is constitutive of a human being.¹²⁸⁶ We must then develop the vague understanding of an εἶδος, and this development may distort the content and make us misunderstand it. But we are still convinced we understand it, and so it may be difficult to dissociate the glimpse from the false development of a particular εἶδος. However, both moments are constitutive of the experience of falsehood at this level. Such a falsehood or untruth in our access to the εἶδη then affects all attributions, which may be additionally affected by a deficient appearing of the empirical beings which are to receive the predicates.¹²⁸⁷

This points to a different source of perplexity associated with untruth or falsehood. How do we come to accept a false judgment or a false assertion? What leads us to untruth? What is our motivation? The ψυχή seems to be directed at truth and to require an identification of it – and yet it is full of baseless or false views. Why do we not reach truth and do not recognize it? Why do we accept something less and mistake it for the real thing? Why do we accept views without sufficient grounds? These questions are important to

¹²⁸⁶ See *Phdr.* 249b-c.

¹²⁸⁷ This is, for instance, the difficulty the philosopher experiences when returning to the cave. His eyes are not used to seeing sensible realities and distinguish between them. See *Rep.* 516e-517a. However, even when his eyes (or the mind that sees through them) are accustomed to this level of reality, there may still be unfavorable perceptive conditions (such as weak light, distance, and so on).

determine our relation to untruth. However, they are too complicated to be tackled now and we will have to return to them later, after we discuss the inner motivations or desires of the soul.¹²⁸⁸ Then we will be able to see how our experience of untruth is not caused by an external source. There is an inner motivation, which is precisely what lies at the basis of the unexamined life.

But the important thing for now is that we are always subjected to the alternative between truth and untruth in all moments of our being and in many moments we cannot distinguish between the both. Fallibility pervades our being. This is something of which we are often reminded. We often find ourselves in error (either attributing wrong predicates or wrongly thinking we understand these predicates), and we would find many more errors if we were to embrace philosophical examination. We may in fact live full of illusions. The consideration of untruth thus raises the question of how true or untrue our usual representation of things is, and also of how we can know something and be certain of it.

2.5. The main features and the problems of the Platonic identification of the truth

After discussing Plato's understanding of the notion of truth and distinguishing the truth status as such from the specification or identification of truth, it is now important to consider what Plato takes to be true – i.e., what is his outlook on reality and on how we can know it. This will allow us to better understand all that may be involved in the identification of truth. So we will briefly try to determine the main features of Plato's identification of truth and the problems associated with it. This task, however, is not simple, in virtue of the nature of the Platonic corpus. As we saw in the Introduction, it is not clear what exactly Plato views were or what he regarded as true. He does not talk in his own voice. His writings rather present a multitude of characters with different viewpoints, and we do not know if the author endorsed any of them. Moreover, many arguments are unclear and apparently fallacious. The dialogues themselves are often aporetic, and even those arguments that go unopposed in a dialogue tend to be contradicted somewhere else. Therefore, it is not clear whether there is an underlying unity to all of this (either in the corpus itself or as a set of hidden doctrines the texts only allude to).¹²⁸⁹ At any rate, even if we do not find a unitary and complete theory in

¹²⁸⁸ See in particular Chaps. 16 and 17 below.

¹²⁸⁹ For more on this, see Introduction, Sect. 4.

the texts, we saw that there are some indications which we can collect and order, and which present something as a general tendency of the texts.

In general, the texts point to an identification of truth that is very different from our usual way of seeing things, and even from all that we are prepared to accept. Many things will seem unreasonable, if not outright insane. Plato himself is aware of how most people tend to find the philosopher's views implausible and unsensible.¹²⁹⁰ But Plato's writings do not simply present strange views. They also try to refute many views to which we are naturally inclined. There is therefore a conflict between the natural way of seeing things and many of the conceptions put forward in the corpus. It seems that according to Plato the main aspects of truth are usually hidden from us. We are far from the truth and our usual outlook on reality is actually a form of madness. Consequently, we can only be lucid if we break with our ordinary views.

This does not mean that the Platonic corpus defends that there is something like a super-knowledge or a super-reality, different from the one we normally recognize (even if some passages may suggest so). The version of truth suggested by Plato's texts is so different from the ordinary views because our ordinary access to things is very deficient, as we saw in Chapter 7. We do not have proper knowledge, and we are not in contact with reality proper. What we take to be knowledge and reality is actually something that lies between absolute ignorance and perfect knowledge and also between non-being and being. More than that: this defective way of seeing things already implies and points to more than what is immediately recognized in it. The truth Plato seems to be referring to is not a super-truth, but rather the truth of what we normally take as true. This is why normally there seems to be no room for any new version of things. We think we already know things (or at least the essentials about them), so any other truth is superfluous. But Plato strongly contests our alleged knowledge, and he gives clues about what should replace it.

But what does Plato say (or suggest) is the truth? Which clues do we find in the texts? In some of the most elaborate passages, truth seems to be primarily connected with the general modes of being or εἶδη, which he discusses especially in *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Sophist*, *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*. But what Plato says about them in these and other texts is far from corresponding to a univocal and clear doctrine. He presents different characterizations or descriptions of them (some of which mythological), and he also presents a robust criticism of them in *Parmenides* (whereby he anticipates much of the criticism of

¹²⁹⁰ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 473e-474b, 481b-c, *Phd.* 64a-b, *Tht.* 173b-175b.

later authors). The reader must therefore decide how the different passages are to be brought together and what results from their combination.

We already considered the notion of εἶδος above, but let us reconsider some aspects of it, in light of the question we are now discussing.¹²⁹¹ The εἶδη are presented as that which fulfills the main requirements of knowledge or truth. Plato argues or tries to show that truth must be stable and clear. It cannot be always changing and it cannot be mixed in a confused whole either. It must be clearly defined as something that is what it is. In other words, it must be itself by itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό) – i.e., it must be absolute, independent from circumstances, standpoint, time, and space.¹²⁹² This is what constitutes objectivity in the highest sense, and the εἶδη are presented precisely as what corresponds to this description. They pervade everything and appear everywhere, but cannot be reduced to individual beings.¹²⁹³ They are a kind of being very different from the ones we normally recognize. In fact, they are described as transcendent, which mainly stresses their autonomy from all sensible reality (i.e., from each of their occurrences in empirical reality). They must be conceived in themselves, independently of individual beings and also of the other εἶδη. In other words, they must be independent, monoeidetic and changeless. Only so can they have their own distinct content, which they must have if they are to determine things. Therefore, the εἶδη are not simply a different kind of being. They are what most fulfills the truth criteria and, as such, they are what is primarily or pre-eminently true. The access to them is knowledge proper, and they are the most real beings – the οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα.¹²⁹⁴

In other words, the εἶδη are what is most real. They are not subjective fictions. They really exist and have a clear content, even if one is unable to identify it. However, Plato appears to go further and at times he seems to hypostasize the εἶδη and to describe (usually under mythological garments) a peculiar geography of truth, according to which there would be a plane of reality different from this one, in which one could leave sensible reality behind and simply contemplate the εἶδη by themselves. This plain of truth (τὸ Ἀληθείας πεδῖον) would be something only accessible after death (or before life) – i.e., a kind of intelligible world to which only the νοῦς has access.¹²⁹⁵ But how is this to be interpreted? Should we read these passages in a more literal sense, or do they admit of a more nuanced interpretation? We could

¹²⁹¹ Cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 2.2.

¹²⁹² Cp. *Phd.* 78d, *Smp.* 210e-211b and *Phdr.* 247c-e.

¹²⁹³ See *Rep.* 476a: “καὶ περὶ δὴ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν εἰδῶν περὶ ὃ αὐτὸς λόγος, αὐτὸ μὲν ἕνα ἕνα εἶναι, τῇ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἕνα ἕνα.”

¹²⁹⁴ For the expression “οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα”, see *Phdr.* 247c

¹²⁹⁵ Cp. *Phdr.* 247c and 248b.

indeed understand this “otherworldly” experience as a different perspective over reality. Usually our perspective is centered in sensible beings and only confusedly aware of the εἶδη that determine them. But we may try to isolate the εἶδη and see them by themselves, which would also allow us to better understand the individual beings that partake in them. The vision of the εἶδη and their separate existence might thus correspond to this clearer perspective over reality as a whole. But let us leave this question aside.

Another ambiguous aspect in the representation of a world of εἶδη concerns their interrelation. Are the εἶδη just juxtaposed, or do they interact and determine each other? This points to the problems we considered above. The εἶδη are supposed to be simple or monoeidetic contents that are the basis of all composite realities, but it appears that, in a way, they are also complex. Some εἶδη partake in other εἶδη, and there may be one or several that determine all others.¹²⁹⁶ In *Sophist*, Plato singles out the μέγιστα γένη (sc. being, movement, rest, sameness, otherness).¹²⁹⁷ In the *Republic*, the good is described as being beyond all being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) and also as what provides knowledge and being to anything. In short, it is the ultimate root of truth.¹²⁹⁸ But it is not clear what exactly the form of good is and how it relates to the other εἶδη. Plato simply points to the possibility of there being an ultimate ground of truth.

The problems concerning the εἶδη are thus many and diverse, and there is still one that we must consider. According to Plato’s description, it is not clear if we ever can have a perfectly clear access to them. We do not even know how such an access would be structured. For instance, we do not know whether it would be purely intuitive or discursive. What seems certain is that our ordinary relation to them seems to be imagetic. We have a defective understanding of them, and do not realize it. We are partially forgotten of them or they are concealed from us.¹²⁹⁹ In general, we can only notice this defect if we perform philosophical examination, and in fact it is also through philosophical examination that we may try to overcome it.¹³⁰⁰

But this is not all. Although the εἶδη are the protagonists of Plato’s conception of truth, they do not account for everything. We still have to consider empirical reality as

¹²⁹⁶ For more on this, see Chap. 6, Sect. 2.3.

¹²⁹⁷ See 251a-259e.

¹²⁹⁸ See 508e-509b.

¹²⁹⁹ This corresponds precisely to the Platonic notion of dreaming (*Rep.* 476c), and more specifically to the notion of dreaming about being (*Rep.* 533b-c). For an analysis of these notions, cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 above.

¹³⁰⁰ In other words, philosophical examination reduces the untruth of our views by showing their limitations (which in a way is already an experience of ἀλήθεια) and it may perhaps reveal the full ἀλήθεια about them, insofar as it may lead us to discover how things really are.

such – i.e., the way individual beings are determined and how we come to know them. According to Plato's texts, it seems the empiric truth is an intermediate form of truth. It is an intermediate form of knowledge, related to an intermediate form of being. Individual beings are not totally unreal or a mere dream image. They are a part of reality. But their essence or their predicates are constitutively referred to the εἶδη. In this sense they compose a derived domain and admit only of a derived truth, which is wholly based on the εἶδη and on the correct attribution of them). Still, this derived domain has its own specificity. Each being is composed of many εἶδη and this poses its own problems. For instance, it is not easy to understand how the predicates are present in things, how they come to be synthesized with each other while remaining distinct, or how they can change without destroying the being in question.¹³⁰¹

There are also some more general problems concerning the empirical domain as a whole, such as the nature of matter and how it comes to be arranged in a particular order, or whether there is any god and how he relates to the κόσμος.¹³⁰² Furthermore, the empirical or sensible domain is also the domain in which our concrete life takes place. We must act in it or at least relate to it in some way. But since it is still a derived domain, we must use the practical or ethical εἶδη (along with all other εἶδη insofar as they also help define our action and its context) to determine things and to determine how we live. Thus, by having a perfect access to the εἶδη, we can also lead a true or authentic life. But according to the Platonic corpus it seems that even if we do not have a perfect access to the εἶδη, we can still have some truth in our lives, if we remain faithful to the need for truth and pursue it (i.e., if we dedicate ourselves to philosophical examination). But let us leave this matter aside for now.

The questions just considered give us an idea of the conception of truth that is suggested in the corpus, though this is still a very vague or formal presentation. It alludes to some general features of what truth might be, but it leaves many things undetermined. For instance, it does not provide a complete definition of the different εἶδη, it does not determine exactly how they relate to each other, it does not say what empirical reality is, and it does not explain how life is to be lived. These are very difficult matters and in order to define them one must fully embrace the challenge of philosophical examination. In fact, the appeal to

¹³⁰¹ The fact that these things are not monoeidetic seems to be the cause of their constitutive unintelligibility. They cannot fulfill the requirements for truth we considered above. For more on this, cp. once more Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4.

¹³⁰² Questions such as these are tackled in *Statesman* (269c ff.), the *Timaeus* and in *Laws X*, but we will not discuss them here. It is only important to bear in mind that they too are related to the sensible, non-eidetic sphere and are in fact seen as essential for determining it.

examine things is precisely one of the most important aspects of Plato's writings. But that is something we will only discuss at a later point.

3. The cognitive powers (δυνάμεις) of the ψυχή

After seeing how the ψυχή is characterized not only by a sphere of pure appearing (φαίνεσθαι), but also by the constitutive reference to truth, knowledge and being, we will now consider the cognitive dimension of the ψυχή from a different angle. More precisely, we will focus on the activity or the self-movement of the ψυχή that is responsible for our access to things or our experience of them. Indeed, the soul is not inert. It has several cognitive powers, capacities or abilities (δυνάμεις) that correspond to different ways of accessing to things, and are thus the source of all our experience. We will try to determine these δυνάμεις. But first let us begin with the notion of δύναμις as such.

Besides its general use to designate physical strength or political power, the term δύναμις also played an important role in Hippocratic medicine, where it was connected with the identification of the elements or letters of reality (or at least of the reality that is relevant for the human body), which were designated by the notions of εἶδος or ἰδέα.¹³⁰³ These elements become manifest in their effects (e.g., in their coldness or hotness, sweetness or bitterness, etc.) and having these effects is actually an essential feature of them. Hence, these elements could also be called δυνάμεις.¹³⁰⁴

Plato, in turn, isolates this notion and applies it to the human ψυχή. There are two passages in particular that are important for us to understand his use of the notion. Plato uses it in *Sophist* to explain (among other things) knowledge in general, since a power implies both an active and a passive component, and knowledge implies an act of knowing and something that is known.¹³⁰⁵ More importantly, the notion of δύναμις is at the center of the analysis of δόξα in *Republic V*. As we saw above, Plato distinguishes δόξα from knowledge and ignorance and says that they are different δυνάμεις. He says that powers are not something visible, defined by color and shape. They cannot be hypostasized, as if they were concrete objects somehow lying within the soul. Each δύναμις is rather defined by that on

¹³⁰³ For more on the relation between Hippocratic medicine and the notion of εἶδος, cp. Chap. 6 Sect. 2.2.

¹³⁰⁴ For more on this, cp. e.g. H. MILLER, *Dynamis and Physis in On Ancient Medicine, Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 83 (1952), 184-197; M. SCHIEFSKY (ed.), *Hippocrates – On Ancient Medicine*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2005, 26-27, 31, 52, 69, 154-156, 163-164, 167-168, 179, 226-234, 246-248, 251-254, 257, 262, 264-265, 267-269, 273, 275-276, 280, 288-289, 293, 316, 321, 327, 341-342.

¹³⁰⁵ See *Sph.* 247d ff.

which it depends or to which it is subordinated (i.e., its ἐφ’ ᾧ) and by what it accomplishes or brings about (ὃ ἀπεργάζεται).¹³⁰⁶ In other words, each δύναμις has some content or is related to some kind of object, and it produces some kind of effect (just like in the case of the Hippocratic concept of δύναμις) – namely, it produces some kind of psychic state. The object to which this psychic state refers may or may not be something independent from the ψυχή, but the important thing here is that each mental state has a particular content or is related to something. This is the inner structure of each δύναμις.¹³⁰⁷

Plato then applies this model to describe knowledge, δόξα and ignorance. But this is just one of the passages in which he considers cognitive powers (whether he uses the word δύναμις or not). There are several other relevant passages, which we will consider in the following. But we must bear in mind that these passages are far from presenting an established and univocal doctrine. In fact, they often vary their approach. Some of them consider a particular power, others try to distinguish several powers and even make an inventory of them (though the criteria and number of cognitive powers vary). Moreover, the nature of the distinctions can be different. In some cases, Plato is considering cognitive powers in a stricter sense (i.e., a sort of inner “faculties” of the soul), in other cases he is considering different degrees of knowledge or different ways of seeing reality and what characterizes them.¹³⁰⁸ In the latter cases, he is more concerned with what would constitute knowledge in the full sense, but some of the aspects considered in this context are nevertheless relevant for the question we are now going to discuss.

We will focus our attention primarily on the different sources of our experience of things. Our way of seeing things derives from more than one power. We will thus consider the several cognitive powers that coexist in us at any given moment and the kind of content they provide. More specifically, we will see how we have αἴσθησις, μνήμη, δόξα and one other power (to which Plato calls δianoia, λόγισμος or νοῦς).¹³⁰⁹ These powers are different from each other and irreducible to each other. In order to distinguish them, we will follow the indications given in the *Republic*. As we saw, different powers have different subjective and

¹³⁰⁶ See *Rep.* 476c-d, and cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 above.

¹³⁰⁷ For more on this, cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 2.4 above.

¹³⁰⁸ To some extent, that is what is in question in *Rep.* V. It is also what happens in the simile of the line in the *Republic* (see 509c ff. and 533b ff.). Eikasía, πίστις, δianoia and νόησις (or ἐπιστήμη) are not different powers of the soul, but different ways of representing the whole of reality. For more on this, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3 a).

¹³⁰⁹ Such an analysis complements what we have seen in Chapter 5, when we considered the notions of οἶεσθαι εἰδέναι and δόξα. At that point, we did not discuss the sources and composition of our way of seeing things – even though the term δόξα designates one of the cognitive powers of the ψυχή. Actually, the fact that we focused solely on this power already calls the attention to its decisive importance, which will become clearer in what follows.

objective sides – i.e., they produce different effects in the ψυχή and are related to different kinds of “appearing” or reality. We will thus consider them in light of this correlation.

It is also important to bear in mind that the powers are not entirely unrelated. They have different degrees of complexity, and in fact they constitute a kind of sequence or cognitive scale where the simpler forms are integrated or implied in the more complex. To put it differently, each layer of the scale introduces additional components that deeply transform the simpler forms.¹³¹⁰ Moreover, when we think of such a scale, we tend to assume the simpler forms can be conceived in isolation. However, we will see that we cannot fully represent them apart from the more complex δυνάμεις, since we are always marked by the effect of the more complex forms, which determine our whole way of seeing things. They are the central powers on which everything depends – including our experience of the simpler ones. So in order to identify the latter, we have to dismantle or tear apart our access to beings. This will produce an artificial result that does not correspond to the way we normally experience these powers.

We will look at each of the cognitive powers separately (though each complex form presupposes the simpler ones). We will see the way they represent things – or to be more precise, we will see how things appear differently in each layer of the scale. Then we will briefly consider their interplay – i.e., how they are always associated and compose what we have before us and what we are.

3.1. Αἴσθησις as the simplest form of access to something

As we considered, the minimal or basic form of awareness or access to something is αἴσθησις – and it is thus the result of the simplest cognitive power of the soul. Some of its essential features were already considered above in Section 1. We saw that in *Philebus*, Socrates contrasts it with a state he calls ἀνασθησία, in which things would fully escape our notice (λανθάνειν).¹³¹¹ When an αἴσθησις occurs, something reaches the ψυχή or something appears to it – even if this appearing is indeterminate with respect to its content and status. But what does this minimal form of reaching the soul exactly amount to?

¹³¹⁰ This corresponds to Aristotle’s characterization of the parts of the soul in comparison with geometrical figures. The latter produce a sequence (ἐφεξῆς) in which the figures with more angles integrate the figures with less angles in them. Something similar characterizes the parts of the soul or, in our present context, its cognitive δυνάμεις. See *De anima* 414b: “παραπλησίως δ’ ἔχει τῷ περὶ τῶν σχημάτων καὶ τὰ κατὰ ψυχὴν· αἰεὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἐφεξῆς ὑπάρχει δυνάμει τὸ πρότερον ἐπὶ τε τῶν σχημάτων καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐμψύχων, οἷον ἐν τετραγώνῳ μὲν τρίγωνον, ἐν αἰσθητικῷ δὲ τὸ θεραπευτικόν.”

¹³¹¹ See 33d-34a.

Let us start by considering the meaning of the term αἴσθησις and of the corresponding verb, αἰσθάνεσθαι. They can be used in a broader or in a stricter sense, and this can contribute to certain misunderstandings (such as the one that affects the analysis of Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge in the eponymous dialogue). The terms in question can be used for any kind of noticing, apprehending or grasping. They refer to any kind of immediate access to something that is fully given to us, and can thus apply for instance to mathematical intuition. It is probably in this sense that Theaetetus puts it forward as a definition of knowledge. But the term can be used in a stricter sense, for the reception of sensory contents (such as colors, sounds, etc.) – and Socrates takes advantage of this in *Theaetetus*.¹³¹² These are the most immediate forms of awareness and it is in this sense that αἴσθησις is the most basic cognitive power of the ψυχή.

Usually we interpret a sensation as an affection (πάθος) or an impression of something external on the body. Some object acts on the body (more precisely, on its sensory organs – αἰσθητήρια) and this is perceived by the soul. Plato himself suggests this model in *Philebus*, when he describes αἴσθησις as a stirring or shaking (σεισμός) in the body that is not extinguished before reaching the ψυχή.¹³¹³ Such a conception, however, presupposes a sort of external witness that simultaneously sees the “ensouled” body and the objects that affect it – and is thus able to situate the αἰσθήσεις in a broader reality. But even in this model an αἴσθησις is always something completely new. The reality it refers to is there, but the sensation caused by it is something different from this reality and not reducible to it. It implies a subjective power of the ψυχή. But what characterizes this power and the psychic state it produces? Regardless of what causes it and of what happens in the body, what characterizes the αἴσθησις as such? What is a sensation experienced in its pure state, without an interpretation of it that already implies more than sensation?¹³¹⁴

Plato's characterization of αἴσθησις stresses mainly the limitations of this subjective psychic state and its content. We briefly considered some aspects of this in Section 1, but now we have to reconsider them in more detail. First, we can say that the entire sphere of sensations is personal or private. Each ψυχή only has direct access to its own sensations and, as Socrates stresses in the discussion of Protagoras' views in *Theaetetus*, different people may have different sensations (i.e., they may see, hear, smell, touch and taste things

¹³¹² For the definition of knowledge as αἴσθησις and Socrates' inflection in the discussion, see 151e ff.

¹³¹³ Cp. once more 33d-34a.

¹³¹⁴ We must indeed take into account that at a primary level our awareness of external objects and of the body itself as an object among others is itself mediated by sensation. External reality in general depends on our power to sense it – and this is what we will now try to isolate.

differently).¹³¹⁵ In addition, the contents of αἴσθησις are scattered through different sensory fields. The five senses (vision, audition, olfaction, touch, taste) furnish contents such as colors, acute and grave sounds, smells, softness and hardness, sweetness and bitterness, etc., and these sensory contents are radically heterogeneous.¹³¹⁶ There are also the inner subjective states (ἔξεις) of pleasure and pain.¹³¹⁷ The manifestation of all these sensory contents constitutes the sphere of the experienced or lived body, which is composed of several fluxes of sensation. However, each of these fluxes presupposes a center that unifies them all. The soul must reach the different sensible contents in some way, because the soul is that with which we hear, see, and so on.¹³¹⁸ All contents appear to the soul. But it is unclear how the different sensations relate to each other and how the soul can unify them. Sensations as such are autonomous. Each of them is an atom, completely isolated from the others, and each sensory field is simply juxtaposed to the others. If there were only sensations, then all of them would lie in the soul as soldiers in a wooden horse.¹³¹⁹ The mediation between them requires therefore a different kind of psychic power.

Actually, in a strict sense, we cannot even speak of a flux. Although sensations are constantly changing, each sensation by itself is instantaneous. This is what distinguishes it from the second power: memory. It occurs and vanishes without a trace. Therefore, an exclusively sensitive ψυχή would only be aware of its present sensations and they would constitute its entire world (if we can speak of world at this level). This is very different from

¹³¹⁵ Cp. 152a-c.

¹³¹⁶ Cp. *Tht.* 184e-185a: “ἢ καὶ ἐθελήσεις ὁμολογεῖν ἃ δι’ ἐτέρας δυνάμεως αἰσθάνη, ἀδύνατον εἶναι δι’ ἄλλης ταῦτ’ αἰσθέσθαι, οἷον ἃ δι’ ἀκοῆς, δι’ ὄψεως, ἢ ἃ δι’ ὄψεως, δι’ ἀκοῆς;”

¹³¹⁷ Plato himself includes them in the list of αἰσθήσεις. See *Tht.* 156b: “αἱ μὲν οὖν αἰσθήσεις τὰ τοιαῦτα ἡμῖν ἔχουσιν ὀνόματα, ὄψεις τε καὶ ἀκοαὶ καὶ ὄσφρησεις καὶ ψύξεις τε καὶ καύσεις καὶ ἡδοναί γε δὴ καὶ λύπαι καὶ ἐπιθυμίαι καὶ φόβοι κεκλημέναι καὶ ἄλλαι, ἀπέραντοι μὲν αἱ ἀνόνομοι, παμπληθεῖς δὲ αἱ ὀνομασμέναι (...).” These feelings are indeed an immediate manifestation or appearing. However, it is important to remark that, at the level of sensation, they are still rather indeterminate. The specific nuances we recognize in our emotional life imply more complex powers. The simple αἰσθήσεις would perhaps correspond to Plato’s characterization of pleasure and pain in *Philebus*. Using medical terms, he says that pain is a moving away from our right state or condition (a movement παρὰ φύσιν) and pleasure a restoration of it (a κατάστασις). He also speaks of a depletion (κένωσις) and a repletion (πλήρωσις). Cp. 31d, 32a-b, 35b, 42c-d. But even this description seems to presuppose that there is something as an objective body, that has a right state and may move away from it. Thus, a pure pleasure and a pure pain could perhaps require an even more abstract description.

¹³¹⁸ Cp. *Tht.* 184b-d: “[ΣΩ] εἰ οὖν τίς σε ὧδ’ ἐρωτῶη· ‘τῶ τὰ λευκὰ καὶ μέλανα ὄρα ἄνθρωπος καὶ τῶ τὰ ὄξεα καὶ βαρῆα ἀκούει;’ εἴποις ἂν οἶμαι ‘ὄμμασί τε καὶ ὠσίν.’ [ΘΕΑΙ] ἔγωγε. [ΣΩ] τὸ δὲ εὐχερὲς τῶν ὀνομάτων τε καὶ ῥημάτων καὶ μὴ δι’ ἀκριβείας ἐξεταζόμενον τὰ μὲν πολλὰ οὐκ ἀγεννές, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τὸ τούτου ἐναντίον ἀνελευθέρων, ἔστι δὲ ὅτε ἀναγκαῖον, οἷον καὶ νῦν ἀνάγκη ἐπιλαβέσθαι τῆς ἀποκρίσεως ἢν ἀποκρίνη, ἢ οὐκ ὀρθή. σκόπει γάρ· ἀποκρίσις ποτέρα ὀρθότερα, ᾧ ὀρῶμεν τοῦτο εἶναι ὀφθαλμούς, ἢ δι’ οὗ ὀρῶμεν, καὶ ᾧ ἀκούομεν ὦτα, ἢ δι’ οὗ ἀκούομεν; [ΘΕΑΙ] δι’ ὧν ἕκαστα αἰσθανόμεθα, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες, μᾶλλον ἢ οἷς. [ΣΩ] δεινὸν γάρ που, ὦ παῖ, εἰ πολλαί τινες ἐν ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ἐν δουρείοις ἵπποις αἰσθήσεις ἐγκάθηται, ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰς μίαν τινὰ ἰδέαν, εἴτε ψυχὴν εἴτε ὅτι δεῖ καλεῖν, πάντα ταῦτα συντείνει, ἢ διὰ τούτων οἷον ὀργάνων αἰσθανόμεθα ὅσα αἰσθητά.”

¹³¹⁹ See *ibidem*.

how we see things. For us there is always temporal continuity and any instant is located therein. A pure instant, absolutely fleeting, is something we cannot represent or even conceive.¹³²⁰

But there is more. As we considered above, sensations by themselves do not determine things as being so or so, and they cannot be true or false. They simply appear and are therefore a hazy presentation. The sensible contents may have certain predicates (such as softness, whiteness, and so on), but they say nothing about reality. In order to do so, we need a different operation, which will integrate these predicates in a particular reality (and thus let us perceive what things there are in reality).

Moreover, Plato stresses that we need to make judgements about sensations to be aware of them as such – so the strictly sensible predicates would still depend on more than sensation to be noticed as such. And there are other operations that normally accompany our sensations. For instance, our experience of sense data (such as softness or whiteness) also seems to imply a comparison of any particular sensation with the range of sensations of the same kind. This kind of comparison would be absent at the level of pure sensation.¹³²¹

A ψυχή composed only of αἰσθήσεις would therefore have a very impoverished experience of things in general and of itself. It would be fragmented in many moments, it would last only an instant, and it would not see anything defined or clear. Furthermore, it would not be aware of any physical body or any external reality. But this is very far from our experience of things and of ourselves. In fact, even the way we usually experience our sensations is very different from this, and it already implies other kinds of operation or power. These powers make us aware of the passing of time, they unify the sensory fields (thereby constituting a more complex subject – or at least a more complex self-awareness), and they constitute an objective domain to which all sensations and feelings are then referred. These other powers that influence our sensations can even produce new sorts of αἰσθήσεις. In *Philebus*, Plato says that we have a sort of painter in the soul (i.e., a power or capacity of imagination) that creates quasi-sensations with respect to something we did not experience directly. These created images may still refer back to other sensory contents, but they require

¹³²⁰ For the difficulties of conceiving it, cp. *Prm.* 156d-e.

¹³²¹ In *Philebus*, Socrates speaks of the operation of judgment that compares different pleasures and pains and determines their intensity – or rather makes us aware of their respective intensity. See 41c-42c. The same applies to many (if not all) sensible contents. Our experience of hardness and softness, for instance, is also determined by a comparison of multiple sensations. In *Phlb.* 44d-e, Plato stresses that if we would like to see the nature of hardness, we should direct our attention to the hardest things (which implies a comparison between multiple things with respect to their hardness).

more than this.¹³²² And this is not the only sensations that more complex operations of the ψυχή may create. They can also develop more elaborate feelings, and even feelings that do not refer to any bodily condition.¹³²³

Finally, it is important to remind once more that the term αἴσθησις can also have a broad sense and, accordingly, one may speak of an αἴσθησις of mental contents – like in the case of the contemplation of the εἶδη. The latter form of αἴσθησις, however, involves a much more complex kind of operation, which we will consider in Section 3.4, and thus it is only an αἴσθησις in a figurative sense. It is true that there are certain similarities between these two operations (especially insofar as they both refer to a kind of givenness or presence), but there are also important differences, which we will have to consider afterwards.

3.2. Μνήμη as a preservation of αἴσθησις

A different source of our access to things is μνήμη. Memory constitutes a form of indirect access to something. Although something is not directly before our mind in the present moment, we had some direct access to it in the past and we still have some notion of it. This stands in contrast with our αἰσθήσεις in their pure state. We saw that they vanish in the precise moment they occur, since the present moment is constantly being annihilated, and so everything that occurs in it is lost or disappears. But things do not disappear completely for the ψυχή. Something remains. This is so because the ψυχή possesses a power of retaining or preserving what appears at a given moment – namely, the power of remembering or memory (μνήμη).¹³²⁴ Therefore, instead of having access only to a moment or atom of time, the ψυχή has a synopsis of different moments. It is aware of multiple moments and, consequently, it is aware of time as something extended.

To be sure, this second power of the ψυχή, in its pure state, still refers back to αἴσθησις. It is a widening of the soul's sensory fields. Despite the bodily stirring as such

¹³²² See 39b-c.

¹³²³ Cp. in particular 47d ff., where Plato considers the mixtures of pleasure and pain that result solely from the soul, without the aid of the body.

¹³²⁴ See *Phlb.* 34a: “σωτηρίαν τοίνυν αἰσθήσεως τὴν μνήμην λέγων ὀρθῶς ἂν τις λέγοι κατὰ γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν δόξαν.” See also *Cra.* 437b: “ἔπειτα δὲ ἡ ‘μνήμη’ παντὶ που μνησκει ὅτι μονή ἐστιν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀλλ’ οὐ φορά.” For the association of memory with preservation (σωτηρία), cp. *Tht.* 163d: “(...) ἄρα δυνατόν ὅτου τις ἐπιστήμων γένοιτό ποτε, ἔτι ἔχοντα μνήμην αὐτοῦ τούτου καὶ σφζόμενον, τότε ὅτε μέμνηται μὴ ἐπίστασθαι αὐτὸ τοῦτο ὃ μέμνηται; (...)” The idea of preservation is also what is emphasized in two images that Plato uses to describe memory. He compares the latter to a wax tablet, in which something is impressed or engraved, leaving traces behind. See *Tht.* 191c ff. He also compares memory to a bird-cage in which the instances or pieces of knowledge we captured are stored. See *Tht.* 197c ff.

having disappeared, it left traces. The sensation was modified and preserved in a modified form.¹³²⁵ It is replaced by an image of the stirring that took place.¹³²⁶ As a result, memory is and is not radically different from what it refers to. It is a preservation of the past αἴσθησις, but it is also something new and different from it. This does not mean that it has a different content (it is still a memory of what was sensed), but it is a different form of presence and it adds a particular time index to this content. It is thus a very different power from αἴσθησις. This power of not letting the past instants disappear is something difficult to explain.¹³²⁷ We can only notice it as a fact. We have access not only to sensations, but also to something like a memoryscape within which each new αἴσθησις emerges. Our access to beings thus becomes something extended. All αἰσθήσεις appear to the same subject which sees and remembers them.

However, by being based on αἴσθησις, μνήμη still shares many of its limitations. In particular, it is also unable to determine the things that appear and reality in general. Thus, someone who is only capable of αἰσθήσεις and μνήμαι will only see sensations changing and being replaced by other sensations, and not things changing through the course of time. In fact, one may still not be aware of these sensations as such, if it is true that awareness of sensations requires a judgment about them (as was said above). So memory only gives us an awareness of time – and even this awareness of time is limited. It concerns only the past and a being that has only sensation and memory will not at all be aware of the future. The latter requires a different power. But this is not all. Memory has its own limitations. We do not remember everything perfectly. We forget many things, other become blurry. The degree of this forgetfulness may vary from person to person, insofar as different ψυχαί may have different capacities for remembering, but there seems to be always some degree of defectiveness in our ability to remember.¹³²⁸ In addition, it is also important to distinguish between what we may call a patent and a latent memory – i.e., we may have a past event in the spotlight of our mind, or it may be somehow stored in our ψυχή.¹³²⁹ We do not possess an

¹³²⁵ Cp. *Tht.* 166b: “αὐτίκα γὰρ δοκεῖς τινά σοι συγχωρήσεσθαι μνήμην παρεῖναι τῷ ὧν ἔπαθε, τοιοῦτόν τι οὔσαν πάθος οἶον ὅτε ἔπασχε, μηκέτι πάσχοντι; πολλοῦ γε δεῖ.”

¹³²⁶ The notion of image (εἶδωλον) is used in the comparison of the memory to a wax tablet. See *Tht.* 191d: “καὶ ὁ μὲν ἂν ἐκμαγῆ, μνημονεύειν τε καὶ ἐπίστασθαι ἕως ἂν ἐνῆ τὸ εἶδωλον αὐτοῦ (...).”

¹³²⁷ Plato even speaks of memory as being a divine gift from Μνημοσύνη. See *Tht.* 191d. It is indeed a sort of miracle we cannot easily conceive and explain.

¹³²⁸ Socrates says in the *Theaetetus* (191c-d) that the wax tablets in our minds may be purer or dirtier, as well as harder or more liquid.

¹³²⁹ This is what is at issue in the metaphor of the bird-cage in the *Theaetetus* and the two modes of relation we may have to the birds. We may simply possess them (κεκτηῖσθαι) without holding them in our hands or we may hold them (ἔχειν). See 197b ff.

entire synopsis of all we remember. But we may also retrieve or recall things – i.e., we may have an ἀνάμνησις.¹³³⁰ This may happen either because something or someone reminds us of something or someone else.¹³³¹ But we can also make an active effort to remember or, as Socrates says in *Philebus*, we may revolve the earth and bring something back to the surface.¹³³² The attempt of bringing something back may require more or less effort and it may be more or less efficient. It may require a complex process with many intermediate stages. But we may also be unable to remember something. In fact, there can be multiple forms of forgetfulness. We may lose sight of something and not think about it, and we may be unable to remember it, even if we try. We may even have forgotten (or at least not noticed) that we forgot something. All these forms of forgetfulness are common and, as a result, the mere fact of retrieving something may make no significant difference at all. If we recollect something, we may still forget it again. Forgetfulness is always a possibility and we must fight against it. This is why Plato emphasizes the importance of exercising our memory.¹³³³

Our usual experience of memory is marked by all these factors. However, when we talk of memory in this sense, we are already conceiving it in a modified sense. It is not memory in a pure state, but it is already transformed by the higher powers of the soul. Our memories and recollections are then referred to things or notions, and not just simple sensory contents.¹³³⁴ They include a different experience of time – and, in particular, anticipations of the future, which are created by a different power (even if their content is then filled with what we remember from past experiences, whereby we assume their repetition in the future).¹³³⁵ These memories may be more or less complex, and they may be either individual or shared by several people. There may indeed be something like a collective memory, which preserves and transmits certain judgments and notions.¹³³⁶ One may even conceive knowledge in terms of memory (as a preservation of experience or of the wisdom accumulated during a long period of time). But all these forms of memory differ from the simple form of memory we tried to isolate above.

¹³³⁰ See *Phlb.* 34b: “ὅταν ἂ μετὰ τοῦ σώματος ἔπασχεν ποθ’ ἢ ψυχῇ, ταῦτ’ ἄνευ τοῦ σώματος αὐτὴ ἐν ἑαυτῇ ὅτι μάλιστα ἀναλαμβάνη, τότε ἀναμνήσκεσθαι που λέγομεν.”

¹³³¹ For the idea of something prompting an ἀνάμνησις, cp. *Phd.* 73c ff.

¹³³² Cp. *Phlb.* 34b-c: “καὶ μὴν καὶ ὅταν ἀπολέσασα μνήμην εἴτ’ αἰσθήσεως εἴτ’ αἷ μαθήματος αἷθις ταύτην ἀναπολήσει πάλιν αὐτὴ ἐν ἑαυτῇ, καὶ ταῦτα σύμπαντα ἀναμνήσεις καὶ μνήμας που λέγομεν.”

¹³³³ Cp. e.g. *Smp.* 208a and *Phdr.* 274e-275a.

¹³³⁴ Plato relates memory with notions (ἐννοιαι) in *Tht.* 191d and with teachings (μαθήματα) in *Phlb.* 34b.

¹³³⁵ Cp. *Phlb.* 34e-35d.

¹³³⁶ This is what seems to be implied in the fact that the poets’ knowledge comes from the daughters of Μνημοσύνη. Cp. 2.1 b) above. It also leads to the conception that those that have lived longer or have more experience have therefore more knowledge. On this conception, cp. *Rep.* 328d-e.

It is also important to remark here that Plato uses the notions of memory and recollection (as well as forgetfulness) in a broader or figurative sense, to describe our relation to the εἶδη. In *Meno* and *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of a pre-natal vision (an αἴσθησις, as it were) of the εἶδη, of which we preserve some memory, though it is also marked by a partial amnesia or λήθη.¹³³⁷ In fact, our relation with the εἶδη, like memory, can be characterized as an indirect access to something, which falls short of what characterizes αἴσθησις in the broad sense – namely, the immediate and full grasp of something before us. But let us leave this aside for now.¹³³⁸

3.3. Δόξα as the central cognitive ψυχή of the soul

We have considered above the term δόξα in its neutral and negative sense.¹³³⁹ Now we will reconsider it from a different angle – namely, as a cognitive δύναμις among others, which relates to the other δυνάμεις in a certain way and plays a specific role in our access to beings. This power corresponds to the neutral and broad sense of the term. It is in this sense that δόξα deeply transforms αἴσθησις and μνήμη, and it is at the center of what we are. In a way, δόξα denotes the superior power of the soul. But Plato’s analysis of this power is somewhat ambiguous, and sometimes he seems to understand it in a more restrictive sense, which allows for a contrast with yet another psychic power, on which δόξα in this restrictive sense actually depends. We will have to see what is the meaning of this ambiguity. But first let us consider the broader sense of the term and how it transforms the previous powers.

As we saw, δόξα can be translated as judgment. This judgment may be more active or more passive (i.e., we may let ourselves be influenced by appearances or common views). It may also be express or tacit. But it always involves a decision (κρίσις). It is opposed to a state of doubting (διστάζειν) or oscillating between alternatives.¹³⁴⁰ It establishes that things are in a certain way. This is what the power of judging adds to sensation and memory. Plato explains this in *Philebus* using the example of someone seeing something from afar without being able to make out whether it is a man or a statue.¹³⁴¹ At that point, one has αἴσθησις and even memory, but one still has no decision about what is being seen. Such a decision is δόξα.

¹³³⁷ Cp. *Men.* 81a ff. and *Phdr.* 248a ff. Plato also describes this ἀνάμνησις in *Phd.* 72e ff., but in this case he does not describe it as a vision.

¹³³⁸ We will discuss this figurative form of memory or recollection in Section 3.4 below.

¹³³⁹ See Chap. 5, Sect. 2, and Chap. 7, Sect. 2.

¹³⁴⁰ See *Phlb.* 38b-d, and *Tht.* 189e-190a. Cp. *Chap.* 5, Sect. 1.2 above.

¹³⁴¹ See the above mentioned passage.

We always have many decisions about what things are and when we do not, we strive towards it. We are thus marked by the advent of δόξα and cannot revert to a previous state.

Plato compares this operation to a conversation of the soul with itself, and he says that the soul asks questions and answers them, by affirming or denying something.¹³⁴² Δόξα is thus a sort of λόγος that is embraced by the ψυχή, or as Plato says, a completion of thinking (διανοίας ἀποτελεῦτησις).¹³⁴³ Plato also says that the act of judging resembles a scribe writing a text in the book of our soul.¹³⁴⁴ It involves both a fixation of sensation and memory and a transition to a different medium. Like one converts sound into symbol, through δόξα one converts sensation into δόξα. This brings about new features. Things are seen as defined, stable and in relation with one another. In fact, the sequences of sensations are thereby integrated in a single narration.

But most importantly, δόξα has a content or an intentional object – namely, the thing judged. This is not just something that appears to the soul, but it appears as being a real thing. In other words, δόξα refers to reality. It is actually what puts us in relation with reality and truth. As Plato says, δόξα is directed to a target, and this allows for different possibilities. Our δόξαι may hit their target or miss it – i.e., they may be true or false.¹³⁴⁵ Because of the power to judge, we strive to know things, we create different versions of events and choose between them, but we may choose the correct or wrong versions. Δόξα may reveal things as they are or hide them. But be that as it may, the power to judge is what is added to the pure appearances and deeply changes them, thereby locating everything in a particular version of reality.

Δόξα is thus a central power of the ψυχή, and it affects or pervades everything. In a sense, we could even say that everything is based on δόξα. All sensations and memories are interpreted in light of one's δόξαι and even our feelings of pleasure and pain are referred to them. As is shown in *Philebus*, we need to judge that we are having pleasure to be aware of any pleasure.¹³⁴⁶ Moreover, we take pleasure with things that are determined by our δόξαι,

¹³⁴² See once more the above mentioned passages, and cp. Chap. 5, Sect. 1.3.

¹³⁴³ See *Sph.* 264a-b.

¹³⁴⁴ See *Phlb.* 39a, and cp. Chap. 5, Sect. 1.4.

¹³⁴⁵ The image of the target appears in *Sph.* 228c-d. For an analysis of this passage, cp. Chap. 5, Sect. 1.5, and Chap. 8, Sect. 1.2.

¹³⁴⁶ See 21b-c: “[ΣΩ] νοῦν δέ γε καὶ μνήμην καὶ ἐπιστήμην καὶ δόξαν μὴ κεκτημένος ἀληθῆ, πρῶτον μὲν τοῦτο αὐτό, εἰ χαίρεις ἢ μὴ χαίρεις, ἀνάγκη δήπου σε ἀγνοεῖν, κενόν γε ὄντα πάσης φρονήσεως; [ΠΡΩ] ἀνάγκη. [ΣΩ] καὶ μὴν ὡσαύτως μνήμην μὴ κεκτημένον ἀνάγκη δήπου μὴδ’ ὅτι ποτὲ ἔχαιρες μνησθαι, τῆς τ’ ἐν τῷ παραχρῆμα ἡδονῆς προσπιπτούσης μὴδ’ ἠντινοῦν μνήμην ὑπομένειν· δόξαν δ’ αὖ μὴ κεκτημένον ἀληθῆ μὴ δοξάζειν χαίρειν χαίροντα, λογισμοῦ δὲ στερόμενον μὴδ’ εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον ὡς χαιρήσεις δυνατὸν εἶναι

we determine the relations of our affections to each other, and we also determine what pleasure means.¹³⁴⁷ But our inner feelings are not the only thing determined by δόξα. Our five senses and their contents are also determined by δόξα and, consequently, referred to objects. Δόξα indeed unites different sensations. As Socrates implies in *Theaetetus*, our sensations are not contained in us as if they were sat in a wooden horse.¹³⁴⁸ In *Philebus*, when Socrates introduces the image of the scribe, he also talks of a coincidence between different sensory moments and memory.¹³⁴⁹ They fall together and constitute one object. The different sensory moments are seen as moments of the same thing, which is determined by a δόξα or set of δόξα. In other words, our judgments establish relations between our sensations and this brings about things as we normally experience them. Reality is thus the result of many different δόξα, which are intertwined in a very complex manner, as we considered in Chapter 6. The system of δόξα determines everything – including our own life and the way we lead it.

But δόξα does not only unify what is given by the previous powers and puts sensations and memories in relation with reality. It also goes way beyond them and creates entirely new contents. For instance, we saw that sensations and memories open us to the present and the past (even if the present and the past must be determined by δόξα), but it is δόξα that constitutes our relation to the future. It allows us to anticipate things.¹³⁵⁰ Likewise, it allows us to have some access to things in the present and the past of which we have had no sensation. As we saw above, the soul also contains a sort of painter, which obeys the scribe (i.e., our power of judging) and creates quasi-sensory contents, already shaped by δόξα.¹³⁵¹

λογίζεσθαι, (...).” Although δόξα is just one of the operations mentioned here, it is responsible for being aware of pleasure while we have it, and in this sense the other operations depend on it.

¹³⁴⁷ See 37c-53c and, for a brief analysis of this passage, cp. Sect. 2.2 a) above.

¹³⁴⁸ See 184d: “δεινὸν γὰρ που, ὃ παῖ, εἰ πολλαὶ τινες ἐν ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ἐν δουρείοις ἵπποις αἰσθήσεις ἐγκάθηται, ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰς μίαν τινὰ ιδέαν, εἴτε ψυχὴν εἴτε ὅτι δεῖ καλεῖν, πάντα ταῦτα συντείνει, ἧ̄ διὰ τούτων οἷον ὀργανὸν αἰσθανόμεθα ὅσα αἰσθητά.”

¹³⁴⁹ See 39a: “ἡ μνήμη ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι συμπίπτουσα εἰς ταῦτὸν κάκεινα ἃ περὶ ταῦτ’ ἐστὶ τὰ παθήματα φαίνονται μοι σχεδὸν οἷον γράφειν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τότε λόγους (...).”

¹³⁵⁰ In 21c, Socrates seems to distinguish δόξα from λογισμός. The former would allow us to be aware of present pleasure, whereas the latter would allow us to calculate the pleasure to come. However, in 39c-40d, Socrates reconsiders our relation to the future and shows that our expectations (ἐλπίδες) are likewise grounded in δόξα or, to be more precise, they are a modality of δόξα, which is a power that may refer to the past, the present or the future. This becomes particularly clear in 40a, where, after comparing our δόξα to λόγοι written in the soul, it is said: “[ΣΩ] Λόγοι μὴν εἰσιν ἐν ἐκάστοις ἡμῶν, ἃς ἐλπίδας ὀνομάζομεν; [ΠΡΩ] ναί.”

¹³⁵¹ See *Phlb.* 39b-c: “[ΣΩ] ἀποδέχου δὴ καὶ ἕτερον δημιουργὸν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐν τῷ τότε χρόνῳ γιγνόμενον. [ΠΡΩ] τίνα; [ΣΩ] ζωγράφον, ὃς μετὰ τὸν γραμματιστὴν τῶν λεγομένων εἰκόνας ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τούτων γράφει. [ΠΡΩ] πῶς δὴ τοῦτον αὐτὸν καὶ πότε λέγομεν; [ΣΩ] ὅταν ἀπ’ ὄψεως ἢ τινος ἄλλης αἰσθήσεως τὰ τότε δοξαζόμενα καὶ λεγόμενα ἀπαγαγόν τις τὰς τῶν δοξασθέντων καὶ λεχθέντων εἰκόνας ἐν αὐτῷ ὀρᾷ πῶς. ἢ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐστὶ γιγνόμενον παρ’ ἡμῖν; [ΠΡΩ] σφόδρα μὲν οὖν.”

But this is not all that δόξα does. Plato points out in *Theaetetus* that δόξα also reflects about sensible moments and makes calculations, whereby it puts them in relation with common predicates.¹³⁵² This is essential for it to unify sensations and to put them in relation with a complex reality. The soul must determine what appears (i.e., our sensations and memories), and the way it does so is by attributing common predicates to the things that appear – i.e., by seeing them in light of the εἶδη. This is what the power of judging does and we can thus see how it deeply affects and transforms sensation and memory. As mentioned, our usual experience is always pervaded by δόξαι and we cannot properly conceive what an experience composed solely of sensations and of memories would correspond to. Our sensation and memory are always doxastic. Δόξα is our starting-point and all sensations and memories we deal with are shaped by it.

However, despite overcoming the limitations of αἴσθησις and μνήμη, δόξα has its own limitations. It is fallible and we may therefore make many false judgments. But these false judgments may also be corrected if we expand our experience or examine things carefully. We may even constitute new forms of knowledge or τέχναι, based on more elaborate δόξαι.¹³⁵³ However, as we saw, δόξα was also characterized by Plato as a constitutively defective way of seeing things, which was strongly influenced by sensible reality and individual beings, failing to understand the specificity and content of the εἶδη that determine them.¹³⁵⁴ This association with sensible reality is not incidental. Δόξα often seems to consist in the attribution of general predicates to sensible beings – and therefore we may contrast it with a different psychic power that puts us in relation with εἶδη and that is the basis on which the power of judging depends. Δόξα is then what connects our understanding of εἶδη with sensible reality. It is an intermediary power, which connects the two extremes: αἴσθησις and νοῦς. It has a sensory basis, which relates it to particular beings, but it also taps in the intelligible contents of our mind, thus connecting both dimensions.¹³⁵⁵

This is one way of understanding δόξα. However, δόξα can also be understood in a broader sense, as an activity of the human mind that tries to determine something – and in

¹³⁵² See 185a-187a.

¹³⁵³ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 464b-465a, *Rep.* 533b-c, *Phlb.* 55e-56a. In these three passages, Plato considers forms of developing our knowledge that take place at the level of δόξα.

¹³⁵⁴ Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.

¹³⁵⁵ This is what is implied in the description of δόξα as a decision of what some concrete being is or as an attribution of general predicates (which may be correctly or incorrectly attributed). Cp. *Phlb.* 38b-39a, *Tht.* 185a ff. Moreover, the defect of a δόξα ὀρθή, as we saw, consists precisely in this: it attributes a predicate without focusing on and understanding its meaning. Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.3.

this sense it can also be applied to notions or eidetic contents.¹³⁵⁶ In other words, we may also make judgments about the εἶδη – perhaps because we can attribute them predicates. But in certain passages Plato seems to admit the possibility of a different kind of access to them. In doing so, he also highlights our constant relation to them as a specific moment of our cognitive apparatus, and this is precisely what we must now consider.

3.4. Διάνοια, λογισμός or νοῦς as our access to the εἶδη

As was just said, it is not clear whether we may talk of a different cognitive power in the case of our relation to the εἶδη (at least in the same sense we talked of power in the other cases), especially because of the intimate connection between our understanding of the εἶδη and the power of judging. In some passages (especially in *Philebus* and *Theaetetus*), Plato seems either to neglect our relation to the εἶδη or he lumps it together with δόξα as what determines sensible beings. However, we find some interesting indications in texts where the characters try to isolate our understanding of the εἶδη or our access to them.

In *Phaedo*, Plato contrasts αἴσθησις with διάνοια, and the latter is precisely what allows us to understand εἶδη.¹³⁵⁷ In *Sophist*, the Visitor stresses that we have access to the εἶδη through λογισμός.¹³⁵⁸ In *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that εἶδη can only be seen by our νοῦς.¹³⁵⁹ In *Theaetetus*, Socrates associates the access to the common predicates (τὰ κοινά) with δόξα, but the latter is conceived as a form of calculation, reflection or reasoning.¹³⁶⁰ All these terms designate non-immediate (i.e., non-sensible) forms of access. They are a form of reasoning or intelligence that allows ψυχή to reach something by itself, without the help of the senses.¹³⁶¹

¹³⁵⁶ The descriptions of δόξα in *Tht.* 189e-190a and *Sph.* 263d-264b, for instance, are rather vague and admit a broader meaning of δόξα.

¹³⁵⁷ See 65e, 66a, 67c, and especially 79a, where immediately after distinguishing between the εἶδη and τὰ πολλά, Socrates says: “οὐκοῦν τούτων μὲν κἂν ἄψαιο κἂν ἴδοις κἂν ταῖς ἄλλαις αἰσθήσεσιν αἰσθοιο, τῶν δὲ κατὰ ταῦτα ἐχόντων οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτῳ ποτ’ ἂν ἄλλῳ ἐπιλάβοιο ἢ τῷ τῆς διανοίας λογισμῷ, ἀλλ’ ἔστιν ἀιδῆ τὰ τοιαῦτα καὶ οὐχ ὀρατά;”

¹³⁵⁸ See 248a: “[ΞΕ] πρὸς δὴ τοὺς ἐτέρους ἴωμεν, τοὺς τῶν εἰδῶν φίλους· σὺ δ’ ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ παρὰ τούτων ἀφερμήνευε. [ΘΕΑΙ] ταῦτ’ ἔσται. [ΞΕ] γένεσιν, τὴν δὲ οὐσίαν χωρὶς που διελόμενοι λέγετε; ἢ γάρ; [ΘΕΑΙ] ναί. [ΞΕ] καὶ σώματι μὲν ἡμᾶς γενέσει δι’ αἰσθήσεως κοινωνεῖν, διὰ λογισμοῦ δὲ ψυχῆ πρὸς τὴν ὄντως οὐσίαν, ἣν ἄει κατὰ ταῦτα ὡσαύτως ἔχειν φατέ, γένεσιν δὲ ἄλλοτε ἄλλως.”

¹³⁵⁹ See 247c: “ἢ γὰρ ἀχρώματος τε καὶ ἀσημάτιστος καὶ ἀναφῆς οὐσία ὄντως οὔσα, ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῆ νῶ (...).”

¹³⁶⁰ Socrates uses different terms to designate our relation to the common predicates, such as διανοεῖσθαι (185a), ἐπισκοπεῖν (185e), ἀναλογίζεσθαι (186a), συλλογισμός (186d). See 185a-190a.

¹³⁶¹ See 185d-e: “ἀλλὰ μὰ Δία, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἔγωγε οὐκ ἂν ἔχοιμι εἰπεῖν, πλὴν γ’ ὅτι μοι δοκεῖ τὴν ἀρχὴν οὐδ’ εἶναι τοιοῦτον οὐδὲν τούτοις ὄργανον ἴδιον ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνοις, ἀλλ’ αὐτὴ δι’ αὐτῆς ἡ ψυχὴ τὰ κοινὰ μοι φαίνεται περὶ πάντων ἐπισκοπεῖν.” See also 187a: “ἀλλ’ οὔ τι μὲν δὴ τούτου γε ἔνεκα ἠρχόμεθα διαλεγόμενοι, ἵνα

This other power thus refers to a different kind of content and a higher form of truth, namely the true beings (i.e., the predicates we attribute to sensible beings or the alphabet with which our understanding of reality is written). Our access to the εἶδη requires a different power, and this power is very important for our δόξα. It allows us to see things as we do, and we have no idea of what δόξα would be in its pure state, without reasoning or intelligence. Our understanding of εἶδη is always active and is a permanent and all-pervasive feature of our way of seeing things. This is so despite all the problems involved in the notion of εἶδη. Regardless of how we conceive them, our relation to them seems to be a necessary component of our way of seeing things.

In this context, it is important to bear in mind that the relation to the εἶδη is not uniform. To be sure, our relation to them is permanent, and Plato even describes it as constitutive of our ψυχή.¹³⁶² We always have some contact with them. They constitute our experience and all δόξα (understood as attributions of predicates) are based on them. But this awareness of the εἶδη (which may be said to be a cognitive power of the ψυχή) can assume different forms.

Usually, we have some notion of what these εἶδη are (or, as we could also say, some opinions or δόξα about them) and these are often (if not always) hazy, imprecise, inconsistent, or outright wrong. As Plato says in the *Republic*, we dream about being.¹³⁶³ Normally we do not have a perfect access to them. Our understanding of the εἶδη is muddled and we have no more than a glimpse or inkling of them. We may think we know them, but if we are questioned about them, we will realize that our views about them are unclear, inconsistent, or wrong.¹³⁶⁴ Our access to them is obstructed and so our understanding of them

εὔρωμεν τί ποτ' οὐκ ἔστ' ἐπιστήμη, ἀλλὰ τί ἔστιν. ὅμως δὲ τοσοῦτόν γε προβεβήκαμεν, ὥστε μὴ ζητεῖν αὐτὴν ἐν αἰσθήσει τὸ παράπαν ἀλλ' ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ ὀνόματι, ὅτι ποτ' ἔχει ἡ ψυχή, ὅταν αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν πραγματευῆται περὶ τὰ ὄντα.”

¹³⁶² See *Phdr.* 249b-c: “ἔνθα καὶ εἰς θηρίου βίον ἀνθρωπίνῃ ψυχῇ ἀφικνεῖται, καὶ ἐκ θηρίου ὅς ποτε ἄνθρωπος ἦν πάλιν εἰς ἄνθρωπον. οὐ γὰρ ἢ γε μήποτε ἰδοῦσα τὴν ἀλήθειαν εἰς τὸδε ἦξει τὸ σχῆμα. δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰδὼν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναιρούμενον· τοῦτο δ' ἔστιν ἀνάμνησις ἐκείνων ἃ ποτ' εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχή συμπορευθεῖσα θεῶ καὶ ὑπεριδοῦσα ἃ νῦν εἶναί φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακύψασα εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως.”

¹³⁶³ Socrates is talking about what happens in the case of particular sciences, but the same holds for our ordinary relation to εἶδη. See 533b-c: “ἀλλ' αἱ μὲν ἄλλαι πᾶσαι τέχναι ἢ πρὸς δόξας ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἐπιθυμίας εἰσὶν ἢ πρὸς γενέσεις τε καὶ συνθέσεις, ἢ πρὸς θεραπείαν τῶν φουζόμενων τε καὶ συντιθεμένων ἅπασαι τετράφαται· αἱ δὲ λοιπαί, ἃς τοῦ ὄντος τι ἔφαμεν ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι, γεωμετρίας τε καὶ τὰς ταύτη ἐπομένας, ὁρῶμεν ὡς ὄνειρώττουσι μὲν περὶ τὸ ὄν, ὕπαρ δὲ ἀδύνατον αὐταῖς ἰδεῖν, ἕως ἂν ὑποθέσῃ χρώμεναι ταύτας ἀκινήτους ἐῷσι, μὴ δυνάμεναι λόγον διδόναι αὐτῶν.”

¹³⁶⁴ Cp. Chapter 7, Sections 1.2 and 2.4.

is a mixture of hiddenness and truth (λήθη and ἀλήθεια). This is why Plato describes this access to the εἶδη as a kind of obstructed recollection.¹³⁶⁵

However, we can also try to develop our understanding of the εἶδη. We may try to isolate these contents and purify our view of them, liberating us from the sensible realities in which they appear and which only confuse us. We will then focus on our understanding of the εἶδη and we may either realize that we do not really understand them, or gain actual insight into them. We may indeed come to understand the εἶδη better, which means that there can be different proportions of λήθη and ἀλήθεια in our access to them.¹³⁶⁶ In fact, we may perhaps even reach a perfect knowledge of them. As we saw, this would constitute the highest form of knowledge (i.e., the full actualization of the cognitive nature of the ψυχή), which Plato designates in different ways – such as νοῦς, φρόνησις, or ἐπιστήμη.¹³⁶⁷

However, the fact that Plato refers to this does not mean that his texts present a clear description of what these εἶδη correspond to, as we saw. We already considered some of the problems involved with the notion of εἶδη above.¹³⁶⁸ Their actual existence, their interrelation with one another, and their participation in sensible beings is problematic. Moreover, it is not clear whether we can ever reach a perfect insight into them. It is even difficult to conceive what a perfect access to them would correspond to – for instance, whether it would be intuitive or discursive (i.e., mediated by λόγος in some way). As was said, one may even doubt whether the εἶδη really exist. They could also be a subjective illusion of ours. But be that as it may, the reference to something like an alphabet of reality deeply determines the way we see things. We must have some awareness of general predicates to judge and determine sensible reality.

3.5. The interplay of the soul's cognitive δυνάμεις

In the previous pages, we considered each δύναμις separately (although the simpler powers were always implied in the more complex). Still, this analysis was artificial, because what we actually experience is the interplay or entanglement of all δυνάμεις. They are always mixed with each other. They constitute a system of forces in which they are all active and

¹³⁶⁵ See e.g. *Phd.* 75c-e, and *Phdr.* 248c-d.

¹³⁶⁶ This is actually what determines the scale of βίοι in *Phdr.* 248c-e. Each βίος has a different understanding of life and reality, according to how much it remembers of the εἶδη.

¹³⁶⁷ The perfect access is a perfect access to εἶδη, which are the ultimate root of knowledge and what is most knowable. On this topic, cp. Section 2.5 above.

¹³⁶⁸ See Chap. 6, Sect. 2.2, and also Sect. 2.5 of this chapter.

produce life as we know it. This does not prevent us from focusing our attention on one or other of these forces (i.e., powers) in their transformed forms, and trying to develop it. They can indeed have different weights in how we see and experience things, and we may in part determine their relative weight or importance. But this is something that always happens within the framework of the whole. We cannot have a pure experience of any of them.

Each power can have its own strength, be more or less developed, and this may be so by nature or by our own efforts.¹³⁶⁹ However, each one is unconceivable by itself – at least for us. It is true that *διάνοια* at some points seems to be conceivable without the others, since a soul without body is represented as not having *αἴσθησις*, and it would probably also lack *μνήμη* and *δόξα*, insofar as they refer to *αἴσθησις*.¹³⁷⁰ But that is not how we experience it. For us it is always intertwined with the other powers, and so our understanding of the *εἶδη* is always intertwined with concrete beings or attributed to them. This is then what constitutes the world – i.e., all the things that appear to us, to which we are related, over which we have some perspective. The complexity of things is the primary correlate of our experience and it is constituted by these different powers, which are responsible for more immediate or more mediated (i.e., more sensible or more intelligible) components.

Still, such a artificial dismantling of our *ψυχή* into different cognitive powers lets us better understand the cognitive dimension of our being, and it complements the above analysis of appearing and truth. But this is not enough to account for the *ψυχή*'s experience of things and of itself. The practical dimension in the broadest sense (i.e., the dimension constituted by the *ψυχή*'s desires and the way it guides itself in life) is also a central component of our *ψυχή*. We must then try to determine it, and we must also see how exactly the two dimensions relate to each other.

¹³⁶⁹ Different persons may indeed have more or less developed powers (i.e., they may have more acute sense organs, more memory, better judgments, more noetic insight), and these differences may be inborn or the result of practice.

¹³⁷⁰ This is what seems to be implied in some passages of the *Phaedo* or in Socrates' palinode in the *Phaedrus*. *Αἴσθησις* and the particular beings to which it refers are an essential feature of life, but not something that would characterize the soul's separate existence – whatever the status and meaning of that separate existence may be.

CHAPTER 12

The ψυχή's practical dimension as a unitary pursuit of a superlative good

“Nonne ipsa est beata vita, quam omnes volunt et omnino qui nolit nemo est? Ubi noverunt eam, quod sic volunt eam? Ubi viderunt, ut amarent eam? Nimirum habemus eam nescio quomodo.”

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, X.20.29¹³⁷¹

As we just saw, the ψυχή has a cognitive dimension. It has some access to things and sees them in a certain way. However, the ψυχή is not a purely cognitive subject. It is not absolutely disinterested or indifferent to everything. It has some interest in seeing or knowing things, and it also has other interests. In fact, the ψυχή is marked by many practical tensions, which move it in many different ways.¹³⁷² It desires, it pursues things, and it acts. In sum, it has a practical dimension, and this is what we must now explore. In doing so, it is important to bear in mind that the distinction between a cognitive and a practical dimension is somewhat artificial. As mentioned, both dimensions are deeply intertwined and this will become patent during our analysis. On the one hand, our desires are guided by our way of seeing things and some of our desires are even directed at knowledge (mostly because we need it to guide our actions, but perhaps also because we are somehow interested in it for its own sake). On the other hand, our way of seeing things is deeply influenced by our desires, as we will see in the following chapters. Therefore, the distinction between the two domains has the sole aim of letting us see more clearly what is normally experienced as a whole. We will later try to determine the soul as a unitary whole, but first we will consider its practical side.

¹³⁷¹ See L. VERHEIJEN (ed.), *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1981.

¹³⁷² The notion of “practical” here includes all kinds of interest and desire, or all that is relevant for how we guide our life. In this sense, it also includes any theoretical or speculative interest, which is concerned with knowledge solely for its own sake.

1. The multiple actions, desires, and concerns of the ψυχή. The problem of their connection

There are many manifestations of the practical dimension of the ψυχή. We are all familiarized with these manifestations and they are illustrated, mentioned and discussed throughout the Platonic corpus. The vocabulary used to refer to them is very diverse and a brief consideration of some of the main terms helps us understand the complex phenomena we will now analyze and try to explain.

The fundamental words in this context are πράττειν and πράξις, which mostly mean “acting” and “action”. Their etymology is associated with the ideas of passing through or crossing something, and also of accomplishing something, reaching a goal, or succeeding.¹³⁷³ These words thus express the fact that life is intrinsically connected with the attempt to attain certain goals and is also determined by how one is faring in the pursuit of these goals. Of course, this presupposes that the ψυχή has the power (δύναμις) to act (πράττειν) and make things (ποιεῖν, ἐργάζεσθαι).¹³⁷⁴ It is not reduced to the domain of thoughts and words (λόγοι), but it is also characterized by deeds (ἔργα).¹³⁷⁵ It moves or changes itself, and it also moves or changes other things.¹³⁷⁶ These movements may imply more or less effort, but in all cases the ψυχή has particular targets (σκοποί) or purposes. These practical targets, in turn, raise questions about the soul’s motivations, the way it steers itself and also its responsibility in what happens to it.¹³⁷⁷

Some other significant aspects about the soul’s agency can be easily seen. First of all, the different actions performed by the soul seem to be based on some kind of lack or need (ἔνδεια or χρεία). Human nature is not self-sufficient (i.e., it is not αὐτάρκης or characterized by a μηδενὸς δεῖσθαι); rather, it is indigent and lacks many things.¹³⁷⁸ At the physiological level, it is permanently being depleted (or in a process of κένωσις) and requires replenishing

¹³⁷³ Cp. e.g. H. SCHMIDT, *Synonymik der griechischen Sprache*, vol. 1, Leipzig, Teubner, 1876, 397ff., and C. MAURER, πράσσω, πράγμα, πραγματεία, πραγματεύομαι, διαπραγματεύομαι, πράκτωρ, πράξις, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*.

¹³⁷⁴ The characters in the corpus constantly use the verbs πράττειν, ποιεῖν and ἐργάζεσθαι, and in some passages they even try to distinguish them (cp. e.g. *Chrm.* 163b-c).

¹³⁷⁵ For this contrast, cp. e.g. *Ap.* 32a, and *La.* 188c-189a.

¹³⁷⁶ See *Phdr.* 245c-246a.

¹³⁷⁷ The idea of targets of our action appears in many passages. For instance, we considered above (Chap. 8, Sect. 1.2) that the soul targets truth, and this targeting has important practical implications, as we will see. Cp. *Sph.* 228c-d. For more uses of the notion of target (σκοπός), see e.g. *Grg.* 507d, *Rep.* 519c, and *Phlb.* 60a.

¹³⁷⁸ According to *Rep.* 369b, this is precisely what creates the need to belong to a political community. Socrates says: “Γίγνεται τοίνυν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, πόλις, ὡς ἐγῶμαι, ἐπειδὴ τυγχάνει ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οὐκ αὐτάρκης, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν <ῶν> ἐνδεής.” On the idea of lack, cp. also *Smp.* 199e ff.

(πλήρωσις).¹³⁷⁹ Moreover, it has other, more complex wants.¹³⁸⁰ These wants give rise to many desires (ἐπιθυμῖαι), which have many different objects (which may be more or less refined).¹³⁸¹ In other words, the soul wants things (which may be expressed by the verbs βούλεσθαι or ἐθέλειν), it strives towards them (ἐπίεσθαι), pursues them (ζητεῖν, διώκειν) and may even feel a passionate love (ἔρως) or yearning (πόθος) for them.¹³⁸² Desires can indeed have different intensities, and they can also be positive or negative desires – i.e., we may want to pursue or attain something, and we may want to avoid or escape it.¹³⁸³ All this raises the question of whether or not we have the power (δύναμις) to achieve what we desire, as well as the question of whether we have any expectation (προσδοκία or ἐλπὶς) of achieving it.¹³⁸⁴

In addition, all these desires deeply affect the way things appear to us or our relation to them. We are not indifferent to other beings. Instead, we “love” (φιλεῖν) and hate (μισεῖν) many of them.¹³⁸⁵ The terms φιλεῖν and φιλία are actually very important in this context, and their meaning is rather complex. There has been much discussion in the secondary literature as to whether the term φίλος is originally a possessive pronoun or a designation of familiarity and attachment, such as the English adjective “dear”.¹³⁸⁶ At any rate, it denotes the particular kind of relation that makes something relevant for us. In general, it refers to persons: one’s family and friends (who, in turn, may be fellow citizens or foreigners).¹³⁸⁷ It may also designate an ally or simply someone relatively close who is not an antagonist in the battle for survival, possessions, or honor. The degree of attachment may vary. It may be rather small,

¹³⁷⁹ See e.g. *Phlb.* 34e ff.

¹³⁸⁰ Indeed, surviving is not enough for us. We also require a good life. For this contrast, cp. e.g. *Cri.* 48b.

¹³⁸¹ For the idea that there are many different desires, see e.g. *Cra.* 403c-d, *Rep.* 580d ff., *Phlb.* 45b

¹³⁸² Cp. e.g. *Cra.* 419e ff., *Prt.* 358d, *Phdr.* 250c, *Rep.* 437b-c, *Smp.* 205a, *Th.* 169c.

¹³⁸³ The idea of escaping something is usually expressed by φεύγειν. For the contrast between wanting to attain and wanting to avoid something, cp. e.g. *Grg.* 507b, *Rep.* 437b, *Th.* 176b.

¹³⁸⁴ For the question of δύναμις in this sense, cp. e.g. *Grg.* 456a-c, 476d. On the topic of expectation, see e.g. *Phlb.* 35e-36c.

¹³⁸⁵ On this contrast, cp. e.g. *Rep.* 334c.

¹³⁸⁶ The bibliography on the proper meaning of φίλος is vast. See e.g. P. KRETSCHMER, *Griech. φίλος*, *Zeitschrift für Indogermanistik und historische Sprachwissenschaft* 45 (1927), 267-271; G. STÄHLIN, *φιλέω, καταφιλέω, φίλημα, φίλος, φίλη, φιλία*, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; A. ADKINS, “Friendship” and “Self-Sufficiency” in Homer and Aristotle, *The Classical Quarterly* 13 (1963), 30-45; M. LANDFESTER, *Das griechische Nomen “philos”*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms, 1966; E. BENVENISTE, *Le Vocabulaire des Institutions indo-européennes*, vol. 1, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969, 335-353; J. HOOKER, Homeric φίλος, *Glotta* 65 (1987), 44-65; D. ROBINSON, Homeric φίλος. Love of Life and Limbs, and Friendship with One’s θυμός, in: E. CRAIK, “*Owls to Athens*”. *Essays on Classical Subjects Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990; H. PERDICOYIANNI, *Philos chez Euripide*, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 74 (1996), 5-26.

¹³⁸⁷ In this sense, φίλος comes close to terms such as ἐταῖρος, ἴδιος, οἰκεῖος, γνῶριμος, συγγενής and even ξένος.

but the word may also express a strong fondness, to the point of obsession or monomania.¹³⁸⁸ It is something of this kind that may then mediate our relation to other beings. We may be fond of them and this fondness may have different degrees. However, we may also hate them and desire to repel them from us, or we may feel indifferent towards them. In sum, everything that appears occupies a certain place in one's life. It has greater or lesser worth for us, according to the role they play in our life.¹³⁸⁹ Things are seen as beneficial (χρήσιμος, ὠφέλιμος, συμφέρων), detrimental (βλαβέρος) or neutral (which is still a way of being functionally determined).¹³⁹⁰ This means that our relation with other beings is fundamentally one of concern.¹³⁹¹ We may pursue or avoid them, according to their value for us. But there is more. Beings can be in a better or worse state, and they can change for the better or for the worse. Therefore, we may also try to improve them or care for them (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι or θεραπεύειν), we may harm them, or we may simply neglect them (ἀμελεῖν).¹³⁹² In other words, we may deal with other beings in many different ways.

These are some of the most important traits of the ψυχή's practical dimension. But when we look at it, one of the first things that stands out is the fact that the practical dimension is composed of a multitude of tensions or desires.¹³⁹³ These desires have many different objects, and they can be more or less intense, more or less prolonged, and more or less frequent. In fact, they are so diverse that it is very difficult to be simultaneously aware of all of them and to see how they relate to each other. At first sight, all these phenomena seem to be largely disconnected and chaotic. Even if some desires and concerns are somehow interconnected (for instance, in the sense that we do something for the sake of something else, ἔνεκά τινος), there seems to be many unconnected chains of desires and concerns. But are these practical phenomena really unrelated, apart from the fact that they arise in the same ψυχή?¹³⁹⁴ Do they have different sources? Or is it rather the case that they all have the same origin and are therefore the result of a unitary desire?

¹³⁸⁸ For more on φιλία, see Chap. 13, Sect. 3 below.

¹³⁸⁹ This recognition of worth can be denoted in different ways, such as περὶ πολλοῦ ποιεῖσθαι, τιμᾶν, πρεσβεύειν, and so on (cp. e.g. *Cri.* 46c-e, *Smp.* 212b). It can also be expressed in a negative form, with such words as ἀτιμάζειν or ὀλιγορεῖσθαι, among others (cp. e.g. *Rep.* 364a, *Phd.* 68c)

¹³⁹⁰ Cp. e.g. *Ly.* 221b, *Cra.* 417a ff., *Grg.* 468c, 499d.

¹³⁹¹ Plato employs verbs such as μέλειν, φροντίζεσθαι or κήδεσθαι to express the idea of concern with something. See e.g. *Ap.* 24c, *Cri.* 44c, *Phd.* 82d, *Smp.* 210c, *Tht.* 199a.

¹³⁹² Cp. e.g. *Ap.* 25c, 29d-e, *Grg.* 485e.

¹³⁹³ In fact, the ψυχή is a kind of πόλις of desires, to use an image employed by Plato that we will discuss in Chap. 13, Sect. 4.4 below.

¹³⁹⁴ In reference to a passage from *Theaetetus* considered above, we could even ask if our desires "sit inside us as if we were Wooden Horses". Cp. *Tht.* 184d: "δεινὸν γὰρ που, ὃ παῖ, εἰ πολλαὶ τινες ἐν ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ἐν δουρείοις ἵπποις αἰσθήσεις ἐγκάθηνται, ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰς μίαν τινὰ ἰδέαν, εἴτε ψυχὴν εἴτε ὅτι δεῖ καλεῖν, πάντα ταῦτα

If we look at the Platonic corpus, we find several decisive passages that endeavor to show how our actions, desires and concerns are not something dispersed and sporadic, but rather something unified. They are all manifestations and variations of a permanent or constitutive desire, which is in fact responsible for the entire practical domain. But how is this unitary desire to be conceived and how does it determine the structure of the soul's practical dimension?

2. The reference to one's self as a form of unity of the soul's practical phenomena

At first sight, there seems to be a rather obvious unity of our actions, desires and concerns. They all belong to the same ψυχή and are thus referred to the same entity: one's self (αὐτός). But how is this self to be determined?

The self is not simply a cognitive subject, and it is also something more than a mere container of desires and interests. There is actually a constitutive relation between one's identity and one's desires. The self is marked by desires and they are not something adventitious, but rather the core of one's self. Moreover, one's desires are not only referred to something else, but they are also related to the very self that desires something. The self is interested in itself or is fond of itself – i.e., it is essentially marked by self-love (φιλία ἑαυτοῦ) or self-benevolence (εὐνοία ἑαυτοῦ).¹³⁹⁵ This love or benevolence may have different degrees, but it is always felt in some way. We are always concerned with ourselves – or, more precisely, with what we have and with what will become of us. Indeed, our life is in many respects open. It may come to have different contents or be determined in different ways. In other words, we are always referred to the domain of what is to come, and we want our self to exist in the future, and also want it to have a good life (i.e., we want it to become an enlarged or enriched self).¹³⁹⁶

However, despite how evident all this may be for us when we act and perhaps even when we think about it, it is still difficult to know exactly what the self is. We can better understand this difficulty if we consider what is said in *Alcibiades I*.¹³⁹⁷ In 127e ff., Socrates

συντείνει, ἢ διὰ τούτων οἷον ὀργάνων αἰσθανόμεθα ὅσα αἰσθητά.” I use Levett's translation, revised by Myles Burnyeat, published in *PCW*.

¹³⁹⁵ We find these expressions in *Lg.* 731e and *Grg.* 485a. In both cases, Plato is referring to an excessive modality of self-love and self-benevolence, but we are always marked by some degree of this love and benevolence.

¹³⁹⁶ On this topic, cp. *Phlb.* 39e: “(...) ἡμεῖς δ' αὖ διὰ παντός τοῦ βίου ἀεὶ γέμομεν ἐλπίδων (...).”

¹³⁹⁷ The text may not have been written by Plato, as many defend, but it nevertheless lets us see something important about the questions discussed in other works. Moreover, in this respect, as in many others, what is

and Alcibiades are trying to determine what caring for one's self (ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) consists in, and this requires them to identify the self, which is not an easy thing to do. After some discussion, they identify the self (or the human being) with the ψυχή.¹³⁹⁸ However, the ψυχή as such is not something to which we have direct access. It is always related to other things – or as Socrates stresses, it uses the body to do things and affect other beings.¹³⁹⁹ This means that the self is related to other entities, which are seen in light of their relation to the self and thus become things that belong to the self (τὰ αὐτοῦ) or even things that belong to the things that belong to the self (τὰ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ).¹⁴⁰⁰ There may be several layers of interrelation. Given the fact that Socrates ends up identifying the self with the ψυχή, it is natural for him to talk of the body as what belongs to the self and material possessions as what belongs to what belongs to the self.¹⁴⁰¹ But the notions of “belonging to the self” and “belonging to what belongs to the self” can be taken in a much broader sense. For instance, our thoughts (just like our words) may in a way be something that belong to ourselves – insofar as we relate to them in some way. Likewise, anything to which we relate via our body (such as other persons or our political community) can also be said to “belong” to what belongs to ourselves. But be that as it may, the decisive point here is the fact that the self is not an abstract or empty content. It contaminates things and changes their status. They become “mine” in a way, or as Plato also says, they become “my own” (οἰκεῖον). It is true that this may be more evident in some cases than others. In fact, things can also be seen as something alien (ἄλλότριον) to us. However, this is still a way of determining them in function of the self.¹⁴⁰² In general, everything has some relation to one's self, which may then be of very different kinds. Socrates thus identifies several spheres or layers which may refer to each other, but ultimately they are all referred to the self. We could also say that there are several concentric circles and the self lies at their center. At first these circles may seem to be regional, which would imply that there are some distant things that are not related to the self and do not belong to it in any way. Later we will see that the question is actually more

said in *Alcibiades I* is closely related to questions discussed elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, especially in the *Apology*. For more on what we will now briefly consider and its relation with the *Apology*, cp. Chap. 2, Sect. 2.3, and Chap. 13, Sect. 2.1.

¹³⁹⁸ See 130c: “ἐπειδὴ δ’ οὔτε σῶμα οὔτε τὸ συναμφοτέρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, λείπεται οἶμαι ἢ μηδὲν αὐτ’ εἶναι, ἢ εἴπερ τί ἐστι, μηδὲν ἄλλο τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχήν.”

¹³⁹⁹ See 129b-130a.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Plato starts precisely by distinguishing these three domains, in order to isolate the self as such and try to identify it. See 128a-129a.

¹⁴⁰¹ See *ibidem*.

¹⁴⁰² The notions of οἰκεῖον and ἄλλότριον do not appear in the passage of *Alcibiades I* we are considering, but they play an important role in several other passages of the corpus (such as *Ly.* 221d ff., *Smp.* 205e, *Phdr.* 229d-230a, and so on) and they apply to what is being described here.

complex and that everything is somehow integrated in this system. But be that as it may, it seems plain that there is always a certain domain of beings with which the self is in contact and by which it is determined.

Now, an essential point in *Alcibiades I*, which we also find in the *Apology*, is the fact that we are always caring for the self in some way, trying to improve it and thus trying to make our life better. But this is not only directed at the center of our being. We may try to care for the sphere of the self in all spheres that are referred to it – i.e., we may care for other beings, but in a way that we are still (or at least we think we are still) caring for ourselves in doing so.¹⁴⁰³ Perhaps this is what we always do. All care for anything may be a variation of our self-care in a broad sense. But Socrates calls our attention to the fact that we may mistake the self for something that belongs to it, and we may focus our care entirely on this peripheral thing, without properly caring for self. In other words, we may fail to understand what is at the center of our life, and as a result we may have wrong priorities.¹⁴⁰⁴ This is possible because of the self's complexity and also because of the interconnection of its different spheres. Therefore, in order for us to correctly care for the self, we must be aware of what exactly the self consists in (i.e., we must know ourselves).¹⁴⁰⁵ As was said, Plato identifies our being with the ψυχή, but the notion is itself mysterious. An important component of it is the fact that it desires things. But how are these desires constituted, and what exactly does the soul desire? This is what we must now consider, in order to better understand the unity of the soul's practical dimension.

3. The good and happiness (εὐδαιμονία) as formal objects of our desires

Let us then consider the nature of our desire. As a being that desires, the soul is directed to something. It is like a projectile and it aims at a particular target (σκοπός).¹⁴⁰⁶ But

¹⁴⁰³ Cp. *Alc. I* 127e-128a: “[ΣΩ.] λάθωμεν οὐχ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιμελούμενοι, οἰόμενοι δέ – καὶ πότ’ ἄρα αὐτὸ ποιεῖ ἄνθρωπος; ἄρ’ ὅταν τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελῆται, τότε καὶ αὐτοῦ; [ΑΛ.] ἔμοι γοῦν δοκεῖ.”

¹⁴⁰⁴ In *Alcibiades I*, Socrates starts precisely by considering this possibility of our self-care disregarding the self in a strict sense (as can be seen in the passage cited in the previous footnote), and then he goes on to establish that one is actually neglecting the self while doing so, because the τέχνη that care for the self's possessions and what belongs to them are different from the τέχνη that cares for the self (see 128a-129a). This is connected with what we find in the *Apology* (see 29d-30b, 36e and 41e), where Socrates discusses whether one should first care for self or rather the self's body and possessions. Socrates argues that most people neglect their self and first care for what is secondary and less important.

¹⁴⁰⁵ See in particular *Alc. I* 129a: “γνόντες μὲν αὐτὸ τάχ’ ἂν γνοιμεν τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἀγνοοῦντες δὲ οὐκ ἂν ποτε.” See also 132b ff.

¹⁴⁰⁶ On the idea of σκοπός, cp. footnote 1377 above.

what is this target? How is it to be defined? And to what extent can we find a unity in the objective side of our desires?

At first sight, it may seem in fact that our desires are directed at very different things. However, the things we desire are not totally unrelated. They have something in common, and they are all desired for the same reason. In other words, they all fulfill the same function or the same formal conditions, and in this sense we may say that our desire has a formal object, which may be identified with the most diverse concrete objects. We must therefore consider this formal object. Plato identifies different layers of it and we will start with the most immediate and superficial layer. Then we will proceed to its core, in order to see the precise manner in which it determines all our particular desires and all our life.

3.1. The pursuit of the good (τἀγαθόν)

Our desire is always directed at some good. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that τὸ ἀγαθόν is “what every soul pursues and it does everything for the sake of this”.¹⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, we want what is good or “the good”.¹⁴⁰⁸ We accept it and do not want to be deprived of it.¹⁴⁰⁹ Alternatively, if we do not have the good, we pursue it, and this is actually the source of all our desires. All things desired are viewed as good, and thus all our movements are directed at the good as such. This is our permanent target or goal (σκοπός). To be sure, we also try to avoid or escape what is bad (τὸ κακόν). However, both kinds of movement are interconnected. Although they usually refer to very different objects, it may also be said that what is bad moves us away from the good we pursue (and hence we avoid it) or that not attaining the good is itself bad (and in this sense we try to avoid missing out on the good).

But before considering these movements and their interrelation, it is important to consider the meaning of the terms “good” and “bad” in Ancient Greece, in order to avoid misunderstandings. Indeed, “ἀγαθός” and “κακός” are not primarily moral terms. Their traditional sense in Greek is first of all functional. This can be more easily seen in the case of the term χρηστός, which is often used as a direct equivalent of ἀγαθός and is etymologically connected with the verb χράομαι (“to use”). Both ἀγαθός and χρηστός are often associated

¹⁴⁰⁷ See *Rep.* 505d-e: “ὃ δὴ διώκει μὲν ἅπαντα ψυχή και τούτου ἔνεκα πάντα πράττει”.

¹⁴⁰⁸ The Greek “τὸ ἀγαθόν” is somewhat ambiguous. It may convey the notions of “what is good” (thus applying to any particular good), “the supreme good” (i.e. what is better than anything else) or even “goodness as such” (the *ιδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*). These three different meanings are in fact intimately connected and in this chapter we will try to determine their precise relation.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Cp. *Alc. I* 115c-d: “[ΣΩ.] (...) σὺ πότερ’ ἂν δέξαιό σοι εἶναι, ἀγαθὰ ἢ κακὰ; [ΑΛ.] ἀγαθὰ. [ΣΩ.] οὐκοῦν τὰ μέγιστα μάλιστα. [ΑΛ.] ναί. [ΣΩ.] και ἥκιστα τῶν τοιούτων δέξαιό ἂν στέρεσθαι; [ΑΛ.] πῶς γὰρ οὔ;”

with terms such as συμφέρον, λυσιτελοῦν, ὠφέλιμον, or κερδαλέον, which qualify something as beneficial, advantageous, helpful, or profitable.¹⁴¹⁰ All these terms can be applied to objects, animals, persons and situations, in order to describe their value and their positive role in our life. But this does not mean that “ἀγαθός” can only be used when our personal profit is at issue. The term can also be used to express approval or commendation, and it can even acquire a moral sense, when applied to actions or persons.¹⁴¹¹ However, in traditional Greek culture one’s goodness consisted primarily in one’s usefulness to the household and to the πόλις, which required one to be able to perform certain fundamental tasks with excellence (ἀρετή). In addition, the term may single out a particular social class – namely, the noble men, which are supposed to have an innate superiority and thus be better qualified to perform the most important tasks in the πόλις. Once more, the sense of ἀγαθός is primarily functional, and only later did it come to be linked with intrinsic moral value – and even then the functional sense is still felt.¹⁴¹²

Something similar can be said of κακός. It expresses the idea that something has low quality and is therefore useless (ἄχρηστον). It does not perform its function properly and it can even be detrimental, harmful, prejudicial, or damaging (βλαβερόν, ζημιῶδες). It comes close in meaning to μοχθηρός and πονηρός – which also have the sense of being toilsome or causing grief. When applied to persons, κακός means primarily that someone is incapable, poor at his job or function, or even weak and coward. It can also denote an inferior or base person in general – i.e., someone who is loathsome to others. Only later does the term come to mean evil and wicked in a moral sense, thus coming close to such other terms as αἰσχρός, πανούργος, μιάρος. But that is a derived sense. The badness expressed by κακός is primarily functional and social, and the term is used to express disapproval, condemnation or repudiation.¹⁴¹³

¹⁴¹⁰ Cp. e.g. *Alc. I* 116a, c, *Cra.* 416e ff., *Th.* 177c-d.

¹⁴¹¹ In this case, it comes close to καλός, which is another important term of commendation and can be translated as “beautiful, fine, noble, laudable.” The two could even be associated in the qualification καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός and were in some cases hard to distinguish from one another.

¹⁴¹² This is, for instance, why Plato often associates moral ἀρεταί with the idea that they are beneficial. See e.g. *Alc. I* 116c, *Hp. Ma.* 296e, *Grg.* 477a, *Rep.* 505a. For more on the use of “ἀγαθός”, cp. e.g. M. HOFFMANN, *Die ethische Terminologie bei Homer, Hesiod und den altern Elegikern und Jambographen*, Tübingen, Kloeres, 1914, 71 ff., 115-116, 124, 127-128, 131ff.; J. GERLACH, *Ἀνήρ ἀγαθός*, Diss. München, 1932; C. CLASSEN, *Sprachliche Deutung als Triebkraft platonischen und sokratischen Philosophierens*, München, Beck, 1959, 138ff.; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 462-465; A. ADKINS, *Moral Values and Political Behavior in Ancient Greece*. From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century, London, Chatto & Windus, 1972, *passim*.

¹⁴¹³ For more on the term “κακός”, see e.g. M. HOFFMANN, *op. cit.*, 82 ff., 116-117, 124, 127-128, 131 ff.; W. GRUNDMANN, κακός, ἄκακος, κακία, κακῶ, κακοῦργος, κακοήθεια, κακοποιέω, κακοποιός, ἐγκακίεω, ἀνεξίκακος, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; A. ADKINS, *op. cit.*, *passim*; K. DOVER, *Greek Popular Morality in the*

The terms ἀγαθός and κακός thus describe how things in the broadest sense of the word relate to us (either as individuals or as members of a community), and how they can contribute to our life. This implies that our being is not impervious to things in general. Rather, it is affected and determined by them – i.e., they affect the quality of one’s life. Therefore, we pursue things that benefit us. We try to attain or acquire them, in order to reach the state of self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) or of not needing anything (μηδενὸς δεῖσθαι).¹⁴¹⁴ But such a pursuit raises the question of whether we have the power (δύναμις) and means to attain the good we pursue.¹⁴¹⁵ Moreover, we may make mistakes about what we desire (as we will see below) – and in this sense we may fail to pursue the real good. This is why sometimes we find statements in the corpus saying that we should pursue the good, which implies that in some cases we do not do so.¹⁴¹⁶ What is meant is that we should pursue the real good. But we are always pursuing what appears to be good. Our concern with ourselves is always directed to what we regard as the good – i.e., as good for us, as something that improves our being, and makes our life better. This is implied in all our desires. They all perform the same function in our life: they try to improve it. These desires are thus not sparse or discontinuous, and they are not simply concerned with our immediate future. They are all part of a global project. The concern with oneself implies – nay, demands – these desires. This means that our concerns, desires, are not primarily directed to their apparent objects, but rather to the good. They are all integrated in this unitary pursuit of the good as what improves us.

Still, there are many things that we regard as good – things such as money, health, friends, the admiration of others, knowledge, and so on.¹⁴¹⁷ Additionally, we do not pursue just one good at a time. We are constantly fighting on multiple fronts and pursuing different goods. This does not mean that they all have the same importance. In general, we establish a scale of values. Some things are better than others. But there is more. Goods are also

Time of Plato and Aristotle, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1974, 52-53, 65, 82; I. SLUITER & R. ROSEN (ed.), *Kakos*. Badness and Anti-Value in Classical Antiquity, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2008.

¹⁴¹⁴ The idea of self-sufficiency has a primarily social or political meaning. It is used of a household or a πόλις that does not need to import goods, since it produces everything it needs and is therefore materially independent. The term can also express the idea of being in a state of sufficiency, without lacking anything – and what we strive to achieve is precisely self-sufficiency in this more general sense. For more on this subject, cp. e.g. M. WHEELER, Self-Sufficiency and the Greek City, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (1955), 416-420; G. WIDMANN, *Autarkie und Philia in den aristotelischen Ethiken*, Diss. Tübingen, 1967, especially 27ff.; T. KRISCHNER, Der Begriff der Autarkie im Rahmen der Griechischen Kulturgeschichte, *Hyperboreus* 6 (2000), 253-262; P. BOSMAN, Ancient Debates on *autarkeia* and our Global Impasse, *Phronimon* 16 (2015), 16-28.

¹⁴¹⁵ The question of having or not the power to attain one’s ends is particularly stressed in the *Gorgias*, when rhetoric is presented as the τέχνη that gives one superlative power and allows one to manipulate all other τέχναι and all persons. See e.g. 447c, 452d ff., 455d ff., 466b ff.

¹⁴¹⁶ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 499e-500a and 507d.

¹⁴¹⁷ Cp. e.g. *Men.* 78c, *Euthd.* 279ff., *Grg.* 467e.

distinguished according to their intrinsic or derived value. Some values are intrinsically good and desired by themselves, others pursued for the sake of something else (ἔνεκά τινος).¹⁴¹⁸ In fact, we may even pursue things that are otherwise seen as bad, just because in a particular situation they appear to be conducive to something good. One thus creates a chain of goods, that may in fact be more or less complex, and include more or less intermediate terms. However, all these intermediate goods refer to a main good or to what is called “first beloved” (πρῶτον φίλον) in *Lysis*, which is what we actually desire.¹⁴¹⁹ Something similar happens with what is bad. Something may be intrinsically bad, or it may be bad because it leads to some greater evil or pushes us away from the good (even if in itself it is not bad).

The different beings we come in contact with are thus integrated in complex chains of desire, which lets these beings appear as beneficial or harmful for us. The goods and evils are connected in many different ways, and it all depends on what we actually pursue. On this account, the attempt to understand our desires raises the question concerning the final goal or goals of our actions and pursuits – i.e., that for the sake of which all actions are done. Is this final good one or are there many final goods? And is there ultimately only one chain of goods (and evils) or are there several? What is it we truly want? What are all our efforts and pains about?

The good we pursue is indeed a problem, and so we must try to better determine it. This can be done in two different ways. First, since the good has primarily a formal character (i.e., it is whatever we pursue), we can try to better determine its formal structure (i.e., the general criteria anything must fulfill to be seen as desirable or good). We can also try to identify what specifically corresponds to it – i.e., what fulfills the criteria just mentioned. In what follows, we will discuss these two questions, and we will start precisely by discussing in

¹⁴¹⁸ For the notion of ἔνεκά τινος, see *Grg.* 467d-e: “ἐάν τις τι πράττη ἔνεκά του, οὐ τοῦτο βούλεται ὁ πράττει, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνο οὗ ἔνεκα πράττει.” See also *Phlb.* 54c: “τό γε μὴν οὗ ἔνεκα τὸ ἔνεκά του γιγνόμενον αἰεὶ γίγνοιτ’ ἂν, ἐν τῇ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μοῖρα ἐκεῖνό ἐστι· τὸ δὲ τινὸς ἔνεκα γιγνόμενον εἰς ἄλλην, ὃ ἄριστε, μοῖραν θετέον.” For a distinction of different kinds of goods, see *Rep.* 357b-d: “ἄρα σοι δοκεῖ τοιόνδε τι εἶναι ἀγαθόν, ὃ δεξαίμεθ’ ἂν ἔχειν οὐ τῶν ἀποβαινόντων ἐφιέμενοι, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ ἔνεκα ἀσπαζόμενοι, οἷον τὸ χαίρειν καὶ αἰ ἡδοναὶ ὅσαι ἀβλαβεῖς καὶ μηδὲν εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον διὰ ταύτας γίγνεται ἄλλο ἢ χαίρειν ἔχοντα; ἔμοιγε, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, δοκεῖ τι εἶναι τοιοῦτον. τί δέ; ὃ αὐτὸ τε αὐτοῦ χάριν ἀγαπῶμεν καὶ τῶν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ γιγνομένων, οἷον αὐτὸ φρονεῖν καὶ τὸ ὄρᾶν καὶ τὸ ὑγιαίνειν; τὰ γὰρ τοιαῦτά που δι’ ἀμφοτέρα ἀσπαζόμεθα. ναί, εἶπον. τρίτον δὲ ὄρᾳς τι, ἔφη, εἶδος ἀγαθοῦ, ἐν ᾧ τὸ γυμνάζεσθαι καὶ τὸ κάμνοντα ἰατρεύεσθαι καὶ ἰατρευσίς τε καὶ ὁ ἄλλος χρηματισμός; ταῦτα γὰρ ἐπίπονα φαῖμεν ἂν, ὠφελεῖν δὲ ἡμᾶς, καὶ αὐτὰ μὲν ἑαυτῶν ἔνεκα οὐκ ἂν δεξαίμεθα ἔχειν, τῶν δὲ μισθῶν τε χάριν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα γίγνεται ἀπ’ αὐτῶν. ἔστιν γὰρ οὗν, ἔφη, καὶ τοῦτο τρίτον.”

¹⁴¹⁹ The first beloved is the basis that allows other things to be object of φιλία. But, as Socrates says, these other beloved things are images of the first beloved, which means that they are intrinsically referred to it and at the same time fall short of it. The examples provided in the text let us understand this. For instance, a father loves his son and because of this he loves also the remedy that saves his son’s life. However, he has no particular love for the remedy or its container as such. See 219b-220b.

more detail the formal structure of our desire. We will consider the pursuit of the good from other angles and we will try to determine the real criteria of the good we pursue.

3.2. The desire of having a good life as a pursuit of εὐδαιμονία

One essential feature of our desire, which helps us define it, is the fact that it is constitutively related to εὐδαιμονία. We all want to be happy.¹⁴²⁰ But this is not just another desire of ours, different from our desire for the good. In *Symposium*, Diotima asks Socrates why anyone wants to have or possess good things, and they go on to determine that one wants them in order to be happy (εὐδαίμων).¹⁴²¹ They even define εὐδαιμονία as the possession of good things.¹⁴²² Moreover, we do not want to be happy for the sake of anything else. Happiness is the final end of all our pursuits.¹⁴²³ Whatever we do and whatever we pursue, we all want the good and we all want to be happy. The desire for happiness is thus referred to the good, but it also lets us better understand our pursuit of the good. We want to possess the good. Our life is to be filled by it and this is what will allow us to have a good life or live well (εὖ ζῆν).¹⁴²⁴ Indeed, we do not just want to live, and we do not just want to pursue the good, but we want to live well or to have a good life, and this requires us (or pressures us) to attain the good.¹⁴²⁵

It is, however, important to understand what is implied in this formal definition of happiness, because the Platonic and Greek understanding of happiness is considerably different from the usual way of understanding it nowadays. We can catch a first glimpse of this difference if we briefly consider the Greek terms Plato uses to express the idea of happiness and the cultural contexts to which they are associated. The most common term is εὐδαιμονία, but Plato also uses μακαρία (in particular the adjective μακάριος) and εὖ

¹⁴²⁰ See e.g. *Euthd.* 278e: “ἄρα γε πάντες ἄνθρωποι βουλόμεθα εὖ πράττειν; ἢ τοῦτο μὲν ἐρώτημα ὧν νυνδὴ ἐφοβούμην ἐν τῶν καταγελάστων; ἀνόητον γὰρ δήπου καὶ τὸ ἐρωτᾶν τὰ τοιαῦτα· τίς γὰρ οὐ βούλεται ἄνθρώπων εὖ πράττειν; οὐδεὶς ὅστις οὐκ, ἔφη.” Cp. also *Smp.* 205a.

¹⁴²¹ See 204e-205a: “φέρε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν ἀγαθῶν· τί ἐρᾷ; γενέσθαι, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, αὐτῷ. καὶ τί ἔσται ἐκεῖνω ὃ ἂν γένηται τὰγαθὰ; τοῦτ’ εὐπορώτερον, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἔχω ἀποκρίνασθαι, ὅτι εὐδαίμων ἔσται. κτήσει γάρ, ἔφη, ἀγαθῶν οἱ εὐδαίμονες εὐδαίμονες, καὶ οὐκέτι προσδεῖ ἐρέσθαι ἵνα τί δὲ βούλεται εὐδαίμων εἶναι ὁ βουλόμενος; ἀλλὰ τέλος δοκεῖ ἔχειν ἢ ἀπόκρισις.”

¹⁴²² See the passage quoted in the previous footnote. We find in the same idea in *Alc.* I, 116b: “οὐκοῦν εὐδαίμονες δι’ ἀγαθῶν κτήσιν;” In *Euthd.* 279a, the following is asked (and then confirmed): “ἐπειδὴ βουλόμεθα εὖ πράττειν, πῶς ἂν εὖ πράττοιμεν; ἄρ’ ἂν εἰ ἡμῖν πολλὰ κάγαθὰ εἴη;” Finally, see also 280b “ὡμολογήσαμεν γάρ, ἔφη, εἰ ἡμῖν ἀγαθὰ πολλὰ παρεῖη, εὐδαιμονεῖν ἂν καὶ εὖ πράττειν.”

¹⁴²³ See once more *Smp.* 205a.

¹⁴²⁴ Cp. *Rep.* 354a: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ὁ γε εὖ ζῶν μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων, ὁ δὲ μὴ τάναντία. πῶς γὰρ οὐ;”

¹⁴²⁵ Cp. *Cri.* 48b: “(...) οὐ τὸ ζῆν περιπλεϊστού ποιητέον ἀλλὰ τὸ εὖ ζῆν.”

πράττειν.¹⁴²⁶ Εὐδαιμονία generally means good fortune or success, which may correspond to different things. In the popular understanding, it was mostly identified with concrete things: wealth, good reputation, health, comfort, good progeny, and so on. All these things were originally understood as the result of a divine favor, as is shown by the etymological connection of εὐδαιμονία with δαίμων. The term δαίμων designates primarily a divine or superhuman power. In contrast with θεός, the deity in question is generally unnamed and has no other personal traits. A δαίμων can also be considered a minor deity.¹⁴²⁷ Among other things, δαίμονες were regarded as a sort of guardians or guiding spirits.¹⁴²⁸ However, they could be either benevolent or malevolent, and could thus bring good or bad things. They were responsible for the content of one's life – i.e., for one's lot or destiny. But this is not all. In what was perhaps a later stage of popular understanding, the magical or animist understanding of life became more abstract, and the term δαίμων came to mean also what happens in one's life or one's particular destiny.¹⁴²⁹ This destiny can be either good or bad, and accordingly one can be either εὐδαίμων or δυσδαίμων.¹⁴³⁰ The latter are not just states one finds oneself in, but they are also possibilities to which we are always exposed and to which we always relate, even when our life already seems pretty determined. As ephemeral beings, we are always open to sudden changes, and hence the theme of εὐδαιμονία is closely associated with the idea that the value of a life can only be defined at its end.¹⁴³¹ Happiness is indeed referred to the totality of one's life and it is the value of this totality that is at issue.

The idea of totality is further stressed by a different understanding of happiness developed in the context of Orphism and of the Mysteries, where εὐδαιμονία and μακαρία designate the blissful state the initiates will enjoy after dying. This is in keeping with the old

¹⁴²⁶ We will leave out the adjective ὄλβιος, which is only found in two less relevant passages (namely, *Ly.* 212e and *Prt.* 337d).

¹⁴²⁷ For this meaning of δαίμων, cp. *Ap.* 27d-e and *Smp.* 202d-203a.

¹⁴²⁸ See e.g. HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, 122-126: “τοὶ μὲν δαίμονες ἀγνοὶ ἐπιχθόνιοι τελέθουσιν/ ἐσθλοὶ, ἀλεξίκακοι, φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων,/ οἳ ῥα φυλάσσουσιν τε δίκας καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα/ ἡέρα ἐσσάμενοι πάντη φοιτῶντες ἐπ’ αἴαν,/ πλουτοδοταί (...).” Cp. also *Phd.* 107d, 108b, *Rep.* 617e, 620d-e, *Plt.* 271d-e.

¹⁴²⁹ On this use of the word, see e.g. E. FRAENKEL (ed.), *Aeschylus – Agamemnon*, vol. 3, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950, ad 1341f.

¹⁴³⁰ For more on the meaning of δαίμων, see e.g. E. OWEN, Δαίμων and Cognate Words, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1931), 133-153; H. SCHLIER, δαίμων, δαιμόνιον, δαιμονίζομαι, δαιμονιώδης, δεισιδαίμων, δεισιδαιμονία, in: *TWNT*, sub voce; P. van der HORST, Δαίμων, *Mnemosyne* 10 (1941), 61-68; M. DETIENNE, *La notion de daimôn dans le Pythagorisme ancien*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1963; F. WILFORD, Δαίμων in Homer, *Numen* 12 (1965), 217-232; S. DARCUS, *Daimon as a Force Shaping Ethos in Heraclitus*, *Phoenix* 28 (1974), 390-407; R. MIRELLI, *Der Daimon und die Figur des Sokrates*. Entstehung einer gegenwärtigen, akademischen Subjektivität am Leitfaden von Platon und Nietzsche, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2013.

¹⁴³¹ See e.g. HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 1.32, AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 928f., SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1524-1530, EURIPIDES, *Andromacha*, 100-102. Cp. also R. JEBB (ed.), *Sophocles – The Plays and Fragments*, vol. 1, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 1883-1896, ad 1529.

myth of the Elysian Fields or the Isles of the Blessed (μακάρων νῆσοι). As we saw above, some heroes were taken there instead of going to Hades, thereby avoiding death and the phantasmagorical state that corresponds to it.¹⁴³² The Isles of the Blessed, in turn, were represented as a land of mild weather, where there was no work and no suffering.¹⁴³³ The initiated believed that they would achieve something similar. If they had purified their soul, they would attain a better lot after dying.¹⁴³⁴ This religious conception implies therefore a less passive understanding of happiness, and Plato further stresses one's active role therein when he uses the expression εὖ πράττειν. Εὖ πράττειν originally conveys the idea of faring well, succeeding, or being prosper. Plato, however, often interprets it in the sense of acting competently, behaving correctly, or "being good", "having ἀρετή" – which corresponds to his own understanding of what εὐδαιμονία consists in.¹⁴³⁵

However, let us leave aside for now Plato's identification of what happiness consists in. We are trying to determine the formal notion of happiness, and there is one central aspect that is present in all these different conceptions of happiness. This aspect is actually at the heart of the difference between Ancient and contemporary conceptions. Whatever the specific content of happiness, it is always understood as something objective. It implies that one actually achieves what one truly desires – namely, what is truly good. A good life consists precisely in this. One must achieve one's goal and become fulfilled. Otherwise, one will be miserable or wretched (ἄθλιος). Indeed, misery is the opposite of happiness and it consists in the failure to reach what one desires. If one falls short of it or even reaches the opposite of what was desired, one's life will be marked by the bad things one wanted to avoid, and it will therefore be pointless and no better (or even worse) than being dead.

In sum, for the Greeks happiness is primarily the fulfillment of a project. But the fact that it is so can be easily lost on us, since we normally conceive happiness as a subjective state that depends on one's emotions. Happiness seems to be primarily a matter of sensation or of feeling good. This presupposes that one has an immediate experience of the value of one's life and so, in order to be happy, one must feel happy. For the Greeks, however, happiness could even be conceived as something totally independent from the strictly subjective (i.e., sensible or affective) component of our being. It could consist in honor or

¹⁴³² Cp. Chap. 10, Sect. 1.1.

¹⁴³³ See e.g. HESIOD, *Opera et dies* 167-73.

¹⁴³⁴ Cp. Chap. 10, Sect. 1.2 above.

¹⁴³⁵ Cp. e.g. *Alc. I* 116b and *Grg.* 507c. For more on this, see e.g. C. CLASSEN, *Sprachliche Deutung als Triebkraft platonischen und sokratischen Philosophierens*, München, Beck, 1959, 138, 108f.; R. CAIN, *The Socratic Method. Plato's Use of Philosophical Drama*, London/New York, Continuum, 2007.

wisdom, for instance. It all depended on what was defined as being objectively good. To be sure, one would still want to avoid pain, but in general that was not the main goal. A life without a subjectively (i.e. affectively) bad state would still fall short of what one truly desired, and if one had the chance to have more than such a painless state, one would always accept it. On the other hand, if someone happened to see happiness as consisting in a good (i.e., pleasant) subjective state (as sometimes seems to be the case), one would still want this pleasure to be real. An illusory pleasure would not be sufficient. In other words, what one wants to attain or possess is an objective state that is intrinsically desirable and good. The idea of objectivity or reality is at the center of the Ancient understanding of happiness, and it is essential for Plato's conception of happiness. Happiness is always referred to a specific program or plan. One pursues a particular good, and one must really attain it. For now, we do not know exactly what this good consists in, and it may even include a particular subjective state. But in any case, it must correspond to what we actually desire and the possession of it must be real.¹⁴³⁶

Such a conception thus raises the question of whether we really know what we desire. It seems possible for us to be unaware of our true desires and wrongly think that we have achieved our goals. We would then possess an illusory happiness. As Socrates says in the *Apology*, we may seem to be happy (δοκεῖν εὐδαίμων εἶναι) without that being the case.¹⁴³⁷ We may fail to reach what is really good and reach something bad instead (or something less good), all the while thinking it is the good. We may be convinced that one's life is turning out well and all the while it may be a failure. In other words, it is possible for us to be miserable without knowing.¹⁴³⁸ Our situation could then be described as a “beauty festering with evils”

¹⁴³⁶ For more on the Ancient notion of “happiness”, see e.g. F. HAUCK & G. BERTRAM, μακάριος, μακαρίζω, μακαρισμός, in: *TWNT, sub voce*; B. GLADIGOW, Zum Makarismos des Weisen, *Hermes* 95 (1967), 404-433; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 66-67; C. de HEER, *Μάκαρ, εὐδαίμων, ὄλβιος, εὐτυχής*. A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the 5th Century B. C., Amsterdam, Hakkert, 1969; K. DOVER, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1974, 174; M. McDONALD, *Terms for Happiness in Euripides*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978; R. KRAUT, Two Conceptions of Happiness, *The Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), 167-197; K. DOVER, *Plato – Symposium*, Cambridge, University Press, 1980, ad 180b7; W. SCHADEWALDT, *Die Anfänge der Geschichtsschreibung bei den Griechen*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1982, 122-123; S. SLINGS, *Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Leiden/New York, Brill, 1994, 77; J. MIKALSON, The *daimon* of *eudaimonia*, in: J. MILLER et al. (eds.), *Vertis in usum*. Studies in Honour of E. Courtney, München/Leipzig, Saur, 2002, 250-258; R. MIRELLI, *Der Daimon und die Figur des Sokrates*. Entstehung einer gegenwärtigen, akademischen Subjektivität am Leitfaden von Platon und Nietzsche, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2013, 44-47.

¹⁴³⁷ See 36d-e: “οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅτι μᾶλλον, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πρέπει οὕτως ὡς τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα ἐν πρυτανείῳ σιτεῖσθαι, πολὺ γε μᾶλλον ἢ εἴ τις ὑμῶν ἵππῳ ἢ συνωρίδι ἢ ζεύγῃ νενίκηκεν Ὀλυμπίασιν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ ὑμᾶς ποιεῖ εὐδαίμονας δοκεῖν εἶναι, ἐγὼ δὲ εἶναι (...).”

¹⁴³⁸ Polus ironically alludes to this possibility in *Grg.* 471b, saying that Archelaus “ἔλαθεν ἑαυτὸν ἀθλιώτατος γενόμενος”. These words express with precision what is in question here.

(κάλλος κακῶν ὑπουλον), to borrow an expression from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.¹⁴³⁹ The cognitive component is indeed very important, and we will consider it in more detail below. Happiness requires us to really possess what we really desire, and the possibility of being deluded about our happiness or misery results from the fact that both of them correspond primarily to objective states, defined by our true desires. We do not just want to feel something, nor do we want the illusion of possessing the good. Perhaps in some cases we may wonder if the illusion of happiness is not preferable, but that is not what we are directed to. No one wants to have what only appears to be good, as Socrates says in the *Republic*. We want what is truly good.¹⁴⁴⁰

This whole description raises several questions. First, it is not easy to determine what an objective state is. It is also not clear how we can determine whether we have really achieved what is objectively good or not. It depends on what we really desire. But at this point it is not clear what we really desire, and whether we all desire the same thing. Moreover, does happiness require us to fully attain the good? Or can we partially attain it and still be happy? In other words, can there be different degrees of happiness? And, if so, do we need to be fully happy, or can we be content with a lesser happiness? It seems that any lesser degree would imply a certain degree of failure, and so accepting it it would be a form of renunciation to our deepest desires. But can we really reach absolute happiness? And what would it correspond to?

We will have to return to all these questions later. They all require a more refined analysis of the structure of our desire – and of our life in general. Above all, we must determine better what we truly desire, according to the indications we find in the Platonic corpus. But before discussing those questions, there are some aspects regarding the general structure of our desire that we should consider.

3.3. The unity of desire and the intermediate (μεταξύ) character of human soul

We saw that our desires are not atomic or discontinuous. Rather, they are integrated in the unitary pursuit of the good and of happiness. This desire pervades our whole being and it is what moves us at all times. But we can better understand what this means if we consider

¹⁴³⁹ See v. 1396. Cp. also *Grg.* 480b, where Plato speaks of a ψυχή ὑπουλος.

¹⁴⁴⁰ See 505d: “τόδε οὐ φανερόν, ὡς δίκαια μὲν καὶ καλὰ πολλοὶ ἂν ἔλοιντο τὰ δοκοῦντα, κἂν εἰ μὴ εἶη, ὅμως ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ κερτῆσθαι καὶ δοκεῖν, ἀγαθὰ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἔτι ἀρκεῖ τὰ δοκοῦντα κτᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσιν, τὴν δὲ δόξαν ἐνταῦθα ἤδη πᾶς ἀτιμάζει; καὶ μάλα, ἔφη.”

some essential points of what is said by Socrates in *Symposium*. In his speech, Socrates (with the help of Diotima) identifies the desire of goods and happiness with ἔρωσ in a broader sense.¹⁴⁴¹ According to him, the usual sense of the word ἔρωσ as a designation of passion or romantic love is just one possible manifestation of our constitutive ἔρωσ, and all other pursuits (such as the pursuit of money, honor or knowledge) also deserve the name.¹⁴⁴² They are all modalities of the same thing. Their unity does not simply consist in the fact that they are all desires of ours and somehow relate to the self's pursuit of a better version of itself. Rather, the self (or the ψυχή) is determined as desire, and more specifically as the desire of the good and of happiness in the senses above mentioned. On this account, we can better understand the desiderative nature of human soul by considering Diotima's and Socrates' analysis of ἔρωσ.

Socrates and Diotima first define ἔρωσ as a kind of being that lies between two poles and is essentially characterized by this intermediate position. Then, they identify our ψυχή with ἔρωσ and show how the former can likewise be characterized as an intermediate being. But before considering how it is so, it is important to consider how the question is introduced. Socrates' words are preceded and prepared by Agathon's speech (194e-197e), where ἔρωσ is qualified by many positive predicates and described as a fullness of being.¹⁴⁴³ But after the speech, Socrates cross-examines Agathon and they agree that, though ἔρωσ is directed at something characterized by the positive predicates Agathon mentioned, it is actually based on desire and lack.¹⁴⁴⁴ Socrates thus isolates the component of desire and then, during the course of his speech, he tries to define it as something that is not sporadic or adventitious, but rather permanent and intrinsic (just as Aristophanes had shown previously).¹⁴⁴⁵

It is at this point that Socrates (recalling his past conversation with Diotima) introduces the notion of intermediacy (μεταξύ). Ἔρωσ is intrinsically related to beauty (or to goodness), but it is deprived of it.¹⁴⁴⁶ Indeed, he is partially determined by its opposite,

¹⁴⁴¹ See 205d: “οὕτω τοίνυν καὶ περὶ τὸν ἔρωτα. τὸ μὲν κεφάλαιόν ἐστι πᾶσα ἢ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμία καὶ τοῦ εὐδαιμονεῖν ὁ ‘μέγιστός τε καὶ δολερὸς ἔρωσ’ παντί (...).”

¹⁴⁴² See 205a-d, where Diotima mentions the restriction of the word “ποίησις” to poetry and says that the same happened with the word “ἔρωσ”, who was restricted only to a few of its forms – especially amorous pursuits.

¹⁴⁴³ For more on this, cp. Section 4.3 below.

¹⁴⁴⁴ See 199e-200b: “ὁ Ἔρωσ ἔρωσ ἐστὶν οὐδενὸς ἢ τινός; πάνυ μὲν οὖν ἔστιν. τοῦτο μὲν τοίνυν, εἰπεῖν τὸν Σωκράτη, φύλαξον παρὰ σαυτῶ μεμνημένος ὅτου· τοσόνδε δὲ εἰπέ, πότερον ὁ Ἔρωσ ἐκείνου οὗ ἔστιν ἔρωσ, ἐπιθυμεῖ αὐτοῦ ἢ οὐ; πάνυ γε, φάναι. πότερον ἔχων αὐτὸ οὗ ἐπιθυμεῖ τε καὶ ἐρᾷ, εἴτα ἐπιθυμεῖ τε καὶ ἐρᾷ, ἢ οὐκ ἔχων; οὐκ ἔχων, ὡς τὸ εἰκός γε, φάναι. σκόπει δὴ, εἰπεῖν τὸν Σωκράτη, ἀντὶ τοῦ εἰκότος εἰ ἀνάγκη οὕτως, τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν ἐπιθυμεῖν οὗ ἔνδεές ἐστιν, ἢ μὴ ἐπιθυμεῖν, ἐὰν μὴ ἔνδεές ᾖ; ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ θαυμαστῶς δοκεῖ, ὃ Ἀγάθων, ὡς ἀνάγκη εἶναι· σοὶ δὲ πῶς; κάμοι, φάναι, δοκεῖ.”

¹⁴⁴⁵ For a brief analysis of Aristophanes' speech, cp. Section 4.2 below.

¹⁴⁴⁶ See 201a-c.

without reducing itself to it. In this sense, it lies between the two opposite poles. This “betweenness”, however, is not to be understood in a geographical sense. It is not an extrinsic property of something. Ἔρως is not a particular being that has its own essence and also happens to lie between these two extremes. Its intermediacy is its essence. Ἔρως is something intermediate insofar as it is intrinsically composed by the two poles and by the way they restrict or negate each other. In other words, ἔρως can only be conceived by reference to these two poles. It is neither one nor the other, but it is somehow the two. Moreover, ἔρως is also μεταξύ in the sense that it is in the middle (or in course) of doing something – namely, it moves away from the negative pole (or at least tries to) and is directed at the positive pole, which it strives to attain. The intermediateness in question is thus a form of pursuit.

This is the general model of intermediacy presented in the text. But Plato does not only define a general notion of intermediacy or “betweenness”. He also identifies different kinds of intermediacy, defined by different sets of opposite poles and also by different ways of understanding the poles in question. The latter point is quite significant, as can be seen in the case of mortality and immortality. Socrates starts by describing ἔρως as something that lies between what-is-mortal and what-is-immortal in the traditional sense of these terms. Consequently, ἔρως is said to be a δαίμων μέγας, which connects mortals and immortals or, as Plato also says, binds the whole closer together.¹⁴⁴⁷ This means that ἔρως is an entity different from us and superior to us. But then Plato introduces a significant shift, and presents a different kind of intermediate between what-is-mortal and what-is-immortal, based on a reinterpretation of the meaning of these poles. Being mortal is now interpreted as being instantaneous and being immortal corresponds to being eternal and changeless. As a result, the intermediate between the two is generation, insofar as it provides a way of somehow surviving the passage of time.¹⁴⁴⁸ This shift is very meaningful because generation is an essential condition of our life and, according to Plato, it pervades our entire body and soul.¹⁴⁴⁹ The intermediate in question is thus something that essentially characterizes us as human

¹⁴⁴⁷ See 202d-202e: “πῶς ἂν οὖν θεὸς εἴη ὃ γε τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἄμοιρος; οὐδαμῶς, ὡς γ’ ἔοικεν. ὁρᾷς οὖν, ἔφη, ὅτι καὶ σὺ ἔρωτα οὐ θεὸν νομίζεις; τί οὖν ἂν, ἔφη, εἴη ὁ Ἔρως; θνητός; ἤκιστά γε. ἀλλὰ τί μὴν; ὥσπερ τὰ πρότερα, ἔφη, μεταξύ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου. τί οὖν, ὦ Διοτίμα; δαίμων μέγας, ὃ Σώκρατες· καὶ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ δαιμόνιον μεταξύ ἐστὶ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ. τίνα, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, δύναμιν ἔχον; ἐρμηνεύον καὶ διαπορθμεύον θεοῖς τὰ παρ’ ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀνθρώποις τὰ παρὰ θεῶν, τῶν μὲν τὰς δεήσεις καὶ θυσίας, τῶν δὲ τὰς ἐπιτάξεις τε καὶ ἀμοιβὰς τῶν θυσιῶν, ἐν μέσῳ δὲ ὄν ἀμφοτέρων συμπληροῦ, ὥστε τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συνδεδέσθαι.”

¹⁴⁴⁸ See 206b ff.

¹⁴⁴⁹ See in particular 207d-208b.

beings. The same applies to the other forms of intermediacy identified by Plato, which we will consider in more detail below.¹⁴⁵⁰ They all characterize both ἔρωσ and our own being, which means that the two are henceforth identified with one another.

We are indeed defined by the pursuit of something that we lack, and this essence of ours is made clearer in the mythological genealogy of ἔρωσ. Plato presents ἔρωσ as the offspring of Πόρος (who is the personification of abundance or of the resourcefulness required to reach it) and Πενία (who personifies poverty and want).¹⁴⁵¹ This means that he shares the nature of both parents, but in him each nature restricts the other, and so ἔρωσ is not a simple form of poverty nor a simple form of abundance. It is a form of abundance intrinsically limited by poverty and the converse.¹⁴⁵² In other words, ἔρωσ is an intermediate entity and as such it is essentially in relation with these two poles. Moreover, it relates to them differently. Ἐρωσ is directed to the positive pole. More precisely, it is a project of attaining or becoming the positive pole. Yet, it is still withheld by its relation to the opposite, from which it desires to release itself. Precisely the same characterizes our relation to the good (which we considered above and is also one of the intermediacies considered in *Symposium*). We do not have the good, but we are essentially related to it and directed to it. There is a longing for the good at the core of our being. Regardless of whether or not we will ever attain it, we are always defined by the desire of it, and this is in turn the basis for all our particular desires. They all irrupt from our μεταξύ-character. A particular object cannot by itself create any desire in us. It can only channel it. If we are to desire something, we must already be marked by lack and by the project of attaining something. In fact, a being marked by this lack and this project sees and experiences everything in light of its desire, as helpful, detrimental and indifferent to its satisfaction.

Being an intermediate is therefore the essence of our being. It determines our whole life and everything in it. We are always in this intermediate position and even our contact with the extremes is determined by it. We do not know exactly what pure lack or absolute fullness are, because our experience of them is always shaped by our intermediate character. However, our intermediate nature is not necessarily something of which we are fully aware. We may relate to it in different ways. We may come to possess what we desire (which would

¹⁴⁵⁰ See Sect. 4.3.

¹⁴⁵¹ See 203b-e.

¹⁴⁵² In fact, this mixture of the two predicates can even be found in the way Ἐρωσ' parents are characterized – at least at the moment of Ἐρωσ' conception. Πενία reveals her resourcefulness by taking advantage of Πόρος, who is in turn found wanting (at least in that particular instance). This points to the fact that we cannot easily conceive absolute poverty nor the opposite. What we experience is always a mixture or intertwining of both.

probably change our condition, although we could still be marked by lack, in the sense that we would still need to attain something in the following moments, or at least preserve what we have, as Socrates also mentions in his speech).¹⁴⁵³ We could also think we already possess what we pursue (and thus think we are happy) when that is not the case. In other words, we may fail to notice our intermediate character. Finally, we may be aware of the lack that constitutes us, and then we will be more aware of our condition and of what we need – which would also allow us to better search for it.¹⁴⁵⁴

But perhaps the most important question in this context concerns the content of the positive pole we are directed to, which is what actually determines the real extension of our desire. We may be inclined to think our lacks are relatively limited, and some analyses in the corpus also seem to point in that direction. In *Lysis*, for instance, one of the main attempts at defining *φιλία* explains it as the result of specific lacks that appear at a certain moment (in particular bodily lacks, such as hunger and thirst) and thus create the need to pursue something that could satisfy them. Such lacks are bad and the good is then conceived as what satisfies them (i.e., as a *φάρμακον τοῦ κακοῦ*).¹⁴⁵⁵ This corresponds to the model of *εὐεξία* (i.e., good condition or good health) presented in *Gorgias*.¹⁴⁵⁶ Such a conception considers the object of our desire (i.e., the state we aim to reach) as a kind of neutral state. But although it may be so at the level of bodily states and bodily desires (which is what probably inspired this model), it is not clear that all our desires can be conceived in these terms. Plato himself explores a different possibility. He considers us as being constitutively directed at the good – and not just at any good, but rather at a superlative good. This is what is expressed in Aristophanes' speech, for instance. It is true that Aristophanes also refers to a previous loss and lack, but this reference is actually used to explain something very different, as we will see. Let us then consider in more detail the most essential features of the good we desire, according to Plato.

¹⁴⁵³ See 200b-d.

¹⁴⁵⁴ This alternative between an unperceived and a perceived intermediate character actually determines how we relate to ourselves, to our life, and to what we may attain in it (i.e., to how we may come to fulfill our desires or not). Socrates himself expressly points to this alternative when he considers the intermediate between ignorance and knowledge, as we will see in Sect. 4.3 below.

¹⁴⁵⁵ See 220b-e.

¹⁴⁵⁶ See 464a.

4. The desire of a superlative good

We find an important indication about the good we desire in *Philebus*. Plato stresses that the good must be something sufficient, perfect, complete.¹⁴⁵⁷ Such a good would bring about a state of self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια). We would be fully satisfied and at rest, without needing anything else.¹⁴⁵⁸ This is what we are really directed at. However, this is not a feature of the goods we ordinarily pursue. Some of them might be better than others, but they usually do not fully satisfy us or do not quench all our desires. We need something more to be fully satisfied, and this demand for more is what we must now consider. According to Plato, we not only desire something comparatively better than most of what we normally attain. The soul's inborn desire is a desire of optimization or maximization. We aim at something unsurpassable or an unqualified maximum – i.e., something superlatively or absolutely good (which Plato designates as τὸ ἄριστον or τὸ βέλτιστον).

This idea may cause some surprise, given the fact that we are usually not aware of having such a superlative desire. At first, it is not even clear what Plato means. A superlative good is not easy to conceive or define, and the same holds true for a desire directed at it. However, despite the unclear character of such a good and such a desire, Plato argues at some decisive points that this is a central component of our ψυχή. It is always present and it constantly exerts pressure over us, thereby determining our whole life. We must therefore try to see how Plato describes this desire of a superlative good and how he tries to derive our whole practical dimension from it. In order to do so, we will consider some essential aspects of Plato's analyses of ἔρωσ in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. But before coming to these texts, it is helpful to see how the fundamental structure Plato is alluding to is not just a philosophical construction of his. In fact, several Archaic forms of expression foreshadowed Plato's analyses and by considering them we can better understand how the structure in question is something with which we always have some contact.

¹⁴⁵⁷ In 20d, we read: “[ΣΩ.] τὴν ἀγαθοῦ μοῖραν πότερον ἀνάγκη τέλειον ἢ μὴ τέλειον εἶναι; [ΠΡΩ.] πάντων δὴπου τελεώτατον, ὃ Σώκρατες. [ΣΩ.] τί δέ; ἰκανὸν ἀγαθόν; [ΠΡΩ.] πῶς γὰρ οὐ; καὶ πάντων γε εἰς τοῦτο διαφέρειν τῶν ὄντων.” See also 22a-b: “μῶν οὖν οὐκ ἤδη τούτων γε περὶ δῆλον ὡς οὐδέτερος αὐτοῖν εἶχε ἀγαθόν; ἦν γὰρ ἂν ἰκανὸς καὶ τέλος καὶ πᾶσι φυτοῖς καὶ ζώοις αἰρετός, οἷσπερ δυνατὸν ἦν οὕτως αἰεὶ διὰ βίου ζῆν (...).”

¹⁴⁵⁸ See *Phlb.* 20e: “δεῖ γὰρ, εἴπερ πότερον αὐτῶν ἔστ’ ἀγαθόν, μηδὲν μηδενὸς ἔτι προσδεῖσθαι· δεόμενον δ’ ἂν φανῆ πότερον, οὐκ ἔστι που τοῦτ’ ἔτι τὸ ὄντως ἡμῖν ἀγαθόν.” See also 60b-c: “[ΣΩ.] τὴν ἀγαθοῦ διαφέρειν φύσιν τῶδε τῶν ἄλλων. [ΠΡΩ.] τίτι; [ΣΩ.] ὅτι παρὲν τοῦτ’ αἰεὶ τῶν ζώων διὰ τέλους πάντως καὶ πάντη, μηδενὸς ἐτέρου ποτὲ ἔτι προσδεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ ἰκανὸν τελεώτατον ἔχειν. οὐχ οὕτως; [ΠΡΩ.] οὕτω μὲν οὖν.”

4.1. The Archaic identification of superlatives. The κάλλιστον πάντων and the priamel

Since the Archaic period, Greek culture showed a clear interest in superlative qualities. We find such an interest in the oracular, the gnomic and the poetical traditions. Indeed, one of the things that stands out in these traditions is the constant reference to superlatives – such as τὸ ἄριστον, τὸ μέγιστον, τὸ δικαιοτάτον, τὸ φέρτατον, τὸ ῥᾶστος, τὸ λῶστος, τὸ ἥδιστον, τὸ τερπνότατον, τὸ πρεσβύτατον, τὸ σοφώτατον, and so on.¹⁴⁵⁹ Often, these references assume the form of a question and an answer. One wonders what might possess a particular property in the highest degree and then something is put forward as the quintessence of the property in question. We considered an example of this above – namely, the inquiries posed to the oracle about who is the wisest, the most just, the most pious.¹⁴⁶⁰ It was also common to create riddles about these matters, as tests of wisdom. People (especially reputed sages) were required to give a quick answer about what is the height of something, and the answer was supposed to help understand what the predicate in question consists in.¹⁴⁶¹ In keeping with this general tendency, there are many passages in Greek poetry which reflect about τὸ κάλλιστον πάντων – i.e., about what is the most beautiful or most admirable thing of all.¹⁴⁶² Such reflections are actually a variant of a broader model that could refer to any superlative – even negative ones.

Reflections about the superlative therefore played an important role in Greek culture, and we can understand why. These are not just abstract questions. These are questions about life itself, whose answers are very important. Declarations about superlatives express intense fascination with certain things in life and strong aversion to others. They also teach us how to navigate life, by assessing our possibilities and determine what we should value or desire. This is what oracles, sages and poets (as well as older people in general) tried to impart to

¹⁴⁵⁹ For bibliographical references, see the following footnotes.

¹⁴⁶⁰ See Chap. 2 Sect. 1.1. Cp. R. HERZOG, Das delphische Orakel als ethischer Preisrichter, in: E. HORNEFFER, *Der junge Platon*. I: Sokrates und die Apologie, Giessen, Töpelmann, 1922, 149-170.

¹⁴⁶¹ For an example of this, see PLUTARCH, *Septem sapientium convivium*, 152f.-153d, in: F. BABITT (ed.), *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 2, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1928. For more on this topic, cp. e.g. K. OHLERT, *Rätsel und Rätselspiele der alten Griechen*, Berlin, Mayer & Müller, 1912, 105ff.

¹⁴⁶² On the idea of κάλλιστον πάντων, see e.g. See *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, in: T. ALLEN (ed.), *Homeri opera*, vol. 5, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1912 (re-pr. 1961), 228: “Ἡσίοδος τὸ δεύτερον· εἶπ’ ἄγε μοι καὶ τοῦτο θεοῖς ἐπιείκελ’ Ὅμηρε, / τί θνητοῖς κάλλιστον οἶσαι ἐν φρεσὶν εἶναι; / ὁ δέ· ὀππότε’ ἂν εὐφροσύνη μὲν ἔχη κατὰ δῆμον ἅπαντα, / δαιτυμόνες δ’ ἀνὰ δώματ’ ἀκουάζωνται ἀοιδοῦ / ἤμενοι ἐξείης, παρὰ δὲ πλήθωσι τράπεζαι / σίτου καὶ κρειῶν, μέθυ δ’ ἐκ κρητῆρος ἀφύσσων / οἰνοχόος φορέησι καὶ ἐγγεῖη δεπάεσσιν. / τοῦτό τί μοι κάλλιστον ἐνὶ φρεσὶν εἶδεται εἶναι.” See also SAPPHO, fr. 16, in: E. LOBEL & D. PAGE (eds.), *Poetarum lesbiorum fragmenta*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1955 (re-ed. 1968): “οἱ μὲν ἰππήων στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων / οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖσ’ ἐπ[ὶ] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν / ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν’ ὄτ/τω τις ἔραται.”

others in very concrete and spontaneous terms. But these are not simple questions. Some of the declarations about the superlatives were perhaps more commonsensical, others more unexpected. In fact, the different notions whose superlative is at issue are often ambiguous and as such they can be associated with different things. In other words, the context in which the superlatives are mentioned is one of dispute or controversy (ἀμφισβήτησις). There is a fundamental disagreement and many opposing claims, which proclaim different things as the best. Oracles, wise people and poets were thus taking a stance in this contest of claims about the superlative values of life.

We can better understand these controversies if we consider the use in Ancient Greek poetry of a literary device that later came to be known as “priamel” (and which is where many of the reflections about τὸ κάλλιστον πάντων appear).¹⁴⁶³ The precise structure of a priamel has been object of much discussion.¹⁴⁶⁴ W. Race describes it in the following terms: “A priamel is a poetic/rhetorical form which consists, basically, of two parts: ‘foil’ and ‘climax’. The function of the foil is to introduce and highlight the climactic term by enumerating or summarizing a number of ‘other’ examples, subjects, times, places, or instances, which then yield (with varying degrees of contrast or analogy) to the particular point of interest or importance.”¹⁴⁶⁵ This form can be applied to different contents and one of these contents is people’s values, which is precisely what we are considering. The “*Priamel der Werte*” (as U. Schmid calls it) compares different valuable things that share a desirable quality, in order to show that one of them possesses this quality in the highest degree and is therefore the most desirable.

However, the specific priamels may vary in some important respects. They may simply single out a particular object that eclipses all others in a particular domain.¹⁴⁶⁶ They may also outline a sort of ranking that orders different things with respect to the quality in question. In this sense, other things may occupy the second or third place, insofar as they are

¹⁴⁶³ Though not all priamels employ adjectives in the superlative degree, many of them do and those are the ones we will mainly focus on here.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Cp. e.g. F. DORNSEIFF, *Pindars Stil*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1921, 97ss.; W. KRÖHLING, *Die Priamel (Beispielreihe) als Stilmittel in der griechisch-römischen Dichtung*, Greifswald, Dallmeyer, 1935; W. van OTTERLO, Beitrag zur Kenntnis der griechischen Priamel, *Mnemosyne* 8 (1940), 145-176; E. BUNDY, *Studia Pindarica*, vol. 1, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1962, 5ff.; U. SCHMID, *Die Priamel der Werte im Griechischen*. Von Homer bis Paulus, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1964; W. RACE, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius*, Leiden, Brill, 1982.

¹⁴⁶⁵ See W. RACE, *op. cit.*, IX.

¹⁴⁶⁶ See e.g. TYRTAEUS, 12.1-20 – especially 10-14: “οὐ γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς γίνεται ἐν πολέμῳ/ εἰ μὴ τετραίη μὲν ὀρῶν φόνον αἱματόεντα./ καὶ δῆϊων ὀρέγοιτ’ ἐγγύθεν ἰστάμενος./ ἢ δ’ ἀρετῆ, τόδ’ ἄεθλον ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἄριστον/ κάλλιστόν τε φέρειν γίνεται ἀνδρὶ νέῳ.”

still good, but not what is most desirable.¹⁴⁶⁷ In some cases, objects may complement each other, and thus two or more things together are the best. In this case, the cumulation of goods (especially goods from different spheres, such as health, beauty, wisdom) is better than any particular thing.¹⁴⁶⁸ In other cases, something may not be particularly good in itself, but it may be a condition for us to enjoy what is best. An example of this is health. It is a sort of auxiliary good, but it is not the best thing in itself.¹⁴⁶⁹

All these different identifications of the superlative let us see that the superlative is first of all a formal position that can be occupied by different things, but is not necessarily identified with any one in particular. There can be different versions of the best thing and some may even be complex and combine different objects. However, this diversity can itself be problematic. Some passages admit that different persons have different tastes, which means that the superlative is flexible. It can very well happen that τὸ κάλλιστον is to attain what one happens to love, as Sappho says.¹⁴⁷⁰ But other authors identify something as the best for everybody. They have a claim to universal truth and may even try to convince others about it.¹⁴⁷¹ This presupposes that people may have a clouded judgment about what is best and may not know what they really want. But regardless of these differences, the formal structure of desire is always the same. We are always concerned with maximizing our life, even if we have different views about what this maximization consists in.

¹⁴⁶⁷ A good example can be found in the scolion to which Socrates alludes in *Grg.* 451e: “ὕγιαίνειν μὲν ἄριστον ἀνδρὶ θνάτω, / δεύτερον δὲ φυὰν καλὸν γενέσθαι, / τὸ τρίτον δὲ πλουτεῖν ἀδόλως / καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ἠβᾶν μετὰ τῶν φίλων.” See *Carmina Convivialia*, fr. 7, in: D. PAGE (ed.), *Poetae melici graeci*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962 (re-ed. 1967).

¹⁴⁶⁸ See e.g. PINDAR, *Pythia*, 1.99-100: “τὸ δὲ παθεῖν εὖ πρῶτον <ἀε>θλων· εὖ δ’ ἀκούειν δευτέρα μοῖρ’· ἀμφοτέροισι δ’ ἀνήρ/ ὅς ἂν ἐγκύρησῃ, καὶ ἔλη, στέφανον ὕψιστον δέδεκται.” The idea of cumulation, however, also raises a problem. It may not be possible for us to cumulate all goods. A common topos in Greek literature was precisely the idea that the gods do not bestow all good things to the same person. See e.g. HOMER, *Iliad* IV.318: “ἀλλ’ οὐ πῶς ἅμα πάντα θεοὶ δόσαν ἀνθρώποισιν (...).” See also *Odyssey* VIII.168f.: “οὕτως οὐ πάντεσσι θεοὶ χαριέντα διδοῦσιν ἀνδράσιν, οὔτε φηὴν οὔτ’ ἄρ φρένας οὔτ’ ἀγορητῶν.” We may then be forced to choose between different goods and accept only part of the superlative (at least for a time). However, that does not change the fact that we are directed at all that composes the best.

¹⁴⁶⁹ See e.g. Ariphron’s poem in D. PAGE (ed.), *Poetae melici graeci*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962: “Υγίεια βροτοῖσι πρεσβίστα μακάρων, μετὰ σεῦ/ ναίοιμι τὸ λειπόμενον βιοτᾶς, σὺ δέ μοι πρόφρων ξυνεΐης· / εἰ γάρ τιξ ἢ πλούτου χάρις ἢ τεκέων/ ἢ τᾶς ἰσοδαίμονος ἀνθρώποις βασιληίδος ἀρχᾶς ἢ πόθων/ οὐς κρυφίους Ἀφροδίτας ἔρκεσιν θηρεύομεν, / ἢ εἰ τις ἄλλα θεόθεν ἀνθρώποισι τέρψις ἢ πόνων/ ἀμνοῦα πέφανται, / μετὰ σεῖο, μάκαιρ’ Υγίεια, / τέθαλε καὶ λάμπει Χαρίτων ἄροις· / σέθεν δὲ χωρίς οὔτις εὐδαίμων ἔφω.” In this respect, cp. ANAXANDRIDES, fr. 17, in: T. KOCK (ed.), *Comicorum atticorum fragmenta*, vol. 2, Leipzig, Teubner, 1884: “ὁ τὸ σκόλιον εὐρῶν ἐκεῖνος, ὅστις ἦν, / τὸ μὲν ὑγιαίνειν πρῶτον ὡς ἄριστον ὄν/ ὠνόμασεν ὀρθῶς, δεύτερον δ’ εἶναι καλόν, / τρίτον δὲ πλουτεῖν, τοῦθ’, ὀρᾶς, ἐμαίνετο· / μετὰ τὴν ὑγίειαν γὰρ τὸ πλουτεῖν διαφέρει· / καλὸς δὲ πεινῶν ἐστὶν αἰσχρὸν θηρίον.”

¹⁴⁷⁰ See the verses quoted above, in footnote 1462. For this idea of relativity, cp. e.g. EURIPIDES, *Andromacha*, 368f.: “εὖ δ’ ἴσθ’, ὅτου τις τυγχάνει χρεῖαν ἔχων, / τοῦτ’ ἔσθ’ ἐκάστωι μείζον ἢ Τροίαν ἐλεῖν.” Euripides does not use a superlative in this passage, but the comparative μείζον and that to which it is compared strongly suggest the idea of superlativeness.

¹⁴⁷¹ See, for instance, the above quoted verses of Tyrtaeus and Pindar.

A different problem raised by the passages we are considering results from the fact that different passages refer to different superlatives, and some of them even compare various superlatives.¹⁴⁷² But what is the meaning of this diversity? Does it express that there are different objects of desire? If so, are some of them more desirable than others? Or are these simply different aspects of the object we desire, which would then be the actual best? In sum, how are the different superlatives to be unified? This is not clear – but the lack of clarity is itself meaningful, since it mirrors our own relation to the superlative object of our desire, which, as we shall see, is marked precisely by confusion and lack of reflection.

One last thing we must consider is the fact that the discussion about the positive superlatives is complemented with a discussion about the negative superlatives, which tries to determine what is the worst thing of all, the most terrible, the most ugly, etc.¹⁴⁷³ This discussion is also full of controversy, and it contains the same components we saw above: it compares multiple evils, it identifies the worst, it may also outline a ranking, and the criterion used may be subjective or allegedly objective (and thus universally valid). This concern with the negative superlative or the superlatively bad thing is an expression of how human beings are vulnerable to many evils. There are many things we desire to avoid and it may even be the case that life is incompatible with our demand of a superlative (which means that there is at least the evil of not being able to reach what we want). In the final analysis, one may consider that the worst thing in life is having been born and the second worst to go on living. In this case, one will also consider that never being born is the best thing of all and dying as soon as possible is the second best thing.¹⁴⁷⁴

We can therefore see that the two forms of superlative, with their possible rankings, belong together and determine our entire life. Pre-Platonic thinking had already recognized it (even if in a vague manner) and this deeply influenced Plato. We even find a direct reference

¹⁴⁷² See e.g. THEOGNIS, *Elegiae*, 255-256: “Κάλλιστον τὸ δικαιοτάτον· λῶιστον δ’ ὑγιαίνειν· πρᾶγμα δὲ τερπνότατον, τοῦ τις ἐρᾷ, τὸ τυχεῖν.” The verses are quoted according to: D. YOUNG (ed.), *Theognis*, Leibzig, Teubner, 1961 (1971²). See also SOPHOCLES, fr. 356: “κάλλιστόν ἐστι τοῦνδικον πεφυκέναι·/ λῶστον δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἄνοσον· ἥδιστον δ’ ὄτω/ πάρεστι λῆψις ὧν ἐρᾷ καθ’ ἡμέραν.”

¹⁴⁷³ See e.g. THEOGNIS, *op. cit.*, 271-278: “ἴσως τοι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις/ γῆρας τ’ οὐλόμενον καὶ νεότητ’ ἔδοσαν·/ τῶν πάντων δὲ κάκιστον ἐν ἀνθρώποις – θανάτου τε/ καὶ πασέων νοῦσων ἐστὶ πονηρότατον –/ παῖδας ἐπεὶ θρέψαιο καὶ ἄρμενα πάντα παράσχοις,/ χρήματα δ’ ἐγκαταθήης πόλλ’ ἀνιερὰ παθῶν,/ τὸν πατέρ’ ἐχθαίρουσι, καταρῶνται δ’ ἀπολέσθαι,/ καὶ συγγέουσ’ ὥσπερ πτωχὸν ἐσερχόμενον.” See also HOMER, *Odyssey*, XII.341-342: “πάντες μὲν συγγεροὶ θάνατοι δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι,/ λιμῶ δ’ οἴκτιστον θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν.”

¹⁴⁷⁴ See *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, in: T. ALLEN (ed.), *Homeri opera*, vol. 5, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1912 (repr. 1961), 228: “(...) τί φέρτατόν ἐστι βροτοῖσιν;/ Ὅμηρος·/ ἀρχὴν μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον·/ φύντα δ’ ὅμως ὄκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.” See also THEOGNIS, *op. cit.*, 425-428: “πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον/ μὴδ’ ἐσιδεῖν ἀγὰς ὀξέος ἡελίου,/ φύντα δ’ ὅπως ὄκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι/ καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμησάμενον.” Cp. PLUTARCH, *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, 115b-d, in: F. BABITT (ed.), *op. cit.*

to these questions in *Gorgias*. In 451e, Socrates quotes part of a scolion that contains a priamel and goes as follows: “to enjoy good health is the best thing; second is to have turned out beautiful; and third (...) is to be honestly rich.”¹⁴⁷⁵ He then puts this in relation with the τέχναι that ensure each of these goods: namely, the τέχνη of the doctor, the physical trainer, and the financial expert.¹⁴⁷⁶ The goal is to define ῥητορική, which Gorgias had said was concerned with “the greatest and best of the human affairs”.¹⁴⁷⁷ The subsequent dialogue then discusses this question, and also the question of what is worst of all. Polus and Socrates present different (and even diametrically opposed) versions of what is best and what is worst. Polus praises the figure of Archelaus, who committed the greatest injustices without being punished for it, and he considers suffering injustices the worst thing. Socrates, in turn, praises a kind of Anti-Archelaus and defends that to commit injustices without being punished is the worst thing, whereas the best thing is to be just, regardless of whether or not one suffers injustices.¹⁴⁷⁸ This inversion, according to which what is best for Polus is the worst for Socrates, and vice versa, shows how the superlative good and the negative superlative are correlative and defined in function of the same basic principle.

The whole system of goods and evils is indeed based on the same principle, and it has at its center the superlative good we are directed at. This does not mean that we know exactly what corresponds to it. It is true that we normally experience the question as being already solved. But it is also possible to dissociate a particular identification from the formal position as such, thus rendering the superlative good wholly problematic. It may be the case that we are directed to a superlative that is solely formal and cannot be really identified with anything in particular (although we may deceive ourselves about it). But even in that case, the superlative is not something inert or irrelevant. It still contains a prescription and it pressures us to pursue the absolute best, thereby determining our relation with everything else. We may be mistaken about it or we may have to compromise, but we still desire the best. This is what was already alluded to in pre-Platonic reflections, and now we have to see in more detail the terms in which the question of the superlative good is posed in the Platonic corpus.

¹⁴⁷⁵ See 451e: “οἶομαι γάρ σε ἀκηκοέναι ἐν τοῖς συμποσίοις ἄδόντων ἀνθρώπων τοῦτο τὸ σκολιόν, ἐν ᾧ καθαριθμοῦνται ἄδοντες ὅτι ‘ὑγιαίνειν μὲν ἄριστόν’ ἐστίν, τὸ δὲ ‘δεύτερον καλὸν γενέσθαι, τρίτον δέ’, ὡς φησὶν ὁ ποιητὴς τοῦ σκολιοῦ, ‘τὸ πλουτεῖν ἀδόλως.’” The translation is based on D. Zeyl’s version (see *PCW*). Socrates omits the fourth verse of the scolion: “καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ἡβᾶν μετὰ τῶν φίλων.” For a brief discussion of the whole scolion and of this passage in particular, see E. DODDS (ed.), *Plato – Gorgias*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, ad 451e2.

¹⁴⁷⁶ See 452a-c.

¹⁴⁷⁷ See 451d: “[ΣΩ.] λέγε δὴ τῶν περὶ τί; τί ἐστὶ τοῦτο τῶν ὄντων, περὶ οὗ οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι εἰσὶν οἷς ἡ ῥητορική χρῆται; [ΓΟΡ.] τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων, ὃ Σώκρατες, καὶ ἄριστα.”

¹⁴⁷⁸ See 468e ff. For more on this, cp. the end of Sect. 4.3 below.

4.2. The desire of a superlative good in Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*

As was said, Plato's reflection about the real extension of the soul's desire and about the nature of the good it desires can be found in his analyses of romantic love or ἔρωσ.¹⁴⁷⁹ This deeply meaningful human experience reveals something essential about ourselves. Although our experience of it is rather sporadic, Plato argues that it is actually a variation of a permanent structure of our being. We are marked by a form of latent and transcendental ἔρωσ, as it were, which becomes more patent in the moment one falls in love with another human being. In other words, ἔρωσ is always present, but we fail to notice it because it is usually scattered by many objects. It is only when we fall in love that our constitutive desire becomes concentrated in one sole object, and this object then appears as everything we desire. This is why we can more easily notice our permanent desire at that moment.

Let us then see how Plato expresses this idea. We can divide Plato's consideration of ἔρωσ in two moments. Aristophanes' speech in *Symposium* presents the formal structure of our desire for a superlative good. This structure is then developed in Socrates' speech in *Symposium* and his second speech in *Phaedrus*. We will now consider the first moment and in the following subsection we will explore the second.

In order to better understand Aristophanes' speech, it is important to make a few remarks about its general context. What we find in *Symposium* is a collective exercise of praising ἔρωσ. Such an exercise has here an epideictic nature and is a sort of paradoxical praise. The characters are supposed to show their rhetoric prowess by praising something that can hardly be praised. It is precisely in these terms that Eryximachus outlines the task. He places ἔρωσ side by side with things that are difficult to praise.¹⁴⁸⁰ This may be strange for us, given the positive light in which romantic love is seen in contemporary culture. But in Greek

¹⁴⁷⁹ The term ἔρωσ actually has a broad meaning that includes any desire (such as hunger, curiosity, and so on), but it can also be used in a more restricted sense to designate sexual desire, physical attraction or even romantic love. In all its senses, ἔρωσ has a connotation of intensity, though romantic love is possibly the form of ἔρωσ that is most intensely felt. For this connotation of intensity, see PRODICUS, DK 7: “ἐπιθυμίαν μὲν διπλασιασθεῖσαν ἔρωτα εἶναι, ἔρωτα δὲ διπλασιασθέντα μανίαν γίνεσθαι.” The analyses we will now consider refer primarily to the restricted sense of ἔρωσ, though they also consider other forms of intense desire.

¹⁴⁸⁰ See 177b-c: “εἰ δὲ βούλει αὐτὸ σκέψασθαι τοὺς χρηστοὺς σοφιστάς, Ἡρακλέους μὲν καὶ ἄλλων ἐπαίνους καταλογάδην συγγράφειν, ὥσπερ ὁ βέλτιστος Πρόδικος – καὶ τοῦτο μὲν ἦττον καὶ θαυμαστόν, ἀλλ’ ἔγωγε ἤδη τινὶ ἐνέτυχον βιβλίῳ ἀνδρὸς σοφοῦ, ἐν ᾧ ἐνήσαν ἄλες ἔπαινον θαυμάσιον ἔχοντες πρὸς ὠφελίαν, καὶ ἄλλα τοιαῦτα συχνὰ ἴδοις ἂν ἐγκεκομιασμένα – τὸ οὖν τοιούτων μὲν περὶ πολλὴν σπουδὴν ποιήσασθαι, ἔρωτα δὲ μηδένα πῶ ἀνθρώπων τετολμηκέναι εἰς ταυτηνὴ τὴν ἡμέραν ἀξίως ὑμνήσαι (...).”

culture ἔρωσ had a bad reputation. It was seen as a disease or a form of madness.¹⁴⁸¹ It is something that robs us of lucidity (φρονεῖν), and, as a result, sets our life in disarray, makes us be remiss in our duties, makes us act against our interests, and renders us slaves of someone else. It is thus opposed to the ideal of the citizen.¹⁴⁸² But this is not all that renders the praise of ἔρωσ a particularly hard task. Given the aristocratic context in which the symposium takes place, the characters would naturally have in mind a particular modality of ἔρωσ – namely, παιδεραστία. This modality had itself a very bad reputation. It was associated with the moral and political decadence of the πόλις, and there was strong criticism of it.¹⁴⁸³ The different speeches must therefore face these tacit accusations, and Aristophanes’ speech is no exception. Like the others, he tries to rehabilitate ἔρωσ, and he does so by revealing something about it that people are normally not aware of.¹⁴⁸⁴

There is still one additional factor that increases the challenge the characters have to face. The sequence of speeches in the *Symposium* follows the model of δέχεσθαι τὸν σκολιόν, which means that each symposiast is expected to pick up elements of the previous speech and built on them, in order to surpass what came before. This determines the whole itinerary of the text. To put it very briefly, we begin with Phaedrus’ praise of pederastic ἔρωσ. Then Pausanias distinguishes two different forms of ἔρωσ and renders the question more complex. Eryximachus presents in turn a medical model that extends ἔρωσ to the whole of reality. Aristophanes, who adopts the medical tone of the previous speech, in a way inverts the tendency of expansion and restricts once more ἔρωσ to the human being. However, at the same time he expands the presence of ἔρωσ in us. Instead of regarding it as a sporadic phenomenon (as in Phaedrus’ and Pausanias’ speech), he describes it as a permanent feature of our being – and this is why his speech is relevant for our problem. We are considering the structure of human desire and Aristophanes describes erotic desire not just as one desire

¹⁴⁸¹ Cp. e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Antigona*, 790 and EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 38-40.

¹⁴⁸² This is precisely what we see in the first two speeches in *Phaedrus*, which give voice to these criticisms of ἔρωσ. For more on the bad reputation of ἔρωσ, see e.g. A. CARSON, *Eros the Bittersweet*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986; M. CYRINO, *In Pandora’s Jar*. Lovesickness in Early Greek Poetry, Lanham, University Press of America, 1995; F. SERRANITO, *Lovers and Madmen*. The μανία-φρονεῖν Opposition in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Diss. Univ. Nova de Lisboa, 2015, 131-144.

¹⁴⁸³ For more on παιδεραστία and its appraisal, see e.g. K. DOVER, *Greek Homosexuality*, London, Duckworth, 1978; F. BUFFIÈRE, *Éros adolescent*. La pédérastie dans la Grèce antique, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1980; W. PERCY, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, Urbana/Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1996; T. HUBBARD, Popular Perceptions of Elite Homosexuality in Classical Athens, *Arion* 6 (1998), 48-78; F. SERRANITO, *op. cit.*, 146-158.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Cp. 189c-d: “ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι παντάπασι τὴν τοῦ ἔρωτος δύναμιν οὐκ ἠσθῆσθαι, ἐπεὶ αἰσθανόμενοι γε μέγιστ’ ἂν αὐτοῦ ἱερὰ κατασκευάσαι καὶ βωμούς, καὶ θυσίας ἂν ποιεῖν μέγιστας, οὐχ ὥσπερ νῦν τούτων οὐδὲν γίγνεται περὶ αὐτόν, δέον πάντων μάλιστα γίγνεσθαι. ἔστι γὰρ θεῶν φιλοφροσύνη, ἐπικουρός τε ὢν τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἰατρός τούτων ὧν ἰαθέντων μέγιστη εὐδαιμονία ἂν τῷ ἀνθρωπείῳ γένοιτο εἶη. ἐγὼ οὖν πειράσομαι ὑμῖν εἰσηγήσασθαι τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ, ὑμεῖς δὲ τῶν ἄλλων διδάσκαλοι ἔσεσθε.”

among others, but as the fundamental human desire, on which everything else in our life depends. We will consider how it is so, but a full discussion of all points of Aristophanes' speech would take us too far afield, so we will restrict ourselves to the points that are more directly relevant for our problem.¹⁴⁸⁵

The first striking aspect of the speech is the fact that it tries to explain our present condition by referring it to a past condition or nature (ἡ πάλαι ἡμῶν φύσις) and what happened to it (τὰ παθήματα αὐτῆς).¹⁴⁸⁶ The purpose of the speech seems therefore to be serious, but at the same time the etiological account presented by Aristophanes is mythological in form and cannot be taken as a serious hypothesis about human pre-history. This may lead us to think that the text has no relevance whatsoever for our own self-understanding. However, it is not necessarily so. Although mythological, the terms in which the explanation of our condition is presented imply a certain description of what is to be explained, and this "etiological description" may show us something important about ourselves. This is why we must try to isolate this descriptive component.¹⁴⁸⁷

Let us then focus on the starting point of the explanation. The myth first describes human beings as they once were. This old condition, however, is not simply different from our present condition. It is a better condition and in fact our right or proper condition, as is expressed by the notion of ἀρχαία φύσις. In medical language, ἀρχαία φύσις does not properly mean "old condition", but rather the healthy state or natural condition, from which one may deviate (thus coming to a state that is παρὰ φύσιν) and which (at least in principle) can be restored.¹⁴⁸⁸ The new condition is thus a form of disease, whereas the old one corresponds to an ideal or utopian state (indeed, a kind of Golden Age) which was lost.¹⁴⁸⁹

But what are then the main features of the primitive human beings? What is our healthy state? In order to properly answer these questions, we must distinguish the mythical description from its actual meaning. The primitive human beings are described as the

¹⁴⁸⁵ For a much more complete analysis, which inspired much of what follows, see M. de CARVALHO, *Die Aristophanesrede in Platons Symposium*. Die Verfassung des Selbst, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2009.

¹⁴⁸⁶ See 189d: "δεῖ δὲ πρῶτον ὑμᾶς μαθεῖν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν καὶ τὰ παθήματα αὐτῆς. ἡ γὰρ πάλαι ἡμῶν φύσις οὐχ αὐτὴ ἦν ἢπερ νῦν, ἀλλ' ἄλλοια."

¹⁴⁸⁷ For a more exhaustive consideration of this question, cp. M. de CARVALHO, *op. cit.*, 24-28.

¹⁴⁸⁸ See e.g. K. LATTE (ed.), *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, vol. 1, Hauniae, Munksgaard, 1953, A7572: "ἀρχαία φύσις· ἡ πρὸ τοῦ νοσεῖν κατάστασις." For other uses of the expression in the corpus, see *Rep.* 611c-d and *Ti.* 90c-d. Cp. also *Grg.* 518c-d, for the closely related notion of ἀρχαῖαι σάρκες. For more on this notion, see M. de CARVALHO, *op. cit.*, 29ff., 501ff.

¹⁴⁸⁹ The presentation made by the Platonic Aristophanes is thus completely in keeping with the comic utopias we find in the works of the real Aristophanes. On the topic of comic utopias, see e.g. F. HEBERLEIN, *Pluthygieia*. Zur Gegenwelt bei Aristophanes, Frankfurt, Haag Herchen, 1980.

constitutive union of two human bodies. They have four arms, four legs, two faces, and so on. They are orbicular and this allows them to move faster than us, by circling around. They also have a field of vision of 360 degrees, which means they can see everything around them.¹⁴⁹⁰ These are very important traits, especially in the context of Ancient societies. Indeed, for a Greek these were immediately seen as characteristics of the ultimate warrior. The primitive humans could hold double the weapons, could pursue or escape their enemies much more easily, and could not be caught off guard. They seemed to possess a superlative form of power, swiftness and knowledge. Moreover, they had the elation or high spirits proper of someone who is always close to his or her beloved and thus completely fused with what one finds most fascinating. In other words, they were in a state of overabundance of being, marked by confidence, pride and exuberance. This is what led to their daring attempt to overtake the heaven and occupy the place of the gods.¹⁴⁹¹ Our original and healthy state (ἀρχαία φύσις) – or, as Plato says, our wholeness or intactness (τὸ ὅλον, 192e) – is therefore far from being a neutral state, as was suggested by the model of desire mentioned above.¹⁴⁹² Rather, it is a state of supreme vigor and self-affirmation. In other words, it follows the general structure of the priamel, and appears to be a kind of superlative combination of positive superlatives.¹⁴⁹³

However, their daring and insolent enterprise was thwarted and Zeus then needed to punish the primitive humankind for their crime (ἀδικία). Since he did not want to destroy humanity, he decided to cut each human being in twain. Such a measure would render them much weaker and much more restrained. Otherwise, they would be once again cut in two.¹⁴⁹⁴ Thus, human beings assumed their current form, which is deceiving. We seem to be a whole,

¹⁴⁹⁰ See 189e-190b.

¹⁴⁹¹ See 190b-c: “ἦν οὖν τὴν ἰσχὺν δεινὰ καὶ τὴν ῥώμην, καὶ τὰ φρονήματα μεγάλα εἶχον, ἐπεχείρησαν δὲ τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ ὁ λέγει Ὅμηρος περὶ Ἐφιάλτου τε καὶ Ὠττου, περὶ ἐκείνων λέγεται, τὸ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνάβασιν ἐπιχειρεῖν ποιεῖν, ὡς ἐπιθησομένων τοῖς θεοῖς.” This was indeed the expression of the highest possible insolence. These beings tried to fully bridge the gap between humans and gods. For this gap, see e.g. *Iliad* V.440-2: “φράζεο Τυδεΐδῃ καὶ χάζεο, μηδὲ θεοῖσιν/ ἴσ’ ἔθελε φρονέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐ ποτε φῶλον ὁμοῖον/ ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων τ’ ἀνθρώπων.”

¹⁴⁹² See the end of Sect. 3.3.

¹⁴⁹³ This goes against the already mentioned Greek idea that the gods do not grant everything to one human being. Cp. footnote 98 above.

¹⁴⁹⁴ See 190c-d: “ὁ οὖν Ζεὺς καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι θεοὶ ἐβουλεύοντο ὅτι χρὴ αὐτοὺς ποιῆσαι, καὶ ἠπόρουν· οὔτε γὰρ ὅπως ἀποκτείναιεν εἶχον καὶ ὥσπερ τοὺς γίγαντας κεραυνώσαντες τὸ γένος ἀφανίσαιεν – αἱ τιμαὶ γὰρ αὐτοῖς καὶ ἱερὰ τὰ παρὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἠφανίζετο – οὔτε ὅπως ἐφῶν ἀσελγαίνειν. μόγις δὲ ὁ Ζεὺς ἐννοήσας λέγει ὅτι ‘δοκῶ μοι,’ ἔφη, ‘ἔχειν μηχανήν, ὡς ἂν εἶέν τε ἄνθρωποι καὶ παύσαιτο τῆς ἀκολασίας ἀσθενέστεροι γενόμενοι. νῦν μὲν γὰρ αὐτούς, ἔφη, διατεμῶ δίχα ἕκαστον, καὶ ἅμα μὲν ἀσθενέστεροι ἔσονται, ἅμα δὲ χρησιμώτεροι ἡμῖν διὰ τὸ πλείους τὸν ἀριθμὸν γεγονέναι· καὶ βαδιοῦνται ὀρθοὶ ἐπὶ δυοῖν σκελοῖν. ἐὰν δ’ ἔτι δοκῶσιν ἀσελγαίνειν καὶ μὴ ‘θέλῶσιν ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν, πάλιν αὖ, ἔφη, τεμῶ δίχα, ὥστ’ ἐφ’ ἐνὸς πορεύσονται σκέλους ἀσκολιάζοντες.’” This possibility of a new cut actually lets us imagine how it was for the primitive humans to be cut in twain. It carried with it a loss similar to the one we would experience if we were to be cut in two.

but we are in fact only half of a real human being. In other words, what we call human beings is actually a fractured, broken being – or as Aristophanes says, a shard or a tally of a human being (ἀνθρώπου σύμβολον).¹⁴⁹⁵

However, this does not mean that the new beings automatically forgot their previous condition. In fact, Zeus ordered Apollo to twist around the faces of the divided human beings, so that they would always contemplate the cut and what they lacked.¹⁴⁹⁶ This became a permanent sight for them and the backdrop against which everything else appeared. Life was now a contemplation of what was lost, and everything appeared in the place of what is missing, being thus compared to it and called to fill its void. This means that, despite being cut in two, the identity of these beings remained the same. They still saw themselves as what they were (i.e., as the superlative being), and their present state was just a fragment (σύμβολον) of their actual self. In other words, the totality of their being did not coincide with their actual boundaries, but was located outside of them, and hence they permanently desired and pursued it.

This desire and pursuit (which Aristophanes describes as a τοῦ ὅλου ἐπιθυμία καὶ διώξις) will henceforth be a permanent feature of these beings.¹⁴⁹⁷ But their state will still undergo further variations. Immediately after the cut, they longed for their lost being and embraced their other half, desperately trying to grow back together. But they were unable to assimilate each other. They could only contemplate their loss. This left them paralyzed (in a state of ἀργία) and unable to fight for their survival. They could not turn their attention to anything else and, consequently, they started dying of hunger.¹⁴⁹⁸ This meant that human beings now had to face a new problem. Many of them had lost their corresponding halves, and they had thus reached the height of loss and helplessness. They were now completely alone (in a state of double emptiness, as it were), and since they could not accept their present condition, they started search for someone that could act as a substitute or surrogate half.¹⁴⁹⁹ But it was not the same thing.

¹⁴⁹⁵ See 191d: “ἕκαστος οὖν ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπου σύμβολον, ἅτε τετμημένος ὡσπερ αἱ ψῆτται, ἐξ ἑνὸς δύο· ζητεῖ δὴ αἰεὶ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἕκαστος σύμβολον.”

¹⁴⁹⁶ See 190e: “(...) ὄντινα δὲ τέμνοι, τὸν Ἀπόλλω ἐκέλευεν τὸ τε πρόσωπον μεταστρέφειν καὶ τὸ τοῦ αὐχένος ἥμισυ πρὸς τὴν τομῆν, ἵνα θεώμενος τὴν αὐτοῦ τμησὶν κοσμιώτερος εἴη ὁ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ τᾶλλα ἰᾶσθαι ἐκέλευεν.”

¹⁴⁹⁷ See 192e-193a: “(...) τοῦ ὅλου οὖν τῆ ἐπιθυμίας καὶ διώξεως ἔρωσ ὄνομα.”

¹⁴⁹⁸ See 191a-b: “ἐπειδὴ οὖν ἡ φύσις δίχα ἐτμήθη, ποθοῦν ἕκαστον τὸ ἥμισυ τὸ αὐτοῦ συνήει, καὶ περιβάλλοντες τὰς χεῖρας καὶ συμπλεκόμενοι ἀλλήλοις, ἐπιθυμοῦντες συμφῶναι, ἀπέθνησκον ὑπὸ λιμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἄλλης ἀργίας διὰ τὸ μηδὲν ἐθέλειν χωρὶς ἀλλήλων ποιεῖν.”

¹⁴⁹⁹ See 191b: “καὶ ὅποτε τι ἀποθάνοι τῶν ἡμίσεων, τὸ δὲ λειφθεῖν, τὸ λειφθὲν ἄλλο ἐζήτει καὶ συνεπλέκετο (...).”

Humanity's punishment was therefore devastating – so much so that, in seeing it, Zeus pitied us and tried to mitigate the effects of what he had done. This mitigation is essential to define our present condition, which is actually a combination of the original loss and its mitigation. But it is important to bear in mind that the countermeasures did not aim at altogether removing the evil brought about by splitting apart each human being. They are palliative measures and only give some relief from the suffering in question. What were these measures, then?

Aristophanes mentions that Zeus created the possibility of sexual relations, which could bring about a certain satisfaction (πλησμονή) of the soul's longing and allowed human beings to turn to their works.¹⁵⁰⁰ But this is just one factor of mitigation, and the myth presupposes another, which is not expressly mentioned, but is even more decisive. Humanity's suffering is mostly relieved by the passing of time and the ensuing forgetfulness. After a while, the half-humans forgot their other halves, they forgot that they were merely σύμβολα, and started identifying themselves with the beings that they currently were. This is why Aristophanes presents himself as a kind of prophet that is revealing a hidden truth about ourselves. We forgot who we are and what happened to us. But this does not mean that we stopped being who we were. Our essence did not change. We are still deeply determined by our past history, with which we now have a very hazy relation. At the surface, everything may appear to be well and we may experience a superficial health. Yet, at the heart of our being, we are still half of what we are. We are still connected to the ὅλον we once were. We forgot what we are pursuing, but we keep longing for it. Therefore, any apparent wellness is no more than a “beauty festering with evils” (a κάλλος κακῶν ὑπουλον), to use Sophocles' phrase once more.¹⁵⁰¹ We still do not have what we desire, and – if anything – our situation has become more precarious and indeterminate, because now we do not know what we are searching for and we do not know whether it exists or not – i.e., whether there is a corresponding half for us or not. We may never have met them or they may not exist altogether. But still there is a latent longing for them, and as a result the persons we meet – and in a way also all other things that appear to us – are tacitly compared to our vague

¹⁵⁰⁰ See 191b-c: “ἐλεήσας δὲ ὁ Ζεὺς ἄλλην μηχανὴν πορίζεται, καὶ μετατίθησιν αὐτῶν τὰ αἰδοῖα εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν – τῶς γὰρ καὶ ταῦτα ἐκτὸς εἶχον, καὶ ἐγέννων καὶ ἔτικτον οὐκ εἰς ἀλλήλους ἀλλ’ εἰς γῆν, ὥσπερ οἱ τέττιγες – μετέθηκέ τε οὖν οὕτω αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν καὶ διὰ τούτων τὴν γένεσιν ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἐποίησεν, διὰ τοῦ ἄρρενος ἐν τῷ θήλει, τῶνδε ἕνεκα, ἵνα ἐν τῇ συμπλοκῇ ἅμα μὲν εἰ ἀνὴρ γυναικὶ ἐντύχοι, γεννῶεν καὶ γίγνοιτο τὸ γένος, ἅμα δ’ εἰ καὶ ἄρρην ἄρρени, πλησμονὴ γοῦν γίγνοιτο τῆς συνουσίας καὶ διαπαύοιντο καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τρέποιντο καὶ τοῦ ἄλλου βίου ἐπιμελοῖντο.”

¹⁵⁰¹ See *Oedipus Tyrannus*, v. 1396.

notion of our corresponding half, in order to see if they can somehow fill the hole within us (even if only as substitutes or makeshifts of our actual half).

Now, when we meet someone that seems to satisfy this latent longing, we are overpowered by feelings of familiarity, belonging and love. We intensively gaze at this person, and refuse to be separated from him or her.¹⁵⁰² This is precisely what romantic love consists in. The beloved seems to surpass all other beings and makes us forget of everything else. Falling in love is thus the feeling of discovering (and coming closer to) what we have longed for all along. It is a first taste and a promise of the superlative state that characterized the primitive human beings. But according to Aristophanes, we do not necessarily understand what is happening to us. Indeed, if we are asked about what we really expect from the beloved, it would not be easy for us to explain.¹⁵⁰³ This does not mean we have no notion of what we want. As Aristophanes says, we sort of divine or have an enigmatic representation of what we desire.¹⁵⁰⁴ This is why the lovers, in the *Gedankenexperiment* presented by Aristophanes, can understand and accept Hephaestus' proposed answer. What they want is to be fused or melted into one and spend as much time as possible in this state – more precisely, the whole life and even after dying.¹⁵⁰⁵ They want to incorporate the beloved, whom they regard as the quintessence of beauty, into themselves. They want to become a superlative being or achieve the superlative state of yore. This is what they desire now and what they always desired. In other words, we are always marked by a permanent or primordial ἔρωσ, which corresponds precisely to the desire and pursuit of the whole (τοῦ ὅλου ἐπιθυμία καὶ δίωξις). We are always desiring and pursuing the superlative condition we lost and romantic love is only one possible manifestation of this constitutive desire and pursuit.

In effect, our permanent ἔρωσ allows for several different manifestations, of which romantic love (the form of ἔρωσ we most immediately recognize) is just one. But Aristophanes also mentions non-passionate forms of erotic desire, such as the ones that

¹⁵⁰² See 192b-c: “ὅταν μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ ἐντύχη τῷ αὐτοῦ ἡμίσει καὶ ὁ παιδευραστής καὶ ἄλλος πᾶς, τότε καὶ θαυμαστὰ ἐκπλήττονται φιλία τε καὶ οἰκειότητι καὶ ἔρωτι, οὐκ ἐθέλοντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλήλων οὐδὲ σμικρὸν χρόνον.”

¹⁵⁰³ See 192c: “καὶ οἱ διατελοῦντες μετ’ ἀλλήλων διὰ βίου οὗτοί εἰσιν, οἳ οὐδ’ ἂν ἔχοιεν εἰπεῖν ὅτι βούλονται σφίσι παρ’ ἀλλήλων γίνεσθαι.”

¹⁵⁰⁴ In 192d Aristophanes says precisely that the ψυχή “μαντεύεται ὁ βούλεται, καὶ αἰνίττεται.”

¹⁵⁰⁵ See 192d-e: “καὶ εἰ αὐτοῖς ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ κατακειμένοις ἐπιστάς ὁ Ἥφαιστος, ἔχων τὰ ὄργανα, ἔροιτο· ‘τί ἔσθ’ ὁ βούλεσθε, ὃ ἄνθρωποι, ὑμῖν παρ’ ἀλλήλων γενέσθαι;’ καὶ εἰ ἀποροῦντας αὐτοὺς πάλιν ἔροιτο· ‘ἄρα γε τοῦδε ἐπιθυμεῖτε, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γενέσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα ἀλλήλοις, ὥστε καὶ νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι ἀλλήλων; εἰ γὰρ τούτου ἐπιθυμεῖτε, θέλω ὑμᾶς συντῆξαι καὶ συμφυσεῖσθαι εἰς τὸ αὐτό, ὥστε δύο ὄντας ἕνα γεγονέναι καὶ ἕως τ’ ἂν ζῆτε, ὡς ἕνα ὄντα, κοινῇ ἀμφοτέρους ζῆν, καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἀποθάνητε, ἐκεῖ αὖ ἐν Ἄιδου ἀντί δυοῖν ἕνα εἶναι κοινῇ τεθνεώτε· ἀλλ’ ὁρᾶτε εἰ τούτου ἐράτε καὶ ἐξαρκεῖ ὑμῖν ἂν τούτου τύχητε;’ ταῦτ’ ἀκούσας ἴσμεν ὅτι οὐδ’ ἂν εἰς ἐξαρνηθεῖν οὐδ’ ἄλλο τι ἂν φανείη βουλόμενος, ἀλλ’ ἀτεχνῶς οἰοῖτ’ ἂν ἀκηκοέναι τοῦτο ὁ πάλοι ἄρα ἐπεθύμει, συνελθὼν καὶ συντακείς τῷ ἐρωμένῳ ἐκ δυοῖν εἰς γενέσθαι.”

characterize φιλογύναικες, μοιχοί, φιλανδροί, μοιχεύτριαι, έταιρίστριαι.¹⁵⁰⁶ These may seem to be entirely unconnected with the desire and pursuit of the whole, but they are just another expression of our broken being – one which, instead of concentrating our desire on just one person (who is then seen as unsurpassable), tries to collect many objects of desire in order to attain, through their combination, the wholeness we all pursue.¹⁵⁰⁷ This is indeed a very important possibility allowed by the structure of our life and desire. We may try to achieve the good by combining different things.

But this is not all. Though Aristophanes does not mention it, the pursuit of this superlative may assume yet other forms. It may be directed to things other than persons – such as possessions, pleasure in general, honor, or knowledge.¹⁵⁰⁸ It may also combine several of these things. Moreover, it is also possible for us (as we will see in the following) to accept something we take to be less than superlatively good, in case we cannot find or attain what we truly desire. We may pursue the second or third best thing – i.e., some substitute or makeshift which we will abandon as soon as something better comes along. If nothing better comes along and we lose hope of it ever coming, we may then be faced with the question of whether we still accept to live or not.¹⁵⁰⁹ In sum, the model presented by Aristophanes accounts for all possible configurations of human life. There is a permanent desire that can be channeled in many different ways – although we usually only notice it when it is embodied in someone or in some particular thing. Otherwise, such a desire seems dormant or absent, although it is still moving us at every moment and shaping our whole life. We are always pursuing the superlative good and, therefore, there is actually no increase in desire during our life – not even when we fall in love. There is only concentration of our permanent desire in one thing, which makes us more aware of our own desire.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Cp. 191d-e: “ὅσοι μὲν οὖν τῶν ἀνδρῶν τοῦ κοινοῦ τμημά εἰσιν, ὃ δὴ τότε ἀνδρόγυνον ἐκαλεῖτο, φιλογύναικές τε εἰσι καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν μοιχῶν ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γένους γεγόνασιν, καὶ ὅσοι αὖ γυναικὲς φίλανδροί τε καὶ μοιχεύτριαι ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γένους γίνονται. ὅσοι δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν γυναικὸς τμημά εἰσιν, οὐ πάνυ αὐταὶ τοῖς ἀνδράσι τὸν νοῦν προσέχουσιν, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰς γυναικὰς τετραμμέναι εἰσὶ, καὶ αἱ ἑταιρίστριαι ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γένους γίνονται.” For more on these forms of erotic desire, see e.g. R. BURY, *The Symposium of Plato*, Cambridge, Heffer, 1909, *ad loc.*

¹⁵⁰⁷ In short, the difference between romantic love and the non-passionate forms of erotic desire corresponds to the difference between Romeo and Don Juan. In a way, both are in love, but the direction of their erotic drive is different. One has only one object of love, the other combines hundreds of objects of desire and regards such combination as the good.

¹⁵⁰⁸ For descriptions of a superlative desire directed at other things, see e.g. *Alc. I* 105a ff. (where Socrates describes Alcibiades’ desire and hope of becoming universally famous), *Grg.* 483c ff. (where Callicles describes strong men, who are characterized by an unsatiable *πλεονεξία*), and *Rep.* 474c ff. (where different forms of *φιλία*, and especially *φιλοσοφία*, are described as a desire for all possible objects of a field). For more on the latter passage, cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 2.4 and Chap. 13 Sect. 3.

¹⁵⁰⁹ For more on these possibilities, cp. Sect. 5.3 below.

What is then the real object of our love? What are we really pursuing? What can satisfy our desire? The goods we normally attain are far from fully satisfying us. Even our greatest desires tend to be insufficient once fulfilled. We desire more. But we do not simply desire to overcome what we have and achieve a better state. Our desire is already directed at the highest possible good – i.e., to something that would fully satisfy us or something about which we could say Faust’s famous words: “Verweile doch! du bist so schön”.¹⁵¹⁰ It is, however, very difficult to conceive what might correspond to such a thing, or how we would experience it.¹⁵¹¹ It is even difficult to determine if there really is an object that could fulfill our desire. It may well be a mirage, a vain dream, a *fata morgana*, and we may be condemned to eternal frustration.¹⁵¹² If that is the case, then what Aristophanes describes is a kind of φύσις that is constitutively sick or inviable. Human life would consist in nothing more than a way of constantly attending to our constitutive disease, without any prospect of a cure. We would all be like Herodicus, who according to the *Republic* spent his entire life taking care of his disease (νοσοτροφία) and thus did nothing more than render his death long (μακρὸς θάνατος)¹⁵¹³

In Aristophanes’ speech, erotic love may seem to be the solution and the cure to our constitutive disease. It would make us whole again. But is it really so? Aristophanes initially presents it as a form of temporary satisfaction.¹⁵¹⁴ Later, he admits the possibility of wanting to spend our life with someone, but it is not clear how one’s feelings would develop with time. How can anyone ever fully satisfy our desire, how can anyone be seen as a superlative being and continue being seen as such? Aristophanes’ solution to our desire is problematic and places an extraordinary demand on one’s beloved – a demand that probably no one would be able to live up to. Aristophanes’ words do not help much. He talks of great hopes of being healed and thus becoming blessed and happy – but it is not clear how this happens and

¹⁵¹⁰ See W. GOETHE, *Werke*, vol. 14, Weimar, Böhlau, 1887, vv. 1699-1702: “Werd’ ich zum Augenblicke sagen:/ Verweile doch! du bist so schön!/ Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,/ Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn!”

¹⁵¹¹ For instance, would it be something as a static superlative (a kind of *repos*, to use Pascal’s expression) or would it have to be a dynamic superlative? Our temporal nature seems to require a renewal of our experience of the superlative good, but would we need it to increase permanently, in order not to be bored? It is difficult to say, especially because such a thing would be very different from what we normally experience. On the notion of *repos*, see B. PASCAL, *Pensées*, edited by M. Le Guern, Gallimard, Paris, 1977, fragments 126 (=Br. 139, Laf. 136, T. A. 134), 386 (=Br. 465, Laf. 407, T. A. 407), and 529 (=Br. 131 Laf. 622 T. A. 672).

¹⁵¹² It may indeed happen that there is no such a thing. It may even be a self-contradictory idea.

¹⁵¹³ See 406a ff. (especially 406b and 407b).

¹⁵¹⁴ See once more 191c.

whether or not it requires some kind of divine help.¹⁵¹⁵ What seems clear, though, is that falling in love awakens in us the awareness of what we really desire – but this may also mean that it prepares us to be more aware of how we probably cannot fulfill this desire and are condemned to disappointment and frustration.

Be that as it may, Aristophanes provides us a description of ἔρωσ and of our present condition. According to him, we are constitutively dissatisfied with our present state, whether we are aware of it or not. Our desire surpasses what we have and is directed at the wholeness or super-health metaphorically represented by the orbicular beings. We always have some memory or premonition (however vague) of it, and that is why we have (whether we clearly realize it or not) an oversized or overdimensioned being, and are unable to be satisfied with our actual boundaries. We always view them as an intolerable contraction or prison, we always surpass them, and we always aim at more. In other words, there is a disproportion between our present contracted form and the expanded form we see as our own (or, as we could also say, between our actual and our desired being). The self is insufficient for itself, because it is affected by this disease of wanting more, and as such it requires a cure, a restoration of its healthy state. The self is a task or a project of itself. It pursues itself, and this means it pursues a superior form of itself – i.e., a super-self or a whole self. This whole self is not achieved by improving our condition a little. The self we desire is a superlative self. It implies the maximized form of ourselves.

Our self is thus marked at its core by a desire for what belongs to us or what is our own (τὸ οἰκεῖον), but this οἰκεῖον is not just a physiological part of us, as appears in Aristophanes' myth. As Socrates underscores later in *Symposium*, what we desire is the good – and so we must say that what is proper to us or belongs to, what we are always directed to, is the superlative good.¹⁵¹⁶ We want to achieve the best thing of all, we want to incorporate it in ourselves, we want to be fused with it, in order to expand our own self. The search for the self is thus a search for the superlative good, and this is what makes us dissatisfied with everything that falls short of it.

¹⁵¹⁵ See 193c-d: “οὐδὲν δὴ τὸν αἴτιον θεὸν ὑμνοῦντες δικαίως ἂν ὑμνοῖμεν ἔρωτα, ὃς ἐν τε τῷ παρόντι ἡμᾶς πλεῖστα ὀνήνησιν εἰς τὸ οἰκεῖον ἄγων, καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔπειτα ἐλπίδας μεγίστας παρέχεται, ἡμῶν παρεχομένων πρὸς θεοὺς εὐσέβειαν, καταστήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν καὶ ἰασάμενος μακαρίους καὶ εὐδαιμόνας ποιῆσαι.”

¹⁵¹⁶ See 205d-206a: “καὶ λέγεται μὲν γέ τις, ἔφη, λόγος, ὡς οἱ ἂν τὸ ἡμισυ ἑαυτῶν ζητῶσιν, οὗτοι ἐρῶσιν· ὁ δ' ἐμὸς λόγος οὔτε ἡμίσεός φησιν εἶναι τὸν ἔρωτα οὔτε ὄλου, εἰ μὴ τυγχάνη γέ που, ὃ ἑταῖρε, ἀγαθὸν ὄν, ἐπεὶ αὐτῶν γε καὶ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ἐθέλουσιν ἀποτέμεσθαι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, εἰ μὴ αὐτοῖς δοκῇ τὰ ἑαυτῶν πονηρὰ εἶναι. οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἑαυτῶν οἶμαι ἕκαστοι ἀσπάζονται, εἰ μὴ εἴ τις τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν οἰκεῖον καλεῖ καὶ ἑαυτοῦ, τὸ δὲ κακὸν ἀλλότριον· ὡς οὐδὲν γε ἄλλο ἐστὶν οὐδ' ἐρῶσιν ἄνθρωποι ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.”

Such a description has a formal character, though, and it corresponds to the way we normally experience this desire for the superlative. At first, we are not aware of what exactly we desire. It is a certain *nescio quid*, and we may come to identify this object of desire with many different things – not only different persons, but even different occupations or things in general. However, the primarily formal and open character of the superlative good does not mean that absolutely anything can occupy its place. Our desire requires something to appear as the absolute best and as what absolutely fulfils our being – and this requirement is enough to disqualify most things, though some pretty strange identifications may still occur. When seen from a distance (i.e., before we come to possess or experience them), non-superlative things may appear to us wrapped in an aura of superlativeness. But in general they are sooner or later unmasked as something that falls drastically short of what we need. It is indeed difficult to know what exactly may correspond to this formal desire and we may make many mistakes about it.

All this analysis lets us define with more precision what was said above about our intermediate nature. In particular, we can now better define the positive pole towards which we are always striving. We are always on route to the superlative, trying to achieve it, and this means that all good states that fall short of it are still bad. The tension and restlessness at the heart of our being is thus much greater than it seemed at first. It is not simply directed to a good condition (εὐεξία), and it cannot be explained as a removal of bad things (as a removal of some kind of sickness). It is rather the pursuit of a maximization of ourselves. The relation to the optimum is primordial and all particular desires (which may inclusively be desires of removing bad things from us) are derived from and subordinate to it. The superlative good is the first beloved which is left undetermined in *Lysis*.¹⁵¹⁷ We are always related to it and defined by this relation – and this in turn pervades our whole experience and everything we come in contact with. We are restless because we are related or directed to the superlative, even if we are normally not expressly aware of this fact. Explicit awareness is not required for our desire of a superlative good to direct all our steps and determine how everything appears to us. Such a desire is always at the core of our ψυχή, it underpins our whole life, and all differences in the way we live are only differences in how we relate to this desire of a superlative good.

¹⁵¹⁷ Cp. 219c-220b.

4.3. The inner complexity of the superlative good. The desire for a superlative combination of superlatives in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*

We saw in Section 3 how our desires are all directed to the good. We want to possess it and be happy. Now we established that all our desires are in fact variations of a single desire for a superlative good. Whether or not we are able to determine what the superlative good is (i.e., which particular being or set of beings corresponds to it), we are always pressured to pursue more, and in fact to pursue the best. This is the essential trait of our desire. But this is not all that Plato has to say about the formal structure of our desire and of its object. Plato presents other formal traits of our desire and its object, which reveal their complexity and are thus important to better define them. This complexity has already been suggested before. We saw that Greek poetry talked of several different superlatives, and Aristophanes' mythological representation of the superlative also consisted in several different predicates. Now, we will see how Plato determines the complexity of ἔρωσ and its object in Socrates' speech in *Symposium* and in Socrates' second speech in *Phaedrus*. In both passages the object of ἔρωσ is defined not simply as a superlative good, but rather as a superlative combination of superlatives, and we have to see what is implied therein.

Let us begin with Socrates' speech in *Symposium*. We already discussed some of its most essential aspects.¹⁵¹⁸ We saw, for instance, how the beginning of the speech is determined by Agathon's speech – and this is once more relevant for what we will now consider. Agathon's speech gives voice to the way lovers see their beloved. He identifies ἔρωσ with the beloved, and then superlatively praises the superlative beauty and all the other superlative predicates (both physical and moral) of the beloved.¹⁵¹⁹ In this sense, ἔρωσ is described as a superlative combination of all superlatives.¹⁵²⁰ Now, Socrates will adopt precisely this idea, but with some important modifications. As we already saw, Socrates

¹⁵¹⁸ See Sect. 3.3 above.

¹⁵¹⁹ This identification of ἔρωσ is actually in keeping with the use of the word ἔρωσ in Archaic Greek to designate not the love or desire one feels for something, but rather an objective (and in many cases divine) power that invades and subjugates us. This idea of ἔρωσ as an invading force can also be found in the fantastic etymology of ἔρωσ in *Cra.* 420a-b: “ἔρωσ δέ, ὅτι εἰσρεῖ ἔξωθεν καὶ οὐκ οἰκεία ἐστὶν ἢ ῥοή αὐτῆ τῷ ἔχοντι ἀλλ' ἐπείσακτος διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων, διὰ ταῦτα ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐσρεῖν ἔσρος τὸ γε παλαιὸν ἐκαλεῖτο – τῷ γὰρ οὐ ἀντὶ τοῦ ὄ ἐχρώμεθα – νῦν δ' ἔρωσ κέκληται διὰ τὴν τοῦ ὄ ἀντὶ τοῦ οὐ μεταλλαγὴν.”

¹⁵²⁰ Agathon says indeed that the god Ἔρωσ is the happiest, the most beautiful and the best (195a). He then explains its beauty by saying that he is young (in fact the youngest), most delicate (ἀπαλώτατος), fluid or supple in form (ὕγρὸς τὸ εἶδος), superlatively graceful (ἢ εὐσχημοσύνη, ὃ δὴ διαφερόντως ἐκ πάντων ὀμολογουμένως Ἔρωσ ἔχει), and has a beautiful complexion (χρῶας δὲ κάλλος ἢ κατ' ἄνθη). See 195a-196b. Finally, Ἔρωσ is also most excellent, insofar as it does not commit or suffer any injustice, it does not force anyone or anything, it is superlatively sound-minded or moderate (σωφροσύνης πλείστης μετέχει), most courageous, wisest, and the best guide. See 196b-197e.

focuses on the fact that ἔρωξ is primarily desire of what one lacks and has therefore an intermediate (μεταξύ) character. It lies between two poles: namely, between what it desires and the opposite of that.¹⁵²¹ But when we considered the question before, we mostly treated this intermediate character as if it were simple – i.e., as if the ἔρωξ that is at the core of our being was just related to two poles: badness and goodness. However, Socrates’ description identifies several forms of intermediacy, between several different sets of poles. He talks of intermediates between what is good and bad, between what is “beautiful” and “ugly”, between what is mortal and what is immortal, and between what is ignorant and what is wise.¹⁵²² This means that ἔρωξ is directed to different things (or to different respects of the same thing) and is in fact a blending of different pursuits or of different forms of “inbetweenness”. Each of them is directed at a superlative and all together they aim at a superlative combination of superlatives, which is thus the actual object of ἔρωξ.

But let us see this in more detail. The intermediacy between the bad and the good (which is in fact between what is worst and what is best) is one of the those identified by Socrates in this passage. It also plays an important role in *Lysis*, and we can better understand it if we consider what is said there. According to the text, we cannot be entirely bad, otherwise we would have no relation to the good. Likewise, we cannot be entirely good, or else there would be no desire or pursuit of it.¹⁵²³ We would simply be good. Thus, if we are to desire something, we must lie between the two extremities and be essentially characterized by both of them, without having any pure contact with one or the other. This is what we saw before. Now we must consider how this intermediacy relates to the others identified by Socrates.

An essential intermediacy (determined precisely by the theme in question: romantic love) is the intermediacy between what is αἰσχρόν and what is καλόν (or, as is implied, between τὸ αἰσχιστόν and τὸ κάλλιστόν).¹⁵²⁴ These terms are notoriously difficult to translate. In general, they qualify something as abject or admirable, and they have esthetic and moral connotations. According to the context, “καλός” can then mean “beautiful”, “fine”,

¹⁵²¹ See in particular 202b: “μὴ τοίνυν ἀνάγκαζε ὁ μὴ καλόν ἐστὶν αἰσχρόν εἶναι, μηδὲ ὁ μὴ ἀγαθόν, κακόν. οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸν ἔρωτα ἐπειδὴ αὐτὸς ὁμολογεῖς μὴ εἶναι ἀγαθόν μηδὲ καλόν, μηδὲν τι μᾶλλον οἴου δεῖν αὐτὸν αἰσχρόν καὶ κακόν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τι μεταξύ, ἔφη, τούτοις.”

¹⁵²² In Greek: μεταξύ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ, μεταξύ καλοῦ καὶ αἰσχροῦ, μεταξύ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου (202d), μεταξύ σοφοῦ καὶ ἀμαθοῦς (204b).

¹⁵²³ Cp. 217e-218a: “καὶ τὸ μῆτε κακόν ἄρα μῆτ’ ἀγαθόν ἐνίοτε κακοῦ παρόντος οὕτω κακόν ἐστὶν, ἔστιν δ’ ὅτε ἤδη τὸ τοιοῦτον γέγονεν. πάνυ γε. οὐκοῦν ὅταν μῆπω κακόν ἢ κακοῦ παρόντος, αὕτη μὲν ἢ παρουσία ἀγαθοῦ αὐτὸ ποιεῖ ἐπιθυμῆν· ἢ δὲ κακόν ποιῶσα ἀποστερεῖ αὐτὸ τῆς τε ἐπιθυμίας ἅμα καὶ τῆς φιλίας τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. οὐ γὰρ ἔτι ἐστὶν οὔτε κακόν οὔτε ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ κακόν· φίλον δὲ ἀγαθῷ κακόν οὐκ ἦν. οὐ γὰρ οὖν.”

¹⁵²⁴ See the above mentioned passage in 202b.

“noble”, whereas “αἰσχρὸς” may mean “ugly”, “base” or “shameful”.¹⁵²⁵ In the context in question, though, the adjective “καλός” refers primarily to the beauty or resplendence of the beloved, which renders him or her absolutely enticing and fascinating. However, the predicate καλόν is not restricted to romantic love, and it can qualify any object of ἔρωσ in a broader sense. Plato himself mentions the “beauty” of activities, laws or knowledge.¹⁵²⁶ These different forms of “beauty” vary in degree of knowledge and reality, and Plato in fact presents a scale of different forms of “beauty” (the so-called *scala amoris*) in *Symposium*, which is also a scale of different ways of recognizing τὸ κάλλιστον. At the basis of the scale, one recognizes the beauty of particular body, and its top one recognizes τὸ καλόν itself, whose contemplation is described as the highest form of fulfillment.¹⁵²⁷ But regardless of the different kinds of “beauty”, the important thing is that we are always directed to it – and in fact to the highest form of it. Thus, the connection of our desire with τὸ καλόν renders more explicit how we do not just want something that is good, but also something that is maximally radiant and fascinating. This becomes clear in *Symposium* and even more in *Phaedrus*, as we shall see.

This twofold goal then raises the question of how they relate to one another. In fact, the terms are often associated and in some cases they may even be used alternatively. This points to a very close relation between them, but Plato does not say anything very clear about it. At some points (including Socrates’ speech in *Symposium*), Plato seems to understand them as direct equivalents and as interchangeable.¹⁵²⁸ It is as if they were two ways of looking at the same thing, even if they perhaps emphasize different aspects of it. Indeed, ἀγαθόν has a functional sense, as we saw, and καλόν expresses the fact that something is admirable and thus affects us in a particular way. But it is not clear that all that is admirable is good and vice versa. These terms are complex, and sometimes they do not coincide.¹⁵²⁹

¹⁵²⁵ For more on these terms (and especially καλός), see e.g. M. HOFFMANN, *Die ethische Terminologie bei Homer, Hesiod und den altern Elegikern und Jambographen*, Tübingen, Kloeres, 1914, 48 f., 113, 124, 131, 144-145; G. BERTRAM, καλός, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; C. CLASSEN, *Sprachliche Deutung als Triebkraft platonischen und sokratischen Philosophierens*, München, Beck, 1959, 138, 145ff.; H. WANKEL, *Kalos kai agathos*, Diss. Wuppertal, 1961, especially 16-21; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l’analyse psychologique dans l’œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 455-461; W. DONLAN, *The Origin of καλός κάγαθός*, *The American Journal of Philology* 94 (1973), 365-374; K. DOVER, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1974, 69-73.

¹⁵²⁶ See *Smp.* 210c.

¹⁵²⁷ See 210a-212a.

¹⁵²⁸ See e.g. *Men.* 77b, *Smp.* 204d-e.

¹⁵²⁹ See e.g. the argument in *Grg.* 474c-475b, where things may be “beautiful” either because they are beneficial (i.e., good) or because they give pleasure when we look at them. However, the relation between beauty and goodness is not always conceived along these lines, and there are many discussions in secondary literature about this topic. For a few examples, cp. e.g. K. KATSIMANIS, *Étude sur le rapport entre le beau et le bien chez*

However, according to the *Symposium*, the καλός we are related to is superlative, and this means that it must contain all positive predicates and all goodness. Therefore, the two terms appear as having a very close meaning.

But so much about the good and the “beautiful”. Another very important form of intermediacy underlined by Socrates and Diotima is the one between what is mortal and what is immortal. As we considered above, Socrates’ speech presents two versions of this intermediacy, which are the result of two different interpretations of the poles.¹⁵³⁰ First, the intermediate is a minor deity or δαίμων, who lies between mortals (i.e., ourselves) and the gods.¹⁵³¹ But then Socrates and Diotima redefine the poles. Being mortal is redefined as lasting only an instant and being immortal is reinterpreted as “being always the same” (παντάπασιν τὸ αὐτὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι).¹⁵³² As a result, the intermediate is also redefined, and now corresponds to pregnancy (κῆσις) and generation (γέννησις).¹⁵³³ Generation in particular is what characterizes ἔρωσ, and it is also something that characterizes us. We lie between what is mortal and immortal in this sense. We do not cease to be at each instance, but we also do not always remain the same. We continue to exist and change, which means that we must somehow reproduce ourselves at each new moment and leave something similar to ourselves behind when we vanish.¹⁵³⁴ We must transfer ourselves from one instant to the next, and we are always being replaced by a new version of ourselves that emanates from us. We are constantly generating ourselves, and this applies both to our body and our ψυχή.¹⁵³⁵ We thus produce something that is and is not us, and this whole process can be described as a mortal form of immortality (i.e., a way of remaining) or an immortal form of mortality.

Our continued existence in time is thus a form of intermediacy between what is mortal and what is immortal. However, our renewal at each moment is not guaranteed – nor is the quality of what we leave behind. We must take care of the body and the ψυχή, and even when we do so we are still subject to a definite and absolute death. Now, the possibility of

Platon, *Diss.* Lille, 1974; R. BARNET, Notes on Plato on the *kalon* and the Good, *Classical Philology* 105 (2010), 363–377; A. KOSMAN, Beauty and the Good. Situating the *kalon*, *Classical Philology* 105 (2010), 341–367.

¹⁵³⁰ Cp. Sect. 3.3 above.

¹⁵³¹ See 202d–203a.

¹⁵³² Cp. 207d–208b.

¹⁵³³ See 206c: “ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο θεῖον τὸ πρᾶγμα, καὶ τοῦτο ἐν θνητῷ ὄντι τῷ ζῳῷ ἀθάνατον ἔνεστιν, ἢ κῆσις καὶ ἢ γέννησις.”

¹⁵³⁴ See 207c–d: “ἐνταῦθα γὰρ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐκείνῳ λόγον ἢ θνητῆ φύσις ζητεῖ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἀεὶ τε εἶναι καὶ ἀθάνατος. δύναται δὲ ταύτη μόνον, τῇ γενέσει, ὅτι ἀεὶ καταλείπει ἕτερον νέον ἀντὶ τοῦ παλαιοῦ (...).” See also 208a–b: “τούτῳ γὰρ τῷ τρόπῳ πᾶν τὸ θνητὸν σώζεται, οὐ τῷ παντάπασιν τὸ αὐτὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι ὡς περὶ τὸ θεῖον, ἀλλὰ τῷ τὸ ἀπὸν καὶ παλαιούμενον ἕτερον νέον ἐγκαταλείπειν οἷον αὐτὸ ἦν.”

¹⁵³⁵ See once more 207d–208a.

disappearing entirely is not irrelevant for us. We are deeply concerned with the possibility of dying, and this shows the connection between this form of intermediacy and the others. We are concerned with the future and in particular with when we will die. We want to live, but this does not mean we want to live as long as possible, regardless of how good or how bad our life is. Instead, we want to have a good life, we want to possess the good, and we want to possess it not just for a moment or a few moments. We want the good (and the beautiful) for the maximum possible time. More precisely, we want to possess the good and be happy forever.¹⁵³⁶ In sum, our relation to the superlative good (and to superlative beauty) is also a relation to a superlative time – and this means that the superlative we desire is not only a qualitative superlative, but also a quantitative superlative.

According to Socrates and Diotima, this is only possible through procreation and, more precisely, procreation in what is beautiful (τίκτειν ἐν τῷ καλῷ).¹⁵³⁷ Such a procreation constitutes a different intermediacy between the mortal and immortal. Instead of simply creating a similar version of ourselves from one moment to the next, it creates something (either a child or a work of ours) that may outlast us and may also be an improved form of ourselves (hence the importance of generating in what is beautiful). This is still different from an absolute immortality, but is a more elaborate form of fulfilling our desire for a superlative time – and the decisive point here is the fact that, regardless of whether we can continue to be or not, our desire also includes this other superlative requirement.

Finally, Socrates and Diotima consider the intermediacy between knowledge and ignorance (μεταξύ τι σοφίας καὶ ἀμαθίας). We already discussed several important aspects of this μεταξύ and of the terms it refers to.¹⁵³⁸ In *Symposium*, however, Plato introduces new aspects, which we will now briefly consider and to which we will return in the following chapters. Like in the case of the previous intermediacy, Plato provides two versions of what lies between knowledge and ignorance. First, the intermediate between the two is correct judgment (ὀρθὴ δόξα), which “hits” being or reality, but is unable to provide an account of it.¹⁵³⁹ Indeed, it is a mixture of ignorance and knowledge. It appears to be knowledge,

¹⁵³⁶ See 206a: “ἄρ’ οὖν, ἢ δ’ ἦ, οὕτως ἀπλοῦν ἐστὶ λέγειν ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὰγαθοῦ ἐρῶσιν; ναί, ἔφη. τί δέ; οὐ προσθετέον, ἔφη, ὅτι καὶ εἶναι τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτοῖς ἐρῶσιν; προσθετέον. ἄρ’ οὖν, ἔφη, καὶ οὐ μόνον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀεὶ εἶναι; καὶ τοῦτο προσθετέον. ἔστιν ἄρα συλλήβδην, ἔφη, ὁ ἔρωσ τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ εἶναι ἀεὶ.” Cp. 200c-e.

¹⁵³⁷ See 206b ff.

¹⁵³⁸ The whole Chap. 7 deals with this notion – especially Sects. 2.3 and 2.4.

¹⁵³⁹ See 202a: “τὸ ὀρθὰ δοξάζειν καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ἔχειν λόγον δοῦναι οὐκ οἶσθ’, ἔφη, ὅτι οὔτε ἐπίστασθαί ἐστιν – ἄλογον γὰρ πρᾶγμα πῶς ἂν εἴη ἐπιστήμη; – οὔτε ἀμαθία – τὸ γὰρ τοῦ ὄντος τυγχάνον πῶς ἂν εἴη ἀμαθία; – ἔστι δὲ δήπου τοιοῦτον ἢ ὀρθὴ δόξα, μεταξύ φρονήσεως καὶ ἀμαθίας.”

because it hits its target (or corresponds to it), which is an essential feature of knowledge. However, it lacks another essential feature of the knowledge – namely, an understanding or a justification of what it has access to. Knowledge is thus something superior to correct judgment.¹⁵⁴⁰

But Socrates and Diotima later refer to a new kind of intermediate between knowledge and ignorance, which corresponds to a different mode of relation between the two. This new intermediate is the love or pursuit of knowledge (φιλοσοφεῖν).¹⁵⁴¹ One desires to know when one is not fully ignorant nor fully knowledgeable. In other words, one must have some awareness of what one does not know, but one must at the same time fail to know it.¹⁵⁴² This is different from correct judgment, because the latter is already settled and does not lead us to search for something. It is a form of static μεταξύ. In fact, all forms of defective cognitive access to something (even completely false δόξαι) are in a way static intermediates between ignorance and knowledge. One must have some notion of the target or the truth, even if one misidentifies it, and one must also have a desire to attain it. In other words, we are also marked by some degree of φιλοσοφία at that moment, and the only thing that prevents us from actively searching for the truth about something is the fact that we think we already know it. In turn, when we are aware of our ignorance, we must pursue knowledge (which constitutes a form of dynamic μεταξύ). But in both cases we are not indifferent to knowing or not. We desire to know and this is thus an essential feature of ἔρωσ.¹⁵⁴³

The connection between this and the other forms of intermediacy or desire is not entirely clear, but Plato nevertheless provides some indications about it. He says that knowledge is an “admirable” or “beautiful” thing, and as such is desirable.¹⁵⁴⁴ In the *Republic*, he further stresses that we want to possess a true good and not something

¹⁵⁴⁰ Cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.3.

¹⁵⁴¹ For a brief consideration of this notion, see Chap. 4, Sect. 2.5 above.

¹⁵⁴² See 204a-b: “θεῶν οὐδεις φιλοσοφεῖ οὐδ’ ἐπιθυμεῖ σοφὸς γενέσθαι – ἔστι γὰρ – οὐδ’ εἴ τις ἄλλος σοφός, οὐ φιλοσοφεῖ. οὐδ’ αὖ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς φιλοσοφοῦσιν οὐδ’ ἐπιθυμοῦσι σοφοὶ γενέσθαι· αὐτὸ γὰρ τοῦτό ἐστι χαλεπὸν ἀμαθία, τὸ μὴ ὄντα καλὸν κάγαθὸν μηδὲ φρόνιμον δοκεῖν αὐτῷ εἶναι ικανόν. οὐκ οὐκ ἐπιθυμεῖ ὁ μὴ οἰόμενος ἐνδεῆς εἶναι οὐδ’ ἂν μὴ οἴηται ἐπιδεισθαι. τίνες οὖν, ἔφη, ἐγὼ, ὦ Διοτίμα, οἱ φιλοσοφούντες, εἰ μήτε οἱ σοφοὶ μήτε οἱ ἀμαθεῖς; δῆλον δὲ, ἔφη, τοῦτό γε ἦδη καὶ παιδί, ὅτι οἱ μεταξύ τούτων ἀμφοτέρων, ὧν ἂν εἴη καὶ ὁ Ἔρωσ. ἔστιν γὰρ δὴ τῶν καλλίστων ἡ σοφία, Ἔρωσ δ’ ἐστὶν ἔρωσ περὶ τὸ καλόν, ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον ἔρωτα φιλόσοφον εἶναι, φιλόσοφον δὲ ὄντα μεταξύ εἶναι σοφοῦ καὶ ἀμαθοῦς.” On this topic, cp. *Ly.* 218a-b: “(...) φαίμεν ἂν καὶ τοὺς ἦδη σοφοὺς μηκέτι φιλοσοφεῖν, εἴτε θεοὶ εἴτε ἀνθρώποι εἰσιν οὗτοι· οὐδ’ αὖ ἐκείνους φιλοσοφεῖν τοὺς οὕτως ἄγνοιαν ἔχοντας ὥστε κακοὺς εἶναι· κακὸν γὰρ καὶ ἀμαθῆ οὐδένα φιλοσοφεῖν. λείπονται δὲ οἱ ἔχοντες μὲν τὸ κακὸν τοῦτο, τὴν ἄγνοιαν, μήπω δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ὄντες ἀγνώμονες μηδὲ ἀμαθεῖς, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἡγούμενοι μὴ εἰδέναι ἃ μὴ ἴσασιν.”

¹⁵⁴³ For more on this desire to know and its modalities, cp. Chap. 13 Sect. 3.3 and Chap. 14.

¹⁵⁴⁴ See 204b: “ἔστιν γὰρ δὴ τῶν καλλίστων ἡ σοφία, Ἔρωσ δ’ ἐστὶν ἔρωσ περὶ τὸ καλόν, ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον ἔρωτα φιλόσοφον εἶναι (...).”

illusory.¹⁵⁴⁵ Truth and knowledge seem to be implied in our relation to the good. They also seem to be implied in our relation to the beautiful, as we can see in the already mentioned *scala amoris* (which is also a *scala pulchritudinis*). The different forms of beauty that compose the scale correspond to different degrees of reality and different forms of knowledge. But we are directed to their superlative form. It thus seems that our desire for a superlative and indeed for a superlative combination of superlatives also includes the desire of a superlative (i.e., perfect) knowledge.¹⁵⁴⁶

In sum, Socrates and Diotima present the human soul as a confluence or intertwinement of multiple intermediacies, directed at different superlatives. We desire to possess a superlative good, a superlative beauty, a superlative time and a superlative knowledge. These different desires are merged in one or, as we could also say, we are the intermediate between them all, insofar as we are essentially marked by their mixture and never experience them in a pure state. We always desire a superlative combination of superlatives and this is the source and framework of all our particular desires. Whether or not there really is something that may correspond to this complex and immense desire of ours, we are nonetheless marked by it.

After considering this description, though, we may wonder whether these are the only modalities of *μεταξύ* that characterize us and the only formal scopes of our superlative desire, or if there are others. The latter seems to be the case, at least if we give credence to what is said in *Phaedrus*. In Socrates' palinode (244a-257a) we find once more the idea that romantic love is an expression of a deeper and more complex form of love, whose object is very complex and can also be described as a superlative combination of superlatives. Let us then consider the aspects of this speech that are more directly relevant for this question.¹⁵⁴⁷

As was the case in Aristophanes' speech, Socrates presents an etiological account of our present condition in the form of a myth. In fact, these two myths resemble each other in many respects. In *Phaedrus*, Plato compares our soul to a winged creature and says that before birth it traveled through the sky and periodically ascended to the top of heaven, in order to see the perfect and true beings, and feast with the sight of them.¹⁵⁴⁸ But the ascent in question is particularly hard and the soul is not guaranteed a vision of the supracelestial

¹⁵⁴⁵ See the already mentioned passage in 505d: “τόδε οὐ φανερόν, ὡς δίκαια μὲν καὶ καλὰ πολλοὶ ἂν ἔλοιτο τὰ δοκοῦντα, κἄν εἰ μὴ εἴη, ὅμως ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ κεκτῆσθαι καὶ δοκεῖν, ἀγαθὰ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἔτι ἄρκει τὰ δοκοῦντα κτᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσιν, τὴν δὲ δόξαν ἐνταῦθα ἤδη πᾶς ἀτιμάζει; καὶ μάλα, ἔφη.”

¹⁵⁴⁶ This is indeed essential for the problem of the unexamined life, and we will return to it later. See in particular Chap. 19, Sects. 2.1 and 2.2.

¹⁵⁴⁷ For more on Socrates' palinode, cp. Chap. 13 Sect. 2.3, Chap. 16 Sect. 5.1 a), and Chap. 17 Sect. 3.1 b).

¹⁵⁴⁸ See 246a ff.

beings. It may actually fail to contemplate them properly, and start to forget them. After a point, forgetfulness will cause the soul to lose its wings and fall into earth and the body.¹⁵⁴⁹ This is what brings about our present condition, which is therefore marked by loss and partial forgetfulness, as was the case in Aristophanes' speech. We lost something and forgot about it – even if not entirely. As a matter of fact, we always preserve some memory of it (and some may remember more than others).¹⁵⁵⁰ We are still related to the supracelestial vision and it still shapes our entire life. Therefore, our life here on earth is described as a kind of exile, though we are familiarized with it and experience it as if it were our homeland. In other words, we think we are directly related to concrete beings, and do not notice that we are primarily related to something else. But what exactly are we related to? What did we lose?

First of all, the possibility we lost is represented by the wings (of which we now have no more than stumps). Wings in general allow unlimited passage and liberty of movement. In particular, they give access to the heights, from whence one can see much more than what we normally see, and encompass it all with one gaze.¹⁵⁵¹ Such a perspective is something normally inaccessible and unknown to us (and of course it was all the more so in Ancient Greece). But the wings of the soul do not simply drive upwards. They drive towards an absolute above or the absolute zenith – i.e., something that is perfect and unsurpassable.¹⁵⁵² But what can be found in this absolute above?

The absolute above is the region above the heavens (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος), which is described as the plain of truth, which nurtures the soul.¹⁵⁵³ It is composed of all the beings the soul really longs for – i.e., the perfect or true beings (or as we could also say, the superlative beings), which are divine (249d), holy (250a) and lovable (250d).¹⁵⁵⁴ Socrates connects them with our ability to see multiple instances of something, so they seem to correspond to what he

¹⁵⁴⁹ Cp. 248c: “(...) ὅταν δὲ ἀδυνατήσασα ἐπισπέσθαι μὴ ἴδῃ, καὶ τινὶ συντυχίᾳ χρησαμένη λήθῃς τε καὶ κακίας πλησθεῖσα βαρυνθῆ, βαρυνθεῖσα δὲ πτερορρηθήσῃ τε καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν πέσῃ (...).”

¹⁵⁵⁰ Socrates says that some saw more than others (248a), and during life people may forget more (cp. e.g. 250a) or they may also start to remember (as is the case when one falls in love or when one philosophizes). These different degrees of recollection are then what determines the kind of βίος one leads, as is seen in the scale of βίοι presented in 248d-e.

¹⁵⁵¹ The image of wings is actually quite expressive in Greek culture in general. It can also express arousal, elation, exultation, as well as fickleness and the ramblings of an errant mind – and the myth's use of the image actually refers to all these different usages.

¹⁵⁵² The myth's core is exactly this reference to an absolute ἄνω. It is different from a merely comparative ἄνω, which would be superior to our ordinary condition, but could still be inferior to something else (even if one does not realize it). On this respect, cp. *Rep.* 584d ff., where Socrates distinguishes between a middle position (which may appear as superior by contrast with a downward region) and an absolute above.

¹⁵⁵³ See 248b-c: “οὗ δ' ἔνεχ' ἡ πολλὴ σπουδὴ τὸ ἀληθείας ἰδεῖν πεδίον οὗ ἔστιν, ἢ τε δὴ προσήκουσα ψυχῆς τῷ ἀρίστῳ νομῇ ἐκ τοῦ ἐκεῖ λειμῶνος τυγχάνει οὕσα, ἢ τε τοῦ πτεροῦ φύσις, ᾧ ψυχὴ κουφίζεται, τούτῳ τρέφεται.”

¹⁵⁵⁴ Socrates uses expressions such as οὐσία ὄντως οὕσα or τὰ ὄντα ὄντως. See 247c, 247e, 249c.

in other texts calls εἶδη.¹⁵⁵⁵ He also gives several examples of these true beings. He talks of beauty, wisdom (τὸ σοφόν, ἐπιστήμη, φρόνησις), goodness, justice, sound-mindedness (σωφροσύνη) – but there are more.¹⁵⁵⁶ Indeed, Socrates does not try to be systematic or exhaustive. He is vague, which is also a characteristic of our usual relation to the general predicates to which our soul is directed.¹⁵⁵⁷

The most important aspect, though, is the fact that Plato presents this “world of εἶδη” as the correlate of a permanent desire of ours, and in fact as the combination of all that we truly desire. We are permanently related to it and when we fall in love our primary relation is also to this place. In this sense, the perfect beings are not just the correlates of a perfect knowledge, but they are also the correlate of our deepest desires. We desire the superlative combination of all these superlative beings – even if the way they relate to each other is not clear. In the myth, they appear side by side, as being all present in the same region. This may refer to the fact that they always constitute a kind of system, in which one element implies many others or even all.¹⁵⁵⁸ At any rate, what we desire is precisely the combination of positive superlatives. We want a perfect access and perfect possession of them, and also the fullness or completeness they provide. Only so could we fully nourish our soul and attain perfect happiness.

Of course, such a description raises many questions about the ontological status of these objects, their actual existence, and the kind of access that we may ever have to them. But regardless of all these questions, it seems to be clear that Plato conceives our desire as being primarily directed to something of this kind. In this sense, he also compares us to a caged bird that is looking above and trying to escape from our everyday domain, where none of these perfect objects can be found.¹⁵⁵⁹ Our longing goes beyond all we usually deal with (all the ἀνθρώπινα σπουδάσματα, 249d). We are pulled by the region above the heavens and

¹⁵⁵⁵ Cp. 249b-c: “οὐ γὰρ ἢ γε μήποτε ἰδοῦσα τὴν ἀλήθειαν εἰς τόδε ἤξει τὸ σχῆμα. δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναρούμενον· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις ἐκείνων ἃ ποτ’ εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἢ ψυχῇ συμπορευθεῖσα θεῶν καὶ ὑπεριδοῦσα ἃ νῦν εἶναι φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακύψασα εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως.”

¹⁵⁵⁶ See 246d-e and 247d.

¹⁵⁵⁷ One is left to wonder, for instance, if all εἶδη are part of the ὑπερουράνιος τόπος understood as the correlate of our desire. If so, what does this say about our desire? Does it imply that we desire to contemplate or have access to all perfect forms of being, including forms such as “equality” or “oneness”? And if so, do we have the same desire for all forms of being or do we have a greater longing for some of them?

¹⁵⁵⁸ We saw above (Chap. 6, Sect. 2.3) that the εἶδη themselves are also in a way intertwined, in the sense that at least some εἶδη partake in other εἶδη. Now we are seeing that there is also an intertwining between the different aspects of our desire. Plato may therefore be alluding to one of these forms of intertwining (or even to both).

¹⁵⁵⁹ See 249d. Although Socrates is here talking about someone who fell in love, the description is valid for all souls – though we normally do not realize that we are just like this bird, because we are distracted about what we actually desire.

thus subjected to a strange form of reverse gravity that counteracts our attachment to the most immediate beings around us. Those superlative objects are what we love, what we long for, what we hunger for.¹⁵⁶⁰

This seems very distant from our usual experience, but according to Socrates it all becomes patent in the experience of romantic love. When we see someone whose beauty captivates us, we are actually reminded of the superlative beauty we once saw.¹⁵⁶¹ In fact, we are reminded of the whole mythical experience and this means of the whole region above the heavens. Τὸ καλόν works as a window for all the superlative beings. Indeed, it seems to be a privileged access to that region, since it is the most shining (ἐκφανέστατον).¹⁵⁶² But this is not necessarily the way we interpret our experience of ἔρωσ. Ἔρωσ is a rather ambiguous experience. It reveals something, but it also conceals its meaning. We can therefore see the beloved in different ways and be differently aware of what we desire. For instance, we can follow weaker impulses and lose sight of beauty as such.¹⁵⁶³ We can also somehow follow the potential of ἔρωσ, but even in that case we may have different experiences, especially insofar as we may have different kinds of access to the superlative combination of superlatives. This is why Socrates talks of the soul having once followed one of several different gods while it was ascending to the region above the heavens.¹⁵⁶⁴ Each god seems to represent a different kind of temperament or personality, and also different modes of relation to beauty and, consequently, to the whole region of perfect and superlative beings. But despite all these differences in the experience of ἔρωσ, one thing seems certain. Ἔρωσ makes us more aware of the kind of object we really desire and of how it exceeds what we normally deal with.

But Socrates does not talk only of romantic love. He stresses how there are several other perfect beings besides beauty, such as justice and sound-mindedness, and says that their earthly likenesses are seen through dull organs and are difficult to observe, because they lack the luster or splendor (φέγγος) that is characteristic of beauty.¹⁵⁶⁵ The same happens with knowledge, intelligence, or lucidity (φρόνησις). However, if we could see a clear sensible image of these other perfect beings, it would also trigger a form of ἔρωσ. According to

¹⁵⁶⁰ Cp. 248b-c, 250c, 250d.

¹⁵⁶¹ See 249d: “ἔστι δὴ οὖν δεῦρο ὁ πᾶς ἦκων λόγος περὶ τῆς τετάρτης μανίας – ἦν ὅταν τὸ τῆδέ τις ὀρῶν κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμνησκόμενος, πτερῶται τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπτέσθαι, ἀδυνατῶν δέ, ὄρνιθος δίκην βλέπων ἄνω, τῶν κάτω δὲ ἀμελῶν, αἰτίαν ἔχει ὡς μανικῶς διακειμένος (...).”

¹⁵⁶² See 250d-e: “(...) νῦν δὲ κάλλος μόνον ταύτην ἔσχε μοῖραν, ὥστ’ ἐκφανέστατον εἶναι (...).”

¹⁵⁶³ Cp. 250e-251a and 255e ff.

¹⁵⁶⁴ See 246e-247a, 250b, 252c-253c.

¹⁵⁶⁵ See 250b: “δικαιοσύνης μὲν οὖν καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τίμια ψυχαῖς οὐκ ἔνεστι φέγγος οὐδὲν ἐν τοῖς τῆδε ὁμοιώμασιν, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἀμυδρῶν ὀργάνων μόγις αὐτῶν καὶ ὀλίγοι ἐπὶ τὰς εἰκόνας ἰόντες θεῶνται τὸ τοῦ εἰκασθέντος γένος· κάλλος δὲ τότε ἦν ἰδεῖν λαμπρὸν (...).”

Socrates, this is particularly true of φρόνησις, whose clear perception would cause in us terrible feelings of love (δεινοὶ ἔρωτες).¹⁵⁶⁶ Socrates seems therefore to admit superior forms of ἔρωτος, which would be centered on other, perhaps more important εἶδη. We can even conceive of an absolute ἔρωτος, that would be equally directed to all the positive superlatives. In fact, such a desire (in its latent form) is what actually characterizes the human soul. We are connected to the whole region above the heavens and this connection is precisely what makes us human. As Socrates says, a soul that caught no glimpse of the true beings cannot assume human form.¹⁵⁶⁷ Recollecting the superlative combination of positive superlatives is thus at the heart of what we are – even if this memory is partially blocked and something we normally do not notice.

In sum, the soul forgets to a certain degree what it really loves and what it is really pursuing. It always longs for the superlative combination of superlatives, but such a desire only becomes more manifest when it falls in love. However, falling in love is concentrated on one particular superlative and leaves the others in the background. It is still not the full manifestation of the ἔρωτος that characterizes us, since it is not fully aware of what we truly desire. Perhaps only the philosopher is aware of it. Indeed, Socrates seems to be able to relate to the totality of this supracelestial region and talks about it with deep longing (πόθοος τῶν τότε).¹⁵⁶⁸ He seems to overcome the limited ἔρωτος of lovers and consciously relate to the totality of superlative beings we are directed to. He seems to experience a form of hyper-ἔρωτος. This does not mean, however, that he has heightened desires, since we all desire the same. The difference is that in his case he is wholly focused on our true object of desire, whereas other people are normally distracted from it and do not realize what they really desire. Thus they experience more mundane desires, that are directed only at a form of apparent nourishment (τροφή δοξαστή, 248b).

The analysis of *Phaedrus* thus complements what we saw above and further determines the nature of our pursuit of the good. Our constitutive desire is complex, as well as the object it is directed to. This means that instead of being directed to the four formal objects identified in *Symposium*, we are related to many more, even if Plato does not specify their number, identity, and precise connection. What at any rate seems clear is that the superlative good we are directed to is in fact a superlative combination of superlatives. In

¹⁵⁶⁶ See 250d: “ὄψις γὰρ ἡμῖν ὀξυτάτη τῶν διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἔρχεται αισθήσεων, ἣ φρόνησις οὐχ ὀρᾶται – δεινοὺς γὰρ ἂν παρείχεν ἔρωτας, εἴ τι τοιοῦτον ἑαυτῆς ἐναργὲς εἶδωλον παρείχετο εἰς ὄψιν ἰόν (...).”

¹⁵⁶⁷ See 249b-c.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Cp. 249c-d and 250b-c.

other words, it must fulfill several formal requirements. This does not necessarily mean that we desire many objects. All superlatives may converge in one object (or at least we may think they do). When we fall in love, for instance, the same object seems to correspond to all that we desire. However, the formal structure of our desire also admits the possibility of combining different objects in order to be fully satisfied. It all depends on what we identify as being a superlative good – and such an identification is what we must consider in the following section.

There is, however, one last issue that we must still consider about the nature of our desire. Our tension or desire always consists in pursuing something (διώκειν) and escaping something else (φεύγειν). Indeed, the positive tension always implies the negative. In this sense, we are not only related to positive superlatives, but also to negative superlatives. We have already observed this dichotomy in pre-Platonic thinking, and it also plays an important role in Plato. He also identifies and discusses the question of a superlative form of badness, which would make us superlatively miserable. The clearest reference to this is precisely in the passages of *Gorgias* we mentioned above. Socrates and Polus discuss what is the worst thing of all and, whereas Polus defends that the worst thing is to suffer the greatest injustice, Socrates advocates that the worst thing is to commit the greatest injustice and not to be punished for it.¹⁵⁶⁹ Regardless of which one is right, we are in any case sensitive to the question of extreme badness, which is not only a neutral state, deprived of the good, but the actual opposite of it. Moreover, the negative superlative is also formally complex. In fact, it contains the counterparts to all positive superlatives – namely, the superlatively bad, the superlatively repulsive (αἰσχρόν), the superlatively mortal, the superlatively ignorant, and so on. It is a superlative combination of negative superlatives, and this is something we are always moving away from. It is true that we may not be able to properly represent a state that would correspond to such a formal description, especially because in such a state we would no longer lie between two poles, but rather coincide with the negative pole. Still, our intermediate position between the good and the bad is referred to such a state. We lie between these two complex poles and we need an identification of both, in order to guide ourselves in life. This does not mean that we must make two wholly unrelated identifications. In fact, they seem to depend on one and the same principle (as we see in the above mentioned passages of *Gorgias*, where Socrates and Polus each presents a coherent view about what is superlatively bad and what is superlatively good). In other words, the identification of the superlative good

¹⁵⁶⁹ See 468e ff.

to which we are constitutively directed brings with it an identification of what is superlatively bad. This is why we may focus primarily on the former. Let us then see how this identification of the good works and what results from it.

5. The complex process of identifying and pursuing the good. Life (βίος) as a practical system based on a system of beliefs

The desire for a superlative good (or the “τοῦ ὅλου ἐπιθυμία καὶ διώξις”) is at the heart of the ψυχή, but this still does not fully determine the way we normally relate to the superlative good. Indeed, we have not yet considered a very important feature of this relation – namely, the fact that normally the desire in question is not a formal and vague desire. We tend to identify some particular thing (or set of things) as the superlative good and we pursue it. Such a description, however, may be surprising, since usually we do not seem to be concerned with a superlative good. As we saw, we have many different desires, which seem to be largely uncoordinated. We are normally concerned with particular goods and it is not clear that everything is part of the same pursuit. Therefore, we must see how the desiderative structure of the soul is constituted, how it brings about its particular moments, and which inner variations it admits of. The superlative good is what ultimately steers us and guides our steps, but we must also determine what mechanism brings about each step, each act, each motion of the soul. In other words, we must determine the whole practical movement of the soul (i.e., its whole βίος) and how it relates to the desire of the superlative good. In order to do so, we have to see how the practical dimension of human life is underpinned by cognitive components and we have to determine the structure of this cognitive components that shape our relation to the superlative good and bring about our βίος.

Life is indeed more than a matter of sensation or memory. It implies beliefs (δόξαι or knowledge claims), and some of these beliefs are what gives us direction and guidance. We cannot act blindly. We need many questions to be settled or defined in some way before we act. Otherwise, we would be in a state of practical ἀπορία and practical πλανάη. We would be paralyzed or roam about without destination. We would have no sense of direction and no way of responding to the extraordinary pressure exerted by the desire of a superlative good. But this is not our usual condition. Normally, we are engaged in many things and our practical domain is very complex. This complexity is what actually corresponds to the notion

of βίος, as we will see, and it is based on an equally complex cognitive system. There are several layers of beliefs guiding our steps (and this means that we may also experience several different forms of disorientation, according to the kind of doubts and errors we find in them). We briefly considered these practical views or beliefs above, but now we have to consider them in more detail and in light of the practical system they enable.¹⁵⁷⁰

5.1. The identification of the superlative good as the fundamental practical belief

As was said, there are many practical views or beliefs that underpin the practical domain and define the way we pursue the superlative good. But one of them is fundamental: namely, the identification of the superlative good itself. We must deformatize or specify the notion of superlative good (understood precisely as the superlative combination of superlatives) and define what is the best thing or the best possession.¹⁵⁷¹ In other words, we must equate the superlative good with something in particular or we must establish for ourselves a version of the good (or of what perfect happiness consists in). This is what makes something seem to us to be the best.¹⁵⁷² It is also what allows us to guide ourselves in life. We need to be convinced that something somehow corresponds to our desire in order to channel our superlative desire in that particular direction.

The identification of the superlative good is thus a fundamental question of life and one whose answer is not pre-decided or fixed. There are many different things in life and we must see which object or which kind of object (such as pleasure, honor or knowledge) is the most desirable. We must also see if this object by itself can satisfy our desire, or if we must combine different objects – which may be equally good or may have different degrees of

¹⁵⁷⁰ Cp. Chap. 6, Sects. 1.2 a) and 2.5. The complex cognitive structure of the practical domain is very important for our general question, since it implies that everything in the practical domain can be either true or false. The general possibility of falsity thus renders philosophical examination particularly useful, insofar as the latter allows us to identify and correct false beliefs. But we will leave aside this question for now (for its discussion, see Chaps. 16-19) and focus instead on the structure of the practical domain (namely, the practical system corresponding to our life or βίος) and the views that underpin it.

¹⁵⁷¹ In *Rep.* 562b, Plato speaks of proposing or setting something up as the good (ὁ προύθεντο ἀγαθόν) or defining something as the good (ὁ ὀρίζεται ἀγαθόν). This is precisely what is discussed in *Philebus*. The characters both say the good is something in particular – namely pleasure or knowledge. See 11b-c. Later, Protarchus even formulates the question as a matter of discerning what is the best human possession (διελέσθαι τί τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων κτημάτων ἄριστον). See 19c.

¹⁵⁷² This is an important structure of our desire that is, for instance, identified in *Gorgias*, when Socrates speaks of ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστα εἶναι. See 466d-467b.

goodness (in which case there will be a sort of scale or ranking of intrinsic goods).¹⁵⁷³ Whatever the modality, one must identify something as the superlative good, and that thing will then become the main or true love of the soul. In other words, it will become the target one will aim at and it will determine one's entire life.

This does not necessarily mean that we must always have some firm belief about what the superlative good is. It may happen that in some cases we are completely clueless about it. However, if that happens, we will be completely disoriented. We will not know where to pursue and find the superlative good. But normally that is not the case. We know what the superlative good we are aiming at is and we are engaged in its pursuit. This does not necessarily mean that we have thought deeply about the matter. We may not have expressly thought about it at all. Our belief about what the superlative good is may be tacit, and it may be very difficult for us to see that we have it and expound it. Such a difficulty may also be partly due to the vagueness or haziness of the belief in question. Considering that we may never have expressly thought about it, our notion of it may be rather blurry. In this sense, it would correspond to the divination (μαντεύεσθαι) or hinting at (αίνιττεσθαι) Plato mentions in the *Symposium* and the *Republic*.¹⁵⁷⁴ We have some idea (some general belief) about what the good is, even if we cannot explain it. In contrast, it may become more and more clear and precise, especially if we examine it.

But the belief in question is not necessarily stable and true. In fact, our views about the superlative good may change (either because we reflect about them, or because something induces us to change them) and we may adopt many different beliefs about it. This mutability and changeability is indeed an essential feature of our δόξαι. But the latter may also be false – i.e., they may be δόξαι in a negative sense or baseless knowledge claims. We may be mistaken about the superlative good – or, as is said in *Gorgias*, what we truly want may not coincide with what seems to us to be the best.¹⁵⁷⁵ This possibility is particularly important for

¹⁵⁷³ We find something of the sort in *Philebus*. The two initial candidates (pleasure and knowledge) are considered insufficient to satisfy our desire (see 20e ff.) and are then combined in a way that will allow Socrates to define a ranking of goods at the end (see 66aff.).

¹⁵⁷⁴ We have already considered the two passages in question. In *Rep.* 505d-e, Socrates says about that good that it is “ὁ δὴ διώκει μὲν ἅπαντα ψυχή και τούτου ἔνεκα πάντα πράττει, ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, ἀποροῦσα δὲ και οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἰκανῶς τί ποτ' ἐστὶν οὐδὲ πίστει χρῆσασθαι μονίμῳ οἷα και περι τᾶλλα, διὰ τοῦτο δὲ ἀποτυγχάνει και τῶν ἄλλων εἴ τι ὄφελος ἦν (...).” In *Smp.* 192c-d, Aristophanes says about the lovers that “ἄλλο τι βουλομένη ἑκατέρου ἢ ψυχή δήλη ἐστίν, ὁ οὐ δύναται εἰπεῖν, ἀλλὰ μαντεύεται ὁ βούλεται, και αἰνίττεται.”

¹⁵⁷⁵ See once more 466d-467b

us, since – as Plato stresses in the *Republic* – we do not simply want what appears to be good, but we want the real good, which would constitute real happiness.¹⁵⁷⁶

To be sure, we may not be very aware of this fundamental belief about the good, or of its changeability and fallibility. But, according to Plato, we usually endorse a particular view about it and are convinced of it. The matter is settled for us. This view or belief is then at the center of our practical views, as we will see. In a way, they all result from it or they are all based on it. Our view of the superlative good ultimately determines all our pursuits, all our actions, and the place of everything in our life. But this is not all. In a way, our view of the good may also be at the center of all our non-practical views, insofar as it shapes how we see things or how they appear to us. We will not consider this question now, but our whole way of seeing things may be based on our beliefs about the superlative good (at least insofar as it determines our way of relating to their contents). If it is so, then these beliefs will be the fundamental *ὑποθέσεις* of our cognitive system.

However, our view about the superlative good may also depend on other views. Usually it does not occur in a vacuum, and it may actually presuppose other views. For instance, it may imply a certain understanding of what is identified as the superlative good. It may also imply an understanding of general predicates or εἶδη – and especially goodness as such or the *ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*.¹⁵⁷⁷ The precise interrelation between our different views is indeed difficult to determine, but they seem at any rate to be somehow intertwined, which means that the defects of one of them will also affect the others. More precisely, our representation of the superlative good may be distorted in itself or by the views it presupposes, but it may also distort our others views. We will see this in more detail in Section 5.4. For now, the most important point though is the central role of our view (or views) about the superlative good.

5.2. The complex pursuit of the superlative good. Life (βίος) as a practical system and the underlying system of views

We are always directed at the superlative good, we have a certain view about what it is, and we pursue it with urgency. This is what unifies our desire. However, our desire does

¹⁵⁷⁶ See 505d: “τόδε οὐ φανερόν, ὡς δίκαια μὲν καὶ καλὰ πολλοὶ ἂν ἔλοιντο τὰ δοκοῦντα, κἂν εἰ μὴ εἶη, ὅμως ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ κεκτῆσθαι καὶ δοκεῖν, ἀγαθὰ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἔτι ἀρκεῖ τὰ δοκοῦντα κτᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσιν, τὴν δὲ δόξαν ἐνταῦθα ἤδη πᾶς ἀτιμάζει; καὶ μάλα, ἔφη.”

¹⁵⁷⁷ For more on this, see Section 6.3 below.

not seem to be exclusively directed at such an object. We desire many things, and not just in turn (as if we were always changing our view about what the superlative good is). Our desires are often directed at smaller things or relative goods, and it is not even sure that we ever directly pursue something of the magnitude implied before: namely, a superlative combination of superlatives. But what about the relative goods we pursue? Are they completely unrelated to the superlative good, or are they somehow related to it?

We already alluded to the fact that the desire for these goods is actually based on (or derived from) the desire for a superlative good. These goods are not desired for themselves, but because they play a role in our pursuit of the superlative. Our relation to them is mediated by our relation to the superlative good. They are somehow a part of the latter. This is what we must now consider in more detail. At the same time, we must consider the cognitive basis that enables these particular desires of ours.

First, these other desires are possible because normally we cannot reach the superlative good (or what we take to be the superlative good) at once. We tend to identify it with something in particular, but the thing in question is usually not within our immediate reach. This does not mean, however, that we immediately give up. We resign ourselves, accept that we cannot attain it instantly, and assume that the superlative is deferred or delayed. Moreover, we do not sit down twiddling our thumbs and simply wait for it to fall onto our laps. The superlative good becomes a task. We pursue it and try to find our way to it. It may not be clear to us how we will ever be able to reach it, but at any rate we try to outline a strategy or plan, which may require several or even many intermediate stages.

This plan of pursuit requires us to accept, for the time being, something less than the superlative good. This does not mean, however, that we accept anything. In fact, we bargain or compromise.¹⁵⁷⁸ If we cannot have it all, we try to have as much as possible. In other words, we search for what is best given the circumstances, and take it as an installment or a part of the superlative good. We try to accumulate goods, and this is still a way of coming closer to the superlative good. The structure of our desire is therefore permanent. We are always related to the superlative good and we always pursue it. However, it is also possible to integrate other pursuits in the main pursuit. We accept what is not superlative as a pathway to

¹⁵⁷⁸ Saul Bellow provides a pointed description of this when he says: "People are beaten at last with their solitary longings and intolerable isolation. They need the right, the missing portion to complete themselves, and since they can't realistically hope to find that they must accept a companionable substitute. Recognizing that they can't win, they settle. The marriage of true minds seldom occurs." See S. BELLOW, *Ravelstein*, London, Penguin, 2001, 120.

the superlative or a means of acquiring it.¹⁵⁷⁹ As a result, our desire becomes scattered or dispersed through many objects, instead of focusing only on one. Instead of one good, there are many, with different degrees and different roles. But our different desires and our acts are still unified, and not only because they are ours, but because they are what is required by our desire of superlative good. All moments are integrated in the general pursuit, which is thus far from being simple and monolithic. It is complex and creates something like a system of interrelated moments and interrelated objects of desire – or, as we could also say, a practical system.

But let us consider in more detail the origin and structure of this system. First of all, we constantly diagnose our situation. We see which beings surround us and which lines of actions are available to us. Beings in general may have intrinsic value, if they happen to be identified with the superlative good, or with the superlative evil. But that is not the case for most things, and consequently they are in themselves neutral, as Plato says. They are neither good nor bad.¹⁵⁸⁰ But this does not mean that they are completely indifferent for us. On the contrary: we incorporate them in our pursuit of the good. In general, we see them as useful (ὠφέλιμα) or harmful (βλαβερὰ), and accordingly they become things we love or things we hate (φίλα or ἔχθρα).¹⁵⁸¹ We may also see them as something indifferent, that is neither useful nor harmful – but even in that case our indifference to them is functionally determined and based on our desire for something else. Everything is determined in light of its role in our pursuit of the superlative good. In other words, everything is somehow an instrument (an ὄργανον) of our pursuit of happiness. We use things to attain something else, and thus they become intermediate goods or intermediate evils. They are not good or bad in themselves, but for the sake of something else.¹⁵⁸² What we do in a given context thus refers to something else. Ultimately, it refers to the superlative good. As is said in *Gorgias*, “it’s because we pursue what’s good that we walk whenever we walk; we suppose that it’s better to walk. And conversely, whenever we stand still, we stand still for the sake of the same thing, what’s

¹⁵⁷⁹ The mechanism of resignation and compromise is in fact complex and admits different modalities. We will consider them in more detail in subsection 5.3. However, the general structure of all resignation is precisely this: we aim at the absolute best, but our inability to immediately attain it turns us to a relative best.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Plato actually says that they lie between what is good and what is bad, but this is a sense of μεταξύ different from the one we considered above. Now, it just stresses the neutrality of these things. See in particular *Grg.* 467e: “[ΣΩ.] ἄρ’ οὖν ἔστιν τι τῶν ὄντων ὃ οὐχὶ ἤτοι ἀγαθὸν γ’ ἔστιν ἢ κακὸν ἢ μεταξύ τούτων, οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν; [ΠΩΛ.] πολλὴ ἀνάγκη, ὦ Σώκратες.” As examples of these intermediate things, Plato enumerates both actions (such as walking, running, making sea voyages) and things (such as stones and sticks). See 468a.

¹⁵⁸¹ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 468c: “οὐκ ἄρα σφάττειν βουλόμεθα οὐδ’ ἐκβάλλειν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων οὐδὲ χρήματα ἀφαιρεῖσθαι ἀπλῶς οὕτως, ἀλλ’ ἐὰν μὲν ὠφέλιμα ἦ ταῦτα, βουλόμεθα πράττειν αὐτά, βλαβερὰ δὲ ὄντα οὐ βουλόμεθα.” For the notions of φίλον and ἐχθρόν in this context, cp. e.g. *Ly.* 218d ff.

¹⁵⁸² For more on this, see the passages mentioned in footnote 1418.

good.”¹⁵⁸³ All our actions and all our desires are unified in this. There is a first beloved (a *πρῶτον φίλον*, as is said in *Lysis*) and then there is a secondary or subordinate loved object that refers to it.¹⁵⁸⁴ We pursue the second in order to attain the first.

This is the general model of remission that constitutes our actions and our relation to particular beings. But the structure of these remissions can be very complex. The first beloved may require (and in general it requires) several instruments or several acts. Thus a complex chain of actions and desires is constituted, and this chain may be subdivided in many different chains, which we pursue simultaneously. In *Lysis*, Plato seems to identify only particular chains, caused by a particular evil and the attempt to suppress it.¹⁵⁸⁵ But all our chains are part of the greater chain of the superlative good. They are subdivisions of the main chain and they complement each other. In short, they all refer to the same principle or *ἀρχή*. The value of things, situations, and actions stems from the pursuit of the superlative good. It is regressive and the desire of the good (as well as our identification of it) holds everything together. This is how many things, persons and actions that are not the superlative good become relevant. We try, through them, to achieve the superlative good or come closer to it. They occupy a particular place in our practical chains, and this place determines whether they are good, bad or neutral. They become relative goods and relative evils – always according to the circumstances and their role in our pursuit of the superlative good.

This is the basic structure of the complex practical system in which we usually find ourselves. We may not be fully aware of the system, and it may be hazy or indeterminate in many respects. However, we are always calculating our route and integrating beings in different stages of our pursuit of the good. Such a calculation gives rise to a complex system of practical views or beliefs. These views presuppose a certain identification of what we ultimately pursue, but this is not all. They also require a diagnosis of our own situation, of what is around us and what possibilities are available to us. We must then conceive a strategy, which may be very complex and integrate many different moments. We must also see how each being or each act fits into it. This in turn determines the value of each thing or its relevance. In sum, we have views about everything we must do and about the role each

¹⁵⁸³ See 468b: “τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἄρα διώκοντες καὶ βαδίζομεν ὅταν βαδίζωμεν, οἴομενοι βέλτιον εἶναι, καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον ἔσταμεν ὅταν ἐστῶμεν, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα, τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ (...).”

¹⁵⁸⁴ See *Ly.* 219c-d: “οὐκοῦν καὶ ἐκεῖνο φίλον αὐτῷ ἔσται ἕνεκα φίλου; ναί. ἄρ’ οὖν οὐκ ἀνάγκη ἀπειπεῖν ἡμᾶς οὕτως ἰόντας ἢ ἀφικέσθαι ἐπὶ τινα ἀρχήν, ἢ οὐκέτ’ ἐπανοίσει ἐπ’ ἄλλο φίλον, ἀλλ’ ἤξει ἐπ’ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἐστὶν πρῶτον φίλον, οὗ ἕνεκα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα φαμέν πάντα φίλα εἶναι; ἀνάγκη. τοῦτο δὴ ἐστὶν ὃ λέγω, μὴ ἡμᾶς τᾶλλα πάντα ἃ εἶπομεν ἐκεῖνου ἕνεκα φίλα εἶναι, ὥσπερ εἶδωλα ἄττα ὄντα αὐτοῦ, ἐξαπατᾶ, ἢ δ’ ἐκεῖνο τὸ πρῶτον, ὃ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐστὶ φίλον.”

¹⁵⁸⁵ See 219b ff.

thing plays in our life. These views depend on each other and, ultimately, on our view about the good. They thus constitute a very complex system of views and this system of views is what guides each step we take.

These views or beliefs may presuppose many other beliefs that are not practical in a strict sense – i.e., that are not directly connected with our pursuit of the good. For instance, we must have views about what the beings around us are. We must determine their identity and their predicates. This requires us to understand these predicates as such. We must also understand practical predicates, such as good, bad, and all ethical predicates, which determine how we should regard other beings and how we should act. In fact, we might need the whole system of views discussed in Chapter 6 in order to properly guide ourselves in life. This complexity raises the question of the relation between the strictly practical views and all the other views. If, in a way, we need other views to determine what to do and the role different beings may play in our life, it is also true that the way we see things and the attention we give them is determined by our practical views.

But let us leave aside this question for the moment. Whatever the relations of dependency between our views, we need a complex system of practical views to act. These practical views may be explicit, but they may also be tacit, and in general we do not need to think much about them. Some doubts may occasionally occur, and in some cases we may require a more elaborate way of seeing things (such as an ἐμπειρία or even a τέχνη) in order to know what to do.¹⁵⁸⁶ But in general the system is already defined, and we are simply executing it. This does not mean that our views are clear and correct. In fact, they are often hazy and maybe even wrong (as we will consider in Section 5.4 below). Still, we need to hold these views or beliefs in order act. Otherwise, we would be completely disoriented and in a state of despair. We would perhaps have a general direction for our life, if we happened to have any idea about what the superlative good is, but we would not know how to pursue it. We would not even know where to start. As a result, our whole situation and everything around us would be indeterminate. We would be completely lost and we would urgently need to define our life. But usually we do not feel such an urgency, and for a good reason. In general, we already defined these matters and we are therefore engaged in a complex system of pursuits directed at the superlative good.

This is thus a central structure of our being, and at this point we may catch a first glimpse of a notion that is crucial for our entire discussion (and which is what we are actually

¹⁵⁸⁶ For more on the notions of ἐμπειρία and τέχνη, see in particular *Grg.* 463b ff.

trying to determine in this Part III) – namely, the notion of βίος. Plato’s understanding of this notion is essentially connected with what we just saw (though it also involves some aspects that we will only consider in the following chapter). As mentioned earlier, the word βίος does not denote an absolutely generic life. Rather, it refers to a particular form of life, which results from a contraction of possibilities.¹⁵⁸⁷ A βίος has a certain content and one relates to this content in a particular way. In other words, a life has a certain course or destiny, it may include different stages, and as a whole it may be good or bad, happy or unhappy. Our relation to life is indeed a relation to the whole of it, though this whole is always open for us while we are alive. As ephemeral beings, we are exposed to what happens and determined by it. This means that the content and value of a life is shifting, and hence the idea that one can only determine whether a βίος was happy or unhappy at its end.¹⁵⁸⁸

A βίος is thus a particular configuration of life and it is determined by what happens in it. But a βίος is not entirely passive. It is also marked by one’s behavior or attitude – which in turn essentially affects the content of such a life. We find many crossroads in life and we must make choices or determine our path.¹⁵⁸⁹ In other words, we must decide how to live and we must guide our life in a certain way. In order to do so, we adopt a certain pattern or way of life. This is essential for Plato. He recognizes that different persons may follow different tendencies in their life and thus end up having very different lives. But people may also have similar ways of life. In fact, all lives are a variation of a small number of general patterns, which Plato identifies and determines, based on our inner constitution. We will consider these different ways of life in the following chapter.¹⁵⁹⁰ But for now we can already define the general structure of each of them. Regardless of whether there are few or many βίοι, each one is a way of pursuing the superlative good and, as such, it depends on a particular view about what this superlative good is. However, it must also determine how to pursue such a good. It must determine its subordinate goals and the relevance of everything in it. A βίος depends therefore on a complex system of views and it creates or unfolds a complex practical system that somehow integrates all beings in it. In other words, a βίος includes a certain way of behaving and also a certain way of seeing everything. Such a behavior and such a way of seeing are then what determines all the particular acts and contents of life.

¹⁵⁸⁷ See Chap. 3 Sect. 2 and Preface to Part III.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Cp. footnote 1429.

¹⁵⁸⁹ For more on the image of crossroads, see Chap. 13, Sect. 6.1 f).

¹⁵⁹⁰ Cp. Chap. 13 Sect. 6.

Of course, we may be more or less successful in attaining our goals – and, as we shall see, we may be more or less hopeful of attaining them. This does not seem to depend entirely on us. Different lives may have different outcomes, and these outcomes are what we tend to consider when we think of a life. However, Plato stresses how life is primarily determined by our views of the good and the kind of desires they constitute. This is what guides our steps and what constitutes the whole practical dimension. Therefore, the different βίοι are just variations of this fundamental structure, and their value (even their success) depends not only on external factors, but also on their inner constitution, as we will see in the following chapter.

5.3. Expectation, abdication and rejection of life as different modes of relating to the superlative good

The description of a permanent pursuit of a superlative good may seem strange, given the fact that normally we do not seem to have such high ambitions. Even if we take into account the dispersion of our desire by many objects and many temporal stages, it is difficult to see that what we are actually pursuing is a superlative good (or superlative combination of superlatives). In general, we appear to accept and expect less from life. Our desires are pretty modest and we seem to gladly accept something suboptimal. Does this then mean that Plato is wrong and that the superlative desire is not a constitutive component of our ψυχή, or is there a way of conciliating Plato's views with the apparently moderate scope of our desires?

The fact is Plato's model admits different modes of relation to the superlative good, according to the circumstances one finds oneself in. This is what we must now consider. Although Plato does not expressly systematize these different possibilities, he alludes to them at different points and their conjoined consideration lets us better understand what was said and how we normally experience the pursuit of the superlative good.

We already saw that normally the superlative good is not immediately available, and it may even be unclear to us how to reach it or what it consists in. We must thus resign ourselves and try to cope with this fact. We must search for the best option available or for a relative best. But still there are different ways of experiencing this resignation and the alternative pursuit it generates. One of them is the one we considered in the previous chapter. We may regard the superlative good as being simply delayed or deferred, and we make a plan of how to achieve it. We pursue intermediate goods, but with something else in mind or for

the sake of something else – namely, the superlative good. In this case, we have some sort of expectation or hope (ἐλπίς) of coming to attain it.¹⁵⁹¹ Our pursuit is indeed based on this expectation, which may have different degrees. We may be fully convinced we are on our way to perfect happiness, we may think it is viable, or we may just strongly wish it. At any rate, we are optimistic that we will somehow achieve the superlative good and be effectively happy.

It is, of course, important to bear in mind that hope or expectation may have different values, as was stressed in Greek Archaic thinking. First, it may be justified or not – in the sense that the good we are pursuing may or may not be viable. If it is viable, the hope of attaining it is a good thing, since it motivates us to pursue it. But if it is unviable or if we end up not achieving it, then hope's value becomes questionable. It may be good, if it is somehow a form of comfort or consolation that takes our mind from the good we lack (though it is still illusory). But it may also be something dangerous, that leads us to excessive acts and dire consequences.¹⁵⁹² In the particular question we are considering, our expectation of attaining the good may be based on a wrong identification of the superlative good, and in that case any vehement pursuit of it (based on a strong hope of achieving it) may take us even further away from what we really desire. The value of our ἐλπίς is thus highly problematic.

However, it is not necessary for us to be hopeful of attaining the superlative good. We may also be pessimistic about our chances of reaching the superlative good. We may not be able to identify it with something specific, or we may see no possible road to it (at least from the situation we find ourselves in). We may thus have lost all hope and be in a state of disillusionment.¹⁵⁹³ But if it is so, we will then have to come to terms with a very important and central question of life – namely, whether we accept to live or not, whether our life is worth living or not, whether it is better for us to live or to die.¹⁵⁹⁴ In fact, we are constantly making a general assessment of our life – of what we have attained and what we expect to

¹⁵⁹¹ In the dialogues, this notion of ἐλπίς (along with its cognates) is often referred to what will happen after death. Cp. e.g. *Ap.* 41c-d, *Phd.* 63c-64a, 114c, and possibly *Smp.* 193d. It can also be used in a more generic sense (see in particular *Phlb.* 39e-40a, where it is said that “ἡμεῖς δ’ αὖ διὰ παντός τοῦ βίου ἀεὶ γέμομεν ἐλπίδων”). But the most relevant use of the word for the present discussion can be found in *Alc. I* 105a-e. For the general meaning of the term in Greek, see in particular O. LACHNIT, *Elpis. Eine Begriffsuntersuchung*, Diss. Tübingen, 1965, and V. LEINIEKS, ‘Ἐλπίς in Hesiod, *Works and Days* 96, *Philologus* 128 (1984), 1-8 (especially 1-3).

¹⁵⁹² On this double value of ἐλπίς, cp. e.g. F. WEHRLI, *Λάθε βιώσας. Studien zur ältesten Ethik bei den Griechen*, Leipzig/Berlin, Teubner, 1931, 6-10; W. VERDENIUS, A “Hopeless” Line in Hesiod. *Works and Days* 96, *Mnemosyne* 24 (1971), 225-231, V. LEINIEKS, *op. cit.*, especially 3-4.

¹⁵⁹³ One may be in a state of ἀνεπίστωτος ἔχειν, as is said in *Phlb.* 36b.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Plato indeed expresses the question in these different ways. See e.g. *Cri.* 47c-e, *La.* 195c-d, *Alc. I* 105a, *Grg.* 483b, 512a-b, *Phd.* 62a, 65a, *Rep.* 406d ff. For more on the this, cp. Chap. 18, Sect. 1 below.

attain. This assessment is mostly tacit, and it may be wrong, but it nonetheless determines our existence, and allows us to decide whether our life is worth living or not. We must have a view or belief about it, and this view is closely related with our assessment of our life in general. If we think we are on our way to the superlative good, we will very gladly accept to live. If, in turn, we regard the superlative good as being out of reach, we may desire to die. But this is not the only possibility. We do not only accept life if we regard ourselves as being on route to what we regard as the superlative good. It seems possible to be satisfied with less. We may compromise – and this is the possibility we must now consider, since it seems to correspond to a state we often find ourselves in.

Plato refers to this possibility at some points. For instance, in *Gorgias*, Callicles describes most of us as weak-willed human beings who renounce their desires to make a sort of social contract.¹⁵⁹⁵ Although Callicles is presupposing a certain view of the superlative good (namely, that it consists in doing what one wants and achieving as much pleasure as possible), he nevertheless outlines the possibility of settling for less. This stands in marked contrast to the figure of Alcibiades, according to Socrates' description of him in the first eponymous dialogue. Alcibiades only accepts to live because he has the expectation of achieving all that he wants – namely, a superlative honor among human beings.¹⁵⁹⁶ This is why Socrates now comes to him as someone who can help him.¹⁵⁹⁷ There is something extraordinary about Alcibiades' high ambitions. He does not abdicate from the superlative good (even if he may misidentify it and thus misdirect his efforts, as is strongly suggested in the course of the dialogue).

Many of us, however, seem to renounce what we really desire and accept less. We accept the best available option and just desire to avoid greater evils. This does not mean that we are fully aware that we are doing so, and it may even happen that deep down there is still some sort of latent expectation of a superlative good. In other words, we may experience our

¹⁵⁹⁵ See 483a ff.

¹⁵⁹⁶ See 105a-c: “δοκεῖς γάρ μοι, εἴ τίς σοι εἴποι θεῶν· ὧ Ἀλκιβιάδη, πότερον βούλει ζῆν ἔχων ἢ νῦν ἔχεις, ἢ αὐτίκα τεθνάναι εἰ μή σοι ἐξέσται μείζω κτήσασθαι;” δοκεῖς ἂν μοι ἐλέσθαι τεθνάναι· ἀλλὰ νῦν ἐπὶ τίνι δὴ ποτε ἐλπίδι ζῆς, ἐγὼ φράσω. ἡγή, ἐὰν θάττον εἰς τὸν Ἀθηναίων δῆμον παρέλθης – τοῦτο δ’ ἔσεσθαι μάλα ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν – παρελθὼν οὖν ἐνδείξεσθαι Ἀθηναίοις ὅτι ἄξιός εἰ τιμᾶσθαι ὡς οὔτε Περικλῆς οὔτ’ ἄλλος οὐδεὶς τῶν πρόποτε γενομένων, καὶ τοῦτ’ ἐνδειζόμενος μέγιστον δυνήσεσθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει, ἐὰν δ’ ἐνθάδε μέγιστος ἦς, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις Ἑλλῆσι, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἐν Ἑλλῆσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τοῖς βαρβάροις, ὅσοι ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμῖν οἰκοῦσιν ἡπεύρω. καὶ εἰ αὖ σοι εἴποι ὁ αὐτὸς οὗτος θεὸς ὅτι αὐτοῦ σε δεῖ δυναστεύειν ἐν τῇ Εὐρώπῃ, διαβῆναι δὲ εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν οὐκ ἐξέσται σοι οὐδὲ ἐπιθέσθαι τοῖς ἐκεῖ πράγμασιν, οὐκ ἂν αὖ μοι δοκεῖς ἐθέλειν οὐδ’ ἐπὶ τούτοις μόνοις ζῆν, εἰ μὴ ἐμπλήσεις τοῦ σοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως πάντας ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀνθρώπους· καὶ οἴμαι σε πλὴν Κύρου καὶ Ξέρξου ἡγεῖσθαι οὐδένα ἄξιον λόγου γεγονέναι. ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἔχεις ταύτην τὴν ἐλπίδα, εὖ οἶδα καὶ οὐκ εικάζω.”

¹⁵⁹⁷ See 105e-106a.

abdication as a strategic retreat. But be that as it may, the structure of our life remains the same. Our real desire is the superlative good and our abdication is just a modality of it. We continue to be directed at a superlative good (even if we accept we cannot reach it) and in case it would suddenly appear to be within reach, we would gladly accept it. If we could have more (or even have it all, as it were), we would.¹⁵⁹⁸

The possibility of abdication could thus explain why often we do not seem to have high ambitions. It lets us lose sight of what we truly desire. However, such a possibility also raises questions. For one, we may wonder whether it is something under our control or not. Do we consciously choose to abdicate our true desires, or is this rather something that happens to us? Moreover, if it is under our control, should we restrict our desires? Should we aim at less, to avoid dissatisfaction and vain efforts? We find several appeals to do so in Greek culture. The whole “ethics of moderation”, associated with the wisdom of Delphi, seems to consist in a limitation of our desires by accepting our finitude.¹⁵⁹⁹ But what is implied in such a limitation, if it is really carried through? Would we need to numb our relation to ourselves? Would we even have to deny ourselves? And, more importantly, is such a life really worth living?¹⁶⁰⁰ Can we really embrace it as such? Perhaps we need to embrace our high ambitions and have high expectations, if we are ever to have a meaningful life. Perhaps we cannot truly renounce to the superlative good, and only by pursuing it can we ever attain it. It all seems to hinge on whether the superlative good is attainable or not. But regardless of whether we should foster high ambitions or rather curb them, we seem to always do one thing or the other, and thus we experience life as a pursuit of the superlative good or a more or less resigned form of trying to reach the best available option.

5.4. False practical views and practical failure

We saw how the pursuit of the superlative good unfolds into a complex practical system that is underpinned by practical views. This is what constitutes our βίος and all our acts and desires take place within this βίος. Without our practical views, we would be

¹⁵⁹⁸ The abdication of a superlative good is indeed a variation of the structure we considered above. Our βίος will then be based on an identification of a substitute good (i.e., a relative best) and we will determine the way of pursuing (or maintaining) it, as well as the role objects will play in this pursuit. But this is not all. We must still have some idea (however vague) about what the superlative good could be and how the relative best differs from it – otherwise we would not know that we were pursuing a substitute good.

¹⁵⁹⁹ On this topic, cp. Chap. 2 Sect. 1.

¹⁶⁰⁰ As we will see, this is indeed an essential problem for the question concerning the value of the unexamined life, whose acceptance could very well be based on some sort of abdication.

disoriented or lost at sea. Our engagement in a particular course of action depends on these views. We must define what the superlative is. Then, we must define our situation and see what the best option available for us is. We must outline a plan for achieving the greatest possible good and we must determine the role all beings play therein. Finally, we must assess what we attained and what we expect to attain, and decide whether our life is worth living or not. All these views constitute a system of practical views. Some of them are more fundamental than others (as we saw), and they may also depend on other, non-practical views. But whatever their exact interrelation may be, they are the basis of our whole life and each step we take therein. Moreover, they also account for changes in behavior and way of living. Indeed, our views are not immutable. We may change them and adopt new views, which may in turn have a greater or a smaller impact in the way we live and act, according to which views were changed and to the role they play in the system of practical views.

But the fact that our life is based on a system of views also means that it is in many respects exposed to the possibility of being false. Our views are exposed to the limitations we discussed above.¹⁶⁰¹ We may lack discernment, make mistakes, confound things, and misunderstand them. This is precisely what we must now briefly consider. We must see how the different kinds of practical views we have identified may be false and what the consequences of such a falsehood might be.

It is important to bear in mind that there may be cognitive mistakes at the different levels of our system of practical views. First, we may misidentify the superlative good in several different ways. For instance, we may think that something is superlatively good and it may not be so, or it may be only a part of the superlative good. We may even mistake something superlatively bad for the superlative good, as Socrates and Polus accuse each other of doing in *Gorgias*.¹⁶⁰² This means that one can be mistaken about what one really wants (ἄβούλεται). One's true desire may not coincide with what is taken to be the best (ἄδοκεῖ αὐτῷ βέλτιστα εἶναι).¹⁶⁰³ But this is not all. There are several other mistakes we may make. We may wrongly determine the course to the superlative good or we may misidentify the means

¹⁶⁰¹ See Chap. 7.

¹⁶⁰² See 472d ff.

¹⁶⁰³ See *Grg.* 466d-e: “[ΣΩ.] (...) οὐδὲν γὰρ ποιεῖν ὧν βούλονται ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, ποιεῖν μέντοι ὅτι ἂν αὐτοῖς δόξη βέλτιστον εἶναι. [ΠΩΛ.] οὐκοῦν τοῦτο ἔστιν τὸ μέγα δύνασθαι; [ΣΩ.] οὐχ, ὡς γέ φησιν πῶλος. [ΠΩΛ.] ἐγὼ οὐ φημι; φημι μὲν οὖν ἔγωγε. [ΣΩ.] μὰ τὸν – οὐ σύ γε, ἐπεὶ τὸ μέγα δύνασθαι ἔφησ ἀγαθὸν εἶναι τῷ δυναμένῳ. [ΠΩΛ.] φημι γὰρ οὖν. [ΣΩ.] ἀγαθὸν οὖν οἶε εἶναι, εἰάν τις ποιῇ ταῦτα ἃ ἂν δοκῇ αὐτῷ βέλτιστα εἶναι, νοῦν μὴ ἔχων; καὶ τοῦτο καλεῖς σὺ μέγα δύνασθαι; [ΠΩΛ.] οὐκ ἔγωγε.”

to achieve it. In other words, we may lack the instrumental knowledge required to attain it.¹⁶⁰⁴ We may also wrongly determine the best course to attain some intermediate good. Likewise, we may wrongly determine the role a particular being can play in our life.¹⁶⁰⁵ Moreover, we may make a wrong diagnosis of our own situation and of our prospects. For instance, we may think we have attained more than we really did and we may have false expectations about our future. Finally, we may also wrongly determine whether our life is worth living or not.¹⁶⁰⁶

Any one of our practical views may thus be wrong, but the cognitive faults need not be circumscribed to just one of our views. They may indeed affect many different layers at the same time, and in fact all our practical views may be defective – either because they are all wrong or because the most fundamental views are wrong and the others end up being affected by their falsehood. Furthermore, the fact that our practical views may depend on other, non-practical views (such as the views about non-practical properties of beings or the meaning of a general predicate – be it practical or not) means that our practical views may also be affected by any distortion in these other views. This is particularly clear in the case of general predicates (and especially the predicate “good”). Our access to things (both in general and with respect to their practical relevance) depends on them, but if our understanding of these general predicates is hazy or wrong, then we will also have a defective access to all things to which we attribute these predicates. A correct attribution of a predicate or a correct δόξα will thus be insufficient for us to know what we are dealing with.¹⁶⁰⁷

The many possible forms of falsehood or untruth that may affect our practical views are not without consequences. They may cause (and in fact do cause) many practical mistakes or failures. On account of them, we may fail to achieve our intermediate goals or even our ultimate goal: the superlative good. They may cause our ruin and turn our life into a tragedy. More precisely, we may become miserable because of them. Our success or failure in life depends essentially on our perspective on things. It is not random or a matter of luck. We need lucidity or φρόνησις.¹⁶⁰⁸ To be sure, we may also wonder if in some cases a correct δόξα

¹⁶⁰⁴ This is precisely the problem with Alcibiades in *Alcibiades I*. He wants to be admired by all (see 105a-e), but then Socrates shows him throughout the dialogue that he lacks the knowledge required to attain what he desires, which culminates in 127d, when Alcibiades says: “ἀλλὰ μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐδ’ αὐτὸς οἶδ’ ὅτι λέγω, κινδυνεύω δὲ καὶ πάσαι λεληθῆναι ἑμαυτὸν αἰσχίστα ἔχων.”

¹⁶⁰⁵ In other words, we may think that something is helpful, harmful or indifferent when that is not the case.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Plato admits that we may fail to notice that we should either change our ways or give up living. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what is implied in the assertion that the unexamined life is not worth living, which is presented by Socrates as something that people will almost certainly not believe. See *Ap.* 38a.

¹⁶⁰⁷ On this topic, see in particular Chap. 7 Sects. 2.3 and 2.4.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Cp. e.g. *Chrm.* 171d ff., *Men.* 88a-c, *Prt.* 356c-e.

is not enough for us to reach our goal (just like it seems to be enough to reach Larissa).¹⁶⁰⁹ In some particular cases, that may be sufficient. But it is difficult to imagine an entire life that is lived without insight and still gets everything right. Moreover, one has no control over one's correct δόξαι, and one may easily change one's views (and thus adopt incorrect ones). It seems, therefore, that we need to avoid all forms of cognitive defect in our views (and especially in the most fundamental ones) if we want to avoid committing practical errors and being miserable.¹⁶¹⁰

But things are more complex than this, since we may not notice that we have defective views, and we may also fail to notice that we commit some practical mistake. This possibility is particularly concerning in the case of our view of the superlative good. Everything may seem fine, at least for a while, and we will then think we are happy or on our way to happiness (although our state is actually bad).¹⁶¹¹ The same may happen with any intermediate good. We may not notice we have a false view about it or about how to attain it. Likewise, we may not notice that we have a false judgment about whether a resigned life is worth living. In all these cases, we will act, we will be engaged, we will seem to be taking care of ourselves, but this care will be superficial and will correspond to what Socrates calls adulation or flattery (κολακεία) in *Gorgias*.¹⁶¹² Later we will have to consider in more detail the meaning of these unnoticed errors (and of the illusion that accompanies them). We must ascertain whether they are always undesirable – especially because the value of philosophical examination depends on this, as we will see. But for now we are just considering different possibilities.

We may thus fail to notice defects in our practical views and we may also fail to notice we committed practical mistakes. But it is also possible for us to notice (either immediately or retrospectively) that something is wrong. There may be some recognition (ἀναγνώρισις) of our situation, and in that case the meaning of our actions and of our possessions (i.e., of all we attained) will change – or, better still, we will become aware of

¹⁶⁰⁹ Cp. *Men.* 97a ff.

¹⁶¹⁰ Indeed, if one has false views about the most fundamental questions (and especially about the superlative good), then the truth or falsity of the subordinate views may be wholly irrelevant. In some cases, errors in those subordinate views may even be a good thing, if they prevent us from attaining a bad thing that we mistake for a good one.

¹⁶¹¹ Cp. *Ap.* 36d, where Socrates talks of δοκεῖν εὐδαίμονα εἶναι, and *Grg.* 471b, where Polus ironically says of Archelaus that he “ἔλαθεν ἑαυτὸν ἀθλιώτατος γενόμενος”. For more on this possibility, cp. Sect. 3.2 above.

¹⁶¹² Socrates indeed distinguishes between true ἐπιμέλεια or true τέχνη, which know how to effectively take care of something and improve it, and κολακεία (along with the corresponding semblances of τέχνη), which only appear to take care of the body and soul (or, as is said in 464a-b: ποιεῖ μὲν δοκεῖν εὖ ἔχειν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἔχει δὲ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον). For the whole contrast between τέχνη and κολακεία, see 463a ff.

their true meaning. As a result, we will disavow the views we had and possibly become disoriented (at least until we adopt new views).¹⁶¹³

5.5. “No one does wrong willingly”. A first consideration of the problem of ἀκράτεια

There is one final aspect we must consider about how we guide ourselves in life and how we act. We have hitherto considered how the pursuit of the superlative good creates a practical system based on a system of practical views. In other words, our acts and our life in general are based on our views. This also implies that if our views are true, we will be able to properly guide ourselves in life. If, however, they are false, we are bound to make practical mistakes. In fact, all practical mistakes result from our ignorance – i.e., from having baseless knowledge claims. But there is one fundamental objection against this model: namely, one may argue that in many cases we seem to act against our better judgment (i.e., against our views), and this implies that we do something other than what we think best. But if this is true, if we are able to avoid something we think is good or to pursue something we think is evil, then the account of our behavior and of our practical failures that we considered in the previous sections is at least incomplete and cannot fully explain how we act and how we live. It is, at best, just part of the story, and it must be restricted.

The Platonic dialogues are very aware of this problem, but before considering their response to it, let us see in more detail what is implied in this objection and the way it was formulated in Greek culture. Euripides seems to have conceived the possibility of acting against our better judgment. Medea, in the eponymous play, says: “(...) evil conquers me. I understand the evil I’m about to do, and yet my raging heart is stronger than my plans – the heart which causes mortal kind the greatest evils.”¹⁶¹⁴ In *Hippolytus*, Phaedra says: “(...) I have pondered before now in other circumstances in the night's long watches how it is that

¹⁶¹³ At this moment, we could perhaps find some guidance in others, especially if we recognized them as knowledgeable and if we entrusted ourselves to them. Plato mentions this possibility several times. See e.g. *Ly.* 209c ff. and *Alc. I* 117c-e. However, we would still depend on practical views. We would have to believe that the other who guides us has true views about how we should live. Moreover, by following the other’s instructions, we would adopt certain correct δόξαι about how to live – though we would lack proper insight into what we would be doing and why. This could be a problem (especially if we need true insight in order to attain the superlative good), but we will not discuss the question here.

¹⁶¹⁴ See *Medea* 1077-1080: “(...) νικῶμαι κακοῖς./ καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα τολμήσω κακά./ θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων./ ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.” I follow R. Blondell’s translation. See R. BLONDELL *et aliae*, *Women on the Edge*. Four Plays by Euripides: Alcestis – Medea – Helen – Iphigenia at Aulis, New York/London, Routledge, 1999.

the lives of mortals are in ruins. I think that it is not owing to the nature of their wits that they fare worse than they might, since many people possess good sense. Rather, one must look at it this way: we know and understand what is noble but do not bring it to completion. Some fail from laziness, others because they give precedence to some other pleasure than being honorable.”¹⁶¹⁵ In keeping with this idea, Ovid will later describe the possibility in question in the following terms: “*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*”.¹⁶¹⁶ There has been much discussion about these passages, but we will not engage with it.¹⁶¹⁷ What matters here is the way these passages express the possibility of strong passions and desires mastering one’s soul and forcing it to go against our calculation and what we know – i.e., our views about what is best. It is not simply a matter of being free to choose between following our views or embracing our passions. There is no indifferent will that is primarily neutral and entirely free to choose between different possibilities. The will is always motivated in some way – and what one may argue based on Euripides is that we may be unable to do what we want and what seems best to us. Our rational motivation (in the broad sense of the word “rational”) may be opposed by another sort of motivation and it may be weak or unable to impose itself.¹⁶¹⁸

¹⁶¹⁵ Cp. 375-383: “(...) ἤδη ποτ’ ἄλλως νυκτὸς ἐν μακρῷ χρόνῳ/ θνητῶν ἐφρόντισ’ ἧ διέφθαρται βίος./ καί μοι δοκοῦσιν οὐ κατὰ γνώμης φύσιν/ πράσσειν κάκιον’· ἔστι γὰρ τό γ’ εὖ φρονεῖν/ πολλοῖσιν· ἀλλὰ τῆδ’ ἀθρητέον τόδε-/ τὰ χρήσι’ ἐπιστάμεσθα καὶ γινώσκομεν./ οὐκ ἐκπονοῦμεν δ’ , οἱ μὲν ἀργίας ὕπο./ οἱ δ’ ἠδονὴν προθέεντες ἀντὶ τοῦ καλοῦ/ ἄλλην τιν’ (...).” I follow D. Kovacs translation. See EURIPIDES, *Children of Heracles – Hippolytus – Andromache – Hecuba*, Cambridge (MA.)/London, Harvard University Press, 1995. On this matter, see also EURIPIDES, fr. 840: “λέληθεν οὐδὲν τῶνδὲ μ’ ὧν σὺ νοθετεῖς, γνώμην δ’ ἔχοντά μ’ ἢ φύσις βιάζεται.”

¹⁶¹⁶ See *Metamorphoses*, 7.17-21: “excute virgineo conceptas pectore flammas,/ si potes, infelix! si possem, sanior essem;/ sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido,/ mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque,/deteriora sequor!” I quote from W. ANDERSON (ed.), *Ovid’s Metamorphoses*. Books 6-10, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.

¹⁶¹⁷ For discussions of the passages in Euripides (and its possible relation with the historical Socrates), see e.g. E. DODDS, Euripides the Irrationalist, *The Classical Review* 43 (1929), 97-104; B. SNELL, Das früheste Zeugnis über Sokrates, *Philologus* 97 (1948), 125-134; B. SNELL, *Scenes from Greek Drama*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1964, 23-69; J. MOLINE, Euripides, Socrates and Virtue, *Hermes* 103 (1975), 45-67; T. IRWIN, Euripides and Socrates, *Classical Philology* 78 (1983), 183-197; G. RICKERT, Akrasia and Euripides’ *Medea*, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 91 (1987), 91-117; H. FOLEY, Medea’s Divided Self, *Classical Antiquity* 8 (1989), 61-85; G. CUPIDO, *L’anima in conflitto*. “Platone tragico” tra Euripide, Socrate e Aristotele, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002.

¹⁶¹⁸ In this sense, it is not a question of our will as such being weak (as we see in later authors and in much of the contemporary reflection on the problem), but rather of our rational motivation being weak and unable to assert itself. For more on the notion of “weakness of will”, see e.g. J. MÜLLER, *Willenschwäche in Antike und Mittelalter*. Eine Problemgeschichte von Sokrates bis Johannes Duns Scotus, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2009 and S. STROUD, Weakness of Will, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/weakness-will/>, 2008, rev. 2014 (last consulted October 2017).

This is precisely what is expressed by the term ἀκράτεια.¹⁶¹⁹ It designates the lack of mastery or control (κράτος or κρατεῖν) that renders us slaves to our passions. As such, it is opposed to the term “ἐγκράτεια”, which means self-control or self-mastery, and implies that one rules oneself (ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχειν) and is not overtaken by feeling. One has self-restraint and is thus able to endure pain and withstand the attraction of pleasure without changing one’s course of action. One does what one deems best and not what one’s affections dictate. In sum, one is free and autonomous, and this played a very important role in Greek social life. A citizen must be able to do the best for his family and his πόλις – both in times of war and in times of peace. Ἀκράτεια, on the contrary, is a form of powerlessness or impotence. Insofar as one is a slave to one’s passions, one can be forced to do disastrous things. One can break one’s compromises and neglect one’s duties, thereby becoming wholly unreliable. In this sense, ἀκράτεια is closely related to unrestraint (ἀκολασία) and it is opposed to sound-mindedness (σωφροσύνη).¹⁶²⁰

But can we really act against our views and knowledge claims about what is best? The historical Socrates is supposed to have denied such a possibility.¹⁶²¹ However, we will leave aside the views of the historical Socrates (following the principles we laid out at the beginning).¹⁶²² We find several denials of ἀκράτεια in the Platonic corpus and this is what we will now consider. Since losing control often translates into errors and missteps, it is no wonder that these denials are in some cases associated with the notorious tenet that “no one errs willingly (or of one’s own accord)” – οὐδεις ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνει.¹⁶²³ All practical errors occur in spite of ourselves (ἀκῶν). We cannot give our assent to something that is a mistake or, to be more precise, we cannot give our assent to something that we know is a mistake.

¹⁶¹⁹ Plato speaks only of ἀκράτεια (see e.g. *Rep.* 461b, *Ti.* 86d, *Lg.* 636c), but Aristotle and much of the subsequent tradition rather use the term ἀκρασία (cp. e.g. *Ethica Nichomachea* 1145a35 ff.), and hence its predominance in secondary literature.

¹⁶²⁰ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 491d-e: “[ΣΩ.] τί δέ; αὐτῶν, ὃ ἐταῖρε, τί; ἢ τι ἄρχοντας ἢ ἀρχομένους; [ΚΑΛ.] πῶς λέγεις; [ΣΩ.] ἕνα ἕκαστον λέγω αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα· ἢ τοῦτο μὲν οὐδὲν δεῖ, αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχειν, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων; [ΚΑΛ.] πῶς ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα λέγεις; [ΣΩ.] οὐδὲν ποικίλον ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, σῶφρονα ὄντα καὶ ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ, τῶν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἄρχοντα τῶν ἐν ἑαυτῷ.”

¹⁶²¹ Cp. e.g. XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, 3.9.4, and ARISTOTLE, *Ethica Nichomachea*, 1145b25-27.

¹⁶²² See Sect. 4 of the Introduction.

¹⁶²³ See *Prt.* 345d-e: “ἐγὼ γὰρ σχεδὸν τι οἶμαι τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐδεις τῶν σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν ἡγεῖται οὐδένα ἀνθρώπων ἐκόντα ἐξαμαρτάνειν οὐδὲ αἰσχροῦ τε καὶ κακὰ ἐκόντα ἐργάζεσθαι, ἀλλ’ εὖ ἴσασιν ὅτι πάντες οἱ τὰ αἰσχροῦ καὶ τὰ κακὰ ποιῶντες ἄκοντες ποιῶσιν (...).” Cp. also *Ap.* 25e-26a, *Grg.* 488a, *Rep.* 336e, 589c, *Phlb.* 22b. We leave out the discussion in *Hippias Minor*, which considers the conditions for doing wrong willingly, but does not affirm the possibility of it happening. In fact, the whole discussion ends with Socrates questioning such possibility by saying: “ὁ ἄρα ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνων καὶ αἰσχροῦ καὶ ἄδικα ποιῶν, ὃ Ἰππία, εἴπερ τίς ἐστιν οὗτος, οὐκ ἂν ἄλλος εἴη ἢ ὁ ἀγαθός.” See 376b. It is also important to note that the above mentioned tenet is closely associated with the idea that no one is bad willingly (cp. *Ti.* 86d-e and *Lg.* 860d), as well as with the tenet that “no one does injustice willingly” (see *Grg.* 509e, *Lg.* 731c, 860d), but we can leave that aside here.

When we err, we do it unknowingly or out of ignorance. We have a wrong judgment or view about what is best, and that is why we make a practical mistake. We can never decide to do the wrong thing (i.e., something other than what is best) knowing that it is wrong. This would imply desiring and pursuing something that we know (or at least think) is bad – and we find many passages in the corpus that are adamant about such a thing being impossible.¹⁶²⁴ Nothing can overtake us and force us to go against our better judgment. In other words, we never lose control. There is no ἀκράτεια. We cannot even be divided (in a state of στάσις) between what we think is best and our other desires. Our entire being follows our views about what is best (both in general and in a particular situation), and all practical errors are caused by these views. Our views are always in control and we automatically follow what they say. If we did something wrong, then we did not know better.

This is the core of the so-called Socratic intellectualism, which was already prefigured in several aspects of Greek culture (as some have noted). Ever since Homer, the vocabulary of knowledge was used to explain action in general, and there seemed to be no gap between knowledge, intention and action.¹⁶²⁵ Deliberation in particular was conceived as a rational discussion in which advantages are calculated.¹⁶²⁶ All errors are thus the result of clouded judgment. The gods must attack our φρένες in order to lead us to our ruin.¹⁶²⁷ But those are extraordinary circumstances. In general, one is able to control oneself and follow reason. This is the aristocratic model, according to which one cannot succumb to passions if one is to correctly perform one's role. Later the same model was adopted by the Sophists, who emphasize precisely the importance of knowledge for a good life. This is why Protagoras, in the eponymous dialogue, accepts Socrates' views so easily.

But Socrates also stresses that the many believe in ἀκράτεια – i.e., that we may be controlled by our passions.¹⁶²⁸ To be sure, there are many cases in which we clearly seem to

¹⁶²⁴ In *Prt.* 358b-c, Socrates says: “(...) οὐδεις οὔτε εἰδὼς οὔτε οἰόμενος ἄλλα βελτίω εἶναι ἢ ἃ ποιεῖ, καὶ δυνατά, ἔπειτα ποιεῖ ταῦτα, ἐξὸν τὰ βελτίω (...).” In 358e, it is said: “ἃ δὲ ἡγεῖται κακά, οὐδένα οὔτε ἰέναι ἐπὶ ταῦτα οὔτε λαμβάνειν ἐκόντα.” See also *Men.* 77b-e and *Grg.* 468c.

¹⁶²⁵ On this matter, see e.g. W. NESTLE, *Intellektualismus und Mystik in der Griechischen Philosophie*, *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum* 49 (1922), 137-157, especially 138; E. DODDS, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley/etc., University of California Press, 1951, 16-17; M. O'BRIEN, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1967, 22ff.

¹⁶²⁶ See e.g. F. DIRLMEIER, *Vom Monolog der Dichtung zum “inneren” Logos bei Platon und Aristoteles*, *Gymnasium* 67 (1960), 26-41, especially 27-30; H. PELLICCIA, *Mind, Body, and Speech in Homer and Pindar*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995, 213-216.

¹⁶²⁷ See e.g. J. STALLMACH, *Ate. Zur Frage des Selbst- und Weltverständnisses des frühgriechischen Menschen*, Meisenheim, Anton Hain, 1968; N. YAMAGATA, *Homeric Morality*, Leiden/etc., Brill, 1994, 50 ff.

¹⁶²⁸ See 352d-e: “οἴσθα οὖν ὅτι οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐμοὶ τε καὶ σοὶ οὐ πείθονται, ἀλλὰ πολλοὺς φασὶ γινώσκοντας τὰ βέλτιστα οὐκ ἐθέλειν πράττειν, ἐξὸν αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ ἄλλα πράττειν· καὶ ὅσους δὴ ἐγὼ ἠρόμην

err or do the wrong thing out of ignorance. Oedipus, for instance, would not have killed his father and married his mother had he known what he was doing. Yet, in other cases, the intellectualist model is not so obvious. In fact, it seems to go against empirical evidence and is as such counter-intuitive or paradoxical (as Aristotle stresses).¹⁶²⁹ We all have felt divided between our thoughts and feelings, and our passions may at some points overtake us and force us to do something. Consequently, the Socratic intellectualism we find in many dialogues seems to be very far from what happens in life. It seems obvious that ἀκράτεια is possible. How could Plato not have seen that?

However, what we find in Plato is not a denial of all those moments that we interpret as an occurrence of ἀκράτεια. Rather, he endeavors to show that these only appear to be an occurrence of ἀκράτεια. What happens is actually something else. Plato reinterprets the phenomena in light of the above mentioned Socratic intellectualism and flatly denies any shadow of ἀκράτεια. This is manifest in several passages. Of course there are other passages that are more problematic. In the context of soul's tripartition (and especially in *Republic* IV), Plato seems to admit the possibility of true ἀκράτεια. This has often been interpreted as a later revision of the views Plato initially adopted from Socrates. But the matter is actually more complicated. As we will see in the following chapter, the developments introduced in the framework of the soul's partition can be conciliated with the so-called intellectualism. The "more Socratic phase" and the "Platonic phase" can be interpreted as corresponding to two different presentations of a single way of looking at our ψυχή. But for now we will leave aside the question of the tripartition. We will consider the arguments that reject the possibility of ἀκράτεια without making any reference to the tripartition and later, after discussing the tripartition as such, we will revise the analysis of this section.¹⁶³⁰

ὅτι ποτε αἰτίον ἐστὶ τούτου, ὑπὸ ἡδονῆς φασιν ἠττωμένους ἢ λύπης ἢ ὧν νυνδὴ ἐγὼ ἔλεγον ὑπὸ τίνος τούτων κρατουμένους ταῦτα ποιεῖν τοὺς ποιῶντας.”

¹⁶²⁹ See *Ethica Nichomachea*, 1145b25-28: “Σωκράτης μὲν γὰρ ὅλως ἐμάχετο πρὸς τὸν λόγον ὡς οὐκ οὔσης ἀκρασίας· οὐθένα γὰρ ὑπολαμβάνοντα πράττειν παρὰ τὸ βέλτιστον, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἄγνοιαν. οὗτος μὲν οὖν ὁ λόγος ἀμβισβητεῖ τοῖς φαινομένοις ἐναργῶς (...).”

¹⁶³⁰ For a reconsideration of the problem of ἀκράτεια in light of the soul's tripartition, see Chap. 13, Sect. 5.3 below. For other discussions of the problem of ἀκράτεια in Plato, see e.g. C. BOBONICH, *Akrasia and Agency in Plato's Laws and Republic*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994), 3-36; T. PENNER, *Socrates on the Strength of Knowledge. Protagoras 351b-357e*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79 (1997), 117-149; M. MORRIS, *Akrasia in the Protagoras and the Republic*, *Phronesis* 51 (2006), 195-229; C. BOBONICH & P. DESTREÉE (ed.), *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy. From Socrates to Plotinus*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2007, 1-138; R. LEFEBVRE, & A. TORDESILLAS (eds.), *Faiblesse de la volonté et maîtrise de soi. Doctrines antiques, perspectives contemporaines*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009, 31-75; J. MÜLLER, *Willenschwäche in Antike und Mittelalter. Eine Problemgeschichte von Sokrates bis Johannes Duns Scotus*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2009, 64-108.

As was said above, a central component of Plato's arguments is that we do not want what is bad or harmful – unless we think that something good comes from it, and in that case it is not truly bad.¹⁶³¹ We do not want to be miserable. This would be in contradiction with life's structure. We only pursue what is good.¹⁶³² More precisely, we pursue what we think is good.¹⁶³³ We want to be happy and that guides all our acts.¹⁶³⁴ Therefore, if we happen to make a practical error and direct ourselves to something bad, it is only because we did not know better. Otherwise, we would not have done it. We always follow our own calculation of what is better. But this is very problematic, as Plato himself recognizes. In *Protagoras*, where we find the most elaborate discussion of the question, Plato formulates it as a problem concerning the strength of knowledge. He asks if knowledge has authority and power of command or if it can be overpowered by feelings, passions, and be dragged by them.¹⁶³⁵ If one knows what is good, can one be somehow forced to act against it?

In order to answer this question, we should bear in mind that the concept “knowledge” can be used in a weaker and in a stronger sense. Indeed, it can designate anything that is experienced as knowledge (i.e., our knowledge claims or δόξαι) – or it can refer to knowledge proper. The difference between the two is that the first may be only apparent (i.e., we may actually have a false knowledge claim), whereas the second is infallible. In a way, this makes little difference for the question of whether we always follow knowledge, because we always follow our views (whether they are true or false). The difference lies in the result. If we follow true views, we will be excellent and happy. If we have wrong views (i.e., simple knowledge claims), we will make practical errors and be miserable.¹⁶³⁶ But this is not the

¹⁶³¹ This is the case of physical exercises and medical treatments. Both may imply pain and seem bad, but their effects ultimately benefit us. See e.g. *Prt.* 354a-b.

¹⁶³² See e.g. *Rep.* 438a: “πάντες γὰρ ἄρα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν (...).”

¹⁶³³ Cp. *Men.* 77d-e: “οὐκοῦν δῆλον ὅτι οὗτοι μὲν οὐ τῶν κακῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν, οἱ ἀγνοοῦντες αὐτά, ἀλλὰ ἐκείνων ἃ ᾗοντο ἀγαθὰ εἶναι, ἔστιν δὲ ταῦτά γε κακά· ὥστε οἱ ἀγνοοῦντες αὐτὰ καὶ οἰόμενοι ἀγαθὰ εἶναι δῆλον ὅτι τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν.”

¹⁶³⁴ This is what constitutes the so-called “psychological eudaimonism”. Cp. e.g. *Euthd.* 278e-279a: “ἄρα γε πάντες ἄνθρωποι βουλόμεθα εὖ πράττειν; ἢ τοῦτο μὲν ἐρώτημα ὧν νυνδὴ ἐφοβούμην ἐν τῶν καταγελάστων; ἀνόητον γὰρ δῆπου καὶ τὸ ἐρωτᾶν τὰ τοιαῦτα· τίς γὰρ οὐ βούλεται ἄνθρωπον εὖ πράττειν; οὐδεὶς ὅστις οὐκ, ἔφη ὁ Κλεινίας.”

¹⁶³⁵ 352b-c: “πῶς ἔχεις πρὸς ἐπιστήμην; πότερον καὶ τοῦτο σοὶ δοκεῖ ὥσπερ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἢ ἄλλως; δοκεῖ δὲ τοῖς πολλοῖς περὶ ἐπιστήμης τοιοῦτόν τι, οὐκ ἰσχυρόν οὐδ' ἡγεμονικόν οὐδ' ἀρχικόν εἶναι· οὐδὲ ὡς περὶ τοιοῦτου αὐτοῦ ὄντος διανοοῦνται, ἀλλ' ἐνούσης πολλάκις ἀνθρώπῳ ἐπιστήμης οὐ τὴν ἐπιστήμην αὐτοῦ ἄρχειν ἀλλ' ἄλλο τι, τοτὲ μὲν θυμόν, τοτὲ δὲ ἡδονήν, τοτὲ δὲ λύπην, ἐνίοτε δὲ ἔρωτα, πολλάκις δὲ φόβον, ἀτεχνῶς διανοοῦμενοι περὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης ὥσπερ περὶ ἀνδραπόδου, περιελκομένης ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων. ἄρ' οὐ καὶ σοὶ τοιοῦτόν τι περὶ αὐτῆς δοκεῖ, ἢ καλόν τε εἶναι ἢ ἐπιστήμη καὶ οἷον ἄρχειν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ ἐάνπερ γινώσκῃ τις τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά, μὴ ἂν κρατηθῆναι ὑπὸ μηδενὸς ὥστε ἄλλ' ἄττα πράττειν ἢ ἂν ἐπιστήμη κελεύῃ, ἀλλ' ἰκανὴν εἶναι τὴν φρόνησιν βοηθεῖν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ;”

¹⁶³⁶ Cp. e.g. *Men.* 88c: “[ΣΩ.] οὐκοῦν συλλήβδην πάντα τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιχειρήματα καὶ καρτερήματα ἡγουμένης μὲν φρονήσεως εἰς εὐδαιμονίαν τελευτᾷ, ἀφροσύνης δ' εἰς τούναντίον; [ΜΕΝ.] ἔοικεν.”

only difference. According to Plato, what we often interpret as ἀκράτεια is only possible if we have knowledge in a weaker sense. Basically, Plato argues that what we regard as being overtaken by our passions is actually a change of view caused by the circumstances we find ourselves in and the limitations of our way of seeing things.

We can better understand how it is so if we consider what is said in *Protagoras*. According to Socrates, all ἀκράτεια seems to be diachronic. Using a hedonist framework, Socrates argues that our actions always pursue what we see as most pleasant or least painful.¹⁶³⁷ It is therefore a matter of how we see things. However, our relation to pleasure and pain is affected by the same problem as our vision of objects in space. Our acuity varies according to how distant the objects are from us. Likewise, if the pleasures and pains we are considering happen to be far away in time, we fail to properly assess them. Temporal distance introduces distortions, and so we lose sight of other possibilities and also of the long-run consequences of what we do. Moreover, the affections determining us at the present will seem greater and have a greater impact in how we see things.¹⁶³⁸ We find a similar idea in *Philebus*. What we feel in a particular moment distorts our past and future affections, and as a result we wrongly estimate the intensity of our present, past and future affections.¹⁶³⁹ This shows that our present affections may change our views and δόξαι. In fact, Plato admits in the *Republic* that we can be deprived of a δόξα in three ways: we can be robbed (by being persuaded by someone else or forgetting what we think), we may be charmed by pleasure or fear, and we may be forced by pain.¹⁶⁴⁰ Our affections may thus change our δόξαι, at least temporarily. There is an oscillation of judgment, according to what affections are nearer at the time. In other words, everything appears in light of one's affections. As a result, something may seem bad when seen from a distance, but when we were close, it temporarily appears to be good.¹⁶⁴¹ So we act based on our judgment, but we do not notice that it

¹⁶³⁷ See 354a ff.

¹⁶³⁸ See 356a-e.

¹⁶³⁹ See 41d ff., especially 42b: “νῦν δέ γε αὐταὶ διὰ τὸ πόρρωθὲν τε καὶ ἐγγύθεν ἐκάστοτε μεταβαλλόμεναι θεωρεῖσθαι, καὶ ἅμα τιθέμεναι παρ’ ἀλλήλας, αἱ μὲν ἡδοναὶ παρὰ τὸ λυπηρὸν μείζους φαίνονται καὶ σφοδρότεροι, λῦπαι δ’ αὖ διὰ τὸ παρ’ ἡδονᾶς τὸναντίον ἐκείναις.”

¹⁶⁴⁰ See 413a-c: “(...) καὶ μοι δοκοῦσιν ἄκοντες ἀληθοῦς δόξης στερίσκεσθαι. οὐκοῦν κλαπέντες ἢ γοητευθέντες ἢ βιασθέντες τοῦτο πάσχουσιν; οὐδὲ νῦν, ἔφη, μανθάνω. τραγικῶς, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, κινδυνεύω λέγειν. κλαπέντας μὲν γὰρ τοὺς μεταπεισθέντας λέγω καὶ τοὺς ἐπιλανθανομένους, ὅτι τῶν μὲν χρόνος, τῶν δὲ λόγος ἐξαιρούμενος λανθάνει· νῦν γὰρ που μανθάνεις; ναί. τοὺς τοίνυν βιασθέντας λέγω οὓς ἂν ὀδύνη τις ἢ ἀλγηδὼν μεταδοξάσαι ποιήσῃ. καὶ τοῦτ’ ἔφη, ἔμαθον, καὶ ὀρθῶς λέγεις. τοὺς μὴν γοητευθέντας, ὡς ἐγὼμαι, κἂν σὺ φαίης εἶναι οἱ ἂν μεταδοξάσωσιν ἢ ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς κηληθέντες ἢ ὑπὸ φόβου τι δεῖσαντες. εἶοικε γάρ, ἦ δ’ ὅς, γοητεύειν πάντα ὅσα ἀπατᾷ.”

¹⁶⁴¹ Cp. 356d: “(...) αὕτη [namely, ἡ τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις] μὲν ἡμᾶς ἐπλάνα καὶ ἐποίει ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω πολλάκις μεταλαμβάνειν ταῦτά καὶ μεταμέλειν καὶ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς αἰρέσεσιν τῶν μεγάλων τε καὶ μικρῶν (...).”

temporarily changed, and so we later interpret the action as akratic, since it contradicted the views we have about what is best when we are not in the circumstances we were at the time of the action.

This is possible only because our representation of things (in this case, our representation of pleasures and pains) can be deceived by the appearances – i.e., by how they appear in virtue of their proximity and distance. Socrates talks precisely of “the power of what appears” (ἡ τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις).¹⁶⁴² But if one were to develop a precise knowledge of all affections (such as would result from the measuring expertise Socrates briefly describes), then it would not be possible for our views to be temporarily distorted and we would not seem to act against our better judgment.¹⁶⁴³ It is the mere doxastic nature of our views about what is best that allows the temporary transmutation of our views due to our affections.

In sum, what seems to be acting against our better judgment is actually a temporary change of our “better judgment”. In the moment when we do not follow what we recognize as the best, we are actually in a state of temporary clouding. It corresponds to the traditional model of a disturbance of one’s φρένες or ἀτή, which we mentioned above. Plato thus allows our views to keep control in a particular way. Each practical decision is based on judgments and has a cognitive basis. Such is the intrinsic structure of our desire. Thus, if there is something like a “*deteriora sequor*”, it must be based on practical judgments. Akratic actions, as well as all forms of inner conflicts (στάσεις), are never a conflict between a judgment and something deprived of judgment. There must be two practical judgments or two practical views and one of them must prevail over the other. Our mind must be somehow split, but there is only one tribunal. We must adopt one of the views, and therefore our action will always be based on knowledge. If (as was said) we have only knowledge in a weaker sense (which is not actually knowledge, but just a knowledge claim), then our views may change and we may perform actions that seem akratic.¹⁶⁴⁴ But if we were to attain actual knowledge,

¹⁶⁴² See once more 356d.

¹⁶⁴³ See See 356d-e: “(...) ἡ δὲ μετρητικὴ ἄκυρον μὲν ἂν ἐποίησε τοῦτο τὸ φάντασμα, δηλώσασα δὲ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἡσυχίαν ἂν ἐποίησεν ἔχειν τὴν ψυχὴν μένουσαν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀληθεῖ καὶ ἔσωσεν ἂν τὸν βίον (...).”

¹⁶⁴⁴ A cognitive limitation is indeed essential. As we saw in Chap. 7, our way of seeing things is often full of errors, inaccuracies and contradictions, and this is what allows for the oscillations of judgment we are now considering.

then (according to Plato) we would be immune to any distortions and we would always do what is best.¹⁶⁴⁵

Ἀκράτεια is thus the conflict between two different views about the good, which prevail in different moments. It is an experience of changing our mind, and not of losing rational control. The δόξαι about the superlative good and about the particular goods always guide us, and it is not within our power to act against them – nor do we want to. What we may want is to act against a particular δόξα, but we only want this because of other δόξαι we have. The only cause of errors is our ignorance, and so the general model of action described above is preserved.¹⁶⁴⁶ Of course, all this still has to be reconsidered in light of the tripartition of the soul. But we will see that when talking about the three parts of the soul, Plato shows that all of them are to a certain extent rational or have a semblance of rationality. Consequently, the inner scission in some of our acts is a scission of different reasons. In some cases, the reasons of our affections may gain the upper hand – but they are still a modality of reason.

6. The different layers of the Platonic identification of the good

We have hitherto considered the structure of the soul's practical dimension according to Plato. We saw that the soul always desires a superlative good and that it must identify it with something, in order to pursue it. This pursuit may then unfold in a complex practical system, based on a system of practical views. However, this is only part of Plato's description of the soul's practical dimension. As was just mentioned, Plato also considers the soul as being tripartite and this tripartition renders the structure we just considered much more complex. However, before considering the soul's tripartition, it is important to discuss one last question: namely, the Platonic identification of the good. We saw that we all pursue the good (and, in fact, a superlative good), but what is the good according to Plato? This is indeed the question on which the secondary literature most often focuses, and there are good reasons for it. The abstract structure we just saw is often presented by Plato in a more concrete form and already identified with a particular understanding of what the superlative good is. Moreover, we all have the greatest interest in knowing specifically what we should

¹⁶⁴⁵ Of course none of this means that we cannot act against our better judgment because of some kind of disease or physical imbalance, as is admitted in *Ti.* 86b ff. However, even in that case the disease must first affect our mind and change our views, or else it will only produce a random movement, which cannot really be imputed to us.

¹⁶⁴⁶ A different question is whether or not we are to blame for this ignorance, and whether we can do something to correct it. For a discussion of this question, see Chap. 17 below.

pursue in life. Therefore, it is natural to wonder exactly what is Plato's identification of the good.

In the following, we will consider some of the most important aspects of such an identification. We will try to determine what Plato regards as the highest good for each of us, and we also see how Plato's discussion of the good is not restricted to our individual good. Plato considers also the "intersubjective" good, the cosmic good and the *idea* of the good as such. This raises many questions about the relation between all these kinds of good. Indeed, Plato's identification of the good is a very complex question and notoriously complicated. This was acknowledged even in Antiquity, as the phrase "the Platonic good" was a proverbial designation for something particularly obscure.¹⁶⁴⁷ The question is further complicated by the fact that, even if Plato possessed a completely developed and coherent doctrine about the good, it is not clear that he somehow conveyed it in the corpus. We do find some important indications in the dialogues, but they fall significantly short of a complete exposition. Plato himself stresses this insufficiency several times.¹⁶⁴⁸ Nevertheless, we will try to systematize (even if very succinctly) the different aspects presented, in order to see their interconnection and the questions they raise.

6.1. The good for an individual ψυχή

The first important question we must consider is Plato's identification of the superlative good for the individual ψυχή – at least insofar as it can be isolated from any other consideration. We must try to determine what the best thing or the greatest possession is. In other words, we must see what our full happiness may consist of, which in turn determines how we shall pursue it or how we should live our life. However, it is difficult to define what exactly the superlative good is for Plato. As was said, he provides us only with some indications, and these are often vague. In some cases, they even seem to be contradictory, so it is not clear whether they can be reconciled in a single doctrine. However, we may regard

¹⁶⁴⁷ See e.g. DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Vitae philosophorum*, III.27: "Ἄμφις Ἄμφικράτει· τὸ δ' ἀγαθὸν ὃ τι ποτ' ἐστίν, οὗ σὺ τυγχάνειν/ μέλλεις διὰ ταύτην, ἦττον οἶδα τοῦτ' ἐγώ,/ ὃ δέσποτ', ἢ τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθόν." The phrase probably originates from Plato's enigmatic lecture on the Good. Cp. R. da RIOS (ed.), *Aristoxeni elementa harmonica*, Roma, Polygraphica, 1954, 39-40; H. DIELS (ed.), *Simplicii in Aristotelis physicorum libros octo commentaria*, vol. 1, Berlin, Reimer, 1882, 453-454.

¹⁶⁴⁸ For instance, in the most developed discussion of the good in the *Republic*, Socrates is very clear about the fact that he will be referring to the good only indirectly. As he says, he will only present the offspring or issue of the good. See 506d-e. In *Philebus*, Socrates adopts a likewise indirect method in order to think about the good. See in particular 61a-b and 64d-65a. We also find several important references to the good in *Timaeus* (especially in 29e ff.), but the entire discussion is presented as a likely account. See *Ti.* 29b-d.

them as contributions to the problem at hand. They present several essential components and outline several important possibilities, and that is what we will now consider. We will bring these indications together and consider the broadest lines of Plato's analysis.¹⁶⁴⁹

First, it is important to bear in mind that our life needs a direction. It normally has one, but for Plato this direction is deficient in many regards, as we will consider in Chapter 18 below, when we discuss the limitations of the unexamined life as such. For now, we may say that life as we normally live it is defined by a great lack. Consequently, we stand in need of care (θεραπεία). We cannot leave things as they are. We need to correct and improve our immediate state.¹⁶⁵⁰ In order to do this, we need a τέχνη – and, more precisely, a τέχνη τοῦ βίου.¹⁶⁵¹ We need an insight into life's structure that allows us to arrange it in the best possible way and thus live correctly – i.e., live a good life. This implies not only knowing what the best thing is, but also knowing how to pursue it – i.e., which βίος we should lead in order to be happy. In fact, it may imply knowing many other things that are not directly connected with how we should live. But regardless of the kinds of knowledge it implies, such a τέχνη will allow us to correct our practical views and thus avoid practical mistakes.¹⁶⁵² Plato is thus clear about the need to improve our life through knowledge, though he is not very clear about what knowledge is implied here. He does not present a full τέχνη τοῦ βίου, though he does offer some contributions to it – and this is what we must now consider.

One of the things often stressed in the dialogues is that εὐδαιμονία is not simply something we receive from the outside, but it rather has an active sense – as is implied in the already mentioned interpretation of faring well (εὖ πράττειν) as acting correctly (ὀρθῶς πράττειν).¹⁶⁵³ The way we act is indeed decisive, but our actions do not stand by themselves. They are rather the result of our inner disposition or character, which may be marked by excellence (ἀρετή) or badness (κακία). Consequently, happiness depends on our own inner worth.¹⁶⁵⁴ This idea had already been defended by other authors – and some of them (such as

¹⁶⁴⁹ This will allow us to better understand some aspects we briefly considered in our analysis of the *Apology*, such as the importance of ἀρετή, philosophical examination and knowledge or truth. Cp. in particular Chap. 3. However, several of the aspects we will now briefly explore will have to be revised later – especially in light of the question of the soul's partition.

¹⁶⁵⁰ In other words, we are in the same situation as Alcibiades and stand in need of special care. See *Alc. I* 127d ff., and cp. the analysis of this passage in Sect. 2 above.

¹⁶⁵¹ Plato never uses the expression τέχνη τοῦ βίου, but he refers to what is involved in it: namely, the idea of determining our life based on a knowledge of its structure. This idea was already present in the Sophistic project, to which the dialogues often refer, but Plato further develops it.

¹⁶⁵² This lack of errors is precisely what characterizes τέχνη as such. See e.g. *Rep.* 340d-341a.

¹⁶⁵³ See e.g. *Alc. I* 116b and *Grg.* 507c. Cp. Sect. 3.2.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 470e: “(...) τὸν μὲν γὰρ καλὸν κάγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα εὐδαίμονα εἶναι φημι, τὸν δὲ ἄδικον καὶ πονηρὸν ἄθλιον.”

Heraclitus and Democritus) even affirmed that the δαίμων that determines our lot is actually within us.¹⁶⁵⁵ However, in Plato's dialogues we find elaborate arguments in favor of this view, and our happiness or misery seems to depend entirely on ἀρετή and κακία. All other things, such as external goods and health, play no important role in our life. We are thus immune to luck and to what others may do to us.¹⁶⁵⁶ Happiness depends solely on us. It is a task, and a particularly difficult one, since ἀρετή is not easy to attain. This had already been stressed long before Plato.¹⁶⁵⁷ Ἀρετή implies much training. But what exactly is ἀρετή and how does Plato conceive of it?

In general, ἀρετή means excellence and it applies not only to persons, but also to animals and utensils. It is what renders someone or something good (ἀγαθόν), and as such the sense of the word ἀρετή is primarily functional, as was the sense of ἀγαθόν.¹⁶⁵⁸ It refers to a particular task (ἔργον) and implies the ability to perform it perfectly.¹⁶⁵⁹ In fact, the word often implies not only that a particular being is fit for a task, but also that it is so fit that it stands out from among other similar beings. In other words, ἀρετή carries a certain connotation of superlativeness. In the case of human beings, its sense was at first socially determined. It implied success and renown. Initially, this success was connected with some sort of competition and being better than the others.¹⁶⁶⁰ It was also associated with the most important roles in the community. In an aristocratic context, ἀρετή implies the ability to govern one's household and the πόλις. This ability may or may not depend on one's birth and breeding, but it is at any rate related to certain functions in the πόλις. Later, however, the word starts to gain an increasingly moral sense and then it comes to correspond to an intrinsic standard that is valid for all human beings. Ἀρετή is our best version or our best self.¹⁶⁶¹

¹⁶⁵⁵ Heraclitus states that “ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων” (DK B119). Democritus, in turn, says (DK B171): “εὐδαιμονία οὐκ ἐν βοσκήμασιν οἰκεῖ οὐδὲ ἐν χρυσῶι· ψυχὴ οἰκητήριον δαίμονος.”

¹⁶⁵⁶ Cp. e.g. *Ap.* 30b, *Cri.* 44d, *Grg.* 469b-c.

¹⁶⁵⁷ Cp. in particular HESIOD, *Opus et dies*, 287-292: “τὴν μὲν τοι κακότητα καὶ ἰλαδὸν ἔστιν ἐλέσθαι/ ῥηιδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει-/ τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἰδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν/ ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτήν/ καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὶν δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται,/ ῥηιδίη δὴ ἔπειτα πέλει, χαλεπὴ περ ἐοῦσα.” Plato himself quotes this passage several times. See *Prt.* 340d, *Rep.* 364d, *Lg.* 718e. For the difficulty of ἀρετή, cp. also XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*. 2.1.21 ff.

¹⁶⁵⁸ See *Grg.* 506d: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ἀγαθοὶ γέ ἐσμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα ὅσ' ἀγαθὰ ἐστίν, ἀρετῆς τινοῦ παραγενομένης; ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι, ὦ Καλλίκλεις.” For the functional sense of ἀγαθόν, see Sect. 3.1 above.

¹⁶⁵⁹ Cp. *Rep.* 353a-b: “νῦν δὴ οἶμαι ἄμεινον ἂν μάθοις ὃ ἄρτι ἠρώτων, πυθθανόμενος εἰ οὐ τοῦτο ἐκάστου εἴη ἔργον ὃ ἂν ἢ μόνον τι ἢ κάλλιστα τῶν ἄλλων ἀπεργάζηται. ἀλλά, ἔφη, μανθάνω τε καὶ μοι δοκεῖ τοῦτο ἐκάστου πράγματος ἔργον εἶναι. εἶεν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ. οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀρετὴ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ἐκάστῳ ὅπερ καὶ ἔργον τι προστέτακται;”

¹⁶⁶⁰ It basically consisted in what Homer expressed as “αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων”. See *Iliad* VI.208 and XI.784.

¹⁶⁶¹ For more on the notion of ἀρετή, see e.g. J. LUDWIG, *Quae fuerit vocis ἀρετῆς vis ac natura ante Demosthenis exitum*, Diss. Leipzig, 1906; M. HOFFMANN, *Die ethische Terminologie bei Homer, Hesiod und*

However, this does not mean that ἀρετή is simple. There are several different ἀρεταί and they are associated with different contexts. In the Homeric world, for instance, courage or “virility” (ἀνδρεία) played a central role. To use Adkins’ distinction, this is an essentially competitive excellence, in contrast with other excellences that are rather cooperative or quiet, and are thus essential for social life.¹⁶⁶² Justice (δικαιοσύνη) in particular is required for one to do what is right, respect the rights of others, and punish those that transgress them.¹⁶⁶³ This implies sound-mindedness or self-control (σωφροσύνη). One must curb one’s desires and avoid excesses, in order not to commit acts of ὕβρις.¹⁶⁶⁴ Justice and sound-mindedness are indeed intimately connected and sometimes they are difficult to distinguish (even in Plato).¹⁶⁶⁵ They may also be combined with ἀνδρεία, or simply opposed to it.¹⁶⁶⁶ But there is more. The Greeks also identified other excellences, such as magnanimity (μεγαλοφροσύνη) and piety or holiness (which qualified one’s relation to the gods).¹⁶⁶⁷ But one other ἀρετή is

den altern Elegikern und Jambographen, Tübingen, Kloeres, 1914, 92 ff., 118ff. 124, 128 ff., 147 ff.; O. BAUERNFEIND, ἀρετή, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; P. HUART, *Le vocabulaire de l’analyse psychologique dans l’œuvre de Thucydide*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, 447-451; A. ADKINS, *Moral Values and Political Behavior in Ancient Greece*. From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century, London, Chatto & Windus, 1972, *passim*; S. DARCUS SULLIVAN, *Psychological and Ethical Ideas*. What Early Greeks Say, Leiden/etc., Brill, 1995, 123-173; M. FINKELBERG, Timē and Aretē in Homer, *The Classical Quarterly* 48 (1998), 14-28.

¹⁶⁶² Cp. A. ADKINS, *Merit and Responsibility*. A Study in Greek Values, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, 6-7, 31ff.

¹⁶⁶³ In this sense, justice implied a concern with the good of other people (the ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν), as Thrasymachus stresses in *Rep.* 343c. But this is just one aspect of the Archaic sense of δίκη and δικαιοσύνη. For more on these notions, cp. e.g. R. HIRZEL, *Themis, Dike und Verwandtes*. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Rechtsidee bei den Griechen, Leipzig, S. Hirzel, 1907; G. VLASTOS, Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies, *Classical Philology* 42 (1947), 156-178; L. PALMER, The Indo-European Origins of Greek Justice, *Transactions of the Philological Society* 49 (1950), 149-168; E. HAVELOCK, Dikaiosune. An Essay in Greek Intellectual History, *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 49-70; H. HOMMEL, Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit. Zur Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffspaares, *Antike und Abendland* 15 (1969), 159-186, especially 168ff.; V. RODGERS, Some Thoughts on δίκη, *The Classical Quarterly* 21 (1971), 289-301; M. GAGARIN, Dike in the Works and Days, *Classical Philology* 68 (1973), 81-94; IDEM, Dike in Archaic Greek Thought, *Classical Philology* 69 (1974), 186-197; M. DICKIE, Dike as a Moral Term in Homer and Hesiod, *Classical Philology* 73 (1978), 91-101; E. HAVELOCK, *The Greek Concept of Justice*. From its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato, Cambridge (MA)/London, Harvard University Press, 1978; S. DARCUS SULLIVAN, *Psychological and Ethical Ideas*. What Early Greeks Say, Leiden/etc., Brill, 1995, 174-228; W. ALLAN, Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 126 (2006), 1-35.

¹⁶⁶⁴ For more on σωφροσύνη, see e.g. G. DE VRIES, Σωφροσύνη en grec classique, *Mnemosyne* 11 (1943), 81-101; D. LANZA, Σοφία e σωφροσύνη alla fine dell’Atene periclea, *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 37 (1965), 172-188; H. NORTH, *Sophrosyne*. Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature, Ithaca (N.Y.), Cornell University Press, 1966; T. TUOZZO, *Plato’s Charmides*. Positive Elenchus in a “Socratic” Dialogue, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2011, 90-98.

¹⁶⁶⁵ See in particular *Rep.* 430d ff., where these two excellences are defined and brought into close connection. For more on the relation between the δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη, see e.g. R. HIRZEL, Über den Unterschied der δικαιοσύνη und der σωφροσύνη in der Platonischen Republik, *Hermes* 8 (1874), 379-411; C. LARSON, The Platonic Synonyms, δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη, *The American Journal of Philology* 72 (1951), 395-414.

¹⁶⁶⁶ On the possibility of combining ἀνδρεία and σωφροσύνη, cp. *Plt.* 306a ff.

¹⁶⁶⁷ For the notion of μεγαλοφροσύνη, see e.g. *Alc. I* 122c (where several other qualities are enumerated), *Ly.* 210d, *Smp.* 194b. Holiness is the object of discussion in *Euthyphro* and mentioned in several other dialogues (see e.g. *La.* 199d, *Me.* 78e, *Prt.* 329c).

very important, especially for Plato. This ἀρετή is σοφία or φρόνησις. It was important already in Homer, insofar as using words and being able to counsel was thought as a complement to one's acts or deeds.¹⁶⁶⁸ In the time of the Sophists, it became even more decisive, since it allowed one to control everybody else.¹⁶⁶⁹ But it was probably Socrates who first reflected about the central role of σοφία in human life and its importance for all other ἀρεταί. We find a similar reflection in the Platonic corpus and that is what we must now consider.

According to several passages, all excellences are interconnected and constitute a unity. Consequently, we can only have one of them if we have all.¹⁶⁷⁰ But this does not mean that they all have an equal status. In fact, knowledge lies at the center of ἀρετή and it connects the different ἀρεταί. They all require knowledge and are based on it.¹⁶⁷¹ In this sense, ἀρετή is a kind of expert knowledge or τέχνη. It can be taught and learned, and it allows one to act excellently and intervene properly in reality.¹⁶⁷² However, it is not clear what exactly this knowledge is. We do not even know whether it is restricted to the practical domain, or whether it implies other forms of knowledge (and perhaps even a superlative form of knowledge, which includes the contemplation of the εἶδη). At any rate, true ἀρετή is essentially a form of knowledge. We need to have σοφία and then we will also have ἀνδρεία, δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη. They are all different sides of the same inner disposition.¹⁶⁷³

This does not mean that all moral differences between persons can be reduced to whether or not one has this knowledge. It is not a matter of all or nothing. Plato admits weaker forms of ἀρετή, which he calls “popular or civic excellence” (δημοτική και πολιτική ἀρετή) in *Phaedo*.¹⁶⁷⁴ But these are only semblances of excellence, and they are actually based on their opposites. As Socrates says, one is restrained (σώφρων) because one fears pain

¹⁶⁶⁸ See e.g. *Iliad* IX.438-443, where the Homeric ideal is presented as: “μύθων τε ῥητήρ’ ἔμναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων”. For more on this, cp. e.g. C. BARCK, *Wort und Tat bei Homer*, Hildesheim/etc., Olms, 1976.

¹⁶⁶⁹ For this idea, cp. e.g. *Grg.* 452d-e.

¹⁶⁷⁰ For the discussion of this idea, see in particular *La.* 198a ff., *Prt.* 329d ff., 349b ff. and 358d ff.

¹⁶⁷¹ See e.g. *Prt.* 361a-b: “(...) νῦν σεαυτῷ τάναντία σπεύδεις, ἐπιχειρῶν ἀποδεῖξαι ὡς πάντα χρήματά ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη, καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ ἀνδρεία, ᾧ τρόπῳ μάλιστα ἂν διδακτὸν φανεῖν ἡ ἀρετή.” See also *Men.* 88a ff.

¹⁶⁷² For the question of whether ἀρετή can be taught or not, cp. *Men.* 70a and 86c ff.

¹⁶⁷³ This is valid even for the passages in which the tripartition of the soul is presupposed, although in that case the question is a bit more complicated. Strictly speaking, justice and σωφροσύνη do not consist in knowledge, but rather in the right arrangement of the soul's drives. However, this right arrangement is based on the development of our desire of knowledge and it brings about knowledge. For more on this, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 6.4.

¹⁶⁷⁴ See *Phd.* 82a-b: “(...) οἱ τὴν δημοτικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιτετηδευκότες, ἦν δὴ καλοῦσι σωφροσύνην τε καὶ δικαιοσύνην, ἐξ ἔθους τε καὶ μελέτης γεγонуῖαν ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας τε καὶ νοῦ (...)” See also *Rep.* 500d. This is indeed the kind of excellence that characterizes all non-philosophers in the ideal πόλις. It is not based on true knowledge, but rather on good habits and correct δόξα.

or desires pleasure, which is itself a form of unrestraint – or one is courageous because one fears greater evils, and so one is courageous because one is frightened.¹⁶⁷⁵ They are thus far from being true excellences, which can only be based on knowledge. They may imitate one’s proper behavior, but they have no insight into why that must actually be done.¹⁶⁷⁶

One could perhaps wonder why we need such an insight, but Plato often points to the fact that the superlative good requires true ἀρετή. In fact, he even argues that it does not need any other goods – especially those that are intrinsically connected with the subjective sphere, such as pleasure or possessions. We only need to have knowledge of how to act and how to live. This will provide us with ἀρετή, and ἀρετή is sufficient for us to be happy. We will know how to guide ourselves and how to attain the good.¹⁶⁷⁷ We will also be able to avoid making any practical mistakes (including those that seem to result from ἀκρασία). Consequently, we will be invulnerable to evil. In fact, the only evil is the opposite of ἀρετή – namely, κακία. We can only be harmed by being ignorant or unjust. All other things cannot really harm us.¹⁶⁷⁸

All this implies a radical inversion of our natural way of seeing things, as Callicles himself stresses in *Gorgias*, when he says to Socrates: “(...) if you are in earnest, and these things you’re saying are really true, won’t this human life of ours be turned upside down, and won’t everything we do evidently be the opposite of what we should do?”¹⁶⁷⁹ But the real nature of ἀρετή and of the knowledge it implies is still somewhat vague, and thus we cannot yet fully understand what the possession of the superlative good corresponds to. We could perhaps think it consists in acting in a certain way and attaining certain goods, but it is not clear which good could really satisfy our desire – and knowing that seems to be an essential part of the knowledge of how to live.

In the dialogues, we find several discussions about what might be the superlative good. Sometimes different candidates are compared – especially pleasure and knowledge (but also honor). This is often determined by the soul’s partition. But in some cases Plato simply compares the views that defend that these objects are the superlative good, and shows that they are all problematic. For instance, in the *Republic* Socrates briefly mentions that pleasures do not all have the same value. There are bad and undesirable pleasures, and thus

¹⁶⁷⁵ See *Phd.* 68d ff.

¹⁶⁷⁶ This means that a correct δόξα cannot provide ἀρετή and the good. It can only help one behave correctly and attain certain goals.

¹⁶⁷⁷ Cp. e.g. *Men.* 88a-d and *Grg.* 507b-c.

¹⁶⁷⁸ See e.g. *Ap.* 41d: “(...) οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ κακὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε ζῶντι οὔτε τελευτήσαντι (...).”

¹⁶⁷⁹ See 481c: “εἰ μὲν γὰρ σπουδάσεις τε καὶ τυγχάνει ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγεις, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἀνατετραμμένος ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία πράττομεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἢ ἂ δεῖ;”

the criterion for the good must be something other than simple pleasure.¹⁶⁸⁰ On the other hand, it is not clear which knowledge is the good. Socrates stresses that there is a tendency to say that the good is the knowledge of the good, but this appears to be circular.¹⁶⁸¹ Hence, we cannot easily say what the superlative good corresponds to. We could perhaps adopt the solution put forward in *Philebus*, when both views are also denied because neither pleasure nor knowledge seem to be sufficient by itself to fully satisfy our desire.¹⁶⁸² Socrates and Protarchus then consider the possibility of blending these two things and their mixture would then be the greatest good. This raises many questions (such as how they are to be mixed and which one plays a more important role in the mixture), and at the end it is also not entirely clear how their mixture can fully satisfy our desire.¹⁶⁸³

However, there are several passages in the corpus that seem to describe (even if mostly in mythological terms) something like a superlative state – namely, the state in which one contemplates the superlative beings such as the good itself, the beautiful itself, and so on. This is what the guardians strive to achieve in the *Republic* and it is described as a state of private happiness.¹⁶⁸⁴ It is also presented as a state of perfect happiness in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.¹⁶⁸⁵ The vision of the perfect beings would allow us to fully satisfy our desires. However, the often mythological terms of the descriptions make it particularly difficult to understand what exactly such a state consists in.¹⁶⁸⁶ It is also difficult to determine how we can pursue such a state and what a βίος based on such a pursuit may amount to.¹⁶⁸⁷ As a matter of fact, it is not even clear we can ever attain such a state. However, Plato's texts

¹⁶⁸⁰ See 505c: “τί δὲ οἱ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀγαθὸν ὀρίζομενοι; μὴν μὴ τι ἐλάττονος πλάνης ἔμπλεω τῶν ἐτέρων; ἢ οὐ καὶ οὗτοι ἀναγκάζονται ὁμολογεῖν ἡδονὰς εἶναι κακάς; σφόδρα γε. συμβαίνει δὴ αὐτοῖς οἶμαι ὁμολογεῖν ἀγαθὰ εἶναι καὶ κακὰ ταῦτά.”

¹⁶⁸¹ See 505b-c: “(...) οἱ τοῦτο ἡγούμενοι οὐκ ἔχουσι δεῖξαι ἤτις φρόνησις, ἀλλ’ ἀναγκάζονται τελευτῶντες τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φάναι. καὶ μάλα, ἔφη, γελοῖως. πῶς γὰρ οὐχί, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, εἰ ὄνειδίζοντές γε ὅτι οὐκ ἴσμεν τὸ ἀγαθὸν λέγουσι πάλιν ὡς εἰδόντες; φρόνησιν γὰρ αὐτὸ φασι εἶναι ἀγαθοῦ, ὡς αὖ συνιέντων ἡμῶν ὅτι λέγουσιν, ἐπειδὴν τὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φθέγγονται ὄνομα. ἀληθέστατα, ἔφη.”

¹⁶⁸² Cp. 20b ff.

¹⁶⁸³ The discussion is indeed imprecise in several respects. Socrates and Protarchus mix all sciences with the pure pleasures (see 61b ff.), and they determine the ranking of goods (66a ff). The result, however, takes for granted that we need knowledge and pleasure, but it does not explain why. It also does not explain how much pure pleasure and how perfect a knowledge we need.

¹⁶⁸⁴ See *Rep.* 498b-c and 519b ff.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Cp. *Phdr.* 246d ff. (especially 250b-c) and *Smp.* 210d ff.

¹⁶⁸⁶ For instance, it is not clear whether we can reach such a state during life. It is also unclear whether such a state would require us to do something. Some passages point in that direction. In the *Republic*, one would have to rule the πόλις (see 519c ff.). In *Smp.* 206b ff., Plato speaks about procreating in what is beautiful. In *Phaedrus*, the soul is said to move the κόσμος (see 246b-c). For more on what may be implied in the access to the εἶδη and the difficulty in conceiving it, cp. Chap. 11, Sect. 2.5 and 3.4.

¹⁶⁸⁷ For more on this, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 6.4 and Chap. 14, Sect. 5.

suggest that such a form of contemplation would be the superlative good for all human beings.

This does not mean that Plato completely disregards everything else, though. In fact, he admits the possibility that certain people, given their nature or circumstances, do not have access to this contemplation. But they can still achieve a kind of second-best state. In a way, philosophical examination as a pursuit of knowledge is a kind of substitute for the superlative good. That is perhaps why Socrates, in the *Apology*, identifies the greatest good with an unimpeded and perpetual examination of all persons and things.¹⁶⁸⁸ But this may still presuppose that one will be able to contemplate truth. The same does not apply to other substitutes of the superlative good. In a way, the modalities of romantic love that include sensual pleasures and fail to lead us to a full contemplation of the true beings are a form of substitute of the superlative good.¹⁶⁸⁹ They do not fully satisfy us, but are still better than our everyday concerns. Another substitute for the superlative good seems to be a life of popular excellence. One will be able to guide oneself in life and avoid making serious mistakes. Plato even seems to admit at some points that most people cannot aim at more than a weaker form of excellence. They can have no more than a correct δόξα about what they should do, because of their limited understanding and their limited ability to contemplate the εἶδη that should determine our behavior and whose contemplation is the most desirable possession.¹⁶⁹⁰ This is an improvement in comparison to a life full of false knowledge claims and vicious behavior. But it cannot fully satisfy us. It is at best a substitute of the superlative good and one will either be dissatisfied or one will have to resign oneself to the fact that this is all one can attain.

6.2. The communal and the cosmic good. The problem of their interrelation with the individual good

The whole consideration of the good until now has neglected the fact that we as individuals belong to larger domains that are themselves related to goodness and badness. The good is not just a private affair, and thus the individual good is not the only good that is relevant for our life. Plato is very aware of this. He considers two domains that are essential parts of who we are – namely the social or “intersubjective” domain and the cosmic domain.

¹⁶⁸⁸ See 40e ff. For an analysis of the passage, cp. Chap. 3 Sect. 3.1 above.

¹⁶⁸⁹ See e.g. *Phdr.* 256a-e.

¹⁶⁹⁰ See e.g. *Phd.* 82a-b.

We must therefore briefly consider how each of these domains is essentially related to goodness and badness, and then we must consider how – according to Plato – that may affect our own individual pursuit of the good.

Let us see the first domain. We are always related to others, since birth. In general, we have a family and friends, by whom we are helped, educated and influenced. We need them. But they have their own private relation to the superlative good, which may or may not be at odds with our own pursuit of the good. Indeed, some goods may be shared, others not. We may thus be faced with the choice between helping them or fighting with them for what we take to be the good. In this context, the cooperative ἀρεταί we have considered (namely justice and sound-mindedness) play an important role. In their traditional conception, they imply respect for the others' pursuit of the good. In Plato's conception, things are more complex – especially insofar as his own version of the superlative good allows one to share the good with others and help them. One can thus promote the ἀρετή and the σοφία of others, as Socrates tries to do in the dialogues. The question is whether we should do it and what our motivation to do so might be. Should we do it out of self-interest (i.e., because it is somehow advantageous for us to do so) or is it rather a matter of benevolence (εὐνοία) and pity (ἔλεος)? But let us leave aside this question for now.¹⁶⁹¹ The important thing here is the fact that we may have to choose between pursuing the superlative good and helping others, and it may even be required by our own pursuit of the good that we help others.

But the question is actually more complicated, because we are not just in contact with a few other people. Normally, we belong to a political entity – be it a πόλις or a country. According to Plato, this is not a simple fact, but rather a natural or constitutive need of ours. We all lack many things that are necessary not only for our survival, but also for living a good life, and so we need to cooperate with others, in order to better achieve them. This is what brings about and sustains a πόλις.¹⁶⁹² But normally we do not have to decide whether we will ally ourselves with others or not. We are born in political communities and our lives are shaped by their laws and customs (νόμοι). As is stressed in *Crito*, we are educated by the νόμοι and our possibilities are determined by them.¹⁶⁹³ In the *Republic*, Plato goes further and

¹⁶⁹¹ For more on it, see Chap. 19, Sect. 5.1.

¹⁶⁹² See *Rep.* 369b: “γίγνεται τοίνυν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, πόλις, ὡς ἐγῶμαι, ἐπειδὴ τυγχάνει ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οὐκ αὐτάρκης, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν ὧν ἐνδεής (...).”

¹⁶⁹³ See 50d-e: “οὐ πρῶτον μὲν σε ἐγεννήσαμεν ἡμεῖς, καὶ δι’ ἡμῶν ἔλαβε τὴν μητέρα σου ὁ πατήρ καὶ ἐφύτευσέν σε; φράσον οὖν, τούτοις ἡμῶν, τοῖς νόμοις τοῖς περὶ τοὺς γάμους, μέμφοι τι ὡς οὐ καλῶς ἔχουσιν; ὄου μέμφομαι, φαίην ἄν. ἀλλὰ τοῖς περὶ τὴν τοῦ γενομένου τροφήν τε καὶ παιδείαν ἐν ἧ καὶ σὺ ἐπαιδεύθης; ἢ οὐ καλῶς προσέταττον ἡμῶν οἱ ἐπὶ τούτῳ τεταγμένοι νόμοι, παραγγέλλοντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ σῶ σε ἐν μουσικῇ καὶ

characterizes our existence as a permanent interaction between two isomorphic entities (our ψυχή and the πόλις) that depend on each other in many different ways.¹⁶⁹⁴

This raises the question of which one is the more important. We saw that individual ψυχαί pursue their own good, but Plato also argues that the πόλις has its own good and its own happiness, which are different from the good and happiness of the individuals.¹⁶⁹⁵ The lawgiver should precisely aim at the good of the πόλις.¹⁶⁹⁶ But what about individuals in general? How do they relate to the common and shared good? Individuals are indeed members of the πόλις or citizens and play a certain role in it. There is even an excellence of the citizen, that may differ from individual ἀρετή.¹⁶⁹⁷ The πόλις has its own requirements, and one requirement in particular is very important: the πόλις needs an order and it needs rulers. We must therefore decide between accepting the rule of others or fighting for power.¹⁶⁹⁸ When we rule, we must also decide between seeking our own good or promoting the good of others (be it of individual others or of the πόλις in general).¹⁶⁹⁹

Obviously, the private and the public pursuit of the good may be in conflict. This becomes particularly clear in the ideal city of the *Republic*, where a particular class has the privilege of pursuing knowledge and possibly contemplating the truth – which means that they would attain what seems to be the superlative good and supreme happiness. Plato indeed describes this state as a state of individual happiness.¹⁷⁰⁰ However, they are required to abandon this contemplation and govern the πόλις. They must preserve political order and stability, promote popular excellence in others, protect the philosophically gifted, and defend the πόλις from external threats. They are the only ones qualified to do so. But all this leaves little time to contemplation, which means that they must sacrifice their own happiness for the happiness of the πόλις. The problem then is why they should abdicate from philosophical contemplation and accept to rule the πόλις. Plato says that the philosophers in the ideal πόλις would owe a debt of gratitude to their πόλις and should therefore govern it when it needs

γυμναστική παιδεύειν;’ ‘καλῶς,’ φαίην ἄν. ‘εἶεν. ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐγένου τε καὶ ἐξετράφης καὶ ἐπαιδεύθης, ἔχοις ἄν εἰπεῖν πρῶτον μὲν ὡς οὐχὶ ἡμέτερος ἦσθα καὶ ἔκγονος καὶ δοῦλος, αὐτός τε καὶ οἱ σοὶ πρόγονοι;”

¹⁶⁹⁴ For more on this, see Chap. 13, Sect. 4.4.

¹⁶⁹⁵ See in particular *Rep.* 419a ff., 465d-466c, 519b ff.

¹⁶⁹⁶ See e.g. *Rep.* 420b: “(...) οὐ μὴν πρὸς τοῦτο βλέποντες τὴν πόλιν οἰκίζομεν, ὅπως ἔν τι ἡμῖν ἔθνος ἔσται διαφερόντως εὐδαιμον, ἀλλ’ ὅπως ὅτι μάλιστα ὅλη ἡ πόλις.” See also *Lg.* 875a-b: “(...) πολιτικῆ καὶ ἀληθεῖ τέχνη οὐ τὸ ἴδιον ἀλλὰ τὸ κοινὸν ἀνάγκη μέλειν – τὸ μὲν γὰρ κοινὸν συνδεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἴδιον διασπᾶ τὰς πόλεις – καὶ ὅτι συμφέρει τῷ κοινῷ τε καὶ ἰδίῳ, τοῖν ἀμφοῖν, ἢ τὸ κοινὸν τιθῆται καλῶς μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ἴδιον (...).”

¹⁶⁹⁷ In *Apology*, Socrates mentions the two. See 20b: “νῦν δ’ ἐπειδὴ ἀνθρώπω ἐστόν, τίνα αὐτοῖν ἐν νῷ ἔχεις ἐπιστάτην λαβεῖν; τίς τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρετῆς, τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ πολιτικῆς, ἐπιστήμων ἐστίν;”

¹⁶⁹⁸ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 347b-d.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 343b ff.

¹⁷⁰⁰ See 498b-c and 519b-c.

them.¹⁷⁰¹ But does this mean that in a non-ideal city there would be no necessity to govern others? In *Republic* I, Plato says that one might want to rule in order to avoid being governed by worse people.¹⁷⁰² However, it is also conceivable that one would understand that there is a duty of governing others – for instance, because rendering life better for everyone (and thus promoting the good as much as possible) is the just thing to do.¹⁷⁰³ The texts do not seem to give us a definite answer. They just show that there might be a conflict between one’s own pursuit of the good and the communal good.

These are not the only problems with respect to others. The πόλις, as Plato conceives it, is also related to other πόλεις, to the Hellenic world in general, and even to the whole of humanity. Therefore, one may also need to promote the good of all others, which would at least partially annul the tribal or πόλις-centered view of reality. Plato sometimes considers this possibility. In *Theaetetus*, he contrasts a life dedicated to judicial and political matters in the πόλις to a life dedicated to the contemplation of the whole of space and time (which would also contemplate humanity and justice as such, instead of considering particular persons and particular events).¹⁷⁰⁴ In *Statesman*, he criticizes the division of humanity between Greeks and barbarians.¹⁷⁰⁵ One may thus relate to an idea of humanity and such an idea may contain its own demands. Plato, however, never considers the question in depth. There are only a few moments where he seems to present an ideal of φιλανθρωπία – for instance, when Socrates says in the *Apology* that, despite being closer to his fellow citizens, he examined everybody.¹⁷⁰⁶ But is this something we should do? Should we promote the good of all human beings? And why?

These are the main questions concerning the relation between individual and communal good. But, as was said, we belong to still another domain to which the difference between goodness and badness seems to be relevant – namely, the universe at large (or in Plato’s words “τὸ πᾶν”, “τὸ ὅλον”, “ὁ οὐρανός” or “ὁ κόσμος”).¹⁷⁰⁷ We normally do not pay much attention to it, since we are occupied with our everyday affairs or, at best, with the domain of the πόλις as a whole (as is described in the passage from *Theaetetus* above

¹⁷⁰¹ For all this, see once more *Rep.* 519c ff.

¹⁷⁰² See the above mentioned passage at *Rep.* 347b-d.

¹⁷⁰³ See *Rep.* 520e: “(...) δίκαια γὰρ δὴ δικάοις ἐπιτάξομεν.”

¹⁷⁰⁴ See the excursus in 172c ff.

¹⁷⁰⁵ See 262b-263e.

¹⁷⁰⁶ See 30a: “ταῦτα καὶ νεωτέρῳ καὶ πρεσβυτέρῳ ὅτῳ ἂν ἐντυγχάνω ποιήσω, καὶ ξένῳ καὶ ἀστῶ, μᾶλλον δὲ τοῖς ἀστοῖς, ὅσῳ μου ἐγγυτέρῳ ἐστὲ γένει.”

¹⁷⁰⁷ See e.g. *Grg.* 508a, *Plt.* 269d-e, *Phlb.* 28d, 29b-d, *Ti.* 28b.

mentioned).¹⁷⁰⁸ Moreover, the domain of nature at large was traditionally seen as something that was not our business. It was the domain of the gods and one should not meddle in it.¹⁷⁰⁹ However, we can also identify a kind of good in this domain – namely, the cosmic good or the good of the whole.

Plato describes in several passages, and especially in *Timaeus*, how the universe is not chaotic or random (even if it may contain a chaotic element). It contains an order and, according to the texts, this means that it is constituted by intelligent design. There is a divine intelligence or a divine craftsman that wants things to be as good as possible, and so this being disposes things in the best possible manner. In other words, there is something like a final cause for the sake of which things are as they are. At least this is what is outlined in the several passages of the Platonic corpus. The characters describe something like a cosmic plan and define its relation with god and the εἶδη – especially with goodness as such.¹⁷¹⁰ But regardless of the precise nature of the cosmic order (i.e., regardless of whether it has an objective foundation, as Plato argues, or whether this order is a subjective illusion), we seem nevertheless able to identify something like the good of nature or the good of the cosmos, and we may then wonder what its meaning for our own life and for the πόλις is. Both seem to depend on nature and the cosmos at large.

According to Plato, we may contemplate the κόσμος in order to better understand our place in it and what we should do. This contemplation of the whole plays an important role in *Timaeus*. By contemplating celestial orbits or revolutions we can bring order to our own mind and its inner orbits or revolutions.¹⁷¹¹ We will then be able to better understand things, because we will be able to better attribute general predicates to empirical reality (and thus we will come closer to resemble the divine demiurge and the way he used the εἶδη as the models to create the κόσμος).¹⁷¹² In *Theaetetus*, Plato also establishes a connection between the contemplation of the whole and the understanding of εἶδη.¹⁷¹³ It seems that turning our attention to the cosmos and its good can help us better understand particular things. Perhaps it may also help us lead a better life, insofar as it helps us understand what we should do. It may for instance let us see the importance of order and goodness in all domains. Finally, the ordered whole is also something constitutively καλός and thus it may help us satisfy our

¹⁷⁰⁸ See 172c ff.

¹⁷⁰⁹ We considered how this idea played an important role in the *Apology*. Cp. Chap. 1, Sect. 2.2.

¹⁷¹⁰ See *Phd.* 97c ff., *Phlb.* 28d-e, *Plt.* 269c ff. and the whole *Timaeus*.

¹⁷¹¹ See in particular 90c-d. Cp. also 43a ff., 47c-d.

¹⁷¹² Cp. 28a ff. and 47c.

¹⁷¹³ See 173e ff. See especially 175c, where Socrates talks of a σκέψις αὐτῆς δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἀδικίας.

desire of beauty.¹⁷¹⁴ Plato does not say much about these matters, but it seems clear that our relation to the individual and the public good may be affected by our contemplation of the cosmos and of its relation to the good.

In sum, the different domains (individual ψυχή, πόλις and κόσμος at large) are somehow interconnected and this interconnection affects our private pursuit of the good. We could be tempted to have an excessively individualistic notion of the good, but Plato stresses the importance of having these other domains in mind when we try to determine what is best for us. This raises difficult questions about whether and to what extent the individual should be subordinated to the community and to the whole. The corpus (as usual) does not say anything definitive about the matter, but at least it reveals the importance of having these questions in mind.

6.3. The *ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ* and its structural position in knowledge and reality

We have seen that there are several kinds of good. There are intermediate goods and the superlative good of the individual, but there are also the public and the cosmic good (which may in turn imply their own intermediate goods). But now we have to consider one final question: namely, the fact that for Plato these multiple goods seem to presuppose something like the *ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ* – i.e., the mode of being that corresponds to goodness as such, which informs all particular manifestations of the good and is not reducible to them.¹⁷¹⁵ In other words, we need to have some understanding of goodness as such if we are to experience all other goods as such.

Plato briefly discusses this general mode of being in the *Republic* and refers to it in several other texts. However, his conception of goodness itself is indeterminate in many respects.¹⁷¹⁶ He presents only some formal traits of the good itself, which raise several questions, especially concerning its relevance for our practical life and for knowledge in general. Aristotle notoriously criticized Plato's emphasis on goodness as such, since by itself

¹⁷¹⁴ There are many references in the texts to the beauty of the universe and of its parts. See e.g. *Ti.* 28a-b, 29a, 30a-b, 92c.

¹⁷¹⁵ Plato often mentions goodness itself when listing different εἶδη – see e.g. *Phd.* 75c-d, 76d 100b, *Phdr.* 246d-e, *Prm.* 130b, 134c. For its relation with particular things, see e.g. See *Rep.* 505a: “ἐπεὶ ὅτι γε ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα μέγιστον μάθημα, πολλάκις ἀκήκοας, ἧ δὴ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τᾶλλα προσχρησάμενα χρήσιμα καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίνονται.”

¹⁷¹⁶ Cp. footnote 1648 above.

it does not seem to be able render anything better.¹⁷¹⁷ Plato, however, describes it as something essential for our practical life. Moreover, he stresses its importance for knowledge. He considers it the highest teaching and seems to ascribe to it a central role among the general forms of being or εἶδη.¹⁷¹⁸ We must therefore consider what is involved in this notion and what its relevance might be. In particular, we must see how we experience it and how the understanding of goodness as such may shape our life and perhaps even reality (or at the very least the way we see it). At first sight, we may tend to agree with Aristotle. Goodness itself may seem useless. However, we must take into account the possibility of it playing a tacit role in our life. It may determine the way we act and how we see things, and if we happen to have a defective understanding of it, it may also cause practical mistakes and cognitive distortions.

If we look at the texts, we see that Plato seems to admit different levels of influence of the good itself. First, there is the level we considered in Section 3-5. Our ψυχή tries to reach the superlative good and it must identify it with something. In other words, we need to have a particular view or judgment about the good and this is what guides us in life. Based on such a view, we will also determine many other things and form many other beliefs, which will determine our situation and the value different things may play in our life. But the view about the superlative good does not necessarily coincide with goodness itself, even if it is somehow referred to it. Indeed, if we had no understanding of the predicate “good”, we would probably not be able to desire anything, or at least we would not be able to direct our desire at anything.¹⁷¹⁹ But our understanding of it may be defective, as may be our identification of the superlative good and, consequently, of everything else that depends on it.

Plato is very aware that our view of the superlative good and all subordinate views may be wrong. But he also admits that we may have a true view about the superlative good,

¹⁷¹⁷ For Aristotle’s criticism of the good itself, see *Ethica Nichomachea* 1096a11 ff. For the particular criticism above mentioned, see in particular 1096b31ff.: “ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ περὶ τῆς ιδέας· εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἔστιν ἓν τι τὸ κοινῆ κατηγορούμενον ἀγαθὸν ἢ χωριστὸν αὐτὸ τι καθ’ αὐτό, δῆλον ὡς οὐκ ἂν εἴη πρακτὸν οὐδὲ κτητὸν ἀνθρώπων δὲ τοιοῦτόν τι ζητεῖται. τάχα δὲ τῷ δόξειεν ἂν βέλτιον εἶναι γνωρίζειν αὐτὸ πρὸς τὰ κτητὰ καὶ πρακτὰ τῶν ἀγαθῶν· οἷον γὰρ παράδειγμα τοῦτ’ ἔχοντες μᾶλλον εἰσόμεθα καὶ τὰ ἡμῖν ἀγαθὰ, κἂν εἰδῶμεν, ἐπιτευξόμεθα αὐτῶν. πιθανότητα μὲν οὖν τίνα ἔχει ὁ λόγος, εἴκοι δὲ ταῖς ἐπιστήμαις διαφωνεῖν· πᾶσαι γὰρ ἀγαθοῦ τινὸς ἐπιέμεναι καὶ τὸ ἐνδεὲς ἐπιζητοῦσαι παραλείπουσι τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτοῦ. καίτοι βοήθημα τηλικούτον τοὺς τεχνίτας ἅπαντας ἀγνοεῖν καὶ μηδ’ ἐπιζητεῖν οὐκ εὐλογον. ἄπορον δὲ καὶ τί ὠφελήθησεται ὑφάντης ἢ τέκτων πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ τέχνην εἰδῶς τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἀγαθόν, ἢ πῶς ἰατρικώτερος ἢ στρατηγικώτερος ἔσται ὁ τὴν ιδέαν αὐτὴν τεθεαμένος. φαίνεται μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ τὴν ὑγίειαν οὕτως ἐπισκοπεῖν ὁ ἰατρός, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπου, μᾶλλον δ’ ἴσως τὴν τοῦδε· καθ’ ἕκαστον γὰρ ἰατρεύει. καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον εἰρήσθω.”

¹⁷¹⁸ See *Rep.* 504c ff., 509b, 517b-c.

¹⁷¹⁹ *Cp. Rep.* 505d-e: “ὁ δὲ διώκει μὲν ἅπαντα ψυχὴ καὶ τούτου ἔνεκα πάντα πράττει, ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, ἀποροῦσα δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἰκανῶς τί ποτ’ ἔστιν οὐδὲ πίστει χρῆσασθαι μονίμῳ οἷα καὶ περὶ τᾶλλα, διὰ τοῦτο δὲ ἀποτυγχάνει καὶ τῶν ἄλλων εἴ τι ὄφελος ἦν (...).”

which will be the basis for true views of everything in life. Indeed, if we have real knowledge about the superlative good, we will also be able to determine how to follow it and what the role of everything in our life is. As Socrates says in the *Republic*, if we correctly determine what the real good is, then we will be able to act lucidly and correctly, and this is then the cause of all correct and commendable things.¹⁷²⁰

In saying this, Plato seems to restrict the good mainly to the practical domain and the views more directly connected with it. But in his texts he goes much further, and describes goodness as such as a condition for all knowledge and even for all reality. In fact, goodness as such seems to be the basis of all particular beings (πολλά), of the general modes of being (εἶδη) and even of the κόσμος at large. This is what Socrates outlines in the *Republic*, when he presents the simile of the sun (though the simile may be construed in different ways, as we will see).¹⁷²¹ Socrates describes the good itself as something that belongs to the domain of true beings, and in fact as something that is even beyond this domain (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας).¹⁷²² One immediately associates this with what is later said in the simile of the line, when Socrates talks of an ultimate principle (ἀρχή) of all knowledge, whose knowledge would be fully transparent and would not presuppose anything else. This is what is implied in the notion of ἀνυπόθετον.¹⁷²³ All other εἶδη (and also all empirical beings) would be based in this first principle. It is not clear whether this means that they would be deduced from it (as if they were wholly contained in it) or just decisively determined by it. But at any rate this first principle seems to correspond to the ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ (even if in other texts other general modes of being seem to be at the center – such as beauty in *Phaedrus* or being itself in *Sophist*). Indeed, when comparing the good itself to the sun, Plato stresses that it illuminates things and allows us to know them.¹⁷²⁴ This means that it lets us see all εἶδη (both the practical εἶδη and the others) and the κόσμος in general. The same idea is then further

¹⁷²⁰ See *Rep.* 517b-c: “τὰ δ’ οὖν ἐμοὶ φαινόμενα οὕτω φαίνεται, ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ τελευταία ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγις ὀρᾶσθαι, ὀφθεισα δὲ συλλογιστέα εἶναι ὡς ἄρα πᾶσι πάντων αὐτῆ ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία, ἐν τε ὀρατῷ φῶς καὶ τὸν τούτου κύριον τεκοῦσα, ἐν τε νοητῷ αὐτῆ κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν παρασχομένη, καὶ ὅτι δεῖ ταύτην ἰδεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα ἐμφρόνως πράξειν ἢ ἰδίᾳ ἢ δημοσίᾳ.”

¹⁷²¹ See *Rep.* 506e ff.

¹⁷²² See *Rep.* 509b: “καὶ τοῖς γινωσκομένοις τοίνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γινώσκεισθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ’ ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεῖα καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.”

¹⁷²³ See *Rep.* 510b and 511b. For more on this, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3 a) and Chap. 9, Sect. 3.2

¹⁷²⁴ See 508d-e: “οὕτω τοίνυν καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὧδε νόει· ὅταν μὲν οὗ καταλάμπει ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν, εἰς τοῦτο ἀπερείσθαι, ἐνόησεν τε καὶ ἔγνω αὐτὸ καὶ νοῦν ἔχειν φαίνεται· ὅταν δὲ εἰς τὸ τῷ σκότῳ κεκραμένον, τὸ γιγνόμενόν τε καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, δοξάζει τε καὶ ἀμβλυώττει ἄνω καὶ κάτω τὰς δόξας μεταβάλλον, καὶ ἔοικεν αὐτῷ νοῦν οὐκ ἔχοντι. ἔοικε γάρ· τοῦτο τοίνυν τὸ τὴν ἀλήθειαν παρέχον τοῖς γινωσκομένοις καὶ τῷ γινώσκοντι τὴν δύναμιν ἀποδιδόν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν φάθι εἶναι· αἰτίαν δ’ ἐπιστήμης οὖσαν καὶ ἀληθείας, ὡς γινωσκομένης μὲν διανοοῦ (...).”

emphasized by the fact that, as the sun is said to generate and nurture all things, goodness itself is said to give them existence.¹⁷²⁵ Goodness as such seems therefore responsible not only for truth and knowledge, but also for the existence of everything.

Such a description, however, leaves many questions open. The text does not say how exactly the good itself relates to the other general modes of being or εἶδη. In fact, it is not even clear whether all εἶδη are interrelated and how. Therefore, we do not know if according to Plato all the other εἶδη are supposed to be contained in the good, nor do we know whether the good is completely independent from the other εἶδη or is still somehow determined by them. The notion of ἀνυπόθετος ἀρχή seems to suggest that the good stands only in itself, but it is not clear. Likewise unclear is the relation between good itself and the κόσμος. In *Timaeus*, the whole cosmic system seems to be at least partly deduced from something similar to the ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, but the analyses are still rather vague.¹⁷²⁶

In sum, Plato stresses the fundamental role played by the good itself in the structure of reality, but he does not explain in detail how the good relates to other beings. But this is not the only limitation of Plato's description. He also talks of the notion of good as something that must have its own content, but he does not determine it with precision either. In the *Republic* he says very little of what the good itself is. In *Philebus*, he tries to understand the good by considering the closely related notions of beauty, proportion or fitness (συμμετρία), and truth, but this is still vague.¹⁷²⁷ In general, the good itself seems to have some connection to the ideas of functionality, order, measure, perfection, and oneness. Hence, all good things must also be somehow characterized by these properties.

However, goodness as such also seems to be intimately connected with our life, and all these analyses do not let us understand whether goodness as such is the same thing as the superlative good we pursue or not. Goodness as such may be an object of contemplation and, if the whole of reality is somehow deduced from it, then contemplating it would amount to contemplating the whole of reality. Such a contemplation may actually be the only thing that satisfies our superlative desire. However, Plato is never very explicit about this.

¹⁷²⁵ See 509b: “τὸν ἥλιον τοῖς ὀρωμένοις οὐ μόνον οἶμαι τὴν τοῦ ὀρᾶσθαι δύναμιν παρέχειν φήσεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὔξην καὶ τροφήν, οὐ γένεσιν αὐτὸν ὄντα. πῶς γάρ; καὶ τοῖς γινωσκομένοις τοίνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γινώσκεισθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ’ ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι (...).”

¹⁷²⁶ *Timaeus* stresses the importance of goodness several times throughout the text. See in particular 29e ff.

¹⁷²⁷ See 64e ff. – and especially 65a: “οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ μιᾷ δυνάμεθα ἰδέα τὸ ἀγαθὸν θηρεῦσαι, σὺν τρισὶ λαβόντες, κάλλει καὶ συμμετρίας καὶ ἀληθείας, λέγωμεν ὡς τοῦτο οἶον ἔν ὀρθότατ’ ἂν αἰτιασαίμεθ’ ἂν τῶν ἐν τῇ συμμείξει, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὡς ἀγαθὸν ὄν τοιαύτην αὐτὴν γεγονέναι.”

In sum, the good itself may be more practical, and thus emphasize the constitutive relation of the whole of reality to our life, but it may also be the ultimate reality that is the basis of all being and all knowledge. Both things are somehow intertwined, though it is difficult to say which (if any) has precedence. At any rate, Plato seems to recognize that there is something like a general understanding of goodness as such, which may be more or less imprecise, but at any rate shapes both our life and reality in general. He also suggests two things: first, that our practical dimension and our practical views are somehow connected with all other questions (including the first principle of reality); and, second, that practical questions have a central importance for the understanding of reality in general. These are very important indications. However, Plato's texts never fully define the precise connection between these different domains.

CHAPTER 13

The tripartition of the ψυχή and its consequences for the ψυχή's practical dimension

“Minha alma é uma orchestra occulta; não sei que instrumentos tangem e rangem, cordas e harpas, timbales e tambores, dentro de mim. Só me conheço como symphonia.”

Fernando Pessoa, *Livro do Desasocego*¹⁷²⁸

According to the model considered in the previous chapter, the soul's desire has a coherent and unified structure. The soul pursues the superlative good and this pursuit (along with our views about the good) accounts for all our particular desires and all our actions. There are, however, several important passages of the corpus that speak of a constitutive diversity of our desires or motivations. We have drives or urges that are directed at different objects and are irreducible to each other. Plato not only affirms this diversity, but he also produces a typology that identifies the main kinds of desire or, as we could also say, the alphabet of our motivations. These motivations are referred back to different principles or parts of our ψυχή, which constitute the basis for the differentiation of motivations or drives. Our soul is in itself fragmented and such a fragmentation determines all our actions and our entire life or βίος.

Thus, we seem to have a second model for understanding the ψυχή's practical dimension, and the existence of these two models raises the question of their compatibility. It is not immediately clear whether these are alternate models or whether they somehow complement each other. The corpus just presents them side by side, and it is up to us to decide how they relate to each other. The developmentalist reading of Plato, for instance, regards the first model as a purely intellectualist model inspired by the historical Socrates, whereas the second model is seen as a model that is aware of the limitations of our intellect and thus corrects the Socratic model. Some passages do indeed suggest a conflict of models. But there are also passages that suggest that they can be combined and integrated in a unitary

¹⁷²⁸ See F. PESSOA, *Livro do Desasocego*, vol. 1, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 2010, 13.

model, and this is a possibility we are going to explore in the following pages. Our analysis of the tripartition will aim to develop what we saw in the previous chapter and not to refute it. But first we must carefully consider what is implied in the partition of the soul and of its desire.¹⁷²⁹

1. The idea of a partition of the ψυχή

The very idea of a partition of the soul poses a problem, insofar as it is at odds with passages that emphasize the ψυχή's simplicity, uniformity or homogeneity (in contrast with the body's complexity and mutability).¹⁷³⁰ A partition of the soul threatens the soul's identity and brings about a sort of divided or fragmented self. Consequently, the Platonic corpus seems to contradict itself in this respect, as in many others. But are the ideas of identity and partition actually incompatible? How are the parts of the soul conceived and how they can be connected and compose a single being? These are decisive questions and in order to answer them we have to consider the general model of the partition. There are many important indications throughout the corpus, but the most developed discussion of this question is found in *Republic* IV, in the passage where the tripartition of the soul is first introduced.¹⁷³¹ Let us then see how the partition is conceived in this text.

First of all, it is important to consider the language used in the *Republic*. The term “part” (which translates the Greek word μέρος) might suggest the idea of pieces or

¹⁷²⁹ The bibliography on this topic is extremely vast. See e.g. F. CORNFORD, *Psychology and Social Structure in the Republic of Plato*, *The Classical Quarterly* 6 (1912), 246-265; A. GRAESER, *Probleme der platonischen Seelenteilungslehre*. Überlegungen zur Frage der Kontinuität im Denken Platons, München, Beck, 1969; T. ROBINSON, *Plato's Psychology*, Toronto & Buffalo, Toronto University Press, 1970; J. MOLINE, *Plato on the Complexity of the Psyche*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978), 1-26; J. ANNAS, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1981, 109-152; J. de ROMILLY, *Les conflits de l'âme dans le Phèdre de Platon*, *Wiener Studien* 16 (1982), 100–113; L. GERSON, *A Note on Tripartition and Immortality*, *Apeiron* 20 (1987), 81-96; C. KAHN, *Plato's Theory of Desire*, *The Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1987), 77-103; J. CONSTÂNCIO, *Percepção e Compreensão em Platão*. Um Estudo Fenomenológico com Especial Referência ao *Teeteto*, Diss. Univ. Nova de Lisboa, 1995, 334-511; S. BÜTTNER, *Die Literaturtheorie bei Platon und ihre anthropologische Begründung*, Tübingen, Francke, 2000, 18-130; H. LORENZ, *The Brute Within*. Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle, Oxford/etc., Clarendon Press, 2006, 1-110; C. SHIELDS, *Plato's Divided Soul*, in M. McPHERRAN (ed.), *Plato's Republic*. A Critical Guide, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2010, 147-170; R. BARNEY et al. (eds.), *Plato and the Divided Self*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2012; N. NOTOMI & L. BRISSON (eds.), *Dialogues on Plato's Politeia (Republic)*. Selected Papers from the Ninth Symposium Platonicum, Sankt Augustin, Academia, 2013, 161-220.

¹⁷³⁰ See e.g. *Phd.* 78b-80e – and in particular 80a-b: “(...) τῷ μὲν θεῷ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ νοητῷ καὶ μονοειδεῖ καὶ ἀδιαλύτῳ καὶ αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχοντι ἑαυτῷ ὁμοιότατον εἶναι ψυχήν, τῷ δὲ ἀνθρώπινῳ καὶ θνητῷ καὶ πολυειδεῖ καὶ ἀνοήτῳ καὶ διαλυτῷ καὶ μηδέποτε κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχοντι ἑαυτῷ ὁμοιότατον αὐτὸ εἶναι σῶμα.”

¹⁷³¹ See 435b ff.

portions – i.e., of entities that are spatial and external to each other.¹⁷³² However, what is at issue is something else entirely. Μέρη is also the Greek word for members or organs of the body, which are characterized by performing a particular function, and the idea of function is indeed central in Plato’s use of the notion of μέρος to designate the “parts” of the soul. This can be seen in the fact that Plato also refers to these “parts” as “that which does something” or “that with which the soul does something”.¹⁷³³ But this is not all. Plato also uses the language of classification to designate the parts as such. He describes them as types or classes of being (εἶδη or γένη). These terms belong to medical and biological contexts, as we saw above, and γένος can also refer to social classes (which is particularly relevant in the *Republic*).¹⁷³⁴

The most decisive aspect, though, is the fact that the parts of the soul have an active nature. In this sense, Plato’s conception echoes the already mentioned model of deliberation we find already in Homer. In moments of great tension, characters are presented as talking to a part of them (to some “soul organ”) as if it were an external agent with its own ideas and its own will, which would be impelling them to act in a certain way.¹⁷³⁵ As we will see, Plato also develops the idea of an interaction and dialogue between different principles of action. At some points, these principles are even described as a kind of inner agents, psychological subjects, or homunculi – which raises questions about whether this model really is really able to explain our behavior, since each part seems to replicate within itself the very structure they were supposed to explain.¹⁷³⁶ But in order to discuss this question, we must first see how Plato identifies and defines each part of the soul.

In *Republic* IV, Socrates starts by referring to the previously established isomorphism between the soul and the πόλις, which leads one to expect the soul to be composed of parts similar to those that have just been identified as parts of the πόλις (namely, its three social classes).¹⁷³⁷ Then, he asks whether all our actions are performed with the same “part” of the soul (which would thus correspond to the whole soul), or whether different actions are

¹⁷³² For the use of μέρος in this context, cp. e.g. *Rep.* 442b, 442c, 444b, 577d, 581a, 583a.

¹⁷³³ Designations such as τὸ λογιστικόν (e.g. 439d) and τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν (e.g. 439e) have an active sense. The parts are also said to be τὸ ᾧ θυμούμεθα (439e), τὸ ᾧ λογίζεται (439d), τὸ ᾧ μανθάνει ἄνθρωπος (580d), and so on.

¹⁷³⁴ For the use of these words in this context, see e.g. 435c, 435e, 441c. For more on their sense (especially the sense of εἶδος), cp. Chap. 6 Sect. 2.2.

¹⁷³⁵ See e.g. *Iliad* XI.403-12; XXII.98-131, *Odyssey* XX.1-30. For some secondary literature on the subject, cp. footnote 1626 above.

¹⁷³⁶ For more on this, see in particular Sect. 5.2 below.

¹⁷³⁷ See 434d-436a. We will carefully consider this isomorphism and what it implies in Sect. 4.4 below.

performed with different parts.¹⁷³⁸ The answer is not easy. As we saw above, Plato often stresses the invisibility of the soul and how we have no direct access to its inner constitution or φύσις.¹⁷³⁹ Hence we cannot immediately see how it makes us act. We need an indirect method, and this is what Socrates provides us in this passage. He introduces what is often called “the principle of opposites”, according to which “the same thing won’t be willing at the same time to do or suffer opposites with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing”.¹⁷⁴⁰ This means, for instance, that something can only stand still and move if one part of it stands still and another part moves.¹⁷⁴¹ Therefore, if we are to distinguish parts of the soul, we need to identify actions of the soul that oppose each other. More precisely, we need to see the soul assenting, longing for, embracing, and at the same time refusing, rejecting, thrusting away the same thing.¹⁷⁴² It is like the archer which “thrust[s] the bow away and draw[s] it near”, but he does so insofar as “one hand pushes it away and the other pulls it in”.¹⁷⁴³ One part must bid something and another forbid it.¹⁷⁴⁴ In other words, it is necessary to find moments of great tension (like the ones found in Homer), when the soul is pulled in different directions or when it is in conflict with itself (or in a kind of civil strife – στάσις). This is when we can identify different parts of the soul in action. Such inner

¹⁷³⁸ See 436a-b: “τόδε δὲ ἤδη χαλεπὸν, εἰ τῷ αὐτῷ τούτῳ ἕκαστα πράττομεν ἢ τρισὶν οὖσιν ἄλλο ἄλλω· μαθηθάνομεν μὲν ἐτέρῳ, θυμούμεθα δὲ ἄλλω τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐπιθυμοῦμεν δ’ αὖ τρίτῳ τινὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν τροφήν τε καὶ γέννησιν ἡδονῶν καὶ ὅσα τούτων ἀδελφά, ἢ ὅλη τῇ ψυχῇ καθ’ ἕκαστον αὐτῶν πράττομεν, ὅταν ὀρμήσωμεν. ταῦτ’ ἔσται τὰ χαλεπὰ διορίσασθαι ἀξίως λόγου. καὶ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, ἔφη. ὧδε τοῖνον ἐπιχειρῶμεν αὐτὰ ὀρίζεσθαι, εἴτε τὰ αὐτὰ ἀλλήλοισ ἐῖτε ἑτερά ἐστί.”

¹⁷³⁹ See Chap. 10 Sect. 2.

¹⁷⁴⁰ See 436b-c: “δῆλον ὅτι ταῦτόν τάναντία ποιεῖν ἢ ἀσχεῖν κατὰ ταυτόν γε καὶ πρὸς ταυτόν οὐκ ἐθελήσει ἅμα, ὥστε ἂν που εὐρίσκωμεν ἐν αὐτοῖς ταῦτα γινόμενα, εἰσόμεθα ὅτι οὐ ταυτόν ἦν ἀλλὰ πλειῶν.” Once more, I follow A. Bloom’s translation. See also 436c: “(...) ἐστάναι, εἶπον, καὶ κινεῖσθαι τὸ αὐτὸ ἅμα κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ἅρα δυνατόν; οὐδαμῶς.” A similar principle plays a central role in the differentiation of the cognitive powers in book V (see 477c-d). Later, in 602e, Plato formulates the principle as “τῷ αὐτῷ ἅμα περὶ ταῦτα ἐναντία δοξάζειν ἀδύνατον εἶναι.” All these formulations have some resemblance to Aristotle’s so-called principle of contradiction (see *Metaphysics* 1005a19 ff.), but we will leave that question aside.

¹⁷⁴¹ Plato gives the example of a human being that moves his hands and a top that spins and stays in the same place. See 436c-e.

¹⁷⁴² Cp. 437b-d: “ἄρ’ ἂν οὖν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, τὸ ἐπινεύειν τῷ ἀνανεύειν καὶ τὸ ἐφίεσθαι τινος λαβεῖν τῷ ἀπαρνεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ προσάγεσθαι τῷ ἀπωθεῖσθαι, πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ἐναντίων ἀλλήλοισ θεῖς εἴτε ποιημάτων εἴτε παθημάτων; οὐδὲν γὰρ ταύτη διοίσει. ἀλλ’, ἦ δ’ ὅς, τῶν ἐναντίων. τί οὖν; ἦν δ’ ἐγώ· διψῆν καὶ πεινῆν καὶ ὄλος τὰς ἐπιθυμίας, καὶ αὐτὸ ἐθέλειν καὶ τὸ βούλεσθαι, οὐ πάντα ταῦτα εἰς ἐκεῖνά ποι ἂν θεῖς τὰ εἶδη τὰ νυνδὴ λεχθέντα; οἷον ἀεὶ τὴν τοῦ ἐπιθυμοῦντος ψυχὴν οὐχὶ ἦτοι ἐφίεσθαι φήσεις ἐκείνου οὐ ἂν ἐπιθυμῆ, ἢ προσάγεσθαι τοῦτο ὃ ἂν βούληται οἱ γενέσθαι, ἢ αὖ, καθ’ ὅσον ἐθέλει τί οἱ πορισθῆναι, ἐπινεύειν τοῦτο πρὸς αὐτὴν ὥσπερ τινὸς ἐρωτῶντος, ἐπορευομένην αὐτοῦ τῆς γενέσεως; ἔγωγε. τί δέ; τὸ ἀβουλεῖν καὶ μὴ ἐθέλειν μὴδ’ ἐπιθυμεῖν οὐκ εἰς τὸ ἀπωθεῖν καὶ ἀπελαύνειν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς καὶ εἰς ἅπαντα τάναντία ἐκείνοισ θήσομεν; πῶς γὰρ οὐ;

¹⁷⁴³ See 439b: “ὥσπερ γε οἶμαι τοῦ τοξότου οὐ καλῶς ἔχει λέγειν ὅτι αὐτοῦ ἅμα αἱ χεῖρες τὸ τόξον ἀποθοῦνται τε καὶ προσέλκονται, ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἄλλη μὲν ἢ ἀποθοῦσα χεῖρ, ἑτέρα δὲ ἢ προσαγομένη.”

¹⁷⁴⁴ See 439c: “τί οὖν, ἔφη ἐγώ, φαίη τις ἂν τούτων πέρι; οὐκ ἐνεῖναι μὲν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτῶν τὸ κελεῦον, ἐνεῖναι δὲ τὸ κωλύον πιεῖν, ἄλλο δὲν καὶ κρατοῦν τοῦ κελεύοντος; ἔμοιγε, ἔφη, δοκεῖ.”

conflicts are a fight between these different parts, and therefore the existence of the latter is revealed by the former.¹⁷⁴⁵

Socrates then gives three examples of inner conflicts that allow him to distinguish between three different parts of the soul. First, he describes the situation of someone very thirsty, but that for some reason does not want to drink. In this case, his sensible desire or appetite fights with reason or calculation (λογισμός).¹⁷⁴⁶ Secondly, he mentions Leontius, who was passing by the corpses of people that had been executed and desired to look at them, but was also angered with himself, because that was a reprehensible act. This anger (ὀργή) or spiritedness (θυμός) is thus opposed to desire.¹⁷⁴⁷ Finally, Socrates distinguishes spiritedness from reason, first by saying that animals and children can experience the former without having the latter, and then he recalls a passage of Homer in which reason or calculation rebukes one's irrational spiritedness.¹⁷⁴⁸

We will consider the particular features of each part later.¹⁷⁴⁹ For now we are just trying to determine the model of partition as such, and the conflicts identified let us better understand it. Above all, they show how the identification of the soul's parts is based on different kinds of drives. Plato considers extreme situations, where these drives appear in a state as pure as possible. These are not just conflicts between different courses of action or views. One is not hesitant about what better corresponds to a particular principle. Rather, one is actually torn apart between completely different drives or principles, which cannot be compatibilized in any way. Whether this means that in these situations our drives actually exist in a pure state (i.e., completely unaffected by each other) or just close to a pure state, is something we will leave aside for now.¹⁷⁵⁰

One thing is clear, though. Most moments in our life (and even most moments of inner conflict) do not correspond to these situations. We may be divided between two objects of desire without being impelled by two different principles of action, and for the most part we are not divided at all. But what happens in these moments of calm? How do the different

¹⁷⁴⁵ The identification of the parts of the soul is thus associated with the kind of inner conflicts that are described as a psychic disease in the *Sophist* (see 228a-b) and that give rise to experience usually interpreted as ἀκράτεια. One fights with oneself and one may win or lose (according to whether the best or the worst part wins). For more on this experience and how it is interpreted in the framework of the soul's partition, see Sect. 5.3 below.

¹⁷⁴⁶ See 437d-439d.

¹⁷⁴⁷ See 439e-440e. Plato does not explain why it is reprehensible or shameful, and we can only speculate about it. However, regardless of why Leontius resisted the desire to see those corpses, we can understand that there are two orders of reason at play and one of them is associated with anger, which is the relevant point here.

¹⁷⁴⁸ See 440e-441c. Plato quotes from *Odyssey* XX.17, which is precisely one of the passages we mentioned above (footnote 1735) as an example of inner dialogue in Homer.

¹⁷⁴⁹ See Sect. 2 below.

¹⁷⁵⁰ For a discussion of this question, see Sect. 5.1 below.

parts of the soul and their drives affect us when no such an extreme inner conflict is taking place? The description may suggest that in those moments we are simply pulled by one of the drives and that they pull us alternately or by turns. But what happens to these drives when they are not pulling us? Are they simply dormant? Plato does sometimes talk of the drives as being asleep and awakening.¹⁷⁵¹ But does this mean that at some points they are completely satisfied and need nothing? Or are they always active?

As we will see, Plato describes them as constitutive or permanent desires that impel us at all times. We can understand this if we consider that it is not always clear which drive is pulling us. In fact, they often cooperate in the pursuit of their particular ends. Plato points precisely in this direction, but at the same time he defends that only one of them can take the lead, and when it does so, it subjects the others to its rule. This means that life, in a sense, is always a contest or fight (we could also say a power struggle) between them, even if for the most part this contest is not patent.¹⁷⁵² The drives are always combined in some way, though their influence in the whole of our desire may vary.

Of course, such a description raises the question of how can Plato prove any of this, given the fact that we have no pure or transparent contact with these drives apart from the moments of extreme conflict between them. All other interactions take place in the depths of our inner being or *ψυχή* and not on its surface. However, Plato is precisely trying to explain what takes place at the surface. According to him, we are the result of the interaction of these drives. Our behavior and our entire life is determined by them. Therefore, our desire for the good must be understood within this framework. But in order to understand how our pursuit of the good and our entire life (*βίος*) is determined by these drives, we must first consider how the drives are characterized and how they interact with each other. As we saw, they are intimately connected with the different parts of the soul, which means that in order to better understand our drives we must see in more detail the way Plato conceives the parts of the soul.

2. The different presentations of the soul's partition

We find several different versions of the soul's partition in the *corpus* and they differ in some important respects. Sometimes Plato distinguishes two parts, other times he adds a

¹⁷⁵¹ Cp. e.g. 440c5, 571c-572a.

¹⁷⁵² Cp. *Lg.* 626d-e, where Plato says that we are enemies of ourselves (*αὐτῷ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὡς πολεμίῳ πρὸς πολέμιον*) and are always at war with ourselves (*ὡς πολέμου ἐν ἐκάστοις ἡμῶν ὄντος πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτοῦς*).

third one. The definition of each part also varies, as well as the kind of discourse used to talk about them. Indeed, some descriptions are metaphorical while others are conceptual. In addition to this, there are also moments in which the characters introduce a partition of our being, but not of our soul. Finally, there are passages that do not mention a partition of our being, but describe aspects intrinsically connected with the partition of the soul – in particular the constitutive partition of our interest or desire, and how it can be directed to different objects. All this diversity means that we cannot identify a canonical presentation of the partition. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing, because it also means that the texts provide us with many complementary angles on the complexity of our motivations or desires, and this may help us better understand these motivations or desires. It is thus important to consider the most important aspects of each passage. This consideration, however, will be brief. We will not attend to the context of each passage and the finer details of the model presented therein. We will likewise disregard questions of chronology and of how Plato developed these ideas. Our goal is rather to get an idea of the complexity of these models and of their interrelation, in order to prepare a more refined analysis of their most decisive aspects. We will start with the more imprecise presentations, which have only a few aspects in common with the idea of the soul's partition, and then proceed to the more explicit and developed presentations of this idea.

2.1. The different possible objects of care and the different kinds of goods *(Apology, Alcibiades, Philebus)*

As was said, there are several passages that make no explicit reference to a partition of our inner being, but still consider aspects that are intrinsically connected with what is implied in the partition of the soul. These passages consider how our concerns or interests can be directed to different kinds of objects or different kinds of goods. These different directions are not necessarily exclusive, but in general one of them must hold primacy over the other(s).

One example of this can be found in passages of the *Apology* and of *Alcibiades I* that we already considered above.¹⁷⁵³ In the *Apology*, Socrates contrasts two general directions of care: one can either care for one's body, one's possessions, one's reputation, or one can care for one's soul and for making it the best possible (i.e., as excellent and wise as possible). If

¹⁷⁵³ Cp. Chap. 2 Sect. 2.3 and Chap. 12 Sect. 2.

one follows one direction or gives it more importance, then the other will be neglected.¹⁷⁵⁴ In *Alcibiades I*, the contrast is between caring for the self (which is identified precisely with the soul), caring for the things that belong to the self (namely, the body) and the things that belong to what belongs to the self (i.e., one's possessions).¹⁷⁵⁵ Our being is constitutively related to these three domains and to the possibilities they offer. However, we can relate to them in different ways. In fact, all of them require care, but we cannot dedicate ourselves equally to all of them. We must thus choose between them and prioritize, which will determine our life and our general condition. Moreover, as Socrates stresses in this passage, it is possible to have a hazy relation to these domains and to how they relate to each other. We may for instance think we are caring for the self when we are caring for something else that belongs to it. It is therefore important to properly distinguish these domains and to determine their relative importance.

A different division (to which we also referred above) can be found in *Philebus*. Socrates and Protarchus discuss what is the best possible possession for a human being and two candidates are put forward: pleasure and knowledge (in the broad sense of the word).¹⁷⁵⁶ In order to determine which one is the best, Socrates makes a thought experiment and asks Protarchus whether one would accept any of them in its pure state, absolutely separated from the opponent. Protarchus recognizes that a life of pleasure deprived of any knowledge or awareness would be undesirable, as well as a complete apathetic life of knowledge (even if Socrates later compares the divine condition with such a state).¹⁷⁵⁷ Thus, it seems that our desire cannot be reduced just to one object or one good. We need some mixture of them or a mixed life. In other words, the good itself is not simple, and the question then is how we are to blend them and which one is more important in the mixture.¹⁷⁵⁸

2.2. Different principles of action and different parts of our being (*Phaedrus*, *Laws*, *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*)

In several other texts, Plato recognizes that our being contains different parts or principles, which in turn account for different kinds of desire. These parts or principles are

¹⁷⁵⁴ See 29d-30b, 36c-d, 41e.

¹⁷⁵⁵ See 127e ff. These three domains and the goods (as well as the evils) that correspond to them are distinguished in several other passages throughout the Platonic corpus. See *Grg.* 477b f., *Euthd.* 279a-c, *Men.* 87e ff., *Phlb.* 48c ff., *Lg.* 631b-d, 743e.

¹⁷⁵⁶ See 11a-d.

¹⁷⁵⁷ See 20e ff., 60c-61a, and, for the praise of an apathetic life, see 33a-b.

¹⁷⁵⁸ This is precisely how the question is formulated in 11d-12a, 22b ff., and 61a ff.

not expressly presented as different parts of the soul, but they already involve much of what is implied in the partition of the soul.

A good example of this can be found in Socrates' first speech in *Phaedrus*, which presents a more traditional model of human motivation.¹⁷⁵⁹ Socrates does not mention the soul at this point, but identifies “two kinds of thing which rule and lead us” (δύο τινὲ ἰδέα ἄρχοντε καὶ ἄγοντε), either at the same time (when they are in accord) or separately (when they are at variance). These principles that guide us are “the inborn desire for pleasure” (ἔμφυτος ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν), on the one hand, and the “acquired judgment which aims at the best” (ἐπίκτητος δόξα, ἐφιεμένη τοῦ ἀρίστου).¹⁷⁶⁰ Socrates does not specify how the latter is acquired and what exactly is the best.¹⁷⁶¹ However, he stresses the heterogeneity of the two principles. The first is irrational, compulsive and can guide us to many different pleasurable objects, whereas the second guides us by means of λόγος and directs us to the best.¹⁷⁶² We have, therefore, these two tensions within us and they always relate to each other in some way, which is then what accounts for our behavior, especially with respect to others, as Socrates endeavors to show.

In the *Laws*, Plato presents an image of the human being that has several aspects in common with the one we just saw.¹⁷⁶³ Human beings are compared to a puppet that is pulled by two different kinds of string. One kind of string corresponds to our pleasures and pains, as well as the expectations we have of them. Opposed to this is the string that corresponds to our calculation or reasoning (λογισμός) about which affection is better and which is worse.¹⁷⁶⁴ There is a certain continuity between the two kinds of string, insofar as both refer to our affections, but they imply different relations to it and different kinds of motivation (one more

¹⁷⁵⁹ See 237a-241d.

¹⁷⁶⁰ See 237d-e. I follow C. Rowe's translation – see C. ROWE (ed.), *Plato – Phaedrus*, Oxford, Aris & Phillips, 1988² (1986¹)

¹⁷⁶¹ During the speech, the best seems to correspond to what is becoming or what is traditionally expected of a good citizen, but it is never clearly defined.

¹⁷⁶² 237e-238c.

¹⁷⁶³ See 644c ff.

¹⁷⁶⁴ Plato first describes these elements separately and then integrates them in the image of the puppet as the strings that pull us. For their characterization, see 644c-d: “[AΘ.] δύο δὲ κεκτημένον ἐν αὐτῷ συμβούλω ἐναντίω τε καὶ ἄφρονε, ὃ προσαγορεύομεν ἡδονὴν καὶ λύπην; [ΚΛ.] ἔστι ταῦτα. [AΘ.] πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἀμφοῖν αὐτῷ δόξας μελλόντων, οἷν κοινὸν μὲν ὄνομα ἐλπίς, ἴδιον δέ, φόβος μὲν ἢ πρὸ λύπης ἐλπίς, θάρρος δὲ ἢ πρὸ τοῦ ἐναντίου· ἐπὶ δὲ πᾶσι τούτοις λογισμὸς ὅτι ποτ' αὐτῶν ἄμεινον ἢ χεῖρον, ὃς γενόμενος δόγμα πόλεως κοινὸν νόμος ἐπωνόμασται.” For their description as the strings that pull or drag us in opposite directions, see 644e-645a.

immediate, the other mediate).¹⁷⁶⁵ Our movement is then determined by what results from the different pulls and the way we relate to them.

In both these texts, the principles of action are not expressly attributed to different parts of our being. The case is different with *Gorgias*, where we find some references to the partition of our being, and even of our soul, though these references are still vague. Socrates starts by distinguishing the body from the soul. He says that the body is no more than a tomb. It limits the soul, but it is not an active principle by itself.¹⁷⁶⁶ Then Socrates mentions “that part of the soul in which appetites reside.”¹⁷⁶⁷ This part lacks a specific designation, but Socrates says that it is “the sort of thing to be open to persuasion and to shift back and forth”.¹⁷⁶⁸ The idea that this part is open to persuasion is further emphasized by a comparison based on wordplay. Socrates says that it is called a jar (πίθος), because of how persuadable it is (διὰ τὸ πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικόν).¹⁷⁶⁹ In the case of fools (ἀνοήτοι), this jar is unrestrained and not watertight, and thus resembles a leaking jar that cannot be filled.¹⁷⁷⁰ But if one is σώφρων, then one will have one’s containers full and will thus avoid dissipation and frustration.¹⁷⁷¹ In sum, it seems clear that the soul’s relation to desires will determine how one acts, what one values, and ultimately how one lives.¹⁷⁷² What is not clear in this passage, though, is how the soul may resist its desires, whether such a resistance involves another part of the soul, and how this other part of the soul should be characterized.

A much more complex model can be found in the *Phaedo*, where Plato says that we are composed of two parts that cannot be reduced to each other: namely, σῶμα and ψυχή. The analysis starts by presenting them as two distinct entities, with their own properties, that are

¹⁷⁶⁵ These different relations are also expressed by the way the two kinds of strings are characterized: one is tough, made of steel, and has all shapes, whereas the other is golden, holy and pliable. See 645a.

¹⁷⁶⁶ See 493a: “ἦδη γάρ του ἔγωγε καὶ ἤκουσα τῶν σοφῶν ὡς νῦν ἡμεῖς τέθναμεν καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστιν ἡμῖν σῆμα (...).”

¹⁷⁶⁷ I follow D. Zeyl’s translation (*PCW*), but the Greek is more vague and says only “that something of the soul”. See 493a: “τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθυμῖαι εἰσὶ”. Later, in 493b, he also says: “τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὐ αἰ ἐπιθυμῖαι εἰσὶ”.

¹⁷⁶⁸ See 493a: “(...) τυγχάνει ὄν οἶον ἀναπεῖθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω κάτω (...).”

¹⁷⁶⁹ See *ibidem*.

¹⁷⁷⁰ See 493b: “(...) τῶν δ’ ἀνοήτων τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὐ αἰ ἐπιθυμῖαι εἰσὶ, τὸ ἀκόλαστον αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐ στεγανόν, ὡς τετρημένος εἶη πίθος, διὰ τὴν ἀπληστίαν ἀπεικάσας.” The image of this part of the soul as a leaking jar is then developed into the image of the whole soul as a sieve (493c) that cannot fill its jar because it is also leaky. Finally, Socrates introduces another image according to which the soul possesses many containers and for some people they are leaky and rotten, so that one is forced to fill them day and night, and in doing so one ends up having great pleasures, but also great pains. See 493e-494a.

¹⁷⁷¹ Indeed, the moderate have sound containers and are able to retain what they acquire. They are not in a constant movement of filling and emptying the part of the soul where desires are contained. See 493e.

¹⁷⁷² In other words, it determines whether one is σώφρων/κόσμιος or ἀκόλαστος, sound or unsound, happy or unhappy. Cp. 493b-494a.

separated at death.¹⁷⁷³ However, during life they are constitutively intertwined or bound together. They affect each other and create our unitary experience of things. Still, Plato is able to differentiate several elements or possibilities of this experience, which he then refers to the opposition between body and soul. He distinguishes two forms of knowledge (αἴσθησις and διάνοια or λογίζεσθαι), which he associates with two ways of seeing reality as a whole (namely, one which only recognizes bodily reality, and another that focus on the εἶδη).¹⁷⁷⁴ He also distinguishes two forms of desire – the love of body and the love of knowledge.¹⁷⁷⁵ This is indeed an essential distinction, since it also determines one’s cognitive attitude.¹⁷⁷⁶ We could even say that there are two different desires at the center of our being. These desires are associated with the two parts of our being, but are experienced alongside one another and in tension with one another. The body by itself has no desire (it is in fact no more than a corpse), but when the soul is combined with it, it can attract us. Consequently, the soul must then decide whether it surrenders to the body or whether it draws away from it and tries to “collect itself”.¹⁷⁷⁷ The resulting relation between our two components will then determine the way we act, how we live and how we see things. Therefore, although the *Phaedo* does not identify a partition within the soul, it does talk of two different interests within us (associated with a pure soul and a pure body) that fight with one another for control, and at least in this regard the analysis comes very close to what we find in the texts in which a tripartition of the soul is introduced.

2.3. The tripartition of the soul (*Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*)

The tripartition of the soul appears in three different texts, which have very different features and actually complement each other. One of these texts is the *Phaedrus*. In Socrates’ palinode (which we already considered above), Plato refers to the ψυχή in metaphorical terms and compares the soul to the “combined power of a winged team of horses and their

¹⁷⁷³ See in particular 64c: “ἡγούμεθα τι τὸν θάνατον εἶναι; πάνυ γε, ἔφη ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Σιμμίας. ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγὴν; καὶ εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ τεθνάναι, χωρὶς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγὴν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσαν αὐτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν εἶναι; ἄρα μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὁ θάνατος ἢ τοῦτο; οὐκ, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο, ἔφη.”

¹⁷⁷⁴ See 65a ff., 78d-79a, 79c-d, 81b, 82d ff.

¹⁷⁷⁵ See in particular 68b-c: “οὐκοῦν ἰκανόν σοι τεκμήριον, ἔφη, τοῦτο ἀνδρός, ὃν ἂν ἴδης ἀγανακτοῦντα μέλλοντα ἀποθανεῖσθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἄρ’ ἦν φιλόσοφος ἀλλὰ τις φιλοσώματος; ὁ αὐτὸς δὲ που οὗτος τυγχάνει ὦν καὶ φιλοχρήματος καὶ φιλότιμος, ἦτοι τὰ ἕτερα τούτων ἢ ἀμφοτέρα.”

¹⁷⁷⁶ See in particular 81b and 82e-83e.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Cp. e.g. 67c-d, 84a.

charioteer”.¹⁷⁷⁸ This image contains two contrasts which are very important to define the soul’s partition: namely, the contrast between the charioteer and the horses and the contrast between the wings and the soul’s weight. Let us start with the first contrast. The horses are a symbol of power and they are capable of the strongest pulls. But they can have different natures or characters, and they can be more or less tamed or trained. Socrates explains that the human soul is composed of two very different horses: a good and a bad one. He describes their external and internal traits, and the latter are particularly relevant. The good horse is defined as an ally of the charioteer and of reason; it easily obeys the spoken command (λόγος); it is a lover of honor; it is sensitive to σωφροσύνη and αἰδώς; and it is a companion of true glory.¹⁷⁷⁹ The bad horse, in turn, is unruly and recalcitrant, deaf (hence it cannot properly hear the orders of the charioteer) and “a companion of excess and boastfulness”.¹⁷⁸⁰ These are all traits we can find in ourselves, and according to Plato they come from one of these two horses. But there is also the charioteer. He is the part responsible for steering the soul and giving it a direction. He is responsible for training the horses, especially the bad one.¹⁷⁸¹ He is also identified with the νοῦς – i.e., with the part of us that contemplates the true beings or the εἶδη and recognizes them in particular beings.¹⁷⁸² The charioteer thus plays a central role in our life. He must interact with the horses and establish a particular relation with them. At times, they can come into conflict, which is presented both as a physical and a dialectical contest.¹⁷⁸³ But they must always work together in order to determine the soul’s movement. But this is not all that determines our behavior. As was said, Plato also considers the contrast between lightness (which is represented by the wings) and weight. The first is associated with the charioteer’s contemplation of the εἶδη, the second with the inability to see or remember them (in which the bad horse plays an important role). Both these elements are variable and they can increase or decrease, according to the relation between the different “parts” of the soul. This will then affect what one does and how one lives.

¹⁷⁷⁸ See 246a: “περὶ δὲ τῆς ἰδέας αὐτῆς [i.e., τῆς ψυχῆς] ὧδε λεκτέον. οἷον μὲν ἐστὶ πάντῃ πάντως θείας εἶναι καὶ μακρᾶς διηγῆσεως, ᾧ δὲ ἔοικεν, ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ ἐλάττονος· ταύτῃ οὖν λέγωμεν. εἰκέτω δὲ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτεροῦ ζεύγους τε καὶ ἠνιόχου.” For more on the palinode, see Chap. 12 Sect. 4.3, Chap. 16 Sect. 5.1 a), and Chap. 17 Sect. 3.1 b).

¹⁷⁷⁹ See 253d-e: “ὁ μὲν τοίνυν αὐτοῖν ἐν τῇ καλλίονι στάσει ὦν τό τε εἶδος ὀρθὸς καὶ διηρθρωμένος, ὑψαύχην, ἐπίγρυπος, λευκὸς ἰδεῖν, μελανόματος, τιμῆς ἐραστής μετὰ σωφροσύνης τε καὶ αἰδοῦς, καὶ ἀληθινῆς δόξης ἐταῖρος, ἀπληκτός, κελεύσματι μόνον καὶ λόγῳ ἠνιοχεῖται (...).”

¹⁷⁸⁰ See 253e: “(...) ὁ δ’ αὖ σκολιός, πολὺς, εἰκῆ συμπεφορημένος, κρατεραύχην, βραχυτράχηλος, σιμοπρόσωπος, μελάγχρωτος, γλαυκόματος, ὕφαιμος, ὕβρεως καὶ ἀλαζονείας ἐταῖρος, περὶ ὧτα λάσιος, κωφός, μάστιγι μετὰ κέντρων μόγις ὑπεῖκων.”

¹⁷⁸¹ Cp. in particular 247b.

¹⁷⁸² See in particular 247c: “ἡ γὰρ ἀχρώματος τε καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀναφῆς οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα, ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῇ νῶ, περὶ ἣν τὸ τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἐπιστήμης γένος (...).” Cp. 249b-c.

¹⁷⁸³ See 253e ff.

A similar partition of the soul is found in the *Republic*, though in this case the presentation is more conceptual and more developed. Plato introduces the tripartition in book IV, in the passage we considered above, and this provides the basis for the extremely refined analyses in books VIII and IX. We saw how the conflicts of motivations allow Socrates to distinguish irrational desire, anger and reasoning, which are seen as manifestations of three different parts of the soul. The first part is the appetitive part (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν), which is primarily referred to our necessary desires, to the pleasures associated with them, and to the possessions that guarantee our survival – though it can also be concerned with more than survival and thus strive for as much pleasure and as much possessions as possible. This part is thus defined by a love of gain (φιλοκέρδεια).¹⁷⁸⁴ The second part of the soul, in turn, is the spirited element (τὸ θυμοειδές), which is particularly noticeable in moments of anger or righteous indignation, and is marked by a love of victory (φιλονικία) and a love of honor (φιλοτιμία).¹⁷⁸⁵ Finally, there is also the rational part (τὸ λογιστικόν), which is not only a formal capacity for thinking, but is also essentially defined by its love of knowledge and truth (φιλοσοφία).¹⁷⁸⁶

Besides this conceptual characterization, Plato also uses several images in order to stress their particular features. He compares them to metals (gold, silver and bronze), thereby distinguishing their value.¹⁷⁸⁷ He also portrays them as different living beings, in order to best show their behavior. The appetitive part is compared to a many-headed beast (which brings to mind the figure of Hydra) or simply to a wild beast (θηρίον) – which emphasizes its wild and unruly character.¹⁷⁸⁸ The spirited part is said to resemble a lion, though it is also compared to a serpent and even a monkey.¹⁷⁸⁹ The rational part, in turn, is compared to a human being, thereby emphasizing its heterogeneity to the other parts and its central importance in defining us.¹⁷⁹⁰ All these living beings compose our soul, which (as Socrates remarks) resembles one of those fantastic or monstrous creatures that are composed of different animals, such as the Chimera, Scylla or Cerberus.¹⁷⁹¹

¹⁷⁸⁴ See in particular 439d and 580d-581a (where Plato also characterizes this part as φιλοχρήματος). For the distinction between necessary and non-necessary desires or pleasures, see 558d ff.

¹⁷⁸⁵ See 441a and 581a-b.

¹⁷⁸⁶ See in particular 439d and 581b.

¹⁷⁸⁷ See e.g. 546e ff (and cp. 415a-c).

¹⁷⁸⁸ See 588c, 588e, 589b.

¹⁷⁸⁹ See 588d and 590b.

¹⁷⁹⁰ See 588d and 589a-b.

¹⁷⁹¹ See 588b-c.

But this is not all. Besides characterizing each part of the soul by reference to different loves or different kinds of drive (which we will consider in more detail in the next section), Plato also associates the parts of the soul with the social classes of a πόλις: namely, the money-making class (τὸ χρημαστικόν), the auxiliary class (τὸ ἐπικουρητικόν) and the deliberative class (τὸ βουλευτικόν).¹⁷⁹² Their identification is in fact based on this isomorphism between the πόλις and the individual soul, which implies that both these things must have the same parts.¹⁷⁹³ In addition, these parts account for the different characters or different types of human being, as well as the different ways of life, according to the part that prevails over the others. Finally, they are also the principle that explains the different political systems or πολιτεῖαι, according to Plato.¹⁷⁹⁴ In this sense, the tripartition of the soul accounts for almost everything in human life.

In *Timaeus*, Plato once again presents a tripartition of our inner being, which is not strictly speaking a tripartition of the soul, since he rather talks of two different souls – namely, an immortal soul and a mortal soul.¹⁷⁹⁵ But one of these parts is divided in two and the result is that we are composed of three psychical parts as was the case in *Phaedrus* and in the *Republic*. What varies is the framework. All psychological analyses are part of a rational cosmology, which allows Plato to associate the soul not only with the whole universe and the gods, but also the body and its different parts. In fact, the bodily parts are now seen as being primarily different seats for the different parts of our soul or souls.

But let us see how this is presented. *Timaeus* starts by distinguishing an immortal soul, directly made by the Demiurge, and a mortal one, fashioned by the created gods.¹⁷⁹⁶ The first can exist in a separate state, is composed of the same ingredients as the cosmic soul (to wit, sameness, difference and being) and has thus knowledge of the εἶδη.¹⁷⁹⁷ It also has inner revolutions, which can be harmonious or chaotic, and thus make true or false judgments about individual beings.¹⁷⁹⁸ Furthermore, it is taught the laws of the universe and of embodiment (or of reincarnation).¹⁷⁹⁹ It is thus primarily marked by knowledge. After the embodiment, which greatly disturbs the inner revolutions of this soul, it is that which

¹⁷⁹² The classes and their relation are defined in books II-IV. For their designations, see 440e-441a.

¹⁷⁹³ See 434a-435c

¹⁷⁹⁴ All these questions are object of an extensive analysis in books VIII and IX. For a brief systematization of what is here implied, see 4.4 c) below.

¹⁷⁹⁵ For the partition of the soul in *Timaeus*, see 41b ff. and 69a ff.

¹⁷⁹⁶ Cp. 41c-d, 69c-e.

¹⁷⁹⁷ See 41d (and cp. 35a, 37a-c).

¹⁷⁹⁸ This is what is implied in 42a-44c.

¹⁷⁹⁹ See 41e and ff.

deliberates and guides us.¹⁸⁰⁰ Hence, it is housed in our head, which is our most divine part and the one that rules over the rest of the body.¹⁸⁰¹ This part is also sensitive to justice and injustice and lifts us up towards the heavens.¹⁸⁰² All this is in contrast with the mortal soul, which is not identified with the body, but is closer to it. This part is composed of affections and passions and has a different dwelling-place (namely, the trunk), in order not to pollute the rational part.¹⁸⁰³ Plato thus stresses how different the two souls are. This second part is then divided in two. The first part is associated with courage and spiritedness, and is a lover of victory. It can hear rational discourse, obey it and enforce it with strong emotions, when it boils with anger. It has an intermediate role and is therefore seated in the heart.¹⁸⁰⁴ The third part is the appetitive part of the soul. It is defined by its search of sustenance or nourishment and portrayed as an untamed beast that needs to be contained or tethered – which is why it is seated in the belly or stomach. This part of the soul does not understand rational discourse and does not heed it, but it can be affected by images, which allow it to have some contact with the other parts of the soul.¹⁸⁰⁵ The different parts thus interact with each other – both by themselves and via the body.¹⁸⁰⁶ Reason can control the other parts or lose control, and this will determine the whole course of life. The analysis of this interaction and its effects, however, is much more imprecise than what we find in the *Republic* or even in *Phaedrus*.

2.4. Brief assessment

The different passages in which Plato discusses the partition of the soul or any other inner divisions of our being have significant differences, but also strong affinities. A detailed analysis of all discrepancies and commonalities would take us too far afield, but there are a few aspects whose consideration allows us to better see the connections between the different presentations and at the same time prepares what follows.

One of the most salient differences concerns the number of parts (or desires) identified. Some texts follow a bipartite model, while others identify three components. These three components are not just distinct, but also one of them (namely, the spirited part) is often conceived as a kind of intermediate between the other two and shares some features

¹⁸⁰⁰ See once more 42a-44c.

¹⁸⁰¹ See 44d-45b.

¹⁸⁰² Cp. 41c, 90a-b.

¹⁸⁰³ See 69d-e.

¹⁸⁰⁴ See 70a-c.

¹⁸⁰⁵ See 70d-71c.

¹⁸⁰⁶ There are indeed many indications of this interaction in the passage we are considering (70a-73a).

with them. This also makes it easier to identify it with one of them – especially with the most irrational part.¹⁸⁰⁷

Another significant difference lies in the role played by the notion of ψυχή in the different presentations we considered. Only some of the texts conceive the partition as a partition of the soul itself. Some do not mention the notion of ψυχή at all, and others see it as an object of care or just as one component of our being. This is perhaps due to the fact that one part of us is more closely connected with our inner being and what characterizes it, whereas the others tend to be extroverted and neglect our inner state.

Plato also emphasizes the qualitative difference between the parts that compose us. One of them is presented as being superior to the others, and this superiority determines how we should live (as we shall see in more detail below). In fact, Plato even defends that one of the parts (namely, the rational part) is more essential to us than the others, either by characterizing it as the inner human being or by discussing the possibility of us shedding the other parts after death. The latter are highly abstract metaphysical discussions, based on elaborate arguments. But in general the analyses have a more phenomenological character, based on what is immediately given in our own experience – namely the conflicts between different kinds of desire or different drives. As was said, this is what allows Plato to identify and define each part of our being. The soul's desires or drives are at the center of the whole analysis and it is therefore important to focus our attention on these drives and see how they are characterized in the texts.

3. The characterization of the soul's three constitutive drives

The different kinds of desire, motivation or drive within us are an immediate expression of our inner being or ψυχή. Their occurrence does not depend on us. Rather, they are an internal fact, something that we can find within ourselves, shaping who we are. This means that we can describe the way we experience them or how they appear to us. However, our experience of them is not immediately clear. We tend not to notice them as such and, if we do, we may not be able to immediately describe them. In fact, their description requires a certain interpretation of what happens with us, and what we find in Plato's texts is precisely the main lines of such an interpretation. Plato determines the general structure of all our

¹⁸⁰⁷ This is what happens in *Phaedo*. See in particular 68b-c.

motivations or drives, and he also distinguishes the different types of motivation or drive, as well as the way they interact with each other.

But let us first see the general structure of our motivations or drives. Plato usually describes them by using compound words with the prefix “φιλο-”. In the Greek language, such compound words may express a propensity, predilection or fondness, but often they denote more than that – namely, a single-minded pursuit or an obsessive love, which becomes an excessive or exaggerated trait of someone’s character. In this case, one’s relation to something has become addictive or compulsive, and it produces a dehumanizing effect (which is why the compounds with φιλο- could be used as emphatic reproaches or even insults).¹⁸⁰⁸ We find a good illustration of this in Aristophanes’ *Wasps*. At the beginning of the play, the slave Xanthias tries to explain the condition or disease (νόσος) of his masters’ father and lets the audience guess what it is. He dismisses the first guess (being φιλόκυβος, addicted to gambling), but says that “φιλο” is the beginning of the evil. He then rejects several other guesses, such as being φιλοπότης, φιλοθύτης and φιλοξένος, before revealing that the person in question is addicted to trials (φιληλιαστής) and describing how this obsession dominates all this person’s actions and thoughts.¹⁸⁰⁹ This is in line with what is said about φιλία at the end of *Republic V*.¹⁸¹⁰ In order to define the φιλόσοφος, Socrates associates him with such questionable figures as the lover of boys, the lover of wine and the lover of honor. All these are described as cherishing an entire class of objects and not neglecting any of it – that is, they do not discriminate between good and bad examples of something.¹⁸¹¹ They pursue any object of the desired kind and are not able to get enough of it. Likewise, the philosopher has an obsessive and insatiate desire for all kind of knowledge.¹⁸¹²

The compounds with “φιλο-” express therefore a strong urge or a great need for something. Each drive impels or presses us to pursue as much as we can a particular kind of object. In this sense, they can also be described as a form of ἔρωσ – i.e., of intense and passionate desire. Thus, the immediate expression of each part of the soul is first and foremost something emotional, volitional and instinctive or irrational. We simply feel an urge

¹⁸⁰⁸ Some passages in Plato stress precisely this pejorative sense of such compounds. See e.g. *Rep.* 347b, 390d, 391c.

¹⁸⁰⁹ See vv. 67 ff.

¹⁸¹⁰ See 474b ff.

¹⁸¹¹ Cp. 474c: “(…) ὄν ἄν φῶμεν φιλεῖν τι, δεῖ φανῆναι αὐτόν, ἐὰν ὀρθῶς λέγηται, οὐ τὸ μὲν φιλοῦντα ἐκείνου, τὸ δὲ μή, ἀλλὰ πᾶν στέργοντα;” Cp. also 475b: “ἄρα ὄν ἄν τινος ἐπιθυμητικὸν λέγωμεν, παντὸς τοῦ εἶδους τούτου φήσομεν ἐπιθυμεῖν, ἢ τοῦ μὲν, τοῦ δὲ οὐ; παντός, ἔφη.”

¹⁸¹² See 475b: “οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον σοφίας φήσομεν ἐπιθυμητὴν εἶναι, οὐ τῆς μὲν, τῆς δ’ οὐ, ἀλλὰ πάσης; ἀληθῆ.”

to have something, without possessing a strong justification for it or an account of why the desired object matters. This applies inclusively to drive characteristic of the rational part of the soul. The desire for knowledge is first and foremost an irrational or blind drive. In this sense, the tripartition is very far from the modern doctrine of the soul's faculties, which distinguishes between feeling, will and reason.¹⁸¹³ Each part is essentially marked by a specific desire, which produces its own feelings and, as we shall see, also ends up producing its own reasons.

Plato thus recognizes how the desiderative component is at the center of our being. But this is not all. He also distinguishes different types of motivation or drive and identifies their main traits. It is true that the distinctions and characterizations found in the texts do not always coincide, and the discrepancy is itself meaningful. But for now we will focus primarily on the model of the *Republic*. We will see how Plato distinguishes three types of drive and how he defines each one of them. In doing so, it is important to bear in mind that Plato's description of these drives is, to a great degree, abstract or artificial. He tries to identify them in their pure state, but this is not how we usually experience them. There may perhaps be some extreme situations in which they stand out (such as the conflicts described in *Republic IV* and considered above in section 1), and they may also become dominant traits of someone's character (which will correspond to an obsession in the sense described above). However, as we will see, the different drives are always present in each one of us and they affect and change each other. In other words, we experience them as blended with one another and not in their pure state. We have no direct access to what these drives are in themselves, and Plato's analysis is in fact an attempt to determine what these drives must be in order to account for our usual experience of them. The following discussion will try to follow this attempt, but it will also pay some attention to how each type of drive can be affected by the others and thus manifest itself in different ways.

3.1. The love of gain (φιλοκέρδεια) and the domain of subjective appearance

The first type of drive is identified with the desires of the appetitive part of the soul (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν). This part of the soul is characterized as polymorphic or as having many

¹⁸¹³ This modern distinction has indeed affected many interpretations of Plato, but there has also been several interpreters who endeavored to separate both things. See in particular S. BÜTTNER, *Die Literaturtheorie bei Platon und ihre anthropologische Begründung*, Tübingen, Francke, 2000, 18-111.

heads, and this is then reflected in its desires, which are themselves complex.¹⁸¹⁴ If we look at the texts (especially the *Republic*), these desires seem to be directed to gain, possessions, and pleasant sensations of different kinds – and the nexus between all these things is not immediately clear. Plato emphasizes the idea of gain, by describing this kind of desires or drives as φιλοκερδής. The term κέρδος means “benefit, advantage, profit, gain”. It is primarily used for material gain, though it can denote any other kind of gain – and it is in this broader sense that Plato talks of a love of gain. Money and wealth are not at the center of our φιλοκέρδεια. In fact, Plato explains that we desire money because it is necessary to satisfy the bodily desires (namely, the desire for food, drink and sex).¹⁸¹⁵ These desires are more closely linked to one’s survival, but they can aspire to more, as we will see. What is decisive is the fact that they ultimately refer to our body (and in this sense they are all manifestations of a love for the body, as is said in the *Phaedo*).¹⁸¹⁶

We must, however, be careful when we talk of body. As was seen above, Plato understands the body primarily as the immanent domain of our subjective condition or state (ἔξις), which is composed of the simple or immediate appearing (i.e., sensation).¹⁸¹⁷ This domain is pretty indeterminate, as we considered above, but it contains at least two kinds of movement. On the one hand, there is the emptying of the body (κένωσις), which is a deviation from our right condition (φύσις) and causes pain. On the other hand, we have the filling of the body (πλήρωσις), which is the restoring of the right condition and causes pleasure.¹⁸¹⁸ These are not just occasional movements, but the body is actually in constant flux, even if we only notice the most intense movements, which cause more noticeable affections.¹⁸¹⁹ The love of gain is thus concerned with these movements and the sensations

¹⁸¹⁴ See *Rep.* 588c: “πλάττε τοίνυν μίαν μὲν ιδέαν θηρίου ποικίλου καὶ πολυκεφάλου, ἡμέρων δὲ θηρίων ἔχοντος κεφαλᾶς κύκλω καὶ ἀγρίων, καὶ δυνατοῦ μεταβάλλειν καὶ φύειν ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντα ταῦτα.”

¹⁸¹⁵ See *Rep.* 580d-581a: “τὸ δὲ τρίτον διὰ πολυειδίαν ἐνὶ οὐκ ἔσχομεν ὀνόματι προσεπειῖν ἰδίῳ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ ὁ μέγιστον καὶ ἰσχυρότατον εἶχεν ἐν αὐτῷ, τοῦτω ἐπωνομάσαμεν· ἐπιθυμητικὸν γὰρ αὐτὸ κεκλήκαμεν διὰ σφοδρότητα τῶν τε περὶ τὴν ἐδωδὴν ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ πόσιν καὶ ἀφροδίσια καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τούτοις ἀκόλουθα, καὶ φιλοχρήματον δὴ, ὅτι διὰ χρημάτων μάλιστα ἀποτελοῦνται αἱ τοιαῦται ἐπιθυμίαι.”

¹⁸¹⁶ Plato uses the expression φιλοσώματος in 68b-c.

¹⁸¹⁷ See *Chap.* 10 Sect. 3.1 and *Chap.* 11 Sects. 1 and 3.1.

¹⁸¹⁸ See *Phlb.* 31d: “[ΣΩ.] λέγω τοίνυν τῆς ἁρμονίας μὲν λυομένης ἡμῖν ἐν τοῖς ζῳοῖς ἅμα λύσιν τῆς φύσεως καὶ γένεσιν ἀλγηδόνων ἐν τῷ τότε γίνεσθαι χρόνῳ. [ΠΡΩ.] πάνυ λέγεις εἰκός. [ΣΩ.] πάλιν δὲ ἁρμοστομένης τε καὶ εἰς τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ἀπιούσης ἡδονὴν γίνεσθαι λεκτέον, εἰ δεῖ δι’ ὀλίγων περὶ μεγίστων ὅτι τάχιστα ῥηθῆναι.”

¹⁸¹⁹ See *Phlb.* 43b-c: “[ΣΩ.] (...) σὺ δ’ ἀπόκριναι πότερον αἰεὶ πάντα, ὅποσα πάσχει τι τῶν ἐμψύχων, ταῦτ’ αἰσθάνεται τὸ πάσχον, καὶ οὐτ’ ἀυξάνομενοι λανθάνομεν ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς οὔτε τι τῶν τοιούτων οὐδὲν πάσχοντες, ἢ πᾶν τούναντιον. [ΠΡΩ.] ἅπαν δῆπου τούναντιον· ὀλίγου γὰρ τά γε τοιαῦτα λέληθε πάνθ’ ἡμᾶς. [ΣΩ.] οὐ τοίνυν καλῶς ἡμῖν εἴρηται τὸ νυνδὴ ῥηθέν, ὡς αἱ μεταβολαὶ κάτω τε καὶ ἄνω γιγνόμεναι λύπας τε καὶ ἡδονὰς ἀπεργάζονται. [ΠΡΩ.] τί μὴν; [ΣΩ.] ὧδ’ ἔσται κάλλιον καὶ ἀνεπιληπτότερον τὸ λεγόμενον. [ΠΡΩ.] πῶς; [ΣΩ.] ὡς αἱ μὲν μεγάλαι μεταβολαὶ λύπας τε καὶ ἡδονὰς ποιοῦσιν ἡμῖν, αἱ δ’ αὖ μέτριαί τε καὶ σμικραὶ τὸ παράπαν οὐδέτερα τούτων.”

caused by them. It aspires to obtain a better subjective state or ἔξις. What causes this state and its sensations is irrelevant. Plato indicates as much when he says that these gain-loving drives are primarily not qualified or specified. We desire some drink (i.e., something that suppresses thirst), but not any particular drink.¹⁸²⁰ At their core, such desires are blind and irrational. They do not care about objective reality – not even about the objective reality of the “subject” (i.e., of the ψυχή). They only care about immediate subjective states. Any additional layer of concern that may characterize such a drive is derived from and subordinate to this one. This does not mean we can represent such pure subjective states and the pure love of gain that is directed at them. Our reality and our desires are always more complex than this. As was mentioned several times, Plato even stresses that any subjective state requires at least a δόξα about its occurrence for us to experience it as such.¹⁸²¹ Our sensations are thus brought into connection with the idea of knowledge and truth, but still our desires can be directed at the sensation as such and neglect the rest as much as possible.

Such is the core of all our gain-loving desires. But this does not mean that all gain-loving desires are the same. In fact, Plato distinguishes different kinds of gain-loving desire. The most important distinction is the one between necessary and non-necessary desires (or, as he also says, between frugal and lavish desires). The first are concerned only with survival, cannot be annulled and their satisfaction benefits us, whereas the second aim at something beyond survival, can be curbed and do not necessarily benefit us (in fact, they can be highly detrimental).¹⁸²² The latter class of desires can again be divided into lawful and lawless desires – the first being at least compatible with reason and the second being as opposed to it as possible.¹⁸²³

Our φιλοκέρδεια may thus assume different configurations and it may come to include all these forms of sensible desire. Its particular configuration, however, seems to depend on the interaction of the different drives and how they transform each other. In fact, such an interaction may also direct our gain-loving drive at more than sensual pleasures. It may come to desire honor and knowledge (which are actually the objects of the two other constitutive desires of the soul), but for the sake of the pleasure they may entail. In other words, there may be sublimated or spiritualized pleasures – and thus a sublimated or spiritualized love of gain. Moreover, one may try to be admired by others for the pleasure one has – or one may

¹⁸²⁰ See *Rep.* 437d ff.

¹⁸²¹ See *Phlb.* 21b-c.

¹⁸²² Plato discusses this distinction in *Rep.* 558d ff.

¹⁸²³ See *Rep.* 571b ff.

try to have pleasures that are somehow true. There are multiple variations and any of them can become dominant in our life.

Also significant in this context is the fact that our love of gain can have different dimensions and it can even become a desire for a superlative gain, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. In other words, one can desire to have the greatest pleasure, for the longest time – which would constitute a life of maximized gain.¹⁸²⁴ To be sure, Plato argues that such a life would never fully satisfy us and constitute true εὐδαιμονία, since our desires are not reducible to a desire of gain. But this desire of gain is nevertheless a permanent component of our being, which cannot be removed (at least during life), but only reduced and subordinated to the other components, as we will see below.

3.2. The love of honor (φιλοτιμία) or of victory (φιλονικία) and the domain of intersubjective appearance

The second kind of constitutive desire or drive of the soul comes from the spirited part of the soul (τὸ θυμοειδές) and is thus primarily associated with anger (θυμός), which manifests itself in the battlefield and in moments of righteous indignation. At the core of anger there seems to be a desire for self-affirmation in a context of conflicting claims. This desire is primarily irrational, but it can also answer to rational considerations about what is correct, noble and just (thus echoing the Homeric notion of θυμός, which was also responsible for thoughts and actions).¹⁸²⁵ Either way, it constitutes a different form of motivation, irreducible to the concern with one's subjective state. We may try to ensure our survival and attain a pleasurable state, but we may also make many sacrifices (and even sacrifice our own life) for the sake of others, without any hope of improving our subjective state. Greek culture is very aware of this possibility and usually associates it with one's sense of honor, and even with the desire to conquer everlasting fame.¹⁸²⁶ Plato has this in mind when describing the second kind of drive, which is characterized as honor-loving (φιλότιμος)

¹⁸²⁴ This pursuit of a maximized gain corresponds to the notions of πλέον ἔχειν or πλεονεξία as they are used in *Grg.* 483c ff., *Rep.* 343b ff., 359b ff. These notions do not simply mean “have more than one's share”, but they also denote a kind of desire that leads one to overstep any boundary and to pursue always more. For more on the meaning and use of this notion, see e.g. H.-O. WEBER, *Die Bedeutung und Bewertung der Pleonexie von Homer bis Isokrates*, Diss. Bonn, 1967, 5 ff. It is also important to bear in mind that the purest φιλοκέρδεια would desire a superlative gain in the purest sense of the word, which would be as deprived of honor and knowledge as possible. The only thing that seems to vaguely correspond to such description is the ideal of eternal drunkenness mentioned in *Rep.* 363d.

¹⁸²⁵ Cp. Chap. 10, Sect. 1.1 above.

¹⁸²⁶ For more on this, see Sect. 6.3 below.

and victory-loving (φιλόνικος). In Greek, these adjectives can express the idea of ambition and competitiveness, which in turn can have a positive or a negative connotation, according to the context. However, this is a very generic description of the two terms. We have to consider them in more detail, see what characterizes each one and what they have in common.

Let us start with the love of victory (φιλονικία). This term denotes a desire to overcome others and show superiority over them. In its extreme form, it coincides with the instructions given to Glaucus by his father, according to Homer: “ever to excel, to do better than others”.¹⁸²⁷ But according to Plato, this is a general trait of human personality or something to which we are always sensitive. We tend to compare ourselves with others around us or to compete with them, and we are not indifferent to the outcome of this competition. But our relation with others is usually more complex and it is also marked by what Plato calls a love of honor (φιλοτιμία). We desire to be acknowledged and even admired by others. We want to be seen as having merit or value (which is indeed one of the senses of ἀρετή in Greek) and as having a noble or commendable life. We also want to avoid any shame and dishonor.¹⁸²⁸ These are desires we sometimes notice in ourselves, but according to Plato they are not limited to a particular moment of interaction with others or to a particular relation. We are permanently concerned with our overall status or with our position in the social hierarchy.¹⁸²⁹

These kinds of concerns were perhaps clearer in Plato’s time than in our own. The life of Greek men was indeed marked by many contests and one’s rights in the πόλις were intrinsically connected with what one did and how one was regarded by others. However, Plato is talking of a permanent feature of human nature, which is expressed both in the love of victory and the love of honor – namely, the concern with how one is seen by others, how one appears to them and which relations of power are established. We are not indifferent to

¹⁸²⁷ See *Iliad*, VI.208. We find also a good expression of this desire in a prayer that appears at the end of several of Euripides’ plays: “ὦ μέγα σεμνή Νίκη τὸν ἐμὸν/ βίον κατέχοις/ καὶ μὴ λήγοις στεφανοῦσα”. See *Iphigenia Taurica* 1499-1501; *Orestes* 1691-3; *Phoenissae* 1764-6.

¹⁸²⁸ Cp. e.g. *Smp.* 178d: “λέγω δὲ δὴ τί τοῦτο; τὴν ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς αἰσχροῖς αἰσχρόνην, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς καλοῖς φιλοτιμίαν· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἄνευ τούτων οὔτε πόλιν οὔτε ιδιώτην μεγάλα καὶ καλά ἔργα ἐξεργάζεσθαι.”

¹⁸²⁹ Thus, the love of honor seems to have a broader scope than the love of victory, since it is concerned with one’s place in the πόλις, as well as with one’s life as a whole. It is in this sense that Zeno seems to understand the meaning of these terms in *Prm.* 128c-e. However, victory and honor can also be intimately connected, since one can try to conquer honor through victory and a frequent consequence of victory is honor. But since honor seems to be a more encompassing designation, it is therefore more frequently used by Plato to designate the kind of drive we are now considering.

the difference between being respected or feared and being despised or laughed at, and this is why we pursue victory and honor.

These drives are thus directed to something beyond our individual appearing or our subjective state. In fact, they require us to represent others outside our subjective state and these others must represent ourselves outside their own state. Cognitive elements are always implied here. However, our concern is with how one appears to the others or what is their impression of us. In this sense, the concern with objectivity or truth is very limited. One is mainly concerned with what one seems to be. It is a matter of seeming (*δοκεῖν*) and not necessarily being (*εἶναι*).¹⁸³⁰ But in any case, our life is about more than our subjective state or our feelings. Our being also has an intersubjective dimension, we are aware of others and their views, and this affects our desires, our actions and our life at large.

Our concern with others and how they regard us may, however, have different ranges and intensities. It may be restricted to the closest ones or extend to the majority or to everybody. It may also be something we hardly think about at all or it may be all we care for. In the latter case, one may want to conquer the world and be admired for it, as Socrates says about Alcibiades, who is precisely presented as the embodiment of *φιλοτιμία*.¹⁸³¹ If this is not possible, such a person will still want as much honor as possible.¹⁸³² This applies both to the degree of one's honor and to its duration, the ultimate goal being to achieve an immortal renown, which would allow one be remembered throughout all time.¹⁸³³

¹⁸³⁰ For this idea, cp. e.g. *Rep.* 365b-c: “τὰ μὲν γὰρ λεγόμενα δίκαια μὲν ὄντι μοι, εἴ μὴ καὶ δοκῶ ὄφελος οὐδὲν φασιν εἶναι, πόνους δὲ καὶ ζημίας φανεράς· ἀδίκῳ δὲ δόξαν δικαιοσύνης παρεσκευασμένῳ θεσπέσιος βίος λέγεται. οὐκοῦν, ἐπειδὴ ‘τὸ δοκεῖν’, ὡς δηλοῦσί μοι οἱ σοφοί, “καὶ τὰν ἀλάθειαν βιάται” καὶ κύριον εὐδαιμονίας, ἐπὶ τούτῳ δὴ τρεπτόν ὄλωσ· πρόθυρα μὲν καὶ σχῆμα κύκλω περὶ ἑμαυτὸν σκιαγραφίαν ἀρετῆς περιγραπτέον, τὴν δὲ τοῦ σοφωτάτου Ἀρχιλόχου ἀλώπεκα ἔλκτεον ἐξόπισθεν κερδαλέαν καὶ ποικίλην.”

¹⁸³¹ Cp. e.g. *Prt.* 336, where it is said that Alcibiades is always *φιλόνομος* πρὸς ὃ ἂν ὀρμήσῃ (*Prot.* 336e). In *Alc. I* 105a-c, Socrates says: “δοκεῖς γάρ μοι, εἴ τίς σοι εἴποι θεῶν· ‘ὦ Ἀλκιβιάδη, πότερον βούλει ζῆν ἔχων ἢ νῦν ἔχεις, ἢ αὐτίκα τεθνάναι εἰ μὴ σοι ἐξέσται μείζω κτήσασθαι;’ δοκεῖς ἂν μοι ἐλέσθαι τεθνάναι· ἀλλὰ νῦν ἐπὶ τίνι δὴ ποτε ἐλπιδὶ ζῆς, ἐγὼ φράσω. ἡγή, εἴ μὴ θάττον εἰς τὸν Ἀθηναίων δῆμον παρέλθῃς – τοῦτο δ’ ἔσσεσθαι μάλα ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν – παρελθὼν οὖν ἐνδείξεσθαι Ἀθηναίοις ὅτι ἄξιός εἰ τιμᾶσθαι ὡς οὔτε Περικλῆς οὔτ’ ἄλλος οὐδεὶς τῶν πρότερο γενομένων, καὶ τοῦτ’ ἐνδείξάμενος μέγιστον δυνήσεσθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει, εἴ μὴ ἐνθάδε μέγιστος ἦς, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις Ἑλλησιν, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἐν Ἑλλησιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τοῖς βαρβάροις, ὅσοι ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμῖν οἰκοῦσιν ἡπεύρω. καὶ εἰ αὖ σοι εἴποι ὁ αὐτὸς οὗτος θεὸς ὅτι αὐτοῦ σε δεῖ δυναστεύειν ἐν τῇ Εὐρώπῃ, διαβῆναι δὲ εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν οὐκ ἐξέσται σοι οὐδὲ ἐπιθέσθαι τοῖς ἐκεῖ πράγμασιν, οὐκ ἂν αὖ μοι δοκεῖς ἐθέλειν οὐδ’ ἐπὶ τούτοις μόνους ζῆν, εἰ μὴ ἐμπλήσεις τοῦ σοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως πάντας ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀνθρώπους· καὶ οἷμαί σε πλὴν Κύρου καὶ Ξέρξου ἡγεῖσθαι οὐδένα ἄξιον λόγου γεγενῆσθαι. ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἔχεις ταύτην τὴν ἐλπίδα, εὖ οἶδα καὶ οὐκ εἰκάζω.”

¹⁸³² See *Rep.* 475a-b: “καὶ μὴν φιλοτίμους γε, ὡς ἐγὼμαι, καθορᾶς ὅτι, ἂν μὴ στρατηγήσῃς δύνωνται, τριτταρχοῦσιν, κἂν μὴ ὑπὸ μειζόνων καὶ σεμνοτέρων τιμᾶσθαι, ὑπὸ σμικροτέρων καὶ φαυλοτέρων τιμώμενοι ἀγαπῶσιν, ὡς ὅλων τιμῆς ἐπιθυμητὰ ὄντες. κομιδῇ μὲν οὖν.”

¹⁸³³ Cp. *Smp.* 208c-e: “ἐπεὶ γε καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰ ἐθέλεις εἰς τὴν φιλοτιμίαν βλέψαι, θαυμάζεις ἂν τῆς ἀλογίας περὶ ἃ ἐγὼ εἶρηκα εἰ μὴ ἐννοεῖς, ἐνθυμηθεὶς ὡς δεινῶς διάκεινται ἔρωτι τοῦ ὀνομαστοῦ γενέσθαι “καὶ κλέος ἐς τὸν αἰὶ χρόνον ἀθάνατον καταθέσθαι”, καὶ ὑπὲρ τούτου κινδύνους τε κινδυνεύειν ἔτοιμοί εἰσι πάντας ἔτι μᾶλλον ἢ ὑπὲρ τῶν παίδων, καὶ χρήματα ἀναλίσκεν καὶ πόνους πονεῖν οὐστινασοῦν καὶ ὑπεραποθνήσκειν. ἐπεὶ

In effect, our φιλοτιμία consents many variations, according to its own development and its interaction with the other drives. As we will see, each drive must be thought as part of a system of forces – and φιλοτιμία plays an important role therein, since it can work as ally of the other two. It can listen to reason and follow it, thus becoming concerned with objective goodness and helping φιλοσοφία to rule the soul. But it can also fall back in φιλοκέρδεια or in one’s self-interest.¹⁸³⁴ In some passages it is even entirely reduced to it (as in *Phaedo*, where it is seen simply as an inner variation of the concern with the body).¹⁸³⁵ But by considering it as an autonomous or irreducible drive, Plato is able to provide a more complex picture of our being. Although the stronger contrast is between the two other drives, the soul’s love of honor may also recruit them to its own ends. One may want to be admired by one’s gains or by one’s intelligence and philosophical prowess, and one’s pursuit of gain and one’s pursuit of knowledge will then be subordinated to one’s desire for honor.¹⁸³⁶ Thus, the identification of φιλοτιμία as a third basic drive of the soul makes our system of motivations significantly more complex.

3.3. The love of wisdom (φιλοσοφία) and the domain of objective reality

The contrast between the pursuit of pleasure and the pursuit of honor was indeed a topos in the pre-Platonic literature, but Plato identifies a third kind of pursuit (and consequently a third kind of drive) that is opposed to the other two. The third kind of pursuit or drive is associated with the rational or calculating part of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν), which is precisely that with which the soul thinks, learns or understands, and is “always entirely directed toward knowing the truth as it is”.¹⁸³⁷ Our rational part is thus not simply a capacity to think, but also a form of desire. It is essentially defined by a drive, which is usually

οἶει σύ, ἔφη, Ἄλκηστιν ὑπὲρ Ἀδμήτου ἀποθανεῖν ἄν, ἢ Ἀχιλλέα Πατρόκλῳ ἐπαποθανεῖν, ἢ προαποθανεῖν τὸν ὑμέτερον Κόδρον ὑπὲρ τῆς βασιλείας τῶν παίδων, μὴ οἰομένους ἀθάνατον μνήμην ἀρετῆς πέρι ἑαυτῶν ἔσεσθαι, ἦν νῦν ἡμεῖς ἔχομεν; πολλοῦ γε δεῖ, ἔφη, ἀλλ’ οἶμαι ὑπὲρ ἀρετῆς ἀθανάτου καὶ τοιαύτης δόξης εὐκλεοῦς πάντες πάντα ποιούσιν, ὅσῳ ἂν ἀμείνους ᾶσι, τοσοῦτῳ μᾶλλον· τοῦ γὰρ ἀθανάτου ἐρῶσιν.”

¹⁸³⁴ Cp. *Phdr.* 253d-e, *Rep.* 440a ff. Cp. also 546d ff., for the description of the honor-loving regime as an intermediate between a gain-loving regime and a knowledge-loving regime.

¹⁸³⁵ See once more *Phd.* 68b-c.

¹⁸³⁶ Plato not only argues that it is so, but he also portrays several characters that seem to discuss only for the sake of victory and honor, and not for the sake of knowledge. See, for instance, Plato’s portrayal of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in *Euthydemus*. Cp. also e.g. *Chrm.* 162c. For the contrast between discussing for the sake of victory and discussing for the sake of knowledge, cp. e.g. *Chrm.* 166c-d, *Grg.* 457c-e, 515b.

¹⁸³⁷ See 581b: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ᾧ γε μανθάνομεν, παντὶ δῆλον ὅτι πρὸς τὸ εἰδέναι τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὅπῃ ἔχει πᾶν αἰεὶ τέταται, καὶ χρημάτων τε καὶ δόξης ἥκιστα τούτων τούτῳ μέλει.” Cp. also *Rep.* 439d.

characterized as a love of wisdom (φιλοσοφία), though sometimes it is also sometimes described as a love of learning (φιλομαθία) or a love of λόγος (φιλολογία).¹⁸³⁸

The use of the term φιλοσοφία in Plato is very complex and can be associated with different things, as we will see in detail in the following chapter. However, in the context of the tripartition the term is used to denote a form of desire – and not just any desire or fondness, but a form of obsessive love that can even be compared to madness.¹⁸³⁹ This love is directed at knowledge in general, though the designation σοφία associates it primarily with a superlative form of knowledge, which surpasses the regular access to things and is directed at the most important things.¹⁸⁴⁰ In general, we can more easily identify this love of knowledge in someone engaged in the active pursuit of it. We can also see it in some psychological traits – such as being inquisitive (ζητητικός) and very fond of learning or acquiring knowledge (φιλομαθής).¹⁸⁴¹ Such a person will probably also be fond of speeches or rational discussions (φιλόλογος), since λόγος allows one to pursue knowledge and to grasp what things are.¹⁸⁴² These are just some of the manifestations of the third kind of desire or drive, which is directed at knowledge and wants to avoid ignorance.¹⁸⁴³ But there are many other manifestations – for instance, in the fact that people do not want to be deceived and that they want to keep the knowledge they have and not lose it.¹⁸⁴⁴ We are sensitive to the difference

¹⁸³⁸ See 581b, where this part of the soul is itself qualified as φιλομαθές and φιλόσοφον. For its designation as φιλόλογος, see 582e.

¹⁸³⁹ See *Rep.* 501d: “πῆ γὰρ δὴ ἔξουσιν ἀμφισβητῆσαι; πότερον μὴ τοῦ ὄντος τε καὶ ἀληθείας ἐραστὰς εἶναι τοὺς φιλοσόφους; ἄτοπον μὲν τῶν, ἔφη, εἶη.” For the association of φιλοσοφία with ἔρως, see also e.g. *Phd.* 66e and 68a. Φιλοσοφία is also associated with longing (πόθος) in *Men.* 84c, whereas in *Hp. Ma.* 297e, Socrates speaks of a ἐπιθυμία τοῦ εἰδέναι. For its association with madness, see e.g. *Smp.* 218b: “(...) πάντες γὰρ κεκοινωνήκατε τῆς φιλοσόφου μανίας τε καὶ βακχείας (...).”

¹⁸⁴⁰ For the notion of σοφία, see Chap. 1, Sect. 2 above.

¹⁸⁴¹ See 535c-d: “τὸ γοῦν νῦν ἀμάρτημα, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, καὶ ἡ ἀτιμία φιλοσοφία διὰ ταῦτα προσπέτωκεν, ὃ καὶ πρότερον εἶπομεν, ὅτι οὐ κατ’ ἀξίαν αὐτῆς ἄπτονται· οὐ γὰρ νόθους ἔδει ἄπτεσθαι, ἀλλὰ γνησίους. πῶς; ἔφη. πρῶτον μὲν, εἶπον, φιλοπονία οὐ χωλὸν δεῖ εἶναι τὸν ἀνόμενον, τὰ μὲν ἡμίσεια φιλόπονον ὄντα, τὰ δ’ ἡμίσεια ἄπονον. ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο, ὅταν τις φιλογυμναστής μὲν καὶ φιλόθηρος ἦ καὶ πάντα τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος φιλοπονῆ, φιλομαθῆς δὲ μή, μηδὲ φιλήκοος μηδὲ ζητητικός, ἀλλ’ ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις μισοπονῆ· χωλὸς δὲ καὶ ὁ τάναντία τούτου μεταβεβληκῶς τὴν φιλοπονίαν.” See also 485a ff., where Socrates describes the psychological qualities the philosophical guardians must have.

¹⁸⁴² Cp. 582d: “ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ δι’ οὗ γε δεῖ ὄργανον κρίνεσθαι, οὐ τοῦ φιλοκερδοῦς τοῦτο ὄργανον οὐδὲ τοῦ φιλοτίμου, ἀλλὰ τοῦ φιλοσόφου. τὸ ποῖον; διὰ λόγων που ἔφαμεν δεῖν κρίνεσθαι. ἦ γάρ; ναί. λόγοι δὲ τούτου μάλιστα ὄργανον.”

¹⁸⁴³ On this idea, see e.g. *Sph.* 228c: “(...) ψυχὴν γε ἴσμεν ἄκουσαν πᾶσαν πᾶν ἀγνοοῦσαν.” Immediately thereafter, the soul is said to be mobilized towards truth (ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὀρωμένης ψυχῆς). For more on this passage, see Chap. 8 Sect. 1.2.

¹⁸⁴⁴ What Plato describes in *Rep.* 485c as a trait of philosophically gifted natures (namely, “τὴν ἀψεῦδειαν καὶ τὸ ἐκόντας εἶναι μηδαμῆ προσδέχεσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος ἀλλὰ μισεῖν, τὴν δ’ ἀλήθειαν στέργειν”) applies to a certain extent to everybody. See *Rep.* 382b: “ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὅτι τῆ ψυχῆ περι τὰ ὄντα ψεῦδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι καὶ ἀμαθῆ εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτηῖσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος πάντες ἠκιστα ἂν δέξαιντο, καὶ μισοῦσι μάλιστα αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ.” See also *Rep.* 412e-413a: “φαίνεται μοι δόξα ἐξίναί μοι ἐκ διανοίας ἢ ἐκουσίως ἢ ἀκουσίως, ἐκουσίως μὲν ἢ ψευδῆς τοῦ μεταμανθάνοντος, ἀκουσίως δὲ πᾶσα ἢ ἀληθῆς. τὸ μὲν τῆς ἐκουσίως, ἔφη, μανθάνω, τὸ δὲ τῆς ἀκουσίως δέομαι μαθεῖν. τί δέ; οὐ καὶ σὺ ἡγῆ, ἔφη, ἐγὼ, τῶν μὲν ἀγαθῶν ἀκουσίως

between knowing and not knowing, and (at least in many cases) we decidedly favor knowledge.¹⁸⁴⁵

According to Plato, this preference is the expression of a particular form of desire, which corresponds to what Nietzsche calls will to truth (*Wille zur Wahrheit*).¹⁸⁴⁶ It is a desire for something that goes beyond our sensation or appearances as such.¹⁸⁴⁷ It aims at something objective or absolute. This does not necessarily imply that there are “things in themselves”, completely independent from any subject and any appearing. Perhaps there is nothing outside consciousness. But such an idea is still a version of things that may be right or not – and the philosophical drive is directed precisely at a right version of things. It wants to define what reality is and it wants this definition to be correct.¹⁸⁴⁸ It wants a full access to what there is or a perfect knowledge of it.¹⁸⁴⁹

Plato describes this love of knowledge as a permanent trait of the soul, irreducible to our love of gain and honor. At some points, he even seems to identify it as the essence of the soul.¹⁸⁵⁰ This may be surprising, since most of us (if not all) are very far from corresponding to the description of the true philosophers we find at the end of *Republic* V. Philosophers desire to know all things, they are insatiable, and they cannot stand to be ignorant of something.¹⁸⁵¹ Our usual state, in turn, seems to be very different from this. We do not desire to know everything. We only want to know some things – namely, those that are more relevant for our practical concerns (which normally means those that are more relevant for the acquisition of gain or honor). Thus, we do not need to know things perfectly. We only need to know them well enough to achieve our goals. In other words, the love of knowledge tends indeed to be subordinated to the other drives. It is not a love of knowledge for knowledge’s own sake. However, this does not mean it is entirely reducible to them. Our love of knowledge is directed at something different from mere gain or honor. Moreover, although

στερέσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἐκουσίως; ἢ οὐ τὸ μὲν ἐψεῦσθαι τῆς ἀληθείας κακόν, τὸ δὲ ἀληθεύειν ἀγαθόν; ἢ οὐ τὸ τὰ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἀληθεύειν δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι; ἀλλ', ἢ δ' ὅς, ὀρθῶς λέγεις, καί μοι δοκοῦσιν ἄκοντες ἀληθοῦς δόξης στερίσκεσθαι.”

¹⁸⁴⁵ In other words, we possess the trait Plato ascribes to the dogs – namely, we distinguish what we know from what we do not know and we are fond of the former and averse to the latter. See *Rep.* 376a-b.

¹⁸⁴⁶ See e.g. *KSA* 3, 352, 574-577; *KSA* 5, 15f., 22-24, 145, 401; *KSA* 10, 87ff.; *KSA* 12, 323f., 364ff., 384f.; *KSA* 13, 226, 229, 500, 522.

¹⁸⁴⁷ This “going beyond sensation” is precisely what is implied in a λογισμός or in the act of λογίζεσθαι, which is what first allows Socrates to identify the part of the soul characterized by φιλοσοφία. See 439c ff.

¹⁸⁴⁸ The goal of this drive is what Plato describes as “γίγνεσθαι καταφανὲς ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ὅπῃ ἔχει” (see *Chrm.* 166d) or as “φανερὸν γενέσθαι αὐτό” (namely, τὸ ἀληθὲς τί ἐστίν – see *Grg.* 505e).

¹⁸⁴⁹ For more on the ideas of knowledge and truth, see Chap. 5 Sect. 2.3 and Chap. 11.

¹⁸⁵⁰ See especially *Rep.* 611a-612a.

¹⁸⁵¹ See 475b-c: “οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον σοφίας φήσομεν ἐπιθυμητὴν εἶναι, οὐ τῆς μὲν, τῆς δ' οὐ, ἀλλὰ πάσης; ἀληθῆ. (...) τὸν δὲ δὴ εὐχερῶς ἐθέλοντα παντὸς μαθήματος γεύεσθαι καὶ ἀσμένως ἐπὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἰόντα καὶ ἀπλήστως ἔχοντα, τοῦτον δ' ἐν δίκῃ φήσομεν φιλόσοφον (...).”

it is normally inconstant and weak, it can be stimulated and developed (as Plato often stresses) – even to the point of becoming stronger than the other drives and thus determining our whole life. In this case, it will also become much more demanding and much more rigorous, and therefore much more easy to recognize as such.¹⁸⁵² But according to Plato, even when we cannot recognize it, φιλοσοφία is a fundamental and inextirpable structure of our being.

3.4. Brief reconsideration of the tripartition of our desire

This brief characterization of each drive lets us better understand some important aspects of the tripartition of the soul. As was said, the description is somewhat abstract. These drives or urges are normally not experienced in their pure state. They affect each other in many ways and, as a result, they may undergo many variations. Normally, we even tend not to recognize their manifestations as variations of the same basic and permanent drive. Plato, however, defends that there are three permanent tensions of our inner being and that they always affect us in some degree.

It is not clear whether these drives are absolutely innate or acquired at some point during our life. Plato sometimes describes them as constitutive and inborn. Other times he recognizes there is no reason in little children – and perhaps no gain-loving and honor-loving drive either.¹⁸⁵³ At some stages he describes the soul of an infant as a chaos of inner movements, without coherent behavior.¹⁸⁵⁴ It is not clear when and why an infant's soul becomes ordered and these drives develop. However, none of this makes the description any less valid for older human beings, who may recognize these tensions in themselves.

One thing is clear: Plato never describes the drives as being derived from one another (even if he sometimes seems to reduce φιλοτιμία to φιλοκέρδεια, or at least to a drive whose essential features are similar to the description of φιλοκέρδεια in the *Republic*).¹⁸⁵⁵ The drives are often interconnected and they may be subordinated to each other, which will transform them, but each one has its own specificity. This does not mean that they all have the same value, though. In fact, Plato seems to establish a hierarchy of drives. Love of gain seems to be the lowest drive and love of knowledge the highest – even the most proper part of the

¹⁸⁵² All these possible variations will be carefully analyzed in the following chapter. See also Chap. 17, Sect. 5.

¹⁸⁵³ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 441a-b.

¹⁸⁵⁴ See in particular *Ti.* 42a ff.

¹⁸⁵⁵ See in particular *Phd.* 68b-c.

soul.¹⁸⁵⁶ This outlines the task of developing the love of knowledge and repressing the other two drives. It also raises the above mentioned question of whether these other drives should be subordinated to φιλοσοφία and transformed by this subordination, or rather eliminated in some way. Plato seems to acknowledge that during life they are all inextricable, but the fact that sometimes he represents death as a shedding off of the other parts raises the question of whether or not that is the most desirable state. However, Plato's eschatological reflections are very problematic and we will therefore disregard them once more.¹⁸⁵⁷

At any rate, in order to better understand the different forms of each drive and their comparison we must consider their interrelation. This also allows us to understand how they are supposed to account for our behavior and our way of life in general.

4. The combination of the different drives

According to Plato, the human ψυχή is essentially marked by motivations or drives whose differentiation and identification require a state of conflict (στάσις), in which we are torn apart between two different drives. However, most of our actions are not preceded by such a conflict. This suggests that in general we are impelled by just one drive, while the others are inert or asleep, waiting for their turn to impel us. In this sense, our motivations seem to be for the most part simple. Our basic drives are usually separated from one another and each of them causes a certain kind of action. Then, on rare occasions, they may be simultaneously active and go into conflict. This may result in inaction or it may perhaps even lead one to act against the rational part and one's better judgment (i.e., it may lead to an akratic action). At least this is what is suggested by the way Plato first describes the soul's inborn drives in the *Republic*. Each drive seems to be responsible for certain acts and they are incapable of conciliation.

However, such a description is only a first approach to the nature of the drives and to their functioning. Later in the text (as well as in other dialogues) we find out that things are actually much more complex. Our drives are always active and this means that they must interact and blend with each other in some way. They are always combined or associated with one another, and this means that the alphabet of our motivations is not what we primarily deal with. Rather, we experience each letter of motivation (i.e., each drive) already as part of a

¹⁸⁵⁶ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 611a-612a.

¹⁸⁵⁷ For more on the problematic status of these reflections, cp. Chap. 10 Sect. 2.

motivational syllable, and within this syllable the different letters are arranged in a particular way.¹⁸⁵⁸ The arrangements may vary and (as we will see) they can be more or less harmonious, but what moves us in life is nevertheless very different from a simple alternation of drives.¹⁸⁵⁹

It is very important to bear in mind here that the arrangement of drives is not completely new at each moment, but there is something like a usual arrangement (or a kind of character) that determines which drive normally prevails in us and how each one of them normally manifests itself. More precisely, this arrangement determines the drives' relative strength, the actions they motivate, and the way they affect the general pursuit of a superlative good. Then, at times, some unresolved tension between our drives may come to the fore and cause a conflict, which may be superficial and transitory, or it may call for a revision of the general arrangement. But such moments of conflict are indeed rare. The relation between our drives tends to be stable and their functions are relatively clear.

This is, in broad strokes, the general model of combination of drives that we find in Plato. But we must consider in more detail what is implied in it. In order to do so, we must direct our attention to the way Plato illustrates this combination of drives. Instead of simply conceptualizing them, Plato employs several images to clarify the way our drives combine with each other. These images are of different kinds and to an extent they carry different implications. We could say that they present somewhat different models of the combination or interaction of the soul's constitutive drives, though they all share a common core. We must therefore start by considering each image (and the model that corresponds to it) and then we will try to better determine their common core and what they say about our motivations.

4.1. The hydraulic model

In the *Republic*, Socrates says: “(...) we surely know that when someone's desires incline strongly to some one thing, they are therefore weaker with respect to the rest, like a

¹⁸⁵⁸ Our motivation for each action has therefore some of the features that characterize intermediate entities. Indeed, it always lies between different poles, without being entirely reduced to any of them. Moreover, we are never able to experience any of them in its simple form, without being already transformed by the others. For the notion of intermediate or μεταξύ, see Chap. 7 Sect. 2.4 and Chap. 12 Sects. 3.3 and 4.3.

¹⁸⁵⁹ We must therefore distinguish the strategy used at first to identify and determine each drive (which tries to see them in their purest form) from the description of how these drives are present in our life or of how we normally experience them. The drives are constantly marked by their interaction with one another, which determines all their particular manifestations, and therefore when we notice one of them, the others are still present and active.

stream that has been channeled off in that other direction”.¹⁸⁶⁰ By comparing the soul’s drives to a flowing watercourse, Socrates stresses several things. First, our soul is in movement and has a strong tension (which, as we saw, is directed at the superlative good). Second, the tension in question – i.e., the stream – corresponds to a fixed quantity. It may be channeled in different ways, but the quantity of water is always the same. Third, this fixed quantity must always be divided between three channels, which correspond to our particular drives. The quantity of each channel is thus not predetermined and this means that the derived streams may be larger or smaller. However, the strength of each derived stream depends on the strength of the others. If one of these streams increases, the others must decrease. Indeed, though they are different streams, they are united by their correlation, which determines their possibilities. One of them may be strong and the other two weak, or the main stream may be more equally distributed by them. What is not clear in this model, though, is how the different streams affect each other or how they interact, apart from the fact that the intensity of each one is intimately connected to the intensity of the others.

4.2. The traction model and the resulting force system

Several passages express a different and more complex model. According to this model, the constitutive drives of the soul are like forces that oppose each other. We find one instance of this model in *Phaedrus*, when Plato describes the soul as the “combined power of a winged team of horses and their charioteer” (σύμφυτος δύναμις ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου).¹⁸⁶¹ The horses and the charioteer have different interests and they pull in different directions – not only in life at large, but particularly when the soul sees someone very beautiful.¹⁸⁶² This image of the soul contains yet another instance of the same model, insofar as it also distinguishes the wings of the soul and its weight, which counteract each other.¹⁸⁶³ Another illustration of the model in question can be found in the *Republic*, when Plato compares the soul’s drives (or, more precisely, what they are directed to) to different plates of a scale. Whatever is put in one of them, affects the other. When one sinks, the other rises.¹⁸⁶⁴

¹⁸⁶⁰ See 485d: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ὅτω γε εἰς ἓν τι αἱ ἐπιθυμῖαι σφόδρα ῥέπουσιν, ἴσμεν ποῦ ὅτι εἰς τᾶλλα τοῦτω ἀσθενέστεραι, ὥσπερ ῥεῦμα ἐκεῖσε ἀπωχέτευμένον.” I follow once more A. Bloom’s translation.

¹⁸⁶¹ See 246a.

¹⁸⁶² For the description of what happens when the soul is in face of someone it finds beautiful, see 253e ff.

¹⁸⁶³ As was said above (Sect. 2.3), this contrast marks the entire palinode.

¹⁸⁶⁴ See 550e-551a: “τοῦντεῦθεν τοίνυν, εἶπον, προϊόντες εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν τοῦ χρηματίζεσθαι, ὅσω ἂν τοῦτο τιμιώτερον ἡγῶνται, τοσοῦτω ἀρετὴν ἀτιμοτέραν. ἢ οὐχ οὕτω πλοῦτου ἀρετὴ διέστηκεν, ὥσπερ ἐν πλάστιγγι

Indeed, we are always inclined towards one drive, and its strength implies the weakness of the others. In the *Republic*, Plato also uses several times the image of pulling when referring to the drives of the soul. He compares the parts of the soul to different animals that try to pull or drag the others.¹⁸⁶⁵ He describes the influence parents and other people have over the soul of a child as a way of being dragged by different principles.¹⁸⁶⁶ He also interprets a tragic situation (like when someone loses a son) as a situation in which one is simultaneously pulled by the desire to cry and by the respect for the νόμος, which says one should not cry.¹⁸⁶⁷ Aside from *Phaedrus* and from the *Republic*, the image of pulling is also important in the *Laws*, when the soul is compared to a puppet moved by different strings.¹⁸⁶⁸ One last example of this model can be found in *Phaedo*, when Socrates discusses the possibility of the soul and the body opposing each other.¹⁸⁶⁹

The language of traction and force is indeed very frequently employed to talk about our motivations, our actions and the life we lead. The soul's drives or motivations are presented as forces that guide the soul (ἄγειν), that pull it or drag it (ἔλκειν) in a certain direction, and that resist each other (ἀντιτείνειν, ἐναντιοῦσθαι).¹⁸⁷⁰ In fact, each drive pursues its object with intensity and strives to be all-dominating, but it must always face the other drives and their counterpull. The resistance is constitutive and it can even fully paralyze the soul. This is what happens when there is a conflict or στάσις. At that point, one cannot determine which direction is to be followed. But these conflicts are not just something that sporadically takes place. In a way, they are a permanent condition of the soul, insofar as the drives are always active (even if they do not seem to directly motivate an action at a certain time). Our drives constitute an internal system of forces and it is within this permanent system of forces that each particular drive manifests itself. The system determines the strength of each drive and it also determines the system's resultant, which can be of different kinds. It can be a state of indecision, in which no particular drive prevails (and thus no clear direction is given to the soul), or it can be a state in which one drive dominates the other and therefore determines the soul to act in a particular way. The latter state is in fact the one we

ζυγοῦ κειμένου ἑκατέρου, αἰεὶ τοῦναντίον ῥέποντε; καὶ μάλ', ἔφη. τιμωμένου δὴ πλούτου ἐν πόλει καὶ τῶν πλουσίων ἀτιμότερα ἀρετῆ τε καὶ οἱ ἀγαθοί.”

¹⁸⁶⁵ See 588c ff. (and especially 589a).

¹⁸⁶⁶ See e.g. 547b-c and 550a-b.

¹⁸⁶⁷ See 603e-604e, especially 604a-b: “οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν ἀντιτείνειν διακελευόμενον λόγος καὶ νόμος ἐστίν, τὸ δὲ ἔλκων ἐπὶ τὰς λύπας αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος; ἀληθῆ.”

¹⁸⁶⁸ See 644c ff. and, for a brief consideration of the passage, Sect. 2.2 above.

¹⁸⁶⁹ See 94b-94e.

¹⁸⁷⁰ These verbs appear frequently in the passages just mentioned.

normally find ourselves in and it is also what we most immediately recognize as our motivation – though it is actually the result of the interplay of our constitutive motivations, which allows one of them to prevail.

The prevalence in question may be either momentary or permanent. Life has many moments and sometimes one drive may prevail, at other times another. But (as was said) it can also produce (and in general it does produce) a habitual state, which may suffer small (or even great) variations, according to what happens in one's life. In other words, each drive is not constituted anew at each time, but it rather takes place within a general balance or arrangement of drives that determines the individual manifestations of each drive – even if we only see the result of the whole process. In effect, the true system of forces is something we are usually not aware of. We only recognize it when the drives somehow cancel each other out and we cannot determine how to act in a particular situation or even how to lead our life. In those moments we may notice an intense interaction between the drives, which results in our paralysis. But when one drive becomes preponderant, we lose sight of their interaction and of how our particular motivation always results from the combination of these drives.

All these aspects are implied in the traction model and they account for important aspects of our action. However, the model as such leaves some questions open – especially the question of what determines the intensity of each drive within the system of drives and how its intensity may vary. On this account, the following model is far more illuminating.

4.3. The biological model

Another of Plato's models for the interaction of our constitutive drives is based on the comparison between the parts of the soul and living beings. The different parts of the soul are sometimes referred to as plants, or as corresponding to different kinds of animals (such as horses in the *Phaedrus*, a many-headed beast, a lion, a monkey or a snake in the *Republic*) and even to human beings (as is the case when Plato speaks of a charioteer in *Phaedrus* or of the inner human being in the *Republic*).¹⁸⁷¹ All these entities are characterized by the fact that they can grow or become stronger, but can also become weaker or wither away. This is a central feature of this new model, which complements what we just saw.

¹⁸⁷¹ For more on this, see Sect.2.3 above.

Let us see this in more detail. Plato seems to talk of the gain-loving part of the soul as a plant when he says that it can be watered or parched.¹⁸⁷² In *Timaeus* he expressly compares the human being to a celestial plant and says that the philosophical part is its roots.¹⁸⁷³ Other times, the soul is described as a society of animals. It is not simply a chimera, composed of different animals, but rather an ecosystem in which they have to relate to each other. The animals are of different kinds and are distinguished by their behavior, their tendencies and their wildness or mildness. In particular, they can have different relations to λόγος – i.e., they may or may not understand speech and obey it.¹⁸⁷⁴ The relation between them can also be more or less peaceful. They can bite each other and fight for power, or they can become friends and allies (especially if the tamest one dominates).¹⁸⁷⁵

However, the most interesting aspect in this model is the fact that the parts of the soul and the corresponding drives may go through many states. Plato speaks of calming them down (πραϋνείν, ἡσυχάζειν), letting them sleep, and he also speaks of moving, provoking or awakening them (κινεῖν, ἐγείρειν).¹⁸⁷⁶ They are compared to muscles, which may be relaxed or strained. It all depends on whether we train them properly or not.¹⁸⁷⁷ Moreover, living beings are hungry and require sustenance. Plants may be watered or we can let them wither away, whereas animals may be fed or starved.¹⁸⁷⁸ The same applies to the soul's drives. Finally, the idea of one part of the soul becoming stronger can also be expressed by the idea of generation or reproduction. In *Philebus*, Plato speaks of the children of reason (which would allow the soul to know more), and in the *Republic* Plato says that appetitive desires can reproduce themselves in the soul, thereby rendering the appetitive part even stronger.¹⁸⁷⁹ In sum, each part and each drive may develop in different ways. They all want to grow and prevent the development of the others, but they cannot all become equally strong. Their particular form and strength at any given time thus depends on what happens to it or what it

¹⁸⁷² Cp. 606d “καὶ περὶ ἀφροδισίων δὴ καὶ θυμοῦ καὶ περὶ πάντων τῶν ἐπιθυμητικῶν τε καὶ λυπηρῶν καὶ ἡδέων ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἃ δὴ φαμεν πάσῃ πράξει ἡμῖν ἔπεσθαι, ὅτι τοιαῦτα ἡμᾶς ἡ ποιητικὴ μίμησις ἐργάζεται· τρέφει γὰρ ταῦτα ἄρδουσα, δέον αὐχμεῖν, καὶ ἄρχοντα ἡμῖν καθίστησιν, δέον ἄρχεσθαι αὐτὰ ἵνα βελτίους τε καὶ εὐδαιμονέστεροι ἀντὶ χειρόνων καὶ ἀθλιωτέρων γινώμεθα.”

¹⁸⁷³ See 90a-b: “τὸ δὲ δὴ περὶ τοῦ κυριωτάτου παρ’ ἡμῖν ψυχῆς εἶδους διανοεῖσθαι δεῖ τῆδε, ὡς ἄρα αὐτὸ δαίμονα θεὸς ἐκάστῳ δέδωκεν, τοῦτο ὃ δὴ φαμεν οἰκεῖν μὲν ἡμῶν ἐπ’ ἄκρῳ τῷ σώματι, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἐν οὐρανῷ συγγένειαν ἀπὸ γῆς ἡμᾶς αἶρειν ὡς ὄντας φυτὸν οὐκ ἐγγεῖον ἀλλὰ οὐράνιον, ὀρθότατα λέγοντες· ἐκεῖθεν γάρ, ὅθεν ἡ πρώτη τῆς ψυχῆς γένεσις ἔφυ, τὸ θεῖον τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ ῥίζαν ἡμῶν ἀνακρεμαννὸν ὀρθοὶ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα.”

¹⁸⁷⁴ This difference is particularly relevant in the contrast between the two horses in *Phaedrus*.

¹⁸⁷⁵ See *Rep.* 588e-589b and *Phdr.* 253e ff.

¹⁸⁷⁶ See in particular 571c-572b. They may never be fully asleep, but they may indeed become very calm. Cp. also 411c-d.

¹⁸⁷⁷ See 590a-590c, 606a-b (and cp. also 411c-412a).

¹⁸⁷⁸ Cp. 588e-589a and 606d.

¹⁸⁷⁹ See *Phlb.* 63d-64a and *Rep.* 560b.

does, and any variation in their form and strength determines the whole system of forces we considered above.

Their development process can happen spontaneously (as a movement naturally resulting from our inner system of forces), but Plato also speaks of it as something in which we can intervene: either from the outside, by affecting the parts of the soul of someone else (especially children), or from within, affecting our own inner drives and their power. In this case, we must develop a sort of husbandry, that allows us to care for the living beings within us. We must take care of them like a farmer.¹⁸⁸⁰ In this sense, our soul is like nature at large: it cannot be left to itself, it requires care. Fortunately, we can submit the souls drives to a τροφή – i.e., we can feed and rear them.¹⁸⁸¹ This applies to all parts of the soul. The inferior parts can be chastised, trained, domesticated (instead of being pandered or allowed to run wild).¹⁸⁸² The superior part, in turn, can be trained and exercised.¹⁸⁸³ It seems therefore that it is in our power to intervene and determine the value of each part (and consequently of the soul as a whole). The problem is how we are to intervene, what means are we to employ and what exactly the consequences of our intervention will be. Furthermore, the possibility of intervening and determining our inner drives raises the question of what motivates us to do it. We are not something apart from these drives, but they determine us, so any kind of intervention seems to be already the result of a certain arrangement of drives.¹⁸⁸⁴

4.4. The political model

The final model compares the relation between the soul's drives to social and political relations. We find throughout the texts several social or political images that are used to describe psychological phenomena. In *Phaedo*, body and ψυχή (which are associated with two different kinds of drives) relate to one another as master and slave.¹⁸⁸⁵ In *Phaedrus* the charioteer and the bad horses deliberate, argue and compromise about what to do.¹⁸⁸⁶ These are basic social or political relations. Some part holds the power or the command (ἀρχή)

¹⁸⁸⁰ For the image of the farmer, see in particular *Rep.* 589b.

¹⁸⁸¹ For the use of τροφή and τρέφειν in this context, see e.g. *Rep.* 441a and *Phdr.* 247b.

¹⁸⁸² See e.g. *Rep.* 590a ff.

¹⁸⁸³ See e.g. *Rep.* 571d and 591c.

¹⁸⁸⁴ For more on this, cp. Chap. 17.

¹⁸⁸⁵ See 79e-80a: “ὄρα δὴ καὶ τῆδε ὅτι ἐπειδὴν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ὧσι ψυχὴ καὶ σῶμα, τῷ μὲν δουλεύειν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἢ φύσις προστάττει, τῇ δὲ ἄρχειν καὶ δεσπόζειν· καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα αὐτῷ πότερόν σοι δοκεῖ ὅμοιον τῷ θεῷ εἶναι καὶ πότερον τῷ θνητῷ; ἢ οὐ δοκεῖ σοι τὸ μὲν θεῖον οἷον ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἡγεμονεύειν πεφυκέναι, τὸ δὲ θνητὸν ἄρχεσθαι τε καὶ δουλεύειν; ἔμοιγε.”

¹⁸⁸⁶ See once more the whole description in *Phdr.* 253e ff.

within us and guides our soul, while the others resist or obey. However, we find in the *Republic* (especially in books IV, VIII and IX) a much more refined presentation of this idea. The entire soul is regarded as a πόλις and the relations between its drives are described as very complex political interactions. This allows Plato to consider important psychological and anthropological problems from unusual and unexpected angles. Let us therefore see the most important traits of this model.

a) The ψυχή as an inner πόλις and a πολιτεία

In *Republic* II, Plato says that the human ψυχή and the πόλις resemble each other. They are like two texts written with the same characters, but in different sizes. This is important, given the difficulty in determining the ψυχή. We can therefore better see what characterizes the ψυχή (and in particular the way it relates to justice) if we consider the πόλις.¹⁸⁸⁷ This is what much of the following discussion will do. Plato will define the structure of the πόλις and its relation to justice, and then he will transfer the analysis – *mutatis mutandis* – to the domain of the ψυχή.

But what exactly is a πόλις? What are its main traits? The word is usually translated as city-state, and it denotes an autonomous political community, composed of several clans or families, tied together by a common history, culture, and destiny. The cultural component is essential here. A πόλις is characterized by a particular way of life, based on a set of values and practices that solidified during time and constitute the πόλις' νόμοι or its πολιτεία.¹⁸⁸⁸ These two words are very important and they are at the core of any πόλις (hence the use of them as the titles for Plato's two major political works).¹⁸⁸⁹ It is, however, important to bear in mind that these words do not primarily designate the positive laws of a state, but rather what was mentioned: the culture of a πόλις (i.e., its own way of seeing and doing things), which is transmitted from generation to generation through the process of education (παιδεία).¹⁸⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸⁷ See 368c-369a and 434d-435c.

¹⁸⁸⁸ Cp. the pseudo-Platonic work *Definitiones*, 415c: “Πόλις οἰκησις πλήθους ἀνθρώπων κοινοῖς δόγμασιν χρωμένων· πλήθος ἀνθρώπων ὑπὸ νόμον τὸν αὐτὸν ὄντων.”

¹⁸⁸⁹ Isocrates even says that the πολιτεία is the ψυχή of the πόλις. See *Areopagiticus*, 14: “Ἔστι γὰρ ψυχή πόλεως οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ πολιτεία, τοσαύτην ἔχουσα δύναμιν ὅσην περ ἐν σώματι φρόνησις. αὕτη γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ βουλευομένη περὶ ἀπάντων καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀγαθὰ διαφυλάττουσα, τὰς δὲ συμφορὰς διαφεύγουσα. Ταύτη καὶ τοὺς νόμους καὶ τοὺς ῥήτορας καὶ τοὺς ιδιώτας ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστιν ὁμοιοῦσθαι καὶ πράττειν οὕτως ἐκάστους οἷαν περ ἂν ταύτην ἔχωσιν.”

¹⁸⁹⁰ For more on the notion of παιδεία, cp. Chap. 1, Sect. 2.2.

But this is not all. Each of us lacks many things and a πόλις is supposed to help us suppress those lacks.¹⁸⁹¹ This is essential to understand what a πόλις is. Indeed, πόλις is also defined by its goals, and as Plato points out, its primary goals include protection from external threats (both natural or human), sustenance, and quality of life (εὖ ζῆν).¹⁸⁹² This requires a division of labor (according to each one's ability) and ends up constituting different social classes, which are specialized in different kinds of work (ἔργα) and thus complement each other. According to the *Republic*, there are three main classes that are necessary for a πόλις to attain its goals. He calls them the money-making part (τὸ χρηματιστικόν), the auxiliary part (τὸ ἐπικουρητικόν, which corresponds to the warrior-class) and the deliberative part (τὸ βουλευτικόν).¹⁸⁹³

These classes do not simply exist side by side, without interaction. They relate to one another and, more than that, they are at odds with each other, insofar as they all try to increase their possessions and their influence in the πόλις. Ultimately, they all try to rule the others. But for a πόλις to work (nay, for it to exist), it must be somehow unified and not in conflict (στάσις) with itself. In other words, there must be some kind of order, and this means that the role of each class within the πόλις must be defined. In this context, the question of the rule (ἀρχή or κρατεῖν) is essential. Who will govern the πόλις and what will be the relations of power between its parts? In other words, what will be the precise arrangement between these parts? The decision of this matter is essential, and given the different profiles of each class, such a decision will shape the entire way of life of the πόλις. In other words, the social and political order of a πόλις is a central component of its νόμοι and its πολιτεία. This was particularly clear in the Ancient world: the order or arrangement of a πόλις was usually a part of the culture and traditions of said πόλις and it also played an important role in defining that same culture and those traditions. Hence, the word πολιτεία encompasses both the political order and the way of life or culture that corresponds to it – and this is very important for Plato's use of the word. In fact, Plato stresses the central role of social order in determining the culture and the way of life of a πόλις.

In this context, it is important to bear in mind that the different kinds of social order might be better or worse. The πόλις may be well-ordered, it may have harmony (ἀρμονία) and unanimity (ὁμόνοια), or it may have a precarious order and be in permanent tension or

¹⁸⁹¹ See *Rep.* 369b: “γίγνεται τοῖνον, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, πόλις, ὡς ἐγῶμαι, ἐπειδὴ τυγχάνει ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οὐκ αὐτάρκης, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν ὧν ἐνδεής· ἢ τίν’ οἶει ἀρχὴν ἄλλην πόλιν οἰκίζειν; οὐδεμίαν, ἦ δ’ ὅς.”

¹⁸⁹² See in particular *Prt.* 322a ff. and *Rep.* 369b ff.

¹⁸⁹³ See 440e-441a: “(...) καθάπερ ἐν τῇ πόλει συνεῖχεν αὐτὴν τρία ὄντα γένη, χρηματιστικόν, ἐπικουρητικόν, βουλευτικόν (...).”

open to serious conflicts (including all-out civil wars). If these tensions and conflicts are weak, the πόλις can still persist. But if they completely overtake the πόλις, then the latter will collapse.¹⁸⁹⁴ A political order or arrangement is indeed a dynamic process. Each part continuously tries to have more power than the others, and their striving can lead to serious conflicts. But they may also be better (or even perfectly) integrated in a particular order. This is the ideal, and the question then is what may that perfect order amount to.

These are the main features of Plato's conception of πόλις in the *Republic*. The same features are then identified as essential features of the ψυχή. Like the πόλις, the ψυχή also has three classes of desire or three main drives. Each of these classes or drives can manifest itself in many particular desires, directed at many different things. As such, the drives and their particular desires may seem relatively independent. However, they all belong together and share a common destiny. In other words, they constitute an inner πόλις of drives or urges. But as was the case in the outer πόλις, the different parts of the inner πόλις want to guide it and they fight with one another for control. Consequently, they need to be ordered or arranged in some way. The soul needs a social order or a πολιτεία, if it is to act and live.¹⁸⁹⁵ It is necessary to decide which drive will rule – or, to use Plato's images, it is necessary to decide which one will occupy the throne of the soul or its acropolis, and thus be its leader (προστάτης τῆς ψυχῆς).¹⁸⁹⁶ It is also necessary to determine which support it will have from the other drives and how they will be integrated in the polity or regime of the soul. In short, the balance of powers and the roles of each drive must be defined. As we will see, this is what then determines the main love (ἔρωσ) of the soul (i.e., its identification of the superlative good), and also how the soul pursues this good and the kind of life it leads.¹⁸⁹⁷

The parallel with the πόλις shows therefore important traits of our ψυχή. Like the πόλις, the ψυχή requires these different classes of desire to work, and these classes of desire must be arranged in some way in order for us to act and live. Indeed, the different inner arrangements or inner πολιτεῖαι affect one's whole life. But the inner arrangements may also be better or worse. The criterion is basically the same as in the case of the outer πόλις. The drives constitutively strive for power and the social or political order established in the soul

¹⁸⁹⁴ Plato presents a similar alternative in *Rep.* 351c ff., when he distinguishes between those that are only partly unjust or partly bad (ἡμιμόχθηροι) and those that are completely unjust or bad (παμπόνηροι). A πόλις may still subsist if it is composed of the former, but not if it is composed of the latter.

¹⁸⁹⁵ Cp. *Rep.* 352a: “καὶ ἐν ἐνὶ δὴ οἶμαι ἐνοῦσα ταῦτα ταῦτα [namely, τὸ στασιάζειν καὶ διαφέρεσθαι] ποιήσει ἄπερ πέφυκεν ἐργάζεσθαι· πρῶτον μὲν ἀδύνατον αὐτὸν πράττειν ποιήσει στασιάζοντα καὶ οὐχ ὁμονοοῦντα αὐτὸν ἑαυτῷ, ἔπειτα ἐχθρὸν καὶ ἑαυτῷ καὶ τοῖς δικαίοις (...).”

¹⁸⁹⁶ See, respectively, 553c, 560b, 573b.

¹⁸⁹⁷ For more on this, see 6.3 a) below.

may create a greater harmony or it may be laden with tensions and open to conflicts or *στάσεις*, which will paralyze the soul. These conflicts may be momentary (perhaps even circumscribed to the situations in which they arose) and if that is the case, then there will be no serious change in the inner arrangement of the soul. But they may also be serious conflicts and lead to profound changes in the relation of forces between the drives. This is what Plato illustrates in books VIII and IX, when considering what happens in the soul of young men and how the inner arrangement of their drives may change.

b) The interaction between the inner and the outer *πολιτεῖαι*

The relation between the soul and the *πόλις* is not simply one of isomorphism, as if they were two similar entities which are otherwise wholly unrelated. The soul as a small *πόλις* is an integral part of the large *πόλις*. As Plato says, the soul needs the *πόλις* in order to survive and to achieve a good life.¹⁸⁹⁸ But what exactly is the interaction between the soul and the *πόλις* – or more precisely, between the inner *πολιτεία* and the outer *πολιτεία*?

Plato shows that there are many interchanges between these two entities and this actually makes it difficult to draw definite boundaries between the two. The dialectic between these two entities that are themselves dialectical (insofar as they are both based on an inner interaction and dialogue) is quite intricate. If we consider the description of the changes of *πολιτεία* in *Republic* VIII and IX, we see that each *ψυχή* belongs to a household (and is thus related to father, a mother and the household slaves), but it also has friends and relates to other people at large.¹⁸⁹⁹ In general, human beings are characterized precisely by this. We are almost always in contact with others, with their behaviors and even their views. But this is not all. These behaviors and views are not simple. Rather, they express a certain arrangement of drives (i.e., an inner *πολιτεία*). Thus, one may have an inner arrangement of drives similar to those of the people around oneself, or one may differ from them. In the latter case, the different *πολιτεῖαι* may affect or influence each other – especially if one is particularly young. The dominant drive in a soul may stimulate the same drive in another soul, cooperate with it, become an ally (or an antagonist) – just like a state may assist a faction with similar ideas in a different state. One may even be pulled in different directions as a result of having close

¹⁸⁹⁸ Cp. footnote 1892.

¹⁸⁹⁹ See e.g. 549c ff.

contact with different kinds of people. Plato describes this process in great detail and he shows how it tends to produce a compromise (insofar as one tends to fall in the middle).¹⁹⁰⁰

One is thus affected by the inner πολιτεῖαι of those around oneself. But the outer πόλις itself also has a πολιτεία. Plato stresses how different πόλεις have different regimes, and these in fact correspond to the prevalence of one kind of drive – i.e., they are also defined in psychological terms.¹⁹⁰¹ This means that the inner πολιτεία may resemble the outer one, and even if there is a significant difference between them, one will probably gravitate towards one's outer πολιτεία. In other words, the outer πολιτεία we live under is relevant for our life, even if not all-determining.¹⁹⁰² However, the communication between the ψυχή and the πόλις is not unilateral. The individual soul also influences the other souls around it, as well as the πόλις at large. Each soul helps determine the outer πολιτεία that encompasses them all. The different souls interact in a complex way and thus produce the general tendencies of the πόλις.¹⁹⁰³ It is in this sense that Plato says that the πολιτεία of the outer πόλις comes from the individual ψυχαί.¹⁹⁰⁴

This still leaves out the broader question of the interaction between different πόλεις and how such an interaction may affect individual souls. Plato alludes several times to these interactions, but without going into much detail. At any rate, he provides us with a complex model of interaction between ψυχαί and πόλεις, which allows for complex analyses of human life in general and politics in particular. Both domains are constitutively referred to one another and they cannot be understood separately. One may wonder about which one is primary and which is secondary. It is true that some ψυχαί (especially the souls of philosophers) seem to become much less influenced by their political community. However, one might never be entirely free, if only because one was born and grew up within the complex system of relations described by Plato.

¹⁹⁰⁰ See e.g. *Rep.* 550a-b, 553a-b, 559e-560b, 572c-e.

¹⁹⁰¹ In *Rep.* 435e-436a, Plato outlines a kind of geography of predominant drives. In certain regions, certain drives prevail. This idea is later developed in books VIII and IX, where Plato tries to define the five possible kinds of regime and how they are all based on a particular arrangement of drives, which is in fact the arrangement of drives within the soul of the rulers of each πόλις. This constitute the main arrangement of drives and it then determines the inner πολιτεῖαι of all subordinate classes in the πόλις.

¹⁹⁰² Plato seems to admit that we can be influenced by others around us and even by the πόλις itself, but the question is actually more complex, because any external influence depends on our receptiveness. In other words, any external influence somehow depends on us. But we will not discuss this matter here. For a discussion of it, see Chap. 17, Sect. 4.2.

¹⁹⁰³ The fact that it is so shows that the analysis of our psychological constitution is also used to understand what a πόλις is – and not just the other way around.

¹⁹⁰⁴ See 435e-436a and 544c-e.

c) The different possible πολιτεῖαι and the transition from one to the other

Both the inner and the outer πολιτεῖαι are not rigid or fixed. Rather, they are dynamic systems. As was mentioned, the different drives and the different classes strive for more power and the particular circumstances a ψυχή or a πόλις go through may lead to conflicts and crises. The latter may be easily solved, but in some cases the conflict may also result in a change or transition (μετάβασις or μεταβολή) of πολιτεία.¹⁹⁰⁵ The ruler of the soul or of the πόλις may be overthrown and replaced by a new ruler. This may result in the submission, enslavement or even banishment of the older ruling class.¹⁹⁰⁶ As a result, the entire life of the soul or of the πόλις will change.

The soul and the πόλις thus have a history. They are marked by what happens to them and they can go through deep changes. Plato describes the internal and external processes of change in very similar terms. In addition, the *Republic* shows how both processes can influence each other. Their reciprocal influence continues and, in addition, changes in one domain may have strong consequences in the other. Plato also describes how parts of the soul or even parts of the πόλις may receive help from the outside.¹⁹⁰⁷ However, the core of the process must come from within. In fact, Plato says that all change comes from the governing class itself and some conflict within it.¹⁹⁰⁸ This is what will shift the balance of power within the soul or the πόλις. In the soul, the relative power of the soul's drives will change and this change will affect all of the soul's actions and its way of living (as well as its way of seeing things). In the πόλις, the change will be equally radical. A new political and social order will be established, which will be expressed in new practices, in new values and even in a new language.¹⁹⁰⁹

¹⁹⁰⁵ This kind of change or transition is precisely what Plato describes throughout books VIII and IX of the *Republic*.

¹⁹⁰⁶ In the case of the soul, the banishment means that a certain part of it will become smaller – i.e., less effective. Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 560c-e.

¹⁹⁰⁷ Cp. the references in footnote 1900.

¹⁹⁰⁸ See 545c-d: “φέρε τοίνυν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, πειρώμεθα λέγειν τίνα τρόπον τιμοκρατία γένοιτ’ ἂν ἐξ ἀριστοκρατίας. ἢ τόδε μὲν ἀπλοῦν, ὅτι πᾶσα πολιτεία μεταβάλλει ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὰς ἀρχάς, ὅταν ἐν αὐτῷ τούτῳ στάσις ἐγγένηται. ὁμοιοῦντος δέ, κἂν πάνυ ὀλίγον ἢ, ἀδύνατον κινηθῆναι; ἔστι γὰρ οὕτω.” Later, Socrates also explains that this conflict may arise from excess. See 563e-564a: “ταυτόν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὅπερ ἐν τῇ ὀλιγαρχίᾳ νόσημα ἐγγενόμενον ἀπόλεσεν αὐτήν, τοῦτο καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ πλέον τε καὶ ἰσχυρότερον ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἐγγενόμενον καταδουλοῦται δημοκρατίαν. καὶ τῷ ὄντι τὸ ἄγαν τι ποιεῖν μεγάλην φιλεῖ εἰς τοῦναντίον μεταβολὴν ἀναποδιδόναι, ἐν ὥραις τε καὶ ἐν φυτοῖς καὶ ἐν σώμασιν, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐν πολιτείαις οὐχ ἥκιστα.”

¹⁹⁰⁹ Plato indeed describes how the meaning of the terms may change after a revolution. See e.g. 560d-e, 572d-e. We find a similar idea in THUCYDIDES, *Historiae*, 3.82, where he describes how civil conflicts (στάσεις) led to a change of the way certain words were understood and applied. As he says, at that point: “καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ.”

However, the possibility of change does not imply that the soul or the πόλις may assume infinite different shapes. Their possibilities are pre-determined by their constituent parts. Moreover, even if there can be many different inner arrangements, they can all be reduced to a few basic ones, and it is precisely these basic arrangements that Plato describes in the *Republic*. He distinguishes five main kinds of outer πολιτεῖαι and five kinds of human being, leaving aside all the intermediate forms, which are more indistinct.¹⁹¹⁰ These main kinds are aristocracy (the rule of philosophers), timocracy (the rule of honor-loving people), oligarchy (the rule of money-loving people), democracy (the rule of people that love all pleasures) and tyranny (the rule of people that have a desire for lawless pleasures and sacrifice everything to it).¹⁹¹¹ Likewise, the soul may be ruled by the love of knowledge, the love of honor, the love of money, the love of pleasure in general, or the love of lawless pleasures – and each of these possibilities corresponds to a different kind of human being.¹⁹¹² It may surprise us that there are five regimes and five kinds of human being when there are only three inner drives. In fact, the inner complexity of the soul's love of gain accounts for three different forms of regime and three different kinds of human being.¹⁹¹³ But let us not go into details. Plato's characterization of each political system and each kind of human being is very complex.

It is important to note that the different possible πολιτεῖαι do not all have the same value. Some are better and others are worse. However, it is still not clear what is the criterion for determining their quality, apart from what we mentioned above. They may indeed have different susceptibilities to conflict, but it is not yet clear why. Plato speaks of different forms of unity and harmony, but he also distinguishes the quality of the parts of the soul and the best πολιτεία would therefore be the one in which the best part rules. But all this is still very vague for now and we will return to it below.¹⁹¹⁴ For now we are just considering the question of how an inner or an outer πολιτεία may change. Plato describes the inner and outer

¹⁹¹⁰ Indeed, each main kind of πολιτεία can have many variants, according to the different possible balances of power between the drives or the social classes. In some cases, it may even be difficult to define them. See 544c-d: “ἢ τινα ἄλλην ἔχεις ἰδέαν πολιτείας, ἥτις καὶ ἐν εἴδει διαφανεῖ τι κείται; δυναστεία γὰρ καὶ ὀνηταὶ βασιλείαι καὶ τοιαῦταί τινες πολιτεῖαι μεταξύ τι τούτων ποῦ εἰσιν, εὖροι δ' ἂν τις αὐτὰς οὐκ ἐλάττους περὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους ἢ τοὺς Ἕλληνας. πολλὰ γοῦν καὶ ἄποιοι, ἔφη, λέγονται.”

¹⁹¹¹ See in particular 543c ff.

¹⁹¹² I.e., human beings can themselves be aristocratic, timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical.

¹⁹¹³ For a consideration of this diversity, see Sect. 3.1 above, where we considered the division between necessary, lawful and lawless pleasures. It is, however, important to bear in mind that in Plato's account the democratic regime and the democratic human being do not confine their interest to lawful pleasures, but they pursue all different kinds of pleasures. See 561a-e.

¹⁹¹⁴ See Sect. 6.4.

transitions in great detail, and his description has several peculiar features that we should be kept in mind.

First, his description only goes one way. It presupposes a perfect system at the start and describes a progressive degradation or entropy of political regimes and of human beings. This suggests something like a cycle of nature, that goes from the highest perfection to highest imperfection and back again.¹⁹¹⁵ However, nothing seems to prevent the process of decay from being counteracted midway through.¹⁹¹⁶ It may be an irregular process, constantly moving to and fro, and Plato's description may simplify it for the sake of presenting the different possible πολιτεῖαι and their relation to one another.

A second relevant aspect is the fact that Plato presents a kind of continuous transition (*à la* Hegel) that goes through all mediations and does not jump stages. As was mentioned, Plato even describes the transitions as the result of being pulled by different opposite drives and consequently falling in the middle, which is thus conceived by reference to its extremities.¹⁹¹⁷ This would exclude any sudden radical changes. However, there does not seem to be any reason for excluding such a possibility. We may go from one πολιτεία to the other without first going through all πολιτεῖαι that lie between them. One interesting aspect of this gradual transition, though, is the tendency to inertia. The drives change slowly and each new πολιτεία imitates as much as it can the features of the old one. In other words, the transformation of the views and behaviors of the old πολιτεία tend to be very slow.¹⁹¹⁸ This happens when it changes for the worse, and probably also when the change is for the better.¹⁹¹⁹ There is always a strong resistance to any change. Plato further emphasizes this resistance by presenting a process of degradation that takes place over several generations – though in principle there can also be several important changes during the course of a single lifetime.

It is also important to note that, according to Plato's description, a particular ψυχή can begin at any point of the continuum of πολιτεῖαι, and it may grow up in a political community

¹⁹¹⁵ In the *Republic*, Plato says that everything that comes into being must also decay (γενομένῳ παντὶ φθορά ἐστιν), and this natural law is what leads to the fall of the perfect πόλις and the perfect human beings. Cp. 545d ff. For other descriptions of such a cycle, cp. *Plt.* 269c ff. and *Lg.* 676a ff.

¹⁹¹⁶ We will not consider here what may allow the fall to be counteracted and whether we have some control over it or not. For a discussion of this question, see Chap. 17 below.

¹⁹¹⁷ See e.g. 550b, 572c-d.

¹⁹¹⁸ See e.g. 547c-d: “μεταβήσεται μὲν δὴ οὕτω· μεταβᾶσα δὲ πῶς οἰκήσει; ἢ φανερόν ὅτι τὰ μὲν μιμήσεται τὴν προτέραν πολιτείαν, τὰ δὲ τὴν ὀλιγαρχίαν, ἅτ' ἐν μέσῳ οὕσα, τὸ δὲ τι καὶ αὐτῆς ἕξει ἴδιον; οὕτως, ἔφη.”

¹⁹¹⁹ The allegory of the cave, for instance, describes παιδεία as a slow and gradual progress, with many intermediate stages (see 515c ff.), and this idea that all cognitive progress is slow can be found throughout the entire Platonic corpus.

that has any of the above mentioned πολιτεῖαι. The soul will partly be influenced by its πόλις, but it is also possible to go against the tendencies of one's surroundings.¹⁹²⁰ At any rate, Plato does not say that all children are initially ruled by the simplest or inferior drive (namely, φιλοκέρδεια), and then develop the others. Rather, young children seem to be in a chaotic state, without inner order, and with time (as well as with certain help from the outside) they develop a certain arrangement of drives.¹⁹²¹

In sum, Plato emphasizes that it is possible for the inner and outer πολιτεία to change, though this is not an easy process. In general, there is a certain stability, though it is not enough to avoid crises and revolutions.

4.5. Assessment

The different images present the combination of the soul's drives from different angles. They have varying degrees of complexity, but they all point in a similar direction. They all conceive the drives as interrelated forces, whether these forces be mechanical, organic or political. Their strength is always the strength they can achieve within the system. They can grow stronger or weaker, but they are always present, limiting the others – even when they seem to be absent. In sum, the combination of drives is present in all moments of our life and determines all manifestations of each drive. Our every action and our way of life in general result from the interaction of our three inborn drives.

The different images also express how dynamic the relation of forces between the drives is. The intensity of each drive and their arrangement can change. What one goes through, the people we meet, and even our own self-examination may affect the strength of each drive. Indeed, any particular moment can prompt a conflict between the drives, by appealing to one of them and forcing the others to resist. These momentary conflicts may then have greater or smaller consequences for the general balance of the drives and for one's life in general. In any case, it seems the soul's inner order is always in movement and there are always at least small variations. As was said, this raises the question of whether we can directly intervene in the combination of drives and determine their relative strength. On the

¹⁹²⁰ Plato admits, for instance, that some may become philosophers despite the fact that they did not grow up in the ideal πόλις. See 520a-b: “σκέψαι τοίνυν, εἶπον, ὃ Γλαύκων, ὅτι οὐδ’ ἀδικήσομεν τοὺς παρ’ ἡμῖν φιλοσόφους γιγνομένους, ἀλλὰ δίκαια πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐροῦμεν, προσαναγκάζοντες τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τε καὶ φυλάττειν. ἐροῦμεν γὰρ ὅτι οἱ μὲν ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις πόλεσι τοιοῦτοι γιγνόμενοι εἰκότως οὐ μετέχουσι τῶν ἐν αὐταῖς πόνων· αὐτόματοι γὰρ ἐμφύονται ἀκούσης τῆς ἐν ἐκάστη πολιτείας (...).”

¹⁹²¹ Cp. e.g. *Ti.* 42a ff.

one hand, we cannot conceive ourselves as something external to this system of forces. Our motivation always depends on it – and so, in a way, the question is how the system can affect itself. On the other hand, Plato at some points seems to identify us with the philosophical drive and he assigns to it a decisive role in determining the relation of forces between the drives. It is therefore difficult to determine the exact way we relate to the system of forces and we will have to consider the question in more detail later.¹⁹²²

5. The mutual contamination of the soul's constitutive drives and their “impure” state

The whole description of the combination of drives in the soul allows us to see some central features of Plato's understanding of our actions and our way of living. However, it also leaves out a decisive aspect of the interrelation of drives as it is conceived in the dialogues – namely, the fact that the drives are not just combined, but also transform or contaminate each other. We need therefore to reconsider the general model of interaction just presented.

5.1. The contamination model as the decisive aspect of the soul's partition

According to what was just seen, it would be possible to conceive the soul's drives as being always combined in a system of forces, but in such a way that each drive in itself would still be in a pure state. It could be weaker or stronger, but it would always have the same identity, which would radically differ from the identity of the other drives. The result of their interaction (i.e., the inner πολιτεία and the acts it brings about) would be mixed and depend on all of them, but the drives as such (regardless of whether we can have any direct access to them or not) would be simple. However, the matter is much more complex, and the mixture between the drives runs much deeper. According to Plato, each drive is itself experienced as a blending or intertwinement of drives. They are not just combined with one another, but – as is said in *Phaedo* – they are intimately associated (ὀμιλεῖν, κοινωνεῖν) and they even contaminate or infect each other (ἀναμίμλασθαι).¹⁹²³ In other words, each of them

¹⁹²² See Chap. 17.

¹⁹²³ See in particular 67a: “καὶ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ζῶμεν, οὕτως, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐγγυτάτω ἐσόμεθα τοῦ εἰδέναι, ἐὰν ὅτι μάλιστα μηδὲν ὀμιλῶμεν τῷ σώματι μηδὲ κοινωνῶμεν, ὅτι μὴ πᾶσα ἀνάγκη, μηδὲ ἀναμιμλώμεθα τῆς τούτου φύσεως, ἀλλὰ καθαρεύομεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἕως ἂν ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸς ἀπολύσῃ ἡμᾶς (...).” Plato uses these terms to describe the relation between the body and the soul (and the tensions associated with each), but to a certain extent they also apply to the relation between the drives of the soul. It is important to remark that the notion of contamination

can be found in the others and in this sense the system of forces we considered lies at the very heart of each drive. They determine and transform each other.¹⁹²⁴ Therefore, the apparently simple manifestation of each drive is already marked by reciprocal limitation and this not only affects its force, but also modifies its own essence. They are in themselves “impure” or contaminated.

This means that any manifestation of our love for gain is already determined by our love for honor (for instance, insofar as it may want its gain to be acknowledged by others) and also by our love of knowledge (which means that it is not indifferent to whether the gain is real or not). Our love of honor, in turn, is also concerned with gain (i.e., with how being honored translates in the subjective sphere) and knowledge (at least insofar as it wants to be really honored). Finally, our love of knowledge is never totally indifferent to gain and honor – at least during life. Our pursuit of truth always has some degree of concern with how this truth will feel and with how the pursuit is seen by others. Thus, each drive is contained in the others, transforms them and, as a result, determines the object it actually pursues.¹⁹²⁵

This fact makes it much harder – or even impossible – to see and conceive our constitutive drives in their pure state. In our experience of them, they are always mixed, and hence we have no direct access to what they are in themselves. Their simple existence is something we may postulate to explain our behavior, but it is not what we come into contact with. Each drive is affected by the others, even in the moments when they appear to manifest themselves as they are. In this sense, the conflicts mentioned in *Republic* IV should not be understood as conflicts between pure drives (though Plato presents them as such). They help us identify contrasting drives, but such conflicts are always between transformed versions of these drives.

This has several consequences for our conception of each drive and for the role they play in our soul. Indeed, each drive can be more or less transformed by the others and, as a result, they can assume very different forms. The way they transform each other is

has a pejorative sense, and it implies that one part harms the other or renders it worse. In this sense, the soul is contaminated by the body, but the body is not properly speaking contaminated by the soul. However, we may also use the term in a broader sense, to express the fact that one thing transforms another and renders it impure (i.e., other than what it is when it is by itself). It is in this sense that we will use the term in the following. For the notion of ἀναμίπλασθαι, cp. e.g. J. BURNET (ed.), *Plato's Phaedo*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1911, ad 67a5.

¹⁹²⁴ They are thus a kind of intermediate being – i.e., their actual configuration can only be conceived as something that lies between (μεταξύ) three extremities (i.e., three entities in their pure state), but is irreducible to them. For the notion of μεταξύ, cp. in particular Chap. 7 Sect.2.4 and Chap. 12 Sects. 3.3 and 4.3.

¹⁹²⁵ We had already considered this possibility of transformation above, while describing each of drives (Sect. 3), but now we will see in more detail how this is a constitutive feature of them.

determined by their general strength and by whether they rule the soul or are subordinated to another drive. However, even the ruling drive is affected by others, and it can be affected in different degrees, according to the strength of each drive. This implies that the subordinate drives also affect what the soul pursues in life and how it pursues it. They do not just restrict the intensity with which we pursue something, but they help shape how the soul lives.

But this is not all. The reciprocal contamination of the soul's drives also raises a problem that is often discussed in the secondary literature. Some argued that each drive seems to contain within it the same parts as the soul, and in this sense they are all agent-like and a kind of homunculus. In other words, the explanations replicates what is to be explained, and if we try to determine the parts of each drive, we would perhaps have to presuppose once more the same three parts. Each homunculus would itself have to be explained by the presence within it of other homunculi, and as a result such a account of the drives may lead to an infinite regression.¹⁹²⁶ But does Plato's description really entail such an infinite regress?

It is important to bear in mind that the parallelism between the whole soul and the drives that compose it is not supposed to be understood as a perfect parallelism. In particular, the drives do not have their own inner conflicts, and so we do not have to subdivide them in order to account for them. Rather than multiplying the parts of the soul and its drives, Plato is trying to show how the three drives are much more intertwined than one would initially think. They cannot be easily distinguished from one another, and any strict separation of them is abstract and artificial.

A different question is whether it is possible to change this and come to completely purify one of the drives from the others – in particular φιλοσοφία, which is considered our highest drive and the one that would allow us to lead the best life. At some points, the dialogues seem to admit the possibility of getting rid of the other drives (though perhaps only after dying and getting rid of the body).¹⁹²⁷ But in *Phaedrus* the soul is always tripartite, even when it is not in an embodied state.¹⁹²⁸ All we can do is try to become as indifferent to gain and honor as possible, and then use these other drives as allies of the philosophical drive. But the texts are somewhat vague about these possibilities, perhaps because they are rather remote and it is not easy to see what they would amount to.¹⁹²⁹ In our present condition, the

¹⁹²⁶ For more on the homunculus problem, see e.g. J. MOLINE, Plato on the Complexity of the Psyche, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978), 1-26, especially 23-24; J. ANNAS, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1981, 142 ff.

¹⁹²⁷ See e.g. *Phd.* 66b-67b and *Rep.* 611b-612a.

¹⁹²⁸ See e.g. 248a-b.

¹⁹²⁹ For more on this, cp. Sect. 6.3 c) below.

drives are never in a pure state nor close to it. This means that our love for knowledge is always affected by other drives. But it also means that the other drives are constitutively contaminated by the love for knowledge. This is actually an essential point in Plato's analysis, which will be decisive for the discussion of the value of an unexamined life. Therefore, we must consider it in greater detail.

5.2. The philosophical character of all drives and all inner πολιτεῖαι

The model of the reciprocal contamination of the soul's drives entails that the soul's inborn φιλοσοφία is present in all drives. The gain-loving drive and the honor-loving drive also contain a knowledge-loving component that transforms them and renders them somewhat sensitive to what is true and to how we can determine it. At first sight, this seems to contradict the very characterization of the non-philosophical drives or urges. They are irrational (ἄλογα or ἀλόγιστα), thoughtless (ἀνόητα), blind (τυφλά) – and Plato himself compares them to animals.¹⁹³⁰ But in what sense are these drives irrational? The word “irrational” may indeed mean that they are altogether incapable of speaking, discussing, calculating or presenting reasons. But it can also designate a defective or limited use of these abilities.¹⁹³¹ In this sense, ἀλογία comes close to the notions of ἄνοια or ἀμαθία, which also denote a distorted form of judgment and rationality.¹⁹³²

Now, if we look carefully at the characterization both of the gain-loving drive and of the honor-loving drive in the texts, we see that they are not entirely deprived of rationality. Plato describes how all the three drives seem to be conscious of the others and even communicate with them. They use arguments, try to persuade the other drives, protest, imagine plots, and so on.¹⁹³³ This is not entirely metaphorical. Plato is referring to the fact that each drive is intrinsically referred to particular views or beliefs. In other words, their manifestation is based on cognitive components and it develops and reinforces these cognitive components. The non-philosophical drives are therefore philosophical in the sense

¹⁹³⁰ See e.g. *Rep.* 441c, 554b, 591c, 604d, 605b-c. For the comparison with animals, see in particular *Phdr.* 253c ff. and *Rep.* 588c ff.

¹⁹³¹ It is in this sense that the characters often use the terms ἀλογία and ἄλογον to designate some defective view or the resulting behavior – see e.g. *Chrm.* 175c, *Hp. Ma.* 303c, *Men.* 90e.

¹⁹³² For the notion of ἀμαθία and its relation with false knowledge claims and δόξα in the negative sense, cf. *Chap. 7, Sect. 1.*

¹⁹³³ See in particular Socrates' description of the relation between the two horses and the charioteer in *Phdr.* 254a.

that they are concerned with how things are. They are concerned with truth and they are essentially determined by knowledge claims.

We can better understand this if we consider that our love for gain and our love for honor are always directed at some particular thing, and this implies different kinds of views. To begin with, we must have a certain understanding of what gain and honor are. They both can be conceived in different ways, and our conception of them will determine the way we pursue them.¹⁹³⁴ We must also regard gain and honor thus conceived as the good (either in particular circumstances or in life at large), and this is also based on views.¹⁹³⁵ Moreover, we must identify how we may satisfy our desire for gain or honor, which implies knowing things around us and the possibilities they provide.¹⁹³⁶ In this sense, we never experience an indeterminate desire for gain or for honor. Plato may suggest as much when he speaks of a desire for an indeterminate drink in the *Republic*, but such a desire is at any rate directed at a drink, which is itself something of which we have some memory and which we conceive in a certain way.¹⁹³⁷ In other words, our experience of the simplest bodily desire is already integrated in a broader conception of our body, its needs, and what might satisfy them. Likewise, the desire of honor cannot be reduced to the simple subjective appearing (if only because we need to judge or believe that there are others and that they see us in a particular way).

In sum, non-philosophical drives have always assumed the form of the philosophical drive. They have their own rationality (or at least a semblance thereof). They are dialectical, they ask and answer questions, or as we could also say, they use a philosophical language. Their occurrence in us depends on the views we have and, insofar as they contaminate our own love of knowledge, they also affect and shape the way we see things.¹⁹³⁸ All these views (i.e., both the ones that shape our drives and the ones shaped by these drives) are not

¹⁹³⁴ For instance, we must think that gain consists either in satisfying the necessary desires or in having as much pleasure as possible. In the latter case, we must also have a notion of what pleasure is. Likewise, if we pursue honor, we must determine whether honor consists in being admired by some or by all, and we must also determine what exactly renders someone admirable.

¹⁹³⁵ As is said in *Rep.* 562b, we must set something up as the good or define it as the good. This may also include a comparative component – i.e., we may regard other things (and in particular the things desired by the other drives) as inferior or even worthless. Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 581c-582a.

¹⁹³⁶ Indeed, our desire is always directed at a superlative good and this means we desire either a superlative gain or a superlative honor. However, these are not easy to attain, and we need very complex plans in order to come closer to what we desire.

¹⁹³⁷ See *Rep.* 437d-439b and cp. *Phlb.* 34e-35c, where Socrates argues that one needs to have some memory of the fulfillment brought about by something (including a drink) in order to desire the thing in question.

¹⁹³⁸ As we will see in Sect. 6.2 and later in Chap. 16, the reciprocal contamination of the drives imply that “non-rational” drives can create their own views and persuade us of them. Though their influence over us depends on our own views, they can also shape how we see things, and this circularity is actually an expression of the close interconnection between our inborn drives.

necessarily explicit. In fact, they are for the most part tacit (which only renders them all the more effective).

Thus, the non-philosophical drives do not simply exert brute force on the soul. We have no direct contact with something ἄλογον. Even if there is something absolutely irrational at the root of our being, this is not what we experience. All drives are mediated by views or beliefs, as is the interaction between the different drives.¹⁹³⁹ They try to persuade each other. In particular, both the love of gain and the love of honor try to persuade the soul's inborn love of knowledge. They try to install λόγοι in the soul, and these λόγοι will shape the configuration of each drive and also their relative force. This becomes particularly obvious when one of these drives becomes the ruling drive of the soul. As Plato's descriptions indicate, their rule is only possible if their λόγοι overtake the citadel of the soul.¹⁹⁴⁰ These λόγοι will then determine our whole way of seeing things and our whole way of life.¹⁹⁴¹

The logical or rational character of our inborn drives is indeed a central feature of the political model of the soul. This is a deliberative model, in which the drives try to persuade each other. The soul is a sort of assembly, in which different members try to persuade the whole gathering.¹⁹⁴² Consequently, we are completely philosophical or rational beings (even if this rationality is often very defective, as we will see). Our views or beliefs (regardless of whether they are express or tacit) pervade everything, and this means that our love of knowledge plays an essential role in the soul. As is said in *Timaeus*, we are a sort of celestial plant, rooted in the superior part of our soul – rationality – and the other drives, as well as our entire life, depend on it.¹⁹⁴³

This is implied in the contamination model, but we must bear in mind that the love of knowledge is itself contaminated by the other drives, and consequently it is also in itself

¹⁹³⁹ This means that in a way our drives may be either true or false – i.e., they may be based either on baseless knowledge claims or on effective knowledge (which in turn may correspond to a correct δόξα or to full knowledge). It also means that we may examine them, correct them and educate them – i.e., these drives may be transformed by philosophical developments. In many dialogues, Socrates endeavors to do precisely this. He tries to identify and challenge the views that underpin one's love of gain or love of honor. See for instance *Philebus* or *Alcibiades I*.

¹⁹⁴⁰ See *Rep.* 560b-c.

¹⁹⁴¹ For more on this, see Chap. 16.

¹⁹⁴² In this sense, Plato's model resembles the inner dialogues we find in Homer and other authors, where characters deliberate about what to do by addressing another part of themselves and discussing with it. Cp. footnote 1626. It also constitutes a variation of the soul's dialogue with itself, which is mentioned in *Tht.* 189e and *Sph.* 264a-b. There are several voices answering the soul's questions and they dialogue with each other, thereby constituting the soul's δόξα.

¹⁹⁴³ See 90a-c.

sensitive to gain and honor.¹⁹⁴⁴ This diminishes its concern with truth. In other words, our inborn φιλοσοφία is weak and imperfect. It is limited by the other drives, distorted by them, and even enslaved to them.¹⁹⁴⁵ As a result, it loses precision, meticulousness and exigency. It accepts many views without carefully examining them and examination in general becomes no more than an instrument to acquire gain or honor. In this sense, our love of knowledge is not absolutely rational, and neither are we. Our rationality is limited by the other drives and therefore we are to a greater or less extent irrational.

As we will see, the restriction of our philosophical drive is actually the basis of the unexamined life, and then we will also have to consider in more detail how this restriction of our inner φιλοσοφία comes about and discuss the possibility of reverting it by developing our inborn love of knowledge.¹⁹⁴⁶ But for now the decisive aspect is that our drives always determine each other and this means that all drives (and thus our entire life) are pervaded by the concern with truth.

5.3. Reconsideration of the problem of ἀκράτεια in light of the soul's partition and of the reciprocal contamination of the soul's drives

We discussed in the previous chapter several important aspects of the problem of ἀκράτεια. We saw that several passages in the corpus deny the possibility of losing rational control and acting against our better judgment. According to these passages, Ovid's words "*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*" can never apply to us – at least in their proper sense. We always do what we deem best – i.e., we always follow our practical views. We cannot pursue what we think is bad, all things considered. Thus, all practical mistakes are unwilling and done out of ignorance. This may seem to go against the facts, since we often seem to lose control and be driven by our passions, but according to the passages in question (and especially those in *Protagoras*), such losses of control actually correspond to a temporary change of views. The conflict that leads to the apparently akratic action is not a conflict between reason and feeling, but rather a conflict between two opposite sets of views.

¹⁹⁴⁴ See e.g. *Phlb.* 21d-e, where it is said that a life of pure rationality without any feelings would not be desirable. Likewise, we are also not wholly indifferent to whether we are admired or despised.

¹⁹⁴⁵ See in particular *Rep.* 553d: "τὸ δέ γε οἶμαι λογιστικόν τε καὶ θυμοειδὲς χαμαὶ ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν παρακαθίσας ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ καὶ καταδουλωσάμενος, τὸ μὲν οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐᾷ λογίζεσθαι οὐδὲ σκοπεῖν ἀλλ' ἢ ὀπόθεν ἐξ ἐλαττόνων χρημάτων πλείω ἔσται (...)." ¹⁹⁴⁶ See Chap. 17.

However, this is not all Plato says about ἀκράτεια. He also considers the problem in the framework of the soul's partition. As Plato stresses in *Republic IV*, the very notions of ἀκράτεια and ἐγκράτεια point to a partition, especially insofar as they are associated with the idea of being better than oneself or superior to oneself (κρείττων αὐτοῦ) and being weaker than oneself or inferior to oneself (ἥττων αὐτοῦ). These notions presuppose that there are multiple parts in us, that these parts have different value, and that they can dominate each other. If the best part dominates, we are superior to ourselves, but if the weaker part triumphs, then we are inferior to ourselves.¹⁹⁴⁷ Therefore, it all depends on which part rules.

After considering this, Plato goes on to discuss the conflicts (στάσεις) between the parts of the soul, which apparently may give rise to akratic actions. To be sure, one may be inclined to argue that in these passages of *Republic IV* Plato has reformulated the views on ἀκράτεια we previously considered and is now allowing for the possibility of us going against our better judgment (i.e., against the calculation of what is best). We may be controlled by blind appetite or irrational anger, and these may drive us to do something harmful.¹⁹⁴⁸ But does Plato actually recognize the possibility of an akratic action? This is what we must now consider – especially since it has a direct bearing on our main question.¹⁹⁴⁹

We already considered that the views put forward in *Republic IV* introduce a model that is developed in later books, and the developments strongly restrict a *prima facie* interpretation of the conflicts mentioned by Plato. This means that the tripartition can actually be reconciled with the intellectualist conception of our behavior. Despite being composed of three different drives, we always follow what we deem best. Indeed, an akratic action would require a constitutively non-philosophical or irrational drive. However, we saw that the other drives are always, to a degree, philosophic. Not only are their concrete manifestations shaped by our views, but they also affect the way we see things. In other words, our love of gain and

¹⁹⁴⁷ See *Rep.* 430e-431b: “οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν “κρείττω αὐτοῦ” γελοῖον; ὁ γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ κρείττων καὶ ἥττων δήπου ἂν αὐτοῦ εἶη καὶ ὁ ἥττων κρείττων· ὁ αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐν ἅπασιν τούτοις προσαγορεύεται. τί δ’ οὐ; ἀλλ’, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, φαίνεται μοι βούλεσθαι λέγειν οὗτος ὁ λόγος ὡς τι ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ μὲν βέλτιον ἐνι, τὸ δὲ χεῖρον, καὶ ὅταν μὲν τὸ βέλτιον φύσει τοῦ χείρονος ἐγκρατὲς ᾖ, τοῦτο λέγειν τὸ “κρείττω αὐτοῦ” – ἐπαινεῖ γοῦν – ὅταν δὲ ὑπὸ τροφῆς κακῆς ἢ τινος ὀμιλίας κρατηθῇ ὑπὸ πλῆθους τοῦ χείρονος μικρότερον τὸ βέλτιον ὄν, τοῦτο δὲ ὡς ἐν ὄνειδι ψέγειν τε καὶ καλεῖν ἥττω ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἀκόλαστον τὸν οὕτω διακείμενον.” For a similar consideration, cp. *Lg.* 626c ff.

¹⁹⁴⁸ More specifically, Socrates seems to admit that one may drink although one thinks it is better not to (see 439b-d), and also that one may be angered despite one's better judgment – i.e., irrationally (441b-c). Later, in 603e-604b, he also considers the case of a man who has lost his son and is torn apart between the desire to give in to pain and his rational part. Here too it seems one may go against one's views about what is best and simply follow one's irrational urges.

¹⁹⁴⁹ To put it briefly: if our views directly determine our actions and our life, then we will need to have the best possible views, and hence philosophical examination will be very important. However, if our views do not entirely determine our life, then striving to have the best possible views may turn out to be useless. For more on this, see Chap. 17, Sect. 5.

our love of honor have their own views. Otherwise, they would not be able to influence our soul. They must try to persuade our philosophical drive and they can only do so by putting forward their own views about things. Consequently, there are many incompatible views within us, fighting with each other to establish their own way of seeing things.¹⁹⁵⁰ The conflicts between our drives correspond precisely to conflicts between their respective views. The battle we experience between our love of gain, our love of honor, and our love of knowledge is actually a battle of δόξαι.¹⁹⁵¹ Consequently, any triumph of a non-rational drive is always a triumph of the views of said drive – in particular, of its views about what is good. Whatever course of action we follow, we will always be guided by δόξαι or knowledge claims – and in this sense we always do what we think is best at the moment we act.

The philosophical drive is thus turned against itself by the other drives – or, more precisely, it lets itself be turned against itself. Our love of knowledge must indeed hand over the control to the other drives – and they can only assume the control insofar as they are themselves philosophic. Consequently, we are never overtaken by pleasure or anger, and our mistakes are never the result of irrational acts. All our acts are based on and sanctioned by our love of knowledge. This means that our best part never loses control and we are never truly inferior to ourselves. It also means that all practical errors result from a cognitive failure. At a certain moment, given the circumstances and our susceptibility, we are persuaded that pursuing gain or honor is the best. Then, when the situation changes, our views may also change, and as a result we will retrospectively interpret what happened as an akratic action. But what we view as ἀκράτεια is actually a deficient philosophical drive sanctioning other drives and their views. It is still a form of rational control, though the rationality in question is defective. It accepts bad views and can be deceived. This is what renders us susceptible to certain views in certain circumstances – and it is also what allows these views to take over the acropolis of the soul and determine our entire way of life. Later we will consider what renders our inborn φιλοσοφία weak and whether we may counteract it.¹⁹⁵² But for now what matters is that we always follow our views about what is best. These

¹⁹⁵⁰ Plato directly refers to this conflict between different δόξαι and their different origins in *Rep.* 602e-603a: “οὐκοῦν ἔφαμεν τῷ αὐτῷ ἅμα περὶ ταῦτα ἐναντία δοξάζειν ἀδύνατον εἶναι; καὶ ὀρθῶς γ’ ἔφαμεν. τὸ παρὰ τὰ μέτρα ἄρα δοξάζον τῆς ψυχῆς τῷ κατὰ τὰ μέτρα οὐκ ἂν εἴη ταυτόν. οὐ γὰρ οὖν. ἀλλὰ μὴν τὸ μέτρον γε καὶ λογισμῷ πιστεῖον βέλτιστον ἂν εἴη τῆς ψυχῆς. τί μήν; τὸ ἄρα τούτῳ ἐναντιούμενον τῶν φαύλων ἂν τι εἴη ἐν ἡμῖν. ἀνάγκη.”

¹⁹⁵¹ This does not mean that there is no battle of pure drives at a deeper level, determining how persuasive the arguments of the different drives are and which one triumphs. But this is not the conflict we normally experience. For more on what determines the outcome of the soul’s inner dialectic, see Chap. 17, Sect. 3.

¹⁹⁵² See Chap. 17.

views always have control and, insofar as we are identified with them, we always have self-control. At least this is the general model put forward in Plato's dialogues.

One may, of course, object that there are several passages in which Plato seems to admit exceptions. In the *Republic*, for instance, Socrates mentions lawless desires that may be unleashed in our dreams, when reason is asleep.¹⁹⁵³ In *Timaeus*, we find the idea that excessive pleasures and pains, caused by the body, may drive us mad.¹⁹⁵⁴ We will not consider these passages in detail here, but it is important to remark that in both cases Plato associates what happens in those moments to an intrinsic deficiency of our love of knowledge (caused either by lack of mental exercise or a defective upbringing).¹⁹⁵⁵ Even the physiological factors mentioned in *Timaeus* are said to limit reason. Consequently, we give in to other impulses because our reason is not developed enough, and not because we are forced to by our impulses.¹⁹⁵⁶ Moreover, when we give in to these impulses, we may still be guided by views (however defective they may be). If it were not so, we would be moving blindly and without any awareness of what we were doing – which could hardly be called an action and be ascribed to us. But if we are guided by views, then this is still a form of rational control.

In sum, even admitting that we have multiple drives and we may sometimes be guided by appetite or anger, this is only possible because such drives have a cognitive structure. All action is intrinsically philosophical or rational – and therefore none of our actions is akratic in the strict sense of the word.

6. Reconsideration of the notion of βίος in light of the soul's tripartition

The analysis of the soul's tripartition allows us to outline a picture of the soul's practical dimension that is more complex than the one we saw in the previous chapter. Each action is not only directed at the good, but it is always motivated by the interaction of our three constitutive drives, which determine not only our desire, but also how we see things. However, we have also considered in the previous chapter that our actions are not separated

¹⁹⁵³ See *Rep.* 571b ff.

¹⁹⁵⁴ See 86b ff.

¹⁹⁵⁵ In the passage of the *Republic*, what happens during one's sleep is the result of how one lives and of whether one soothes or arouses each part of the soul. In *Timaeus*, one's badness is associated not only with one's physical constitution, but also with one's lack of education (ἀπαίδευτος τροφή, 86e). Moreover, it is admitted that one can flee from badness with help of education and knowledge (τροφή, ἐπιτηδεύματα, μαθήματα – see 87b).

¹⁹⁵⁶ See in particular 86d-e: “καὶ σχεδὸν δὴ πάντα ὀπόσα ἡδονῶν ἀκράτεια καὶ ὄνειδος ὡς ἐκόντων λέγεται τῶν κακῶν, οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὄνειδίζεται· κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἐκὼν οὐδεὶς, διὰ δὲ πονηρὰν ἔξιν τινὰ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀπαίδευτον τροφήν ὁ κακὸς γίγνεται κακός, παντὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἐχθρὰ καὶ ἄκοντι προσγίγνεται.”

from one another, but they are all moments of our pursuit of the superlative good. As was said, our desire of a superlative good creates a practical system and each part of this system is referred to the superlative good we desire. Moreover, our practical system is based on a complex system of views that determines what the superlative good is, what we must do in order to attain it, and which role each thing plays in the pursuit of the good. These two systems are actually the same system – namely, the system that corresponds to the notion of βίος.¹⁹⁵⁷ But this is still an insufficient consideration of all that is implied in Plato’s notion of βίος, and therefore we must now reconsider and develop the previous analysis in light of the tripartition of the soul. We have to see how the combination and reciprocal contamination of the soul’s constitutive drives constitute a practical system and its underlying system of views. This will allow us to bring together everything we saw in this Part III about the structure of our ψυχή. It will also serve as the basis for the subsequent discussion and appraisal of the unexamined life. In fact, we will have to anticipate some aspects that we will see in more detail later and whose brief consideration is necessary to properly understand what is involved in Plato’s notion of βίος.

This intrinsic relation with what precedes and with what follows in our analysis goes to show that this is indeed a central question in the Platonic corpus, and it is important to properly discuss it. But before entering into the discussion of how the tripartition determines the constitution of a βίος, it is helpful to briefly consider the pre-Platonic understanding of this notion. We already made some allusions to decisive aspects of this understanding, but now we must discuss them in greater detail, as a preparation for our analysis of Plato’s concept of βίος. This will allow us to recapitulate some aspects we discussed before (aspects which in many cases can also be found in Plato) and it also works as a contrast to some essential aspects of Plato’s analysis.

6.1. The pre-Platonic understanding of βίος

We will consider the use of the word βίος in epic, lyric, dramatic and comic poetry, as well as by historians, medical writers, sophists and the so-called Pre-Socratic philosophers. To be sure, the texts under consideration are very heterogeneous. They come from different periods and have very different styles. All this makes it difficult to systematize them. It is also important to note that these texts do not provide us with a conceptual analysis of the

¹⁹⁵⁷ For this analysis of βίος, see Chap. 12, Sect. 5.2.

structure of βίος as such. They refer in concrete and often imagetic terms to several different aspects of βίος, and though these references are often brief and one-sided, their combination allows us to compose a rich description of βίος as such. We will thus try to identify the main traits of this description. In doing so, we will fall drastically short of a full reconstruction of the pre-Platonic understanding of βίος. In particular, we will not consider in detail the context of each passage, the literary style of the text in question and the period in which it was composed. We will simply compare what is said in the different statements about βίος.

We will focus our attention on the term βίος and its cognates (βίωτος, βιοτή, βιοῦν, βιοτεύειν). These terms correspond to a certain way of seeing and understanding life, which is something we are always in contact with, though its aspects, structures and meaning are often unclear and can be conceived in different ways. We will see how the Greeks understood “life”. This analysis, however, will be one-sided insofar as we will not bring into consideration other terms that have a similar meaning. These other terms are sometimes used alongside βίος, and they can also be used in its stead. The best examples of this are the terms ζῆν (which is the most generic term for “living”) and αἰών (which refers mainly to one’s lifespan). In some cases, life may even be referred to by the term ψυχή – especially in moments of risk or emotional tension.¹⁹⁵⁸ But βίος can also be used in a sense similar to μοῖρα or δαίμων, insofar as these terms designate one’s lot or destiny – i.e., the content of our life. In other cases, βίος may come close to terms such as τρόπος, ἥθος or φύσις, which denote a particular character or way of being that determines one’s path in life. In addition, βίος may refer to a mode of living – i.e., a certain pattern of behavior or rule of life that becomes a habit. In this sense, it comes to resemble terms such as διαίτα, ἐπιτήδευμα or τροφή. All these terms are frequently used by Greek authors, and also by Plato. We will, however, not consider them here. We will rather focus on the uses of βίος, partly because this is the most relevant term for our main question, and partly because its uses are themselves very meaningful and sufficient for our goal here.

a) The uses of the word βίος and its cognates

Let us put aside for now the proximity between βίος and other terms and look more closely at what the word βίος designates or what it may be applied to. It is true that the word

¹⁹⁵⁸ Cp. Chap. 10, Sect. 1.

βίος means “life”, but the term life is itself complex and multilayered, so we must define which aspects of life may be expressed by βίος.

One point is immediately clear: the term βίος is used to designate more than the simple fact of being alive. It designates life as something we live or to which we relate. We experience life and this is not just one of the things we experience, alongside others. Rather, our experience of life integrates all our experiences. In other words, life has a content and in fact it includes all possible contents. But we do not simply notice life and things in it. We are not indifferent to life and to how we experience it. We want our experience of life to be good – i.e., we want to have a good life. This is an essential aspect of βίος and it pervades all its senses – even when the word is apparently used in a more neutral sense, closely associated with the biological fact of being alive (as is for instance the case in the Hippocratic corpus).¹⁹⁵⁹

The older uses of the word, however, often have a narrower sense and rather emphasize the fact that our life and our comfort are not guaranteed. We need to survive from one moment to the next and we want to do it without great discomfort. Βίος (or βίωτος) then denote what we need to stay alive and to have some quality of life – i.e., our means of sustenance, which include food, clothes, housing and all other possessions that may ensure we have a safe and comfortable life.¹⁹⁶⁰ The term βίος may also designate one’s occupation or job, especially insofar as it is what allows one to find sustenance.¹⁹⁶¹ These occupations may be of different sorts. A πόλις needs many different workers, which complement each other, and usually one has to adopt one of these occupations. Furthermore, the term βίος may designate a certain pattern of behavior or lifestyle, which may or may not be directly connected with one’s occupation.¹⁹⁶² This implies that there is a certain way of relating to one’s life and its contents that permeates our experience of everything and is not necessarily determined by the things we come into contact with (at least not directly).

We can therefore see that βίος is something that is open to other beings and to itself. But this is not all. Βίος is something that may characterize different kinds of beings (which

¹⁹⁵⁹ See e.g. *De Prisca Medicina*, 14.8-11: “ὕπὸ γὰρ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου τουτέων πάσχει τε καὶ ἑτεροιοῦται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἢ τοῖον ἢ τοῖον· καὶ διὰ τουτέων πᾶς ὁ βίος καὶ ὑγιαίνοντι, καὶ ἐκ νοῦσου ἀνατρεφόμενῳ, καὶ κάμνοντι.”

¹⁹⁶⁰ The word βίωτος is often used in the *Odyssey*, especially to designate what Penelope’s suitors are constantly devouring. See e.g. II.122, III.299-302. We also find this use of the word later. Cp. e.g. EURIPIDES, *Helena*, 512.

¹⁹⁶¹ For the association of βίος with one’s occupation, see e.g. ARISTOPHANES, *Pax*, 1212f.: “ἀπώλεσάς μου τὴν τέχνην καὶ τὸν βίον,/καὶ τουτοῦ καὶ τοῦ δορυξοῦ ’κεινοῦ.” Cp. also SOLON, fr. 13 (West), vv. 43 ff.

¹⁹⁶² Cp. e.g. ARISTOPHANES, *Aves*, 412-415: “ἔρωζ/ βίου διαίτης τε σοῦ/ καὶ ξυνοικεῖν τέ σοι/ καὶ ξυνεῖναι τὸ πᾶν.”

actually raises the question about their differences and their interrelation). In general, βίος is something individual and experienced in the first-person perspective. However, each individual comes into contact with many others – and thus we are all aware of (and distinguish ourselves from) many other βίοι, which are all likewise experienced in the first-person perspective.¹⁹⁶³ In other words, βίος is not just referred to an “I”, but also to others – the others that one knows, all others that exist at a certain time or even all others that were and ever will be.¹⁹⁶⁴ In fact, one may contemplate the lives of others and compare one’s own life with theirs.¹⁹⁶⁵ And this is not the only form of “otherness” the term βίος may be referred to. One may also talk of the βίος of trees and animals, which may be a remnant of animism, but also stresses how the behavior or habits of other animate beings may illustrate a possibility of ours and thus reveal something about ourselves.¹⁹⁶⁶ Moreover, the term may also be used in reference to gods, insofar as their existence is determined in some way.¹⁹⁶⁷

It is important to note that in most of these cases the term βίος is applied to individual beings, but this is not always the case. One may also speak of a common βίος, the βίος of a πόλις, the βίος of a people (such as the Hellenes), and – as was mentioned – the βίος of a certain epoch or even human life in general.¹⁹⁶⁸ This may imply that the lives of a collective entity essentially relate to each other or that they all share similar traits. Indeed, some of these collectives are cultural or historical entities to which we belong, but the term βίος may also have a more universal sense – in which case it describes something like a unity of condition or something we all have in common. However, even if that is the case, the term is still referred to the first person. Life is always experienced from the standpoint of the individual, though all other instances mentioned may be an important part of our life. In general, we are related to a community, a people, an epoch and the human condition in general, and all this characterizes us.

The term βίος can thus have different scopes. It can refer to the totality of one’s life (i.e., to the interval between one’s birth and one’s death), and it can be applied to larger entities. But this is not all. Βίος may also refer to a particular period or phase of an

¹⁹⁶³ In general, we are essentially intertwined with these other lives and we may even depend on them. For more on this, cp. footnote 2061 below.

¹⁹⁶⁴ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Phoenisae*, 1272 (σῶν κασιγνήτων βίος), THUCYDIDES, *Historiae*, 6.16.5 (ἐν τῷ κατ’ αὐτοῦ βίῳ), HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 6.109 (τὸν ἅπαντα ἀνθρώπων βίον).

¹⁹⁶⁵ Cp. DEMOCRITUS, DK B191.

¹⁹⁶⁶ See SEMONIDES, fr. 13 (West), AESCHYLUS, *Persae*, 616-618, *Agamemnon*, 717-726, HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 3.108, ARISTOPHANES, *Plutus*, 920-925.

¹⁹⁶⁷ Cp. EURIPIDES, fr. 1075 (Nauck).

¹⁹⁶⁸ In addition to the references in footnote 1693, see also e.g. ARISTOPHANES, *Ecclesiazusae*, 573-576, 590-594, AESCHYLUS, fr. 181a (Radt), HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 7.46.

individual's life and to what characterizes it.¹⁹⁶⁹ These periods or phases (which may or not coincide with the ages of life) are marked by certain habits or certain events, and can greatly differ from one another. In general, they express how we go through different situations and how these situations shape our whole experience of life. Hence, we may say we live different lives. Furthermore, the idea of different phases is present in some references to afterlife as a kind of βίος or a different shape our life may assume.¹⁹⁷⁰

From all these uses we can already see that there can be many different βίοι, with very different configurations. But insofar as they are forms of βίος, they must also have something in common, and we must now consider how the Greeks determined the most essential traits of life.

b) The metaphors used to portray the structure of βίος as such

The texts employ many metaphors to describe βίος as such. This imagetic component is indeed a decisive feature of the pre-Platonic thinking about βίος. The metaphors employed show different aspects of life. Many of these aspects are connected with situations of crisis, where life's features become more manifest, while others refer to the usual features of life. We will now consider (even if briefly) these different metaphors and see what they imply. Although some of them are more frequent than others, they all help us understand what the term βίος means.

Let us start with a set of images that is relatively common and very expressive. Life is often portrayed as a distance we must traverse and also the act of covering that distance. In other words, life is presented as a journey. The phrase “διὰ βίου” is often used and several verbs (such as διάγειν, διατελεῖν, διέρχεσθαι, ἐκπεραίνειν) express the idea of traversing life.¹⁹⁷¹ These verbs may emphasize the idea of movement and effort, or the idea of reaching the end of the journey. The latter idea can also be expressed by the verb τελευτᾶν, or by mentioning the endpoint of life (τέλος, τέρμα, πέρας).¹⁹⁷² Moreover, the metaphor of the journey can be developed in different ways. Life can be compared to a path or a road we take

¹⁹⁶⁹ See e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 81, 168, *Oedipus Coloneus*, 1619, 1691-1692, EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 1157-1158, GORGIAS, DK B11a (15).

¹⁹⁷⁰ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 1039, *Hippolytus*, 195.

¹⁹⁷¹ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Coephoroe*, 610, SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Coloneus*, 1619, ARISTOPHANES, *Lysistrata*, 217-218, EURIPIDES, *Hercules*, 428-429, HIPPOCRATES, *De dieta*, 69.

¹⁹⁷² See e.g. HOMER, *Iliad*, XVI.786-790, THEOGNIS, *Elegiae*, 905-906, PINDAR, *Isthmia* 4.4-5, HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 1.32, SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 79, EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 643, *Hippolytus* 678.

(κέλευθος, ὁδός, πόρος).¹⁹⁷³ Life can also be compared to a sea one must cross. Euripides, for instance, speaks of sailing life (ἐκπλεῖν τὸν βίον).¹⁹⁷⁴ There are also several descriptions of this sea. Sophocles mentions waves and compares a life full of toil to the agitated sea of Crete and Euripides speaks of a life without waves (ἄκυμος).¹⁹⁷⁵ Euripides also compares youth to the prow of a ship (πρῶρα βιότου).¹⁹⁷⁶ Likewise meaningful in this context is the fact that Sophocles says that children are for mothers the anchor of life (ἄγκυραι βίου).¹⁹⁷⁷ These images show how life may be long and full of risks. But life may also be compared to a short journey, as when Sophocles speaks of the narrow passage (ἰσθμός) of life.¹⁹⁷⁸ Finally, life may also be compared to a race, where one must show one's worth. This race is normally a race between two points, where one has to run to a certain point, turn around and return to where one departed from. Indeed, authors often speak of the last turn of life and there are several references to the finish point.¹⁹⁷⁹

Another set of images emphasize more directly the idea of effort. Life is something we may have to stretch (τείνειν), often beyond a certain point where it could have ended.¹⁹⁸⁰ Life is also something we may wear out or consume (τριβεῖν, ἐκτριβεῖν).¹⁹⁸¹ One may drag it out (ἔλκειν) or creep to its end (ἔρπειν).¹⁹⁸² We may also have to drain it as if it were a leaking ship, especially if one leads a life of suffering and tears.¹⁹⁸³ All these images usually stress how hard life can be. The same idea can be expressed by comparing life to a burden one must carry and that may be easy to carry or may oppress us.¹⁹⁸⁴ But the idea of effort may

¹⁹⁷³ Empedocles speaks of the harsh paths of life. See DK B115: “(...) δαίμονες οἷτε μακροαἰώνος λελάχασι βίῳ./ τρίς μιν μυρίας ὥρας ἀπὸ μακάρων ἀλάλησθαι./ φουμένους παντοῖα διὰ χρόνου εἶδα θνητῶν/ ἀργαλέας βιότοιο μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους.” Democritus, in turn, says: “βίος ἀνεόρταστος μακρὴ ὁδὸς ἀπανδόκευτος” (DK B230). Cp. also EURIPIDES, *Hercules*, 430-434, and PINDAR, *Isthmia* 6.15.

¹⁹⁷⁴ See EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 169, and *Hecuba*, 1270.

¹⁹⁷⁵ See SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 112-121, and EURIPIDES, *Hercules*, 698-699.

¹⁹⁷⁶ See *Troïades*, 103.

¹⁹⁷⁷ See fr. 685.

¹⁹⁷⁸ See fr. 568.

¹⁹⁷⁹ For comparisons of life to a race, see PINDAR, *Nemea* 6.7, SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Coloneus*, 133, 142-146, fr. 646-647, EURIPIDES, *Hercules*, 655-668, *Medea*, 1245, *Electra*, 952-956, *Helena*, 1666, *Ion*, 1514.

¹⁹⁸⁰ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Prometheus vincetus*, 537-539, *Agamemnon*, 1362-1363, EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 1108-1111.

¹⁹⁸¹ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Heraclidae*, 84f.; ARISTOPHANES, *Pax*, 586-589.

¹⁹⁸² See EURIPIDES, *Orestes*, 201-207 and *Medea*, 1245

¹⁹⁸³ See EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 898.

¹⁹⁸⁴ In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, we find the expression “ῥᾶστα τὸν βίον φέρειν”. Aeschylus, in turn, mentions a life difficult to carry (βίος δύσφορος) in *Agamemnon*, 859. Sophocles speaks of being oppressed (βαρύνεσθαι) under the weight of evils (*Trachiniae*, 151-152). It is also said that we must carry or bear the necessary things of life (τὰναγκαῖα τοῦ βίου) – see EURIPIDES, *Helena*, 253-254. In this context, we may also mention the idea of bearing (ἀνέχεσθαι) life. See e.g. SOPHOCLES, fr. 568.

also be combined with the idea of skill. Life can be more like a manual work or a work of art, as when Herodotus says it is something one must weave (διαπλέκειν).¹⁹⁸⁵

Other metaphors are taken from the domain of economics. Euripides compares life to a merchandise by saying that Phaedra is like a merchant of her own life (ἔμπορος βίου) if she killed herself in order to obtain something else.¹⁹⁸⁶ Life is also compared to one's possessions or a quantity of money, insofar as it is something which we may spare (φείδεσθαι), squander (ἀναλίσκειν) or be robbed of (στέρεσθαι).¹⁹⁸⁷ Anacreon and Aristophanes, in turn, compare life to a coin or a metal that can be falsified.¹⁹⁸⁸ It is also meaningful that Sophocles compares life to a weighing scale, and death is then the critical moment when the scales tilt.¹⁹⁸⁹ Incidentally, the idea of a critical moment can likewise be expressed by the image of standing on the razor's edge.¹⁹⁹⁰

Several other metaphors are taken from the domain of nature. For instance, life is sometimes compared to a day with all its different phases, which emphasizes the idea of time and of a cycle of activity. This is closely connected with the Greek conception of being born as coming to light and death as a domain of darkness.¹⁹⁹¹ Old age is then compared to the nightfall.¹⁹⁹² But life can also be associated with different natural elements. Aeschylus speaks of the breath of life (πνεῦμα βίου), and when one dies one is said to breathe one's last or expire (ἐκπνεῖν or ἀποψυχεῖν).¹⁹⁹³ If, however, one still has some life in oneself, it can be said that one still breathes.¹⁹⁹⁴ Life may still be compared to a liquid, as when Euripides describes the life of someone who is often crying as a life that melts.¹⁹⁹⁵ Euripides also refers to the mixture of liquids (σύγχυσις) in order to describe a life marked by confusion.¹⁹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁸⁵ See *Historiae*, 5.92, ζ.

¹⁹⁸⁶ See EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 964-965.

¹⁹⁸⁷ See SOPHOCLES, *Philoctetes*, 931-934, HIPPOCRATES, *Epistulae*, 17.114 and EURIPIDES, *Hecuba*, 338.

¹⁹⁸⁸ We find the expression κίβδηλος βίος in ANACREON, fr. 43 (Page), and Aristophanes uses the phrase κίβδηλία τοῦ βίου in *Aves*, 158.

¹⁹⁸⁹ See *Oedipus Coloneus*, 1508-1509: “ρόπη βίου μοι· καί σ’ ἄπερ ξυνήνεσα/ θέλω πόλιν τε τήνδε μὴ ψεύσας θανεῖν.”

¹⁹⁹⁰ See HOMER, *Iliad*, X.173-174: “νῦν γὰρ δὴ πάντεσσιν ἐπὶ ξυροῦ ἴσταται ἀκμῆς/ ἢ μάλα λυγρὸς ὄλεθρος Ἀχαιοῖς ἢ ἐ βίωναι.”

¹⁹⁹¹ For the idea of life as being in the light, see e.g. EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 357-362, *Hecuba*, 167-168, *Phoenissae*, 1281. For the idea of death as something that hides life, see *Oedipus Coloneus*, 1551-1552.

¹⁹⁹² Cp. e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 1121-1124, EMPEDOCLES DK B152.

¹⁹⁹³ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Persae*, 506-507, *Agamemnon*, 1493, 1517, SOPHOCLES, *Ajax*, 1031, EURIPIDES, *Heraclidae*, 565-566, *Helena*, 142.

¹⁹⁹⁴ See EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 1244-1246: “χὼ μὲν ἐκ δεσμῶν λυθεῖς/ τμητῶν ἰμάντων οὐ κάτοιδ’ ὅτωι τρόπω/ πίπτει, βραχὺν δὴ βίοντον ἐμπνέων ἔτι (...).”

¹⁹⁹⁵ See EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 139-143.

¹⁹⁹⁶ See EURIPIDES, *Andromacha*, 291, and *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, 551.

Life can additionally be portrayed as a living being. It is like a plant, especially in its youth, when it is said to sprout, thrive or bloom (θάλλειν).¹⁹⁹⁷ Life is also like a fruit one may reap.¹⁹⁹⁸ Moreover, the description of human lives as leaves that fall from the trees is sometimes brought into connection with the description of βίος, to express its briefness and frailty.¹⁹⁹⁹ Gorgias and Democritus, in turn, compare life to a living organism by saying that it can have diseases like the body.²⁰⁰⁰ Diseases imply a certain defect in one's natural constitution, and this idea of deviation can be further highlighted by saying that one's life is monstrous (τέρας) – i.e., a life that breaks with the natural order of things.²⁰⁰¹

Several of these images already referred to the idea of disturbance, but sometimes this idea is brought to the fore, often with social and political implications. Aristophanes indeed speaks of the disturbance of life (τάραξις τοῦ βίου) and several authors say that something may upset life or turn it upside down.²⁰⁰² But one may also set it straight (ὀρθῶσαι βίον) or order it (συντάξασθαι).²⁰⁰³ In a similar sense, one may speak both of an unsteady or wavering life, and of a firm life.²⁰⁰⁴ The latter idea may also be expressed by describing a life as being without danger (ἀκίνδυνος βίος).²⁰⁰⁵

These are the main groups of images, but there are still other images that appear to be isolated. For instance, Antiphon compares life to a board game where one cannot replay a move – i.e., there are no “do overs”.²⁰⁰⁶ This idea of non-repeatability can also be expressed by saying that life is a single race and we cannot run it twice.²⁰⁰⁷ Particularly expressive is the comparison of life with a theater play. As Democritus says: “the cosmos is the stage, life is the parodos, we come, see and go away.”²⁰⁰⁸ Life can also be compared to a religious rite, in which case youth is a ceremony of initiation to one's life (ἐν βιότου προτελείοις).²⁰⁰⁹

¹⁹⁹⁷ See e.g. EMPEDOCLES, DK B20, v. 6, EURIPIDES, *Electra*, 951-953.

¹⁹⁹⁸ See EURIPIDES, fr. 571, 1-3.

¹⁹⁹⁹ See HOMER, *Iliad*, VI.146-149, MIMNERMUS, fr. 2, ARISTOPHANES, *Aves*, 685-687.

²⁰⁰⁰ See GORGIAS, DK B11a (35), and DEMOCRITUS, DK B288.

²⁰⁰¹ See EURIPIDES, *Helena*, 255-261.

²⁰⁰² Cp. ARISTOPHANES, *Thesmophoriazousae*, 137, and also ARCHILOCHUS, fr. 130 (West), EURIPIDES, *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, 24-27, *Hercules*, 735-736.

²⁰⁰³ See SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 39, and DEMOCRITUS, fr. 61.

²⁰⁰⁴ See PINDAR, *Nemea* 7.98 (ἐμπεδοσθενέα βίον); GORGIAS DK B11a (17), (25), (29); EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 785, fr. 916; ARISTOPHANES, fr. 899 (βέβαιον βίον).

²⁰⁰⁵ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 248, *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, 17-18.

²⁰⁰⁶ See ANTIPHON, DK B52: “ἀναθέσθαι δὲ ὡσπερ πεττὸν τὸν βίον οὐκ ἔστιν.”

²⁰⁰⁷ Cp. EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 1080-1086 and *Hercules*, 655-672.

²⁰⁰⁸ See DK B115: “ὁ κόσμος σκηνή, ὁ βίος πάροδος· ἦλθες, εἶδες, ἀπῆλθες.”

²⁰⁰⁹ See AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 720.

Bίος is also associated with the idea of inhabiting a place. Euripides describes life as the act of inhabiting the body for a time, before returning it to earth.²⁰¹⁰ The same author also speaks of life as a camp that one settles when arriving at a certain place (καθιδρύειν βίον).²⁰¹¹ Moreover, Euripides sees life as a kind of army or city, insofar as it is something that may have a leader (προστάτης).²⁰¹² More generally, life is something that can be seduced, as is implied when Euripides speaks of divination as a bait for one's life (βίου δέλεαρ).²⁰¹³ Life may also be overtaken or possessed – for instance, by Victory.²⁰¹⁴ But life is not just passive. It may possess us (in the sense that it keeps us alive or forces us to live), or it may be something we fight with and that gives us blows.²⁰¹⁵ Euripides describes life as an entity that holds us or as a prison, when he speaks of it as something we may release ourselves from (ἀπαλλάττεσθαι).²⁰¹⁶ It is also said to be something we may leave behind (λείπειν or ἐκλείπειν).²⁰¹⁷ There are actually several expressions to designate the loss of life. Some are more generic and refer only to its destruction (which often implies violence).²⁰¹⁸ But life can also be seen as something that can be cut in two in the battlefield or from which one may be severed, which seems to presuppose a certain identification with the body, at least at the moment of death.²⁰¹⁹ In contrast, life may also be preserved or saved (σῶζειν) – at least for a little longer.²⁰²⁰

²⁰¹⁰ See *Supplices*, 531-536: “ἔασατ’ ἤδη γῆ καλυφθῆναι νεκρούς,/ ὅθεν δ’ ἕκαστον ἐς τὸ φῶς ἀφίκετο,/ ἐνταῦθ’ ἀπελθεῖν, πνεῦμα μὲν πρὸς αἰθέρα,/ τὸ σῶμα δ’ ἐς γῆν· οὐτὶ γὰρ κεκτῆμεθα/ ἡμέτερον αὐτὸ πλὴν ἐνοικῆσαι βίον,/ κάπειτα τὴν θρέψασαν αὐτὸ δεῖ λαβεῖν.”

²⁰¹¹ See *Bacchae* 1336-1339: “ὅταν δὲ Λοξίου χρηστήριον/ διαρπάσωσι, νόστον ἄθλιον πάλιν/ σχήσουσι· σὲ δ’ Ἄρης Ἄρμονίαν τε ρύσεται/ μακάρων τ’ ἐς αἶαν σὸν καθιδρύσει βίον.”

²⁰¹² See *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, 446-450: “ἡ δυσγένεια δ’ ὡς ἔχει τι χρήσιμον./ καὶ γὰρ δακρῦσαι ῥαδίως αὐτοῖς ἔχει,/ ἅπαντὰ τ’ εἶπειν. τῷ δὲ γενναίῳ φύσιν/ ἄνολβα ταῦτα. προστάτην δὲ τοῦ βίου/ τὸν ὄγκον ἔχομεν τῷ τ’ ὄλῳ δουλεύομεν.” As we mentioned above, Plato uses a similar image to designate the ruling drive of the soul (see *Rep.* 573a-b).

²⁰¹³ See *Helena*, 755.

²⁰¹⁴ See EURIPIDES, *Iphigenia Taurica* 1499-1501, *Orestes* 1693-5, *Phoenissae* 1764-6.

²⁰¹⁵ See, respectively, SOPHOCLES, *Electra* 223-225 (ὄφρα με βίος ἔχη), EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 426 (ἀμιλλάσθαι βίῳ), and AESCHYLUS, *Eumenides*, 933 (πληγαὶ βιότου).

²⁰¹⁶ See *Hippolytus*, 356-357.

²⁰¹⁷ See e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Electra*, 1131, and EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 693. We also find the expression ἀποστάσις βίου in EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 277.

²⁰¹⁸ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Supplices*, 936-937 (ἀπολακτισμοὶ βίου), *Persae*, 464 (ἐξἀπέφθειραν βίον), *Agamemnon*, 1453-1454 (ἀπέφθισεν βίον), EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 1367 (ὀλέσας βιότον), *Iphigenia Taurica*, 674 (βίον ἀπορρήξειν), 691-692 (λῶσαι βίον).

²⁰¹⁹ See EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 1375-1377, and SOPHOCLES, *Philoctetes*, 1427.

²⁰²⁰ See e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 85, *Electra*, 768, DEMOCRITUS, DK B43.

c) The characterization of particular βίοι according to their content or way of being

The metaphors we have just considered showed some important traits and some basic possibilities of all human lives, but there can be many different lives, and now we must see how particular lives are characterized and distinguished from one another. Greek authors often try to show the essential trait of a particular life by adding some attribute to the term βίος. This attribute may refer to what one does, what one possesses or to one's relation with others, and it distinguishes an individual life from other possibilities. However, these characterizations may apply to many different individuals. To be more precise, they are possibilities available to all of us. In this sense, their differentiation already foreshadows the question of the main ways of life, though it still recognizes a great diversity of possibilities. But what are then the attributes attributed to βίος throughout the texts?

As was said, lives are often characterized according to what they do or do not do. Sometimes, the social function of someone is specified. One may lead the life of a man or of a female slave.²⁰²¹ But one's life may also be defined by one's way of making a living, which is often associated to a certain way of being. Aristophanes talks of the life of a farmer (γεωργικός βίος) and of a rural life (ἄγροικος βίος).²⁰²² Archilochus, in turn, speaks of a maritime life (θαλάσσιος βίος), and Euripides of the life of an islander (νησιώτης βίος).²⁰²³ One may also do nothing. Archilochus speaks of a βίος ἀπράγμων as something beneficial for the elderly. This describes a certain way of spending the time: namely, by doing nothing and having no concerns.²⁰²⁴ Other times authors speak of a vagrant life (βίος ἀλήτης or πλανήτης βίος), which is associated to lack of means, misery and disorientation.²⁰²⁵ Aristophanes also mentions the life of a beggar (βίος πτωχοῦ).²⁰²⁶ Such lives are characterized by the “ἀσθενεΐη βίου” mentioned by Herodotus.²⁰²⁷ But one may also lead a dishonest life. As was mentioned, Anacreon speaks of a fraudulent life (κίβδηλος βίος).²⁰²⁸ Herodotus accuses someone of acquiring the means of sustenance through the most impious deeds (ἀπ' ἔργων

²⁰²¹ See EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 938, and *Andromacha*, 89-90.

²⁰²² See *Pax*, 589, and *Nubes*, 43.

²⁰²³ See ARCHILOCHUS, fr. 116 (West) and EURIPIDES, *Heraclidae*, 84.

²⁰²⁴ See ARCHILOCHUS, fr. 330 (West).

²⁰²⁵ See HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 3.52, EURIPIDES, *Heraclidae*, 873-878. See also EURIPIDES, *Helena*, 520-527.

²⁰²⁶ See *Plutus*, 548, 552.

²⁰²⁷ See *Historiae*, 2.47 and 8.51.

²⁰²⁸ Cp. footnote 1988 above.

άνοσιωτάτων).²⁰²⁹ Aeschylus, in turn, uses the expression “ἀργυροστερῆ βίον νομίζειν” for someone who spends life stealing, whereas Aristophanes speaks of bringing false accusations (συκοφαντεῖν) as an ancestral βίος.²⁰³⁰

Indeed, many characterizations of βίος have a broader moral sense. Euripides criticizes a useless and lawless life (ἀχρεῖος and ἄνομος.)²⁰³¹ Sophocles disparages a life full of envy (πολυζήλος βίος).²⁰³² One may also turn to the soft side of life (τὸ μαλθακὸν βίου), which is associated with the Muses, or one’s life may also be associated with godlessness and injustice.²⁰³³ Gorgias, in turn, talks of a shameful (ἐπονείδιστος) life.²⁰³⁴ In contrast, one may lead a life without blemish or reproach (ἀκέραιος ἀνεπίπληκτος βίος).²⁰³⁵ One’s life may be moderate (σαόφρων) or just.²⁰³⁶ It may be marked by peace or endurance.²⁰³⁷ It may also be a chaste (ἀγνός) or holy (σεμνός) life.²⁰³⁸ In some other cases, the attributes of life have a more intellectual sense. Pindar compares a young man good at counseling or deliberating (ἐν βουλαῖς) to the life of a one-hundred-year-old man. In this case, time expresses wisdom.²⁰³⁹ Aristophanes, in turn, describes human beings as beings that spend their lives in darkness (ἀμαυρόβιοι), probably because of all frailties that plague their lives, which he goes on to enumerate.²⁰⁴⁰

These material, moral and intellectual features of a particular life already point to many interactions between lives, but the social dimension of lives is further emphasized by the fact that lives are frequently determined by their interrelations – both in the domain of the family and the domain of the πόλις.

Let us first consider relations between family members. Aeschylus speaks about how important it was for maidens to find a husband and have a ἀνδροτυχῆς βίος.²⁰⁴¹ Aristophanes stresses how pleasant the life of engaged people or newlyweds is (νυμφίων βίος).²⁰⁴² Euripides talks of a life sharing a table (ξυντράπεζος βίος) to designate the way one treats a

²⁰²⁹ See *Historiae*, 8.106.

²⁰³⁰ See AESCHYLUS, *Choephoroe*, 1001-1003 and ARISTOPHANES, *Aves*, 1152.

²⁰³¹ See *Hercules*, 1301-1302.

²⁰³² See *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 380-382.

²⁰³³ See EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 883, *Hercules*, 433-434.

²⁰³⁴ See DK B 11a (25).

²⁰³⁵ See EURIPIDES, *Orestes*, 922.

²⁰³⁶ See ARCHILOCHUS, fr. 328 (West), and ARISTOPHANES, fr. 899 (βέβαιον ἔξεις τὸν βίον δίκαιος ὢν).

²⁰³⁷ See ARISTOPHANES, *Pax*, 439-440 (ἐν εἰρήνῃ διαγαγεῖν τὸν βίον), and EURIPIDES, *Hercules*, 1351 (ἐγκαρτερήσω βίον).

²⁰³⁸ See EURIPIDES, fr. 472, and *Ion*, 56. Cp. also *Bacchae*, 75, and *Helena*, 9-10.

²⁰³⁹ See *Pythia* 4, 281-286.

²⁰⁴⁰ See *Aves* 685.

²⁰⁴¹ See *Eumenides*, 956-960

²⁰⁴² See *Aves* 161.

slave as a wife.²⁰⁴³ In contrast, we also find the resolution to lead an unwedded life in Aristophanes.²⁰⁴⁴ But this is not all. Having or not having children may likewise define a life. One may lament having an ἄπαις or ἄτεκνος βίος, but one may also consider having children a great evil, given the fact that our life is characterized by the fondness we feel towards them (φιλοτέκνος βίος).²⁰⁴⁵

As for political relations, one may live subordinated to someone else.²⁰⁴⁶ One may also lead the life of a slave – especially if one has lost the privileges one had.²⁰⁴⁷ Aeschylus praises an intermediate life that is neither a life without rule (ἀνάρχετος βίος) nor a life submitted to someone else (δεσποτούμενος βίος).²⁰⁴⁸ He also praises a grand and good life, under the rule of law.²⁰⁴⁹ In Euripides, the Cyclops talks about νόμοι as a ποικίλλειν of human life – which here means not so much an adornment, but rather something that complicates life.²⁰⁵⁰

All these aspects may define a life and distinguish it from others. But this is not the only kind of characterization of particular lives that we find in the texts.

d) The characterization of particular βίοι with respect to their value

Often βίος is characterized with respect to the way one values its content – namely, whether it is positive or negative. This is a consequence of our interest in life, to which the texts refer in different ways. First of all, we are attached to our life and we desire to live it.²⁰⁵¹ Life is even said to be what we are most fond of.²⁰⁵² Even those that disparage old age do not want to die, as is said in Euripides.²⁰⁵³ But our fondness for life is not unalterable. Under certain circumstances, life may become extremely undesirable or unlivable (οὐ βιώσιμος or

²⁰⁴³ See *Andromacha*, 658.

²⁰⁴⁴ See *Lysistrata*, 217-218.

²⁰⁴⁵ See EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 670-671, *Ion*, 488-491, 790-791, *Phoenissae*, 963-966.

²⁰⁴⁶ See AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 472-474.

²⁰⁴⁷ See SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 302, and EURIPIDES, *Ion*, 1373.

²⁰⁴⁸ See *Eumenides*, 526-531.

²⁰⁴⁹ See *Persae*, 852-853.

²⁰⁵⁰ See *Cyclops*, 338-340.

²⁰⁵¹ Homer, for instance, uses the expression λιλαιεσθαι βιότοιο (*Odyssey* XII.328, XXIV.536), whereas Euripides speaks of a πόθος τοῦ βίου (*Hercules* 316-318). Cp. also *Alcestis*, 715 (“μακροῦ βίου γὰρ ἠισθόμεν ἐρῶντά σε”) and fr. 816 (where he describes mortals as φιλόζωοι and as having ἔρωσ βίου).

²⁰⁵² See SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 611-612: “φίλον γὰρ ἐσθλὸν ἐκβαλεῖν ἴσον λέγω/ καὶ τὸν παρ’ αὐτῷ βίον, ὃν πλεῖστον φιλεῖ.”

²⁰⁵³ See *Alcestis*, 669-672: “μάτην ἄρ’ οἱ γέροντες εὐχονται θανεῖν,/ γῆρας ψέγοντες καὶ μακρὸν χρόνον βίου-/ ἦν δ’ ἐγγὺς ἔλθῃ θάνατος, οὐδεὶς βούλεται/ θνήσκεν, τὸ γῆρας δ’ οὐκέτ’ ἔστ’ αὐτοῖς βαρύν.”

ἀβίωτος).²⁰⁵⁴ We may be no more than a νεκρὸς ἔμψυχος, as Sophocles says.²⁰⁵⁵ We may desire to die or deem it best.²⁰⁵⁶ This stems from the fact that we do not simply want to live. We want a desirable life (ἱμερόεις βίος, ποθεινὸς βίος, ἀγαστὸς βίος).²⁰⁵⁷ We want to benefit from life or enjoy it (ὄνησις τοῦ βίου).²⁰⁵⁸ We are always marked by a concern with our life (τοῦ βίου κήδεσθαι), and this means that we are always appraising what happens and what we expect to happen, and such an appraisal provides us with an essential predicate of life.²⁰⁵⁹ We may also try to intervene. We may take many pains (πόννοι) to improve our live and we may exercise ourselves or train (ἀσκεῖν) to live in a certain way.²⁰⁶⁰ At any rate, the value of life fluctuates. It can improve or deteriorate, according to what we go through. There are indeed different factors that may determine it – such as what we have, what we do, and the others we come in contact with.²⁰⁶¹ But now we must consider how the assessment of one’s life is expressed in the texts we are dealing with.

We find many value predicates in these texts and they can be organized in two poles – a positive pole, that expresses the desirability of life, and a negative one, that expresses how life can become unbearable. Several of these predicates have a formal character and do not specify what renders a life good or bad, while other reveal a particular criterion according to which one appraises one’s life. These criteria are fundamentally of two sorts (which actually correspond to two of the soul’s drives identified by Plato). Some predicates appeal to what we feel and other predicates appeal to the way one is seen and valued by others. To be sure, the boundaries between the general and the specific appraisals of life may sometimes be blurry. Yet, their diversity allows us to understand something important, to which we will return later – namely, that we may have different sensitivities in life.

²⁰⁵⁴For the use of these and equivalent expressions, see e.g. HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 3.109, SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, 566, EURIPIDES, *Alceste*, 242, *Hercules*, 1257, *Ion* 670, *Hippolytus*, 821, ARISTOPHANES, *Plutus*, 969, HIPPOCRATES, *De dieta*, 82, GORGAS, DK B11a (20)

²⁰⁵⁵ See *Antigone*, 1165-1167: “τὰς γὰρ ἡδονὰς/ ὅταν προδῶσιν ἄνδρες, οὐ τίθημι’ ἐγὼ/ ζῆν τοῦτον, ἀλλ’ ἔμψυχον ἡγοῦμαι νεκρόν.”

²⁰⁵⁶ See e.g. MIMNERMUS, fr. 1 (West), vv. 1-9, fr. 2, vv. 9-11, AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 1314.

²⁰⁵⁷ See, respectively, H. BECKBY (ed.), *Anthologia Graeca*, vol. 1, München, Heimeran, 1965² (1957¹) 6.346 (attributed to Anacreon), SIMONIDES, fr. 79 (Page), EURIPIDES, *Hecuba*, 168-169.

²⁰⁵⁸ See H. BECKBY (ed.), *op. cit.*, 7.516 (attributed to Simonides), and EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 254.

²⁰⁵⁹ For the expression τοῦ βίου κήδεσθαι, cp. SOPHOCLES, *Electra*, 1327, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1061.

²⁰⁶⁰ Cp. e.g. EURIPIDES, *Orestes*, 922, and fr. 201.

²⁰⁶¹ The last aspect is particularly important. The presence or absence of others in our life may be decisive. See e.g. HOMER, *Odyssey*, V.394-399, VIII.464-468, XVIII.254-256, HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, 397-400, SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, 566. For others as cause of destruction of one’s βίος, see e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 1453-1454.

Let us then start with the more formal attributes – which for the most part we have already discussed before. Life can be qualified as good or bad.²⁰⁶² It can also be said to be happy or wretched.²⁰⁶³ Similarly, it can be enviable or not.²⁰⁶⁴ Sometimes we even find some general images of this. Life can be full of light or darkness.²⁰⁶⁵ It may also be marked by singing or wailing and tears.²⁰⁶⁶ In general, it can be loved or hated.²⁰⁶⁷ Finally, we may include here the contrast between a fortunate (εὐτυχής) or unfortunate (δυστυχής) life, which expresses how we are normally exposed to what happens to us.²⁰⁶⁸

As was said, all these characterizations are neutral about what defines the quality of one's life. But there are other characterizations of life that place the emphasis on one's subjective or emotional experience. These characterizations do not necessarily imply that one is only concerned with what one feels, especially because one's feelings are usually a reaction to what is happening in one's life. However, one still focus on how events make one feel. For instance, life can be said to be sweet or bitter.²⁰⁶⁹ It can also be pleasurable or painful.²⁰⁷⁰ One can say that there is no delight or gratification (χάρις) in one's life or that life has nothing pleasant (τέρπνον) in it.²⁰⁷¹ Mimnermus in particular stresses that life is no life without the pleasures of Aphrodite.²⁰⁷² One can also say life is not desirable without pleasures.²⁰⁷³ Enjoying (ἀπολαύσαι or εὐφραίνειν) life is indeed important for us.²⁰⁷⁴ It is also important to have a life without suffering or harm.²⁰⁷⁵

²⁰⁶² Cp. e.g. HOMER, *Odyssey*, XV.491 (ἀγαθὸς βίος), THEOGNIS, *Elegiae*, 1.303-304 (*idem*), SEMONIDES, fr. 13 (West – κάκιστος βίος), AESCHYLUS, fr. 90 (Radt – πονηρὸς βίος), SOPHOCLES, *Electra*, 599 (βίος μοχθηρός).

²⁰⁶³ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Persae*, 711 (εὐδαίων βίος), EURIPIDES, *Bacchae*, 910-911 (βίος εὐδαίμων), EURIPIDES, *Orestes*, 1659 (εὐδαίμων βίος), ARISTOPHANES, *Plutus*, 555 (μακαρίτης βίος). We find the expression ἄλιος βίος in passages such as EURIPIDES, *Heraclidae*, 878, *Andromacha*, 408 or *Phoenisae*, 1454. See also EURIPIDES, *Hecuba*, 198 (δύστανος βίος) and *Supplices*, 960 (δυσαίων βίος).

²⁰⁶⁴ See SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 284 (ἄζηλος βίος) and ARISTOPHANES, *Nubes*, 464 (ζηλωτότατος βίος).

²⁰⁶⁵ See e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Coloneus* (τὸν βίον λαμπρὸν ποιῆσθαι).

²⁰⁶⁶ Aeschylus, for instance, says that an Erinys gives songs to some and a life dim with tears to others (τοῖς μὲν αἰοιδάς, τοῖς δ' αὖ δακρύων βίον ἀμπλωπὸν παρέχουσαι – see *Eumenides*, 950-955). See also SOPHOCLES, *Philoctetes*, 689-690 (πανδάκρυτος βιοτά) and EURIPIDES, *Hecuba*, 457 (οἰκτρὰ βιοτά), *Orestes*, 201-207.

²⁰⁶⁷ See once more SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 611-612 and EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 147 (στυγερὰ βιοτά).

²⁰⁶⁸ See e.g. HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 1.32 (τοῖς μὲν αἰοιδάς, τοῖς δ' αὖ δακρύων βίον ἀμβλωπὸν παρέχουσαι), and EURIPIDES, *Phoenisae*, 1582-1583 (εὐτυχέστερος βίος). The expression δυστυχής βίος appears in SOPHOCLES, *Electra*, 602, and EURIPIDES, *Iphigenia Taurica*, 851.

²⁰⁶⁹ See PINDAR, *Pythia* 2.26 (γλυκὺς βίος), and SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1487 (πικρὸς βίος). See also ANACREON, fr. 50 (Page), and EURIPIDES, fr. 23.

²⁰⁷⁰ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Medea*, 1355 (τερπνὸς βίος), ARISTOPHANES, *Nubes*, 43 (ἥδιστος βίος), EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 940 (λυπρὸς βίος).

²⁰⁷¹ See e.g. ARISTOPHANES, *Lysistrata*, 865-866: “ὡς σὺδεμίαν ἔχω γε τῷ βίῳ χάριν./ ἐξ οὐ̄περ αὐ̄τη ‘ξῆλθεν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας (...).” See also EURIPIDES, *Cyclops*, 522, *Alcestis*, 347, *Medea*, 226-227, *Hippolytus*, 1408. In this context, it is also relevant to mention *Hecuba*, 168-169: “οὐ̄κέτι μοι βίος/ ἀγαστὸς ἐν φάει.”

²⁰⁷² See MIMNERMUS, fr. 1, v. 1: “τίς δὲ βίος, τί δὲ τερπνὸν ἄτερ χρυσῆς Ἀφροδίτης;”

²⁰⁷³ See SIMONIDES, fr. 78 (Page): “ἡμερόφων’ ἀλέκτωρ/ τίς γὰρ ἄδονᾶς ἄτερ θνα/τῶν βίος ποθεινὸς ἢ ποί/α τυραννίς;/ τᾶσδ’ ἄτερ οὐ̄δὲ θεῶν ζηλωτὸς αἰών.”

Other characterizations concern the way one is seen by others and also one's own worth. One may lead a glorious (εὐκλεής), irreproachable (ἀνεπίληκτος) or admirable (περίβλεπτος, καλός) life.²⁰⁷⁶ This all depends on whether or not one fulfils one's duties and does what one should.²⁰⁷⁷ In any case, one must disregard one's feelings and one's immediate self-interest. It may even come to the point where one must sacrifice one's life in order to be excellent.²⁰⁷⁸

These predicates thus correspond to two different kinds of concern and two different ways of seeing life. This is a fundamental difference in Greek culture, and it outlines two very different ways of life, as we will see in section f).

e) The portraits of human life in general. The frailty of human life and the possible solutions

After focusing on the different characterizations of particular lives, it is now important to consider how Greek authors try to describe features common to all human lives. In other words, they try to portrait what characterizes human life as such. The term βίος is indeed often used in passages where someone is reflecting about our common condition and trying to determine it. This reflection often takes place in a context of tension or distress, and the portraits painted tend therefore to be gloomy. Human life is mostly seen as frail and finite.²⁰⁷⁹ But at the same time, the authors also try to find solutions to our limitations. This is what we must now consider. We will try to combine the main lines of the different passages, in order to draw something like a general portrait of human life.

²⁰⁷⁴ See e.g. THUCYDIDES, *Historiae*, 2.53.4 (τοῦ βίου τι ἀπολαῦσαι), SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Coloneus*, 1353-1354 (εὐφρανεῖν βίον), EURIPIDES, *Ion*, 1374-1477 (τρυφῆσαι καί τι τερφθῆναι βίου), *Cyclops*, 451-453 (βίον ἡδέως ἄγειν), and *Medea*, 1354-1356 (τερπνὸν διάξειν βίον).

²⁰⁷⁵ Such a life can be designated in different ways. See e.g. PINDAR, *Olympian* 8.87 (ἀπήμαντος βίος), SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 168 (ἀλύπητος βίος), *Electra*, 650 (ἀβλαβῆς βίος), EURIPIDES, *Bacchae*, 1004 (ἄλυπος βίος). In Euripides, *Medea* refuses a λυπρὸς εὐδαίμων βίος (see *Medea* 598-599). See also AISCHYLUS, fr. 29 (Radt): “τί γὰρ καλὸν ζῆν βίο<το>ν ὃς λύπας φέρει.” Cp. also PINDAR, *Olympia* 2.62-63 (ἀπονέστερος βίος) and SOPHOCLES, *Trachiniae*, 147 (ἡδοναῖς ἄμοχθον ἐξαίρει βίον).

²⁰⁷⁶ See SOPHOCLES, *Electra*, 393 (καλὸς βίος), EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 623 (εὐκλεέστερος βίος), *Medea*, 810 (εὐκλεέστατος βίος), *Hippolytus*, 717 (εὐκλεῆς βίος), *Hercules* 1369-1370 (βίου εὐκλειαν), *Andromaca*, 89-90 (περίβλεπτος βίος), *Orestes*, 922 (ἀνεπίληκτος βίος). On this topic, cp. also PINDAR, *Olympia* 1.97-100: “(...) ὁ νικῶν δὲ λοιπὸν ἀμφὶ βίον/ ἔχει μελιτέσσαρ εὐδία/ ἀέθλων γ' ἔνεκεν. τὸ δ' αἰεὶ παράμερον ἐσλὸν/ ὕπατον ἔρχεται παντὶ βροτῶν.”

²⁰⁷⁷ Cp. e.g. HOMER, *Iliad* IV.168-175, AESCHYLUS, *Septem contra Thebas*, 698-699, GORGIAS, DK B11a(29).

²⁰⁷⁸ Cp. e.g. HOMER, *Iliad*, XV.511-514, TYRTAEUS, fr. 40 (West), AESCHYLUS, fr. 90, SOPHOCLES, fr. 952.

²⁰⁷⁹ This corresponds to the traditional sense of ἄνθρωπος, which we considered above. See the introductory remarks to this Part III.

Let us start with the diagnosis of our limitations. First of all, authors may emphasize the need for means of sustenance. Our survival is not guaranteed and, as Hesiod says, the gods have hidden our βίος (i.e., our means of sustenance) from us – otherwise we would work just one day and be workless (ἀεργοί) the rest of the year.²⁰⁸⁰ We must therefore work hard for our survival and even when we acquired a βίος in this sense, we still stand in risk of losing it.²⁰⁸¹ Authors also stress the risks one may undertake to guarantee one's βίος. Sailing in particular is frequently associated with the idea of running serious risks.²⁰⁸² But this is far from being the only risky endeavor. Solon says that there is danger in all works or undertakings (ἔργματα), because when we start them, we do not know what will come of them.²⁰⁸³

Indeed, life often does not follow the course we want and it does not seem to be in our hands. We do not know what will happen.²⁰⁸⁴ Pindar even says that we cannot know when we are to have a tranquil day.²⁰⁸⁵ We are exposed to fortune (τύχη) and suffer many unexpected misfortunes (συμφοραί).²⁰⁸⁶ We do not know our destiny (μοῖρα, αἴσα). We do not know if it brings something good or bad, as Solon says.²⁰⁸⁷ A god or a δαίμων may move things against us.²⁰⁸⁸ As Archilochus says, the gods set things aright or turn them upside down, which causes us to roam about and disturbs our mind.²⁰⁸⁹ In fact, everything we attain is still precarious. Life may seem to go well, but only in the end can we pronounce someone happy

²⁰⁸⁰ See *Opera et dies*, 42-46: “κρύψαντες γὰρ ἔχουσι θεοὶ βίον ἀνθρώποισιν·/ ρηϊδίως γὰρ κεν καὶ ἐπ’ ἡματι ἐργάσαιο./ ὥστε σε κείς ἐνιαυτὸν ἔχειν καὶ ἀεργὸν ἐόντα·/ αἰψὰ κε πηδάλιον μὲν ὑπὲρ καπνοῦ καταθεῖο./ ἔργα βοῶν δ’ ἀπόλοιτο καὶ ἡμιόνων ταλαεργῶν.”

²⁰⁸¹ We see this in the *Odyssey*, where the suitors are permanently consuming the βίος (i.e., the substance) of Odysseus' family. See e.g. I.160, I.377, XIII.396, XVII.378. Cp. also ARISTOPHANES, *Nubes*, 837-838: “(...) σὺ δὲ/ ὡσπερ τεθνεῶτος καταλόει μου τὸν βίον.”

²⁰⁸² See e.g. HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, 682-690. Likewise, Bias is supposed to have said: “ὁ πλωτικὸς μήτε ἐν τοῖς τεθνηκόσιν ἐστί, μήτ’ ἐν τοῖς βιοῦσι.” See SEPTEM SAPIENTES, *Sententiae et apophthegmata*, in: F. MULLACH (ed.), *Fragmenta philosophorum graecorum*, vol. 1, Paris, Didot, 1860, 230.

²⁰⁸³ See fr. 13 (West), vv. 63-76, and especially 63-66: “Μοῖρα δὲ τοι θνητοῖσι κακὸν φέρει ἡδὲ καὶ ἐσθλόν./ δῶρα δ’ ἄφουκα θεῶν γίγνεται ἀθανάτων./ πᾶσι δὲ τοι κίνδυνος ἐπ’ ἔργμασιν, οὐδὲ τις οἶδεν/ πῆι μέλλει σχήσειν χρήματος ἀρχομένου (...).”

²⁰⁸⁴ Cp. HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 1.32: “Σκοπέειν δὲ χρή παντὸς χρήματος τὴν τελευτὴν κῆ ἀποβήσεται (...).” Cp. also EURIPIDES, fr. 304 (Nauck).

²⁰⁸⁵ See PINDAR, *Olympia* 2.30-34: “ἦτοι βροτῶν γε κέκριται/ πείρας οὐ τι θανάτου./ οὐδ’ ἡσύχιμον ἀμέραν ὀπότε, παῖδ’ ἀλίου./ ἀτειρεῖ σὺν ἀγαθῷ τελευτάσομεν· ῥοαὶ δ’ ἄλλοτ’ ἄλλαι/ εὐθυμῖαν τε μετὰ καὶ πόνων ἐς ἄνδρας ἔβαν.”

²⁰⁸⁶ See in particular SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, 1155-1160, EURIPIDES, *Ion*, 381-383.

²⁰⁸⁷ See once more fr. 13 (West), vv. 63-66. See also EURIPIDES, *Ifigenia Taurensis*, 912-914. In fact, we do not even know whether it is our destiny to live or die at any given moment. See e.g. HOMER, *Odyssey*, XIV.359: “(...) ἔτι γὰρ νύ μοι αἴσα βιῶναι.” Cp. also PINDAR, *Pythia* 6.27, where we find the notion of allotted lifetime (βίος πεπρωμένος).

²⁰⁸⁸ See e.g. HOMER, *Odyssey*, XVIII.256: “νῦν δ’ ἄχομαι· τόσα γὰρ μοι ἐπέσσευεν κακὰ δαίμων.”

²⁰⁸⁹ See fr. 130 (West): “τοῖς θεοῖς τ’ εἰθειάπαντα· πολλάκις μὲν ἐκ κακῶν/ ἄνδρας ὀρθοῦσιν μελαίνῃ κειμένους ἐπὶ χθονί./ πολλάκις δ’ ἀνατρέπουσι καὶ μάλ’ εὖ βεβηκότας/ ὑπτίους, κείνοις <δ’> ἔπειτα πολλὰ γίνεται κακά./ καὶ βίου χρήμηι πλανᾶται καὶ νόου παρήγορος.”

(ὄλβιος).²⁰⁹⁰ Until then, one can only be considered fortunate (εὐτυχής), as is said in Herodotus.²⁰⁹¹ Our future may indeed hold many evils in stock and in that case dying beforehand may be considered enviable (as in the case of Darius, according to Aeschylus' *Persians*).²⁰⁹²

But this refers to another constitutive problem of human life. Regardless of how fortunate or unfortunate we are, we always have to deal with death. Human life is too short and it soon ends.²⁰⁹³ In fact, it may end at any time. We do not know when we will die – and we do not understand the imminent danger we are often in.²⁰⁹⁴ If, however, we happen to escape death for a long time, we will have other problems. We will have to face old age and all the evils it brings.²⁰⁹⁵ Moreover, we also have to deal with the death of others around us, and this may even cause the meaning of our life to collapse.²⁰⁹⁶

Human life is thus very frail. However, we tend to forget all this.²⁰⁹⁷ We are usually full of expectations (ἐλπίδες), commit daring acts and act insolently.²⁰⁹⁸ This easily brings about further disasters and disappointments. Indeed, we all have to face many hardships and no one seems to escape them.²⁰⁹⁹ Consequently, we are often concerned or anxious.²¹⁰⁰ Sometimes we cannot even find any joy in life, and it seems to lack all meaning.²¹⁰¹ Life then becomes a burden too heavy to bear. It seems too long and is no longer dear.²¹⁰² We will thus desire to die or even not having been born at all.

²⁰⁹⁰ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Agamemnon*, 928-929, SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1524-1530, *Oedipus Coloneus*, 1720-1723, fr. 646-647, HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 1.30-33.

²⁰⁹¹ See HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 1.32: “πρὶν δ’ ἂν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν μὴδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον, ἀλλ’ εὐτυχέα.” Cp. also EURIPIDES, fr. 198.

²⁰⁹² See AESCHYLUS, *Persae*, 709-712.

²⁰⁹³ SEE SOPHOCLES, fr. 572 (Radt), HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 7.46, EMPEDOCLES, DK B2, PROTAGORAS, DK B4. In any case, we have an allotted time.

²⁰⁹⁴ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 782-786: “βροτοῖς ἅπασι καταθανεῖν ὀφείλεται, / κούκ ἔστι θνητῶν ὅστις ἐξεπίσταται / τὴν αὔριον μέλλουσαν εἰ βιώσεται / τὸ τῆς τύχης γὰρ ἀφανὲς οἱ προβήσεται, / κάστ’ οὐ διδακτὸν οὐδ’ ἀλίσκεται τέχνη.” See also THEOGNIS, *Elegiae*, 1.905-906.

²⁰⁹⁵ See e.g. MIMNERMUS, fr. 1 and 2 (West).

²⁰⁹⁶ Cp. the references in footnote 2061.

²⁰⁹⁷ For instance, in many cases we act as if we were to live forever, as Democritus says of thrifty people. Cp. DEMOCRITUS, DK B227.

²⁰⁹⁸ See e.g. PINDAR, *Olympia* 1.54-64: “εἰ δὲ δὴ τιν’ ἄνδρα θνατὸν Ὀλύμπου σκοποῖ / ἐτίμασαν, ἦν Τάνταλος οὗτος· ἀλλ’ ἄνδρα καταπέσαι / μέγαν ὄλβον οὐκ ἐδυνάσθη, κόρφω δ’ ἔλεν / ἄταν ὑπέροπλον, ἂν οἱ πατὴρ ὑπερ / κρέμασε καρτερόν αὐτῷ λίθον, / τὸν αἰεὶ μενοινῶν κεφαλᾶς βαλεῖν εὐφροσύνας ἀλάται, / ἔχει δ’ ἀπάλαμον βίον τοῦτον ἐμπεδόμοχθον, / μετὰ τριῶν τέταρτον πόνον, ἀθανάταν ὅτι κλέψαι / ἀλίκεσσι συμπόταις / νέκταρ ἀμβροσίαν τε / δῶκεν, οἷσιν ἄφθιτον / θέν νιν. εἰ δὲ θεὸν ἀνὴρ τις ἔλπειται / τι λαθέμεν ἔρδων, ἀμαρτάνει.”

²⁰⁹⁹ Cp. e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Choephoroe*, 1018-1020, EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 189-190, fr. 196.

²¹⁰⁰ See PINDAR, *Pythia* 8.88-96: “ὁ δὲ καλόν τι νέον λαχῶν / ἀβρότατος ἐπι μεγάλας / ἐξ ἐλπίδος πέταται / ὑποπτέροις ἀνορέαις, ἔχων / κρέσσονα πλούτου μέριμναν. ἐν δ’ ὀλίγῳ βροτῶν / τὸ τερπνὸν αὔξεται· οὕτω δὲ καὶ πίτνει χαμαί, / ἀποτρόπῳ γνώμα σεσεισμένον, / ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις; τί δ’ οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ / ἄνθρωπος.”

²¹⁰¹ See e.g. MIMNERMUS, fr. 1, v. 1, AESCHYLUS, fr. 177 (Radt).

²¹⁰² See e.g. HESIOD, fr. 276 (Merkelbach & West), MIMNERMUS, fr. 1, vv. 5-10, AESCHYLUS, *Persae*, 263-265, HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, 7.46.

But the texts do not only show the difficulties of life. They also recommend possible solutions for these problems, which in turn may have their own limitations. We will now briefly consider these solutions and their limitations, and this will allow us to better understand the pre-Platonic understanding of life.

First of all, some texts value work and painstaking (ἔργον, πόνος) as a form of ensuring our survival and also a safe life.²¹⁰³ This is opposed to laziness and dishonesty. However, it is also recognized in other passages that one's efforts may be in vain.²¹⁰⁴

One may also endeavor to attain ἀρετή and glory, in order to give meaning to life.²¹⁰⁵ One will then have value and be acknowledged by others. This also requires great effort.²¹⁰⁶ But even if one is admired by others, one will still have to face old age and death.

Other texts stress the importance of justice (δίκη) and being just.²¹⁰⁷ This prevents conflicts and even divine anger. It makes social life possible and will perhaps lead to a divine reward. Some texts indeed assume our life may continue after death and we may be rewarded.²¹⁰⁸ However, there are also passages that state that justice does not guarantee a good life.²¹⁰⁹ Other passages stress that there is no other life or that we do not know how that life will be.²¹¹⁰

We may therefore have to focus on this life, and in order to overcome its limitations one may try to develop τέχνη. There are indeed several praises of τέχνη that highlight how it can improve human life.²¹¹¹ Initially, human beings did not know how things were constituted, they could not discern them, and could not control nature.²¹¹² It was the development of τέχνη that changed that. However, τέχνη do not guarantee a full control of life.

²¹⁰³ See e.g. HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, 287ff., 493ff., 574-577.

²¹⁰⁴ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Hercules*, 501-505, *Hippolytus*, 467.

²¹⁰⁵ See in particular PINDAR, *Olympian* 1.97-100: “ὁ νικῶν δὲ λοιπὸν ἀμφὶ βίον/ ἔχει μελιτόεσσαν εὐδίαν/ ἀέθλων γ’ ἔνεκεν. τὸ δ’ αἰεὶ παράμερον ἐσλὸν/ ὑπατον ἔρχεται παντὶ βροτῶν.” See also TYRTAEUS, fr. 40 (West), EURIPIDES, *Ifigenia Aulidensis*, 566-567, fr. 994.

²¹⁰⁶ See e.g. EURIPIDES, fr. 238, 1052.

²¹⁰⁷ See HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, 225ff., PINDAR, *Olympian* 2.51ff., AESCHYLUS, *Eumenides*, 517ff., EURIPIDES, *Electra*, 953-958.

²¹⁰⁸ See in particular PINDAR, *Olympia* 2.58ff.

²¹⁰⁹ See e.g. ARISTOPHANES, *Plutus*, 500-506.

²¹¹⁰ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 1080-1086, *Hippolytus*, 193-197.

²¹¹¹ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Prometheus vincetus*, 442 ff., EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 195ff. For more on these praises of τέχνη (or σοφία), cp. Chap. 1, Sect. 2.2 above.

²¹¹² See in particular AESCHYLUS, *Prometheus vincetus*, 445-450: “λέξω δέ, μέμψιν οὐτὶν’ ἀνθρώποις ἔχων./ ἀλλ’ ὦν δέδωκ’ εὖνοιαν ἐξηγοῦμενος-/ οἱ πρῶτα μὲν βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην./ κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον, ἀλλ’ ὄνειράτων/ ἀλίγκιοι μορφαῖσι τὸν μακρὸν βίον/ ἔφυρον εἰκῆ πάντα (...).” See also ARISTOPHANES, *Aves*, 685-692.

Τέχνη require a very long effort to be constituted and life is too short.²¹¹³ Moreover, τέχνη is still powerless against death.²¹¹⁴ Thus, it does not seem able to fully solve our problems.

Some passages thus advise us to moderate our desires, control our expectations (ἐλπίδες) and avoid excesses (μηδὲν ἄγαν).²¹¹⁵ We are mortal and we should entertain mortal thoughts (θνητὰ φρονεῖν).²¹¹⁶ We must accept we cannot have all happiness (εὐδαιμονία πᾶσα).²¹¹⁷ We should be satisfied with less. But can we really control our expectations and be satisfied with less? We may always aim at a superlative good, as we saw.²¹¹⁸ This means that any attempt to reduce our expectations would also render life too disappointing and too depressing. This is perhaps one of the main reasons some authors emphasize the importance of hope. It can sustain or console us.²¹¹⁹ It may even make us confident or glad.²¹²⁰ It is true that it can be deceptive and destructive.²¹²¹ But it may also render life bearable. It may indeed be better not to know our own situation. We find such an idea in Sophocles' *Ajax*, when ignorance is praised.²¹²² In some cases, though, it may be impossible to repress our desire to know, as we see in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.²¹²³ Life itself may force a revelation of its tragic character.

This is in very broad terms the map of possibilities we find in pre-Platonic thinking about βίος, and it determines many of Plato's own discussions. But before returning to Plato, there still one last question we must consider.

²¹¹³ See HIPPOCRATES, *Aphorismi*, 1: “Ὁ βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ (...).”

²¹¹⁴ See e.g. SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, 361-363, EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 782-786.

²¹¹⁵ See e.g. PINDAR, *Pythia* 2.21-52; *Pythia* 3.61-62; EURIPIDES, *Supplices*, 951-954; *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, 920-925; *Bacchae*, 907-911; fr. 893; DEMOCRITUS, DK B246, 285.

²¹¹⁶ On θνητὰ φρονεῖν, see e.g. EURIPIDES, *Alcestis*, 787-802, *Bacchae*, 386-401.

²¹¹⁷ See e.g. PINDAR, *Nemea* 7.54-58: “φυᾶ δ' ἕκαστος διαφέρομεν βιοτῶν λαχόντες./ ὁ μὲν τά, τὰ δ' ἄλλοι τυχεῖν δ' ἐν' ἀδύνατον/ εὐδαιμονίαν ἅπασαν ἀνελόμενον· οὐκ ἔχω/ εἰπεῖν, τίτι τοῦτο Μοῖρα τέλος ἐμπεδον/ ὄρεξε.”

²¹¹⁸ See Chap. 12, Sect. 4. On this topic, cp. e.g. SOLON, fr. 13 (West), vv. 71-73: “πλοῦτου δ' οὐδὲν τέρμα πεφασμένον ἀνδράσι κεῖται· οἱ γὰρ νῦν ἡμ<έω>ν πλεῖστον ἔχουσι βίον./ διπλάσιον σπεύδουσι· τίς ἂν κορέσειεν ἅπαντας;”

²¹¹⁹ See e.g. PINDAR, *Isthmia* 8.11-15a: “ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ δεῖμα μὲν παροιχόμενον/ καρτερὰν ἔπαυσε μέριμναν· τὸ δὲ πρὸ ποδῶς/ ἄρειον αἰεὶ βλέπειν/ χρῆμα πᾶν· δόλιος γὰρ αἰὼν ἐπ' ἀνδράσι κρέματα./ ἐλίσιων βίου πόρον· ἰατὰ δ' ἔστι βροτοῖς σὺν γ' ἐλευθερίᾳ/ καὶ τά· χρῆ δ' ἀγαθὰν ἐλπίδ' ἀνδρὶ μέλειν.”

²¹²⁰ See e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Prometheus vinculus*, 537-541: “ἠδὲ τι θαρσαλέαις/ τὸν μακρὸν τείνειν βίον ἐλπίσι, φανᾶις/ θυμὸν ἀλδαίνουσαν ἐν εὐφροσύναις (...).”

²¹²¹ See e.g. PINDAR, *Pythia* 8.73-96, SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, 613-630, EURIPIDES, *Bacchae*, 902-910.

²¹²² See SOPHOCLES, *Ajax*, 552-555: “καίτοι σε καὶ νῦν τοῦτο γε ζηλοῦν ἔχω./ ὀθούνεκ' οὐδὲν τῶνδ' ἐπαισθάνει κακῶν./ ἐν τῷ φρονεῖν γὰρ μηδὲν ἡδιστος βίος./ ἕως τὸ χαίρειν καὶ τὸ λυπεῖσθαι μάθης.”

²¹²³ See in particular vv. 1056-1068: “[IO.] τί δ' ὄντιν' εἶπε; μηδὲν ἐντραπῆς· τὰ δὲ/ ῥηθέντα βούλου μηδὲ μεμῆσθαι μάτην./ [OI.] οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τοῦθ' ὅπως ἐγὼ λαβῶν/ σημεῖα τοιαῦτ' οὐ φανῶ τοῦμὸν γένος. [IO.] μὴ πρὸς θεῶν, εἴπερ τι τοῦ σαυτοῦ βίου/ κήδει, ματεύσης τοῦθ'· ἄλις νοσοῦσ' ἐγώ. [OI.] θάρσει· σὺ μὲν γὰρ οὐδ' ἐὰν τρίτης ἐγὼ/ μητρὸς φανῶ τρίδουλος, ἐκφανεῖ κακῆ./ [IO.] ὅμως πιθοῦ μοι, λίσσομαι· μὴ δρᾶ τάδε./ [OI.] οὐκ ἂν πιθοίμην μὴ οὐ τὰδ' ἐκμαθεῖν σαφῶς./ [IO.] καὶ μὴν φρονοῦσά γ' εὖ τὰ λῶστά σοι λέγω./ [OI.] τὰ λῶστα τοῖνυν ταῦτά μ' ἀλγύνει πάλαι. [IO.] ὃ δύσποτμ', εἴθε μήποτε γνοίης ὅς εἴ.”

f) The main alternatives in life and the choice of life

We saw that pre-Platonic literature speaks about βίος in different ways. It outlines general traits of all human life, but it also identifies many distinguishing features of particular βίοι. This tension between the general structure of life and its particular configurations is very important. We need to understand what life in general is in order to guide ourselves in it. This is particularly visible in the last group of passages we considered. Life is difficult, but we may try to intervene. Such a possibility then raises several questions: namely, what are our main options, which one should we choose and how free are we to choose it? We must now briefly consider how these questions are treated in pre-Platonic literature. In particular, we must see what is said about the choice of life (βίου ἀρεσις) and in what terms it is conceived.²¹²⁴

But first of all, it is important to reconsider the fact that there can be different βίοι, and not only because we may be more or less successful in life (and thus our life can have more or less value for us). As we saw, there are many different livelihoods and we may also have many different characters or ways of being.²¹²⁵ This is not necessarily conceived as something we choose. Nevertheless, it expresses the fact that life can have many different contents and we may relate to it in different ways. This is not just determined by one's circumstances, but also by our sensitivity – especially by what we regard as most important in life. In fact, the idea of what one values most in life is expressly stated in several passages – usually through metaphors. Pindar uses the idea of light to express what is meaningful in life.²¹²⁶ Euripides, in turn, speaks of the most precious thing as the eye of life (ὄφθαλμὸς βίου), the greatest treasure in life (μέγιστον ἐν βίῳι κειμήλιον), or its leader (προστάτης τοῦ βίου).²¹²⁷ This is also intrinsically connected with particular cultural practices, such as the questions about who is happy (or the happiest) or the μακαρισμοί which proclaimed a certain kind of life or a certain kind of person as happy.²¹²⁸ In the questions and proclamations, a certain good was identified as the most important and this identification was

²¹²⁴ The expression βίου ἀρεσις (used in Plato and Aristotle) is not frequently used during this period, but still we find it in EURIPIDES, *Andromacha*, 384-385.

²¹²⁵ See Sect. c) above.

²¹²⁶ See *Olympia* X, 22-23 (βίῳι φάος).

²¹²⁷ See *Andromacha*, 406; *Rhesus*, 654; *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, 449.

²¹²⁸ See e.g. ALCMAN, fr. 1 (Page), vv. 37-39, EURIPIDES, *Bacchae*, 73-82. For the questions about who is happy (which were just one of the many questions about positive predicates that were used as tests of wisdom), see e.g. K. OHLERT, *Rätsel und Rätselspiele der alten Griechen*, Berlin, Mayer & Müller, 1912. On the topic of μακαρισμοί, see e.g. G. DIRICHLET, *De veterum macarismis*, Gießen, Töpelmann, 1914; B. GLADIGOW, *Zum Makarismos des Weisen*, *Hermes* 95 (1967), 404-433.

an expression of a particular sensitivity. The idea of different sensitivities and different interests in life was also a central part of the priamels, as we considered above.²¹²⁹ Whether or not they refer to something as a superlative good or as the κάλλιστον πάντων, priamels contrast many perspectives about what is desirable in life. In some cases, they seem to accept a diversity of that sort, while in others they argue in favor of a particular good being superior to all others. But, at any rate, they recognize that people pursue many different things, such as pleasure, beauty, health, wealth, glory, ἄρετή, and so on. These different preferences then correspond to different βίαι.²¹³⁰

This is not all. Many other passages (some of which mentioned in the previous section) oppose different possibilities of life and apparently try to convince us to live in a certain way. These passages (which do not necessarily mention the word βίος) tend not to be exhaustive or systematic, but at any rate they anticipate the Platonic (and Aristotelian) doctrine of the “choice” of life, and are therefore relevant for us. We will not consider all relevant passages here, but a few general considerations will help us prepare what follows.²¹³¹

We find one important antecedent of the choice of life in Homer: namely, the dilemmas. Characters are sometimes confronted with two very different destinies and they must choose between them, thus determining their whole life. The most famous case is Achilles’ choice in *Iliad* between a glorious but short life, or a long and ordinary life.²¹³² Ulysses himself must choose between staying with Calypso (who offers him an immortal life, full of beauty and ease) or returning home to Penelope, which implies great sufferings.²¹³³ Moreover, Homer also makes a reference to Paris’ judgment, which may also be interpreted as a choice of life (insofar as each goddess embodies different values and a different course of life).²¹³⁴ Later we find a similar idea of choosing between goddesses (and shaping one’s

²¹²⁹ See Chap. 12, Sect. 4.1.

²¹³⁰ This becomes particularly clear in EURIPIDES, fr. 659, which connects this diversity with the notion of βίος. Euripides says: “ἔρωτες ἡμῖν εἰσὶ παντοῖοι βίου· ὁ μὲν γὰρ εὐγένειαν ἱμείρει λαβεῖν, / τῷ δ’ οὐχὶ τούτου φροντίς, ἀλλὰ χρημάτων / πολλῶν κεκληῖσθαι βούλεται πάτωρ δόμοι· / ἄλλω δ’ ἀρέσκει μηδὲν ὑγιᾶς ἐκ φρενῶν / λέγοντι πείθειν τοὺς πέλας τόλμη κακῆ· / οἱ δ’ αἰσχρὰ κέρδη πρόσθε τοῦ καλοῦ βροτῶν / ζητοῦσιν· οὕτω βίος ἀνθρώπων πλάνη· / ἐγὼ δὲ τούτων οὐδενὸς χρήζω τυχεῖν· / δόξαν <δὲ> βουλοίμην ἂν εὐκλείας ἔχειν.”

²¹³¹ For more on the topic, see e.g. N. TERZAGHI, La scelta della vita, *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 1 (1920), 364-400; R. JOLY, *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l’antiquité classique*, Bruxelles, Palais des Académies, 1956; A. FESTUGIÈRE, Les trois vies, in: IDEM, *Études de philosophie grecque*, Paris, Vrin, 1971, 117-156; J. RUSTEN, Two Lives or Three? Pericles on the Athenian Character, *The Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985), 14-19; A. HARBACH, *Die Wahl des Lebens in der antiken Literatur*, Heidelberg, Winter, 2010.

²¹³² See *Iliad* IX.410-416. As we saw, Socrates himself refers to this alternative in the *Apology* (see Chap. 2 Sect. 2.2).

²¹³³ See *Odyssey*, V.203-224.

²¹³⁴ See *Iliad*, XXIV.25-30.

life accordingly) at the opening of Euripides' *Hippolytus*.²¹³⁵ The alternatives presented correspond to very different βίαι and the choice has therefore very serious consequences in one's life.

In addition to the dilemma and the contest between divinities, the idea of choice of life may also be expressed using the image of a juncture or crossroads (τρίοδος). A juncture represents a decisive moment where one must decide one's path, and it can thus be used as a metaphor for a decisive choice or a turning-point in life.²¹³⁶ Hesiod seems to have this in mind (though he does not explicitly mention the crossroads as such) when he presents the alternative between two paths or two roads: one that is difficult to traverse and leads to excellence (ἀρετή) and another that is easy and leads to badness (κακότης).²¹³⁷ Theognis, in turn, mentions the crossroads between being thrifty and having possessions or wasting one's substance in order to live a life of pleasure.²¹³⁸ However, the most emblematic and developed image of the crossroads is probably the one we find in the myth, attributed to Prodicus, of Heracles at the crossroads. According to Xenophon, Prodicus represented the young Heracles sitting and pondering about what road to take in life. Then two women (called Κακία and Ἀρετή) appear and each praises a different road. The first praises a road of pleasure and ease, while the other praises a road of toil and effort, which will render him excellent and admired. The second woman also criticizes the road proposed by the first. She says that such a road would produce no happiness, and then she presents a different interpretation of what such a road would correspond to.²¹³⁹

The contrast between κακία and ἀρετή is indeed common in the texts and it may assume many shapes (some of which we considered before). For instance, it may be presented as a contrast between laziness and painstaking, between excesses and quiet (ἡσυχία), or between ὕβρις and justice.²¹⁴⁰ These and other pairs of opposites have some relation between them and they seem to correspond to a fundamental choice between two radically different ways of being. Also relevant here is the fact that these contrasts are generally established in exhortative passages, which try to convince someone to choose the virtuous path.

²¹³⁵ See in particular vv. 10-19.

²¹³⁶ For more on the image of the τρίοδος, see e.g. *Laws* 799c-d, and S. HALLIWELL, Where Three Roads Meet. A Neglected Detail in the Oedipus Tyrannus, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986), 187-190.

²¹³⁷ See *Opera et erga*, 287-292.

²¹³⁸ See *Elegiae*, 903-932.

²¹³⁹ See XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II.1.21-34.

²¹⁴⁰ See e.g. EURIPIDES, *Electra*, 77-81, *Bacchae*, 386-401, AESCHYLUS, *Eumenides*, 517ff.

But we also find other possibilities and other contrasts in pre-Platonic texts. Euripides, in the lost play *Antiope*, established an important contrast between Zethos and Amphion. Amphion is a musician and leads a life of ease. Zethos, in turn, censures him and defends a life of action and honor.²¹⁴¹ Later, this will be interpreted as a conflict between a contemplative and a practical life, as can be seen in Plato's *Gorgias*.²¹⁴²

Another interesting possibility in Euripides' plays is represented by Ion, who lives at the temple of Delphi and leads a religious life.²¹⁴³ Religion could indeed have serious consequences in one's life, as was clearly seen in Orphic religion, which involved practices of purification and religious experiences that affected one's whole life.²¹⁴⁴ The practices of purification played a likewise important role in the Pythagorean rule of life (which is also connected with the development of the idea of a contemplative life, as we will see).

These are thus new forms of βίος that go beyond the identification of different livelihoods and also the traditional contrast between a life of ease and a life of effort and excellence. They are connected with the development of new forms of knowledge (or the new σοφία we considered above), which brought about other ways of life.²¹⁴⁵ Medicine, for instance, defined a particular δίαίτα, which included new behaviors, practices and concerns. Sophistry, likewise, deeply influenced the behavior, the values and the life of πόλεις at large. Knowledge in particular came to be more valued and one tried to guide one's life by it (which is a prefiguration of the idea of τέχνη τοῦ βίου). In this context we also find the development of the idea of a life dedicated to knowledge, which we will consider in more detail in the following chapter. In many cases, the knowledge in question was mostly practical. Xenophanes, for instance, contrasts his wisdom with the honors of athletes, and this has strong ethical and political implications.²¹⁴⁶ But we also find two figures directly associated with the acquisition of knowledge or with contemplation. One of them is the traveler that pursues knowledge by seeing different lands. Ulysses is a precursor of this model, and later Solon is presented by Herodotus as someone who travelled precisely for the sake of knowledge.²¹⁴⁷ Another important figure in this context is the stargazer (μετεωροσκόπος),

²¹⁴¹ See EURIPIDES, frs. 179-227 (Nauck).

²¹⁴² See 485e ff.

²¹⁴³ See *Ion*, 53-56, 82ff.,

²¹⁴⁴ Plato himself refers to “ὀρφικοί βίοι” in *Lg.* 782c. For more on Orphism and its effects on one's life, see Chap. 10, Sect. 1.2.

²¹⁴⁵ See Chap. 1, Sect. 2.2.

²¹⁴⁶ See DK B2.

²¹⁴⁷ See *Odyssey* I.1-5, and *Historiae*, 1.30. For more on this passage, cp. also Chap. 14, Sect. 1.

who was someone purely consecrated to the contemplation of the cosmos and unconcerned with practical and political questions.²¹⁴⁸

These different figures will be merged by Plato in order to characterize the philosopher as such and define a new lifestyle. It is not clear, however, to what extent this was already conceived as a particular way of life, different from others, before Socrates and Plato. Later sources say that Pythagoras distinguished between a life dedicated to the acquisition of money and to luxuriousness, a life dedicated to the acquisition of honor and a life dedicated to contemplation.²¹⁴⁹ It is, however, difficult to determine whether this testimonial has a true basis or is an anachronistic projection from a later phase. But for now we will leave aside this question.²¹⁵⁰ Whether Pythagoras expressly distinguished these ways of life or not, it is clear that pre-Platonic authors were aware that there are fundamental alternatives in life from which we can choose

What is not so clear, though, is the way these choices are conceived and the kind of freedom that they might imply. In many cases the choices may be conceived as being determined by one's nature, by society, by destiny or even by the gods. But in other cases there seems to be some room to choose and to implement a certain life style.²¹⁵¹ This is indeed presupposed in any exhortation. Authors often try to influence the choices of others. They present new options and try to convince people of their desirability. This becomes particularly important with the development of new τέχναι and their need to gain social validity. Thus, different thinkers developed elaborate protreptic strategies, which are actually a development of previous addresses or exhortations to virtue that we find ever since Homer.²¹⁵²

However, these authors are normally not interested in the question of how the choice of life as such is to be conceived and whether or not we are free to choose a βίος. For the most part, they are only concerned with the practical efficiency of their exhortations. But the

²¹⁴⁸ For this idea, cp. e.g. EURIPIDES, fr. 910 (Nauck): “ὄλβιος ὅστις τῆς ἱστορίας/ ἔσχε μάθησιν./ μήτε πολιτῶν ἐπὶ πημοσύνην/ μήτ’ εἰς ἀδίκους πράξεις ὀρμῶν./ ἄλλ’ ἀθανάτου καθορῶν φύσεως/ κόσμον ἀγήρων, πῆ τε συνέστη/ καὶ ὄπη καὶ ὄπως./ τοῖς δὲ τοιοῦτοις οὐδέποτε’ αἰσχροῶν/ ἔργων μελέδημα προσίζει.” See also H. KOLLER, *Jenseitsreise des Philosophen, Asiatischen Studien* 27 (1973), 35-57.

²¹⁴⁹ Cp. CICERO, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, V.3, in: M. POHLENZ (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis Scripta quae mansuerunt omnia*, Fasc. 44, Leipzig, Teubner, 1918, and L. DEUBNER & U. KLEIN (eds.), *Iamblichi de vita Pythagorica*, Stuttgart, Teubner, 1975² (1937¹) 12.58-59.

²¹⁵⁰ For more on this distinction attributed to Pythagoras, cp. Chap. 14, Sect. 1 below.

²¹⁵¹ For instance, in *Nemea* 7.54-55, Pindar speaks of βίος as something that is allotted to us (“βιοτῶν λάχοντες”), whereas Euripides, as we saw above, expressly speaks of a choice of βίος. For more on this question, see in particular N. TERZAGHI, *op. cit.*

²¹⁵² For more on this, see e.g. K. GAISER, *Protreptik und Paränese bei Platon*. Untersuchungen zur Form des platonischen Dialogs, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1959, 33-106.

fact that they consider these alternatives raises several questions. For instance, what exactly characterizes a particular βίος as such? Which kinds of βίος are there or can there be? And which one is the best? In fact, what criterion can we use to determine their quality? And are we entirely free to choose a life, or is our “choice” always somehow predetermined? These are very important questions, and we must now consider how they are treated in the Platonic corpus.

6.2. The constitution of a βίος within the framework of the soul’s partition

Plato describes in detail how a βίος is constituted. Some aspects of these description were already considered in the previous chapter. We saw that a βίος involves a certain identification of the superlative good and also of the path we must follow in order to attain the good. This path may imply many subordinate tasks and intermediate goals, and it is always redefining itself according to the circumstances. It is also what determines the role each being plays in our life. We called all this intertwinement of tasks, goals and instruments the practical system of life, and saw that it is based on a system of views that defines all the components mentioned. We hold views about the superlative good, about how we are to follow it, and also about the role everything plays in our life. These views may in turn be connected with many other non-practical views, which help us define our circumstances or the meaning of important general notions that affect how we see all particular things. In fact, a βίος implies a general way of seeing things. Thus, we can clearly see that life is a totality that integrates all our acts, all our behavior, and even all our views. We can also see that this totality is primarily determined by inner factors. It is our desire of the superlative good, the way we pursue it and the way we see things that define how we live. All other factors are subordinated to these.

This is the description made in the previous chapter. But now we have to reconsider it in light of the soul’s tripartition. We saw that the soul is pervaded by the love of gain, the love of honor and the love of knowledge. These drives always combine with each other in a particular way. They have a relation of forces, which constitutes an inner arrangement or an inner πολιτεία. This precedes and enables every action we perform and every moment of our life. Moreover, we saw that the drives contaminate each other. In particular, the two non-philosophical drives directly affect our rational drive and vice-versa. This means that our inner πολιτεία determines how we see things – at least with respect to particular actions.

However, our life is much more than a sequence of actions. It is a unitary or systematic pursuit of the superlative good.

According to Plato this whole pursuit is also determined by the drives we have been discussing and by their arrangement (i.e., by the inner polity of the soul). This is what we must now consider in some detail. Let us then start with the superlative good. We need to determine it in some way, in order to guide ourselves in life, and the three drives help us do it. It is true that they all tend toward different goods, and if they are in conflict, we cannot determine exactly what the good we pursue is. But one of the drives tends to subjugate the others, and this is then what gives us a direction in life. The relation of forces between the drives determines what we primarily desire in life (i.e., it determines our view about the superlative good) and it also determines how the other drives influence this desire (or this view of the good). It may happen that one of the drives strongly dominates the others and as a result we will single-mindedly pursue what it desires and we will pursue it in a pure state. If, however, the relation between them is more balanced, then the soul will be more divided and it will have a more mixed goal in life. There are many possible inner configurations, but in each case a particular view of the superlative good is outlined, and the role of each drive in life is defined.

The essential role of the inner πολιτεία can also be noticed in the unfolding of the practical system of life. As was said, the greatest good we pursue (be it pleasure, honor, knowledge, or some mixture thereof) is not immediately available. We must pursue it, and this implies outlining a program. We determine the best means to achieve it, establish intermediary goals, determine many subordinate and coordinate actions, and define the role things may play in our pursuit of the good.²¹⁵³ All this depends on our view of the superlative good, and to that extent, it also depends on the inner πολιτεία of the soul. All our goals and all our actions are determined by the inner balance of the soul's drives, and the same holds for our relation to each object. The whole practical system emanates from the soul's πολιτεία. The drive that holds the throne of the soul (however restricted and transformed by the subordinate drives) determines one's whole life. We will have very different systems, according to the soul's inner arrangement. They all have the same general structure, but this structure can vary significantly according to what is seen as the superlative good and the plans the soul outlines to reach it.

²¹⁵³ This is so even if all we want in life is instant gratification. Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 491e f., where a life with such a goal is also described as a general project.

It is especially important to note that the soul's inner πολιτεία does not only determine life's practical system, but also the views that underpin it. We saw that any βίος implies a complex system of views. It requires us to define all practical moments, and this definition in turn presupposes other views, and even views about general predicates (both practical and non-practical). All these views are intimately connected with our love of knowledge (i.e., with that part of us that is interested in determining what things are). But we saw that the other drives are also "contaminated" by the philosophical drive and thus assume a philosophical form. This means that each drive forms its own views and when it rules the soul it tells us what to think and what to say, as it were.²¹⁵⁴ In turn, the philosophical drive may also be contaminated by the other drives, and as a result it will pay less attention to what things are and it will more easily accept defective views (such as the ones dictated by the other drives). As we will see in Part IV, this is precisely what characterizes the unexamined life. Our way of seeing things may be hazy and it may even be full of cognitive defects in virtue of the interaction of the soul's constitute drives. But this interaction may also make us more demanding in cognitive terms and thus lead to a better understanding of our life and things in general. Our cognitive state may vary greatly and this is essential to determine our βίος. In *Phaedrus*, this is even the primary criterion for the differentiation of βίοι. We may be more or less forgetful of the true beings (whose understanding affect our views of everything else) and this determines the kind of βίος we lead.²¹⁵⁵

Our βίος is thus essentially determined by the soul's inborn drives, their particular arrangement, and the way this arrangement shapes our views and our pursuit of the good. In other words, the soul's πολιτεία is the primary principle from which everything else derives. In this sense, the soul's πολιτεία is just like the political regime of a particular πόλις. All the laws, institutions, customs and culture of the latter derive from the kind of rule that is established in it. This can be more clearly seen when there is a change of πολιτεία – both in the πόλις or in the soul. A new governing body brings about a new representation of the good that determines all subordinate goods and the role everything plays in the pursuit of the good.

²¹⁵⁴ In this sense, our relation to our drives corresponds to the relation we may have to a beloved person, at least according to Socrates' description of the latter in *Gorgias* 481d-482a. Socrates says to Callicles that: "αἰσθάνομαι οὖν σου ἐκάστοτε, καίπερ ὄντος δεινοῦ, ὅτι ἂν φῆ σου τὰ παιδικὰ καὶ ὅπως ἂν φῆ ἔχειν, οὐ δυναμένου ἀντιλέγειν, ἀλλ' ἄνω καὶ κάτω μεταβαλλομένου (...) τοῖς γὰρ τῶν παιδικῶν βουλευμασίν τε καὶ λόγοις οὐχ οἷός τ' εἶ ἐναντιοῦσθαι, ὥστε, εἴ τις σου λέγοντος ἐκάστοτε ἅ διὰ τούτους λέγεις θαυμάζοι ὡς ἄτοπά ἐστιν, ἴσως εἴποις ἂν αὐτῷ, εἰ βούλοιο τάληθῆ λέγειν, ὅτι εἰ μὴ τις παύσει τὰ σὰ παιδικὰ τούτων τῶν λόγων, οὐδὲ σὺ παύσει ποτὲ ταῦτα λέγων."

²¹⁵⁵ See 248c ff.

All views change and words may even acquire new meanings, as we saw.²¹⁵⁶ The whole practical and cognitive system change. Life as a whole changes, as does reality as we know it.

The difference between βίοι is indeed a global difference. However, despite such a radical difference, these βίοι are still based on the same inner constitution and on the same set of principles. This is a central aspect of the conception we find in the corpus – and especially in the *Republic*. Despite all possible differences between lives, they are all based on the same desire for a superlative good and the same inborn drives. The arrangement of the latter is what lies at the heart of each βίος, and all other features to which we usually pay more attention (such as the content of a particular life and its outcome) are secondary. They are all based on the soul's inner πολιτεία.

6.3. The multiple βίοι identified by Plato and the problem of their respective value

Plato not only describes the constitution of any βίος, but he also identifies many different possibilities throughout the texts. Sometimes he mentions particular βίοι, other times he contrasts two decisive βίοι, and he also makes full inventories or typologies of the main kinds of βίος. In addition, Plato portrays the characters in such a way that they not only discuss different possible βίοι, but also embody particular βίοι and put forward the sort of views and arguments that such βίοι would defend. Plato's discussion of βίοι is thus very complex, and in many cases it is not directly connected with the partition of the soul. We will now briefly consider all this diversity, but we will pay closer attention to how this is presented in *Republic*.

If we consider the uses of βίος throughout the corpus, we notice that there are many generic uses of the word and also that the word is sometimes associated to metaphors similar to those we identified in pre-Platonic thinking.²¹⁵⁷ In many cases, however, these uses of the word are accompanied by some further characterization that we will not consider here. We will rather focus on the passages where a certain βίος is presented and defined in its main traits.

A very important passage can be found in *Republic* X (617d ff.). Socrates tells the story of Er, who in his fictive journey through the afterlife witnessed how the souls choose

²¹⁵⁶ Cp. footnote 1909.

²¹⁵⁷ Cp. e.g. *Euthphr.* 16a, *Ap.* 31a, 33a, 37d, *Cri.* 43d, *Phd.* 85b, 85d.

their lives before birth. Lachesis puts forward many models of life, which are conceived not as general possibilities or kinds of life, but rather as individual lives. These models include lives of animals and of human beings, and many aspects of these lives (such as duration, birth, material conditions, talents, excellences, social or political role, and even some main events) are already defined. What is not defined is the inner arrangement of the soul that will characterize such lives.²¹⁵⁸ In this sense, this description of lives is superficial. It focuses on the many details or the many contents that compose an individual life, but it leaves open how one will relate to its contents, which will depend on the soul itself.

In other passages, Plato rather focuses on the essential features of a life or on its inner conditions, which may then be shared by many individuals. In some cases, he describes a particular kind of life by comparing it to something or someone, in order to emphasize a particular trait of such a life.²¹⁵⁹ This is normally integrated in a broader contrast between fundamental alternatives. In *Philebus*, Socrates and Protarchus distinguish a life of pleasure from a life of knowledge. They first consider each one in absolute isolation, and then they try to determine a mixed life.²¹⁶⁰ In *Gorgias*, the conflict is rather between a life that pursues power, honor and ultimately pleasure, and a philosophical life, which pursues knowledge and justice.²¹⁶¹ This contrast has some affinity with the contrast between a political and a philosophical life that we find at the end of *Euthydemus* (where a mixed life is also considered) or in *Theaetetus*.²¹⁶² The last text is particularly relevant, since Plato describes in it the features of a life dedicated to political contests and contrasts it with an apolitical life, concerned only with the contemplation of the whole.

All these passages and the contrasts they present are very important, but they do not aim at being exhaustive. There can be other kinds of life than the ones that are being considered in each case. But we also find passages in the corpus that try to organize the diversity of lives and even outline something like a scale or hierarchy of lives according to their goodness or badness. In general, these passages are integrated in an eschatological context, where lives are judged according to their merits, and the judgment determines the next incarnation (which may also correspond to the life of an animal). In *Timaeus*, Plato

²¹⁵⁸ See 618b: “ψυχῆς δὲ τάξιν οὐκ ἐνεῖναι διὰ τὸ ἀναγκαίως ἔχειν ἄλλον ἐλομένην βίον ἀλλοίαν γίνεσθαι.”

²¹⁵⁹ In *Gorgias*, for instance, we find such expressions as the life of stone or the life of a dead man to describe a life that avoids pleasure, and a life dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure is compared to the life of a bird called *χαρδριός*, or the life of a robber (see 494b and 507e). In *Philebus*, Socrates compares a life without knowledge to the life of sea creatures (see 21c).

²¹⁶⁰ See in particular 20b ff.

²¹⁶¹ See 484c ff.

²¹⁶² See 305b ff. and 172c-177b, respectively.

presents a very simple version of this.²¹⁶³ In *Phaedrus*, Socrates briefly distinguishes between livelihoods and the kind of insight into the truth that they imply.²¹⁶⁴ In *Phaedo*, Plato distinguishes many different possibilities according to the kind of relation between the different parts of our being and the kind of excellence and knowledge this relation generates.²¹⁶⁵

The most developed and detailed typology, however, is the one in books VIII and IX of the *Republic*. Here Plato distinguishes and characterizes in great detail five kinds of βίος (or, as he also says, five kinds of human being or five characters), which are correlated to five kinds of outer πολιτεία. The whole description is based on the tripartition and on the relation between the soul's inborn drives. There is indeed a parallel between the soul's drives and the different lives, insofar as each life is dominated by a certain kind of drive. Plato thus describes a philosophical life, which is only concerned with acquiring truth and living according to it, and he also describes a honor-loving life, which is concerned with contests, reputation and the semblance of ἀρετή.²¹⁶⁶ The parallel only breaks down when we come to the rule of the third drive. This rule may constitute three different βίοι, which are associated with the three kinds of pleasures we considered above: namely, the necessary pleasures, the non-necessary pleasures and the lawless pleasures.²¹⁶⁷ Thus, Socrates distinguishes a money-loving life, a life of anarchical pursuit of pleasure and a life of pursuit of the most extreme pleasures.²¹⁶⁸ This distinction is very meaningful, because it shows how complex the love of gain is and how it can have very different relations with itself and the other parts of the soul. In particular, it can be more restrained or more unrestrained – which is probably connected with the greater or smaller strength the other two drives have in each of these lives.

The *Republic* thus provides us with a complex typology of βίοι. It involves some simplification, since there can be many relations of force and thus many intermediate kinds of βίος. However, like in the case of political systems, these intermediate βίοι would be more indistinct and thus more difficult to define.²¹⁶⁹ According to Plato, these five kinds of βίος are the main ones. They have a clearer configuration, and for each βίος Plato describes the

²¹⁶³ See *Ti.* 42b-c.

²¹⁶⁴ See the already mentioned passage in *Phdr.* 248c ff.

²¹⁶⁵ See *Phd.* 80e ff.

²¹⁶⁶ The description of a philosophical life is scattered throughout books V-VII, whereas the description of an honor-loving life (or of a timocratic man) appears in 548d-550b.

²¹⁶⁷ Cp. Sect. 3.1 above.

²¹⁶⁸ See 553a-555a, 559d-562a and 571a-576b, respectively.

²¹⁶⁹ Cp. *Rep.* 544c-d, where Socrates reduces all political regimes to five, because those are the only ones that present themselves “ἐν εἴδει διαφανεῖ τι.”

representation of the good, the values, the character, the kind of practices and the general outlook on life that characterizes it. He also describes how all these features derive from the soul's inner drives. We will not see their characterization here.²¹⁷⁰ However, it is important to have in mind that for Plato our individuality always corresponds (even if only approximately) to one of these possibilities. Our life is never absolutely unique, but a variation of this system. In this sense, each particular kind of life described or illustrated in the corpus can be integrated in this framework and contributes to refining it. Indeed, despite the fact that we may find many differences between different lives, the main differences and the main possibilities are always prefigured in the soul's constitution. They may take place in very different circumstances, and thus seem very different, but their structure is always similar and in many cases they may correspond to the same pattern.

But this is not all. There is still one last distinction between βίοι that is extremely important, and this distinction is precisely the main problem of this dissertation. In the *Apology*, when Socrates speaks of an unexamined life and opposes it to his own life, spent in philosophical examination, he reduces all possible lives to two different possibilities.²¹⁷¹ He merges all non-philosophical lives and presents them as being basically the same. To be sure, there may still be some differences between non-philosophical lives, including the degree of examination that they admit or carry out (some lives may indeed examine many things and still be unexamined). But Socrates opposes all these lives that do not examine enough to a life dedicated to philosophical examination, and in doing so he calls the attention to how decisive the philosophical drive is when it comes to defining our lives.

6.4. The comparison of βίοι and Plato's conception of the best βίος

The fact that our ψυχή may assume different inner configurations, which translate into different βίοι, raises the question about their relative value. Is it indifferent which life we lead or are there some lives that are in themselves better than others? In the previous chapter, we saw that lives can be better or worse according to their proximity to or distance from the superlative good – i.e., they can be compared with respect to their degree of happiness or fulfillment. But can the value of a life also be determined on the basis of what drive rules the

²¹⁷⁰ For some aspects of this characterization, cp. Chap. 14, Sect. 5, and Chap. 15, Sect. 3.

²¹⁷¹ See 38a.

soul and how the drives are arranged? Can one's βίος and the underlying inner πολιτεία determine our relation to the good? This is what we must now consider.

The texts often discuss how we should live and they defend that there is a way of life that is the best (ὁ τρόπος ἄριστος τοῦ βίου).²¹⁷² This is intimately connected with our previous discussion about the greatest good, which in principle corresponds to what the best life desires. In contrast with such a life, the other have fundamental limitations and are seen as bad or defective (κακός). If one leads one of these lives, one will never be fully happy. In some cases, one will even be extremely miserable. Plato thus outlines a hierarchy of βίοι. According to the *Republic*, the life of lawless pleasures is the worst life and the philosophical life is the best.²¹⁷³ But what can the criteria for such a differentiation be? And what does the best life exactly consist in? The texts provide some indications which we will discuss in the following chapters, but there are some aspects we can anticipate here, in order to complement our analysis of Plato's concept of βίος.

First, it is easy to understand from the above discussions that for Plato the question of the best βίος does not primarily concern the particular contents of a life, but rather the inner disposition of the soul (i.e. the inner arrangement of the soul's drives). The best disposition of the soul will generate the best βίος. We must therefore determine which inner arrangement of the soul is the best and why. This implies determining which drive should rule the soul and how the other drives should be subordinated to it. In other words, we must define how the drives can be best combined and blended. But what are then the criteria to determine the quality of our inner πολιτεία?

One possible criterion is the degree of order in the soul that results from each inner πολιτεία. The different arrangements of the soul's drives can have different degrees of harmony, and therefore a particular arrangement may be more stable and immune (or almost immune) to inner conflicts (στάσεις), whereas others are more prone to conflicts. This seems to depend on how the drives affect each other, but also on which drive rules. According to Plato, the drives have intrinsic functions (ἔργα) in the soul and one drive in particular – the philosophical drive – is better and naturally fit to rule, whereas the other two are not fit to rule and must obey. Thus, the drives may perform their role (τὰ αὐτῶν πράττειν – which is what justice consists in and what enables all other ἀρεταί in the soul), or the inferior drives

²¹⁷² For such formulations of the question, cp. e.g. *Grg.* 492d (πῶς βιωτέον), 500c (ὄντινα χρῆ τρόπον ζῆν – which also appears in *Rep.* 352d), 500d (ὀπότερον βιωτέον). For the notion of the best way of life, see *Grg.* 527e.

²¹⁷³ See in particular 576c ff.

may usurp the functions of the superior drive and meddle in its business (which constitutes a form of *πολυπραγμοσύνη* and is identified as being what injustice in the soul consists in).²¹⁷⁴ In other words, if the best drive does not rule, the soul is in conflict with itself. The non-philosophical *πολιτεῖαι* and the corresponding *βίοι* are marked by a kind of constitutive *στάσις*, and this *στάσις* may easily bring about many particular conflicts between our drives and the views that correspond to them.

All this is essentially linked with the importance of knowledge in life. We need knowledge to pursue the superlative good and guide ourselves in life, but the rulers of different lives (as well as the *βίοι* they constitute) bring about very different cognitive states – and they may lead us to pursue the wrong thing, or they may fail to guide us properly in this pursuit. Thus, Plato defends that the best life is the life ruled by the desire of knowledge. The philosophical way of life is maximally concerned with knowledge and this concern guides everything in this life. The other drives are subordinated to this desire, and according to Socrates they can be perfectly integrated in a philosophical life. To be sure, this integration is not instantaneous. The other drives must be weakened and sublimated (i.e., rendered more philosophical) and this requires much training. Likewise, we cannot immediately attain the good a philosophical drive strives for, even if we are ruled by it. We must insist and at the same time try to strengthen the philosophical drive, in order to be better able to attain the truth. All efforts must indeed be directed at this twofold goal of developing the philosophical drive and transforming the other drives.

But this is still a very vague description. It does not specify what exactly the superlative good in question is (we only know that it is associated with knowledge), what is to be done, and how things are to be integrated in the general pursuit of knowledge. It is also not clear how exactly we can control the other drives and develop the love of knowledge. We will consider these and other related questions in more detail below.²¹⁷⁵ But for now we have already caught a glimpse of the basic structure of the best life (i.e., of the life that is best able to fulfill our nature and our intrinsic possibilities). This is not by itself a perfectly happy life, since it does not immediately attain its goal, but it is structurally better than the others.

²¹⁷⁴ See *Rep.* 443c-444e – especially 444d: “οὐκοῦν αὖ, ἔφη, τὸ δικαιοσύνην ἐμποιεῖν τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κατὰ φύσιν καθιστάναι κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων, τὸ δὲ ἀδικίαν παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ’ ἄλλου; κομιδῆ, ἔφη.” Cp. also *Phd.* 79e-80a: “ὄρα δὴ καὶ τῆδε ὅτι ἐπειδὴ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ὧσι ψυχὴ καὶ σῶμα, τῷ μὲν δουλεύειν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἢ φύσις προστάττει, τῇ δὲ ἄρχειν καὶ δεσπόζειν· καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα αὖ πότερόν σοι δοκεῖ ὅμοιον τῷ θεῷ εἶναι καὶ πότερον τῷ θνητῷ; ἢ οὐ δοκεῖ σοι τὸ μὲν θεῖον οἷον ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἡγεμονεύειν πεφυκέναι, τὸ δὲ θνητὸν ἄρχεσθαι τε καὶ δουλεύειν; ἔμοιγε. ποτέρῳ οὖν ἢ ψυχῇ ἔοικεν; δῆλα δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅτι ἢ μὲν ψυχῇ τῷ θεῷ, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τῷ θνητῷ.”

²¹⁷⁵ See in particular Chap. 14, Sect. 5, and Chap. 17, Sect. 5.

But what does all this say about the other lives? Are they intrinsically defective? And what does that mean? Does it mean that they are undesirable or miserable lives? And how is this undesirability or misery experienced? This is what we will have to discuss in Part V. We will try to determine the value of the unexamined life, which is a designation that encompasses all non-philosophical forms of life.

6.5. The problem of the “choice” of βίος

One last question we must briefly discuss concerns the choice of life. We saw above how there are several passages in pre-Platonic literature that discuss two or more possible lives and often try to exhort us to choose one and reject the other(s). These passages, however, do not discuss in detail how this choice works and how free we are to choose a life different from the one we have. How does Plato then conceive of this choice in the framework of the tripartition?

The situation in which one is faced with different alternatives and chooses between them seems to imply that one is completely free to choose. One may perhaps be more inclined to one alternative, but one will ponder and see the advantages and disadvantages of each βίος. But are we ever in such a situation? Can we really talk of choice in this sense? If we look at the Platonic corpus, we find several meaningful passages. Plato describes a pre-natal choice of lives in *Republic X* and he also speaks of a choice of life in the *Phaedrus*.²¹⁷⁶ The latter may well be conceived as a choice we make during life, which will determine our next incarnation (and in this sense it is not very different from what we also find in the above mentioned passages of *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*). In all these cases, one’s choice is in a way pre-determined by one’s present state. This is particularly clear in the passage of the *Republic*, where Plato describes how for the most part each soul appraises and chooses its new life according to its character or past life.²¹⁷⁷ In the framework of the tripartition, this means that each choice we make in life is intrinsically determined by one’s inner πολιτεία. We find ourselves in a particular βίος that results from our inner πολιτεία and which we did not choose based on a comparison of possibilities. If we do compare different βίοι, we tend to

²¹⁷⁶ Cp. *Rep.* 617d ff., and *Phdr.* 249b.

²¹⁷⁷ See in particular 620a: “κατὰ συνήθειαν γὰρ τοῦ προτέρου βίου τὰ πολλὰ αἰρεῖσθαι.” The whole description between 619b-620d illustrates precisely this.

appraise them according to our inner πολιτεία. As Socrates says in an earlier passage of the *Republic*, each human being thinks that their life is the best.²¹⁷⁸

The question then is whether our inner arrangement of drives is somehow under our control. Can we choose to adopt a different inner πολιτεία? Can we at least affect the inner balance of the soul's drives? How do we relate to it? And what determines the relation of forces between the drives? Does it somehow depend on us? Does it depend on the drives themselves (on one of them or all of them)? Or does it depend on something external to the soul? This is a very important question, since it concerns our responsibility for our life. If our every action is determined by our βίος and the inner πολιτεία that underpins it, then how responsible are we for this inner πολιτεία? Did we somehow choose it? Can we change it? And if we try to change it, can we preserve our choice, or are we liable to lose control (i.e., to be ἀκρατής) and fail to implement our choice?

Normally we lead an unexamined life, but it is not clear exactly what responsibility we hold for it, nor whether we have any leeway to leave the unexamined life. These are actually decisive questions for our problem, given the fact that Socrates' assertion about the unexamined life is also an exhortation to abandon it. We will thus return to this question in Chapter 17. We will see that it is very difficult to use the language of choice in this context, since a choice usually implies a free deliberation and decision, and normally we simply find ourselves in a particular life or find ourselves having already adopted it. In some cases, we may perhaps examine the question about which life is the best, but this already implies a certain development of the philosophical drive. As we will see, this is in fact the decisive factor in the adoption of a life: the state of our philosophical drive. However, it is not something to which we relate as if it were something external to us and about which we can make decisions. We are always already determined by the strength of our philosophical drive. But let us leave aside this question for now. We must first define in more detail the meaning of φιλοσοφία in Plato and we must also see the constitution of the βίος we usually find ourselves in. Then we will be better able to understand what determines our adoption of a particular βίος.

²¹⁷⁸ See *Rep.* 581c-e: “οἴσθ’ οὖν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὅτι εἰ ‘θέλοις τρεῖς τοιοῦτους ἀνθρώπους ἐν μέρει ἕκαστον ἀνερωτᾶν τίς τούτων τῶν βίων ἥδιστος, τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἕκαστος μάλιστα ἐγκωμιάσεται; ὁ τε χρηματιστικὸς πρὸς τὸ κερδαίνειν τὴν τοῦ τιμᾶσθαι ἡδονὴν ἢ τὴν τοῦ μαθάνειν οὐδενὸς ἀξίαν φήσει εἶναι, εἰ μὴ εἴ τι αὐτῶν ἀργύριον ποιεῖ; ἀληθῆ, ἔφη. τί δὲ ὁ φιλότιμος; ἦν δ’ ἐγώ· οὐ τὴν μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν χρημάτων ἡδονὴν φορτικὴν τινα ἡγεῖται, καὶ αὐτὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ μαθάνειν, ὅτι μὴ μάθημα τιμὴν φέρει, καπνὸν καὶ φλυαρίαν; οὕτως, ἔφη, ἔχει. τὸν δὲ φιλόσοφον, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, τί οἰώμεθα τὰς ἄλλας ἡδονὰς νομίζειν πρὸς τὴν τοῦ εἰδέναι τάληθές ὅπη ἔχει καὶ ἐν τοιοῦτῳ τινὶ αἰεὶ εἶναι μαθάνοντα; τῆς ἡδονῆς οὐ πάνυ πόρρω; καὶ καλεῖν τῷ ὄντι ἀναγκαίας, ὡς οὐδὲν τῶν ἄλλων δεόμενον, εἰ μὴ ἀνάγκη ἦν;”

CHAPTER 14

The different senses of “φιλοσοφία” in the Platonic corpus and their interrelation

“Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει.”

Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 980a21

Before making an assessment of this Part III and proceeding to the discussion of the unexamined life as such, there is one last question that we should consider and that allows us to connect the analysis of the soul’s constitutive drives with what we saw in Part II about philosophical examination. The question we must now explore concerns the complexity of the term φιλοσοφία in the Platonic corpus. We saw in the previous chapter that φιλοσοφία designates an inborn or constitutive drive of the soul – namely, the soul’s love of knowledge. We also saw that this drive pervades the other drives and our entire being. Indeed, any way of life depends on it (insofar as it always implies a system of views, which try to define how things are). However, we had also considered in Chapter 4 that the term φιλοσοφία is one of the designations for philosophical examination, which is a particular activity or practice to which human beings may dedicate themselves at some points, but is far from being a constitutive component of our being.²¹⁷⁹ This other φιλοσοφία is something supervenient, sporadic and rare. Furthermore, the term φιλοσοφία is also associated with something that was just mentioned and that is even rarer: namely, a philosophical way of life. We must therefore determine the relation between these different senses of the term φιλοσοφία, and any other senses the word may have throughout the corpus. In particular, we must determine why our permanent love of knowledge normally does not translate into the practice of philosophical examination and much less into a philosophical way of life. This is indeed an important question and it will let us better prepare what follows.

This analysis of the different senses of the term φιλοσοφία is likewise important because of our familiarity with the word “philosophy”, which is still today an ambiguous word. Indeed, we may associate it with a certain activity, a method, a field of studies, a

²¹⁷⁹ See in particular the end of Chap. 4, Sect. 2.5.

doctrine or set of doctrines, and also with a certain attitude or even a way of life. However, this familiarity with the word and its complexity may also affect the way we understand Plato's use of the term φιλοσοφία. Above all, we may lose sight of the fact that for Plato the word primarily denotes something that has a passionate or desiderative character. We may also find it strange that Plato identifies such a passion or desire with something more than a supervenient activity. For Plato, φιλοσοφία lies at the heart of our ψυχή. This deep-seated desire for knowledge is the essential manifestation of φιλοσοφία and all others are just variations of it.

We must consider what all this means. However, before doing so, it is useful to briefly consider the history of the term and the cultural contexts it was associated with. This will give us a more solid basis for considering the different ways in which Plato uses the word.

1. The pre-Platonic history of “φιλοσοφεῖν”, “φιλόσοφος” and “φιλοσοφία”

The word φιλοσοφία and its older cognates φιλοσοφεῖν and φιλόσοφος were not coined by Plato. They appear a few times in pre-Platonic authors. However, the first attested uses of these words are somewhat vague and raise several questions that have been amply discussed in secondary literature.²¹⁸⁰ We will not go into great detail here, but it is important to consider some of the main aspects of these first uses.

First of all, it is important to bear in mind that the words φιλοσοφεῖν, φιλόσοφος and φιλοσοφία seem to admit a more general sense, insofar as they can be associated with

²¹⁸⁰ See e.g. O. MICHEL, φιλοσοφία, φιλόσοφος, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; A.-H. CHROUST, Philosophy, its Essence and Meaning in the Ancient World, *The Philosophical Review* 56 (1947), 19-58; W. JAEGER, Die Griechen und das philosophische Lebensideal, *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung* 11 (1957), 481-496; J. MORRISON, The Origins of Plato's Philosopher-Statesman, *The Classical Quarterly* 8 (1958), 198-218; W. BURKERT, Platon oder Pythagoras? Zum Ursprung des Wortes “Philosophie”, *Hermes* 88 (1960), 159-177; J. HEYDE, Φιλοσοφία bzw. lat. philosophia = dt. Philosophie?!, *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 35 (1961), 219-243; A.-M. MALINGREY, “*Philosophia*”. Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.-C., Paris, Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1961; A.-H. CHROUST, Some Reflections on the Origin of the Term “Philosopher”, *The New Scholasticism* 38 (1964), 423-434; IDEM, The Term “Philosopher” and the Panegyric Analogy in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, *Apeiron* 1 (1966), 14-17; P. MERLAN, Zum Problem der drei Lebensarten, *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 74 (1966/67), 217-219; R. JOLY, Platon ou Pythagore? Héraclide Pontique, fr. 87-88 Wehrli, *Latomus* 114 (1970), 137-142; A. NIGHTINGALE, *Genres in Dialogue*. Plato and the Construction of Philosophy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 14ff.; T. EBERT, Why Is Evenus Called a Philosopher at *Phaedo* 61c?, *The Classical Quarterly* 51 (2001), 423-434; A. NIGHTINGALE, On Wandering and Wondering. *Theôria* in Greek Philosophy and Culture, *Arion* 9 (2001), 23-58; C. MOORE, When “Philosopher” was a Bad Name. The Origins of Philosophos, <http://www.personal.psu.edu/crm21/philosophos.htm>, March 2011 (last consulted July 2017); B. SCHUR, “*Von hier nach dort*.” Der Philosophiebegriff bei Platon, Göttingen, V&R, 2013, 27-41.

different contexts and cultural practices that are only broadly related to one another. But we also find a more circumscribed sense that associates the term with a specific practice and a specific class of people. In addition, the broader and stricter meanings of the word can then be used as a self-description by those that practice or admire the practice of φιλοσοφία (and thus try to promote it), but it can also be used by those that criticize it and therefore use the term as a reproach.

The word does not seem to have been used by the first thinkers (i.e., those that are normally acknowledged as the first philosophers of our tradition). Their activity is rather associated with the broader context of σοφία – and it is actually in this context that the term φιλοσοφία is developed, as is clear from its composition. Now, we saw earlier that the term σοφός originally denoted an expert that had an exceptional insight in a certain domain of things, and this allowed him to intervene in this domain. Σοφία was thus an equivalent of τέχνη. However, there are many τέχναι, and σοφία designates above all an extraordinary or superlative knowledge. In this sense, it may designate either the accumulation of τέχναι or the most important τέχνη, which concerns the most important things – namely, how we are to live and how is the πόλις to be governed. The knowledge of these most important matters was originally the prerogative of certain classes, but then new forms of knowledge developed (such as medicine, history, sophistry, and so on) and they had their own claim to superlative knowledge or σοφία. The context associated with the term σοφία is therefore a context of complexity and conflict, and it is in this context that the term φιλοσοφία emerged.²¹⁸¹

As was said, φιλοσοφία and its cognates often have a generic sense. They designate a particular devotion to culture and learning, or to a form of liberal education that allows one to acquire παιδεία and become a fully-fledged citizen. It seems to be in this sense that the word is used in Thucydides, for instance. Pericles says that the Athenians “philosophize” without mollification of the mind (φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἄνευ μαλακίας).²¹⁸² In other words, their dedication to knowledge and learning does not render them incapable of acting and performing their duties (which seems to be already recognized as a risk and a possible accusation against φιλοσοφία).²¹⁸³ Isocrates also uses the word in this broad sense, and especially as a designation of the kind of παιδεία he offers, which is particularly concerned with political

²¹⁸¹ For more on the history of the term σοφία, cp. Chap. 1, Sects. 2.1 and 2.2.

²¹⁸² See *Historiae* 2.40.1.

²¹⁸³ We also find references to this risk in Plato. Cp. in particular *Grg.* 487c-d and *Rep.* 487c-d.

matters.²¹⁸⁴ Indeed, the word later came to designate what was learned – and thus particular forms of knowledge and even sciences in general, such as mathematics.

This dedication to knowledge in general may be object of another criticism. Heraclitus speaks of φιλόσοφοι that know many things and in other fragments he criticizes πολυμαθία as a form of erudition that misses the essential – namely, the wisdom that everything is one and that λόγος rules everything.²¹⁸⁵ But the term φιλοσοφία, like σοφία, may also be applied to a more fundamental or more important form of knowledge, which goes beyond the surface of things. It is in this sense that the term seems to be used in the Hippocratic corpus. There it designates a form of knowledge (which the author of the text opposes) that first considers general questions about what the human being is or what its nature is, and only then considers empirical questions of medicine.²¹⁸⁶ Empedocles is given as an example of such a procedure, and this brings us to the context of the so-called φυσιολόγοι, who tried to understand the structure of reality in general.

The idea of pursuing a form of knowledge that goes beyond what is more immediate and familiar is also present in another earlier use of φιλοσοφεῖν. In Herodotus, the word is associated with travels of exploration and contemplation (θεωρία).²¹⁸⁷ One would temporarily abandon one's community, wander about, without a particular destination, in order to know different places and acquire knowledge.²¹⁸⁸ This is what Solon is said to have done. It is also what Herodotus did, and it illustrates an essential aspect of the term φιλοσοφία, which becomes even more manifest later. The term is indeed associated with the pursuit of a broad or deep knowledge, pursued only for the sake of knowledge. This idea plays an important role in Plato, and it is clearly expressed in a story told about Pythagoras which we already mentioned above.²¹⁸⁹

²¹⁸⁴ See e.g. *Panegyricus*, 47; *Areopagiticus*, 45; *Antidosis*, 266ff.

²¹⁸⁵ Cp. DK B35, 40, 129.

²¹⁸⁶ See *De Prisca Medicina*, 20: “Λέγουσι δέ τινες καὶ ἰητροὶ καὶ σοφισταὶ ὡς οὐκ ἐνὶ δυνατὸν ἰητρικὴν εἰδέναι ὅστις μὴ οἶδεν ὃ τί ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος· ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δεῖ καταμαθεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα ὀρθῶς θεραπεύσειν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Τείνει δὲ αὐτέοισιν ὁ λόγος ἐς φιλοσοφίην, καθάπερ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἢ ἄλλοι οἱ περὶ φύσιος γεγράφασιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὃ τί ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ὅπως ἐγένετο πρῶτον καὶ ὅπως ζυνεπάγη. ἐγὼ δὲ τουτέων μὲν ὅσα τινὲ εἴρηται σοφιστῆ ἢ ἰητρῶ, ἢ γέγραπται περὶ φύσιος, ἧσσον νομίζω τῆ ἰητρικῆ τέχνη προσήκειν ἢ τῆ γραφικῆ. Νομίζω δὲ περὶ φύσιος γνῶναι τι σαφὲς οὐδαμῶθεν ἄλλοθεν εἶναι ἢ ἐξ ἰητρικῆς.”

²¹⁸⁷ For more on this word, cp. Chap. 4, Sect. 2.3.

²¹⁸⁸ See *Historiae*, 1.30.2: “θεησάμενον δὲ μιν τὰ πάντα καὶ σκεψάμενον ὡς οἱ κατὰ καιρὸν ἦν, εἶρετο ὁ Κροῖσος τάδε. ‘ξείνε Ἀθηναῖε, παρ’ ἡμέας γὰρ περὶ σέο λόγος ἀπῖκται πολλὸς καὶ σοφίης εἵνεκεν τῆς σῆς καὶ πλάνης, ὡς φιλοσοφῶν γῆν πολλὴν θεωρίας εἵνεκεν ἐπελήλυθας· νῦν ὧν ἐπειρέσθαι με ἵμερος ἐπῆλθέ σε εἴ τινα ἤδη πάντων εἶδες ὀλβιώτατον.’”

²¹⁸⁹ Cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 6.1 f), and see the bibliographical references in footnote 2149. See also DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Vitae philosophorum*, I.12. For a discussion of whether the story is true (at least to a certain extent) or rather a later creation, influenced by Plato's and Aristotle's thought, see the works mentioned in footnote 2180 above (of which several deal exclusively with this question).

This story attributes the invention of the term φιλοσοφία to Pythagoras. When inquired by the king Leon of Phlius about what kind of expert knowledge he had, he said he had none, but was rather a philosopher. Leon was surprised and inquired about the meaning of the term. Pythagoras explained that only a god could be truly wise, and he was only someone who was fond of knowledge (σοφίαν ἀσπαζόμενος, as is said in Diogenes Laertius, or *sapientiae studiosus*, as appears in Cicero). In order to explain this better, Pythagoras compared human life to the Games, which are frequented by very different people, with very different goals. Some go there to make money, others to gain honor and glory, and still others simply want to see the spectacle, and especially all the fine and excellent deeds. Likewise, some come to life only to make profit, others to gain power and fame, and others (which are the freest people) come to contemplate things – and in particular to contemplate nature and the heavens. The latter are the philosophers.²¹⁹⁰

Though it is not clear whether or not Pythagoras coined the term and gave it this precise meaning, it is nevertheless highly likely that the word came to be associated with the Pythagoreans at an early date. The above mentioned fragment of Heraclitus that says that philosophers know many things may well be referring to the Pythagoreans; Socrates, in Plato's *Phaedo*, may also have this association in mind when he first inquires about whether or not Evenus is a philosopher.²¹⁹¹ If this is so, the word φιλοσοφία was connected not only with the concern with seeing and understanding the nature of things, but also with a particular rule of life and particular spiritual concerns (including the concern with the afterlife).

However, even if the term primarily designated some particular class, it had also a broader meaning, and most people were not concerned with refined distinctions between intellectuals. For them, all intellectuals were the same. We find an example of this confusion in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Despite Socrates' peculiarity, he was still identified with the Sophists and with natural scientists, since for most people there were no clear boundaries between these different figures.²¹⁹² They all looked the same, insofar as they were all opposed to traditional forms of wisdom and suggested a new way of seeing and doing things. In this sense, the word φιλόσοφος also came to have a strong negative connotation for many people.²¹⁹³ The philosopher was extremely concerned with things that did not matter and

²¹⁹⁰ This story agrees with frs. 18 and 19 from Aristotle's *Protrepticus* (I. Düring's edition), according to which both Pythagoras and Anaxagoras said that we were born to contemplate the heavens (θεάσασθαι τὸν οὐρανόν).

²¹⁹¹ Cp. once more the bibliographical references in footnote 2180 – especially the work of T. Ebert.

²¹⁹² For more on this, cp. e.g. K. DOVER, *Aristophanes – Clouds*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968 (repr. 1989), XXXV ff.

²¹⁹³ For this common negative connotation, cp. *Phd.* 64b, *Rep.* 473e-474a, 487c ff.

often neglected both his private interests and public matters. He was a sort of vagrant, outsider or pariah. He was overtaken by an interest that others could not understand, and this could be further emphasized by the prefix φιλο-, which as we saw was often used to describe excessive or compulsive behaviors.²¹⁹⁴

All these elements seem to have been associated with the pre-Platonic use of φιλοσοφία and its cognates, though in some cases our interpretation of the meaning of these passages may be influenced by later authors – and especially by Plato. Indeed, we also find the aspects just mentioned in the Platonic corpus. Plato develops and interconnects them in his analyses, and this is what we must now consider.

2. The different uses of φιλοσοφία and its cognates in the Platonic corpus

As was said, Plato uses the terms φιλοσοφεῖν, φιλόσοφος and φιλοσοφία in different senses. Some of the uses are more traditional, other are perhaps an innovation of his. At any rate, he constantly refers to these notions and in some passages he even tries to define the philosopher as such. We already considered several important passages and we also defined some of its main uses. But now we will consider the matter from a different angle, in order to better define the relation between the different senses of the word. Let us then see in more detail the ways in which Plato talks about φιλοσοφία.

In some passages, the term φιλοσοφία is used as an equivalent of knowledge. In *Euthydemus*, the term φιλοσοφία is even defined as possession of knowledge (κτησις ἐπιστήμης).²¹⁹⁵ This knowledge may be general, or it may refer to a particular field. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates refers to geometry as a form of φιλοσοφία.²¹⁹⁶ In *Protagoras*, he mentions the laconic φιλοσοφία and describes it as a form of wisdom or σοφία.²¹⁹⁷ Other times, φιλοσοφία seems to be identified with education and culture in general – and in these cases it is brought into close connection with μουσική and the Muses.²¹⁹⁸ But this seems to be a rather conventional association, which is promptly accepted by Socrates' interlocutors. Also

²¹⁹⁴ See C. MOORE, *op. cit.*, and also Chap. 13 Sect. 3 above.

²¹⁹⁵ See 288d: “ἡ δὲ γε φιλοσοφία κτησις ἐπιστήμης· οὐχ οὕτως; ἔφη. ναί, ἔφη.”

²¹⁹⁶ See 143d: “εἰ μὲν τῶν ἐν Κυρήνῃ μᾶλλον ἐκηδόμην, ὃ Θεόδωρε, τὰ ἐκεῖ ἄν σε καὶ περὶ ἐκείνων ἀνηρώτων, εἴ τις αὐτόθι περὶ γεωμετρίας ἢ τινα ἄλλην φιλοσοφίαν εἰσὶ τῶν νέων ἐπιμέλειαν ποιούμενοι (...).”

²¹⁹⁷ See 342a-343a.

²¹⁹⁸ In the *Phaedo*, φιλοσοφία is presented as the greatest μουσική (61a) and it is likewise associated with the Muses in *Phaedrus* (259d). The etymology of the Muses in the *Cratylus* (406a) also brings out this close relation.

conventional is the close relation between φιλοσοφία and ἀρετή, which points to the importance of one's upbringing and one's education in order to become excellent.²¹⁹⁹

In other passages, though, the terms φιλοσοφία, φιλόσοφος and φιλοσοφεῖν are strongly contrasted with knowledge and σοφία and rather imply the lack of such a knowledge or σοφία. It is in this sense that those that are wholly ignorant or wholly wise are said not to philosophize.²²⁰⁰ It is also in this way that wonder is said to be the beginning of φιλοσοφία.²²⁰¹ Philosophy is then a kind of pursuit that implies dedication and invention. One is required to examine things or to converse with others.²²⁰² This can be done in different ways, which are not necessarily all equally good. Plato often distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic forms of philosophical examination or philosophical enquiry.²²⁰³ But if there are different kinds of φιλοσοφία, then this raises the question of what distinguishes the different forms of pursuit of knowledge from one another. One factor of differentiation seems to be one's commitment. One may invest one's life in it and also try to purify oneself from other interests (i.e., both from the bodily interests, as is said in *Phaedo*, and the social or political interests, as is stressed in *Theaetetus*).²²⁰⁴ This is something Socrates seems to do better than anyone else. However, there are other factors differentiating inauthentic from authentic philosophy. One of these factors seems to pertain the kind of object or reality these forms of philosophy are referred to. One of them is concerned with something illusory or particular beings, while the other is directed at the true beings.²²⁰⁵ Still, regardless of what kind of φιλοσοφία one practices, the word is here understood as an active pursuit of knowledge.

²¹⁹⁹ Cp. e.g. *Smp.* 184c ff. and *Euthd.* 274e-275a.

²²⁰⁰ See *Ly.* 218a-b and *Smp.* 204a-b.

²²⁰¹ See *Tht.* 155d.

²²⁰² See Chap. 1.

²²⁰³ Plato often speaks of a genuine, correct, true, guileless, healthy, pure, just, or sufficient form of φιλοσοφεῖν, which presupposes that there are also imperfect forms. Cp. *Phdr.* 249a, 261a, *Phd.* 64b, 64e, 66b, 67e, 80e, 82c, 83b, *Rep.* 473d, 485e, 486b, 490d, 540d, *Sph.* 216c, 253e, *Phlb.* 57d, *Ep. VII* 326b. The imperfect forms of philosophy may include, among other things, those figures that resemble philosophers, but are different from them, such as φιλοθεάμονες and φιλήκοοι (see *Rep.* 475d-e) or the sophist (see *Sph.* 216c-d, 230e-231a, 253c-254a). But for a closer consideration of the difference between authentic and inauthentic "philosophy", cp. Sect. 4 below.

²²⁰⁴ In *Phaedo*, philosophy is described as the practice of death (μελέτη θανάτου), and death is conceived as the separation of the body (and thus of its way of seeing things and its desires). See in particular 67d-68a. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes philosophy as a concern with the whole, that goes far beyond political matters. See 172c ff. In both cases, φιλοσοφία is associated with having leisure (σχολή) from these other kinds of concern. The whole passage in *Theaetetus* is actually about σχολή, and Plato also mentions it in *Phd.* 66b-67b.

²²⁰⁵ This is what is implied in the *Sophist*, when the Visitor distinguishes the philosopher from the sophist (253c-254a), or in the *Republic*, when Socrates differentiates philosophers from lovers of sights and lovers of sounds (476b ff.).

But the meaning of the word can also be broader. It may correspond to a particular relation to knowledge, regardless of whether we possess it or not (or better still, regardless of whether we think we possess it or not). This sense of φιλοσοφία is what we considered in the previous chapter.²²⁰⁶ We are not indifferent to whether we know things or not – and this lack of indifference may have different degrees or intensities. In order to identify it, Plato isolates strong modalities of non-indifference, which let our constitutive love of knowledge stand out. In the *Republic*, he stresses the prefix φιλο- and associates φιλοσοφία with other words that designate excessive traits and compulsive behaviors.²²⁰⁷ Φιλοσοφία is also defined (both in the *Republic* and elsewhere) as a form of ἔρωσ. Philosophers are described as lovers of knowledge, truth and being.²²⁰⁸ They have a desire or longing for knowledge.²²⁰⁹ In fact, φιλοσοφία may even be characterized as a form of madness or divine possession (βακχεία).²²¹⁰ But this excessive form of desire does not seem to be something we all experience. Only a few of us seem to have such an exacerbated relation with knowledge, and these are often seen as useless, mad or fools.²²¹¹ Plato, however, describes this love of knowledge as something that up to a point characterizes all human beings. We all have an inborn love of knowledge, even if we do not notice it, and this is a constitutive part of our ψυχή.²²¹² This desiderative sense of φιλοσοφία may then be presented as a trait of some people's character.²²¹³ As such, it may also be associated with other qualities (both moral and intellectual) and contrasted with traits such as the love of lies or the hate of λόγοι.²²¹⁴

Our constitutive love of knowledge may thus have different degrees. It may manifest itself in simpler forms and be subordinated to other drives (being then employed to attain the particular goals of the latter).²²¹⁵ But it may also define one's entire life – i.e., one may lead a

²²⁰⁶ See in particular Chap. 13, Sect. 3.

²²⁰⁷ See *Rep.* 474c ff.

²²⁰⁸ See in particular *Phd.* 66e, 68a, *Rep.* 501d. It is also important to note that the description of the philosopher in *Smp.* 204a-b is intrinsically associated with the description of ἔρωσ.

²²⁰⁹ The expressions ἐπιθυμία τοῦ εἰδέναι and ποθεῖν τὸ εἰδέναι appear in *Hp. Ma.* 297e and *Men.* 84c, respectively, and they both describe what is implied in φιλοσοφία.

²²¹⁰ See *Smp.* 218b. Plato also refers to φιλοσοφία as something that may take hold of us. See *Prm* 130e: “(…) οὐπω σου ἀντεῖληπται φιλοσοφία ὡς ἔτι ἀντιλήψεται (...).”

²²¹¹ See e.g. *Rep.* 487c-d.

²²¹² This is particularly clear in the *Republic*, where he also describes this love of knowledge as a love of learning (φιλομαθία) or a love of λόγος (φιλολογία). See 475c, 485c-d, 581b, 582e.

²²¹³ See *Ly.* 213d, *Prt.* 335d-e and *Phdr.* 279a-b.

²²¹⁴ See in particular *Rep.* 485a ff.

²²¹⁵ See e.g. *Rep.* 553d: “τὸ δέ γε οἶμαι λογιστικόν τε καὶ θυμοειδὲς χαμαὶ ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν παρακαθίσας ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ καὶ καταδουλωσάμενος, τὸ μὲν οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἔᾶ λογίζεσθαι οὐδὲ σκοπεῖν ἄλλ' ἢ ὀπόθεν ἐξ ἐλαττόνων χρημάτων πλείω ἔσται (...).”

philosophical life.²²¹⁶ According to Plato, the kind of relation we have to knowledge is decisive. It determines the quality of our life and even our afterlife.²²¹⁷ It is also decisive for public life, insofar as philosophers should rule the political communities or the rulers should philosophize properly.²²¹⁸ Philosophy is thus not just directed at a different reality (or a different view of reality), but it is also a different mode of relation with reality in general, that will allow for a better life.

But how is this all to be connected? What is the precise relation between learning, philosophical examination, constitutive interest in knowledge, intense desire of knowledge and a philosophical life? This is what we must now consider.

3. The relation between φιλοσοφία as intrinsic drive of the soul and φιλοσοφία as philosophical examination (ἐξέτασις)

The main problem we must consider concerns the relation between the constitutive φιλοσοφία of our soul and the mostly occasional practice of philosophical examination. We saw that there is an inborn, instinctive or compulsive love or desire of knowledge at the heart of what we are. We want to know how things are. But this is not our only desire. The soul is also directed at gain and honor, and these three constitutive desires or drives restrict and modify one another. This means that the soul's inborn φιλοσοφία can be repressed and it can acquire other forms. In many cases, however, our love of knowledge seems to be very small or even entirely absent. There are many things (both distant and close to us) that we do not know and we do not seem to mind not knowing them. Only a few things prompt our curiosity or our need to know. When that happens, we engage in philosophical activity or philosophical examination. Φιλοσοφία in this sense is thus something supervenient and acquired. It requires dedication and effort, but usually our dedication to it and the effort we invest in it are very limited. We use it solely to attain a particular goal, prescribed by the other drives of the soul, and then abandon it. Only in very rare cases (if at all) do we seem to desire to know everything just for the sake of knowledge. In those cases, the soul's innate philosophical

²²¹⁶ See e.g. *Ap.* 28e (φιλοσοφοῦντά με δεῖν ζῆν), *Phd.* 63e (ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίβειν τὸν βίον), 68c (ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ζῆν), *Phdr.* 259d (ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διάγειν).

²²¹⁷ For a discussion of the importance of knowledge for life, see Chaps. 18 and 19 below. On the importance of philosophy for our afterlife, see e.g. *Phdr.* 249a, *Phd.* 63e-64a.

²²¹⁸ See *Rep.* 473c-d: “ἐὰν μή, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἢ οἱ φιλόσοφοι βασιλεύσωσιν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἢ οἱ βασιλεῖς τε νῦν λεγόμενοι καὶ δυνάσται φιλοσοφήσωσι γνησίως τε καὶ ἰκανῶς, καὶ τοῦτο εἰς ταὐτὸν συμπέσῃ, δύνάμις τε πολιτικῆ καὶ φιλοσοφίας, τῶν δὲ νῦν πορευομένων χωρὶς ἐφ’ ἐκάτερον αἱ πολλαὶ φύσεις ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποκλεισθῶσιν, οὐκ ἔστι κακῶν παῦλα, ὃ φίλε Γλαύκων, ταῖς πόλεσι, δοκῶ δ’ οὐδὲ τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ γένει (...).”

drive becomes conspicuous, represses the other drives and dominates our life. But in general this is not what happens. What does this mean, then? Does our desire to know remain latent in those moments? And what happens when we start to examine? Does it then become active? Or is it somehow always active?

We said above that the soul's constitutive drives are always active, but now we have to discuss the question in more detail. We have to see how we are always concerned with knowledge and never indifferent to it – even if we are not pursuing knowledge. In fact, the lack of philosophical examination is itself a manifestation of our inborn φιλοσοφία, as will be shown. Moreover, we must also see what happens when we start to examine – or, to be more precise, we must see how philosophical examination (in all its different modalities) is only a variation of our permanent concern with knowledge.

3.1. The usual satisfaction of the philosophical drive as the main factor for not performing philosophical examination

Let us first briefly consider what happens when there is no philosophical examination. This question will be discussed in more detail in Part IV, since it is essential to define the unexamined life. We will have to see at that point in what way the unexamined life is still philosophical – i.e., in what sense our inborn φιλοσοφία still plays a constitutive role in it.²²¹⁹ But there are a few aspects we can already anticipate and that will help us better understand the concept of φιλοσοφία.

To be sure, most people (if not all) do not spend their life examining. Usually, we perform very few examinations. We only examine if we have doubts in important matters, but apart from that we do not concern ourselves with trying to know more. What is then the meaning of this lack of examination? Does it really express lack of interest in knowledge? Is it wholly non-philosophical? Does it lack any relation to knowledge? Not at all. Although we normally do not examine, we still make out what things are. We are able to ascribe predicates to them and we understand these predicates. Indeed, we have many knowledge claims (or many judgments), not only about things and general notions, but also about how we are to live. All our perceptions, all our thoughts, and all our actions are shaped by these knowledge claims, which constitute a very complex system, as was shown before.²²²⁰ This does not mean

²²¹⁹ Cp. in particular Chap. 16.

²²²⁰ See in particular Chap. 6, Sect. 2. Cp. also Chap. 11, Sect. 3.3, and Chap. 12, Sect. 5.

that we are explicitly aware of the presence and content of these knowledge claims. As we saw above, they are mostly tacit.²²²¹ However, this does not render them any less effective. They determine how we see things and seem obvious to us – so much so that we do not feel the need to question or examine them.

Philosophical examination is thus hindered by our knowledge claims. Examining implies doubting our views or putting them in question. It requires us to admit that we do not know things or at least that we might not know them as well as we think. In other words, we must admit that we still do not possess perfect knowledge. As is said in *Lysis* and *Symposium*, the only beings that philosophize are those that lie between full ignorance and full knowledge.²²²² We, however, tend to think we are not in an intermediary state. This can either mean that we do not really lack any knowledge (at least in questions that matter the most for us), or it can mean that we have an empty conceit of knowledge. In fact, Plato tries to show that the latter is very often (if not always) the case. Our cognitive access to things is full of defects. We are far from possessing actual knowledge. As Plato says at the end of *Republic* V, our cognitive state is a state that lies between ignorance and knowledge – or, as he also says, it is a mere δόξα.²²²³ Yet, we do not notice that it is so. We forget our intermediate condition and are therefore satisfied with our way of seeing things. At least with respect to the most important matters (namely, those that we need to know in order to guide our life), we think we already know everything we need to know, and we do not need to pursue any knowledge. Hence, it is not necessary to examine things. We already have the knowledge we desire (or so we think). Our love of knowledge is already satisfied, and it does not require us to do anything. We may turn our attention to other things – namely, to those that we “know” are important.

This is why we perform only a very limited number of examinations. We may need to think about some things and find a solution for some practical problems, but apart from that philosophical examination seems useless to us. At best, it may play some role in education (insofar as it helps young people think about life) or it may be used as a pastime. However, after a point, too much philosophy would be detrimental and prevent us from doing what we must do in life.²²²⁴ At any rate, it would be superfluous. From our standpoint, our need of

²²²¹ Cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.

²²²² See once more *Ly.* 218a-b and *Smp.* 204a-b.

²²²³ See 476b ff. For an interpretation of this passage, cp. also Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 above.

²²²⁴ Callicles expresses precisely this idea in *Grg.* 485e ff. See also 487c-d: “καί ποτε ὑμῶν ἐγὼ ἐπήκουσα βουλευομένων μέχρι ὅποι τὴν σοφίαν ἀσκητέον εἶη, καὶ οἶδα ὅτι ἐνίκα ἐν ὑμῖν τοιάδε τις δόξα, μὴ προθυμεῖσθαι εἰς τὴν ἀκρίβειαν φιλοσοφεῖν, ἀλλὰ εὐλαβεῖσθαι παρεκελεύεσθε ἀλλήλοις ὅπως μὴ πέρα τοῦ δέοντος

knowledge is already met and we regard ourselves as self-sufficient in cognitive matters. We do not need more.

None of this means that we are at any moment indifferent to knowledge. On the contrary, we are always very fond of knowledge. However, most of the time we think we have already attained it. We are strongly attached to it, but we do not need to pursue it. We only desire to keep it – i.e., we desire to keep our views or beliefs.²²²⁵ Our love of actual knowledge becomes a love of our supposed knowledge, and it is in this sense that Plato designates the lovers of sights and sounds as φιλοδόξοι.²²²⁶ In fact, all non-philosophers are deeply attached to a particular way of seeing things that focus primarily on what things appear to be and is therefore defective.²²²⁷ We may not be explicitly aware of this way of seeing things, but if someone tries to rob us of our knowledge claims by putting them into question we strongly resist (as we see many characters doing throughout the Platonic corpus).

We can thus see how the unexamined life is also, to a certain extent, a philosophical life. We are still fundamentally concerned with what things are and how we are to live. It only seems not to be so because we think we do not need to inquire into those matters. We think we already know what we need to know. As such, the unexamined life is very different from a life completely indifferent to knowledge. The latter would have no relation to its own cognitive state and it would not be cognitively satisfied. Moreover, it would have no presumed knowledge to lose and it could not become restless because it does not know something. The same cannot be said of the unexamined life, as we will see. It only seems indifferent to knowledge because it is cognitively satisfied.

A question one must raise, however, is how can such a life become satisfied with its knowledge claims. If these claims were solid, it would be easy to understand. But according to Plato, our knowledge claims are highly questionable and many of them (if not all) are false. There are many limitations in our way of seeing things. How can we then come to accept a distorted or even completely fictitious version of reality and be satisfied with it? To use an expression from Plato, how can we become rich only in dreams (ὄναρ πλουτεῖν) and

σοφώτεροι γινόμενοι λήσετε διαφθαρέντες.” For the idea of a moderate use of philosophy, cp. also *Euthd.* 305d-e and *Rep.* 487c-d, 497e-498b.

²²²⁵ As Plato stresses in *Symposium*, we may desire something we already have, but only in the sense that we desire to keep having it in the future. Cp. *Smp.* 200b-e.

²²²⁶ See *Rep.* 480a.

²²²⁷ This is actually the basis of all our other empirical attachments.

not notice it?²²²⁸ What is the role played by the other drives of the soul in this process? And how much of this cognitive failure can be ascribed to the soul's constitutive φιλοσοφία?

As we will see, our acceptance of questionable knowledge claims is only possible if our φιλοσοφία is weak in comparison to our other drives. When this happens, our φιλοσοφία is not entirely suppressed, but it becomes distorted, and as a result it does not perform its functions properly. It does not realize that its version of things is questionable and needs to be examined. But this is not all. The other drives also disguise themselves as φιλοσοφία and talk in a philosophical language, as it were. They create a defective version of things and deceive our love of knowledge. This is, in short, how the unexamined life works, but we will have to consider this entire mechanism in much more detail and we will also have to discuss what the ultimate cause of this process is.

3.2. The awakening of φιλοσοφία in the form of philosophical examination. The ἐξέτασις as a response to the perceived frustration of the soul's intrinsic φιλοσοφία

Our soul's constitutive φιλοσοφία may thus coexist with (and even explain) the lack of examination. However, it may also assume the form of philosophical examination. This is what we will now briefly discuss. What determines the awakening of philosophical examination?

In *Theaetetus*, Socrates says that wonder or astonishment (θαυμάζειν) is the beginning of φιλοσοφία (which is here understood precisely in the sense of philosophical examination).²²²⁹ The wonder in question is aporetic – i.e., it is essentially connected with ignorance. Something stands out and captures our attention because we cannot understand or explain it. It eludes our cognitive grasp. The thing in question may be something entirely new for us, which goes against our expectations, or it may be something with which we were previously familiarized, and which now reveals itself as problematic. The Platonic corpus constantly illustrates and causes the latter form of wonder.²²³⁰ The most familiar things reveal themselves to be the most obscure.²²³¹ In other words, we realize that our knowledge claims

²²²⁸ Cp. *Ly.* 218c and *Th.* 208b.

²²²⁹ See 155d: “μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν· οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὕτη (...).”

²²³⁰ Cp. e.g. *Sph.* 244a: “ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν ἡμεῖς ἠπορήκαμεν, ὑμεῖς αὐτὰ ἡμῖν ἐμφανίζετε ἰκανῶς, τί ποτε βούλεσθε σημαίνειν ὅποταν ὄν φθέγγησθε. δῆλον γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς μὲν ταῦτα πάλαι γινώσκετε, ἡμεῖς δὲ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν ὠόμεθα, νῦν δ' ἠπορήκαμεν.”

²²³¹ We can actually say about many things what Augustine says when trying to determine what is time: “Dicimus haec et audivimus haec et intellegimur et intellegimus. Manifestissima et usitatissima sunt, et eadem

are false, and we notice that we are actually in an intermediate position with respect to knowing something – namely, we already have some relation to it, but we still do not know it. As a result, we are mobilized to examine.²²³²

Philosophical examination is thus based on the frustration of our love of knowledge. If we want to know something and realize (or even suspect) that we do not, we must inquire into it. It produces a longing or hunger for knowledge that is hard to repress. Of course, this does not mean that any perceived or suspected ignorance automatically mobilizes us to examine. In many cases, we do not mind not knowing something, but this is itself based on the knowledge claim that the matter at hand is just a small detail or, in any case, of little or no relevance for us. In other words, there are basic assumptions (ὕποθέσεις) that still remain valid for us and that restrict the cognitive crisis and the need to examine. However, these assumptions may also be unsettled – and in that case our love of knowledge will lead us to examine them. The outbreak of philosophical examination is thus a consequence of our cognitive circumstances. If we had a perfect access to reality (as we often think we do), our love of knowledge would simply translate into a contemplation of the truth, and we would act according to this truth. However, we often realize that things escape us – and this forces us to examine. We must pursue truth and take pains to find it.

When we examine, different things may happen. In many cases, we may be easily satisfied with an apparent solution and thus adopt a new false knowledge claim. In other cases, we may be more demanding, and then we will notice just how difficult the acquisition of effective knowledge can be. It all seems to depend on the strength of our inborn φιλοσοφία. When it is weakened and ruled by the other drives, it is particularly difficult for us to notice our cognitive limitations and we can more easily accept bad solutions to our problems. If, however, we exercise and develop our love of knowledge (which probably requires us to somehow start examining things), then this love of knowledge becomes more able to perform its task – and as a result we will examine much more and much better than we normally do. The other drives will grow weaker and φιλοσοφία may even become the ruling love of our soul, thus determining our whole βίος.²²³³ In this case, we will be overtaken

rursus nimis latent et nova est inventio eorum.” See L. VERHEIJEN (ed.), *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1981, XI.22.28.

²²³² We find a good expression of this in *Men.* 84c: “[ΣΩ.] Οἶει οὖν ἂν αὐτὸν πρότερον ἐπιχειρῆσαι ζητεῖν ἢ μαθάνειν τοῦτο ὃ ᾔετο εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, πρὶν εἰς ἀπορίαν κατέπεσεν ἡγησάμενος μὴ εἰδέναι, καὶ ἐπόθησεν τὸ εἰδέναι; [ΜΕΝ.] Οὐ μοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες.”

²²³³ This is, for instance, what is implied in the characterization of φιλοσοφία as a separation from the body and the practice of death. See *Phd.* 67c-67e Our other interests become irrelevant and we start seeing things in a very different manner.

by the need to know and we will neglect everything else (which may precisely appear to others as a form of madness).²²³⁴

We have thus seen how the constitutive φιλοσοφία of the soul may bring about philosophical examination and how the latter is a variation of the former. However, this explanation raises an important question – namely, the question of whether or not we have some control over the process we described. In general, we do not seem to be able to immediately start examining, especially because we are laden with knowledge claims. We must first question them, but are we free to simply start questioning them? By referring to wonder, Plato invokes an experience in which we are normally passive. He also presents the possibility of being released from our immediate convictions by another person who starts examining us (as Socrates normally does). We seem thus to need either luck or help – at least at first.

We may also wonder about whether or not philosophical examination may be repressed after we start examining. If we realize that we do not know something important, it may be impossible to repress the examination. But, as was said, we may become too easily satisfied with a solution and our inquisitiveness may fade away. This then raises the question of how we can fully develop our love of knowledge and our ability to examine – and also the question of whether we should do it. We will not consider these questions now, but we will return to them at a later stage.²²³⁵

4. The different forms of φιλοσοφία as philosophical examination. The distinction between authentic and inauthentic philosophical activity

One could easily be tempted to think that the alternative between examining and not examining is simple. We would either examine or not, but if we did we would always be doing fundamentally the same thing (even if we would examine different things, with varying degrees of success). However, it has already been indicated that the matter is more complex, and now it is time to develop such indications. There can be “weaker” and “stronger” forms of philosophical examination. Plato expresses this in different ways. He talks of a genuine, correct, true, guileless, healthy, pure, just, or sufficient φιλοσοφεῖν, which he contrasts with

²²³⁴ See e.g. *Phdr.* 249c-d.

²²³⁵ See in particular Chap. 17, Sect. 5, and Chap. 19.

imperfect forms of φιλοσοφία.²²³⁶ This assumes that there can be sorts of φιλοσοφία that are still unphilosophical. But what exactly is the meaning of this?

We find in the Platonic corpus several references to the ambiguity or complexity of philosophical activity. For instance, Socrates says at the beginning of the *Sophist* that a philosopher may assume different masks and appear disguised of a sophist, a statesman or a mad man.²²³⁷ Later, however, the Visitor shows that the first two figures differ from philosophers, though they somehow resemble them. The same happens in the *Republic*, when Socrates distinguishes philosophers from lovers of sights and sounds.²²³⁸ Plato is indeed very careful in distinguishing the true philosopher from other cultural figures. Seen from the outside, these figures may be similar to philosophers or philosopher-like, and yet there may be a world of difference between them.

However, the question we are discussing does not refer to the fact that some practices resemble philosophy or philosophical examination. The problem is rather the fact that there can be different modalities of philosophical examination (i.e., different ways of performing it or relating to it), and these modalities do not all have the same value. Plato distinguishes between a proper and an improper philosophy (or a proper and an improper philosophical examination). In other words, philosophical activity can have different degrees. We can better understand this if we consider the difference between Socrates and the young men that follow him, according to the *Apology*.²²³⁹ Socrates is presented as the epitome of philosophical examination and he tries to explain its importance. The young men, in turn, are suggested to be superficial imitators of his behavior, without fully understanding the nature and importance of philosophical examination. We find an illustration of this in the figure of Apollodorus, whom we meet at the beginning of *Symposium*.²²⁴⁰ He follows Socrates and tries to imitate him, but lacks all the depth that characterizes the latter. We start therefore to understand that the improper forms of philosophical activity are a sort of image (εἶδωλον) of what philosophical activity is all about. They try to be like the real deal, but fall short of it, and if we are not careful, we might mistake them for proper philosophical activity. We may think we are really performing philosophy and at the same time we may still be largely unphilosophical.

²²³⁶ Cp. footnote 2203 above. For more on these designations, see also e.g. K. NAWRATIL, Γνησιῶς φιλοσοφεῖν, *Wiener Jahrbuch für Philosophie* 8 (1975), 72-84.

²²³⁷ Cp. 216c-d.

²²³⁸ See 475d ff.

²²³⁹ See 23c and 33b-c

²²⁴⁰ See 172c-173a.

But what exactly is the limitation of the weaker forms of philosophical activity? In some texts, we find explicit references to modalities of philosophy that go only up to a point and avoid going further. In *Gorgias*, for instance, Calicles recognizes the advantages of studying some philosophy and considers anything beyond that (especially after a certain age) detrimental in many ways.²²⁴¹ In the *Republic*, Socrates talks about the possibility of philosophy being a side activity or hobby (πάρεργον).²²⁴² In *Euthydemus*, we find the idea of limiting philosophy by combining it with another activity, namely politics.²²⁴³ All these passages imply a limited dedication and also a limited development of one's skills and philosophical knowledge. But this still does not let us see the limitation of these weaker forms of philosophical examination.

We may better understand this limitation if we consider the case of the young Socrates (who appears in *Symposium* and *Parmenides*) and of the young characters that are said to closely resemble Socrates (especially Theaetetus).²²⁴⁴ These characters are presented as immature philosophers, in whom we already find a strong desire for knowledge (indeed, they question many things, and display much talent), but whose philosophical impulse is still not fully developed (which is seen especially in the fact that there are still some fundamental assumptions that they do not question).²²⁴⁵ They are on their way to becoming consummate philosophers, but they still need practice and guidance – otherwise their development may be interrupted.²²⁴⁶

There are thus different degrees of philosophical activity, and we can identify even more. For instance, Plato admits the possibility of someone having a limited love of learning (φιλομαθία).²²⁴⁷ One can also have a limited or superficial love of λόγος (φιλολογία), as seems to be case with Phaedrus, who gladly listens to speeches, but does not question them.²²⁴⁸ In fact, there is something like a continuum that ranges from the complete indifference to philosophical examination (based on the belief that one already knows

²²⁴¹ See 484c ff. and 487c-d.

²²⁴² See 498a.

²²⁴³ See 305c ff.

²²⁴⁴ See *Smp.* 201d ff., *Prm.* 127d ff., and *Th.* 143e ff.

²²⁴⁵ See e.g. *Prm.* 130e: “νέος γὰρ εἶ ἔτι, φάναι τὸν Παρμενίδην, ὃ Σώκρατες, καὶ οὐπω σου ἀντείληπται φιλοσοφία ὡς ἔτι ἀντιλήγεται κατ’ ἐμὴν δόξαν, ὅτε οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἀτιμάσεις· νῦν δὲ ἔτι πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀποβλέπεις δόξας διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν.”

²²⁴⁶ Plato gives the example of those who dedicate themselves to rational discussions, but do not do it properly, and as a result end up mistrusting all λόγοι and becoming μισόλογοι. See 89d ff. Cp. also *Rep.* 539b-c.

²²⁴⁷ On a limited φιλομαθία, see *Rep.* 474c ff. and 485c-e.

²²⁴⁸ Cp. *Phdr.* 228a-c, 234c ff., For an analysis of Phaedrus' limited φιλολογία, in contrast with Socrates' own love of λόγοι, see e.g. F. SERRANITO, *Lovers and Madmen. The Μανία-Φρονεῖν Opposition in Plato's Phaedrus*, Diss. Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015, 23-29.

everything that matters) to the most developed form of it, illustrated by the mature Socrates. Between the two extremes there are many intermediary forms. Thus, the alternative before us is not just between philosophizing or not. There are many different ways of philosophizing.

The difference between these ways of philosophizing is not primarily determined by one's external behavior or by the quantity of time one spends examining. It is also not primarily a matter of having more or less knowledge. Socrates himself, who seems to be portrayed as the consummate philosopher, admits that he knows only a few things or even nothing at all.²²⁴⁹ What seems to be decisive is thus the scope of examination – namely, whether one's focus is confined to a limited and derived domain, or whether one is able to move beyond it. In other words, when we examine something, we may still have many basic assumptions (ὑποθέσεις) that are left untouched or unexamined. This is precisely the problem with the young Socrates and Theaetetus.²²⁵⁰ It is also what characterizes the particular sciences, according to the *Republic*.²²⁵¹ They are said to dream about being insofar as they do not examine the main ontological properties of their domain of study. In other words, the examination they perform is a kind of unexamined examination, and they may very well fail to realize it. They may believe that nothing important is being left out of consideration. Philosophical examination may thus have different stages and different depths (as is illustrated in the Simile of the Line and in the Allegory of the Cave). These differences, however, do not necessarily correspond to different degrees of positive knowledge or σοφία. They rather correspond to different degrees of awareness of our ignorance and of what we must still discover or learn.

But there is more. In some important passages, Plato connects the different degrees of perceived ignorance (and thus the scope of our philosophical examination) with the arrangement of the soul's constitutive drives. There may be different inner πολιτεῖαι, and our inborn φιλοσοφία may play different roles in these πολιτεῖαι. The inauthentic or improper modalities of philosophical examination are thus the result of a weaker philosophical drive, which may even not dominate the soul. The other drives may still be strong and they may still

²²⁴⁹ See e.g. *Ap.* 23b and *Euthd.* 293b.

²²⁵⁰ At the beginning, Socrates had not sufficiently examined the notion of εἶδος and what it entails (see *Prm.* 130b ff.), whereas Theaetetus was dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, but had not sufficiently examined what knowledge was and could not define it (see in particular *Tht.* 145c ff.). Moreover, while they examine the matter at hand, they are still concerned with what other people think and promptly accept their views, without questioning them. See *Prm.* 130e: “νέος γὰρ εἶ ἔτι, φάναι τὸν Παρμενίδην, ὃ Σώκρατες, καὶ οὐπω σου ἀντεῖληπται φιλοσοφία ὡς ἔτι ἀντιλήψεται κατ' ἐμὴν δόξαν, ὅτε οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἀτιμώσεις· νῦν δὲ ἔτι πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀποβλέπεις δόξας διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν.” See also *Tht.* 162e: “νέος γὰρ εἶ, ὃ φίλε παῖ· τῆς οὖν δημηγορίας ὀξέως ὑπακούεις καὶ πείθῃ.”

²²⁵¹ Cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3 a) and Chap. 9, Sect. 3.1 d).

rule, which means that they can limit our philosophical activity and surreptitiously determine the course of the examination. In other words, the examination may still have a non-philosophical end in sight. One may strive to achieve pleasure (as the young men that followed Socrates seemed to do) or one may try to defeat others.²²⁵² As a result, one will not question several things or one will accept certain answers too readily.

It is important to bear this in mind. Often it is difficult to discern our true motivations and it may happen that we have unphilosophical motivations even while doing philosophy. Our philosophical drive may still be strongly limited by the other drives and our life may still be unexamined, despite our belief to the contrary. As a result, we will only be able to properly philosophize when our φιλοσοφία is strong enough to dominate the other drives. When that happens, we will no longer lead an unexamined life. Instead, we will lead a life governed by our inborn φιλοσοφία, in which philosophical examination is fully developed and plays a central role. In other words, we will lead a philosophical life. The notion of “philosophical life” is thus important to determine the proper sense of philosophical examination and it also helps us better define the notion of φιλοσοφία as such. Hence, we must finish by briefly discussing this notion.

5. The configuration of a βίος φιλόσοφος. The different shapes such a life may assume

What are then the most important traits of a philosophical life? The corpus provides us many indications about this notion. There are several important discussions that try to define the philosopher, and Socrates himself is portrayed as a good (if not perfect) embodiment of such a life. To be sure, some of these indications may seem somewhat contradictory at times, but we will see that there is a good reason for that.

Let us then begin with what lies at the heart of the philosophical life. We saw that any βίος is essentially a form of pursuing what it perceives as the superlative good, and our representation of the superlative good is determined by the arrangement of the soul’s inborn drives. A philosophical life is thus a life essentially ruled by our knowledge-loving drive or φιλοσοφία, which is then stronger than the other drives, and is not used or distorted by them. Instead, the soul’s φιλοσοφία subdues, uses and transforms the other drives. This constitutes a philosophical πολιτεία and gives rise to the philosophical life. To be sure, such a state is not

²²⁵² On the possibility of examining for the sake of pleasure, see *Ap.* 23c, 33b-c. For the distinction between a way of examining matters that only seeks to defeat others and a way of examining that is interested in finding the truth about something, see e.g. *Grg.* 515b, *Prt.* 360e, *Phlb.* 14b.

easy to attain. It requires much discipline and intellectual training. However, once it is fully attained, it is the most stable πολιτεία according to Plato. It will fully integrate the other drives and avoid conflicts.²²⁵³

Such an inner πολιτεία will then determine our representation of the superlative good and of happiness. We will want to possess, more than anything, knowledge and truth. We will want to see things as they really are – i.e., we will want to have access to reality. In other words, we will be obsessed with knowledge and this will be seen as what maximizes our life. Consequently, all our actions will be determined by this representation of the superlative good. We will either pursue truth or we will act according to it, if it shows us that we should do something. All other things will be seen as secondary, irrelevant or harmful. We will thus be free (or as free as we can be) from our concern with gain and with honor. Indeed, a philosophical life is marked by σχολή in this sense (which actually corresponds to a form of asceticism). One has leisure from those that are our normal concerns and one will only pursue them if the truth somehow requires us to do so.²²⁵⁴

This is still a very generic description, but what was said is enough to notice that we are talking about a very unusual way to live. Normally, people are concerned with pleasure, money or honor, and there are very few exceptions. The philosopher thus appears to neglect all that matters in life, and as such he seems very strange, and perhaps even mad.²²⁵⁵ In fact, it may even be difficult to conceive what such a possibility entails. That is why Plato makes such an effort to present and define it.

But let us return to our description. We have seen the core of the philosophical life. Now we must consider how this core (the philosophical πολιτεία) unfolds and creates a practical system, underpinned by a particular system of views or beliefs. It is, however, important to bear in mind that the general structure of the philosophical life admits two very different modalities, according to whether we are still pursuing actual knowledge or whether we have already attained it. Plato presents and describes the two modalities, and this may cause some confusion. We may indeed dedicate our lives to the pursuit of truth and thus to philosophical examination. This is what Socrates is shown doing, especially in the *Apology* and in the so-called Socratic dialogues. He is aware of his ignorance and does not seem to find full knowledge. He even imagines an eternal life of pursuit – which would also be a life

²²⁵³ For more on this, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 6.4.

²²⁵⁴ For the relation between a philosophical life and σχολή, see in particular *Phdr.* 258e-259d, *Phd.* 66b-67b, *Tht.* 172c-177b.

²²⁵⁵ Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 64a-b, *Phdr.* 249c-d.

of eternal ἀπορία and eternal wandering about (πλάνη). Such a life could be called a βίος ζητητικός, and it stands in contrast with another possible philosophical life – namely, a life marked by the possession of knowledge and thus primarily dedicated to enjoying the contemplation of the truth. We find in the corpus several allusions to this possibility, which we could call βίος θεωρητικός in a strict sense.²²⁵⁶ Although Plato does not expressly distinguish these two possibilities, his analyses presuppose this distinction. We must therefore consider it in more detail, and see how these two possibilities correspond to two different configurations of the same fundamental structure or of the same kind of βίος. In order to do so, we will use some of the indications given about the philosopher in the texts.

Let us then start with the life of philosophical pursuit, which is also the life of philosophical examination. In normal conditions, truth is not immediately available. Indeed, if we train our philosophical drive and develop it, we realize that many (if not all) of our views are defective, and we are thus forced to examine things more closely. This examination may take almost all of our time and produce a state of extreme ἀσχολία (as is illustrated by the case of Socrates).²²⁵⁷ We will have no time for anything else (unless it somehow helps us to find truth). All our actions will thus be somehow derived from our pursuit of the truth. We will lead a simple life and use every pretext to examine ourselves or others. Consequently, we will develop elaborate λόγοι, most of them provisional, and we will probably follow those that seem more plausible.²²⁵⁸ This may determine further actions, but the latter will be in many cases the result of provisional views. As such, these actions may not correspond to what we should do, and we will not be fully certain of them. We will only be certain that we must pursue the truth – and in that extent we will know what to do.²²⁵⁹ Of course this also raises the question about the validity of one's view that knowledge is the good. Initially, at least, it is not clear that one really possesses a rational insight into the importance of knowledge. Its pursuit may be instinctive, and later one will perhaps be able to find the reasons why it is so important to attain it.

In this context, our way of seeing beings or of relating to them will also be very different from usual. We will be like the philosophical dogs described in the *Republic*, in the

²²⁵⁶ Indeed, the descriptions in *Symposium* (210a-212a), *Republic* (books V-VII) and *Theatetus* (172c-177b) assume that one would be able to see the truth and shape one's life according to it.

²²⁵⁷ Cp. e.g. *Ap.* 23b-c.

²²⁵⁸ See e.g. *Cri.* 46b-d.

²²⁵⁹ This actually corresponds to the paradox we considered in Part I: namely, how could Socrates avow his ignorance and at the same time have strong convictions about what to do. We can now interpret these convictions as the result not of full insight, but rather of the fact that his soul was ruled by the philosophical drive and this rendered obvious for him that he should do what allowed him to come closer to the truth.

sense that all beings we come into contact with will be primarily seen as known or unknown, and this will determine our relation to them.²²⁶⁰ They will also be determined as helpful, indifferent or harmful according to how they influence our pursuit of truth. Apart from that, one will be pretty indifferent to what happens to one's body or in one's πόλις. One will probably spend one's life in some corner.²²⁶¹ However, although one's body will be in the πόλις, one's mind will wander far and wide. As is said in *Theaetetus*, one will think about the whole of space, whole of time, and also the general predicates that pervade all individual beings.²²⁶² But since one will still not have access to those broader domains which frame every particular being, the things that lie around oneself will be seen as problematic. In other words, one will regard the immediate reality as a kind of shadowy cave or the depth of the sea.²²⁶³ Everything will be unclear – i.e., a sort of degraded reality that refers to something else that locates and defines it. The life of the philosopher is thus constitutively referred to something beyond, which is not exactly a second world, different from this one, but rather the truth about this world of ours.

This shows us the basic structure of a βίος ζητητικός. It may admit many changes and developments, according to the results of one's examinations, and it may even contain moments of contemplating particular truths. But we may still conceive a different kind of philosophical life – namely, a life in which one has full access to truth. In this case one would be able to see what the εἶδη consist in, and one would also be able to properly attribute them to particular beings (which would therefore be seen as what they are – i.e., as instances of the truth). This vision of the truth is described by Plato as an intense experience. In fact, one would profoundly admire such a vision and be nurtured by it.²²⁶⁴ It would fully satisfy us – or, as Diotima says in *Symposium* when she is describing the vision of τὸ καλλός, our life could only be worthwhile at that point.²²⁶⁵ We could even say that this would constitute the true or right way of living (i.e., the ἀληθῶς or ὀρθῶς ζῆν).²²⁶⁶ One would be truly free and have true σχολή (insofar as one would no longer have to pursue the good).

²²⁶⁰ Cp. *Rep.* 375e-376b – especially 376b: “ἦι, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὄψιν οὐδενὶ ἄλλῳ φίλην καὶ ἐχθρὰν διακρίνει ἢ τῷ τὴν μὲν καταμαθεῖν, τὴν δὲ ἀγνοῆσαι. καίτοι πῶς οὐκ ἂν φιλομαθὲς εἶη συνέσει τε καὶ ἀγνοίᾳ ὀριζόμενον τό τε οἰκεῖον καὶ τὸ ἀλλότριον; οὐδαμῶς, ἦ δ’ ὅς, ὅπως οὔ.”

²²⁶¹ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 485d-e.

²²⁶² Cp. 173e ff.

²²⁶³ Cp. *Rep.* 514a ff., *Phd.* 109a ff. For a brief analysis of these passages, see Chap. 16, Sect. 5.1.

²²⁶⁴ For the idea of truth as something that nurture or feeds the soul, cp. *Phdr.* 247d-e and 248b-c.

²²⁶⁵ See 211c-d: “(...) καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν μαθημάτων ἐπ’ ἐκεῖνο τὸ μάθημα τελευτῆσαι, ὃ ἐστὶν οὐκ ἄλλου ἢ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα, καὶ γινῶ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν ὃ ἐστὶ καλόν. ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου, ὃ φίλε Σώκρατες, ἔφη ἡ Μαντικὴ ξένη, εἶπερ που ἄλλοθι, βιωτὸν ἀνθρώπων, θεωμένῳ αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν.”

²²⁶⁶ For the notion of ἀληθῶς ζῆν, see *Rep.* 490b and *Lg.* 730c. For the notion of ὀρθῶς ζῆν, see *Ap.* 39d.

Such a life raises some questions, though. At first, Plato's descriptions may suggest a life in which one is always immersed in contemplation and would not notice or do anything else. But is that really the case? Can such a life be sustained? Wouldn't we need to care for the body to survive, and also for the πόλις, insofar as it is the context in which we normally live? And wouldn't we need to help the others learn the truth? In fact, it may happen that when we contemplate the truth we learn that we must still act in the world (as is the case with the guardians in the *Republic*). Thus, we would not be able to fully lose ourselves in contemplation. We may have to pursue other things (and perhaps even honor or pleasure, for some particular reason). We may have to perform many actions and use things in a particular way – and this will render the βίος θεωρητικός more complex.²²⁶⁷

Of course, this whole description is contingent on us being able to attain the truth. But it is not clear that we can ever attain it. Some texts seem to admit this possibility, but in *Phaedo*, for instance, Socrates defends that it cannot be attained while we are alive, due to the body and its tensions – and in *Phaedrus* he says that we may not even be able to fully contemplate it after death (indeed, only godly souls have an unimpeded access to the truth).²²⁶⁸ Moreover, all this assumes that there is something like truth. However, the project of finding the truth may be unfeasible – either because we are not able to find it or because it is an absurd idea to begin with. In that case, the only philosophical life would be the life of pursuing the truth. But what is the value of such a life if it can never attain what it desires? The contemplative life seems to be the best life and the life of philosophical examination is a sort of second best (at least according to Plato's analyses).²²⁶⁹ But if there is no truth, then there is no good life or no happiness. We will be condemned to pursue something we will never attain. Life will be a fool's errand. But let us leave this question aside for now.²²⁷⁰

We saw that the philosophical life may assume two different modalities. They are both completely regulated by our love of knowledge, and to this extent they differ radically from any form of unexamined life, as we will see. It is, however, important to bear in mind that this description is somewhat idealized. In general, there are no pure philosophical lives. There are only mixed forms – i.e., lives in which the rule of philosophical drive is not absolute. Plato is very aware of this, and at some points he even describes the other drives of

²²⁶⁷ We will leave aside the question of whether and how Plato's understanding of the contemplative life differs from what we find in Aristotle (see in particular *Ethica Nichomachea*, 1177a12 ff.).

²²⁶⁸ See *Phd.* 66b-67b, *Phdr.* 248a-b.

²²⁶⁹ For this idea, see *Phlb.* 19c: “(...) καλὸν μὲν τὸ σύμπαντα γινώσκειν τῷ σώφρονι, δεύτερος δ' εἶναι πλοῦς δοκεῖ μὴ λανθάνειν αὐτὸν αὐτόν.”

²²⁷⁰ For more on this, cp. Chap. 20, Sect. 3.4.

the soul as inextirpable, which means they will always contaminate the philosophical drive and prevent its perfect development. Still, we may try to perfect it and thus render our life more and more philosophical.

CONCLUSION OF PART III

The long analyses performed in this Part III laid the groundwork for the discussion of the unexamined life. We saw the fundamental structures that – according to Plato – determine any way of life and are thus at the basis of the unexamined life. In order to identify these structures, we had to consider Plato's understanding of the kind of being that we are (i.e., human nature at large), which is in many respects extremely different from the way we normally understand ourselves. To be sure, the presentation of Plato's perspective is not without problems. One could even argue that the corpus does not communicate a coherent doctrine on this matter. However, we tried to conciliate the different passages as much as possible, in order to determine Plato's general understanding of the human being.

But let us recapitulate some of the main points. We saw that Plato mainly considers our being as *ψυχή*, and this is a very meaningful word. Hence, we started by considering the history of the word and the reasons why Plato uses it (Chapter 10). We saw that the word expresses a mysterious component of our being (often associated with eschatological reflections), which is contrasted with the more immediate and obvious character of the body. In fact, the word *ψυχή* implies a new way of looking at ourselves that raises the problem of what lies at the heart of our being. Plato tries to distinguish this component from the body, and in doing so he calls our attention to the central role of the *ψυχή* in our way of seeing things and in our way of acting.

In the previous chapters we tried to determine the precise role the *ψυχή* plays in cognition and in action – or, which is the same thing, we tried to determine the cognitive and the practical dimension of the *ψυχή*. We started by seeing how the cognitive structure of our being is defined in the Platonic corpus (Chapter 11). The *ψυχή* lets things appear, but it also tries to define them, and is thus essentially referred to the notions of knowledge, truth and objective reality. Moreover, the *ψυχή* has several cognitive powers or capabilities, which produce different kinds of content, and together constitute our way of seeing things. At the core of this powers lies the power of judging, which is what constitutes our relation to the truth and what mediates our relation with the other powers and their cognitive contents.

As for the practical dimension of the *ψυχή*, we first considered how our actions and desires are not a mere aggregate, but are rather unified in a unitary pursuit of the good or of

happiness (Chapter 12). We also considered how this goodness or happiness are referred to a superlative good. This is what we always pursue, but we cannot immediately attain it, and hence our pursuit turns into a system of interrelated actions, underpinned by a complex system of views or beliefs, which is what actually corresponds to the notion of βίος.

However, Plato's analysis of the practical domain (and of the notion of βίος in particular) is much more complex. According to Plato, the ψυχή is internally divided and characterized by three different drives, which are directed at three very different kinds of object: namely, gain, honor and knowledge. These drives (φιλοκέρδεια, φιλοτιμία and φιλοσοφία) are permanently active and inextirpable. They fight with each other for control and their relation of forces constitutes the inner arrangement (or the inner πολιτεία) of the soul. In addition, the drives pervade and transform each other (also according to their relation of forces), which means, among other things, that they are all essentially philosophical. This combination and mutual contamination of the drives is then what determines the practical system of life (i.e., our βίος) and its underlying views or beliefs. The different inner πολιτεία constitute different βίοι and all diversity of human lives can be reduced to a few main configurations. In fact, they may be ultimately reduced to the contrast between the unexamined life and its opposite.

Finally, we considered in more detail the term φιλοσοφία, which is central for our whole analysis and for the characterization of the human soul. The term is somewhat ambiguous, but we saw how this ambiguity corresponds to different layers or different forms of the same thing. The fundamental meaning of the word is love of knowledge, and because we often think we already know what we need to know, we do not feel any need to examine things. If, however, we realize we do not know something, we will examine it (and this examination may also be called φιλοσοφία). Finally, we saw how the knowledge-loving drive may become the dominating drive of the soul and thus generate a philosophical life (which may be either a life dedicated to philosophical examination and the pursuit of truth, or a contemplative life). All the meanings of φιλοσοφία are thus interconnected.

This is the gist of the complex anthropology we can extract from the Platonic corpus. It is important to remark that these analyses show how the cognitive and the practical dimensions of the soul are closely intertwined. Our actions and our way of life are based on views or beliefs. In turn, these views or beliefs are the expression of a particular drive of the soul (namely, the philosophical drive) and are influenced by the other drives and the way we pursue the good. In fact, we can see even better the fundamental correlation between the

cognitive and the practical domains if we focus on the notion of φιλοσοφία. The word designates a practical tension, but it is directed at knowledge, and it expresses itself in a particular way of seeing things. This is very important, and Plato further stresses this importance by presenting φιλοσοφία as the fundamental trait of the soul. It pervades everything and our life is determined by its variations. It may be weaker or stronger, and this will determine everything else in our life.²²⁷¹ In other words, our relation to knowledge or truth is at the center of what we are, and this relation is simultaneously cognitive and practical. Thus, any distinction between a cognitive and a practical side is artificial, and we only made such a distinction in order to better identify the inner complexity of our being.

By defining the inner structure of our being, we were able to define in great detail the term βίος. We saw that a βίος is a complex totality of meaning that is directed at a superlative good, and this totality is shaped by the inner arrangement of the soul's constitutive drives and the views outlined by them, which determine how we see things and how we live. This is the general structure of all lives, and the different combinations of drives outline the main possible βίοι. Each particular life thus corresponds to one of the main βίοι and is never completely individual, despite all its specificities.

One may of course wonder whether there really is a general structure of life, which only admits of a few variations (i.e., a few βίοι), and one may also wonder whether Plato properly identified it. Furthermore, one may doubt this particular interpretation of Plato – especially insofar as it tries to combine very different texts and present a unitary conception of the human being. We brought together the epistemological considerations of the later dialogues, the intellectualist considerations of action that characterize the early, Socratic dialogues, and the tripartition of the soul that is found in Plato's mature works (according to the usual chronology of the texts). In so doing, we were able to better understand important aspects of our life. However, we may also have neglected particular aspects of each question.

At any rate, we should not lose sight of the fact that the analyses made implied a distinction between formal structures and their material identification. In other words, we saw that the soul is marked by a relation to truth, by the pursuit of the superlative good and by an inner πολιτεία that configures a particular βίος. These structures, however, do not imply the particular identification of them that is presented (or at least suggested) in the Platonic

²²⁷¹ For more on this, cp. Chap. 17.

corpus. We may disagree with Plato's identification of the truth, the superlative good and the best βίος, and still agree with his description of the formal structures of our being.

Regardless of whether we agree with Plato or not, we are now in a position to see how he describes and appraises the unexamined life. Many important aspects of his description and appraisal were already alluded to, but we will still need to develop them, which is also beneficial, because it will give us the chance to look at these aspects from a different angle.

PART IV

The Platonic description of the unexamined life

“(…) nos autem tenebras cogitemus tantas quanta quondam eruptione Aetnaeorum ignium finitimas regiones obscuravisse dicuntur, ut per biduum nemo hominem homo agnosceret, cum autem tertio die sol inluxisset tum ut revixisse sibi viderentur: quod si hoc idem ex aeternis tenebris contingeret ut subito lucem aspiceremus, quanam species caeli videretur? sed adsiduitate cotidiana et consuetudine oculorum adsuescunt animi, neque admirantur neque requirunt rationes earum rerum, quas semper vident, proinde quasi novitas nos magis quam magnitudo rerum debeat ad exquirendas causas excitare.”

Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II.38.96²²⁷²

After seeing the basic structures of human life according to the Platonic corpus, we must now consider what characterizes a life marked by the lack of philosophical examination. In other words, we have to determine what exactly is implied in the notion of “unexamined life” (ἀνεξέταστος βίος) and how such a life is constituted. As a particular kind of βίος, the unexamined life corresponds to a pursuit of the superlative good that unfolds in a certain kind of practical system, based on a system of beliefs of a certain kind. We will have to see how such a life unfolds (Chapter 15) and how it relates with knowledge (Chapter 16). We will also have to discuss what exactly is responsible for the occurrence of such a life and to what extent we may release ourselves from it (Chapter 17). All this will be essential for our subsequent discussion of Socrates’ assertion about the worthlessness of the unexamined life and the importance of philosophical examination.

But before anything else, a few preliminary remarks about the notion of unexamined life (or ἀνεξέταστος βίος) are in order. First of all, we saw that Socrates, in the *Apology*, presents the alternative between the unexamined life and his own life (a life dedicated to philosophical examination) as a fundamental alternative in life.²²⁷³ However, this is not an alternative of which we are normally aware. Usually, we do think about the possibility of

²²⁷² See O. PLASBERG (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis scripta quae manserunt omnia*, Fasc. 45, Leipzig, Teubner, 1917.

²²⁷³ Cp. in particular Chap. 3, Sect. 2 above.

dedicating our life to philosophical examination. Moreover, we can conceive of many different lives that may very well include some occasional examinations, but are not primarily concerned with examining things. We notice something similar in the Platonic corpus. The dialogues illustrate and mention many non-philosophical lives, which have their own values, their own goals and their own views. If we focus only on the *Republic*, Plato distinguishes five kinds of life and four of them are non-philosophical.²²⁷⁴ The difference between examining and not-examining is therefore far from being the only difference between lives or even the most recognizable. However, we can regard all lives that are opposed to the philosophical life as different modalities of the unexamined life. Despite all the differences, the notion of unexamined life actually expresses an essential trait of all these different lives, and their diversity only goes to show the variegated character of the unexamined life, or how it may assume many forms.

But this does not yet express the full malleability of the unexamined life. It is also important to note that we do not stop living an unexamined life just by performing some philosophical examinations. As we considered above, one may perform philosophical examination in an inauthentic or adulterated way.²²⁷⁵ More precisely, one may perform only a semblance of philosophical examination or one may still be immature and unable to fully develop it (as is the case with the young Socrates or Theaetetus). When this happens, one may already grant an important role to philosophical examination in one's life, but the examination in question is limited or defective. As a result, one's life is still unexamined. It is an unexamined life disguised as its opposite or a kind of unphilosophical philosophical life. In some cases, the inauthenticity in question may be immediately manifest, but in others it may be harder to identify. In fact, sometimes the boundaries between inauthentic and authentic philosophy may become blurry. This renders it all the more important to see in detail what characterizes a life marked by inauthentic examination and why it is still unexamined.²²⁷⁶

²²⁷⁴ For a brief consideration of this and the other identifications of possible βίαι in the corpus, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 6.3.

²²⁷⁵ See Chap. 14, Sect. 4.

²²⁷⁶ There are actually several reasons for doing this. Besides helping us draw the boundaries between the unexamined life and its opposite, it also let us understand the transition from one into another. Indeed, a partially examined life may develop our philosophical drive and, as a result, it may lead to a fully philosophical life. However, the life marked by inauthentic examination still shares many important features with the other kinds of unexamined life, and as such it also lets us understand not only how tenacious the unexamined life can be, but also how difficult it is to lead a philosophical life as Plato conceives it.

In sum, the unexamined life is more complex than we might have thought at first and it is important not to be deceived by the superficial differences between lives. Two particular ways of life may be extremely different and still be equally unexamined. We must therefore see which features are shared by all these lives as a result of their lack of examination, and since our main interest here is to identify the essential traits of the unexamined life, we must carefully separate what is specific of each kind of life from what may characterizes all forms of unexamined life as such.²²⁷⁷

We must also note that the description of the unexamined life is not the description of some abstract or remote possibility. The unexamined life is very close and very familiar to most (if not all) people. Normally, people are born into it and spend their entire life without deeply examining things. This is also the life lead by most of the characters in Plato's dialogues (even though Socrates constantly tries to change that). The unexamined life is a constant presence in the texts, and the philosophical life itself grows out of it and is defined by it. However, despite all its pervasiveness and all its familiarity, it is difficult to say what exactly characterizes it. At first, the only thing we may know for sure is that such a life lacks examination. Whether we understand the word “ἀνεξέταστος” in a passive or active sense (i.e., as a life that is not submitted to philosophical examination or as a life that does not perform it), the ἀνεξέταστος βίος is nevertheless a life that has no contact with the particular kind of examination Plato presents throughout the corpus.²²⁷⁸ It may admit some brief and superficial examination, but it is not a life dedicated to it or defined by it.

However, this is not all that is contained in the notion of unexamined life as it is used by Socrates. The lack of a particular kind of examination is not an incidental fact with no consequences for the life in question. On the contrary: the lack of examination is a form of defect and it can (and does) have very serious consequences on how we see things and on how we live. In other words, the term “unexamined life” is a pejorative term and it designates a defective kind of life. Thus, a life marked by perfection (both cognitive and practical)

²²⁷⁷ In doing so, we need to bear in mind that the analysis of the unexamined life as such is abstract. In our experience of ourselves and others, we never deal with the unexamined life as such, but rather with certain modalities of unexamined life (which may have their own strengths and weaknesses). In order to render this clearer, and also to see how the general structure normally manifests itself, we will pay some attention to the particular kinds of unexamined life. However, our main focus will still be the features that pervade all those kinds of life.

²²⁷⁸ For more on the sense of ἀνεξέταστος, see Chap. 3, Sect. 2, and Chap. 4, Sect. 2.1.

would not be unexamined in the Platonic sense, even if it did not perform any examination whatsoever.²²⁷⁹

At this point, we still do not know how serious are the consequences of leading an unexamined life. It seems to depend on how much of one's views are true or false. However, even if our views turn out to be right in many important things, we may still have a very defective access to things, which is something that may have serious consequences.²²⁸⁰ But let us leave this aside for now. In Part V, we will consider the badness or undesirability of the unexamined life as such, but in order to do so we must first identify the general structure of such a life, and this is our goal now.

²²⁷⁹ To be sure, the idea that the unexamined life involves a constitutive defect may seem paradoxical. We easily recognize that we do not perform the examination described by Plato, but we hardly see it as a defect (i.e., as something that brings about bad consequences). This means that there is a contrast between the structure of the unexamined life and its own self-interpretation, and we will have to account for such a contrast in what follows (i.e., we have to see how the defectiveness of the unexamined life comes to hide itself).

²²⁸⁰ This is precisely what is implied in Plato's criticism of the notion of ὀρθὴ δόξα (cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.3).

CHAPTER 15

The formation or unfolding of the unexamined life

“Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror.”

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, XIII.9.10²²⁸¹

We will begin by considering the way the unexamined life is formed. Although in general we are all very familiarized with such a life, it is usually (if not always) experienced as something already formed, whose mechanism or inner dialectics we do not follow. In fact, we tend not to be at all aware that there is something generating and sustaining the unexamined life. This is what we now have to explore. We must identify the basis or source of such a life, and see how it unfolds. In order to do so, we will refer back to many aspects of the analyses of βίος presented in Chapters 12 and 13.

1. The predominance of a non-philosophical drive as the basis or source of the unexamined life

The main trait of the unexamined life is obviously the lack of examination. This lack is not necessarily absolute. The unexamined life admits a certain degree of examination, but this examination is always circumscribed and subordinated to the particular goals of such a life. It is therefore very far from being a deep and global examination as the one we defined in Part II. The unexamined life does not perform such an examination and it is not submitted to it. This could be the result of such a life possessing a perfect or infallible knowledge. However, this is not case, as we will see. Then why does the unexamined life fail to examine?

The framework of the *Republic* lets us better understand why this happens. We saw that according to this text each life is the expression of an inner πολιτεία – i.e., of a particular arrangement of the soul’s drives (i.e., an arrangement of its love of gain, its love of honor and its love of knowledge). These drives pull in different directions and they fight for control, but in general one of them prevails (to a greater or lesser degree) over the others and controls

²²⁸¹ See L. VERHEIJEN (ed.), *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1981.

them. This defines how each drive will affect the way we lead our life and also how they will affect each other (insofar as they are not only combined, but also contaminate and transform each other in a particular way). The submitted drives will be the most modified, and they will mirror to a great extent the ruling drive. The latter, in turn, will also be modified (even if to a lesser extent), according to the strength of the other drives.

This is enough for us to identify the main feature of the unexamined life. The lack of examination is the result of the inner arrangement of the soul's drives (or of the soul's inner πολιτεία). All the lives that are not decisively dominated by the love of knowledge, but rather by non-philosophical drives, are unexamined. The lack of examination is thus a consequence of one's limited interest in knowledge. One's philosophical or knowledge-loving drive does not prevail over the other drives. Instead, it becomes subject to them or controlled by them – and this is what blocks philosophical examination.²²⁸² Indeed, the unexamined life does not consist in a permanent conflict of the soul's drives. Although it admits of certain conflicts and changes of arrangement, it nevertheless corresponds to a kind of inner πολιτεία in which the love of gain or the love of honor prevails. The soul's φιλοσοφία is thus submitted to one of these other drives, and this submission transforms it and prevents it from functioning properly. One's mind becomes numb and to a great extent irrational and blind. This does not mean that one becomes totally indifferent to knowing what reality is. As we will see in the following chapter, the unexamined life is still full of beliefs or knowledge claims. However, one's relation with these beliefs or knowledge claims is weak. They are not the result of a careful examination and one does not feel the need to carefully examine them. Rather, one is credulous and easily accepts them. In many cases, they are dictated by the other drives, which assume a philosophical form and then determine how we see things. In other words, our non-philosophical drives create their own views and their own "truth". These views may have many limitations or defects of which one is not aware, but we are nevertheless easily and strongly convinced of them.

The basis of all forms of unexamined life is thus a particular kind of inner πολιτεία or inner arrangement of the soul's drives. We may wonder about what brings about such an inner arrangement and thus causes the inborn φιλοσοφία to be weak and mastered by other drives. However, we will leave this question aside for now.²²⁸³ We will simply grant that the

²²⁸² Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 553d: "τὸ δέ γε οἶμαι λογιστικόν τε καὶ θυμοειδὲς χαμαὶ ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν παρακαθίσας ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ καὶ καταδουλωσάμενος, τὸ μὲν οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐᾷ λογίζεσθαι οὐδὲ σκοπεῖν ἀλλ' ἢ ὅποθεν ἐξ ἐλαττόνων χρημάτων πλείω ἔσται (...)."

²²⁸³ For its discussion, see Chap. 17 below.

soul may have a non-philosophical πολιτεία and consider how such a kind of inner πολιτεία may unfold into a complex way of life.

2. The unfolding of the unexamined life. The unexamined superlative good and the unexamined practical system

The unexamined life corresponds to a certain configuration of the inner structure of the soul. It is true that it may assume many concrete forms, but regardless of the particular contents of each unexamined life, they all share a common constitution, and this is what we must now identify. We must determine the unexamined life's core in more detail and see how it unfolds or spreads out, shaping one's life and all its moments. The unexamined life is indeed constituted by this dynamic process, even if we are not aware of it. For the most part, the process is inapparent and subterranean. It is an unexamined process. We do not need to think about it for it to occur. In some cases, the process may perhaps become more conspicuous – for instance, if there is an inner conflict (στάσις) or a change of inner πολιτεία that forces us to change our course in life. But even at that moment we will probably pay little attention to the process that shapes our way of life. The constitution of all forms of unexamined life is mostly a blind process. We tend not to notice it, not to follow it and not to examine it. It merely occurs, as a manifestation of our being. We may pay closer attention to some of its moments and help shape them, but for the most part the process is tacit.

We must now describe this mostly tacit process. In doing so, we will focus primarily on the practical side of the system of life. This means that for now we will pay little attention to its cognitive side, even if it is always present and underpins the whole practical system. It is true that the unexamined character of the unexamined life is directly referred to this life's views, but for now we will consider the practical tensions of such a life and how they restrict any examination. Then, in the following chapter, we will explore the cognitive side of the unexamined life.

2.1. The unexamined identification of the superlative good

We saw that each βίος corresponds to a particular form of pursuing the good, and such a pursuit is first of all based on a particular identification of the superlative good (i.e., of what will maximize its life and render it the best or happiest life). This identification is what allows

the soul to guide its own life. However, it is not automatically given to us. The soul is composed of three ineradicable drives and each of them is directed to a different kind of object. These drives thus pull us in different directions and fight for control. But in the case of the unexamined life, the soul is ruled by a drive that is in itself non-philosophical (even if it ends up being affected by the philosophical drive and, consequently, assumes some of its features). What does this mean for our identification of the superlative good?

We saw that the interaction of drives creates a certain view (a δόξα) of what the superlative good is. This is not the only view of the soul, but it is a central one. It sets a target for the soul by defining what is most esteemed, and setting it apart from things that are indifferent or even despised. As a result, this view generates an intense love or desire (ἔρως) for what is seen as the good, and this love or desire tends to coincide with the soul's ruling drive – even if it may be partially transformed by the other drives. In fact, the object of love may be simpler or more complex. It all depends on the specific arrangement of the soul's constitutive drives.

Now, since we are talking about the unexamined life, the particular object of desire will be some form of gain or honor. In order to identify one of them as the good, we may need several views about what they mean and what they imply. However, the unexamined life is characterized by the fact that this identification of the good is not the result of any explicit deliberation or rational discussion. In fact, it tends to be wholly tacit. We do not explicitly know that we have an identification of the good and we do not explicitly know what this identification is. Our tension towards it is rather experienced as a more or less immediate perception of what matters, and we are not able to say much about it. In some cases, we may perhaps have dedicated some thought to it, but this is still far from a complete examination. Our relation to the superlative good is fundamentally unexamined. However, this renders it no less effective.

2.2. The unexamined pursuit of the superlative good and the constitution of an unexamined practical system

Our relation with the superlative good, however, is not direct and simple. As we established before, the superlative good is not automatically available, and we need to pursue it. This pursuit may involve much work and painstaking, and it is essential to constitute a βίος. By pursuing the good our life becomes complex. But this is not all. Our identification of

the good also becomes complex. We may have to identify intermediate goods, which help us in our pursuit of the superlative good, as well as intermediate evils, which harm our chances of attaining what we desire. In fact, this may create very complex chains of referral. Many things may be pursued (or avoided) for the sake of something else, though ultimately they all refer to the superlative good. In other words, a complex practical system unfolds. We are always moved by our main love or desire, and this love or desire may direct us to many different targets (including our most immediate target – i.e., the action we are performing at any given moment).²²⁸⁴ However, our ultimate target is always the superlative good.

The whole life is thus integrated in this pursuit of the superlative good, and the latter is defined by the soul's inner πολιτεία or by the arrangement of the soul's constitutive drives. This πολιτεία or arrangement determines which drive rules the soul, and the ruling drive then plays a central role in defining all life's pursuits – even if it is still affected (and partially transformed) by the other drives. These other drives, in turn, are also transformed by the ruling drive, and the inner πολιτεία of the soul thus determines the way they are integrated (or how relevant they are) in one's life.²²⁸⁵ It is true that this inner arrangement is open to conflicts and may suffer some regional or even global variations, which will then change our particular routes or even our global destination in life. In fact, the whole practical system of life is being redefined at every moment, according to the circumstances we find ourselves in. However, the main lines of the system tend to be quite solid and to undergo very few changes.

Be that as it may, the definition of our life's practical system depends on a very complex calculation or weighing. We must consider our possibilities and outline a meaningful plan. This is so even in the unexamined life. But in the latter, despite the constitutive calculation of how one is to live, we do not think things through. All the practical system is constituted almost automatically. In most cases, we did not even think about it explicitly. We have no clear relation to the constitution of our life's plan. The general direction of life and even all our particular steps tend to be (at least to a large extent) unexamined. They are quasi-instinctive or quasi-blind – even if they also have a cognitive structure, as we will see. We live without fully examining and justifying what we do. We do not demand much in terms of rational insight to be engaged in our life. We may not even

²²⁸⁴ The targets may all be of a similar kind. For instance, one may try to always have pleasure in each circumstance. But the practical system may also include very different things, and even the opposite of what is taken to be the good. One may for instance accept to suffer pain in order to later attain a greater pleasure. Cp. e.g. *Prt.* 354a-e.

²²⁸⁵ For instance, one will pursue honor, but will still have a greater or smaller desire for pleasure and knowledge.

have a clear idea of what we hope to achieve by our actions. We do not even examine the particular interrelations between our acts and how we do some of them for the sake of others. We tend to have only a hazy notion of the whole path (or as Plato would say, we look at it from afar) – and this may end up causing crises or practical mistakes, when the orientation is revealed to be problematic or erroneous.

It is true that at some moments one may employ or resort to some examination (and thus to some explicit calculation), but this examination is mostly instrumental. It serves practical purposes (namely, how to better achieve a particular goal we have, or even our general goal) and it is not concerned with attaining the complete truth of the matter. Thus, the examination in question is very limited. Even if one were to examine many more things, it would always fall short of a complete examination – especially because one does not have the time or the *σχολή* for it. In general, we must care for other things and we need to act with some urgency. We cannot spend much time examining our life and delay our action indefinitely. Our passions force us to act.²²⁸⁶ Moreover, the lack of examination is also important for us to be engaged and take pains in our life project. If we would question everything, we would most probably not be able to act resolutely.

2.3. The unexamined integration of all beings in life's practical “system”

We come into contact with many beings that are not the superlative good or the superlative evil. As Plato says, they are by themselves intermediate (*μεταξύ*) – i.e., neutral, neither good nor bad.²²⁸⁷ But this does not mean that we experience them as being absolutely neutral. On the contrary, they are subjected to demands and determined by the role they play in our life plan. They are helpful, harmful or indifferent. We may use them as instruments or they may be obstacles in our path. This also determines our relation to them. They become dear or hated, our own or alien. The process applies to things in a strict sense, to persons and even to the *πόλις*. They are all somehow integrated in our life and this determines them for us. Moreover, the process may be more or less complex. In some cases, it may include several layers. We may determine the value of something in general and also in a particular context (in which a thing may acquire a completely new – albeit temporary – value). But in all cases the functional role of things (and thus their immediate aspect and insertion in our

²²⁸⁶ Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 66b-d.

²²⁸⁷ See *Ly.* 220d, and *Grg.* 467e.

life) derives from the practical system and from the superlative good we ultimately pursue. The latter is what ultimately determines the way we relate to things and how they appear to us. In a sense, it creates the reality around us.

This is very important, but normally the role things have in our life (and thus their aspect for us) is determined in a tacit manner. We do not need to examine these things in detail in order to see what role they might play. They are immediately regarded as helpful, harmful or irrelevant. Then, in some cases, we might examine them in some respect, and we may even try to know things good enough in order to manipulate them – i.e., we may develop an ἐμπειρία or a τριβή. But the examination in question is partial and focused on what is relevant for the main drive of the soul.²²⁸⁸ This follows a general tendency of the unexamined life. Our contact with things is always shaped by our desires or interests. We look mostly at their possible relevance for our life. If they are irrelevant, we do not focus our attention on them. If they are relevant, we only consider the predicates that more directly concern us. We do not try to fully determine their identity and all their predicates. Thus, the way things appear to us is directly determined by our pursuit of the superlative good, and this produces an insufficient – and perhaps even greatly distorted – experience of things.

2.4. Unexamined expectation and unexamined resignation as modes of appraising one's life

Our previous consideration of what characterized a particular βίος included one last important aspect – namely, the fact that we always have a diagnosis of our state or, to be more precise, a diagnosis of how our pursuit of the superlative good is going and what we might expect. We may have met more or less limitations and hindrances, and we may regard ourselves as having power (δύναμις) to overcome our obstacles or we may think we are in a state of weakness (ἀσθένεια). In other words, we may have good expectations for the future (and live with hope) or we may be more despaired (and suffer something similar to the double pain mentioned in the *Philebus*).²²⁸⁹ In the latter case, we must then decide if life is still worth living or not. If we continue living, we may try to compromise or settle for less, and this will affect our practical system. We will have a weaker relation to the superlative

²²⁸⁸ Cp. *Grg.* 492b ff., where Socrates says that rhetoric is a form of ἐμπειρία or τριβή, and goes on to describe what an ἐμπειρία or τριβή is. He says that they are basically a form of pandering (κολακευτική). Their only concern is to provide pleasure. They do not consider the φύσις and the causes of things (465a) and, as a result, they lack real discernment about what they do and what they deal with.

²²⁸⁹ Cp. 36a-b.

good and may rather focus on other things (such as safety or freedom from pain). This does not mean we will stop desiring the superlative good, but we will try to distract ourselves from it and guide ourselves to more modest goals (which will not fully satisfy us, though).

To be sure, the process of compromising or settling for less is not something entirely under our control. We may be unable to distract ourselves from what we take to be the superlative good. But we may also settle for less without thinking much about it, and in the unexamined life the process actually tends to be tacit and automatic. As was said, we do not examine our desire of a superlative good and our relation to it. Moreover, we do not examine in full detail the happiness or misery of our state. We also do not examine our expectations or lack thereof, in order to see if they are legitimate or not. If we happen to think we will not achieve much, we do not fully examine whether or not we should go on living, and whether or not satisfy ourselves with what we got. Indeed, even if we try to distract ourselves from our superlative desire, we have no real justification for doing so (just like we have no real justification to do the opposite – i.e., to pursue the superlative good with all our strength). We simply do it, without wondering why. Thus, our appraisal of our life and our reaction to it tends to be unexamined, and in many cases we may not even be aware of it (i.e., we may not be aware of our resignation or of our expectations as such).

3. The specific traits of the main kinds of unexamined life and their commonalities

Up until this point, we have considered the general structure of the unexamined life in general and paid almost no attention to the fact that the unexamined life may assume many different shapes, according to the many different possible arrangements of the soul's drives. The different kinds of unexamined life share the structure we just described, but they also have particular features. This is not entirely negligible, especially because the dialogues often focus on particular modalities of the unexamined life and the kinds of person that correspond to them. We find ample discussion of these modalities, and their unexamined character is always stressed in one way or the other. Given this emphasis on the particular forms of unexamined life, it is important to consider them (even if only to see their most basic features). We will first focus on their pure forms (i.e., the ones in which the ruling drive more strongly prevails over the other drives), and then we will pay some attention to the mixed forms and their specificity. In doing so, we will be able to better understand what characterizes the unexamined life and we will also be able to better recognize it.

3.1. The different forms of gain-loving life

One possible form of unexamined life is the one characterized by the love of gain. This life is ruled by the appetitive desires, and the other drives (namely, the love of honor and the love of knowledge) are subdued. The gain-loving life is thus primarily focused on our private or subjective sphere (i.e., our affective or bodily states) and it desires to achieve the best possible subjective state. But this is still a very generic description, and we have to see it in more detail.

First of all, it is important to note that in several texts (such as *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Philebus*), this is presented as a unitary form of life, and it even seems to encompass all non-philosophical lives (including the honor-loving life).²²⁹⁰ The gain-loving life is then characterized as a constant pursuit of pleasure, though one can also exercise some moderation (even if only for the sake of attaining more pleasure or avoiding pain).²²⁹¹ In other texts (such as *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*), Plato sets it apart from an honor-loving life.²²⁹² More importantly, Plato also distinguishes different kinds of gain-loving life, which have their own practical systems and their own views. As we saw, Plato identifies in the *Republic* three kinds of gain-loving life, which correspond to the oligarchic, the democratic and the tyrannical polities. Each of these lives pursues a different kind of desire or pleasure. The first kind of gain-loving life only considers our necessary desires (i.e., those that must be satisfied in order for us to survive) and tries to acquire all that assures its permanent satisfaction (namely, money or possessions).²²⁹³ The second kind of gain-loving life, in turn, pursues all sorts of pleasure (both necessary and non-necessary) and makes no distinctions among them.²²⁹⁴ Finally, the third kind of gain-loving life is only concerned with the most intense pleasures, which also tend to be unlawful pleasures, since they have no regard for others and society in general.²²⁹⁵

The rule of our gain-loving drive may therefore assume very different forms, depending on their ultimate goals, and one is bound to wonder what accounts for the different goals of these lives. Plato's model suggests that the difference may come from the

²²⁹⁰ See in particular *Phd.* 68b-c.

²²⁹¹ This is what is implied in the description of the popular ἀρεταί in *Phd.* 68d ff.

²²⁹² See e.g. *Phdr.* 237d ff.

²²⁹³ For the description of such a life, see 553a-555a.

²²⁹⁴ Cp. 559d-562a.

²²⁹⁵ See 571a-576b.

arrangement of the soul's drives. In the oligarchic life, the love of gain still seems to be opposed by the love of honor (and perhaps the love of knowledge), whereas in the tyrannical life all other drives seem to be reduced to their minimal forms. In addition, each of these three lives has its own view or understanding of what gain or pleasure is, as well as of how we may attain it, and this also plays an important role in distinguishing them.

However, despite these differences, the three lives are ruled by the love of gain. This of course does not mean that other drives become inactive. Even the most tyrannical life is still somewhat concerned with how it is seen by others and with what the truth is. We are never indifferent to these questions. We are aware of others and of things in general, and so we want to be recognized by others and we want to have cognitive access to things. However, these urges are weakened and deeply transformed by the love of gain. As a result, they become integrated in a particular gain-loving project. One wants one's gain to be admired by others and one wants it to be true. In fact, the connection of our love of knowledge with the love of gain is particularly relevant. We always determine the subjective sphere and what is more closely connected to it. In other words, we have many views about it. The most important view of each gain-loving life, however, is the one that identifies the superlative good with having as much possessions as possible, having as much pleasure as possible, or having the most intense pleasures. These views of the good will then generate different kinds of pursuit. Each of them unfolds in a multitude of desires that are subordinated to the main desire of the soul. One will do many things to acquire possessions or pleasure, and everything will be seen or judged in light of its contribution to these goals.²²⁹⁶ However, in many cases it will not be easy to attain one's goal, and at that point one might have to compromise and settle for less (at least for a time). But still one will long for a superlative gain.

It is important to note that this pursuit of the superlative gain (be it in the form of possessions or of pleasure) may imply very complex calculations. In *Protagoras*, Socrates points out that there is always some anticipation of future pains and pleasures.²²⁹⁷ In *Gorgias*, he admits that one may even develop a more elaborate view of things (and particularly of body and soul), although this is still a limited form of knowledge. Socrates calls this more elaborate view of things ἐμπειρία, τρίβη, or κολακευτική, and says that it is only concerned with what is relevant for one's pursuit of pleasure, and not with determining the nature of

²²⁹⁶ In other words, things are judged by wealth and gain (as is said in *Rep.* 582d-e) or by pleasure (cp. *Lg.* 700e).

²²⁹⁷ See 353c ff.

things and taking proper care of them.²²⁹⁸ Thus, not even these more elaborate views change the fact that almost everything in the gain-loving lives is unexamined. One does not lose much time thinking about things. One automatically pursues possessions or pleasure, and there is no true examination of why they matter. One also fails to examine what exactly possessions or pleasures are, or what kinds of possession and pleasure there may be.²²⁹⁹ Moreover, there is in general little examination of the best way to achieve them. One may calculate some ways of achieving them (and in this sense use some examination – especially in a life that pursues money), but this never includes a full inspection of how we should act and of the circumstances in which we find ourselves (i.e., of the beings around us and of how they can contribute to our main goal). These lives are mostly irrational, just like the drive they are based on. They imply many views, but their carelessness about the quality of these views leaves them open to all sorts of errors and distortions, which easily translates into practical failures and into misery.

3.2. The honor-loving life

A different kind of unexamined life is the one dominated by the spirited desires – namely, the love of victory and the love of honor. In the *Republic*, this is the life of the timocratic man, who is mostly concerned with whether or not he prevails over others and, in general, with how he appears to others. We all want to be admired and we want to avoid being ill-regarded, but for an honor-loving life this becomes the main goal and everything is directed at it. One wants to have as much honor or status as possible.²³⁰⁰ However, one cannot instantly attain this goal. It requires great efforts (such as contests, conflicts, or even wars). In fact, one may have to dedicate one's entire life to such a goal. Every action will then be integrated in the project of gaining honor. Everything will be done for the sake of honor, and everything will be seen in light of its contribution to one's main goal.²³⁰¹ This is the general structure of the honor-loving life. There can be many variations of it (according to the context and to one's expectations or resignation), but they all differ significantly from the gain-loving life. Whereas the latter is mainly concerned with one's subjective sphere (and

²²⁹⁸ See *Grg.* 462b ff.

²²⁹⁹ Cp. e.g. *Phlb.* 12c ff.

²³⁰⁰ Socrates' description of Alcibiades in *Alc. I* 105a ff. is the perfect illustration of a boundless and insatiable love of honor. Cp. also *Smp.* 208c-e, where Plato describes how the desire for eternal fame can motivate some people.

²³⁰¹ To use an expression we find in *Rep.* 582e, such a person judges everything by honor, victory and courage.

thus with what one feels), the former are mostly concerned with the intersubjective sphere and with all that is relevant therein.

But the prevalence of the honor-loving drive does not mean that the other drives become inactive. Although the love of honor rules the soul, there is still love of gain and love of knowledge, and they can modify or distort the love of honor in greater or lesser degree. As a result, we also want to take pleasure in being honored by others and we want our honor to be true. However, these desires for pleasure and knowledge are relatively weak and distorted. This becomes particularly relevant in the case of our love of knowledge. Despite some concern with truth, the honor-loving life is nonetheless unexamined. It might occasionally examine things (even in a more philosophical way), but this examination will only be a means to better achieve its goal. One does not deeply examine what the others are, how exactly they see us, what it is to be honored or admired, and why it matters so much. One also does not examine in full how one should pursue honor. For instance, one tends not to think about what competences one should acquire.²³⁰² One also fails to fully examine one's circumstances and the beings around oneself, in order to better determine the role they could play in one's general pursuit of the good. All these things tend to be more or less automatically determined, and thus one is exposed to the possibility of making many mistakes.

3.3. The inauthentic dedication to philosophical examination and the inauthentic philosophical life

All forms of unexamined life have a philosophical component, but (as we saw above) there is also a particular form of unexamined life that takes itself to be philosophical in a pre-eminent sense.²³⁰³ It occupies itself with philosophical examination, and it may even regard itself as devoted to this activity. In fact, this kind of life does not seem as concerned with gain or honor as the lives just considered. Rather, it seems to be ruled by the love of knowledge. Indeed, it has many cognitive desires, it undertakes many things for the sake of knowledge and apparently it regards beings in general as objects of knowledge. This is why it examines so many things. However, this life's dedication to philosophical examination is inauthentic. More precisely, it is based on something other than a genuine philosophical

²³⁰² This is precisely what is shown throughout *Alcibiades I*. Alcibiades wants to engage in politics and be admired by all (cp. 105a ff.), but he does not think about all the knowledge required to attain such a goal.

²³⁰³ See Chap. 14, Sect. 4.

interest. Its love of knowledge is still limited and thus it is not truly philosophical. It only resembles a philosophical life.

Plato is very aware of this possibility and he shows how it can still be regarded as a variation of the two other kinds of unexamined life: the gain-loving life and the honor-loving life. In other words, the false philosophical life is a mixed life, in which the philosophical drive is more developed than usual, but still not fully developed. Truth is still not pursued entirely for its own sake. Its pursuit is still subordinated to some other goal, even if one does not notice it. The philosophical drive is subverted and acts for the sake of gain or honor. Despite all the concern with knowledge, one's true priority is of a different kind. Pleasure or honor are ultimately at the center of the inauthentic philosophical life. In other words, the rule (and consequently the polity) of the soul is not truly philosophical.

One of the most direct allusions to this possibility can be found in *Phaedo*, when Socrates says that people that are truly concerned with dying are not really philosophers.²³⁰⁴ They may examine things in their free times, but their priorities change as soon as what they desire is not guaranteed. This is one important aspect of it, but there are several other important references to inauthentic philosophical lives in the Platonic corpus. For instance, Plato admits that the democratic man, who pursues pleasure above all, may also dabble in philosophy.²³⁰⁵ He also mentions the young that imitate Socrates' examination in order to have pleasure.²³⁰⁶ Other times he portrays someone that is only interested in defeating someone else's arguments or in being celebrated for his wisdom.²³⁰⁷ In fact, even if one's desires do not go so far, one may still be concerned with what others will think and this may limit one's ability to examine something.²³⁰⁸

All these lives are thus unphilosophical and unexamined. Indeed, the examinations they carry out are all affected and even guided by the love of gain or the love of honor. This means that there are many things that one will accept without sufficient examination and there are also many things one will not truly question (especially one's most fundamental views).²³⁰⁹ Most importantly, this kind of life does not truly examine its motivations and is

²³⁰⁴ See *Phd.* 68b-c.

²³⁰⁵ See 561c-d.

²³⁰⁶ Cp. *Ap.* 23c, 33b-c, *Rep.* 539b, *Phlb.* 15d-16a.

²³⁰⁷ For this idea, cp. e.g. *Chrm.* 166c-e, *Grg.* 457c-458b, 515b, *Phd.* 91a, and *Phlb.* 14b.

²³⁰⁸ Cp. in particular *Smp.* 216b, *Tht.* 162d, *Prm.* 130e.

²³⁰⁹ In other words, he does not decide or judge things (at least not primarily) by means of experience, intelligence and rational argument, which are the instruments that characterize the philosopher's judgment. Cp. *Rep.* 582a ff.

not truly aware of what it really desires. Thus, despite all its philosophical concerns, this life is still essentially unexamined.²³¹⁰

3.4. Other mixed βίαι

What we just saw points to an important aspect of Plato's model that largely multiplies the number of forms the unexamined life may assume. According to Plato, there can be mixed lives. It is true that in a sense all lives are mixed, insofar as they always imply a combination and mutual contamination of all the soul's drives. But in many cases there is still a prominent drive that rules the soul and gives it a relatively simple target in life. This is not the case in what we here call a mixed βίαι. Plato speaks of outer πολιτεῖαι that are not clear, and we may assume the same applies to the inner πολιτεῖαι.²³¹¹ Indeed, even if Plato does not say much more about it, he seems to admit the possibility of lives in which no particular drive is clearly prominent. Two or even all three of them may have similar strength and may transform each other to a great degree. In fact, it is not clear whether one must still somehow prevail over the others or not. At any rate, the soul will apparently have a mixed ruler and a mixed goal in life. This will determine this life's practical system and the role each being plays in it. In other words, we are dealing with a particular way of life. It is only more difficult for us to describe it.

One thing seems clear, though. Given the fact that these mixed lives are not dominated by the love of knowledge, they are just as unexamined as the lives we considered before. In general, they define themselves without much examination. They do not examine their ultimate goal or, to be more precise, they do not examine why this goal is important or how it is to be understood. They also do not examine their way of pursuing it and the role the different things may play in that pursuit. They do not even examine whether they should have high hopes or should settle for less. For the most part, everything will be automatically determined by the soul's ruling drives, and any examination these mixed lives might carry out will be very restricted in scope. Thus, the only difference between these and the previously considered lives lies in the number of drives that rule the soul.

²³¹⁰ This is a very interesting kind of life, precisely because it is also different from a pure unexamined life. In fact, the existence of such a life suggests that the boundaries between the unexamined life and its opposite are not as rigid as one might think. This raises the question of when a life is no longer unexamined – i.e., when the philosophical drive is strong enough to release us. For more on this, cp. Chap. 17, Sect. 5.

²³¹¹ See *Rep.* 544c-d.

3.5. Variability and constancy of the unexamined life

As we saw above, there can be many changes in one's βίος, but for the most part these changes do not change the unexamined character of one's life.²³¹² Most changes tend to be superficial and concern only the more immediate questions (such as what we should do or how we should regard something). In fact, our life is in constant flux and our plans are constantly being adapted to the circumstances (either automatically or with the help of some circumscribed examination). However, the most basic assumptions of our life, and especially our view of the superlative good, tend to be very resistant. Still, it seems possible for our βίος to change. The relation of forces between the soul's drives can vary according to what we do or what we go through. In fact, there are always small variations in our inner πολιτεία, but in some cases the change may be more significant and the soul may even start being ruled by a different drive. This will produce a radical change in one's life and everything will be affected by it. One will change one's conception of the superlative good and this will generate different pursuits and a different practical system. Consequently, one will look at everything differently and things will now play a different role in our life. In sum, our entire life and our entire world becomes different. However, such deep changes are not very frequent. Plato describes these processes as something that occurs very slowly and mostly in one's youth.²³¹³ In general, our resistance to change increases with age, as we developed firmer habits.

One could wonder what leads to such changes and how much control we have over it, but we will not consider this question at this point.²³¹⁴ What we must now consider is how these changes are mostly marked by the lack of examination. Indeed, we usually leave a modality of unexamined life for another. Moreover, we normally do not examine different alternatives and the advantages of each, in order to make an informed choice. We are not like Odysseus in *Republic X* or like Heracles in Prodicus' story.²³¹⁵ Even if we examine some aspects related with the change, we tend not to consider the whole. In fact, we may not even be fully aware of the change, or at least of what changed and why. Moreover, we tend not to be disturbed by the fact that our life has had two very different configurations at two different moments in time, and thus we do not question the present configuration and do not consider

²³¹² Cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 4.4 c).

²³¹³ Cp. *Rep.* VIII and IX.

²³¹⁴ For a discussion of this, cp. Chap. 17 below.

²³¹⁵ Cp. *Rep.* 620c-d, and XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II.1.21-34.

that it may very well change again. We tend to simply go on living as if nothing had happened.

3.6. Moments of crisis

Until now, we assumed that our life is always defined in one way or another, but we may also go through moments of crisis. These crises may be superficial or deep. It is, for instance, possible that in particular circumstances two different drives fight each other in order to determine our action (as is illustrated and discussed in *Republic IV*).²³¹⁶ But this kind of conflicts usually takes place within the framework of a certain βίος, which is determined by a certain arrangement of the soul's drives. Thus, our motivations in a particular situation are determined by the general arrangement of our motivations. However, there can also be a crisis at this level. Different drives may fight to control our soul and this may produce a state of indecision. One may be pulled in two directions, and our soul may thus fall into a civil strife (στάσις).²³¹⁷ While the conflict lasts, there will be no ruling drive, and consequently one will have no clear goal in life, no path to follow, and the role of everything in one's life will be indeterminate. In sum, one will be in a state of global ἀπορία and πλάνη.

During the conflict, we will not be leading an unexamined life in the strict sense. In fact, we will not have any defined βίος. Moreover, this kind of conflict will tend to bring about a great deal of examination. We must think about what we should do. However, this does not mean that our philosophical drive will be dominant and that we will fully embrace philosophical examination. We just want to solve the crisis quickly and go on with our life. Therefore, we tend to reduce the crisis to a particular problem and to simple alternatives, without considering its full scope. We will thus make many unexamined assumptions, which probably remain from the previous life and thus limit the potential for change. We may also be easily satisfied with the first solution that comes our way, and this solution will probably be dictated by a non-philosophical drive. Consequently, the unexamined life will reinstate itself and nothing significant will have changed.

²³¹⁶ See 437d ff.

²³¹⁷ One may wonder whether there are really such crises. In fact, most of our crises are regional. Yet, it seems it is possible to be completely torn apart about what matters in life. In the *Republic*, Socrates describes the moment in which a child is torn apart between two different parts of the soul and their corresponding drives (see e.g. 550a-b). This may perhaps happen at any moment in life, though our soul's arrangement tends to stabilize when we grow up.

3.7. The commonalities of all the forms of unexamined life

We saw that there can be many different forms of unexamined life, and each of them has its own goals, its own practical system, and its own experience of reality. However, they are not entirely different from one another. In fact, we even saw how Plato sometimes reduces all unexamined (or non-philosophical) lives to just one: the body-loving or pleasure-loving life. In doing so, he brings to the fore the contrast between pleasure and knowledge – i.e., between our subjective and our objective dimensions. But assuming we can make this reduction, there is still a variety of pleasures, and (as Plato stresses) some of them are better than others, which means that we could still identify different pleasure-loving lives. But usually Plato does not explore the question from this angle. Instead, he calls our attention to other differences, and with respect to the latter we must make some remarks.

First, according to Plato, not all forms of unexamined life have the same value. Some seem to be better than others, and apparently this depends on the role the philosophical drive plays in such lives. We will return to this question later.²³¹⁸ Meanwhile, it is important to bear in mind that even if there is a scale of unexamined lives, Plato is not necessarily describing an itinerary we all must follow during our lives. We do not all begin at the bottom of the scale and we do not need to go through all stages. In fact, we may begin with any particular kind of inner πολιτεία and thus with any particular kind of life.²³¹⁹ Moreover, although Plato in the *Republic* describes the transitions from one life into another as a gradual process, it is not clear whether this is only a matter of presentation or if it really implies the view that the changes must always be the smallest possible.

Be that as it may, there are many different unexamined lives, which vary according to the inner arrangement of the soul and the particular kind of object one pursues in life. Insofar as these lives are unexamined, they all share common traits. They are all based on a weak love of knowledge, and thus they lack full knowledge and also lack any serious examination of themselves and everything that is relevant to them. These lives are not clearly aware of themselves and of what they come into contact with. Thus, they are to a great extent blind, irrational and rash (despite all knowledge claims that they may still contain and which will be discussed in the following chapter).

²³¹⁸ See Chap. 18.

²³¹⁹ Plato even admits the possibility of having philosophical talent and being thus naturally inclined to lead a philosophical life (even though one will still have to train one's philosophical drive). Cp. *Rep.* 485a ff.

4. The self-interpretation of the unexamined life with respect to its cognitive status and its need to examine

Before considering the cognitive nature of the unexamined life and how the desire of knowledge is always an essential trait of it, it is important to see how the unexamined life in general tends to understand or interpret itself, especially with respect to its cognitive state and to the possibility of examination. This is a difficult matter. Indeed, the unexamined life usually does not think about its own status and its self-understanding is often tacit. Moreover, given the intrinsic diversity of the unexamined life, it is difficult to determine a precise pattern that cuts across all forms of unexamined life. Still, we can identify general tendencies. We already made some references to them, but now we have to consider them more closely.

4.1. The intuitive and “inspired” character of the unexamined life (according to its own interpretation)

First of all, the unexamined life does not regard itself as having any special form of knowledge. It may admit to knowing some things, but it is not primarily concerned with knowledge. Thus, it also does not regard itself as unexamined (i.e., as failing to submit its views to examination). But despite its apparent epistemological humility, the unexamined life does not regard itself as being blind to itself and to things around it. On the contrary, the unexamined life believes it has contact with reality. From its standpoint, it immediately sees things as they are and it also immediately sees what it has to do. In other words, it thinks it has an intuitive character. All things are seen as being immediately given and this life relates to reality in a passive manner. It does not have to determine what things are – i.e., its experience does not depend on judgment or reason, and is thus free from being false or wrong. This does not exclude that there might be some cognitive mistakes and that appearances may sometimes be wrong. But these are rare occurrences and we are normally not concerned with them.

In general, we are absorbed in our own unexamined life. As Plato sometimes says, we are spellbound or charmed (γοητευόμενοι) by what appears to us – and especially by what it makes us feel.²³²⁰ We are simply attracted by things and by what we desire, without thinking much about it. This comes directly from the soul’s πολιτεία, and mostly from the ruling drive

²³²⁰ Cp. *Phd.* 81b-c, and *Rep.* 413c-d.

of the soul, which determines what we must pursue. Thus, we immediately see what is the good, what we must do to attain it and what role things may play in this pursuit. We also see without difficulty how this pursuit is going and whether or not we should settle for an inferior version of the good. All this is experienced as being already decided for us, and not as being the result of our own activity or judgment.

Knowledge thus seem to play a very modest role in the unexamined life (at least according to the latter's self-interpretation). It is not decisive, and even if one admits that this life has cognitive components, the latter are still not viewed as something complex and requiring full rational insight. In fact, we tend to think that our views consist solely in the attribution of predicates. We may misattribute them or we may get things right (i.e., we may have ὀρθαὶ δόξαι). In general, however, we think that most attributions are right (even if we have no deep insight into the predicate being attributed). If this is so, then – according to Plato – we live in a state of divine inspiration or possession (ἐνθουσιάζειν or κατέχεσθαι).²³²¹ We are not able to give an account of why we see things as we do or of why we do what we do, but we will think we are seeing them as they are and doing what we must do.

4.2. The limited need for examination in the unexamined life (according to its own interpretation). The useless and even harmful character of philosophical examination

Finally, we must briefly discuss how the unexamined life tends to regard the possibility of examining things, and above all the possibility of carrying out something like a philosophical examination in the sense previously defined.²³²² What is the examination's role in the unexamined life? What is its value?

We all have a tacit understanding of the possibility of examining things and we often carry out many ordinary examinations. They help us clarify things and better determine our course in life. However, these examinations are spasmodic and regional. They concern a particular doubt or a particular inner conflict we may have, but leave many things unexamined (and even things that may be decisive for what we are examining). Moreover, our examination normally does not examine itself – i.e., it does not try to understand what it

²³²¹ On the notion of ὀρθῆ δόξα and its relation with divine inspiration or possession, see *Men.* 97a ff. (and especially 99c-d). Cp. also *Ap.* 22b-c.

²³²² Cp. Part II.

exactly does and how important it is. We have an immediate understanding of when we must examine and we tend not to question it.

But what about the possibility of philosophical examination? In fact, we are normally not aware of such a possibility. We do not even have an explicit notion of most of our views, much less of the possibility of exhaustively examining them. Thus, if we are to meet some Socrates, we are bound to have difficulties understanding what he does and why he does it. But this does not mean that we will have no stance about it. Faced with the possibility of undertaking a philosophical examination, we will easily regard it as useless or fruitless.²³²³ All that matters in life seems to be already decided. We already see what things are and what is to be done. Thus, the possibility of an extensive and deep examination of everything seems to be a strange project. At best, it suggests the possibility of a distant and transcendent truth, but such a truth is irrelevant for the here and now.

This is one possible reaction to philosophical examination, but it is not the worse one. The unexamined life may also regard such an examination as something intrinsically harmful, and there may be several reasons for that. First, philosophical examination tends not to be seen as a respectable practice.²³²⁴ Second, it is unpleasant to be examined and one would rather avoid it.²³²⁵ Third, it meddles with established practices and established truths.²³²⁶ Fourth, it causes us to hesitate and can even paralyze us.²³²⁷ Fifth, even if philosophical examination does not cause us to have doubts about what we should do, it delays us and goes against the urgency of life.²³²⁸ Thus, we would rather avoid philosophical examination. At least, this is the general tendency of the unexamined life.

However, we saw that it is also possible to perform some philosophical examination without abandoning the unexamined life. For instance, one may perform it as a part of one's general education or as a pastime.²³²⁹ In this case, one admits that it is useful to think a little about life, even if only up to a point; after such a point, there are more serious matters we

²³²³ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 487c ff., and *Prm.* 135d.

²³²⁴ Cp. in particular *Grg.* 484c ff.

²³²⁵ For the idea that philosophical examination causes anger or disturbance, and is something one will probably want to get rid of, cp. e.g. *Ap.* 23c, 39c-d, *Tht.* 168a-b.

²³²⁶ This is, for instance, what is implied in the older accusations against Socrates, according to the *Apology*. Cp. Chap. 1, Sect. 2 (especially 2.2) above. See also *Rep.* 538d ff.

²³²⁷ See in particular *Men.* 80a-d, where Socrates is compared to a sort of torpedo ray that paralyzes the mouth and the soul of his interlocutor.

²³²⁸ Indeed, our course of life and our course of action are usually clear and we have no time to examine things. The characters in the dialogues sometimes invoke this lack of time, by saying that it is time to leave or to act. Cp. e.g. *Euthphr.* 15e (where the conversation is interrupted with the words “μοι ὄρα ἀπιέναι), and *Cri.* 46a (where Crito says to Socrates: “οὐδὲ βουλευέσθαι ἔτι ὄρα ἀλλὰ βεβουλευῆσθαι”).

²³²⁹ Cp. *Grg.* 484c ff., 487c-d, *Rep.* 487c, 497e f.

must concern ourselves with. But it is also possible to develop a strong dedication to philosophical examination – despite the fact that one’s soul is still ruled by non-philosophical drives. One’s examination will then be limited and somewhat superficial. We will easily accept what is dictated by the other drives (i.e., we will follow our non-rational inclinations). To be sure, we may also use this examination to develop more elaborate forms of empirical knowledge or perhaps even particular sciences. However, the main assumptions of our life and of reality will remain unexamined.²³³⁰ Moreover, this is not what normally happens when we start examining. In general, the beginning of philosophical examination is very difficult and we do not see much immediate progress. On the contrary: when we start questioning our views, we easily become dazzled (as is said in the allegory of the cave), and thus we tend to fall back in our previous views and practices.²³³¹ As a matter of fact, our bad experience when trying to examine things may even make us start hating all rational discussions (i.e. we may become μισόλογοι).²³³²

In sum, the unexamined life tends to be completely averse to philosophical examination and, even when it seems to accept some form of it, its relation to it tends to be superficial and precarious.

²³³⁰ Cp. *Grg.* 463a ff. and *Rep.* 510c ff., 533a ff.

²³³¹ Cp. *Rep.* 515c-e.

²³³² Cp. *Phd.* 89d ff.

CHAPTER 16

The philosophical character of the unexamined life. The complexity and all-pervasiveness of its alleged “truth”

“(…) sic amatur veritas, ut, quicumque aliud amant, hoc quod amant velint esse veritatem, et quia falli nollent, nolunt convinci, quod falsi sint (…)”

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, X.23.34²³³³

We have made some references to cognitive elements while describing the formation of the unexamined life. Above all, it was mentioned that the soul’s inner πολιτεία determines one’s identification of the good (i.e., one’s δόξα about it). However, this is very far from being the only cognitive component of the unexamined life. As we saw above, any particular βίος is based on a system of views or beliefs. Many of these beliefs refer to how we should live and what we should do, but they go much further than that. Thus, all forms of unexamined life depend on a supposed knowledge. In other words, the unexamined life is always concerned with truth – i.e., with knowledge and being. It is always philosophical or it always desires to know. This is not a minor detail of this life, but rather one of its most essential features. All the parts of the practical system are philosophical – and they are so in many ways (i.e., they all involve many views). We will now focus on this and see how the unexamined life is pervaded from top to bottom by views or beliefs. This is especially important because it determines how much of it is not being examined, and it will also determine the consequences of such a lack of examination.

In considering this question, we will have to revisit some of the previous analyses, although we will now see them in a different light. Thus, we will see how all the beliefs identified in Chapter 6 are formed within the unexamined life and thanks to it. Likewise, the unexamined life determines the entire cognitive structure of the soul we identified in Chapter 11. This then raises the question about the quality of our views – which is thus a question about the quality of our entire life. The examination will in fact show that our views have

²³³³ See L. VERHEIJEN (ed.), *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1981.

many limitations or defects, as we considered in Chapter 7, but now we will see how these limitations result from the soul's practical structure.

1. The kind of presence of the philosophical drive in the unexamined life

At first sight, the philosophical drive may seem to have a very limited and circumscribed presence in the unexamined life. We need to know some things, and we may even examine them, but in general we appear to be much more concerned with pursuing other goals – namely, some form of gain or honor. This is so because at the core of the unexamined life lies a non-philosophical drive. The latter, in its pure state, has no relation to knowledge or truth (which is indeed the province of the philosophical drive). However, the soul's drives interact with each other, and the gain-loving drive or the honor-loving drive may thus use (and even require) knowledge in order to better attain their goals. Knowledge (and the love of knowledge) has then a certain presence in the unexamined life, even if it is wholly subordinated to the soul's non-philosophical drives. But is this all?

Such a description suggests that knowledge is something that may sometimes be used by the soul in the unexamined life. However, we saw above that the whole unfolding of a βίος (i.e., the practical system of life) is philosophical or supposedly cognitive. In other words, the unfolding of a βίος is at the same time the unfolding of a system of views or beliefs (i.e., of δόξαι or knowledge claims). The former contains a version of truth or an unexamined "truth". Thus, despite the apparently immediate presence of our desires and of things in general, we never come into contact with a simple αἴσθησις or a purely subjective appearing. Everything is already pervaded and shaped by δόξαι.²³³⁴ Even though most of these δόξαι are tacit and we do not notice them, they nevertheless determine our entire life or make life clear for us, and this is an expression of our inborn love of knowledge.

The truth status is therefore attributed to a version of things. This attribution or identification may be correct or incorrect – i.e., things may or may not be as they appear to be (or as we think they are). But be that as it may, the philosophical drive is omnipresent in the unexamined life, and it is normally satisfied. Indeed, we tend to think we have everything figured out. To be more precise, we have many views (even if most of them are tacit) and these views are not provisional. In many cases, it even seems that there is no alternative to

²³³⁴ There are always cognitive decisions or answers. The soul's scribe always writes down a version of things, and things appear as being something in particular (i.e., as being thus and not otherwise). Cp. Chap. 11, Sect. 3.3.

how we see things, and it is precisely this that makes us skeptical about philosophical examination. Examining things seems useless. We already know all we need to know, and now it is time to act and live according to this knowledge. But how do we come to know these things? Obviously, most of these views are not the result of deep reflection. Rather, they are formed by some tacit process, or they are the result of some spontaneous (and probably not very rigorous) examination. The origin of our views is thus mostly unclear to us. We do not pay much attention to the process that forms them or we forget it, and this is why we may even be unaware that it happens and that we have knowledge claims at all.

But we can better understand this process if we consider that, as was said above, the soul's constitutive drives always contaminate or transform each other, and we cannot represent something like a pure and blind instinct – i.e., a drive that is wholly indifferent to what things are. The drives that we experience (and that rule the unexamined life) are not wholly blind, but rather philosophical to a certain extent. In other words, the way we experience the love of gain and the love of honor already exceeds a simple appearing of something indeterminate. Our drives are already accompanied and shaped by our views or beliefs about what things are. These views or beliefs determine how we understand gain and honor, how we may pursue them, how things may contribute to this pursuit, and what things in general are.

However, our love of gain and our love of honor are not just accompanied and affected by our love of knowledge and our views. The contamination works both ways, and this means that our love of gain and our love of honor affect our love of knowledge. More precisely, they create their own views and try to persuade us of them. At the same time, they become sensitive to arguments and able to be persuaded.²³³⁵ Thus, the conflicts (στάσεις) between drives actually become a conflict of views (and especially of the main views of each drive). These views fight to be accepted or, as Plato says, they fight to overtake the citadel of the soul and rule it.²³³⁶ The image is very expressive. The attacking views try to enter by force, and not by withstanding a rigorous examination. It is true that it is never a matter of brute force. As we will see in the following chapter, the soul (and its φιλοσοφία) must be persuaded. However, the views in question do not present any cognitive credentials, and their acceptance is therefore illicit.

²³³⁵ For more on this, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 5.2 above.

²³³⁶ See *Rep.* 560b-d, and also 561b-c.

This is what characterizes the unexamined life. A non-philosophical drive comes to rule the soul and, as a result, it manipulates our love of knowledge. More precisely, this drive convinces us of its own views and defines the way we see everything. However, this is only possible because the philosophical drive is weakened or withered. It lacks rigor or has lower demands in terms of justification, clearness and consistency.²³³⁷ Hence, it easily accepts views that may be unjustified, unclear or inconsistent. Since it does not fully examine things, it does not fully exclude that things may be otherwise. But this is not all. Our love of knowledge may be so weakened that we do not even notice it as such. In other words, our concern with knowledge and truth may seem to be entirely absent, and our life may seem to be immediate and unreflected.

However, this is not what is happening. Our soul does not stop aiming at the truth, nor does it confine the question of truth to some particular topics. The unexamined life contains a very complex system of views, as was mentioned, and these views are all intimately connected with what we just considered. Indeed, after installing its main views in the soul, the ruling drive develops a view of reality based on these views. In other words, everything comes to be seen in light of the soul's main desire, which thus creates a gain-loving or a honor-loving reality (as well as its underlying ontology). This is not simply a theoretical process apart from our life and the world we live in. It actually constitutes our life and our reality, and as such it is something to which we are deeply attached. This attachment results from the main drive or the main love of the soul and it corresponds to a form of erotic necessity that shackles us to a particular way of seeing things.²³³⁸ In the case of the unexamined life, this way of seeing things is extremely defective and coincides with what Plato calls δόξα. Consequently, in virtue of its main love, the unexamined life is also φιλόδοξος.²³³⁹ It takes place in the domain of δόξα and is fond of this domain (i.e., it takes it as its natural place).

Our experience of life and of reality in general is thus defined by the main drive or main love of the soul. This is very important to understand the Platonic conception of the unexamined life. In such a life, our love of gain or our love of honor becomes, in a way, the measure of all things. We take things to be as they appear to us in light of our interests. In

²³³⁷ It fails to live up to Locke's criterion (or "unerring mark") of a lover of truth for truth's sake, namely "not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant." Cp. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 19 – here quoted according to: J. LOCKE, *Works*, vol. 3, London, T. Tegg/etc., 1823 (repr. Aalen, Scientia, 1963), 147.

²³³⁸ On this idea of being imprisoned by our desires in a particular version of truth, see *Phd.* 82d-83a and 83d. On the idea of our desires as a form of prison, cp. also *Cra.* 403c-d.

²³³⁹ For this notion, see *Rep.* 480a.

other words, our views of things are fundamentally pragmatic. We find this idea expressly stated in the *Phaedo*, when Socrates says that our bodily desires make our ψυχή share the views of the body (ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι) – i.e., the views created by our bodily desires.²³⁴⁰ Another passage that stresses the role our love plays in defining things for us can be found in *Gorgias*, when Socrates says to Callicles that both of them repeat what their beloved say and cannot contradict or oppose them.²³⁴¹ In both cases, this love involves a component of blindness, corresponding to what is said in the *Laws* about the lover being blind about the beloved.²³⁴² The fact that we love something makes us want it to be true and it also makes us take it to be true. The soul's intrinsic desires smuggle views into our way of seeing things without going through border control – i.e., through a full rational inspection. More precisely, the particular relation of forces of the soul allows for a non-philosophical drive to use the love of knowledge as its instrument or handmaiden. Our love of knowledge then creates or develops views to sustain and strengthen this drive and it also accepts them as good views.

This is the origin of most (if not all) of our knowledge claims. Their genesis is highly defective, although we normally do not have any idea of this. The process occurs deep within our soul and we do not follow it. We only notice its effects, which we then interpret as something other than the views instigated by our non-philosophical drives. We see these effects simply as an immediate contact with things as they are. But if the present description is correct, then the way we experience things and life in general is highly questionable. It is marked by a deep (even if not complete) irrationality or ἀλογία. More specifically, the irrational drives assume a rational form and our gaze becomes a mixture of λόγος and ἀλογία. We see things, but this perception is selective and perhaps distortive. In other words, a drive that is originally blind creates our particular way of seeing things.²³⁴³ However, things may be otherwise. The unexamined life is constitutively exposed to the possibility of untruth. This characterizes such a life as a whole, as well as all of its components. Moreover, since each component of life is itself determined by several intertwined views, it is actually exposed to several forms of falsity. In sum, the unexamined life may be radically and thoroughly untrue. It may be no more than a dream state or a state of complete insanity. We may be totally unaware of our true situation. Given the origin of our views, this is a possibility we cannot

²³⁴⁰ See *Phd.* 83d.

²³⁴¹ See *Grg.* 481d-482a.

²³⁴² See *Lg.* 731e: “τυφλοῦται γὰρ περὶ τὸ φιλούμενον ὁ φιλῶν (...).”

²³⁴³ For the idea of a blind guide or leader of our life, cp. *Rep.* 554b.

exclude. Despite the permanent presence of our love of knowledge and of truth, we may be entirely deceived about everything.

2. The complex system of beliefs that make up the unexamined life

The description just made is still very generic and it is important to see in more detail the cognitive dimension of the unexamined life. More precisely, we must see how our love of gain or our love of honor use our love of knowledge in order to create a very complex system of views or beliefs that encompasses absolutely everything, thereby producing our usual experience of things. Many important features of this system were already considered in previous chapters.²³⁴⁴ Now, however, we must consider them from a different angle. The analyses of the soul's constitutive drives and of how they usually form an unexamined life will help us understand not only the origin or genesis of our views, but also their place or function in our life.

In the following analysis, we have to bear in mind the simultaneous unity and diversity of the unexamined life. Indeed, there can be many unexamined systems of beliefs (or, as we could also say, many unexamined versions of truth), and in a way they are constantly changing (at least in their most superficial aspects). However, there are also common features (and even a general structure) that are shared by all. We will first focus our attention on what is common to all kinds of unexamined life and later (Section 3) we will consider each of the main kinds of unexamined life in more detail.

2.1. The beliefs about life or the practical domain

Let us start with the practical beliefs – i.e., those that concern the way a ψυχή lives or the role different things play in the ψυχή's life. The practical systems (i.e., the systematic pursuit of the superlative good) we considered in the previous chapter are all based on an intricate system of beliefs. The basic beliefs of this system concern the identity of the superlative good. We must establish something as being the good (for instance, gain or honor) and at the same time define it in some way (i.e., we must understand what gain or honor is). This is what determines one's desire and one's pursuits. Then, one must determine what one is to do in order to pursue this superlative good. In other words, one must have

²³⁴⁴ See in particular Chap. 6 and Chap. 12, Sect. 5.

beliefs about the courses of action to follow and how they relate to each other and to our general goal. This also requires us to determine the value of each thing for our general pursuit or for any of our courses of action. More precisely, we must have beliefs about whether things are useful, harmful or indifferent. Finally, we need to appraise our circumstances and our pursuit of the good. This means that we will have beliefs about our prospects of reaching the superlative good, about whether we should go on pursuing it, and also about whether or not we should settle for less.

These practical views are at the center of our life. They are not absolutely isolated from our other beliefs (such as the beliefs about the εἶδη or about what particular objects are). Actually, they depend on these other beliefs in many ways. But to a large extent, our practical beliefs are autonomous. They determine how we act and how we live. In other words, all the apparently automatic desires and actions are based on knowledge claims. We need some idea of what we are to do and why.²³⁴⁵ Our life is thus guided by our love of knowledge, and this affects all its parts. We want all our practical beliefs to be correct, we want to live correctly and we want to reach the true good or true happiness.

However, if we consider what happens in the unexamined life, we notice that our practical beliefs are never the result of a rigorous examination of how we should live. Life always employs complex calculations and some examination, there is always some rationality at play, but our beliefs are not fully justified and often they are not even explicit (which makes it even harder to identify and justify them). We find an illustration of this in many dialogues. One of the best examples is perhaps Alcibiades, who wants to enter into politics in order to be admired by the whole world.²³⁴⁶ However, he has not properly examined what this course of action requires or whether this is really the best for him, and this is what Socrates endeavors to show throughout the dialogue. The same applies to all other forms of unexamined life. We rush into things before being cognitively prepared.²³⁴⁷ Consequently, it may happen that many (if not all) of our practical beliefs are wrong. We may commit many mistakes in our pursuit of the good, we may attain things that we do not truly desire and, in short, we may live very differently from how we should live, as Callicles ironically says in *Gorgias*.²³⁴⁸

²³⁴⁵ For more on this, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.2 a), Sect. 2.5, and Chap. 12, Sect. 5.

²³⁴⁶ Cp. *Alc. I* 105a ff.

²³⁴⁷ Cp. *Alc. I* 118b: “(...) ὅττις ἄρα πρὸς τὰ πολιτικὰ πρὶν παιδευθῆναι.”

²³⁴⁸ Cp. *Grg.* 481c: “εἰ μὲν γὰρ σπουδάζεις τε καὶ τυγχάνει ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγεις, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἀνατετραμμένος ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία πράττομεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἢ ἂ δέϊ;”

2.2. Beliefs about particular beings (τὰ πολλὰ). The structure of predication and the attribution of predicates

Next, we must consider the beliefs that are not directly related to how we live. Many of these beliefs directly concern the concrete beings around us, which Plato calls τὰ πολλὰ. Our access to these beings is not immediate or simply perceptual. We must determine what they are (their ὅπερ ἐστίν) and what qualifies them (their ποῖόν τι), and we do so by attributing predicates to them.²³⁴⁹ Each particular being is thus the combination of many different predicates, which have their own content and determine the being in question as being so or so. This is what configures our experience of beings in general, and it even configures our experience of our own life, of what we do, and of the practical relevance of things.²³⁵⁰ Everything consists of attributions of predicates.

These attributions are not wholly unproblematic. They may be true or false – i.e., we may or may not attribute the correct predicate to things. Consequently, we should be careful about them, because we may commit many cognitive mistakes. However, the unexamined life is not very concerned about most of these attributions. There may be some moments of doubt, when one cannot make out what something is and feels the need to examine it more closely.²³⁵¹ But for the most part we do not examine what predicates correspond or do not correspond to something, nor do we examine whether we are in a position to attribute them or not. Most of the attributions are automatic and we do not think much about them. We are sure we know things, even if we have not fully excluded the possibility that they are something other than what we think. Moreover, we tend not to fully determine things. We do not need to know all their predicates. We tend to focus on those that are more relevant for our life (and particularly for our ruling drive). This is also what happens when we try to examine things and their predicates. We tend to focus on what is practically relevant, leaving aside a full discussion of their identity and of all that qualifies them.

We find several references to this in the dialogues. Plato sometimes explicitly calls the attention to the fact that one is trying to determine whether or not something is qualified in a

²³⁴⁹ On the distinction between identity and the qualities or properties of something, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 2.1.

²³⁵⁰ Indeed, one important predicate of all beings is their practical relevance for us (i.e., whether they are useful, harmful, or indifferent).

²³⁵¹ Cp. *Phlb.* 38c-d, where Socrates gives the example of someone that sees something from afar and does not know whether it is a human being or a statue.

particular way without properly determining its identity first.²³⁵² He also mentions the possibility of developing our way of seeing things, especially in order to better achieve what we want. We may for instance develop an ἐμπειρία or τριβή, as is discussed in *Gorgias*. This allows us to attain more pleasure, without actually knowing what things really are and why we deal with them as we do.²³⁵³ In sum, our interest in beings tends to be very limited and we tend not to be very discerning. We usually confine our attention to the predicates that are more relevant from a practical standpoint and we even tend to absolutize them.

2.3. Our beliefs about the εἶδη as the basis of all attributions of predicates

The attribution of predicates concerns concrete beings, but the predicates we attribute are not concrete or individual beings. They can be attributed to many different things and correspond to general modes of being or εἶδη. These modes of being constitute the alphabet of reality and we can only see things as determined in some way if we have some understanding of them. Plato constantly calls our attention to this fact.²³⁵⁴ According to him, there are εἶδη of different kinds (ontological, ethical, mathematical, and so on). Moreover, some of these εἶδη relate to others or are predicated of one another in the ways we considered above.²³⁵⁵ There can even be a fundamental εἶδος that is somehow the basis for all others. According to the *Republic*, this role is played by the form of the good.²³⁵⁶ But whether this is so or not, there is a complex system of general predicates shaping our entire experience of things and we need to understand these predicates (or at least claim to understand them) if we are to see things as we do and live the way we do.

Normally, this does not seem to be a problem. We are not only directed at the εἶδη and trying to divine what they are, but we also have knowledge claims about them and we do not think we need to examine them any further. This is what characterizes the unexamined life and we find many examples of this in Plato's dialogues. When the characters are inquired about some general notion, they do not feel perplexed or confused. They rather presume to know it.²³⁵⁷ However, this understanding of the general predicates of things is not the result of any deep examination about these predicates. In fact, it is probably motivated by our main

²³⁵² Cp. e.g. *Meno* 71a-b, 86d-e, 100b, *Rep.* 354b-c. Although Plato is talking about general predicates in these passages, the same applies to any complex being we come into contact with.

²³⁵³ Cp. 464b ff.

²³⁵⁴ For more on this, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 2.2.

²³⁵⁵ See Chap. 6, Sect. 2.3.

²³⁵⁶ Cp. Chap. 12, Sect. 6.3.

²³⁵⁷ Cp. e.g. *La.* 190e, *Hp. Ma.* 286e ff.

interest in life (be it gain or honor). In other words, we probably see all εἶδη in light of our main desires. This is perhaps clearer in the case of the ethical εἶδη, which may often be immediately understood in gain-loving or honor-loving terms, but our understanding of all other εἶδη may also be guided by the main love of our soul. Our love of gain or of honor may indeed determine the degree of abstraction or the degree of clearness of our understanding of any particular εἶδος. It will certainly be sufficient for us to see things and act, but it will not provide a fully transparent notion of what these εἶδη consist in. Indeed, our relation to them tends to be very hazy. Usually, we do not think about them and we may not even be aware of the fact that we have some understanding of them (even if we are constantly applying them to individual beings). We normally focus our attention on individual beings. We have things to do, we must pursue the good, and we have no time to think about general predicates. In addition, if we ever come to think about them, we tend to focus on their particular qualifications (especially those that seem to be more directly relevant for our life) and not on their identity.²³⁵⁸ The latter is quite difficult to focus on and we cannot easily articulate it. In fact, our understanding of the identity of the εἶδη is probably unclear or even self-contradictory, as is often shown in the dialogues, and any defects it may contain affect our entire way of seeing things, insofar as all attributions of predicates depend on them.

2.4. The beliefs about what reality in general is

One other kind of belief we may consider here (and which we did not expressly discuss in Chapter 6) is intimately connected with what was just considered. Besides all beliefs about concrete things and about the different εἶδη, we also have beliefs about what being in general is or about what reality is. In other words, we have an ontology. This ontology might be more implicit or more explicit, but it nevertheless affects the way we look at everything. It is indeed possible to have different views about being or about the general structure of reality, as is discussed in several passages of the corpus.²³⁵⁹ One may see reality as being static or in movement, and one may also recognize that things partake in general predicates or εἶδη. However, this is not the ontology characteristic of the unexamined life. The unexamined life tends to see all beings as concrete or bodily (or at least it conceives the

²³⁵⁸ Cp. the passages mentioned in footnote 2352.

²³⁵⁹ See e.g. *Cra.* 439b ff., *Phd.* 78b ff., *Rep.* 475e ff., *Tht.* 152d ff., 179d ff., *Sph.* 242c ff.

body as the clearest and the truest thing).²³⁶⁰ In other words, there is a tendency to reduce everything to the bodily domain – i.e., to what we can see, hear, touch or feel in any way.²³⁶¹ This does not mean that one only recognizes the existence of an individual body and what appears to it. One may, for instance, admit that there is a public domain and a shared appearing. However, everything will still be conceived as concrete and bodily.²³⁶² In fact, the soul itself will tend to be reduced to the body.²³⁶³

In sum, the ontology of the body is usually the basis and place of the unexamined life. We are usually convinced that reality is concrete or bodily and we act accordingly. But this is not necessarily so. In fact, conceiving reality as being bodily is a metaphysical decision. What is given to our senses does not allow us to exclude that there is more. But normally we do not pay much attention to this. The ontology of the body is not something about which we think much and it is not the result of an exhaustive examination of beings in general. Rather, it is motivated by the ruling drive of the soul. This is clearly stressed in *Phaedo*, where the ontology of the body is described as a direct consequence of our love of the body. It is this love that binds us (and even imprisons us) in a particular ontology or version of things.²³⁶⁴ Using the model of the *Republic*, we could say that the inner arrangement of the soul's drives determines the kinds of reality we most promptly recognize, and all non-philosophical arrangements tend to give prominence to the bodily domain.²³⁶⁵

However, this does not change the general structure of things. Even if we do not recognize the existence of εἶδη, our life is still fully determined by our understanding of them. However, we will tend not to focus on them and rather turn our attention to individual beings. As a result, we may have a very distorted understanding of these εἶδη and we may be in a state of dreaming – i.e., we may mistake some image or defective form of them for the

²³⁶⁰ Cp. *Phd.* 83c.

²³⁶¹ In fact, even if one admits that there is more than the body and what appears to it (if only because there are multiple bodies and a shared domain of reality such as the πόλις), one still tends to reduce everything to particular instances of beings and focus primarily on them.

²³⁶² This is what is stressed in *Theaetetus* (172c ff.). One may see the πόλις as the center of reality, but this still implies focusing on the individual beings that are mediated by the body. To be more precise, one will consider particular instances of human being or of justice, and one will not consider these predicates in themselves (which is something only the philosopher does). See in particular 174b and 175c.

²³⁶³ Cp. e.g. *Phdr.* 246c.

²³⁶⁴ Cp. 81b-c, 82e, 83b-d.

²³⁶⁵ One may wonder whether the bodily ontology holds for all forms of unexamined life. We may indeed admit some differences, insofar as some ontologies are exclusively confined to the body and to sensible reality, whereas others may recognize the importance of a social sphere and a social truth, or they may have some notion of the εἶδη. However, there is always a tendency to attach more importance to sensible reality and to neglect the full structure of reality (especially at the tacit level).

real thing.²³⁶⁶ Likewise, even if we do not recognize our ψυχή, we will still have the cognitive and practical dimensions we considered above. We will still be directed at truth and the superlative good. But let us leave this aside for now.

2.5. The global character of the beliefs that compose the unexamined life

The previous analyses showed how the unexamined life is composed of a complex system of beliefs and it also showed how these beliefs are generated, motivated or at least strongly influenced by this life's inner motivations (i.e., its ruling drive or its arrangement of drives). This does not exclude that many of these beliefs are received from others around us through learning or through some other form of contact with them. However, the fact that we adopt these beliefs as ours requires an inner motivation. We must be moved by our love of gain or our love of honor (or some combination of these two with our love of knowledge). These drives and their arrangement determine not only the practical system of our life, but also our cognitive system. In other words, our drives determine not only how we act, but also how everything appears to us.

The arrangement of our soul's drives thus forms or affects many beliefs and these beliefs even go as far as giving us the impression of a homogeneous and perfect knowledge of things. At least we do not think there are any significant defects in how we see things. We may perhaps recognize that there are some things we do not know. For instance, we do not know what is happening far away from us, and there are many forms of expert knowledge or τέχνη we lack. But these and other lacks tend to be understood as mere gaps that are already located or integrated in a well-known reality. We hold the answer to the more important questions – and we do so in two respects. First, we know what matters in life and everything else is irrelevant. In fact, we know (i.e., we think we know) that we do not need to know those things, and this is already a form of alleged knowledge of them (insofar as we think we know enough about them to exclude that they might be important for us). Second, we think we know all the basic structures of reality (i.e., all basic ὑποθέσεις) and thus there is nothing we are really ignorant of. We think we know what the most important predicates of things are and we also think we understand these predicates. Thus, despite all gaps in our cognitive

²³⁶⁶ According to the *Republic*, one tends to focus on the many beautiful things and not on beauty itself (see 476b ff.). This does not simply mean that we fail to realize that there is a general predicate that is common to all the instances of beauty, but it also implies that we are not really aware of what exactly beauty consists in. We always see it mixed with other things and thus we will only have a hazy understanding of it. For more on this, see Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4, and also Sects. 5.2 c) and 5.2 d) below.

system, we think we are functionally omniscient and do not recognize any significant defect or limitation in terms of knowledge.

It is, however, obvious that this impression or belief of having a knowledge of the whole of reality does not stem from a careful examination of our knowledge and of what reality in general might be. We do not consider whether something important might escape us or if things might actually be otherwise (either because absolutely all our beliefs are untrue, or because some basic beliefs are untrue and they then distort everything else). In general, we do not consider this possibility. We tend not to think about cognitive questions and when we do their scope tends to be very limited (and usually subordinated to some practical question and our practical interests). Our belief of knowing everything (i.e., everything that matters) is thus mostly tacit, which only renders it more effective. We have the impression that our life is entirely clear and we only need to attain what we pursue.

3. The different unexamined lives and their respective versions of truth

In the previous sections we focused mostly on the common features of all forms of unexamined life, but it is also important to look more closely at the particular configurations this life may assume, in order to have a more concrete idea of the cognitive systems that characterize the unexamined life. Despite their structural resemblances, the different sorts of unexamined life correspond to different inner πολιτεῖαι, which constitute their own version of truth and their own world. We will now consider the main kinds of unexamined life and what their general beliefs might correspond to. This is still abstract, insofar as there are many subspecies, according to the different relations of force between the drives. However, it will provide us with a good idea both of the common traits and also of specificity of the unexamined systems of beliefs.²³⁶⁷

3.1. The gain-loving systems of beliefs

When the love of gain controls the soul, it produces a gain-loving life. We saw that there may be different gain-loving lives, but at the center of such lives lies the belief that gain (i.e., the good of one's private sphere) is the best thing of all. This requires one to have at

²³⁶⁷ This analysis will complement the analysis of the practical systems of each kind of unexamined life (cp. Chap. 15, Sect. 3).

least a tacit belief about what the private or subjective sphere is, and one must also have a belief about what its good consists in. If one regards the private or subjective sphere as a body with needs that must be satisfied in order to survive, one will see that which allows it to survive (namely austerity and thriftiness) as the good. If, however, one regards the body mainly as a sphere of feelings, one will regard pleasure as the greatest good. In addition, we must determine what exactly thriftiness and pleasure are, and what their superlative form amount to. Thriftiness in its superlative form corresponds to having as much wealth as possible, whereas pleasure may consist in the satisfaction of as many desires as possible or in the intense satisfaction of one major desire. These decisions are very important, but usually they are not submitted to any particular examination. One knows these things almost automatically – mostly because the inner arrangement of the soul produces and validates these beliefs.

The same holds for all other beliefs. One must have a plan of how to achieve what one desires, and this means one must have views about how best to acquire wealth or pleasure. These views will then determine one's actions and also the role things and people play in one's pursuits. This may require very complex calculations, but the latter are mostly automatic. In general, one does not have to carefully examine things and one's situation, and when one does so one tends to only pay attention to the aspects that are more directly relevant for one's plan to acquire wealth or pleasure. One's interests thus affect one's attribution of predicates to things.²³⁶⁸

But this is not all. One's love of gain also affects the understanding one has of εἶδη – especially of those that are more directly connected with the practical domain. One will tend to interpret them in gain-loving terms and, moreover, one will tend to pay little attention to what is implied in them. This will render one's understanding of them vague and potentially distorted, which in turn will affect the whole attribution of predicates to things in general. The whole world will be seen in light of one's love of gain (or, to be more precise, in light of the precise modality of φιλοκέρδεια that rules the soul). As a result, the world will be reduced to the world of the body or a sensible world, which will constitute a sort of cognitive cave that will prevent us from seeing the real complexity of things.

²³⁶⁸ This is so even if one develops the ἐμπειρία or τριβαί that Socrates characterizes as κολακευτική (i.e., as an expertise in flattery or adulation). They let us better understand things, but only insofar as they are relevant for someone to attain one's goal – namely, pleasure. They provide no real knowledge or real insight into what things are. Cp. *Grg.* 463a ff.

Thus, even though the love of gain always speaks a philosophical language (i.e., even though its contact with everything is mediated by beliefs or knowledge claims), it still distorts our love of knowledge. It uses the latter in order to pursue its ends, just as it uses our love of honor. There may be different relations of forces between the three drives, but while one is mainly interested in gain, the other two drives are no more than instruments of our love of gain.

3.2. The honor-loving systems of beliefs

The central belief of the lives ruled by the love of honor is the belief that honor (or victory, understood as a modality of honor) is the greatest good. This requires an understanding of what honor is. But we cannot understand honor as such if we do not understand the fact that there are others and that one may appear to them in different ways. The honor-loving life thus implies an understanding of what others in general are and of what constitutes the intersubjective appearing. Moreover, one's views are not restricted to this core. We must also have views about how we may come to be honored by others. In other words, we must have a plan of action, and this plan may be very elaborate. We may have to hone many skills and do many things. In fact, the honor-loving life seems to require constant effort and painstaking. But in general it is more or less clear what one has to do. We just have to pay attention to the others around us, what they do and what they value. Thus, we tend not to examine our honor-loving project (or we do so only if we have some particular doubt).²³⁶⁹ For the most part, we are simply engaged in the pursuit.

This pursuit also determines how we see people and things around us. Everything is integrated in one's pursuit of honor and seen in light of it. More precisely, beings are seen as useful, harmful or indifferent for one's pursuit. In general, these pragmatic predicates are easily attributed. On rare occasions, one may need to examine things more carefully and develop one's knowledge about them, but one will still focus one's attention on the aspects of beings that are more directly relevant for one's pursuit. This is what Socrates describes in *Theaetetus*, when he contrasts the life of those dedicated to judicial or public contests with the life of philosophers.²³⁷⁰ The former will know (and perhaps even carefully examine)

²³⁶⁹ We find a good example of this in *Alcibiades I*. Socrates begins by revealing Alcibiades' ambition (105a ff.) and then he focus on Alcibiades' plan of action (106c ff.), examining it in great detail (which is precisely what one normally does not do).

²³⁷⁰ Cp. 172c ff.

genealogies, possessions, and everything else insofar as it is relevant for life in the πόλις. The πόλις, as the intersubjective domain, will be the center of reality for them and everything else will be neglected. In particular, one will not consider (or even be aware of) general predicates as such. This means that one's view of reality will still be mainly sensitive or referred to the body – even though we are always referred to the εἶδη. One's understanding of them will be simply tacit, and probably very limited. In fact, one will tend to tacitly interpret them in honor-loving terms. The whole really will thus be seen in light of one's love of honor and only insofar as the love of honor needs to know it. This means one will still inhabit a kind of cognitive cave. One will have a limited access to reality, but one will take it as the world.

This is so because the honor-loving life has no actual interest in knowledge for its own sake. Although the love of knowledge permeates everything in such a life (insofar as everything is determined in a particular way), knowledge is only a means to acquire honor. Consequently, one is not very demanding with respect to knowledge. One is normally satisfied and only feels the need to examine when some problem appears or when one does not know how to proceed in order to attain honor. In some cases, one may perhaps be more concerned with knowledge and even use it as the very object for which one is honored. In these cases, one will try to know things better. But one's main interest is still to be admired by others or to defeat them in discussions, and as a result one is above all interested in appearing wise. In other words, the love of knowledge is still subordinated to the love of honor.

3.3. The pseudo-philosophical systems of beliefs

As we have seen, the inauthentic philosophical life (despite all its resemblance to the opposite of the unexamined life) is still a form of unexamined life. In fact, it is a variation either of the gain-loving life or of the honor-loving life.²³⁷¹ This is reflected on the cognitive system that characterizes such a life. Its beliefs about the good, about how to pursue it, about the role things play in such a pursuit, and about reality at large closely resemble the views of a gain-loving life or of an honor-loving life. But there are some aspects that differentiate an apparently philosophical life and its beliefs from the purer forms of gain-loving or honor-loving life. To begin with, the inauthentic philosophical life is based on a stronger or more developed philosophical drive and, as a result, philosophical examination and rational

²³⁷¹ Cp. Chap. 14, Sect. 4, and Chap. 15, Sect. 3.3.

discussion (λόγος) play a much more active role in it. We are thus dealing with a life that is partially examined and, as such, it may contain many more doubts and also much more refined views. It may even recognize that there are εἶδη and that our view of everything depends on them. In sum, the beliefs of an inauthentic philosophical life are not so strictly determined by the ruling drive of the soul. This life may therefore understand itself better. Its views may be less defective or at least it may have less false conceit of knowledge.

However, all this cognitive development is still motivated by the pursuit of some form of gain or honor. This means that the former is based on a set of beliefs about the importance of gain or honor and about how to pursue them. One will grant a very important role to knowledge and philosophical examination in this pursuit, and one may not even notice that they have no more than an auxiliary role. Nevertheless, the main cognitive decisions in this life (and even those made during the course of examination) are still made in name of gain or honor. One is still concerned with one's subjective state or with how one is seen by others, and this affects how one sees things. Ultimately, one's beliefs are not fully examined and they are not simply the result of philosophical examination. Many of them, and indeed the most central ones, will still have an irrational foundation.

This holds both for the pseudo-philosophical lives based on the love of gain and for the ones based on the love of honor. At their core, they do not differ much. It is true that Plato recognizes that our love of honor is closer to our love of knowledge, insofar as the former can more easily listen to reason.²³⁷² This is probably linked with the fact that its scope (namely, the intersubjective appearing) is broader and more complex than the scope of our love of gain (which is primarily focused on the subjective appearing). Moreover, one probably requires more knowledge to impress others and prevail over them than one requires to acquire pleasure or possessions. However, the pursuit of the two latter may also come to require knowledge as complex as the one required by the pursuit of honor. And even if that is not so, none of this changes the fundamental fact that both kinds of life and their cognitive systems are ultimately based on an irrational drive and are, therefore, still unexamined, despite all their philosophical interest and cognitive progress.

²³⁷² Cp. *Phdr.* 253d-e, *Rep.* 440a ff.

3.4. Mobility and rigidity of one's beliefs within the unexamined life

In general, we always have a complex system of beliefs – at least if we are not completely disoriented and in the middle of a crisis (and even then there may still be a system of basic assumptions that is still active). However, this system is not rigid and unchangeable. There can be many changes and these changes may be superficial or profound, and they may also be for the better or for the worse. We can make discoveries, learn things, be persuaded, forget things, or be charmed by our feelings or our ambition.²³⁷³ However, despite all this, the unexamined life is marked by a tendency to avoid deep changes in one's beliefs. The main presuppositions (ὑποθέσεις) hardly ever change, especially the ones that concern one's views of the superlative good. In fact, for such views to change the inner πολιτεία of the soul must change. Otherwise, all changes tend to be superficial, and we may even fail to notice them. If, however, the inner πολιτεία somehow changes, then the whole practical and cognitive system (i.e. the whole βίος) will change. One will thus have new views about the good, about how to achieve it, about the role things play therein, about their predicates and about the meaning of these predicates.

Deep and extensive changes may therefore occur within the unexamined life. However, all the changes (including the deeper ones) tend to be unexamined. One may perhaps have thought a little about them. Many moments of crisis do lead us to examine some things. But this examination is usually very limited in scope and depth, and one does not simply adopt the most rational views in the end. One's love of knowledge is still limited and one is still guided or persuaded by irrational drives. Moreover, if any such a change happens, one will normally not think much about it. In particular, one will not consider how the new beliefs may themselves be transitory. One easily accepts them, and thus one is once more satisfied with one's way of seeing things.

4. The problem of the unexamined life's cognitive status

Each kind of unexamined life has its own system of beliefs, which is primarily determined by one's inner πολιτεία, as we just saw. These systems may undergo changes (especially at a more superficial level) according to the circumstances of each individual life. But regardless of that, the unexamined life is always full of beliefs. One may be more or less

²³⁷³ Cp. *Rep.* 412e-413c

explicitly aware of them, but they still pervade everything and provide us with a view of the whole of life. This pervasiveness and globalization of our beliefs is, however, very problematic, given the fact that these beliefs are mostly (if not all) accepted without proper examination. The unexamined life is marked by a weak love of knowledge, which tries to determine everything, but does so without much precision and rigor. More precisely, one's love of knowledge is particularly credulous and it easily accepts the views created and endorsed by drives that are not directly concerned with truth. This raises the important problem of the value of these views, which is also the problem of the unexamined life's cognitive status. We must indeed determine this cognitive status if we want to determine not only the structure, but also the value of the unexamined life (as we will try to do in Chapter 18). Therefore, we will discuss this question now, even if briefly, and in order to do so, we will have to reconsider some aspects discussed in Part II above.

We saw before that our knowledge claims are marked by a formal defect. They were not examined and we cannot really exclude the possibility that things are otherwise. We can now better understand why this happens. The way we adopt most of our beliefs is highly questionable and this opens the door to many untruths. We may be deluded about many things and this means that we may be in a much worse condition than if we were simply ignorant of them and were aware of our ignorance. To be sure, this defective way of adopting beliefs does not necessarily mean that these beliefs are false. We do not have a full insight into their validity and often not even into their content, but it may happen that we somehow get things right – i.e., we may have a correct δόξα about many of these things. This is at least what we tend to think when we are faced with the question, and Plato himself discusses this possibility at some points. In many cases, we may lack expert knowledge (τέχνη), we may not understand what things are, we may not be able to account for how we should proceed, and still do things right. We do not need to have full knowledge in order to have practical success. This is, according to Plato, the case of poets, seers and statesmen.²³⁷⁴ It may also happen to judges that judge a case correctly without knowing the truth.²³⁷⁵ In all these cases, one somehow touches reality, even if in a defective manner. Plato describes this as a sort of divine inspiration. There is a superior form of access to things that is somehow communicated to us and that allows us to act. It is something that we do not control and that

²³⁷⁴ See in particular *Men.* 99b-d.

²³⁷⁵ See *Tht.* 201b-c.

we may easily lose, but in general it seems to be enough to guide ourselves in life.²³⁷⁶ In other words, our main beliefs about how to live may be correct and we may also correctly attribute predicates to things in general. The main problem will concern the understanding of these predicates (i.e., of the εἶδη). We must have some representation of them if we are to attribute them to things, but we will lack real insight into them. This is already a kind of defect (and indeed the kind of defect that is implied in the notion of a correct δόξα).²³⁷⁷ Still, it will not be enough to affect our life, at least according to the possibility we are now considering.

The question, then, is what is the cognitive state or the cognitive competence of an unexamined life. How much cognitive defect can it have and how serious is it? Should we be concerned? What can be said on this matter? It is indeed difficult to make a general assessment, given the multiplicity and complexity of our beliefs. We normally do notice them and much less question them. However, the unexamined life's structure and its constitutive love of knowledge render this question particularly pertinent. We need to know if we know what is happening in our life.

At first sight, the quality of our beliefs and the extension of the defects may vary greatly. We already considered this above.²³⁷⁸ We easily admit that pretty much all of our knowledge claims are true and that our way of seeing things is fundamentally right. We may also admit that we do not know many things (even important things), but our knowledge claims are still sufficiently true for us to live and attain our practical goals. However, our knowledge claims may also be sufficiently wrong, or they may be essentially wrong (i.e., our basic beliefs may be wrong and this may affect everything else). It may even happen that all our beliefs are wrong. The range of possibilities is therefore wide. But what determines the diagnosis of our views? Does it vary from individual to individual, according to one's circumstances? Or does it hinge on one's inner πολιτεία and the kind of life that one leads? Are there significant differences between the different forms of unexamined life as such? Or can we make a general diagnosis about the unexamined life as such?

Plato decidedly points in the latter direction. The differences between individuals or between the various forms of unexamined life are not significant enough. There is a fundamental cognitive defectiveness that is associated with the unexamined life as such. We have already considered some of the main traits of this defectiveness in Chapter 7 above, but now we must reconsider the question in light of our practical tensions.

²³⁷⁶ Cp. *Men.* 97c ff.

²³⁷⁷ For more on this notion, cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.3.

²³⁷⁸ See Chap. 7, Sect. 1.3, and Chap. 8, Sect. 2.

5. The radical untruth of the unexamined life

There are different ways in which Plato's dialogues suggest or indicate that all forms of unexamined life are radically untrue. First, the different characters (who illustrate different forms of unexamined life) show how one's beliefs easily collapse when one submits them to examination. One easily contradicts oneself and in the end one does not know what to say. As we considered above, this is not simply a matter of temporary aphasia. It reveals one's conceited ignorance about a given question, and this conceited ignorance may in fact affect our whole system of beliefs. At some points, the dialogues consider precisely this possibility. For instance, there are a few images in the corpus that depict our normal life as being wholly illusory or untrue. Other times, the characters provide conceptual indications or even reflect in a conceptual manner about the possibility of a global defect and what characterizes it. Let us then consider these two kinds of approach in turn and see how they complement each other.

5.1. The images of the unexamined life's untruth

An important indication about the cognitive defects of the unexamined life can be found in allegories and myths that are intended as images of the human condition. The clearest examples of this are found in the myths of *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo*, as well as in the allegory of the cave in the *Republic*. These passages portray our way of seeing things as being profoundly defective and the reality that appears to us as being completely distorted. It is true that these are only images and, as such, they do not fully explain why that is so. But as images they let us visualize in a very effective manner the kind of distortion that may be implied in all forms of unexamined life.

It is important to note that Plato does not expressly speak of "unexamined life" in any of these passages and one could perhaps wonder whether these portraits apply to all forms of unexamined life. However, the three images directly associate our limitations with the lack of philosophy or philosophical examination. Moreover, the above description of the unexamined life helps us understand why lives may have the kind of limitations expressed in these images.

Let us then consider the aspects of these images that are more directly relevant to the question at hand. This consideration will be very incomplete, given the complexity of these passages, but it will nevertheless give us a good idea of the kind of distortion involved in the unexamined life as such.

a) Like wingless birds. The portrait of the unexamined life in the myth of *Phaedrus*

In *Phaedrus* 244a-257a, Socrates presents a very elaborated myth that, among other things, helps us understand the way in which our life may be affected by the lack of philosophical examination. We will now briefly consider this, but in order to do so we will have to consider once more some aspects that were already mentioned above.²³⁷⁹

Socrates introduces a complex model of reality, according to which there is the place where we presently dwell – namely, earth – and a complex region above it, which encompasses not only the heavens, but also the region above the heavens (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος). The latter constitutes the highest domain of reality and it contains the perfect or superlative beings. As we saw, the latter correspond to what Plato calls εἴδη, and they are also what our soul intimately desires or longs for. To be more precise, the soul is said to be constitutively directed at the contemplation of these true beings, insofar as that is what truly nurtures it.²³⁸⁰

Socrates also describes how the souls are like a winged team of horses and their charioteer.²³⁸¹ The wings are an essential component of this combination, insofar as they allow the soul to ascend to the supracelestial region and contemplate the true beings.²³⁸² The horses are equally important, since they condition the way the charioteer guides the soul. In the case of the godly souls, the horses are good and they easily obey. This means the gods can easily reach the supracelestial region. As for the other souls (including those that will become human beings), the task of the charioteer is more complicated, since one of the horses is good and obedient, but the other is bad and recalcitrant.²³⁸³ This renders the ascent particularly difficult and, at best, these souls catch only a glimpse of the perfect beings.²³⁸⁴ But they may

²³⁷⁹ Cp. Chap. 12 Sect. 4.3, Chap. 13 Sect. 2.3.

²³⁸⁰ For all these aspects, cp. in particular 247c-e.

²³⁸¹ See 246a.

²³⁸² Cp. 246d.

²³⁸³ Cp. 246a-b and 247b.

²³⁸⁴ Cp. 248a.

also fail to see these beings and start to forget them. As a result, their wings will start to wither, and they will be more and more subject to gravity. Eventually, they come to lose their wings and fall into earth, where they hold on to a body.²³⁸⁵

This is where human life starts. This life is marked by many limitations and it actually constitutes a form of imprisonment.²³⁸⁶ One cannot do what one actually desires – that is, one cannot ascent to the top of the heavens in order to see the superlative beings. One no longer has wings (only the corresponding stumps), and one is confined to the body and its own possibilities of movement. In sum, one has become a wingless bird.²³⁸⁷ However, our limitations go much further than this. One has forgotten what the true beings or εἶδη look like (i.e., what they consist in), even though one must see all beings in light of them or as instances of them.²³⁸⁸ This means that our understanding of everything around our body and of our own possibilities of action is distorted. Our sense organs are dull and fail to see things as they are.²³⁸⁹ In addition, we also forget that we forgot the εἶδη – in fact, we forget that we are a soul directed at the contemplation of the true beings. We think we are a body that moves itself, we think the domain of this body is all the reality that matters, and consequently we become fully engaged in our regular pursuits (the ἀνθρώπινα σπουδάσματα).²³⁹⁰

Our ordinary, non-philosophical life (i.e., the unexamined life) is thus marked by a radical distortion of our access to everything and by a completely false interpretation of our condition. In this sense, this life and the domain of reality that corresponds to it become a kind of substitute home or substitute destination. But we never entirely lose our connection to the supracelestial region. There is still some tacit recollection and the wings are still somehow present (even if only as stumps). We still long for the true beings, since they are still what truly nurtures us. Hence, the substitute region is constitutively insufficient or defective, even if we normally do not notice it. But we can also notice it – i.e., we may remember what we really desire. Socrates considers two possibilities of this happening. First, one may see someone that fully embodies beauty and thereby start remembering the vision of beauty itself.²³⁹¹ Second, one may philosophize and try to determine what things really are – which constitutes a form of active longing (πόθος) for the perfect beings.²³⁹² These two

²³⁸⁵ Cp. 248c-d and 246c.

²³⁸⁶ Cp. 250c.

²³⁸⁷ Plato uses the image of a bird that is unable to fly in 249d.

²³⁸⁸ Cp. 249b-c.

²³⁸⁹ See 250b.

²³⁹⁰ See 249d.

²³⁹¹ Cp. 250d ff.

²³⁹² Cp. 250c.

experiences allow us to overcome the limitations of our immediate condition (i.e., they allow our wings to start growing back) and, even if they do not fully release us, at least they make us aware (though with varying degrees of clearness) of our real condition and of what we really desire.²³⁹³

b) Like fishes at the bottom of a pond. The portrait of the unexamined life in the myth of *Phaedo* (108d ff.)

In *Phaedo*, after much discussion about the immortality of the soul, Socrates ends up considering the different destinies souls may have after dying.²³⁹⁴ Some souls return to the bodily domain, whereas others go to a better region, where they live with the gods.²³⁹⁵ Socrates then tries to describe this other region in geographical terms. In order to do so, he presents a complex description of earth and its regions, which completely redefines the domain in which our life usually takes place and introduces other regions we are not aware of. But Socrates does not simply reveal that the earth is larger than we thought. He also establishes important cognitive and ontological contrasts between the different regions, and in order to render these contrasts clearer, he compares our own situation with the situation of fish in the sea. This is what we must now consider.

Socrates begins by saying that he is going to describe the earth as he thinks it really is. After describing his shape and position in space, he says that the known world at the time (namely, the region “from the Phasis up to the pillars of Heracles”, which surrounds the sea) is only a very small part of the real earth or earth itself.²³⁹⁶ This renders the region we inhabit (and even ourselves) insignificant. We are just like ants or frogs around a pond.²³⁹⁷ To make matters worse, our region is not even on the surface of the earth, but rather in one of its many hollows.²³⁹⁸ This means that there is a vast and superior region beyond everything we know, and our region is thus disqualified. We think we live in a vast region and on the surface, but we are actually in a small and inferior region, and we have no idea of this.²³⁹⁹ In other words, we have no idea of what our situation actually is.

²³⁹³ Or, as Plato says when he compares us to a bird, we look upwards and we try to fly. Cp. 249d.

²³⁹⁴ See 107d ff.

²³⁹⁵ See 108c.

²³⁹⁶ See 108e-109b. I follow the translation by Long and Sedley. See A. LONG & D. SEDLEY (ed.), *Plato – Meno and Phaedo*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2010.

²³⁹⁷ See 109b.

²³⁹⁸ See *ibidem*.

²³⁹⁹ Cp. 109c.

To help us understand this, Socrates says that our situation is just like the situation of someone who, like fish, happened to live in the middle of the seabed and, due to their slowness (βραδυτήγ) and weakness (ἀσθένεια), had no idea of what lies above the sea.²⁴⁰⁰ Like such a person, we are not aware that there is a reality beyond what we take to be the highest and truest reality. This is actually an instance of the above mentioned “Heraclitean thought pattern”.²⁴⁰¹ Our condition is described as the intermediate between two extremities, and in order to reveal our limitations, we are compared to the bottom extremity. By considering the limitations of the latter condition in comparison with our own, we come to better understand the kind of limitations that we ourselves have and how there can be a condition superior to our own. But what are then the limitations or defects of our present condition and how do they resemble the situation of fish?

The first point to consider concerns our position. Although we think we dwell on the surface of the earth, we actually live in a hollow. As a result, we think the upper limit of our region is the real top – i.e., the sky. It is just as if someone in the sea were to think that the surface of the water was the actual sky, without realizing that the sky lies beyond it. Due to our slowness and weakness, we do not realize that there is a region above what we represent as being on the top.²⁴⁰² We are therefore marked by strong cognitive limitations. Normally we cannot turn our head up and see what lies beyond our present circumstances.

But this is not all. Just like fish live in water, our dwelling is filled with air, whereas the region above (i.e., the true surface of the earth) is filled with aether. This then accounts for the quality of the objects or of the reality present in each of these regions, as well as the kind of life one may live in those regions. Plato calls our attention to how things at sea are muddy, dirty and eaten away by brine; he also says that nothing of worth grows there.²⁴⁰³ In comparison with things in our region, they are full of flaws or corrupted. But something similar happens with things in our region when we compare them with the superior region. Reality around us is also deformed and tainted. Plato, indeed, imagines someone doing what fish do – i.e., just like fish are able to reach the top of the sea and look outside, someone would go to the top of air (for instance, by acquiring wings) and turn their gaze to the superior place, in order to see the true surface of the earth and the true heaven.²⁴⁰⁴ This vision would be difficult to endure, but if one could endure it, one would see how things are much

²⁴⁰⁰ See 109d-e.

²⁴⁰¹ Cp. footnote 742.

²⁴⁰² Cp. 109d-e.

²⁴⁰³ See 110a.

²⁴⁰⁴ See 109e.

more perfect and much more beautiful there. Indeed, Plato initially speaks of earth itself and its stones, and says that they are smoother, more colorful, shinier, purer, and more beautiful. He also mentions how plants, animals, human beings, and everything else are in better condition than here. In general, there is no distortion, unshapeliness or illness.²⁴⁰⁵

Finally, Plato briefly compares the cognitive abilities of human beings that live in the superior region with our own. Like all other things, their perceptions and wisdom far exceed our own.²⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, they can see and hear the gods (which means that they can learn from them), and they can contemplate the real celestial bodies.²⁴⁰⁷ In sum, their access to reality and the kind of reality they have access to are far superior to our own. This is very important. Life in the superior region is described as a state of complete happiness, and its cognitive and ontological superiority lie at the heart of this happiness.²⁴⁰⁸

Plato thus describes a life that is very different from our own. But he seems to admit the possibility of a transition to such a place.²⁴⁰⁹ If we dedicate ourselves to philosophy during our life and abandon all other concerns, we may come to experience this happiness.²⁴¹⁰ If, however, we fail to examine things as much as we can, our life will lack all this perfection. In other words, we will have a very defective gaze and the reality we will deal with will be much inferior. We will not live among the true things, but rather in a very distorted version of everything we think we have. Indeed, the consequences of the lack of examination are global and pervade everything – just like the different elements (namely, water, air, aether) shape the different levels of reality in the myth we just considered.

c) Like prisoners in a cave. The portrait of the unexamined life in the *Republic*

Despite all the interesting aspects of the two myths we have just considered, the most expressive image of the unexamined life's cognitive limitations can be found in the allegory of the cave. The allegory is presented as an image of our nature with respect to education (παιδεία) and the lack thereof.²⁴¹¹ Socrates asks Glaucon to imagine prisoners at the bottom of a cave. He thus invokes the image of cave dwellers or primitive human beings that are

²⁴⁰⁵ Cp. 110b ff.

²⁴⁰⁶ See 111b.

²⁴⁰⁷ See 111b-c.

²⁴⁰⁸ See 111c.

²⁴⁰⁹ See 108c.

²⁴¹⁰ We will leave aside the question of whether such a transition necessarily implies a physical death (as the text seems to affirm) or not.

²⁴¹¹ See 514a.

marked by extreme brutishness and ignorance. These ideas are further stressed by their circumstances. Socrates says the prisoners are chained up or strapped to their seat (θῦκος) from childhood, with their backs against the entrance of the cave, and they can only see in front of them.²⁴¹² This means they have no idea of what lies behind their back. In fact, they do not even know that there is reality behind their back. More than that, they have no idea of the prison as such. They are not aware of their limitations and for them the world is what lies before them. But this world of theirs constitutively depends on what is behind them. The wall in front of them is lit by a fire that burns behind them and all they see is the shadows, projected on the wall, of artifacts and statues passing behind them, carried by some other people.²⁴¹³ These other people also talk to each other, and the prisoners hear the echo of these conversations. However, since the prisoners have no notion of the fire and the people behind them, they think the shadows and the echo that seems to come from them is all that there is. They mistake a very deficient reality for what things really are, and they may even develop a wisdom about the shadows, by making out what these shadows supposedly are and considering how they normally precede, accompany or follow each other.²⁴¹⁴ But regardless of how complex the beliefs about their world are, they still do not have any knowledge. Everything they come into contact with is entirely distorted and has no real consistency.

Glaucon admits that this is a strange image and these are strange people, but Socrates immediately says that they are like us, and this is a very important indication.²⁴¹⁵ The prisoners are not someone who knows less than us and is not yet educated. They correspond to the state we are in. This means that we are not spectators who look at prisoners knowing that they are prisoners and that there is a world behind them. We are within the cave, everything we see is shadows, and we have no idea that there is a cave and that we only see shadows. Thus, we have no idea of the outside (i.e., of what things truly are). Our entire world (i.e., the entire reality as it appears to the unexamined life) is as distorted as the world of the prisoners in the cave. We think we are seeing things as they are, but our gaze only sees images – i.e., a poor or defective version of things that is constitutively referred to something different from it. In other words, we are not where we think we are, we do not have what we think we have, but reality corresponds to something else. We have no knowledge whatsoever

²⁴¹² See 514a-b.

²⁴¹³ See 514b-515a.

²⁴¹⁴ See 515b-c and 516c-d.

²⁴¹⁵ See 515a.

and this is why we are in extreme need of education. But what does this education consist in and what does it reveal about our ordinary condition?

Plato describes our normal way of seeing things as a stagnated and imprisoned gaze. We cannot look around and we cannot move in order to see things from different angles. But Plato also admits the possibility of being released – although this release entails many difficulties. One may be set free by someone else and compelled to turn around and walk. However, one is deeply attached to the shadowy version of things, and this means that one will at first resist to any attempt to change one’s perspective.²⁴¹⁶ Moreover, if one happens to turn one’s gaze, one will initially become dazzled by light and will not be able to see any alternative version of things.²⁴¹⁷ Consequently, one will retain one’s beliefs. It is only after much insistence that one starts to realize that things are actually different from what one thinks.²⁴¹⁸ But this is not all. It is also important to bear in mind that the release is rather complex and involves many stages. More precisely, one will first see statues, then one will realize that these statues are also images of persons, then one will see that this is only a cave and that there is a world outside, and even then one will first see the images in water and only in the end will one be able to see the highest reality – the sun.²⁴¹⁹ These different stages replicate the model of imprisonment that characterizes the initial condition of the prisoners. One does not see – and may not be aware – that they are defective and constitutively refer to something else (i.e., that they are still images). In other words, until the final stage is reached, one still has strong cognitive limitations.²⁴²⁰

Exiting the cave (and consequently the unexamined life) requires this complex process. But this is not something we normally undertake. In general, we are simply absorbed in the shadowy or imagetic world, even if we carry out some examination. This means that we completely misunderstand reality and everything we deal with, and have no idea of what

²⁴¹⁶ One will not recognize that someone else knows better what things are and if someone insists that one has no knowledge whatsoever of what things are, one may become aggressive and, according to Socrates, even try to kill this person (cp. 516e-517a).

²⁴¹⁷ See 515c-d.

²⁴¹⁸ Cp. 515e-516a

²⁴¹⁹ Cp. 515c-516c.

²⁴²⁰ If we compare the allegory of the cave with the simile of the line, we see that the intermediate levels in the cave correspond to the intermediate role played by particular sciences. The latter are indeed limited forms of inquiry or examination. They question our immediate way of seeing things, but they still use unexamined assumptions or *ὑποθέσεις*, which seem to correspond to the *εἶδη*. However, one may also inquire into the *εἶδη* and even search for their ultimate principle and the principle of everything (the *ἀρχὴ ἀνυπόθετος*), which seems to correspond to the idea of the good. At the point one starts inquiring about this, one is no longer deceived by images and as such one is already free from our cognitive cave (as well as from any form of unexamined life). For more on the simile of the line, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.3 a) and Chap. 9, Sect. 3.1 d).

things really are. This is our pitiable cognitive condition.²⁴²¹ We are just like a shadow in Hades.²⁴²²

d) The common features and the common meaning of these images of the unexamined life

At first sight, there are many differences between these three images. Many of their details vary and their main focus is also different. This is partly owing to the different contexts in which they appear and the goal these images are meant to achieve. However, despite all the differences, there are also significant points of contact, and the previous analyses tried to highlight some of them – namely, those that concern the cognitive limitations that are connected to the lack of philosophical examination. But let us now systematize these points of contact, in order to prepare for a more conceptual analysis of the question.

First of all, it is important to note that these images talk of places or regions, as well as of the beings that are found in them. In doing so, Plato seems to neglect the subjective or cognitive component. However, the quality of the different places and beings also expresses our different cognitive states. In particular, the defectiveness or deformity of a particular reality expresses how defective (i.e., how distorted or hazy) our views of this reality are. Moreover, the fact that Plato talks of regions also stresses the global character of what is being discussed. The defects alluded to in each image do not affect some things or some questions, but they pervade everything. In other words, the defect affects the region as such.

This global defect is represented by the fact that the region we normally find ourselves in lies below some other region in which beings are more perfect. Indeed, the contrast between up and down expresses the superiority and inferiority (or the greater perfection and the greater degradation) of the different regions of reality. But, in addition, Plato represents our usual place as some strange form of reality. It is a kind of pit in which we fall, a small pond or sea, or a cave full of shadows. Andrea Nightingale describes this as a “rhetoric of estrangement”, in which Plato “attempts to make what is familiar strange and what is strange

²⁴²¹ Cp. 516c, where it is said that the released prisoner would pity the others that are still imprisoned.

²⁴²² We are actually compared to Achilles, and like him it is said that we would rather choose a very humble life than being honored in a shadowy world. Cp. 516d, which expressly refers to *Odyssey* XI.489–90.

familiar, thus dislodging the reader from his ordinary beliefs.”²⁴²³ The reality we see and the way we see it are, in fact, portrayed as something strange and inferior to what we think, and this also points to something beyond it and to a different version of things that may replace it.

The reason why Plato needs to do this is also explained in the images. There is a fundamental forgetfulness or a fundamental ignorance of what our situation is and of what things really are. We think we already have a perfect version of things, but this version is defective and it is constitutively referred to a better version of the same things. In this sense, what lies beyond our usual life is not just something besides what we already know, but it is what we and everything around us are immediately referred to. The “real world” is what the inferior world claims to be. The former is revealed when we discover the limitations of the latter and the attempt to reach it is not simply a journey into a distant land, but rather a radical transformation of the unexamined world. This is particularly clear in the allegory of the cave, insofar as what we reach at the end (the outside world and the sun) is what we normally think we know. In *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo*, Plato describes a distant and unknown region, but the model is still fundamentally the same. These regions correspond to what we usually think we already know and possess – to wit, the real beings and the real nurture in *Phaedrus*, and the real earth and the purest things in *Phaedo*. The fundamental component of the three passages is therefore the global revelation of how defective our immediate way of seeing things is.

5.2. Conceptual analysis of the untruth of the unexamined life

We must now inquire into the meaning of these images and try to determine the cognitive defects that characterize the unexamined life as such. More precisely, we must see how any form of unexamined life is marked by defects that affect everything we come into contact with. In order to do so, we will reconsider some aspects we considered in Chapter 7, when we discussed the limitations of our beliefs.

a) The uncertainty and imprecision of the unexamined knowledge claims

One kind of defect was already considered in Section 4 above. Since we did not fully examine our knowledge claims, we cannot exclude the possibility that they are wrong. But in

²⁴²³ See A. NIGHTINGALE, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy. Theoria in its Cultural Context*, Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2004, 36f.

general we do not admit the possibility of any significant defect in our beliefs (and especially in the most important ones). In fact, most of them are tacit and we hold them without expressly thinking about their content, their validity, or their origin. But, as we saw, the origin of our beliefs renders them very questionable. From an external standpoint, we take as certain what is very uncertain. There is a formal defect in our beliefs and this opens the door to many material defects – i.e., to many errors and misunderstandings. To be sure, this does not imply that there are any material defects. In principle, our beliefs could all be correct (i.e., all our δόξαι could be ὀρθαί). Still, the formal defect in question already implies a certain degree of distortion. There may be some contact with reality, but as Plato stresses in *Meno*, one does not know the cause of something being as it is.²⁴²⁴ Our beliefs are in themselves defective and our notion of what they refer to is therefore imprecise or unclear. As we will see, this is particularly problematic in the case of our understanding of predicates (i.e., of the εἶδη), given their fundamental role in how we see things in general. But first, let us consider in more detail the problems with the attribution of predicates.

b) The errors in the unexamined attributions of predicates

We attribute many predicates to beings in general. More precisely, we determine their identity (their ὅπερ εἶναι) and their attributes in a strict sense (their ποῖόν τι), and thus each being is subject to many attributions of predicates. This applies to things, animals, and persons, but also to situations and actions. Our entire course of life is based on many attributions of predicates – especially in the attribution of the predicates good and bad. However, these attributions of predicates are mostly unexamined. They are often motivated by our irrational drives, and we do not consider things very closely. Even if we may think about some attributions (especially if we experience difficulties in making out what something is), we are very far from fully verifying if they are correct. This means that they have the formal defect just mentioned. We cannot be sure of these attributions, and many of them may be (and often are) wrong. In addition, we saw that we are often far from determining all predicates of things. There are many things to which we do not pay attention, and we tend to focus only on the predicates that we think are more relevant for us. Our access to things is therefore hazy, and even if many of the attributions of predicates are correct, this may still easily produce a wrong impression about things. In other words, it may lead to

²⁴²⁴ See 98a.

wrong attributions of predicates – especially of those that concern the role things may or should play in our life.

c) The lack of clearness and the inner contradictions of the unexamined claims to understanding

As we saw, the attributions of predicates presuppose a certain understanding of these predicates (i.e., of the general modes of being or εἶδη). But the unexamined life does not carefully examine the predicates it uses to determine things (in fact, it tends not to reflect about them at all). Its understanding of them is mostly automatic and influenced by the drive that rules the soul. This means that this understanding may contain many defects. It may be unclear and even self-contradictory. And this is not just a remote possibility. Plato's dialogues show how many people cannot explain the content of the general predicates they use to determine things in general (and especially those that more directly determine their actions and the way they live). At first, they tend to be unable to say anything at all about them, and when they start identifying the way they understand them, they easily contradict themselves. But this is not just something that affects the characters in Plato's dialogues. In general, we would all suffer the same fate, because we all have a vague notion of these predicates. We are permanently referred to them (or, as Plato says, we have some recollection or some premonition of what they are), but we cannot see them clearly (and in this sense we are partly forgotten of them – i.e., they still elude us).²⁴²⁵

This is indeed the essential problem for Plato, and the one that more directly justifies the portraits of the unexamined life we considered above. Our defective understanding of the general predicates is not confined to them, but it affects all attributions of predicates, and thus it spreads untruth throughout our whole way of seeing things. Many of these attributions will automatically be wrong.²⁴²⁶ Moreover, even if some attributions of predicates happen to be correct, they will still include great distortions. One will get some things right (i.e., one will have correct δόξαι), but one will not exactly understand what one got right. It is therefore clear that a defective understanding of the εἶδη has the most serious consequences for our way of seeing things in general. But let us consider this in more detail by focusing on other

²⁴²⁵ The problem applies not only to all individual predicates as such, but also to their relations to one another (cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 2.3). We do not clearly understand these interrelations either, and we cannot fully explain them.

²⁴²⁶ For instance, we may think that something is just, but only because we have a distorted understanding of what justice is.

aspects highlighted by Plato when he discusses the most essential cognitive defects that beset the unexamined life.

d) The constitutive unclearness (ἀσάφεια) of the bodily ontology

Our relation to the εἶδη is decisive, but the unexamined life is characterized by a partial amnesia (i.e., a partial ignorance) of the εἶδη. We know something about them and see everything according to them, but our notion of them is wholly unclear. Moreover, we are ignorant of our ignorance or we forget our forgetfulness. To be more precise, we do not realize that we have an insufficient understanding of the εἶδη. In fact, we even tend not to recognize that there are εἶδη and that they shape our entire experience of life. As we considered above, the unexamined life is usually characterized by a version of reality according to which everything (or at least what is most real) is somehow bodily. This notion of body refers to our domain of subjective appearing and to the sensible reality that appears to us. Our experience of all concrete and individual beings is related to the body in this sense, and we may consider these beings as all that there is. In other words, we will not notice the large quantity of general predicates that determine our experience of everything and we will not focus on these predicates as such. This contributes decisively for our defective understanding of the general predicates. We do not consider them and thus we do not notice how hazy or how self-contradictory our notions of them are. As a result, our access to the individual beings will also be distorted and we will live in a defective world or a world of δόξα in the pejorative sense of the word.²⁴²⁷

We saw above that this ontology of the body is the result of our own inner πολιτεία. We somehow love the body or something that is referred to the bodily domain. This is the case of gain and also of honor, which is constitutively related to individual or concrete beings and situations. Since we are moved by these interests, we pay little attention to what individual things are (aside from what is more directly relevant for our interests) and to the predicates that determine them. The love of the body thus constitutes a kind of prison, as is mentioned in *Phaedrus* and developed in *Phaedo*.²⁴²⁸ This love rivets us to the body and makes us believe that what affects it is what is most clear and true.²⁴²⁹ We could also say that

²⁴²⁷ This applies not only to things around us, but also to our own being, as we will see in the following subsection.

²⁴²⁸ See *Phdr.* 250c, *Phd.* 81e, and especially 82e-83d.

²⁴²⁹ As Plato also says in *Phd.* 83d, the soul says the same things or holds the same δόξαι as the body.

we become riveted to δόξα in the pejorative sense, although we do not experience this as a prison. On the contrary, we become fondly attached to δόξα – or, as is said in the *Republic*, we become φιλόδοξοι.²⁴³⁰

The attachment to the body is thus the attachment to a particular way of seeing things, and this way of seeing things is essentially marked by haziness or confusion. In *Gorgias*, Plato associates the views of the body with Anaxagoras' idea of confusion. From the standpoint of the body, everything is jumbled together (“ὁμοῦ ἂν πάντα χρήματα ἐφύρετο ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ”) and indiscernible (ἄκριτα).²⁴³¹ This can be understood in an absolute sense, insofar as the body corresponds primarily to the domain of sensation and sensation by itself is indeterminate.²⁴³² But it also applies to a kind of perspective that only makes a few functional distinctions, based on one's main interest in life, and neglects all other distinctions. This does not render all things indistinct, but it produces a very hazy way of seeing things. One will not have a clear access to the εἶδη and consequently one will also not have a clear access to the concrete beings. Everything will be simplified and seen in the light of gain or honor.

e) Self-ignorance as an essential feature of the unexamined life

This description applies to everything around us, but also to our own self. Indeed, we also tend to identify ourselves with the body and the bodily domain.²⁴³³ This means that we do not notice or do not pay attention to the ψυχή and the role it plays in our life. We do not see beneath the surface of our being and do not see what really determines our knowledge and our actions. Consequently, we also do not know that our inner being may have different modalities (i.e., it may be characterized by ὑπερή and κακία), nor that these modalities determine the quality of our life. In fact, often we are not even aware of whether we are happy or miserable, or we have a false view about it, since we are not really aware of what we truly desire.

In sum, we tend to be ignorant of ourselves, of our own ψυχή, of the role knowledge plays in it, of our own cognitive limitations, and of the need to care for ourselves (i.e., to care for our ψυχή).²⁴³⁴ We simply care for what belongs to us (namely, our body) or for what

²⁴³⁰ See 480a.

²⁴³¹ See 465d.

²⁴³² As is said in *Phd.* 65b, sensation is not accurate or clear.

²⁴³³ Cp. e.g. *Phdr.* 246c and *Phd.* 85e ff.

²⁴³⁴ This is, for instance, the condition Alcibiades finds himself in, as Socrates tries to show him in *Alcibiades I*. See in particular *Alc. I* 127d ff.

belongs to what belongs to us (i.e., our possessions). To use the model of tripartition, we care only for gain or honor. This means that we simply rush into things without realizing that we are not prepared to achieve what we really want.²⁴³⁵

f) The unexamined life as a form of sleep and as a dream

What we saw up to this point allows us to understand a set of images used by Plato to describe the cognitive status of the unexamined life. In the *Apology*, Socrates compares ordinary life to a form of dozing off or being half asleep (νυστάζειν).²⁴³⁶ One is not fully aware of what is happening nor of oneself, and only philosophical examination can wake us up. In the *Republic*, the way we normally live is presented as a form of slumbering or sleep.²⁴³⁷ This is a very diminished form of being and comparable to death. In *Gorgias*, Plato even quotes Euripides and says that perhaps “being alive is being dead and being dead is being alive.”²⁴³⁸ However, even if life is a sort of death, this death does not correspond to a dreamless night. On the contrary, we are surrounded by oneiric images (εἰδωλα) and we are ourselves a sort of image.²⁴³⁹

This is very important. We saw above that for Plato an image is something whose identity refers to something else, but falls short of that to which it refers. In other words, the identity of an image is intrinsically referential and lies outside of itself. This means that the appearing of an image is always the defective appearing of something else to which it refers.²⁴⁴⁰ But we can relate to this defective and referential being in two different ways. On the one hand, we can understand that the image is an image, i.e., that it is not what it appears to be, but rather refers to something else and falls short of it. On the other hand, we may fail to see the image’s defectiveness and its referral to something else – i.e., we may see the image as if it were a self-contained identity, even though that is not the case, and thus we mistake the image for the thing itself whose image it is. This kind of mistake actually corresponds to Plato’s notion of dreaming (ὄναρ). Dreaming, according to him, consists in “believing a likeness of something to be not a likeness, but rather the thing itself to which it is

²⁴³⁵ Cp. *Alc. I*, 118b.

²⁴³⁶ See 31a.

²⁴³⁷ See 534c.

²⁴³⁸ See 492e.

²⁴³⁹ In fact, the unexamined life is comparable to life in Hades insofar as everything in it is but an unsubstantial shadow.

²⁴⁴⁰ For more on the notion of image, see the beginning of Chapter 4 above.

a likeness”.²⁴⁴¹ This means that a life full of images that are not recognized as such is a life full of dreams or a complete dream state. But exactly in what sense is the unexamined life full of images that are mistaken for the real things? And what kind of images in this sense can be found in the unexamined life?

We can say that any defective belief is an image in the negative sense, insofar as it mistakes a defective version of something for the real thing. On this basis, we can say that there are several different kinds of images (and several kinds of dreams) in the unexamined life. First of all, we often attribute wrong predicates to things and this creates an illusory image of them, which we mistake for the real thing. Moreover, all concrete beings are images of the εἶδη, insofar as the former are constitutively referred to the latter. But, in virtue of the body-loving ontology, we also think that the particular instances of the εἶδη are the things themselves, and fail to realize that they are just images. However, the decisive kind of image and dream concerns our understanding of the εἶδη themselves, which is very defective, but we normally take it to be appropriate. In this sense, our understanding of the εἶδη is purely imagetic and oneiric, and this affects or distorts everything else we deal with. Finally, we could also say that our understanding of ourselves is imagetic and oneiric, insofar as it is distorted and does not see the real structure of our being.²⁴⁴²

This mistake, along with all others, makes us think we are directed at something other than what we truly desire, and causes us to be unhappy, even if we do not notice it. But let us leave aside this question for now. The important thing here is the fact that the unexamined life is full of images in a negative sense, and is therefore constantly dreaming. Plato even says, in *Statesman*, that “each of us knows everything as if in a dream and then again is ignorant of everything as it is in waking”.²⁴⁴³ Life is indeed a dream – not in the sense that everything it deals with is only a fancy of our imagination, but in the sense that everything is something other than what we think it is.

²⁴⁴¹ See *Rep.* 476c. For an analysis of this whole passage (including the notion of dreaming), cp. Chap. 7, Sect. 2.4 above.

²⁴⁴² In fact, our being, insofar as it is essentially determined by desire (and in fact the desire of a superlative good), has itself the structure of an image. Indeed, desire is something that refers to something else or wants to be like it (i.e., wants to possess it), but falls short of the thing it desires – and this is precisely what characterizes the notion of image.

²⁴⁴³ See 277d: “κινδυνεύει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οἷον ὄναρ εἰδὼς ἅπαντα πάντ’ αὖ πάλιν ὥσπερ ὕπαρ ἀγνοεῖν.”

5.3. Assessment of the truth and untruth of the unexamined life

The different forms of unexamined life seem to have serious cognitive limitations and these limitations do not simply concern a few details or some complex theoretical questions. Although one is normally convinced of knowing everything that matters, Plato's dialogues raise the possibility and argue that we have no knowledge at all – i.e., that the unexamined life is an entirely distorted way of seeing things. This may imply that every single belief we have (i.e., every attribution of a predicate and every claim to understanding a predicate) is untrue. But we do not have to go that far. We have seen that our beliefs are intertwined in very complex ways and some of them are the basis (or ὑποθέσεις) for the others. This means that even if some beliefs are somehow correct, they may still be affected by other beliefs that are untrue (especially if the latter constitute the basis for those correct beliefs).

According to Plato, this is precisely what happens. We think we understand the general predicates or εἶδη, but this is far from being the case. As a result, all attributions of predicates involve a distortion, and thus our access to everything is distorted. Although things appear to us and we think we see them as they are, the entire reality actually eludes us. Things are not as we think they are and we are not where we think we are. This is what is alluded to in the myths of *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo*, as well as in the allegory of the cave. The reality we deal with is a second-rate reality and truth is something else. This does not imply that there is a metaphysical world that is completely unrelated to this one. Indeed, how could such a world be the truth of the world we find ourselves in? Plato is rather referring to a radically different view of this world, which recognizes that it has a completely different structure (namely, one in which general predicates or εἶδη are its basic components). We are far from recognizing this, and thus we are very far from knowing where we are and what we should do. Despite our complex system of beliefs, we are ignorant of everything.

This does not mean that we have absolutely no relation to truth. We are not completely unconscious and we are not simply related to indeterminate sensations. Insofar as the soul loves knowledge and is not indifferent to it, we always have some relation to truth and to what things are. But this is not the same as revealing the truth and what things are. Our relation to them is blocked. In other words, things elude us and our way of seeing things is thus a complex mixture of ἀλήθεια and λήθη or, as Plato says, it lies between the two. In fact, this would be so even if we were fully aware of not knowing what things are. But in the case of the unexamined life, we think we know things. Thus, the fact that they elude us also eludes

us. We are twice removed from the truth and the degree of λήθη that characterizes such a life is much greater than in the case of simple ignorance. We are related to the truth, but we live in a completely distorted or fictitious version of it. In Plato's words, our life is "a day that is like night" (νοκτηρινὴ ἡμέρα).²⁴⁴⁴ We think we are seeing things but we are not. We are just dreaming.

We can therefore see how there is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the unexamined life, and this will be very important in the following, when we will discuss whether or not such a life is desirable and whether or not we need philosophical examination. But before we do so, we must still consider in more detail one other question.

²⁴⁴⁴ See *Rep.* 521c.

CHAPTER 17

The question of the responsibility for the unexamined life and the possibility of abandoning such a life

“Il est bien malaisé (...) d’ôter à des insensés des chaînes qu’ils révèrent.”

Voltaire, *Le dîner du comte de Boulainvilliers*²⁴⁴⁵

In the previous chapters we considered the formation and structure of the unexamined life. We saw that this life is based on a particular arrangement of the soul’s drives in which one’s love of knowledge is weakened and plays a subordinate role. However, this does not yet fully account for the occurrence of such a life. We must still consider what exactly determines this inner arrangement of drives. In other words, we must identify what (or who) is responsible for the unexamined life. This is very important, because it shows how we relate to the unexamined life – i.e., whether we are somehow forced or constrained to live such a life, or if this somehow is a choice and an act of ours. In short, we will see whether and to what extent we are free and autonomous while living an unexamined life. In doing so, we will develop our previous discussion about the choice or adoption of a particular βίος.²⁴⁴⁶ Moreover, we will also be able to determine whether or not it is under our control to abandon the unexamined life. This is an important question, and it will have important consequences for the following discussion of whether or not we should examine, because it determines whether or not we can embrace philosophical examination by ourselves.

Let us then see what is said (or what can be inferred from what is said) about this problem in the Platonic corpus. There are indeed several indications about the origin of the unexamined life and of all the defects (i.e., all badness) associated with it. We will try to combine these indications and see how the problem can be conceived within the framework of the tripartition. But before considering the Platonic answer to the problem, it is important to define the problem better and also to briefly see the cultural background against which Plato discusses the matter.

²⁴⁴⁵ See VOLTAIRE, *Œuvres*, vol. 29, Paris, Armand-Aubrée, 1829, 335.

²⁴⁴⁶ See Chap. 13, Sect. 6.5.

1. Fall, imprisonment, and the problem of the soul's responsibility therein

We will try to determine who or what is responsible for the occurrence of the unexamined life. In doing so, it is important to bear in mind that we are not just considering one possible way of life. Based on the previous chapters, we can already understand that the unexamined life is a life marked by many cognitive defects, which easily translate into many practical defects.²⁴⁴⁷ This fact then determines the whole question of this life's origin and of what is responsible for it. Plato renders this especially clear in the way he portrays our relation to such a life. In *Phaedrus*, Plato presents the origin of the unexamined life as a fall from a superior condition into an inferior one.²⁴⁴⁸ This means that one loses sight of the true beings (i.e., the εἶδη) and holds on to the domain of the body (i.e., the domain of concrete beings and the way we normally see them). In addition, one forgets that there are true beings and that we are directed at them, and one pursues other things. The unexamined life is thus the result of this fundamental movement of falling. But the unexamined life is not simply the result of a fall. Besides falling, we are also retained there. Apparently, we cannot simply leave this life at any point. Inspired by Orphism, Plato portrays the unexamined life as a prison.²⁴⁴⁹ We are prisoners of our body and, more than that, we are prisoners of its way of seeing things. The cognitive nature of the prison becomes particularly clear in the allegory of the cave. One is strapped down and forced to look at shadows, and this prison is so effective that one does not even know that one is a prisoner.

These two images stress the fact that the unexamined life is constitutively limited. To be more precise, the unexamined life is marked by loss and by the impossibility of immediately recovering what was lost. But how is this possible? How can we pursue an unexamined version of the good and create a practical system of pursuit, based on a system of unexamined views? And admitting that such a life is marked by many cognitive limitations, how can we accept these views and be engaged in this life? What is the ultimate origin of this defective mode of being?

It is important to note that these questions may be understood in two different senses, which actually correspond to the two different images used to describe our relation to the unexamined life. On the one hand, we may wonder what is responsible for the fall – i.e., why

²⁴⁴⁷ For a more close consideration of these defects, see Chap. 18.

²⁴⁴⁸ Cp. Sect. 3.1 b) below.

²⁴⁴⁹ Cp. *Gr.* 493a, *Cra.* 400c, *Phd.* 62b, 81d-e, 82e ff.

we adopted an unexamined life in the first place. On the other hand, we may inquire into what causes the imprisonment – i.e., why we remain in it and do not abandon it. Plato discusses both questions. The second one is perhaps the most important, because this imprisonment is what prevents us from adopting a philosophical life, but we can find important indications about this also in the discussion of the first question. Both these questions ask about the possibility of the unexamined life and both help us understand what ultimately causes it, so it is important to consider them together.

We must thus try to determine what is responsible for the adoption of the unexamined life – i.e., what can be blamed for it or what is objectively at fault for it. In short, we must find the αἴτιον. In particular, we must determine our own responsibility or the responsibility of our ψυχή. Are we completely passive in the process? Or is it rather an act of ours? And even if there is some passivity involved, can it be the result of some inner activity? Moreover, if some inner activity of ours causes the unexamined life, does this mean that we are entirely to blame, or can this be an activity of which we are not entirely aware and which does not depend on us as other activities of ours do? In other words, what exactly is our relation with what happens in us, how is our own self and its agency to be conceived, and what are the implications of this for the question about our own responsibility in the life we adopt (and consequently in everything that comes with it: namely, all the views and acts that stem from it)? If we look at the corpus, we see that Plato uses many terms that are associated with our agency – such as ἐκών, ἄκων, ἐθέλειν, βούλεσθαι, ἐπιθυμία, ἔρωσ, ὀρέγεσθαι, κρατεῖν, ἐγκράτεια, ἀκράτεια, ἐξουσία, ἐλευθερία, δουλεία. But what understanding of our own activity and responsibility underlies the use of these terms? And what does that understanding imply for our relation with the unexamined life?

The consideration of our agency in a broad sense is indeed very important for the question at hand. If we simply adopt our normal conception of agency and responsibility, then it seems obvious that we cannot be blamed for the unexamined life at all. In general, we do not think about adopting it and remaining in it. We do not see it as a possibility among others and we do not remember choosing it at any moment. We are not even aware that we lead an unexamined life as such. We simply live it. Furthermore, admitting that the unexamined life is full of defects, choosing it would imply making a bad choice and a practical error. But many passages in the dialogues are adamant about the impossibility of choosing something bad. No one errs willingly. We are always guided by our representation of the best, and thus any bad choice is always the result of our ignorance. It is not something

we truly desire, but rather something we do in spite of ourselves or *malgré nous*.²⁴⁵⁰ Finally, if we consider the above mentioned images, we notice that both the fall and the imprisonment imply constraint. One is forced by gravity and by one's shackles or prison to adopt a certain position. Thus, we seem to be exonerated from any responsibility with respect to the unexamined life. We are constrained, forced or compelled to live such a life. But are we really unaccountable? What exactly compels us?

Our ignorance seems to play an important role here. We are not aware of the choice and of what we are choosing. But is this ignorance just something that happens, or can we somehow be to blame for it? Plato does qualify our ignorance or stupidity (*ἀμαθία*) as reprehensible (*ἐπονείδιστος*), and this seems to involve the idea that we should know what we are ignorant of, or at least we should know that we are ignorant of it, instead of having a false conceit of knowledge.²⁴⁵¹ Moreover, Plato constantly stresses our own role in deciding how we live, both during the conversations (which are full of protreptic appeals to examine things thoroughly) and when he presents eschatological myths (in which the soul chooses its life and is then judged for the life it chose in the end). All this suggests that our *ψυχή* (or something that happens in it) might be the main responsible for the life we lead, after all. But how can this be?

As we saw before, the cognitive limitations of the unexamined life, as well as its general practical structure, derive from a particular arrangement of the soul's drives – namely, an arrangement in which our inborn love of knowledge is weak and subordinated to other drives. The unexamined life is thus directly associated to what happens within us. But what exactly determines the relative strength of the soul's inborn drives? Is it determined (or at least influenced) by something outside the soul? Or is it determined solely by the soul itself? And if the latter is true, in what way? Is the inner arrangement of drives the result of the struggle of the drives themselves? Or is it determined by a particular part of the soul?

The answer to these questions is very difficult, especially because they concern something that happens in the depths of our being. We will have to see what can be said about this in light of Plato's dialogues, and in doing so we will be able to better understand the role we play in our life and the way we relate to it. In fact, the following analyses will allow us to better understand the sense in which we can talk of the self – as well as of will,

²⁴⁵⁰ For more on this, cp. Chap. 12, Sect. 5.5.

²⁴⁵¹ See *Ap.* 29b, *Alc. I* 118a, and cp. the preface to Chap. 7, Sect. 1.

responsibility, autonomy and freedom – in the framework of Plato’s thought. To this extent, the problem of our responsibility for the unexamined life is also decisive for our own self-understanding.

2. Brief consideration of the pre-Platonic understanding of human responsibility

Before seeing how the question of the responsibility for the unexamined life can be conceived in Platonic terms, it is helpful to briefly consider the pre-Platonic conceptions of human responsibility and of related notions such as blame, merit, freedom, autonomy, and so on. These conceptions constitute the backdrop against which Plato develops his own understanding of human responsibility and they can therefore render Plato’s ideas clearer.²⁴⁵² We must, however, bear in mind that this backdrop is quite complex. It includes ideas and texts from different periods and different contexts – such as literature, religion, science, philosophy, politics, jurisprudence and everyday life. We will not consider all these contexts in detail, but we will try to succinctly outline the thought patterns that have a decisive bearing on Plato’s reflections.²⁴⁵³

Let us begin with Homer, who provides us with important indications about human responsibility. Homer conceives reality as a system of forces and human beings themselves

²⁴⁵² It is important to note that these Pre-Platonic conceptions are not concerned with the responsibility one may have for the unexamined life as such. They are usually more concerned with our actions (especially the most decisive ones) and consider the inner and outer conditions that determine such actions.

²⁴⁵³ The question has been object of many studies (both concerning particular authors or epochs, and Greek culture in general). For more elaborate discussions, see e.g. H. SCHLIER, ἐλεύθερος, ἐλευθερώω, ἐλευθερία, ἀπελεύθερος, in: *TWNT*, *sub voce*; M. POHLENZ, *Griechische Freiheit*. Wesen und Werden eines Lebensideals, Heidelberg, Quelle & Meyer, 1955; A. ADKINS, *Merit and Responsibility*. A Study in Greek Values, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960; H. SCHRECKENBERG, *Ananke*. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Wortgebrauchs, München, Beck, 1964; D. NESTLE, *Eleutheria*. Studien zum Wesen der Freiheit bei den Griechen und im Neuen Testament. Teil I: Die Griechen, Tübingen, Mohr, 1967; R. DAWE, Some Reflections on Ate and Hamartia, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 72 (1968), 89-123; J. STALLMACH, *Ate*. Zur Frage des Selbst- und Weltverständnisses des frühgriechischen Menschen, Meisenheim, Anton Hain, 1968; J. BREMER, *Hamartia*. Tragic Error in the *Poetics* of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy, Amsterdam, Hakkert, 1969; O. GIGON, Der Begriff der Freiheit in der Antike, *Gymnasium* 80 (1973), 8-53; T. STINTON, Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy, *Classical Quarterly* 25 (1975), 221-254; H. KRÄMER, Die Grundlegung des Freiheitsbegriffes in der Antike, in: J. SIMON (ed.), *Freiheit*. Theoretische und praktische Aspekte des Problems, Freiburg/München, Alber, 1977, 239-270; B. SIMON, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece*. The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1978; R. PARKER, *Miasma*. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983; R. HANKEY, “Evil” in the *Odyssey*, in: E. CRAIK (ed.), *Owls to Athens*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990; A. SCHMITT, *Selbstständigkeit und Abhängigkeit menschlichen Handelns bei Homer*. Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Psychologie Homers, Mainz/Stuttgart, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur/Franz Steiner, 1990; R. PADEL, *In and Out of the Mind*. Greek Images of the Tragic Self, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992; EADEM, *Whom Gods Destroy*. Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995; C. GILL, Mind and Madness in Greek Tragedy, *Apeiron* 29 (1996), 249-268; J. SERRA, *Pensar o trágico*. Categorias da tragédia grega, Lisboa, F. C. Gulbenkian, 2006, 287 ff.

seem to correspond to an internal system of forces, composed of multiple inner agents. The unity of the human being is thus problematic, especially with respect to action. Often there seems to be some inner division, and deliberation is itself conceived as a discussion of inner agents.²⁴⁵⁴ Thus, although the source of action seems to be within each human being, the real cause of action is often unclear. Moreover, human motivations are not strictly internal. Human beings are affected by others and things around them, and there is also a frequent interaction with gods and divinities in general. In fact, there is even a notion of fate as something to which the gods themselves must obey.²⁴⁵⁵ But the most relevant problem concerns the relation between human and divine responsibility. In some cases, one may blame the gods for what one did.²⁴⁵⁶ It is particularly relevant in this context the conception of temporary madness (or loss of one's wits) as something that is caused by the gods and leads to disaster.²⁴⁵⁷ These may be only exceptional occurrences, but they are always possible. Human beings thus seem to be subjected to the caprices of the gods, who are responsible both for good and for bad things.²⁴⁵⁸ But despite this vulnerability, human beings may also try to affirm themselves, show their strength and ἀρετή. The Homeric world is not fatalistic. The influence of the gods is not enough to annul one's blame or take away one's merit. Human beings are still responsible for what happened and, in particular, they are to blame for their evils.²⁴⁵⁹ In sum, the models of inner responsibility and external intervention seem somehow to coexist, although this coexistence is not clearly defined.

It is thus clear that Homer's conception of human action is affected by his conception of the gods. However, Homer's gods are not moral beings, and thus their intervention in human life is not directly connected with moral questions. It is only in Hesiod and in later authors that we find the idea that Zeus is essentially concerned with justice. Zeus guarantees justice in the cosmos and punishes injustice. This points to a greater social concern with the cooperative virtues – i.e., with those virtues that are oriented towards others and towards the community in general. But Hesiod describes his own age as an age of injustice, and thus very different from the Golden Age and the ease that characterized it. Furthermore, he warns that things will become even worse. Consequently, one should choose the path of justice.²⁴⁶⁰ This

²⁴⁵⁴ For more on this, see Chap. 10, Sect. 1.1. Cp. also footnote 1626.

²⁴⁵⁵ Cp. A. ADKINS, *op. cit.*, 17ff.

²⁴⁵⁶ See e.g. *Iliad*, XIII.222-227.

²⁴⁵⁷ This madness and this disaster were often associated with the word ἄρη. For more on this, cp. e.g. R. DAWE, *op. cit.*, J. STALLMACH, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁵⁸ Cp. *Iliad*, XXIV.527-32.

²⁴⁵⁹ Cp. *Odyssey* I.32-34.

²⁴⁶⁰ See *Opera et dies*, 109ff.

appeal plays a central role in Hesiod and it seems to presuppose that we can control our actions. Likewise, the idea of a divine punishment seems to assume that one is somehow responsible for what one did (i.e., one must somehow have intended it), although this may also be related with the traditional conception of objective blame.

The idea of objective blame is based on a magical understanding of reality. According to it, certain actions cause pollution (μίασμα). If, for instance, one is in contact with something unholy (and especially with blood), one will have a material or physical infection, which may fester and produce greater evils (such as the plague at the outset of *Oedipus Tyrannus*). It may even pass from generation to generation. Thus, one needs to be cleansed or purified. Otherwise, what one did in the past may have serious consequences in the future. This protracted effectiveness is indeed an important trait of these popular conceptions. It also seems to have been at the basis of Orphic doctrines that speak of an ancient crime of the soul that caused it to be incarcerated in the body. Empedocles, for instance, presents himself as a fallen δαίμων that must pay for this crime.²⁴⁶¹ We also find in Ancient sources the idea that human beings are born from the ashes of the Titans, who dismembered and ate Dionysus, and were punished by Zeus. For this reason, we also contain a part of Dionysus within us, and we must nurture it. This means once more that we must purify ourselves, but now in the sense of purifying our soul and releasing it from the body.²⁴⁶² It seems therefore that we may choose between freeing ourselves or continuing to be attached to the titanic element (i.e., the body). But we do not seem to be entirely free to choose, because we are still constrained by the past action of the soul and by our embodiment. In fact, it is not very clear how we can purify ourselves and achieve true liberation. But there is at least the appeal to do so.

We can also find meaningful reflections about human agency in tragedy, which develops some aspects that were already considered. On the one hand, there is the idea that one is responsible for what is later called (based on Aristotle's analysis in his *Poetics*) the tragic error (ἁμαρτία). In other words, one unwittingly leads oneself to one's own ruin.²⁴⁶³ On the other hand, the gods also seem to contribute to this ruin (especially by causing madness, as we see in Sophocles' *Ajax*). In addition, there are many references to pollution and even to ancestral guilt. Thus, the idea that one is responsible for something seems to be once more conciliated with higher powers or with the idea of an indirect responsibility (insofar as an act only produces consequences much later). In these cases, one is no longer fully at fault for

²⁴⁶¹ See DK B115.

²⁴⁶² Cp. O. KERN (ed.), *Orphicorum fragmenta*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1922, fr. 220.

²⁴⁶³ Cp. e.g. J. BREMER, *op. cit.*, T. STINTON, *op. cit.*

what happens. The same applies to the passages in which Euripides seems to admit the possibility of being controlled by passions.²⁴⁶⁴ But this does not mean one is fully exonerated. One may at least be responsible for coming to the point where one loses control. Indeed, there are many passages in which we are advised to be aware of our human limitations, think mortal thoughts, avoid excesses, and so on.²⁴⁶⁵ Such advices to moderate ourselves clearly presuppose that we always had a certain degree of freedom. Thus, according to Greek Tragedy, we are always at least partly responsible for what happens to us.

These are the more traditional conceptions of the problem of human responsibility. But there are some later innovations that are also important for Plato. For instance, the idea of being controlled by passions also plays an important role in rhetoric and sophistic thought. Gorgias in particular is very aware of the power of love, and also of how λόγος may charm us and manipulate our πάθη, thereby placing us under the control of whoever is able to master this λόγος.²⁴⁶⁶ In this framework, the orator (i.e., the one that possesses a sophistic education) seems to be the only one that is fully free, and thus fully responsible for what he does.

The medical texts also lay out interesting innovations in the understanding of human beings and their actions. Diseases and madness, which strongly restrict our agency, are no longer seen as the result of an external intervention of the gods. Rather, they are determined by our inner disposition and by our interaction with our environment. In turn, the action of these two determinants decidedly depends on the particular regimen of life we adopt. We may indeed determine our behaviors and habits in different ways, and in doing so we also determine much of what happens to us – especially at the level of the body.

All these literary, religious and technical or scientific conceptions recognize constraints that limit our responsibility for some actions, but in general they see us as beings that are free – i.e., autonomous or self-determined. This is fully in keeping with the Greek understanding of freedom in the social and political domains. A citizen is free if he takes part in the govern of the πόλις. He may still be slave to the law, but he is not submitted to another man (which would be a slavish and wholly undignified condition). Likewise, a πόλις is free if it is sovereign – i.e. not controlled by another state. In this sense, the highest freedom of a πόλις or a citizen corresponds to the ideal of αὐτάρκεια. One will not need anything from other states or other people, and thus one will not depend on them.

²⁴⁶⁴ Cp. the beginning of Chap. 12 Sect. 5.5 above.

²⁴⁶⁵ See e.g. *Alcestis*, 787-802, *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, 920-925.

²⁴⁶⁶ Love and λόγος are indeed two of possibilities Gorgias explores (along with the gods and physical force) in order to acquit Helen of the charge that she is responsible for the Trojan war. See GORGIAS, DK B11 (8).

In this framework, every action of a citizen presupposes that he is in control of his life. He is a sort of pilot or steersman. He decides the course and is able to implement it – both in his house (where he is an undisputed authority) and in the πόλις (where he may not rule the others, but is also not ruled by them). However, in order to determine one's course effectively, one must know what one is doing. One needs rational insight as to where one is going and how one can get there. In short, one needs intelligence or lucidity (φρονεῖν).²⁴⁶⁷ Moreover, one must be able to control oneself (i.e., control one's passions). Otherwise, if one is a slave to one's desires, one may easily commit serious blunders and ruin one's life. Both in private and in public life, one must be able to follow one's best judgment. This is the only way of properly attaining the ideal of ἀρετή, which is what all human beings should strive to attain.

To be sure, many human beings are not citizens in the Greek world and their freedom is therefore severely limited. Likewise, many citizens do not attain the ideal of ἀρετή. According to some (especially those with aristocratic proclivities), this may be determined by one's birth or φύσις. But there were also many advocates of democratic ideas, according to which all have the same potential. In fact, medicine and sophistry recognized that all human beings have a common constitution.²⁴⁶⁸ Everyone may thus be educated and overcome one's natural limitations. Consequently, one may gain control not only over one's life, but also over one's πόλις (at least as far as a democratic regime allows).

In conclusion, we see that the discussion about human agency and about our responsibility for our own life often stresses our freedom, autonomy and self-determination, even if it still recognizes that there are many sources of constraint. Plato follows the same general pattern, although he also introduces many significant changes in light of his own understanding of human life.

3. Plato's conception of the soul's responsibility for the unexamined life

Let us then start by looking at how Plato conceives of our self-determination, and thus of our responsibility for the unexamined life.²⁴⁶⁹ The Platonic corpus lays out a complex answer to the question about what is ultimately responsible for the unexamined life. This answer has two main components: the first is mythological, and the second is conceptual. The

²⁴⁶⁷ We find strong echoes of this conception in Plato. See e.g. *Ly.* 209b ff.

²⁴⁶⁸ For more on this, see the preface to Part III above.

²⁴⁶⁹ Afterwards we will consider how he combines this self-determination with the idea of constraint.

mythological component is important, because it clearly points towards the answer to the problem. However, it does not properly explain what is implied in this answer, and therefore we must complement the mythological consideration of the problem with a more conceptual analysis, based not only on what is said in other passages, but also on what can be inferred from general aspects of Plato's thought.

3.1. The mythological presentation of the soul's responsibility for the unexamined life

We find many indications about the unexamined life in the different myths of the corpus, but only a few of these myths discuss why we fall into such a life and why we normally do not abandon it. The two most important myths in this context are those from *Republic X* and *Phaedrus*, and we will therefore focus primarily on them. We will also consider what is said in *Timaeus*, which has a semi-mythological character.

Each of these three texts presents an elaborate etiological account of our life as it is now, and this includes an account of what caused us to adopt an unexamined life in the first place. We will focus our attention precisely on the most important aspects of the latter account and reflect on their possible meaning. It is true that the mythological character of the passages in question renders them particularly problematic, but they can nevertheless teach us something about the way we relate to the unexamined life and about the role our ψυχή plays in determining it.

a) The choice of lives in *Republic X*

In 614a ff., Socrates tells the story of Er, who was dead for several days, and during this time made a journey to the place where human souls go after dying. Then, he came back to life with a report of what he saw.²⁴⁷⁰ This story is introduced as an account of the rewards and punishments for being just or unjust.²⁴⁷¹ The souls are said to be judged after dying and, according to whether they were just or unjust, they make a thousand-year journey through heaven (where they are rewarded with delights and beautiful sights for being just) or earth

²⁴⁷⁰ Er is thus a sort of θεωρός, who travels outside the familiar domain and comes back with a report that may change the way people normally understand themselves. For more on the practice of θεωρία, cp. Chap. 4, Sect. 2.3.

²⁴⁷¹ See 614a.

(where they are punished with suffering for being unjust).²⁴⁷² In addition, the story describes how the souls return to life after their long journey, and this includes an elaborate ritual of choosing one's future βίος. Indeed, Socrates says that after their long journey the souls come to a place where they see a light that holds the heaven together and also the spindle of necessity, by which the celestial revolutions are turned.²⁴⁷³ Here, the souls meet the three Fates (namely, Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos), who are associated with past, present and future, respectively.²⁴⁷⁴ This place lies therefore at the center of space and time, it determines the whole of reality, and it is precisely here that the souls have to decide their life. Everything else that happens in their lives after this will just be the unfolding of this decision.

According to Socrates, the souls have to draw lots in order to determine their turn and then they can choose from many different models of life (τὰ τῶν βίων παραδείγματα).²⁴⁷⁵ The order in which they choose determines the number of lives available to them at the moment of choice, but even the last one will still have good options available.²⁴⁷⁶ Thus, despite the constraints, there is always room to choose.

As for the βίοι available, they are of all sorts. Some are animal and others are human. Not much is said about the animal lives. They seem to correspond to some human traits (which is why some souls choose them).²⁴⁷⁷ The human lives, in turn, correspond to a particular set of contents (such as money, health, natural talents, repute, family, events), which are mixed with one another in order to compose each particular life.²⁴⁷⁸ When a soul chooses a life, all its contents will be determined, and the soul will not be able to change them later. The only thing that is not directly determined by this choice is the inner arrangement or inner disposition (τάξις) of the soul, which seems to be a consequence of the different lives a soul chooses.²⁴⁷⁹ It is not clear whether this means that the contents of a particular life end up determining the character of the soul that chose it, or whether this character is actually determined by the successive choices of the soul. At any rate, the choice is primarily focused on the contents of a life, which is what we first notice when we consider a life. But this does not mean that the content of a life is wholly clear for the souls at the moment of choosing it.

²⁴⁷² See 614d-616a.

²⁴⁷³ See 616b-617b.

²⁴⁷⁴ See 617c.

²⁴⁷⁵ See 617d-618a.

²⁴⁷⁶ See 619b: “καὶ τελευταίῳ ἐπιόντι, ξὺν νῶ ἔλομένῳ, συντόνωσ ζῶντι κεῖται βίος ἀγαπητός, οὐ κακός, μήτε ὁ ἄρχων αἰρέσεως ἀμελείτω μήτε ὁ τελευτῶν ἀθυμείτω.”

²⁴⁷⁷ Cp. 620a-c.

²⁴⁷⁸ See 618a-b.

²⁴⁷⁹ See 618b: “ψυχῆς δὲ τάξιν οὐκ ἐνεῖναι διὰ τὸ ἀναγκαίως ἔχειν ἄλλον ἐλομένην βίον ἀλλοίαν γίνεσθαι (...).”

Plato admits that one can rush one's choice and fail to consider all that is contained in a particular life.²⁴⁸⁰ It is therefore important to examine the available lives very carefully and determine whether they are good or bad, in order to avoid having a bad life and terrible punishments in afterlife.²⁴⁸¹ Above all, one must pay attention to what contributes to one's ἀρετή (i.e., one must honor it), otherwise one will not be able to attain it.²⁴⁸² Our choice is thus decisive, and our merit or blame depends on it. No other factors will affect it. As is said by the spokesman, "the blame belongs to him who chooses; god is blameless."²⁴⁸³

Thus, the soul is primarily active and it determines itself. This does not exclude a component of passivity or constraint. Indeed, one will be accompanied by a guarding spirit (δαίμων) that will enforce one's choice throughout one's life.²⁴⁸⁴ But this constraint is the result of an active choice of the soul.²⁴⁸⁵ It is determined by the soul at the beginning, before one's life starts unfolding. In other words, the passive elements are based on one's activity. We choose the general conformation of our life and then everything is automatic. In other words, there is a basic decision or a basic choice that underpins and pervades the whole life, and everything else is an indirect result of this choice.

But what about the choice itself? How does Plato describe it? Is one completely free to choose any life whatsoever, or is this choice determined in some way?

Plato's description is not entirely clear. At the moment of choosing, one can compare lives and appraise them (at least if one does not rush it).²⁴⁸⁶ This seems to suggest a completely free choice. But there are some factors that limit this freedom. Socrates says that most choices are made according to the habits the soul had in its previous life (i.e., by their previous choices).²⁴⁸⁷ Choices are also determined by the soul's post-mortem experiences. Those souls that were rewarded with enjoyments and beautiful sights may pay less attention to the choice (such as the soul that chose the life of a tyrant in Socrates' narration) and those

²⁴⁸⁰ See 619b-c: "(...) τὸν πρῶτον λαχόντα ἔφη εὐθὺς ἐπιόντα τὴν μεγίστην τυραννίδα ἐλέσθαι, καὶ ὑπὸ ἀφροσύνης τε καὶ λαιμαργίας οὐ πάντα ἰκανῶς ἀνασκευάμενον ἐλέσθαι, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν λαθεῖν ἐνοῦσαν εἰμαρμένην παίδων αὐτοῦ βρώσεις καὶ ἄλλα κακά (...)"

²⁴⁸¹ Cp. the appeal made in 618c-619a.

²⁴⁸² Cp. 617e: "ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον, ἦν τιμῶν καὶ ἀτιμάζων πλέον καὶ ἔλαττον αὐτῆς ἕκαστος ἔξει." Cp. also 618c-e.

²⁴⁸³ See 617e: "αἰτία ἐλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος." This, of course, does not prevent the souls from blaming other beings when they make a bad choice. See 619c: "οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτὸν αἰτιᾶσθαι τῶν κακῶν, ἀλλὰ τύχην τε καὶ δαίμονα καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον ἀνθ' ἑαυτοῦ."

²⁴⁸⁴ See 620e-d: "(...) ἐκείνην δ' ἐκάστῳ ὃν εἴλετο δαίμονα, τοῦτον φύλακα συμπέμπειν τοῦ βίου καὶ ἀποπληρωτὴν τῶν αἰρεθέντων."

²⁴⁸⁵ See 617e: "οὐχ ὑμᾶς δαίμων λήξεται, ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς δαίμονα αἰρήσεσθε."

²⁴⁸⁶ See 618c-619a and 620c.

²⁴⁸⁷ See 620a: "κατὰ συνήθειαν γὰρ τοῦ προτέρου βίου τὰ πολλὰ αἰρεῖσθαι."

that were punished with sufferings will tend to be more careful.²⁴⁸⁸ Odysseus, for instance is said to choose a simple life because of all his past labors (πόννοι).²⁴⁸⁹ But this does not mean his choice is fully free. In fact, according to Socrates, the only kind of soul that seems able to overcome any conditioning is the soul of someone who philosophized in a healthy way during life.²⁴⁹⁰ This is the only kind of soul who will properly examine the lives available. As for the others, their choice will be more or less unexamined, and this has important consequences for the question we are considering. If the souls choose to live an unexamined life (as most – if not all – the souls mentioned in the text appear to do), then this unexamined life will itself be based on the lack of examination. In other words, the adoption of an unexamined life already presupposes an unexamined life. However, this does not really explain how we come to adopt such a life in the first place. If anything, it only renders such a life more problematic.

But let us leave this aside for now. The most important aspect of the myth is how it describes the whole process of adopting a life as a process that takes place before our own lives begin. The souls choose a life, this life becomes their destiny, and then they go to the plain of Forgetfulness and drink the water of the river of Carelessness.²⁴⁹¹ This makes them forget the choice, the life chosen, and what will happen to them. They will then believe that they make many choices during their lives. However, all those supposed choices will be merely apparent. Everything was already determined in a previous stage, in which the soul itself determined its destiny. To be sure, the soul that determines its own destiny in this way is not the soul as we normally experience it during life. It is rather a deeper layer of the soul, which in the myth is presented as having an increased awareness of itself and of the whole of its existence. This stands in clear contrast with our usual condition, which is marked by lack of transparency and forgetfulness of all this. We do not have this basic choice in mind, and we do not see it as ours. Instead, we see our own life and our own destiny as something we are not wholly responsible for. Thus, we do not really blame ourselves (or, to be more precise, we do not blame the dimension of ourselves that makes such a choice), nor do we think of caring for ourselves in order to make the best possible choice. We are careless and

²⁴⁸⁸ See 619c-d (and cp. once more the description of the soul's post-mortem experiences in 614d-616a).

²⁴⁸⁹ See 620c.

²⁴⁹⁰ See 619d-e.

²⁴⁹¹ See 621a-b.

simply follow the general tendency of our life – and precisely this is an essential trait of the unexamined life.²⁴⁹²

b) The fall of the soul and the adoption of βίος in *Phaedrus*

In *Phaedrus* 246a ff., we find a somewhat different (and in many aspects more complex) perspective about the adoption of the unexamined life. This perspective distinguishes two moments. The first moment is the fall of the soul in the cycle of incarnations and the second corresponds to the process of adopting a particular βίος within this cycle of incarnations.

Let us start with the fall of the soul. Several of the important aspects were already considered above.²⁴⁹³ Socrates describes a mythical time and mythical events that account for our present condition. He says that the souls are like a winged team of horses and their charioteer, and in the past they roamed free through the heaven.²⁴⁹⁴ From time to time they made a procession towards the region above the heavens (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος), where they could attain what they really long for or what really nurtures them: namely, the contemplation of the true and perfect beings.²⁴⁹⁵ However, not all souls are equally able to arrive at this destination. The divine souls can ascend with ease because their charioteer and their horses are good.²⁴⁹⁶ In turn, the other souls are composed of a good and a bad horse (which roughly correspond to the soul's love of honor and its love of gain), and their charioteer (i.e., the part that is concerned with knowledge) is not necessarily good (i.e., competent).²⁴⁹⁷ This renders the soul's driving and its ascent to the supracelestial region particularly difficult. In fact, these souls may fail to properly contemplate the true beings.²⁴⁹⁸ They will then start to forget them and this forgetfulness, along with their badness, may cause the souls to be weighted down, lose their wings, and fall down to earth – where they will hold on to a body and become a living being.²⁴⁹⁹

²⁴⁹² The forgetfulness and carelessness are thus intrinsically connected. We forget the choice of life and we do not care for what helps us make a better choice. Hence, we keep leading an unexamined life or we keep choosing it.

²⁴⁹³ See Chap. 12 Sect. 4.3, Chap. 13 Sect. 2.3, and Chap. 16 Sect. 5.1 a).

²⁴⁹⁴ See 246a-b.

²⁴⁹⁵ See 246d ff.

²⁴⁹⁶ See 246a and 247b.

²⁴⁹⁷ See 246b and 248b.

²⁴⁹⁸ See 248b.

²⁴⁹⁹ See 246c and 248c.

This is what leads these souls to assume a particular βίος. They must still act and pursue things, but they can no longer fly through the heavens and contemplate the truth. The souls are now imprisoned in the body and they must live through it. Thus, they can only pursue deficient instances of the beings they once contemplated. In other words, the souls must now deal with a defective reality. However, they do not notice this, because they are to a great extent forgotten of what they saw and what they long for. To be sure, the souls are still somehow directed toward the true and perfect beings and still long for them, but they got used to this new domain and now mistake it for their home. Consequently, they fully engage in human – i.e., finite or mortal – pursuits (ἀνθρώπινα σπουδάσματα).²⁵⁰⁰ This is precisely what characterizes the unexamined life, as we saw in the previous chapter.

But what are the reasons for such a fall and such an imprisonment, and what do these reasons tell us about our relation to the unexamined life? We saw that the immediate cause is the fact that the soul fails to attain its goal – i.e., it fails to contemplate the truth and becomes full of forgetfulness. But what causes this inability to attain the truth?

At first sight, one may think that the text presents more than one answer. On the one hand, the fault of what happens seems to lie with the soul's bad horse. This horse is poorly trained by the charioteer, and as a result it weights the soul down and causes the soul's driving to be quite difficult.²⁵⁰¹ On the other hand, Socrates also describes how there is a great confusion when the souls try ascend, which causes them to trample each other and, due to the lack of competence (κακία) of some charioteers, some souls end up damaging their wings.²⁵⁰² We may therefore wonder whether the fall is caused by the bad horse or by the conditions in which the souls try to ascend. However, upon closer inspection, we notice that both problems refer to the same cause: namely, the incompetence of the charioteer. It is the charioteer who fails to train or to educate the bad horse, and it is also the charioteer who drives the soul in a very poor fashion and fails to avoid the reciprocal trampling of souls. Consequently, the charioteer seems to be responsible for the fall.

Of course, one may still wonder what the causes of the charioteer's incompetence are. It is not clear whether this incompetence is based on ignorance (which implies some previous failure to contemplate the true beings) or if it is a problem regarding the inner quality of the

²⁵⁰⁰ For this expression, see 249d.

²⁵⁰¹ See 247b: “(...) βρίθει γὰρ ὁ τῆς κάκης ἵππος μετέχων, ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ῥέπων τε καὶ βαρύνων ὃ μὴ καλῶς ἦν τεθραμμένος τῶν ἡνιόχων.”

²⁵⁰² See 248a-b: “αἱ δὲ δὴ ἄλλαι γλιχόμεναι μὲν ἅπασαι τοῦ ἄνω ἔπονται, ἀδυνατοῦσαι δέ, ὑποβρύχια συμπεριφέρονται, πατοῦσαι ἀλλήλας καὶ ἐπιβάλλουσαι, ἑτέρα πρὸ τῆς ἑτέρας πειρωμένη γενέσθαι. θόρυβος οὖν καὶ ἄμλλα καὶ ἰδρῶς ἔσχατος γίγνεται, οὗ δὴ κακία ἡνιόχων πολλαὶ μὲν χωλεῦνται, πολλαὶ δὲ πολλὰ πτερὰ θραύονται (...).”

charioteer. If the former is true, then we must determine why the charioteer fails to contemplate the true beings in the first place. If, in turn, the problem is some inner defect of the charioteer, we must ascertain what kind of defect this is. But the myth presented by Socrates offers no answer to any of these questions. It only points to the fact that the origin of all human lives (and thus of all forms of unexamined life) is essentially connected to the charioteer – i.e., to the part of us that is related to knowledge and that guides the whole soul.

All this is just the first of the two moments mentioned above. The second moment concerns what happens after the fall, and more specifically the way the soul adopts a particular βίος. As was pointed out above, the soul becomes attached to the body, comes into relation with the many concrete beings, and engages in human pursuits. This does not mean that it completely forgets the region above the heavens. In fact, the soul can only become a human being if it still retains some recollection of the true beings, because this recollection is necessary to identify things as we do (i.e., we must see them as instances of the εἶδη).²⁵⁰³ In addition, the kind of recollection we have determines the kind of βίος we adopt after the fall. According to Socrates, each individual soul may have seen more or less of the true beings, and it may have become more or less forgetful of them.²⁵⁰⁴ Based on this, he distinguishes different degrees of recollection (i.e., different degrees of insight into what the true beings are), which he correlates with a nine-level scale of βίοι (here understood mostly in the broad sense of livelihoods or occupations).²⁵⁰⁵ The first level includes the philosopher, the lover of beauty, as well as people devoted to the muses or to love. These seem to be conceived as different experiences of radical truth, and they stand in contrast with all the other levels. These other levels range from the law-abiding king to the tyrant. They imply more and more forgetfulness and distortion, and they constitute different forms of unexamined life. But we will not consider the particular levels of the scale. The important thing here is how this constitutes a kind of necessity.²⁵⁰⁶ As Plato says, if a soul sees the truth, it remains unharmed. If, in turn, it becomes full of forgetfulness and deficiency, it falls to earth and its first birth is then determined by how much truth it saw and still retains.²⁵⁰⁷

²⁵⁰³ See 249b-c: “οὐ γὰρ ἦ γε μήποτε ἰδοῦσα τὴν ἀλήθειαν εἰς τόδε ἤξει τὸ σχῆμα. δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναρούμενον· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις ἐκείνων ἃ ποτ’ εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ συμπορευθεῖσα θεῶν καὶ ὑπεριδοῦσα ἃ νῦν εἶναι φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακύψασα εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως.”

²⁵⁰⁴ See 248a and 250a.

²⁵⁰⁵ See 248d-e.

²⁵⁰⁶ Plato designates it as the ordinance of Necessity (θεσμὸς Ἀδραστείας). For more on this designation, see e.g. F. SERRANITO, *Lovers and Madmen*. The μανία-φρονεῖν Opposition in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Diss. Univ. Nova de Lisboa, 2015, 494ff.

²⁵⁰⁷ See 248c-d.

But this is not all. In the end of their first life (and most likely also in the end of the following lives), the souls will be rewarded or punished according to how justly or unjustly they lived.²⁵⁰⁸ Then, after a thousand years, there is a new draw and a new choice of life. The souls choose the lives they want and they may change from human into animal form and from animal into human form (provided they had some access to truth before falling, otherwise they cannot become human).²⁵⁰⁹ In this respect, what is said in *Phaedrus* is very similar to what we find in the *Republic*. However, after ten thousand years, the souls will be released from the cycle of incarnations, or perhaps even earlier, if they happen to adopt three times in a row the best life – i.e., a philosophical life without guile or a life of pederastic love (here understood as the most sublime form of ἔρωϛ) accompanied by philosophy.²⁵¹⁰

But how does the soul relate to the different lives it adopts? The first birth is automatically determined by how much recollection the soul has. What about the others? Is the soul entirely free to determine its life afterwards? The language of choice may suggest so, but one is probably conditioned by one's previous life. Indeed, one had to have a certain degree of recollection to adopt such a life, and what happened during one's life (especially how just or unjust one was) may have improved or worsened one's recollection.²⁵¹¹ For instance, Socrates mentions that one's companies can increase one's forgetfulness of the true beings. More importantly, the experience of romantic love has the power to awaken our memory of the supracelestial region (although its potential can also be squandered if one follows the advices of the bad horse and satisfies one's lower impulses).²⁵¹² The dialectic between the different parts of the soul will actually determine the soul's trajectory and the lives it will adopt. But this is perhaps not the ultimate factor in determining one's life. The dialectic in question seems to depend most of all on the charioteer and on his ability to guide the soul. Nevertheless, the text is not fully clear on this point, and we will have to see the question from a different angle.

²⁵⁰⁸ See 249a-b: “(...) ὅταν τὸν πρῶτον βίον τελευτήσωσιν, κρίσεως ἔτυχον, κριθεῖσαι δὲ αἱ μὲν εἰς τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς δικαιοτήρια ἐλθοῦσαι δίκην ἐκτίνουσιν, αἱ δ' εἰς τοῦρανοῦ τινα τόπον ὑπὸ τῆς Δίκης κουφισθεῖσαι διάγουσιν ἄξιως οὐ ἐν ἀνθρώπου εἶδει ἐβίωσαν βίου.”

²⁵⁰⁹ See 249b: “τῷ δὲ χιλιοστῷ ἀμφοτέραι ἀφικνούμεναι ἐπὶ κλήρωσίν τε καὶ αἴρεσιν τοῦ δευτέρου βίου αἰροῦνται ὃν ἂν θέλη ἐκάστη· ἔνθα καὶ εἰς θηρίου βίον ἀνθρωπίνην ψυχὴ ἀφικνεῖται, καὶ ἐκ θηρίου ὅς ποτε ἄνθρωπος ἦν πάλιν εἰς ἄνθρωπον.”

²⁵¹⁰ See 249a: “(...) εἰς μὲν γὰρ τὸ αὐτὸ ὅθεν ἦκει ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκάστη οὐκ ἀφικνεῖται ἐτῶν μυρίων οὐ γὰρ πτεροῦται πρὸ τοσοῦτου χρόνου – πλὴν ἢ τοῦ φιλοσοφῆσαντος ἀδόλως ἢ παιδεραστήσαντος μετὰ φιλοσοφίας, αὗται δὲ τρίτῃ περιόδῳ τῇ χιλιετῇ, ἐὰν ἔλονται τρις ἐφεξῆς τὸν βίον τοῦτον, οὕτω πτερωθεῖσαι τρισχιλιοστῷ ἔτει ἀπέρχονται.”

²⁵¹¹ Socrates alludes several times to the relation between knowledge and justice, though he does not develop it. See in particular 248e.

²⁵¹² See 250a and 250d ff.

c) The embodiment of the divine soul in *Timaeus*

There are also some interesting indications about the fall of the soul and the adoption of a life (and more specifically of an unexamined life) in *Timaeus*. It is true that these indications do not have a strictly mythological character. Plato lays out an elaborate cosmology and tries to rationally explain the structure of the universe in general and the human being in particular. However, this explanation is presented as problematic and as having the status of a likely myth (εἰκὸς μῦθος).²⁵¹³ This means that it provides a middle term between the mythological presentations we just considered and the conceptual analyses we will develop in the following. Let us then see the indications we can find in the text. In order to isolate them, we will have to reconsider some aspects already mentioned above, but now we will look at them from a different angle.²⁵¹⁴

Among other things, Timaeus describes the creation of the human soul. More precisely, he considers how our soul is actually composed of two different parts or two different souls: one that is immortal and another that is mortal.²⁵¹⁵ The immortal soul is created by the Demiurge with the same materials he used to compose the world soul and to bring order to the universe – namely, sameness, alterity and being.²⁵¹⁶ Thus, the soul contains the revolutions of the same and the other, which – if functioning properly – allow the soul to know things.²⁵¹⁷ In addition, the Demiurge revealed to these immortal souls (after distributing them throughout the stars) the nature of the universe and the laws of destiny that determine the incarnations – thereby rendering himself blameless (ἀναίτιος) for any future badness or evil (κακία), because we have all the knowledge we need within us.²⁵¹⁸ Then, he sew the souls on Earth and other planets, where they ended up being implanted in the bodies fashioned by the created gods.²⁵¹⁹ Timaeus says that this implantation happens necessarily (ἐξ ἀνάγκης), and this probably means that it is just a part of the Demiurge's process of creating

²⁵¹³ For this expression, see 29d, 68d. For more on the status of this cosmology as a likely account, see 29b-d, 30b, 48d, 59c-d.

²⁵¹⁴ For more on *Timaeus*, see Chap. 12, Sect. 6.2, and Chap. 13, Sect. 2.3.

²⁵¹⁵ See 41c-d, 69c-e.

²⁵¹⁶ See 35a-b and 41d.

²⁵¹⁷ Cp. 37a-c, 43e-44b. It is important to notice that Timaeus expressly says that the ingredients used to fashion the immortal soul were no longer completely pure (41d). This means that there is a defect at the very core of the immortal soul, which helps account for the possibility of cognitive mistakes (i.e., of mistaking what is the same for what is other and vice-versa). However, this is not the only (and perhaps not even the main) cause of our cognitive limitations, as we will see.

²⁵¹⁸ See 41e-42d.

²⁵¹⁹ See 42a and 42d.

an universe that is as perfect as possible.²⁵²⁰ Human souls are therefore not to blame for their “fall into the body.” But does this mean that they are entirely blameless for what happens in their life? What exactly is the role played by the body, and by the other part of the soul we have not yet considered?

Indeed, human beings are not just composed of an immortal soul and the body. The immortal soul is weaved together with a different kind of soul, which – just like the body – is fashioned by the created gods. Both the body and the mortal soul are thus more imperfect than what is directly created by the Demiurge, and insofar as they are brought into connection with the immortal soul, they play a role in limiting its perfection.²⁵²¹ The body, for one, is described as a chaotic river, with elements always flowing in and out, and this greatly disturbs the inner revolutions of the soul, causing it to have a distorted access to things.²⁵²² As for the mortal part of the soul, it contains many affections (such as pleasure, pain, boldness, fear, expectation, anger, αἴσθησις and ἔρωζ).²⁵²³ All these affections (which constitute the spirited and the appetitive parts of the soul) try to control us and control our rational part (i.e., the immortal soul). This means that they try to lead us into an unexamined life, and as a result, they make it all the more difficult for the soul to be educated and develop its rationality (i.e., to restore its inner revolutions and attain the truth).

Our way of life and its quality is thus determined by all these conflicts. Indeed, Timaeus is very emphatic about the fact that it all depends on whether or not one develops one’s rationality (i.e., whether one returns it to its original healthy state) and brings under control the irrational turbulence of the body and the irrational affects of the mortal soul.²⁵²⁴ This will affect not only how one lives, but also what happens after one dies. If one’s rationality (i.e. one’s immortal soul) is fully developed and one lives well, one will return to one’s star. If, however, one leads a bad life (and this includes all forms of unexamined life, insofar as they do not fully develop our rationality or intelligence), one will change into inferior forms of life (including all sorts of animals).²⁵²⁵ It is important to note that Plato no longer speaks of choosing lives, but rather of simply changing from one into the other.

²⁵²⁰ On the need for creating such beings, cp. 41b-c.

²⁵²¹ The fact that the body and the mortal soul are fashioned by the created gods and not by the Demiurge is actually what renders these beings mortal (and therefore unlike gods). Cp. 41c.

²⁵²² See 43a-44a.

²⁵²³ See 69d, and cp. 42a-b, where these affections are directly associated with the body.

²⁵²⁴ See 44b-c, 87b, 90a-d.

²⁵²⁵ See 42c and 90e-92c. We will leave aside the distinction between men and women, for which Plato presents no arguments, and which seems to be only a manifestation of general prejudices of the time. The important distinction here is between degrees of rationality or intelligence, self-control, and justice.

But what exactly determines whether one develops one's rationality or not? Is this the result of how the various parts of our being relate to one another? Does it depend solely on the immortal soul? Or does something else determine how we live?

The text is not entirely clear about this. It says that one may be willing to follow justice and the created gods, or one may become the cause of evils for oneself.²⁵²⁶ Moreover, one may make an effort to be educated or one may neglect oneself.²⁵²⁷ This means that we are not subjected to any external power. We are the ones that determine our own life. But it is not clear what exactly in us determines our choices. Timaeus admits that, at the begin of our life, the body disturbs the revolutions of the immortal soul, and the affections corresponding to the mortal soul increase this disturbance. With the passage of time, the inner revolutions become more orderly and one becomes more aware of what things are.²⁵²⁸ However, one still needs to be educated or to train the immortal soul in order for it to govern the mortal soul and the body.²⁵²⁹ This does not seem to depend entirely on oneself. At least at first, one's education is determined by one's family and one's πόλις.²⁵³⁰ Later one may perhaps make all efforts to learn, and the text seems to exhort us to do so.²⁵³¹ But what determines these efforts and the decision to undertake them (and thus to abandon the unexamined life)? The text suggests that it depends on each individual, and the part of them that may decide these things is precisely the part that raises us up – namely, the rational or immortal soul.²⁵³² This would then be the part responsible for what happens to us and for how we live.

In this context, it is also important to mention Timaeus' analysis of how one's bodily condition may cause diseases of the soul. He says that the disease of the soul is mindlessness or folly (ἄνοια) and it can be of two kinds: namely, madness (μανία) and stupidity (ἄμαθία).²⁵³³ He then goes on to show how excessive pleasures and pains, especially the ones associated with sexual desire, can make us lose control of ourselves and can affect the soul's intellectual abilities.²⁵³⁴ Then, he considers how there can be a proportion or a disproportion between body and soul, and if the body is too strong, it renders the soul dull, stupid and

²⁵²⁶ See 41c and 42e.

²⁵²⁷ Cp. 44b-c, 87b

²⁵²⁸ See 44b.

²⁵²⁹ See 44b-c, 86e, 87b, 89d-90d

²⁵³⁰ See 86e, where one of the factors for being bad is an uneducated upbringing (ἀπαιδευτος τροφή). See also 87b.

²⁵³¹ See 87b and 89d-90d.

²⁵³² See 90a.

²⁵³³ See 86b.

²⁵³⁴ See 86b-87b, and cp. 88a-b.

forgetful.²⁵³⁵ It seems therefore that the badness of the soul can come from the body and the soul is not responsible for it.²⁵³⁶ The body seems to have a certain autonomy and it seems to be able to prevent the soul from improving itself.

However, throughout these considerations, Timaeus makes several references to the importance of education and exercises (especially exercises of the soul) in order to counteract or even avoid these diseases of the soul.²⁵³⁷ This means that, at least up to a point, one may control the body and how it affects one's life. Moreover, this seems to be up to us. One may choose between one's appetites (ἐπιθυμίας) or one's ambitions (φιλοτιμίας), and the pursuit of knowledge (which is what allows us to gain control over our entire being).²⁵³⁸ As was said above, this choice seems to be connected with the immortal soul (which would therefore decide between neglecting itself or nurturing and developing itself). Yet, the text is not entirely clear on this point.

d) Comparison and assessment of the myths

The myths (or semi-mythological texts as the *Timaeus*) are always difficult to interpret, especially because they can be read in many different ways. Above all, they can be taken in a more literal or in a more figurative sense, and this affects the entire interpretation.

In the present case, we considered three complementary mythical versions of our fall and our imprisonment in the unexamined life (i.e., of how we come to adopt and maintain a defective way of life). These versions differ in some important respects. For instance, the myth of the *Republic* makes no explicit reference to a fall from a superior condition, whereas in *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* the soul is initially outside the cycle of incarnation and then falls into it – either because of its inner constitution (as we saw in *Phaedrus*) or because of some outer necessity (as seems to be the case in *Timaeus*).

However, the most important aspect of these texts is the idea of choice – and particularly the choice of life. We can also find significant differences in this respect. In *Timaeus*, there are some references to one's responsibility in the way of life one leads, while in the *Republic* and in *Phaedrus* Plato expressly speaks of a choice of life and places the

²⁵³⁵ See 87c-88b.

²⁵³⁶ In 86e, badness is also explicitly attributed to a corrupt condition of the body (πονηρὰ ἔξις τις τοῦ σώματος), and not just to an uneducated upbringing. Both factors account for how badness is not willing (κακὸς ἐκὼν οὐδέεις). However, there is a way in which both factors are willing. We already saw how this may be said of one's education, and now we will see how, in a way, the bodily influence also depends on us.

²⁵³⁷ See once more 87b and 89d-90d.

²⁵³⁸ See in particular 90b-c.

moment of choice at a time before our birth.²⁵³⁹ The latter possibility, however, is very problematic, because we have no memory of such a time or of making such a choice. We did not compare the life we lead, which is usually a form of unexamined life, with other forms of unexamined life or with the possibility of leading a philosophical life, and we did not decide to adopt the life we lead. Moreover, even if we somehow forget the process of choice, there is still another problem. Since the soul cannot desire anything bad and the unexamined life seems to be intrinsically defective, then such a life cannot be consciously chosen by the soul. One must somehow be ignorant of its defects, and this means that one must have an unexamined relation to it. In other words (and as was said above), the unexamined life must somehow presuppose itself. We need to assume at the origin what we are trying to explain, and thus we end up dodging the question.

It is perhaps better if we read what is said in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus* simply as a description of how we relate to our present state (thereby bringing these texts closer to what we saw in *Timaeus*). This would mean that the unexamined life is something we are constantly choosing, although this choice is very different from the ones we normally make. It somehow underlies all our regular choices, and the latter are an expression of it. We cannot understand these usual choices without understanding the other kind of choice. Indeed, by referring to a distant time and a distant place, Plato is pointing to the fact that we cannot explain our present situation with the means normally available to us. Something else is happening, even if we have no clear notion of it (i.e., even if we forget it). We are somehow adopting an unexamined life, but we are oblivious of the fact that we adopt it. What is this adoption, then? What exactly corresponds to this other kind of choice? And what determines it?

Plato seems adamant that the soul cannot be forced to live an unexamined life. The latter is always an inner choice, determined by one's inner state. In other words, the soul is always responsible for the unexamined life. But in what sense can it be said to be responsible for it? And if the soul is responsible for it, does this also mean that it is free to abandon it at any time? Plato seems to think so. In the *Republic*, one may decide to be careful in one's choice. In *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*, one may try to live a better life and acquire more knowledge. This may lead to the adoption of a different kind of life – either immediately or in

²⁵³⁹ It is true that in *Phaedrus* we do not choose our first life after the fall, but we may choose the following lives. See once more 249b.

the following incarnation. However, regardless of what we do, the life we adopt always seems to hinge on one's relation to knowledge.

3.2. Conceptual analysis of the soul's responsibility for the unexamined life

The analyses of Plato's myths gave us some important indications about the question of the ultimate responsible for the unexamined life. Now, however, we must translate these indications into a more conceptual form, and combine them with Plato's description of the soul's tripartite structure. This will provide us with a more accurate answer to the question we are discussing. However, this does not mean that we will be able to lay out a completely univocal and unproblematic doctrine. As we saw while considering the myths, the question is particularly difficult, and Plato's answer refers to something that happens in the depths of our inner being. Since we do not have a direct and clear access to these depths, we cannot be fully certain or fully clear about what happens there. Yet, we may infer much from the more immediate manifestations of life and from the model used to interpret them. This is what we will now try to do. Let us then see what can be said about how we relate to the unexamined life.

a) The soul as what is responsible for the unexamined life

It was already mentioned that the unexamined life is described using two apparently contradictory ideas. On the one hand, Plato speaks of weight, prison, necessity or constraint. On the other hand, he admits that there is choice and that we are responsible for the life we adopt. But how can both things be reconciled?

In general, Plato never assigns the blame for the unexamined life to external factors. It may be necessary for us to have a body, but this does not force us not to examine things. Likewise, we are not forced by our affections, by the others around us, by god or by chance. The responsibility lies within us, in our own *ψυχή* – which is precisely defined as self-movement.²⁵⁴⁰ The soul is, thus, not just something that moves. It is the very act of moving itself – i.e., of determining itself. In this sense, it is both active and passive, or – as we could also say – it reconciles in itself freedom and constraint. But, since the constraint in question is not motivated from the outside, the fall and the imprisonment in the unexamined life also

²⁵⁴⁰ See *Phdr.* 254c ff. and *Lg.* 895c-896b.

cannot be motivated from the outside. The soul is responsible for all that happens to it – or, as Plato says, all good and all bad things come from ψυχή.²⁵⁴¹

However, we also saw that, according to Plato, the soul never errs – or never does anything wrong – willingly (ἐκόν).²⁵⁴² If the unexamined life is an inferior form of being and does not correspond to the soul's true desire (as we will consider in the following chapter), then the soul cannot consciously choose it. It can only do so out of ignorance. What does this then mean for the question of the soul's responsibility for the unexamined life? It all seems to hinge on what causes this ignorance. We saw that it is associated with a particular arrangement of the soul's drives in which the love of knowledge is inhibited and ruled by another drive. This is what allows the soul to accept false beliefs as being true, and thus it is also what leads us to do or attain something bad. But what causes the arrangement of the soul's drives (and, consequently, the beliefs, actions and the life that results from it)?

According to Plato, this arrangement is not forced upon the soul. Even if it may be somehow affected by external factors, it is still something that comes from within. It is a manifestation of the soul's self-movement and self-determination. This means that the soul is the true responsible for the unexamined life. But how exactly does the soul come to have an arrangement of drives that leads into an unexamined life?

b) Φιλοσοφία as the central component of the self and as the agent ultimately responsible for the unexamined life

The arrangement of drives that brings about and sustains the unexamined life is not random. It is determined by the soul itself and, more precisely, by an essential component of it – namely, the soul's inborn love of knowledge (φιλοσοφία). Indeed, although the three drives always restrict and contaminate each other, Plato recognizes that our love of knowledge plays a central role in this interaction. So much so that Plato even presents it as the essential part of our being or what we most properly are. According to the *Republic*, if one wants to see the true nature of the soul, one must look at its inborn φιλοσοφία.²⁵⁴³ It is also represented as a human being within the soul, whereas the other drives are represented as irrational animals.²⁵⁴⁴ This does not mean that our soul's identity can be reduced to its love of

²⁵⁴¹ See e.g. *Chrm.* 156e ff.

²⁵⁴² See Chap. 12, Sect. 5.5 above.

²⁵⁴³ See 611d-612a.

²⁵⁴⁴ See 588c ff.

knowledge. Our soul has several other essential features, such as its relation to the superlative good or even the domain of sensation. However, both these things are pervaded and transformed by our desire to know things and by the views produced by this desire. Our φιλοσοφία is therefore at the basis of our whole experience of ourselves and of reality in general. It determines everything in our life, and this includes the other drives, their general arrangement and the βίος that results from it.

This means that the ultimate responsible for the fall and the imprisonment in the unexamined life is the soul's inborn love of knowledge. In fact, we had already seen that the unexamined life is based on the fact that our soul's love of knowledge is inhibited, underdeveloped or untrained. Plato directly alludes to this in the *Phaedrus*, by depicting the fall of the soul as being ultimately caused by the incompetence (κακία) of the charioteer, who is identified with the soul's love of knowledge.²⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, the soul does not adopt an unexamined life (as well as all the beliefs associated with it) after much reflection. On the contrary, the soul does not have a clear idea of what such a life is or what it entails. One is guided by other drives and the beliefs they install in the soul, and this installation is possible only because the soul easily accepts those beliefs and does not submit them to a rigorous examination. This is what allows the soul to forget what things really are and to be satisfied with a defective view of them. The soul neglects itself and this allows it to live and keep living an unexamined life.

But this is not all. A weak love of knowledge does not only affect the views we adopt. It also allows the other drives to grow. As is said in *Phaedrus*, the lack of training of the bad horse (which corresponds to our love of gain) renders it unruly and affects the entire soul.²⁵⁴⁶ The same may be applied to our love of honor. One of these drives (or even the two) become stronger and more uncontrolled. Hence, they are better able to convince us of their own views (i.e., of the views they create in order to better attain their goals). In fact, the strengthening of the other drives and the acceptance of their views are two sides of the same process that brings about and sustains the unexamined life. The entire process is ultimately rooted in the weakness of our φιλοσοφία (i.e., in our weak *Wille zur Wahrheit*). In other words, everything in life (i.e., one's inner πολιτεία, the practical system of life, its cognitive system) is fundamentally determined by our relation to knowledge. The fall and imprisonment is actually the fall and imprisonment of the soul's φιλοσοφία.

²⁵⁴⁵ See 248b.

²⁵⁴⁶ See 247b.

This latter aspect deserves special attention. The very notions of fall and imprisonment are to be understood from the standpoint of our love of knowledge. It is our love of knowledge that assumes an inferior form and becomes subordinated to something that is inferior to it. If our love of gain or our love of honor happen to assume a philosophical form and we end up adopting a philosophical life, this is not seen as a constitutive limitation (i.e., as a fall or an imprisonment) by Plato. Likewise, if we fail to attain gain or honor, this is not conceived as a constitutive limitation. The cognitive limitations, however, are essential for the appraisal of our life, as we will see in the following chapter. Our relation to knowledge is essential and therefore any defect in it is seen as a strong limitation of our own being. This may be surprising, since we are not very aware of our desire of knowledge, but Plato's texts try to reveal not only what happens at the depths of our being, but also how we are in contradiction with ourselves (and more precisely with our love of knowledge) when we lead an unexamined life.

c) The autonomy or self-determination of the soul's inborn φιλοσοφία

It is not enough to point to the fact that the soul's love of knowledge is responsible for the unexamined life. We have to define what kind of responsibility we are talking about, and this requires us to find out how our inborn φιλοσοφία functions and how it determines our life. More precisely, we have to see how it comes to be inhibited or weak. Is this a spontaneous manifestation of this drive, a way in which it determines itself? Or is this weakness determined by some other factor? In short, is our inborn φιλοσοφία autonomous or heteronomous?

This is not an easy question, especially because we cannot easily dissociate the philosophical drive from the non-philosophical drives, nor can we directly see what constitutes and determines any of our inner drives. We can, however, consider in more detail the model of drives and see some implications of how they are conceived.

We saw that the soul is composed of different drives, and these drives are irreducible to each other. This means our love of knowledge always coexists with other kinds of desires (namely, with our love of gain and our love of honor). Moreover, these drives oppose each other and fight to control our soul. We could therefore think that φιλοσοφία's weakness is the direct result of the other drives' strength. Φιλοσοφία would be forcibly limited by these other

drives and, consequently, it would not be the ultimately responsible for the fall and for the imprisonment in the unexamined life.

However, we saw that we never experience the non-philosophical drives in their pure state. They are always contaminated by the love of knowledge and thus intrinsically referred to views or beliefs. They assume a logical form, present arguments and try to persuade the rest of the soul. Indeed, it is only by speaking the language of φιλοσοφία that they can move the soul, especially given the fact that we always act based on our views.²⁵⁴⁷ Consequently, all drives are mediated by φιλοσοφία. To use the language from *Phaedrus*, the horses (even the bad one) are always molded (i.e., trained or educated) by the charioteer, and their actual manifestation depends on how the charioteer determines them. The horses may be more docile or more recalcitrant, but this always depends on the charioteer, and it is the charioteer's fault if the horses happen to oppose him. The power of the other drives always stems from the philosophical drive, and this means that any conflict between the "irrational" drives and φιλοσοφία is, in a way, an inner conflict of φιλοσοφία itself.²⁵⁴⁸ Only φιλοσοφία can resist itself, and this resistance is what causes the fight between our drives. In other words, our love of knowledge must be somehow defective, and this defect cannot come from the outside. The other drives may be strong, but it is the philosophical drive that renders them strong.

Thus, although the other drives may grow and come to limit the soul's φιλοσοφία, this is only possible if φιλοσοφία lets them grow. By themselves they cannot force our love of knowledge. As Plato says, φιλοσοφία is a divine part of us.²⁵⁴⁹ As such, it cannot be controlled by the mortal and irrational parts, because the difference in quality between them is very significant. The soul's inborn φιλοσοφία must therefore limit itself and "fall" – i.e., it must let itself be guided by other drives. This is the only way it can be controlled by them. It can do their bidding, but this requires it to submit itself to these other drives. In other words, it can become limited and imprisoned, but it must contribute to its imprisonment.²⁵⁵⁰ We could even speak of a self-imposed servitude of the soul's φιλοσοφία. This is what renders the soul "weaker than itself" or what makes it lose its rational control. One's love of knowledge (or the part of the soul that corresponds to it) must surrender, yield, concede (ἐᾶν

²⁵⁴⁷ See e.g. *Phd.* 98c: "(...) πάντα ὅσα πράττει νῶν πράττει (...)."

²⁵⁴⁸ This does not mean that the other drives are completely derived from the desire to know. As we saw in Chap. 13 Sect. 1, Plato describes them as being irreducible to one another. But their characteristics and the way they relate to one another means that the non-philosophical drives can only have power and control the soul if the philosophical drive allows them to do so.

²⁵⁴⁹ See *Phd.* 80a, *Rep.* 589c-590d, *Ti.* 89d, 90a.

²⁵⁵⁰ Cp. *Phd.* 82d-83a.

or παραδιδόναι).²⁵⁵¹ Then it may be dragged (ἔλκεσθαι) or carried along (ἄγεσθαι) by the other parts.²⁵⁵² However, these passive or affective modalities of our being (in which our love of knowledge or our rational capacity seems to obey other drives) are in fact an inner variation of the rule of φιλοσοφία.²⁵⁵³ The philosophical drive is still present and it is decisive for the ruling non-philosophical drive, though at this point it is modified and very weak.²⁵⁵⁴

The decisive role of the soul's φιλοσοφία can also be seen in the fact that, according to Plato, the soul's love of knowledge is able to regain actual control of the soul, as we will see in Section 5 below. As is presupposed by the constant appeals or exhortations to examine, our love of knowledge may grow stronger and start examining things. This examination may then render it stronger and stronger, until it is able to control the other drives. At this point, the other drives will not be able to control the soul's φιλοσοφία in any way. This does not mean that they will be eradicated. Rather, they will be perfectly integrated in the rule of our love of knowledge. They will not oppose the soul's φιλοσοφία, because the soul's φιλοσοφία will not oppose itself or weaken itself. Our love of knowledge will be fully developed – and thus it will be fully autonomous and free.

In turn, when our love of knowledge is not fully developed and, consequently, does not rule the soul, it can accept false beliefs or lose the true beliefs it has.²⁵⁵⁵ The other drives will be able to create views and pass them off as knowledge. This is how they can become stronger and start ruling the soul. The non-rational drives must deceive the soul's φιλοσοφία – or, as we could also say, the philosophical drive must deceive itself.²⁵⁵⁶ However, the latter will not be conscious of doing so. The philosophical drive cannot go against its own nature and desire something else than knowledge (or what appears to be so). Thus, it must be convinced or persuaded of the views it adopts. These views must appear to be true. Indeed, the soul's φιλοσοφία must always determine itself, and this means it must

²⁵⁵¹ Cp. e.g. *Grg.* 507d-e, *Phd.* 82b-c, 84a, *Rep.* 550a-b, 553c-d, 554b.

²⁵⁵² Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 588e-589a.

²⁵⁵³ Plato, however, often describes it as if the non-philosophical drives were in control (see e.g. *Rep.* 553d), which corresponds to the way these modalities of the soul (and of its inborn φιλοσοφία) are experienced.

²⁵⁵⁴ This means that we can only be enticed, seduced or charmed by our affections because our philosophical drive makes it possible. Those moments in which we lack rational control or follow our irrational impulses are still a form of rationality (albeit a very defective one). All momentary lapses and all moments of apparent madness are somehow based on φιλοσοφία. Even the most tyrannical inner πολιτεία, which is only concerned with lawless pleasures, is still characterized by φιλοσοφία's constant self-surrender (i.e., by its constant decline or fall). Reason surrenders the rule to the other drives, keeps supporting this rule, and thus blocks itself. It then makes more and more mistakes, and these mistakes weaken it more and more, and at the same time strengthen the other drives more and more. The latter become more and more blind, though they never become totally irrational or unphilosophical.

²⁵⁵⁵ As is said in the *Republic*, it can be robbed, forced or bewitched. Cp. *Rep.* 412e-413c

²⁵⁵⁶ For the idea of self-deception, cp. *Cra.* 428d: “τὸ γὰρ ἐξαπατᾶσθαι αὐτὸν ὑφ’ αὐτοῦ πάντων χαλεπώτατον· ὅταν γὰρ μηδὲ σμικρὸν ἀποστατῆ ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ παρῆ ὁ ἐξαπατήσων, πῶς οὐ δεινόν;”

always follow what appears to be true. The other drives may try to convince it, but they must always do so in φιλοσοφία's own terms. The inner dialogue of drives is never between equals. Rather, one drive dominates this dialectic and lends its voice to the others, which means that in a way it discusses with itself, and it must also convince itself.

In sum, our inborn φιλοσοφία can become weaker or stronger, it can wither or grow, but whether it does so or not is never a direct result of the other drives. It depends only on this drive. This is what is shown in the corpus. However, saying this is still not enough to fully understand how the philosophical drive works. It may determine itself and determine its force, but this does not mean that its strength or weakness depends on a deliberated choice on the part of the soul's φιλοσοφία. Plato does not say that this drive deliberates about its own power and consciously decides to surrender itself to the other drives. It does not persuade itself to do so. In fact, its weakness or strength seem to be a fact that we cannot fully explain. What we can say, based on the Platonic corpus, is that there is no element that directly controls the development of our φιλοσοφία (i.e., whether it is weaker and submitted to other drives or whether it is strong and in control of them).

d) The soul's freedom and spontaneity

Let us now see what all this means for us, insofar as we are responsible for the fall and the imprisonment in the unexamined life. Indeed, Plato's model is in keeping with some of the most important conceptions of human agency in Greek culture. One's soul is autonomous and it determines itself, insofar as its love of knowledge determines its own strength and thus everything else. But what exactly does all this mean in terms of freedom? Are we free to choose between limiting our φιλοσοφία or not – and, consequently, between leading an unexamined life or not? Or are we free in some other way?

According to Plato, there is no indeterminate will that considers different possibilities, deliberates and chooses between them without having any inner inclination that would determine its choice. This may be how we often interpret empirical decisions, but it is not how we choose things, nor is this the way we adopt the unexamined life. We are always determined by our views, which are the result of the soul's inner πολιτεία, and the latter is in turn primarily determined by the soul's φιλοσοφία. As for the philosophical drive, it is not conceived as having to choose between being strong or being weak, or between exercising

itself or neglecting itself. In fact, it is not clear what determines it – or, to be more precise, it is not clear how it determines itself.

Our choices thus refer back to something we cannot truly determine. It somehow determines itself in a spontaneous manner, and in doing so it also determines everything else in our life. It may therefore seem that we have no freedom and we cannot really be considered responsible for what happens. Whatever is responsible for this is something that lies in the depths of our being. However, this is actually the deepest essence of what we are and also the essence of our soul's self-movement. It is in a way an action of ours, though very different from our regular actions. It does not lie at the surface of our life, and it is not an action we recognize as ours. But it cannot come from the outside. It is at the core of our being and has its own necessity or its own law. Thus, it is an autonomous, free or spontaneous action. Moreover, it is not just one more action we perform. It is a sort of transcendental action, and in this sense it is more concrete than all other actions, which are always mediated by it and a result of it.

To be sure, we have no clear awareness of performing this action. We somehow forget it (just as the choice of life described in the myths is forgotten). But this forgetfulness is nothing extraordinary, given the fact that our access to the depths of our soul is very deficient and only indirect. We do not see what exactly happens there, and this is also why it is difficult to prevent this basic action from happening or to change it. We somehow determine ourselves behind our backs. This is why we are responsible for the unexamined life and, at the same time, we can also say that no one errs willingly, since there is no clear awareness of any of this. One always does what seems best and this is based on φιλοσοφία's self-determination. This may go against our φιλοσοφία's own tendency and against what we really want, but that happens only because our love of knowledge may contradict itself – i.e., it may be weak, careless, and fail to exercise itself.

At any rate, there is no fatalism in our adoption of the unexamined life and all that results from it. According to Plato's conception, we cannot exculpate ourselves, despite our lack of clarity about what happens. It is true that this conception changes our usual understanding of our actions and has strong ethical implications. It introduces a component of necessity in our most immediate acts, insofar as they are the result of a basic action of ours or a basic choice. This basic action or basic choice, in turn, is not something we can immediately determine as we determine (or seem to determine) other things. As a result, we could perhaps think that our action is irrelevant and we are not really responsible for anything

we do. But things are more complicated than that. The basic action we identified – i.e., our φιλοσοφία weakening itself or exercising itself – belongs to us in a more fundamental way than any of our other actions. It is what we most properly do. Hence, everything we do is somehow connected with an action of ours and expresses it. Furthermore, the way φιλοσοφία determines itself can change, as we will see. It normally make us passive (insofar as it surrenders us to other drives), but it can also make us highly active and autonomous. Indeed, we can gain control over ourselves, strengthen our φιλοσοφία, and make it more and more demanding.²⁵⁵⁷ This in turn will make us examine things in more detail, and it may change many of our empirical decisions. Our entire life will be directly connected with our basic action. It will become an expression of our self-affirming spontaneity. We will be truly free and truly coincide with our acts, which will then be fully determined by the idea of objective truth. Thus, we cannot really say that our empirical decisions and our empirical actions are irrelevant. In one way or the other, they are always related to our basic action and they always accompany it.

4. The different forms of constraint (ἀνάγκη) that characterize the unexamined life and their derived character

After seeing how the soul (through its inborn φιλοσοφία) determines itself and how this is the ultimate origin of the unexamined life, we must now consider the different components of constraint (ἀνάγκη) that Plato associates with such a life. According to several passages in the corpus, there are some other factors that seem to determine our inner πολιτεία when we lead an unexamined life – and by affecting our πολιτεία, they also affect the way we see things and the way we live. These factors are somewhat external, or at least they are different from our own self-determination, and thus they do not seem to depend on us or to be under our control. But how can this be reconciled with the soul's self-determination? The latter is essential for us to adopt an unexamined life. This means that all other sources of determination cannot explain why we lead an unexamined life. Their strength is rather based on the fact that we adopt such a life. Indeed, these external factors must conspire with the internal factors, and they receive their power from the latter. The unexamined life is composed of a mixture of autonomy (or self-determination) and constraint, but the latter is derived or has a subordinate role. Our inborn φιλοσοφία must determine itself to be

²⁵⁵⁷ For more on this, see Sect. 5 below.

constrained, and this marks the entire development of the unexamined life. Things that are not under our control help shape our life, but this passivity of ours is still subsidiary of the soul's self-determination. The soul and its φιλοσοφία must surrender their self-guidance – which, in a way, is still a form of guiding one's life. Thus, our experiences of ἀνάγκη are not incompatible with the soul's spontaneity, but are actually made possible by it. They are the result of the soul's fall or of the decay of its φιλοσοφία.

But let us see these heterogeneous factors in more detail. We have to consider how each of them seems to force us to live in a certain way and to remain in the unexamined life, and we also have to consider how they are actually derived from the way our constitutive love of knowledge determines itself.

4.1. Our affections (πάθη)

The Platonic corpus often mentions how our affections (i.e. pleasure and pain) can determine us – and, most importantly, how they can disturb or oppose our love of knowledge.²⁵⁵⁸ Affections are connected with the body or, more precisely, with the immediate sphere of appearing or sensation.²⁵⁵⁹ This sphere can have different contents and these contents may be better or worse. According to what is said in *Philebus*, there is something like a right condition, and we may move away from it (which causes pain) or towards it (thereby having pleasure).²⁵⁶⁰ These movements are always happening, even without our intervention, and according to other dialogues they may determine our actions, our views and even the inner arrangement of our constitutive drives or their relation of forces. But how exactly is this possible?

According to Plato, our affections do not influence us directly. They can only constrain or influence us because we are not indifferent to these affections. We are sensitive to them or interested in them, in virtue of our inborn φιλοκέρδεια. The latter is concerned with our preservation and also with our best subjective state, which is often identified with the greatest possible pleasure. We want to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, and this gives our affections power over us. The greater our love of gain, the greater the power of our affections over us. They will control our pursuits and actions more directly, and they will subjugate and use our love of knowledge to better manipulate our subjective state. In this case, our

²⁵⁵⁸ Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 65a ff., *Phlb.* 63d-e.

²⁵⁵⁹ For more on this, cp. Chap. 11, Sects. 1 and 3.1.

²⁵⁶⁰ See 31d-32b.

affections may also strongly influence our views. In the *Republic*, Socrates considers how the latter may change – and change for the worse – because we are forced by pain or bewitched by pleasure or pain.²⁵⁶¹ We will lose the good views we had and adopt other more closely motivated by our affections. But there is more. Besides affecting our views, strong pleasures and pains (especially if they are frequent) may also change our inborn drives and our inner πολιτεία. They feed our love of gain, make it stronger, make it the ruling drive of our soul or solidify its rule.²⁵⁶² But, as was said, all this is only possible because our love of gain is strong in the first place – otherwise the affection as such would not change anything in us.

What is then the cause of our strong love of gain? We already saw that it can only be strong if the inborn φιλοσοφία is weak, and this weakness cannot come from outside the philosophical drive. Our affections cannot directly influence it. Our love of knowledge must determine itself to be less demanding, and as a result it can develop uncritical views that strengthen the love of gain and make us value our affections. In other words, the philosophical drive must make the gain-loving drive strong. It must imprison itself in our love for our affections or for our body.²⁵⁶³ The power of φιλοκέρδεια and the importance of our affections are always an expression of our φιλοσοφία and intrinsically determined by it.

Thus, if our love of knowledge had determined itself to be strong and had fully developed itself, we would not be able to be constrained, seduced or impelled by our affections (or by the promise of pleasure and the threat of pain). We can only be controlled by our affections if our love of knowledge lets it – and in this sense we are not truly controlled by them. It is true that once opened to affections, they can make us more and more forgetful, and our φιλοσοφία becomes weaker and weaker. But in general we can still liberate ourselves (i.e., our love of knowledge can still determine itself in a different way), although it becomes harder and harder.²⁵⁶⁴

²⁵⁶¹ See 412e-413c.

²⁵⁶² This is, for instance, the danger of art, according to *Republic* X. By causing strong affections in us, tragedies (and comedies) conspire with our irrational drives, stimulate them, weaken the philosophical drive and thus ruin our soul. See in particular 605a-c and 606a-c.

²⁵⁶³ Cp. *Phd.* 82e-83a: “(...) τοῦ εἰργμοῦ τὴν δεινότητα κατιδοῦσα ὅτι δι’ ἐπιθυμίας ἐστίν, ὡς ἂν μάλιστα αὐτὸς ὁ δεδεμένος συλλήπτωρ εἴη τοῦ δεδέσθαι (...).”

²⁵⁶⁴ In some passages, Plato seems to admit that one may become unable to liberate oneself – i.e., the evil in one’s soul may become incurable (see e.g. *Grg.* 525c, *Phd.* 113e, *Rep.* 615e). However, these are extreme cases. Let us then leave aside this question for now. For more on it, see Sect. 5.1 below.

4.2. The others and the πόλις

Until now, we have considered our relation with the unexamined life mostly as a private matter, but we are also surrounded by others (such as our family, our friends, the whole community), and these others seem to influence us in many ways. They have their own views, their habits, their occupations, their ways of life, and their inner arrangements of drives – and all these possibilities may be transmitted to us through our upbringing (τροφή) and general education (παιδεία), or simply through our constant contact with them. Plato often stresses this, as we saw above.²⁵⁶⁵ We receive many views from others, especially when we are children (and thus more credulous) or when these views are frequently repeated around us. Likewise, our constitutive drives are affected by others around us, and their ruling drives tend to work as allies of the same drives in us.²⁵⁶⁶ As a result, they change our inner πολιτεία, and this then determines our whole βίος and our whole way of seeing things. We seem therefore to be deeply influenced by others, and one could therefore assume that the others can also be the reason why we lead an unexamined life.²⁵⁶⁷

But how can one soul be influenced by another soul or a group of souls? Is there really an external influence that forces us to see things in a certain way or forces our inner πολιτεία to change? One may be tempted to think so. We may indeed seem passive with respect to this external influence. However, this is only possible if the internal forces of the soul conspire with the external forces. The inner arrangement of the soul is always the primary factor. We need to be open to external influences, and this requires our love of knowledge to be weak. As our love of knowledge grows weaker, the influence of others becomes stronger. Our soul will be ruled by the love of gain or the love of honor, and the others will be important insofar as they affect our gain and our honor. We may guide ourselves by them because we want pleasure and fear pain, because we want to survive, or because we want to be admired by them. But they do not influence us directly. Their influence is always based on the state of our inborn φιλοσοφία. If the latter were not weak, they would never transform us – i.e., they would not convince us of any views or affect the strength of our drives. Moreover, even if our love of knowledge is weak and allows others to influence us in a negative way, we may nevertheless counteract these influences. Plato admits

²⁵⁶⁵ For more on this, cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 2.2 and Chap. 11 Sect. 2.3.

²⁵⁶⁶ Cp. Chap. 13 Sect. 4.4 b) above.

²⁵⁶⁷ See e.g. *Phdr.* 250a: “αἱ δεῦρο πεσοῦσαι ἐδυστύχησαν, ὥστε ὑπό τινων ὁμιλιῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄδικον τραπόμεναι λήθην ὧν τότε εἶδον ἱερῶν ἔχειν.”

that one may become a true philosopher even in a bad πόλις, though this is very difficult, and while our φιλοσοφία is not yet fully developed, there is always the risk of it being corrupted.²⁵⁶⁸

Finally, it is also important to mention in this context that the action of others is not necessarily negative. As we will see below, Plato also admits the possibility of a positive external influence, which helps one to release oneself from the unexamined life – either by limiting our other drives or by inspiring our love of knowledge. The latter is precisely what Socrates tries to do when he examines others. However, the external impulse as such is never enough to liberate us. We must always determine ourselves – i.e., our inner φιλοσοφία must determine itself and become stronger. Only then will we start examining and strengthen our inborn love of knowledge.²⁵⁶⁹

4.3. Other possible constraints: one's φύσις, god(s) and chance

There are still other factors that could be regarded as constraining us into leading an unexamined life. One of these factors is one's nature or φύσις. As we saw above, the term φύσις designates what is automatically given to a being (as opposed to what depends on nurture, practice, habit, τέχνη, etc.). It may apply either to our shared condition as human beings (which determines our range of possibilities) or to our optimal form. But it may also designate the natural tendencies or predispositions of a particular human being, and even one's particular abilities and talents.²⁵⁷⁰ Plato often uses the term in these latter senses, in order to distinguish individuals. In particular, we may have more or less talent for philosophy and have a greater or smaller bent towards knowledge. This may render it easier or harder to examine and to have a stronger inborn φιλοσοφία. Thus, some natures may be predisposed towards philosophical examination, while others may be predisposed towards adopting an unexamined life.²⁵⁷¹

But how is this natural bent to be understood? Does it entail that we are predestined to live an unexamined life or the opposite? Or is this no more than a predisposition for one thing or the other? Certainly, it seems that one's φύσις can make it easier or harder for us to develop our inborn φιλοσοφία. However, our natural constitution does not seem to be an

²⁵⁶⁸ Cp. *Rep.* 492a, 520a-b.

²⁵⁶⁹ For more on this, see Sect. 5.2 a).

²⁵⁷⁰ For more on φύσις, cp. preface to Part III.

²⁵⁷¹ This idea is most conspicuous in the *Republic*. See e.g. 484b ff. For more on this subject, cp. Chap. 20, Sect. 3.1.

absolute constraint. For one, it seems impossible to have such a nature that one is completely immune to the possibility of falling into the unexamined life. Even when the most perfect state is attained, there is still the possibility of degeneration.²⁵⁷² On the other hand, a bad φύσις does not seem to fully exclude the development of φιλοσοφία. Since one's φιλοσοφία is never fully inhibited, it can still grow. The predisposition is thus not enough.

But this is not all. We may also wonder if there is some metaphysical entity or power that determines our φιλοσοφία (and is thus responsible for the kind of life we lead), either directly or indirectly. At some points, Plato seems to refer to entities of this kind. For instance, sometimes he seems to admit the possibility of a godly influence or intervention.²⁵⁷³ We will not discuss here Plato's understanding of god or the gods, but it is important to make some remarks about how Plato conceives of their interaction with human beings. Traditionally, the gods were seen as sending human beings good and bad things.²⁵⁷⁴ Plato, however, says that god cannot be the cause of bad things.²⁵⁷⁵ In fact, the gods have no ill-will towards human beings.²⁵⁷⁶ Moreover, Plato stresses that god cannot be blamed for the βίος we choose.²⁵⁷⁷ Even in *Timaeus*, where Plato describes the whole universe as created by the divine Demiurge, we find no reference to god constraining us. The most Plato seems to admit is the possibility of a divine dispensation that turns us towards philosophy. But the nature of this divine dispensation is problematic. It might be above all an admission of the fact that one does not know why it happened. Indeed, the strengthening of our philosophical drive is not simply something we decide to do. It is not a choice like our other choices. It comes from the depths of our being. Thus, even if there is some external factor, its influence must still be confirmed by our own inborn φιλοσοφία. One cannot simply be forced by god to philosophize.

Finally, there is also the possibility of our fall being determined by pure chance or an absolute randomness.²⁵⁷⁸ At some points, Plato seems to allude to something of the kind. For instance, Plato does admit that there is something like a material element and this element is absolutely chaotic. It contains no order or form.²⁵⁷⁹ However, this material element does not affect our soul directly. In *Timaeus*, it may disturb us while we are small children, but it is

²⁵⁷² Cp. *Rep.* 546a. For more on this, see Sect. 5.3 below.

²⁵⁷³ See e.g. *Rep.* 492a.

²⁵⁷⁴ Cp. *Iliad*, XXIV.527-32 – a passage that is partly quoted in *Rep.* 379d.

²⁵⁷⁵ See *Rep.* 379b-c.

²⁵⁷⁶ Cp. e.g. *Phdr.* 247a.

²⁵⁷⁷ See *Rep.* 617e.

²⁵⁷⁸ In *Phdr.* 248c, for instance, we find a reference to chance (συντυχία), though its meaning is not very clear.

²⁵⁷⁹ Cp. e.g. *Plt.* 269d-e, 273b ff., *Ti.* 52a ff.

unable to force us to follow our affections and to live in a certain way.²⁵⁸⁰ The soul must always conspire with it, and it can also limit its influence over us. Thus, our life is not submitted to this kind of randomness. But Plato alludes to other kind of chance – namely, to the idea of a cosmic cycle that causes things to inevitable decay after a time.²⁵⁸¹ This is what causes the downfall of the perfect city in the *Republic*, and it could also be responsible for us not being able to remain always perfect. Indeed, we are constitutively finite, especially insofar as we have a body – i.e., a sphere of sensation. However, it is not clear that this cycle is something external to our love of knowledge, which will then constrain it to become weak. It may be conceived as something that pervades our whole being, including our inborn φιλοσοφία. As such, it would not change the fact that our love of knowledge determines itself and our entire life.

5. Plato's conception of the release from the unexamined life

After considering the reason that leads us to adopt an unexamined life, it is now important to discuss the possibility of abandoning it. The main question is whether we are free to leave such a life and what kind of control we have over this possibility. In addition, we also need to consider how difficult any release from the unexamined life is and how there may be relapses. All these questions will help us understand our relation with the unexamined life and the kind of responsibility we have for leading such a life. They also have important implications for the discussion of whether we should dedicate ourselves to philosophical examination (i.e., whether there is some sort imperative of philosophical examination). Indeed, the value of this imperative is very different according to whether or not we have control over the kind of life we lead. We must therefore see how the release from the unexamined life can be conceived within the framework hitherto described.

5.1. The possibility of abandoning the unexamined life

In general, the unexamined life is our default setting. We fall into it and we tend to remain in it. There is a sort of inertia. Our philosophical drive remains restrained and ruled by a non-philosophical drive. Thus, it may seem we have no control over whether or not we

²⁵⁸⁰ Cp. Sect. 3.1 c) above.

²⁵⁸¹ See 546a ff.

abandon the unexamined life. Usually we do not even think about this possibility, and if we happen to think about it, there seems to be a sort of resistance (or a sort of ἀκράτεια) that prevent us from simply leaving. Plato, however, admits the possibility of a release or a deliverance (ἀπαλλαγὴ or λύσις). We can unstrap ourselves and abandon our seated position in the cave. We can gain wings and fly. We can separate ourselves as much as possible from the body-loving drive, and develop our philosophical drive. In sum, we can perform a cleansing (κάθαρσις), both in the sense of removing our false views and in the sense of cancelling the rule of non-philosophical drives (thereby changing our βίος).²⁵⁸² But how does this happen? What are the conditions for this cleansing? And can we bring it about at any moment, or does it require some preconditions? How much control do we have over the entire process?

In order to answer these questions, we must start by considering what the release from the unexamined life consists in. Given the fact that the imprisonment in the unexamined life is based on the weakness of philosophical examination, the release from such a life requires our philosophical drive to be developed and to gain control over our soul. In other words, our love of knowledge will have to be trained or exercised, and this requires us to embrace philosophical examination. The latter will allow us to review our views and realize our empty conceit of knowledge. It will also show us the need to inquire further, in order to discover how things really are. In other words, it will attack the unexamined life and make us more aware of the importance of philosophical examination. Our love of knowledge will thus become more demanding and more rigorous, and this change will also affect the other constitutive drives of the soul. They will not be extirpated, but they will be increasingly weaker (not only because the philosophical drive will grow stronger, but also because more and more of the views these other drives were associated with will be refuted).²⁵⁸³ As a result, our inner πολιτεία and the βίος based on it (i.e., our whole practical system and the system of views that underpins it) will be transformed or reshaped. This whole process is therefore necessary for us to abandon the unexamined life. But how does this process begin? What is the ultimate reason for us to start examining?

We saw above that the fall in the unexamined life was caused by the way our φιλοσοφία determines itself. We adopt an unexamined life if our love of knowledge determines itself to be weak. Thus, we may release ourselves from the unexamined life if our

²⁵⁸² For these senses of κάθαρσις, cp. *Sph.* 226b ff., and *Phd.* 67c-d.

²⁵⁸³ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 571d-572b, 588e-589b.

love of knowledge determines itself to become stronger. But, as was said, this is not a possibility to which we relate consciously. We do not deliberate about it and we do not choose to embrace it. The strengthening of the philosophical drive and consequently the release from the unexamined life are rather a matter of self-affirmation of our being and its most important part – our inborn φιλοσοφία. The latter becomes stronger and more demanding, and as a result it starts to see the pertinence of philosophical examination.

Abandoning the unexamined life seems therefore to depend solely on the philosophical drive. This means that we may release ourselves at any moment – at least in normal conditions. As was mentioned, Plato admits in some passages the possibility of the soul having such an unjust (or perverted) inner arrangement of drives and committing so many injustices that it will become incurable.²⁵⁸⁴ In this case, it seems that the soul's φιλοσοφία will become so weak that it will no longer be able to strengthen itself. However, this is a very extreme case, and very different from what normally happens. Moreover, it is not clear what exactly Plato has in mind. He mentions this possibility only when he is describing an eschatological judgment. He considers it a state of extreme misery and even extreme suffering, but this is a very vague description, and apart from that it is difficult to imagine what such a state would actually amount to. Usually, our circumstances are very different and we are still able (with more or less difficulty) to revert the fall into the unexamined life, if our love of knowledge so determines it.

5.2. The external and internal sources of philosophical examination

We have outlined the basic structure of our release or escape from the unexamined life. However, this is still not enough to determine the way the release (or at least the beginning of a release) normally occurs and how we normally relate to it. Despite the fact that the ultimate origin of this release lies in the depths of our being (i.e., in the way our inborn love of knowledge determines itself), we can still distinguish different immediate circumstances in which we begin to examine and to abandon the unexamined life. These circumstances may be external to us (or, to be more precise, they may depend on others around us and the way they influence us), but they may also be internal (i.e., they may be the result of the way we relate to things). Let us then consider each of them in turn and see how they relate with the self-determination of our love of knowledge.

²⁵⁸⁴ See e.g. *Grg.* 525b ff., *Phd.* 113e-e, *Rep.* 615e-616a.

a) The possibility of being instigated by others to examine

As Plato often points out, we receive much from others. Both our education and our constant contact with others provide us with views and help determine our soul's inner arrangement. These processes are usually uncritical and passive, and they tend to solidify the unexamined life. However, we may also be instigated by others to examine things, and this examination may ultimately lead to a release from the unexamined life. We find a clear reference to such an "external release" in the allegory of the cave. Socrates raises the possibility of someone being released (λυθείη) and forced or constrained to rise, turn around, walk, and look to the light behind him.²⁵⁸⁵ In fact, the released prisoner must be dragged by force (ἔλκοι βίᾳ) through much of the ascent.²⁵⁸⁶ In addition, the person who liberates the prisoner also explains what is happening and questions him.²⁵⁸⁷ To be sure, at the later stages of the process there is no more references to the instigator of the process, and the prisoner reflects by himself about the meaning of his experience. However, much of the process does not seem to have been the choice of the prisoner. Indeed, the whole passage stresses how these prisoners tend to strongly resist any attempt at releasing them.²⁵⁸⁸ As prisoners, they want to remain where they are, and even if they are released, they are still tempted to return.²⁵⁸⁹

This passage is very relevant, but we find many other illustrations of this throughout the dialogues. We often see Socrates perform the role of the external instigator. He is a gadfly that awakens others from their drowsiness.²⁵⁹⁰ He interrupts them when they are in the middle of something and examines their beliefs and their lives. Often, he lets them see how baseless

²⁵⁸⁵ See *Rep.* 515c: "σκόπει δὴ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, αὐτῶν λύσιν τε καὶ ἴασιν τῶν τε δεσμῶν καὶ τῆς ἀφροσύνης, οἷα τις ἂν εἴη, εἰ φύσει τοιάδε συμβαίνοι αὐτοῖς· ὅποτε τις λυθείη καὶ ἀναγκάζεται ἐξαίφνης ἀνίστασθαι τε καὶ περιάγειν τὸν ἀγένηα καὶ βαδίζειν καὶ πρὸς τὸ φῶς ἀναβλέπειν (...)." ²⁵⁸⁶ Cp. 515e.

²⁵⁸⁷ See 515d: "(...) τί ἂν οἶει αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν, εἴ τις αὐτῷ λέγοι ὅτι τότε μὲν ἑώρα φλυαρίας, νῦν δὲ μᾶλλον τι ἐγγυτέρω τοῦ ὄντος καὶ πρὸς μᾶλλον ὄντα τετραμμένος ὀρθότερον βλέπει, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν παριόντων δεικνὺς αὐτῷ ἀναγκάζει ἐρωτῶν ἀποκρίνεσθαι ὅτι ἔστιν;"

²⁵⁸⁸ This becomes clear when Socrates tries to imagine what would happen if, upon returning to the cave, the prisoner tried to release some of his fellow prisoners. He says that the other prisoners would be aggravated if someone tried to snatch them away from what they see as reality – so much so that they would attack the one that tried to liberate them and perhaps even kill him (cp. 517a).

²⁵⁸⁹ Indeed, this resistance also occurs once the process of release is initiated. The released prisoner (at least at first, while he is still dazzled by the new visions) is strongly tempted to return, since the bottom of the cave still seems more true to him (cp. 515d-e). Hence it is necessary to drag him.

²⁵⁹⁰ See *Ap.* 30e-31a.

their beliefs are and how problematic their way of living is.²⁵⁹¹ In doing so, he tries to motivate them to continue examining.²⁵⁹² The process is long, but by increasing one's exigency and creating an acute awareness of one's ignorance, Socrates is trying to inflame his interlocutors' inborn love of knowledge – and this may indeed be a decisive impulse to leave the unexamined life.

However, there can be different reactions to this external effort to release us, as Plato sometimes points out. The external intervention disturbs us, but one can interpret this disturbance in different ways. One may assign the blame for it to someone else, or one may notice that this disturbance is the result of one's cognitive limitations – and thus it is one's own fault. Consequently, one may also direct one's anger in two different directions: namely, towards the other or towards oneself.²⁵⁹³ According to Plato, this is partly determined by the way the examination is carried out. Indeed, the examiner must help the examinee realize his own ignorance.²⁵⁹⁴ But carrying out the examination in the correct way is not enough. The external influence cannot force us to examine and keep examining. This is illustrated by the fact that many characters in the dialogues keep leading an unexamined life, even if they happen to have some contact with Socrates. There is an inalienable component of self-determination. One is never purely passive, not even if one is instigated to examine by someone else. One must have interest, follow the arguments, think of answers; one must also realize the importance of this and persevere in the pursuit of the truth. This is only possible if one's inborn φιλοσοφία has already become stronger, in order for one to appropriate the external impulse and integrate it in one's life. Some previous tension is necessary and this cannot simply be forced from the outside.²⁵⁹⁵ It must come from within the soul and its most fundamental part. In other words, one must turn oneself to philosophical examination, and before that happens all external intervention can be nothing more than a protreptic appeal or an appeal to self-determination.²⁵⁹⁶

²⁵⁹¹ Socrates is therefore compared to a torpedo ray that shocks his interlocutor and leaves him in ἀπορία (see *Men.* 80a-b). He is also a sort of Daedalus, insofar as he can make other people's beliefs run away, just like Daedalus was said to make his statues move (see *Euthphr.* 11b-e).

²⁵⁹² Often he even uses the others' love of gain or love of honor to motivate them. If they want to attain what they desire, they must continue to examine their beliefs and the questions they refer to.

²⁵⁹³ Cp. *Ap.* 39c-d, *Tht.* 168a, *Sph.* 230b.

²⁵⁹⁴ This is precisely what is emphasized in the above mentioned passages from *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

²⁵⁹⁵ To use the metaphor from *Theaetetus*, the midwife can only perform its role if the subject is pregnant. See 148e ff.

²⁵⁹⁶ This does not mean that this impulse cannot be useful. It may actually be necessary for many of us. But the efficiency of an external impulse always hinges on one's inner condition, and especially on the strength of one's inner φιλοσοφία.

b) The possibility of examining by one's own initiative and the factors that may condition this examination

Plato does not consider only the kind of examination that is instigated by someone else. There are also some important indications about the possibility of starting to examine things by one's own initiative. Whether examining oneself or examining another, one will be fully active. But is this a possibility available to us at all times? And how much control do we have over it? Is it simply a matter of intention and decision? Can we be blamed for not adopting it?

As we saw, we can only start examining (or at least fully engage in this examination) if our love of knowledge becomes more demanding than it normally is. We will then suspect that our beliefs might be wrong, we will notice that we are ignorant of more things than we think, and we will feel the need to keep examining.²⁵⁹⁷ But how exactly does our love of knowledge grow stronger? As we saw, these significant variations of our inborn φιλοσοφία cannot be ascribed to anything else. Our philosophical drive determines itself and this constitutes a sort of transcendental act, which precedes any empirical moment of our being. In other words, the self-determination of our love of knowledge is the ultimate ground of our life and it constitutes a mystery. We do not control it and we can only infer its existence and activity from its effects.

Still, the fact that we must be moved by our love of knowledge, over which we have no control, does not imply that nothing else is relevant to whether we examine or not, or to how we examine. Plato admits that there are some conditions that influence whether or not we dedicate ourselves to philosophical examination. For instance, we need to have a minimum of knowledge (such as knowledge of language and of how to examine).²⁵⁹⁸ We also need to have leisure (σχολή) – i.e., we need not to be concerned with gain or honor.²⁵⁹⁹ This will make it easier to examine, but it is not what ultimately leads us to abandon the unexamined life and dedicate ourselves to philosophical examination. Finally, Plato also associates philosophical examination with some πάθη. In *Theaetetus* he says that wonder (θαυμάζειν) is the starting-point of philosophy.²⁶⁰⁰ In *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, he seems to

²⁵⁹⁷ Indeed, at this point we will relate consciously to the possibility of examining things and we will actively embrace it.

²⁵⁹⁸ Cp. e.g. *Chrm.* 159a.

²⁵⁹⁹ Cp. in particular *Phd.* 66b ff. and *Tht.* 172c ff.

²⁶⁰⁰ See 155d. For an example of how being in a state of ἀπορία may lead us to reflect about things, see *Rep.* 523a ff.

relate philosophy with the outbreak of ἔρως, insofar as the latter is an experience of truth and may lead us to inquire further into what reality is.²⁶⁰¹ However, these experiences do not necessarily produce philosophical examination, and much less a release from the unexamined life. In general, they tend to be easily integrated in our usual way of life.

We can therefore see that the decision to examine (and even the decision to pursue the conditions that help us to examine) essentially depends on what happens in the depths of our being. Our circumstances may make it easier to examine, but they cannot force us to start examining things and much less to abandon the unexamined life. We must decide to examine, and we can only do so if our philosophical drive determines itself to examine. When this happens, we might still need the help of others to strengthen our love of knowledge – at least at first. After a while, we will probably be able to examine by ourselves. But during this whole process we cannot be forced by anything – be it others or the circumstances we go through.

This might seem very arbitrary, but it also means that nothing can prevent us from examining and abandoning the unexamined life. Our love of knowledge is entirely free to determine itself as it pleases. This is why Socrates may try to convince others to examine, and why Plato's dialogues may try to convince the reader to adopt an examined life. The exhortation or appeal is not necessarily effective, but the one that is faced with it may determine oneself to examine (even if one does not simply control this self-determination, given the fact that it happens in the depths of one's soul).

5.3. The slowness of the release process and the possibility of a relapse

The previous considerations were still too vague, because we did not distinguish sufficiently between beginning to examine things and being fully released from the unexamined life. The release requires a long process of struggling against our defective views and altering the relation of forces between the soul's drives. This long process is expressed in the image of a difficult ascent, with several stages. The unexamined life resists examination and a full release is very hard to achieve. In the beginning, philosophical examination will tend to be superficial and inauthentic. It will leave many views unexamined (and especially the most important ones), and it will still be guided by non-philosophical drives.²⁶⁰² Thus,

²⁶⁰¹ Cp. 249c ff. and 210a ff., respectively.

²⁶⁰² Cp. Chap. 14 Sect. 4.

although one is already examining, there is still no real release from the unexamined life. We are only freed from the unexamined life if we examine our views deep enough and if this corresponds to a real strengthening of our love of knowledge. The latter must come to rule the soul and subjugate the other drives. If this happens, the practical and cognitive systems of our life will be reconstructed, and we will live a philosophical life. As we saw, this life does not necessarily involve finding the truth, but at least one would fully long for it and one's life will be determined by this longing.²⁶⁰³ In other words, the core of our being (i.e., our love of knowledge) will fully express itself or it will be fully free.

Now, we may wonder whether it is really possible to attain a full release from the unexamined life, or whether we are always partly limited by our other drives. In *Phaedo*, for instance, a full release seems to be impossible during life.²⁶⁰⁴ But in *Republic* V-VII, Plato seems to admit that one's philosophical drive may fully rule the soul and even attain perfect knowledge. This apparent contradiction goes to show how difficult the question is. In fact, it can only be truly decided by trying to achieve a full release and seeing what happens then. But in any case, it seems perfectly possible to attain a large degree of release and to live a predominantly philosophical life.

The release may be slower or faster, and it may also be partial or (at least ideally) complete. But regardless of the kind of release we attain, there is still one problem: namely, the possibility of relapse. Our being is in flux and our views, as well as our inner arrangement of drives, are constantly changing. We may attain better views and strengthen our philosophical drive, but there is also the possibility of backsliding or falling back again.²⁶⁰⁵ In *Phaedo*, Plato even outlines the possibility of an inverted Penelope, that breaks the ties to the body and its desires, only to redo the shackles in secret, thus performing an endless job.²⁶⁰⁶ Indeed, the release can be no more than an Adonis' garden – i.e., a short-lived transformation of our being that soon fades away.²⁶⁰⁷ This applies not only to the small outbreaks of philosophical examination, but even when there were great efforts and many results (i.e., many new views – or at least new doubts – and a great strengthening of one's inborn

²⁶⁰³ Cp. Chap. 14 Sect. 5.

²⁶⁰⁴ Cp. *Phd.* 66d-67a.

²⁶⁰⁵ In other words, we may return to the cave, although not in the sense described by Plato in *Rep.* 516e-517a. In this passage, the prisoner's return does not imply that he adopts once more an unexamined life. It only means that he will deal with others in the πόλις and that he will focus his attention on concrete beings, instead of focusing on their general predicates.

²⁶⁰⁶ See *Phd.* 84a: “(...) οὕτω λογίσαίτ' ἂν ψυχὴ ἀνδρὸς φιλοσόφου, καὶ οὐκ ἂν οἰηθεῖν τὴν μὲν φιλοσοφίαν χρῆναι αὐτὴν λύειν, λουούσης δὲ ἐκείνης, αὐτὴν παραδιδόναι ταῖς ἡδοναῖς καὶ λύπαις ἑαυτὴν πάλιν αὖ ἐγκαταδεῖν καὶ ἀνήνυτον ἔργον πράττειν Πηνελόπης τινὰ ἐναντίως ἰστὸν μεταχειριζομένης (...).”

²⁶⁰⁷ For the relation between philosophical examination and Adonis' gardens, cp. *Phdr.* 276b.

φιλοσοφία), the past condition may still be reinstated. The unexamined life resists and fights back, thus making the release from it an uphill battle, in which one is very liable to relapse.

But what motivates this relapse, according to Plato? We find several reasons in the corpus. For instance, we can be overwhelmed with difficulties when we try to ascend to the truth (or, as Plato says in the allegory of the cave, we can become dazzled), and as a result we may come back to our previous seat.²⁶⁰⁸ We can also be seduced by pleasures, forced by suffering, or overtaken by external influences.²⁶⁰⁹ This is so because the philosophical drive does not immediately gain full control over the other drives. When we start examining, the other drives still retain considerable force. We are still sensitive to pleasure or honor, and we may give in to them, thereby changing the inner πολιτεία back again. However, this act of giving in to our other drives is not something to which we relate as a simple possibility that we can choose and adopt. We do not simply decide to repress philosophical examination and return into the unexamined life. Likewise, we are not forced by the circumstances we find ourselves in. Just like the imprisonment and the release, this relapse does not come from the outside or from our irrational drives. It all happens in the depths of our being, and it ultimately depends on our philosophical drive and the way it spontaneously determines itself. Such a drive will not directly desire the opacity of the unexamined life, but it may become less demanding and less acute, and this will slowly invert the release process. The effects of examination will slowly fade away and one will slowly fall asleep again. What can one then do to avoid the return to the unexamined life? Is there anything that helps or ensures one's freedom? It is difficult to say. Apparently, the only thing we can do is to keep exercising our love of knowledge (i.e., to keep examining), though this is not exactly a choice of ours. Our inborn φιλοσοφία must actually embrace this possibility and try to fully develop itself. Before doing so (i.e., before φιλοσοφία becoming fully-fledged and assuming full control of the soul), the possibility of relapse is constantly present.

But, assuming a full release from the unexamined life is possible, what happens then? Is this release permanent? Do we become fully immune to the possibility of relapse? Or can one's φιλοσοφία become weak again?

The dialogues are not absolutely clear about this, perhaps because it is not easy to conceive such a state. Plato usually refers to it in mythological terms. His description of the fall of the soul in *Phaedrus* seems to admit that one is always liable to fall back again.

²⁶⁰⁸ See *Rep.* 515c-e.

²⁶⁰⁹ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 412e-413c and *Alc.* I 135e.

Likewise, in the *Republic* he seems to admit a sort of unavoidable entropy, which never let us be assured of any progress made. Even the strongest love of knowledge does not seem impervious to change and fall. It is (as the best political state) only hard to move or disturb (*χαλεπὸν κινηθῆναι*). It retains some frailty or weakness, and this can cause at first a small relapse, which with the passing of time will bring us back to an unexamined life.²⁶¹⁰ Still, the possibility of relapse always depends on one's love of knowledge. The latter is always at the center of our life. This is indeed the main aspect of the considerations we find in the Platonic corpus about the fall in the unexamined life, the release from it, and the possibility of a relapse.

²⁶¹⁰ See *Rep.* 546a ff. This cycle of rise and fall refers primarily to the πόλις, but it may also apply to any individual soul. In fact, the error that brings about the decay of the ideal πόλις (to wit, the error of calculation that will cause defective births) is actually made by individuals and not by the πόλις at large.

CONCLUSION OF PART IV

The goal of this Part IV was to define the general structure of the unexamined life, regardless of the many different forms it may assume. In Chapter 15, we saw how this life is formed and we determined the kind of practical system that corresponds to it. In Chapter 16, we considered the cognitive structure of the unexamined life and the cognitive limitations that stem from this cognitive structure. In Chapter 17, we discussed why we adopt such a life and also the possibility of abandoning it. In sum, we identified the main features of such a life and also the way we relate to it. We are thus able to better understand the place where we usually begin and where we usually find ourselves. In most cases, this is also the place where we spend our whole life, and even if we happen to escape it, we are still likely to relapse into it. We could therefore say that we are constitutively attracted to the unexamined life.

This does not mean that we can easily identify the structure of such a life or recognize the validity of its conceptual description. In fact, our understanding of it is usually very different from what we just saw. This raises an additional challenge. If the description is not immediately recognized, we could perhaps wonder whether it is appropriate or even plausible. But it is important to keep in mind that the Platonic conception of the unexamined life also tries to account for the usual interpretation of it. The unexamined life is fully convinced of possessing the truth about itself and all that matters. Consequently, it does not recognize any problems or limitations. This explains why one hardly recognizes this description as the description of one's own life. Moreover, this conception of the unexamined life seems to be the result of a very developed form of philosophical examination and it requires much philosophical examination in order to be understood. But this is precisely what the unexamined life in general lacks. Thus, even if Plato is correct, it is difficult to fully recognize it if we are still living an unexamined life.

We can approach the problem of the validity of this conception from yet another angle. This seems to be only one possible description of the unexamined life – i.e., of the life that lacks or opposes philosophy. Other thinkers have presented different descriptions of such a life. We may then ask what the basis and validity of Plato's description are. But if we look at our analysis, we can easily see that this whole description is based on Plato's description of the general structure of our being and on how this structure accounts for the way we live.

More precisely, it implies that our soul is constitutively directed to the superlative good and also that it has a constitutive relation to knowledge and a constitutive interest in it. In fact, the soul is composed of three different drives that interact with each other and fight for control. These drives (one of which is our love of knowledge) establish a particular political order within the soul and if our love of knowledge does not rule the soul we live an unexamined life. We can therefore clearly see that the conception of the unexamined life stands and falls with the conception of our being or our ψυχή.

PART V

The value of the unexamined life and the value of philosophical examination

“ἢ φιλοσοφητέον οὖν ἢ χαίρειν εἰποῦσι τῷ ζῆν ἀπιτέον ἐντεῦθεν, ὡς τὰ ἄλλα γε πάντα φλυαρία τις ἔοικεν εἶναι πολλή καὶ λήρος.”

Aristotle, *Protrepticus*, fr. 110²⁶¹¹

After seeing the structure of life in general and of a life without philosophical examination in particular, we can finally return to Socrates' assertion that “the unexamined life is not worth living” and reconsider the meaning of these words, now within the framework of the whole Platonic corpus. Indeed, we can now understand the standpoint and the criteria that allow us to appraise such a life. We will thus see how the unexamined life falls seriously short of what we desire, and how this deficiency is essentially connected with the lack of philosophical examination. We will also consider the consequences of Plato's diagnosis or how this diagnosis should affect our life. In particular, we will see how, according to Plato, we should reject the unexamined life and devote ourselves to philosophical examination. The latter point is very important. Plato's appraisal of the unexamined life also outlines the need for philosophical examination – or, as we could say, a sort of imperative of examination. We will have to discuss this imperative, and see what its exact basis and its status are. In addition, we will have to consider the possible outcomes and the risks of philosophical examination. In other words, we will try to appraise philosophical examination, in order to see whether or not it is able to correct the defects of the unexamined life and render our life desirable and good. Then, we will have to consider whether this appraisal of philosophical examination (especially if it turns out to be negative) somehow affects the rejection of the unexamined life and the imperative of philosophical examination.

The goal of all these analyses is twofold. On the one hand, we want to see what is or can be said about these matters in the framework of the Platonic corpus. On the other hand,

²⁶¹¹ I. DÜRING (ed.), *Aristotle's Protrepticus. An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Stockholm/etc., Almqvist & Wiksell, 1961.

we will try to determine both the inner coherence and the validity of the Platonic views. The latter question is particularly difficult, but even if we cannot reach a definite decision about the validity of the Platonic views, we will at least become better aware of how complicated the problem is and how we cannot naively accept or easily dismiss Plato's assertion about the unexamined life.

CHAPTER 18

The badness and misery of the unexamined life

“Πάλαι γάρ, εἶπε, λέγω, σὺ δὲ οὐκ ἀκούεις, ὅτι σὺ αὐτῷ μάλιστα ἔχθιστος εἶ καὶ πολεμιώτατος, μέχρι ἂν ᾗς κακὸς καὶ ἀνόητος.”

Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes*, 4.56-57²⁶¹²

In Part IV, we considered the general structure of the life we usually lead – the unexamined life. We did not discuss its value or desirability, though, nor the criterion or criteria we might use to appraise its worth. This is what we must now explore. We have to see how it is to live a life and what that means for beings such as we, which are characterized by the complex structure we considered in Part III. Indeed, we are concerned with ourselves and we want to attain something good – or, to be more precise, we want to attain something maximally or superlatively good. Moreover, we are characterized by having three constitutive drives, and one of these drives – our love of knowledge – plays a central role in our soul and our life in general. In a way, it always determines itself and determines all other drives.

We must now appraise the unexamined life on the basis of this description of our inner constitution or our φύσις as human beings, and we must see if this life is marked by constitutive deficiencies that seriously affect its worth or desirability. Socrates, in the *Apology*, is adamant about the fact that such a life is not worth living, and we considered in Part I how the entire text can be read as a discussion of this view. But now we have to consider the entire Platonic corpus and formulate the full accusation against such a life. We have to see what exactly its defects and limitations are, how serious they are, and how they derive from the lack of examination. Moreover, assuming Plato is right, we must also consider why according to him one does not normally notice any of this. Finally, we must determine whether it is important to notice these defects, or if it may be preferable to be deluded about the unexamined life’s worth.

It is important to bear in mind that we will be appraising the unexamined life as such. This means that we will not focus on the qualitative differences between particular forms of

²⁶¹² J. von ARNIM (ed.), *Dionis Prusaensis quem vocant Chrysostomum quae exstant omnia*, 2 vols., Berlin, Weidmann, 1893-1896 (repr. 1962).

unexamined life, even if Plato often does so. Indeed, some of his discussions (especially those in *Gorgias* and in *Republic* II-IX) seem to be mostly concerned with showing that a particular life – to wit, the life of a tyrant – is the worst possible life. This, however, is an extreme and rare kind of life. In general, people live calmer and more inconspicuous lives, which seem to be better. Plato even admits that some kinds of unexamined life may have many correct δόξαι and a popular form of ἀρετή.²⁶¹³ At any rate, he grants that some lives are better than others and in *Phaedrus* he even outlines a ranking of lives that shows that there are many intermediate lives between the life of a tyrant and the life of a philosopher.²⁶¹⁴ But we will not be primarily concerned with these differences. According to Plato's analyses, even the best unexamined life is still marked by significant defects. Thus, we will try to determine why all forms of unexamined life (even the better ones) can still be considered worthless or undesirable, regardless of all the differences between them.

In doing so, we will not yet try to determine whether there is any alternative to this way of life that is not worthless or undesirable. More precisely, we will not yet consider whether a life devoted to philosophical examination can actually overcome the limitations we will consider and is thus absolutely desirable. Regardless of whether or not the alternative to the unexamined life has its own limitations, the diagnosis of the unexamined life stays the same. Let us then try to determine the value of such a life in light of what is said in the Platonic corpus.

1. The “unlivable” (ἀβίωτος) character of the unexamined life

Let us start by considering once more the terms of the accusation against the unexamined life and what is implied in them. Socrates says that such a life is not βιωτός. This expression, along with the equivalent ἀβίωτος, denote that certain circumstances (as well as a life that is marked by them) are extremely undesirable or bad – so much so that our life becomes unfit or unsuitable to be lived (i.e., it becomes miserable).²⁶¹⁵ This is of course based on the fact that we are not indifferent to our life and to how it turns out. We want to have a good life, and in fact the best possible life. We are permanently moved by this desire and, as a result, we are also constantly appraising our life, in order to determine its quality. This appraisal is actually quite complex, as we saw above. We must determine whether or not

²⁶¹³ See e.g. *Men.* 97a ff. and *Phd.* 68c ff.

²⁶¹⁴ See 248d-e.

²⁶¹⁵ For more on the terms βιωτός and ἀβίωτος, cp. Chap. 3 Sect. 2, and Chap. 13 Sect. 6.1 d).

it is the best life. If it is not, we must then determine whether we expect to attain the best life or not. If we have no hope of attaining the superlative good we desire, we must then decide whether or not we compromise or settle for less. This implies that we must decide whether we should accept life (ζῆν δέχεσθαι). We must see whether it is better for us to live or to die. Indeed, when we do not attain the good we desire and have no expectation of attaining it, the question of why we should live or what we gain by living, becomes particularly pressing. We must see if our life is worth living (ἄξιον ζῆν) or not – i.e., if it is meaningful.²⁶¹⁶

When we lead an unexamined life, this appraisal is mostly a tacit process. We are not aware of it and we do not think deeply about it. However, it still takes place and determines our relation to ourselves and our life. In general, while we lead an unexamined life, we are convinced that life is worth living, and there may be several reasons for this. We may resign ourselves to what we have and think that, although it is not great, we nonetheless have all we need. We may also have the expectation of attaining the superlative good. Finally, we may think that our life is already the best possible life. In any of these cases, we will probably think we are happy (εὐδαίμονας δοκεῖν εἶναι).²⁶¹⁷ But this is not always the case. We may experience bad things and they may render our life patently bad and miserable. We may then want to reject our life – either by deeply changing it or by abandoning it altogether. We find many examples of such situations in Greek literature. Life may become unacceptable or unbearable (ἀβίωτος) if one is deprived of something one deems an important (or even the best) thing in life – such as pleasure, a beloved one, the trust of others, and so on.²⁶¹⁸ In fact, the term is particularly suited to express a tragic situation, in which our life becomes unbearable in virtue of some personal loss. What we lose (i.e., what we value the most) may change from person to person, but the fact of valuing something and the possibility of loss is common to all.²⁶¹⁹

Plato also recognizes this common structure and its variability. Throughout the corpus, he uses the word ἀβίωτος (as well as equivalent expressions, such as “not accepting life” or “being better to die than to live”) several times, and we may systematize these usages according to the different kinds of object we value, and whose loss may render one’s life “unlivable” in one’s own eyes. For instance, we may value our bodily condition or material

²⁶¹⁶ For more on this, cp. Chap. 12, Sect. 5.3.

²⁶¹⁷ Cp. *Ap.* 36d.

²⁶¹⁸ Cp. ARISTOPHANES, *Nubes* 1074, SOPHOCLES, *Antigone* 556, EURIPIDES, *Ion* 670, GORGIAS, DK B11a (21).

²⁶¹⁹ For references in Greek literature to the many things we may value the most, cp. Chap. 12, Sect. 4.1. For the appraisals of life based on the possession or loss of it, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 6.1 d).

conditions in general, and thus disease or precariousness will render life difficult to accept.²⁶²⁰ In addition, one may consider that life is not worth living without pleasure.²⁶²¹ We may also be mostly concerned with honor (i.e., with being well-regarded by others), and its loss will then render our life unbearable.²⁶²² These are actually the concerns that may lie at the center of the unexamined life. But one may also prize knowledge and real excellence above all, and then one's life will not be bearable without these things.²⁶²³ In sum, it all depends on what we attain and its relation to what we desire. The content of our life may satisfy our desires or not. If it seems to do so, we will deem ourselves happy. If it does not (and if, moreover, we have no expectation of coming to attain what we want), our life is then considered bad and miserable – and it is at this point that we may declare it worthless or say that it is not worth living. Although these appraisals are mostly tacit, they are nevertheless a structure of our life, and Socrates' statement in the *Apology* is making a clear reference to it.

All this seems pretty straightforward. However, we must also consider the possibility (already mentioned above) that we might not understand ourselves and what we really desire, which will certainly contribute for our failure in attaining it. Indeed, we might desire something bad, and we might expect to attain it or we might already have attained it without noticing its badness. In the latter case, we will think we are happy, though we are not. In other words, we will be miserable without knowing it. We will be ignorant of how far we are from the good and from happiness. In fact, this ignorance even increases our distance from them, insofar as it closes us off to them and prevents us from pursuing them. But this does not annul our relation to them. Our desire is still directed at the good and at happiness. This is what we truly want, even if other things may seem to us to be best.²⁶²⁴ At first sight, it might not be clear how this can happen, and why we do not notice this discrepancy. This is, at any rate, something we often experience. After attaining something, we may notice it does not satisfy us as we thought it would, but it is also possible for us to attain it without noticing that it does not fulfill us.²⁶²⁵

²⁶²⁰ Cp. *Cri.* 47e-48a, *Rep.* 407a-b, *Plt.* 299e.

²⁶²¹ Cp. *Phd.* 65a, *Phlb.* 54e.

²⁶²² Cp. *Mx.* 246d.

²⁶²³ Cp. *Hp. Ma.* 304e, *Alc. I* 115d, *Smp.* 211b-d, 215e-216a, *Lg.* 874d.

²⁶²⁴ On this distinction, see in particular *Grg.* 466b ff.

²⁶²⁵ We find an interesting formulation of this possibility in Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, when Mr. Dumby says: "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst; the last is a real tragedy!" Cp. O. WILDE, *Complete Works*, Glasgow, HarperCollins, 2003⁵ (1948¹), 452.

Socrates' assertion about the worthlessness of the unexamined life must be understood in light of this possibility. As we will see, Plato shows that the unexamined life fails to attain the good. It only attains bad things and is therefore miserable. However, we fail to notice any of this (or at least we fail to realize the full extent of this), and this ignorance about our real state only makes this life worse and more unacceptable, since it distances us more from the good. This, at least, is the formal structure of Plato's argument. But such an argument will nevertheless come as a surprise to most of us. Even if we admit the possibility of sometimes being ignorant of what we really want, it is difficult to accept that this happens in all forms of unexamined life. Many people are satisfied with their lives, either because they settle and do not want more, because they have high expectations, or because they think they have attained a superlative good. There is a strong conviction that many such lives are meaningful. We would therefore not reject them *en bloc*, as Plato does. In many cases we would perhaps change some things, but not the general way of life as such, and certainly not by devoting ourselves to philosophical examination. The unexamined life (or certain modalities of it, at least) is regarded as our natural place. It may have some circumstantial problems, but it is not bad in itself. In sum, we are convinced that many things may render our life bad and miserable, but not the lack of examination. At best, some may be displeased for not knowing – but not everybody.

Plato, however, is talking about human beings in general. We all have a common constitution and a common desire, and the unexamined life fails to correspond to it, even if we do not realize it (which is possible only because we do not really know what such a life amounts to and what we really desire). Plato's judgment is thus valid for everybody and the criterion for this judgment is supposed to be immanent. But what is it then that we objectively desire, and what is the real value of the unexamined life as such? How can we know this? Moreover, even admitting Plato's appraisal is correct, what is the importance of all this? If normally we are not aware of falling short of our true desire (i.e., we are not aware of the badness and misery of the unexamined life), why should we care about it? In other words, the fact that something is in itself bad also means that it is bad for me? If we do not know, why should we care? Why don't we simply go on thinking we are happy or on our way to happiness?

We must therefore consider two different questions in this chapter. We have to see how Plato shows that the unexamined life is objectively bad and miserable, even if we are not aware of it. Then we have to consider the meaning of this for us – and whether this means

that we should reject such a life. But before addressing these questions, and in order to prepare their discussion, we must start by looking more closely at the Platonic understanding of the notions of badness (or defectiveness) and misery.

2. Plato's understanding of badness and misery

As was indicated above, badness and misery are two fundamental notions for the appraisal of the unexamined life. As Plato tries to prove, the unexamined life possesses or attains many bad things (κακά) and is therefore a bad or miserable (ἄθλιος) life. In fact, one not only fails to attain what one pursues, but also becomes unable to attain it. But this is only a generic or formal description, and it still does not clarify what exactly badness and misery are or what they consist in. Therefore, we must now consider these notions, and we must also determine how it is possible to misidentify them and regard a bad or miserable state as a good and happy state.

Some important aspects of the notions of badness and misery were already mentioned above, when we considered the notions of goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία).²⁶²⁶ But now we must primarily focus on the negative notions. We have to determine what is bad for us and in what way it renders our life miserable (i.e., in what way it prevents us from attaining the superlative good we desire), and this requires us to consider several questions. First, we have to see how, according to Plato (and in contrast with the common understanding of badness), badness and misery are essentially connected with our ψυχή or our inner being. Badness lies within us or at least it comes primarily from within. Second, we have to consider how this badness is not simple. Plato identifies two forms of inner badness or κακία that are irreducible to each other, though intimately connected. Finally, it is necessary to consider how these two forms of badness, as well as the misery caused by them, can be either patent or latent. This whole analysis will thus provide us with the basis to see how the lack of philosophical examination causes badness and misery – i.e., how it distances us from goodness and happiness, thus rendering our life “unlivable” or undesirable.

²⁶²⁶ See in particular Chap. 12, Sects. 3.1, 3.2 and 4.3.

2.1. The inner origin of all badness and all misery

First of all, it is important to bear in mind that the badness we are talking about is experienced by a being that is interested in its own life and wants this life to be good and happy, which implies attaining good things (in a broad sense of the word “things”, which may include good actions or good inner states). Indeed, we are primarily marked by our desire for the good (or, to be more precise, by a desire for the superlative good), and everything that falls short of what we desire, as well as everything that prevents us from attaining it, is to some extent bad, and renders our life lacking – and therefore miserable. This is the core of badness and misery, and it is in keeping with what we considered above. We saw that “being bad” (κακός, πονηρός) in Plato does not have a primarily moral sense. Badness is to be understood in a functional sense, as defectiveness.²⁶²⁷ A bad tool is a tool that fails to perform its task (ἔργον). This refers to its role in human life. Bad things (such as beings, actions or states) are thus something harmful, that prevent us from attaining what we want. But the word can also be applied to living beings – and particularly to human beings. In this case, the criterion is clearly immanent, and badness means that this being falls short of its proper or best condition. In this sense, every state we find ourselves in that falls short of the superlative state is to a certain extent a bad state – even if there can be different degrees of distance from the superlative good and, consequently, different degrees of badness (and of misery). In sum, the core of badness is the disagreement or contradiction between what we desire and what we attain. But what exactly brings about this disagreement or contradiction? What is its source?

In general, we might be tempted to think that if our life is not perfect, that is only due to external causes. Something on the outside prevents us from attaining the good, or even moves us further away from it. This was also a common view in Greek culture.²⁶²⁸ We considered above how Greek culture in general recognizes that we are responsible for what we do (though with some restrictions).²⁶²⁹ However, this does not mean that all badness comes directly from us. We may be harmed by the gods, by our guarding spirit (δαίμων), by destiny, by what others do – and these harms may not be directly connected with what we did or with who we are. Of course, this presupposes that the quality of our life can be affected by

²⁶²⁷ Cp. Chap. 12, Sect. 3.1.

²⁶²⁸ We will not discuss the matter at length here, but a few remarks can help us better understand the specificity of Plato’s understanding.

²⁶²⁹ Cp. Chap. 17, Sect. 2.

these external agents. According to the prevailing view, we want to have external goods – i.e., health, material possessions, a prosperous household, a good family, friends, and an honorable life.²⁶³⁰ This leaves us open to the attacks of other beings and even of chance – to what the day (any day) may bring. We are ephemeral beings and our life can be turned upside down at a moment’s notice.²⁶³¹ Hence the importance of how our life turns out or ends. It is only in the end that we can know if our life was happy.²⁶³² But until we die, other beings can cause us to be in a bad or miserable state. To be sure, pre-Platonic thinking also recognizes that we may try to develop ourselves, educate ourselves, attain ἀρετή, and thus we may turn the others and perhaps even the gods in our favor. If we are ignorant and vicious, we will bring much greater harm to ourselves. However, even if we greatly improve ourselves, our effectiveness (and thus our possibility of ensuring our happiness and escaping misery) is always limited by external factors.

This is not the prevailing view in the Platonic corpus, where we actually find much criticism of the externalist model of badness and misery. This is intimately connected with the conception of the good we considered above.²⁶³³ We saw that the good depends essentially on our inner disposition and whether it is marked by excellence (ἀρετή) or badness (κακία). Without entering into much detail, this means that things, states and actions are in themselves neutral. Their goodness or badness depends on our ψυχή. It is our inner being that determines what we attain and the role everything plays in our life. Thus we cannot be harmed or become miserable in virtue of external factors. Badness and misery come exclusively from our inner disposition, which is what determines how we see things, how we act and how we live. This also seems to imply that the superlative good we desire is not something external that can be taken away from us. Whether our ultimate goal is to contemplate the truth or to act and live based on that knowledge, it always depends on us to attain it. We need to develop our ψυχή as much as possible, which implies developing its ability to know. If we do not do this and become bad, we will only attain bad things and, consequently, we will be miserable. Badness is thus primarily inner or psychic badness, and this is what causes us to be miserable.

²⁶³⁰ We also find this view in Plato’s dialogues. Cp. e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 291d-e, where Hippias says: “λέγω τοίνυν ἀεὶ καὶ παντὶ καὶ πανταχοῦ κάλλιστον εἶναι ἀνδρὶ, πλουτοῦντι, ὑγιαίνοντι, τιμωμένῳ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων, ἀφικομένῳ εἰς γῆρας, τοὺς αὐτοῦ γονέας τελευτήσαντας καλῶς περιστείλαντι, ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκγόνων καλῶς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς ταφῆναι.”

²⁶³¹ This is what is implied in the Greek notion of ἐφήμερος. Cp. footnote 1037.

²⁶³² For more on this, cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 6.1 e).

²⁶³³ See Chap. 12. Sect. 6.1.

Normally, however, we are unaware of this (which is precisely the problem, as we will see). We do not notice that the value of our life depends essentially on our inner quality (i.e., our intrinsic goodness and badness), and we are not even clearly aware of how good or how bad we are. Consequently, we think that it is not entirely under our control whether we live a good or a bad life. Plato, however, tries to show that the opposite is the case, and that we must therefore be very attentive to our inner disposition and not neglect it.

2.2. Reconsideration of the two forms of badness of the soul: illness and deformity. Their commonalities and interconnection

What we just saw does not specify what exactly constitutes the inner badness that makes us miserable. Plato discusses this in several different passages. One of them is especially illuminating and may be used as the basis for our analysis. In *Sophist* 227d ff., the Visitor distinguishes and characterizes two forms of psychic badness (κακία). We briefly considered this distinction above, although we followed the tendency of the text and focused mostly on one of these forms of badness.²⁶³⁴ Now, however, we must reconsider some of the aspects we saw and develop them.

Putting aside the context in which this distinction emerges, the Visitor starts by saying that there are two forms of badness (or defectiveness, κακία) in the soul, and he compares them to two forms of badness or defectiveness that affect the body: namely, illness (νόσος) and deformity (αἴσχος).²⁶³⁵ Then, he considers each of these defects in turn.

First, he characterizes illness in general as a form of sedition or a civil war (στάσις).²⁶³⁶ As Plato says, it is “variance (διαφορά) of the naturally akin that comes from some kind of corruption”.²⁶³⁷ The soul has indeed a multiplicity of elements that belong together. The Visitor mentions beliefs, desires, anger, pleasures, reasoning, pains. These elements may agree or disagree with each other, and when they disagree (i.e., when there is no inner harmony, but rather a conflict) the soul is ill.²⁶³⁸ This is somewhat vague, but Plato seems to be referring primarily to different motivations of our action and to the fact that they

²⁶³⁴ See Chap. 8, Sect. 1.2.

²⁶³⁵ See 227d-228a: “[ΞΕ] δύο μὲν εἶδη κακίας περὶ ψυχὴν ῥητέον. [ΘΕΑΙ] ποῖα; [ΞΕ] τὸ μὲν οἶον νόσον ἐν σώματι, τὸ δ’ οἶον αἴσχος ἐγγιγνόμενον.”

²⁶³⁶ See 228a: “νόσον ἴσως καὶ στάσιν οὐ ταῦτὸν νενομίκας;”

²⁶³⁷ See 228a: “[ΞΕ] Πότερον ἄλλο τι στάσιν ἡγούμενος ἢ τὴν τοῦ φύσει συγγενοῦς ἕκ τινος διαφθορᾶς διαφοράν; [ΘΕΑΙ] Οὐδέν.”

²⁶³⁸ See 228b: “[ΞΕ] τί δέ; ἐν ψυχῇ δόξας ἐπιθυμίας καὶ θυμὸν ἡδοναῖς καὶ λόγον λύπαις καὶ πάντα ἀλλήλοις ταῦτα τῶν φλαύρως ἐχόντων οὐκ ἠσθήμεθα διαφερόμενα; [ΘΕΑΙ] καὶ σφόδρα γε.

may come into a violent conflict, thus paralyzing us. We can reinterpret this in light of the soul's tripartition (even if it is not expressly mentioned in the *Sophist*). The soul is composed of different drives (which associate with each other and pervade each other), and they may come into conflict. When this happens, the soul disagrees with itself, is internally divided, and therefore finds itself in a bad inner state. It is, however, important to note that the Visitor not only alludes to states of conflict, but also to bad dispositions of the soul that may express themselves in many actions and even in one's whole life. Indeed, he associates sedition and illness in the soul with forms of moral defect or vice, such as cowardice, unrestraint, and injustice.²⁶³⁹ In addition, he says that such an illness is supposed to be corrected by chastisement (κολαστική).²⁶⁴⁰ At any rate, the conflict in question makes us attain bad things and renders our life miserable. A good life would thus require a good arrangement of drives and internal harmony. This would produce psychic health and moral excellence (i.e., courage, sound-mindedness and justice).

As for the other form of psychic badness, it is compared with deformity in the body. According to the Visitor, the main feature of the latter is ἀμετρία – i.e., disproportion, unfitness or disagreement.²⁶⁴¹ This implies a relation between two things, and the Visitor goes on to explain (with the help of Theaetetus) that the soul is like a projectile that sets out a target for itself, tries to hit it, and may either be successful or stray away from it.²⁶⁴² If this projectile hits the target, this is a form of proportion, fitness or agreement. If it misses, it is the opposite. In the case of the soul, the target in question is truth.²⁶⁴³ The Visitor is thus alluding to the fact that the soul is constitutively characterized by love of knowledge or φιλοσοφία. It is directed at reality and it may either hit it (i.e., have access to it, know it as it is) or miss it (in which case it will be ignorant of what things are or, as Plato says, it will deviate from understanding or σύνεσις, and be in a state of derangement, παραφροσύνη).²⁶⁴⁴ It is important to bear in mind that there can be two different forms of ignorance. We can be simply ignorant of things (by being completely oblivious to them or by being aware that we are ignorant of it), and we can also suffer from a double ignorance (i.e., we may be ignorant

²⁶³⁹ See 228e: “(...) καὶ δειλίαν μὲν καὶ ἀκολασίαν καὶ ἀδικίαν σύμπαντα ἡγήτεον νόσον ἐν ἡμῖν (...).”

²⁶⁴⁰ See 229a.

²⁶⁴¹ See 228a: “ἀλλ’ αἴσχος ἄλλο τι πλὴν τὸ τῆς ἀμετρίας πανταχοῦ δυσειδὲς ἐνὸν γένος;”

²⁶⁴² See 228c: “ὅσ’ ἂν κινήσεως μετασχόντα καὶ σκοπόν τινα θέμενα πειρώμενα τούτου τυγχάνειν καθ’ ἐκάστην ὁρμὴν παράφορα αὐτοῦ γίγνηται καὶ ἀποτυγχάνη (...).”

²⁶⁴³ See 228c-d: “(...) ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὁρμωμένης ψυχῆς (...).”

²⁶⁴⁴ See 228c-d: “τό γε μὴν ἀγνοεῖν ἐστὶν ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὁρμωμένης ψυχῆς, παραφόρου συνέσεως γιγνομένης, οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν παραφροσύνη.”

and think we know, which corresponds to the notion of stupidity or ἀμαθία).²⁶⁴⁵ But regardless of this distinction, the soul is always trying to hit things as they are and all ignorance it may have is unwilling.²⁶⁴⁶ In other words, if the soul fails to attain the truth, it will not satisfy its desire. Ignorance is an undesired state and it makes the soul miserable.

By stressing these two forms of badness, Plato shows how decisive inner order and truth are for our soul and our life. We need both of them to be happy. If, however, our soul is ill and deformed (and we will see that this is precisely what happens when we lead an unexamined life), then our life will be bad and miserable. We may then wonder which of these forms of badness is worse. As we will see in the following, Plato's texts seem to point in different directions. Sometimes the greatest problem seems to be injustice (which is intrinsically connected with the soul's illness), while other times the major problem in our life seems to be ignorance and untruth. However, this discrepancy may perhaps be explained by the fact that the two forms of badness have an intimate connection. On the one hand, they have a similar structure, insofar as both consist in an inner disagreement or inner conflict.²⁶⁴⁷ In this sense, they also correspond to the definition of badness and misery in general, which consists in a disagreement or conflict between what we desire and what we attain. On the other hand, they not only resemble one another in a certain respect, but they often accompany each other and also increase each other. In fact, they share a common root. They are both based on a weak or self-inhibited philosophical drive.²⁶⁴⁸ This is what allows the different drives to fight for control, and it is also what causes our ignorance.

But how exactly do these defects characterize the unexamined life? It is not immediately clear that all unexamined lives are in a constant inner conflict and that they are ignorant of everything (or at least of everything that matters). In some cases, these forms of psychic badness may be very contained, and one's soul may be mostly healthy and shapely. At least this is what we tend to think. However, we must also consider that for Plato these forms of badness may be – and almost always are – hidden from us. The characterization we

²⁶⁴⁵ The latter is indeed the form of ignorance that the Visitor goes on to single out as the most frequent and the most difficult to handle. See 229c: “[ΞΕ] ἀγνοίας γοῦν μέγα τί μοι δοκῶ καὶ χαλεπὸν ἀφωρισμένον ὄραν εἶδος, πᾶσι τοῖς ἄλλοις αὐτῆς ἀντίσταθμον μέρεσιν. [ΘΕΑΙ] ποῖον δὲ; “[ΞΕ] τὸ μὴ κατειδῶτα τι δοκεῖν εἰδέναι· δι’ οὗ κινδυνεύει πάντα ὅσα διανοία σφαλλόμεθα γίνεσθαι πᾶσιν. [ΘΕΑΙ] ἀληθῆ. [ΞΕ] καὶ δὴ καὶ τούτῳ γε οἴμαι μόνῳ τῆς ἀγνοίας ἀμαθίαν τοῦνομα προσρηθῆναι.” For more on the distinction between simple and double ignorance, as well as on the notion of ἀμαθία, cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 1, and Chap. 8 Sect. 1.2.

²⁶⁴⁶ See 228c: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ψυχὴν γε ἴσμεν ἄκουσαν πᾶσαν πᾶν ἀγνοοῦσαν.”

²⁶⁴⁷ This structural resemblance between the two forms of badness perhaps explains why ignorance (and especially double ignorance) is sometimes described as a form of disease (see e.g. *Ti.* 86b ff.). This happens even in the passage of the *Sophist* we are considering, as we saw above (cp. Chap. 8, Sect. 1.4).

²⁶⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, what causes these two forms of badness is also what causes the unexamined life, and we will see that this is no accident. The three things are intimately connected according to Plato.

gave of them already alluded to this possibility, but now we have to see it in more detail, and briefly discuss its meaning.

2.3. Patent and latent forms of badness. Patent and latent misery

As we will see, the Platonic corpus shows how our usual way of living (i.e., the unexamined life) is full of disagreements and contradictions – and particularly the disagreements and contradictions that correspond to the illness and the deformity of the soul. However, these self-disagreements or self-contradictions can have different modes of presence in our life. Some of them are immediately patent or manifest – i.e., we automatically notice them and we automatically notice that they are bad. Others, however, are usually latent or hidden. They usually escape our notice and, in fact, escaping our notice is an important condition for their occurrence. In the case of psychic illness, this means that even when we are not torn apart between drives (and therefore do not notice any conflict between them), these drives may still be somehow in conflict with each other, and thus their relation will not be completely harmonious. In other words, they may be arranged in some way, but this arrangement may still be wrong and prevent them from fully working together. It is not immediately clear what this means, but we will consider this possibility in detail below. As for a latent psychic deformity, we have already a pretty good idea of what it corresponds to. We saw that we may be aware of our ignorance, but we may also be ignorant of something and at the same time be convinced of knowing it – i.e., we may have false or baseless knowledge claims, and thus be in a state of stupidity (*ἀμαθία*). This unconscious ignorance (or double ignorance) actually constitutes an increased (or even extreme) form of psychic deformity, and we already saw that it pervades the unexamined life. Now we will have to consider what this means for the value of such a life.

But whatever this may mean, it seems clear that we may notice only a part (and in fact a very small part) of the illness and deformity of our soul. This also determines our experience of them. Whereas patent or perceived badness disturbs us (especially if it concerns something important) and thus renders our own misery visible and felt (even if we do not interpret it as such), latent badness leaves us undisturbed and at peace. As a result, we may easily convince ourselves that we are in a good state, and that our life is good and happy. As

is said in the *Apology*, we may seem to be happy, though we are not.²⁶⁴⁹ We are miserable, but this misery is latent.

As mentioned above, the notion of latent misery (based on the notion of latent badness) plays a central role in Plato's analyses. This can perhaps be more clearly seen in Plato's *Gorgias*, where we find several allusions to this idea. The most obvious allusion is made by Polus in an ironical manner. When faced with Socrates' views about the importance of justice, he says about Archelaus (whom he presented as the epitome of injustice) that "although he's committed these crimes, he remains unaware of how 'miserable' he's become, and feels no remorse either."²⁶⁵⁰ Socrates, in turn, refers several times to the possibility of this occurring both in the body and in the soul. He speaks, for instance, of a bodily condition that is only apparently good (δοκοῦσα εὐεξία, οὐσα δ' οὐ). In this case, one may think everything is alright with one's body, and only a doctor or a gymnastics teacher will know the real condition of the body.²⁶⁵¹ The same happens with the soul. It may seem alright, although it is actually in a bad state. Something similar happens in the case of the forms of adulation or flattery (κολακεία) considered by Socrates. They pass themselves off as real forms of caring for our body and soul, but are only concerned with giving them pleasure.²⁶⁵² They thus produce the impression that our body and our soul are in a good state, even if they are not. For instance, he opposes cosmetics to gymnastics, and says that the former "make[s] people assume an alien beauty and neglect their own, which comes through gymnastics."²⁶⁵³

The most important notion in this context, however, is the notion of festering soul (ψυχὴ ὕπουλος). Socrates is considering what happens to a soul that commits many injustices and does not get treated (i.e., punished) for it. This behavior and the lack of treatment will render the soul more and more unjust, and finally it will become festering and incurable.²⁶⁵⁴ The notion of festering soul clearly indicates that one's soul is affected by badness, but this badness is hidden, and thus one does not notice how ill – and how miserable – one's soul is.²⁶⁵⁵ This is precisely what is expressed by the adjective ὕπουλος. In its literal sense, it

²⁶⁴⁹ See once more *Ap.* 36d.

²⁶⁵⁰ See 471b: "καὶ ταῦτα ἀδικήσας ἔλαθεν ἑαυτὸν ἀθλιώτατος γενόμενος καὶ οὐ μετεμέλησεν αὐτῷ (...)." I follow D. Zeyl's translation (see *PCW*).

²⁶⁵¹ See 464a.

²⁶⁵² Cp. 464b ff.

²⁶⁵³ See 465b: "(...) ὥστε ποιεῖν ἀλλότριον κάλλος ἐφελκομένους τοῦ οἰκείου τοῦ διὰ τῆς γυμναστικῆς ἀμελεῖν."

²⁶⁵⁴ See 480a-b: "ἐὰν δέ γε ἀδικήσῃ ἢ αὐτὸς ἢ ἄλλος τις ὧν ἂν κήδηται, αὐτὸν ἐκόντα ἰέναι ἐκεῖσε ὅπου ὡς τάχιστα δώσει δίκην, παρὰ τὸν δικαστὴν ὥσπερ παρὰ τὸν ἰατρόν, σπεύδοντα ὅπως μὴ ἐγχρονισθῆν τὸ νόσημα τῆς ἀδικίας ὕπουλον τὴν ψυχὴν ποιήσει καὶ ἀνίατον (...)."

²⁶⁵⁵ It is true that this passage talks only of justice and, as such, it seems to refer (even if only loosely) to the form of badness characterized as illness in the *Sophist*. However, this injustice also involves ignorance.

denotes a festering or purulent scar – i.e., a sore that is only apparently healed, but actually extends under the skin.²⁶⁵⁶ The contrast between surface and depth is thus at the center of the notion. This is also the basis for its figurative sense, which can be found in several texts. Ὕπουλος is used to qualify the good order of a state (εὐνομία), the Trojan horse, someone’s peace or quiet (ἡσυχία), an oracle (μάντευμα), the mud at the edge of a riverbank (τέλμα), and even persons.²⁶⁵⁷ In these uses, “Ὕπουλος” has the sense of unsound, hollow, unreal, treacherous, false or deceitful. Something is not what it claims to be. It deceives us, presents itself as good, beautiful or safe, although it is actually the opposite.

We find a similar idea in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which comes very close to the question we are considering. After discovering that he was the killer of his father and the husband of his mother, Oedipus describes his previous condition, which seemed very good (if not superlatively so), as “a beauty festering with evils” (κάλλος κακῶν ὕπουλον).²⁶⁵⁸ Indeed, he seemed to have a superlatively good life. He had a good family, he was the king, and he was celebrated as the savior of Thebes. Yet, his apparent good fortune or happiness was hiding many evils – namely, his evil deeds (which were “the most shameful deeds among men”), the pollution caused by them and all subsequent consequences.²⁶⁵⁹ When these evils were revealed, they became unbearable to him, and he had to blind himself – an action he justifies by saying that it is “sweet when our mind dwells outside its evils.”²⁶⁶⁰ This sweetness was what characterized his state before discovering what his real condition was. When he made this discovery, he realized how he was completely deluded about his condition. He was miserable and did not know it.

According to Plato, something similar may happen to someone who is leading an unexamined life. When we lead such a life, our inner being may seem to be in a good condition, although it is actually in a bad state, and we are therefore miserable, even if we do

Moreover, the most relevant aspect of the notion of ψυχὴ ὕπουλος is the fact that it lets us better understand the notion of latent misery, and it is in this respect that we will now consider it. For a very similar analysis of this notion, on which the following analysis is based, see: H. TELO, Can One Be Miserable Without Knowing it. The problem of ψυχὴ ὕπουλος in Plato’s *Gorgias*, in: M. de CARVALHO & T. FIDALGO (eds.), *Plato’s Gorgias. Labyrinth and Threads*, Coimbra, Instituto de Estudos Filosóficos, 2016, 125-151.

²⁶⁵⁶ Cp. HIPPOCRATES, *De medico*, 11.1-6.

²⁶⁵⁷ See THUCYDIDES, *Historiae*, 8.64, SOPHOCLES, fr. 1105, DEMOSTHENES, *De corona*, 307, PAUSANIAS, *Graeciae descriptio*, 3.7.3, PLUTARCHUS, *Romulus*, 18.4, and MENANDER, *Sententiae*, 587 (Meineke).

²⁶⁵⁸ See v. 1396. I follow a common interpretation of the passage. Others defend that κακῶν goes with κάλλος and not with ὕπουλον, thus having the sense of “superlative evil”. For more on this, see e.g. J. BOLLACK, *L’Oedipe roi de Sophocle. Le texte et ses interprétations*, vol. 4, Lille, Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1990, *ad loc.*

²⁶⁵⁹ See v. 1408: “(...) αἴσχιστ’ ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔργα (...).”

²⁶⁶⁰ See v. 1389f.: “(...) τὸ γὰρ/ τὴν φροντίδ’ ἔξω τῶν κακῶν οἰκεῖν γλυκύ.”

not realize it. To be sure, this badness or misery may still manifest itself in some way. Plato considers this possibility when he speaks about a festering and swelling πόλις, which is filled by its statesmen with everything it desires, but has no justice or sound-mindedness.²⁶⁶¹ This πόλις is ill, even if it does not notice it. But one may come to notice it, if this illness produces some crisis. As Socrates says, the πόλις may suffer a fit or an attack of this illness (καταβολή τῆς ἀσθενείας).²⁶⁶² This is for instance what happened when Athens lost the war and its empire (which is what Plato is alluding to in this passage). The cause of this loss was the πόλις' inner state, which had been determined by the previous statesmen, and not those in charge at the time of the crisis. However, as Socrates says, people do not perceive this (οὐκ αἰσθάνονται). They only notice the crisis.

Something similar may happen in the soul. It may be in a bad condition, and we may fail to notice it. Then, a crisis (i.e., some patent badness) may happen, and we will notice that there is a problem (i.e., that there is badness affecting our life). However, even in that case we will tend not to understand exactly what this problem is and how it comes from our inner state. This is due to the fact that we usually have very little self-knowledge. Consequently, we do not notice much of our inner badness, and even what we notice tends to be misinterpreted. In addition, we do not have a clear understanding of what we truly desire, or of what we have truly attained. Thus, we tend not to know exactly how miserable we are. We may easily deem ourselves happy or close to a happy state, even if we are very far from it. But this is not all. Even if we are faced with a description of badness and misery (and especially of latent badness and latent misery), we may still be unable to recognize the defects Plato is describing. We may perhaps recognize Plato's description of the patent defects, but it is not easy to see our latent defects or render them somehow patent, since they lie in the depths of our soul.

In the following, we will try to determine the real extent of these defects or these forms of badness in the unexamined life. We will first consider the soul's patent badness (i.e., those moments of inner conflict or ignorance which the soul promptly identifies) and then we will consider the badness of the soul that is normally latent and hidden, especially when we lead an unexamined life. We will also consider how these two forms of badness (i.e., how the two forms of illness and the two forms of deformity) relate to each other. Finally, we must consider the importance of latent badness and latent misery. As was said above, one could

²⁶⁶¹ See 518e-519b.

²⁶⁶² The expression “καταβολή” is used, for instance, of attacks of fever. Cp. DEMOSTHENES, *Philippica* 3, 29.

perhaps be tempted to think that since they lie in the depths of our soul, they are irrelevant and our life cannot be undesirable or worthless because of them. We should only concern ourselves with patent badness and patent misery. Plato's argument, however, goes in the opposite direction, and we must understand why.

3. The soul's patent badness as a usual feature of the unexamined life

Let us then start by considering the kind of inner badness most promptly identified by us when we lead an unexamined life – namely, the one that is patent or manifest, that produces a crisis we recognize, that disturbs us, and that is clearly undesirable. In general, these are the only kinds of inner disagreement or inner contradiction that are recognized in the unexamined life, and one might be tempted to think that this is what Plato is alluding to when he attacks the unexamined life. Indeed, throughout the dialogues he identifies many forms of patent illness and patent deformity of the soul – i.e., moments in which one consciously deals with them. In a way, this is already indicative of how problematic the unexamined life is. But the fact that one consciously experiences an inner sedition or ignorance does not ensure that one will interpret these phenomena in Platonic terms. Indeed, we will probably disregard them. Hence it is important to consider them in some detail. This will allow us to see how there can be many manifestations of the soul's inner badness in the unexamined life, and it will also allow us to better understand what characterizes the soul's illness and the soul's deformity (thus making it easier to identify it in the depths of the soul). Moreover, we will be able to clearly see how averse the soul is to these kind of inner disagreements, how they disturb or unsettle us, and how they make our life worse, perhaps even undesirable or worthless – depending on the frequency and scope of these inner disagreements. Indeed, they may be more or less frequent, as well as more or less localized, and they may also concern more or less important aspects of our life. But regardless of this variation, they show that we are still distant from the superlative good – and this makes them particularly important, even if they are not what Plato is primarily referring to.

Let us then see each kind of patent badness in turn.

3.1. The patent illness of the soul

The illness of the soul is described by Plato as a sedition or civil war (στάσις), which happens when people or classes that live together fight with one another for control. This is something we can easily see happening within us. The different constitutive drives of the soul can enter into declared conflict and fight for control over particular actions or even over our life in general. When this kind of conflict happens (be it in the πόλις, in a smaller group, or in one's soul), it is difficult not to notice it, since the entities in question can no longer function properly. They become internally divided, they lose their inner harmony and oneness of mind (ὁμόνοια), and become unable to act.²⁶⁶³ Thus, such conflicts are something of which we become painfully aware. We are split apart, pulled in different directions, and we do not know what to do.

Plato supplies many examples of this. Most of them are restricted to a particular action or a particular situation (even though they may have broader consequences), but he also considers the possibility of a deep conflict emerging and affecting our whole life.

Let us start with the localized conflicts (i.e., with the localized forms of patent illness of the soul). The most elaborate consideration of this kind of conflicts can be found in *Republic IV*, in a passage we already considered above.²⁶⁶⁴ Plato uses particular situations of inner conflict in order to differentiate our inborn drives. Indeed, we may be thirsty but calculate that it is better not to drink.²⁶⁶⁵ We may desire to do something ignoble and be angry at ourselves, or we may endure something unpleasant out of our sense of honor or justice.²⁶⁶⁶ Finally, we may argue with our anger, or our ability to calculate may oppose it – such as Odysseus does when he controls his anger against the suitors.²⁶⁶⁷ But this is not all. Later in the *Republic*, Plato also considers tragedies (whether they happen on stage or in real life). He gives the example of someone who lost his son and is pulled apart by the desire to cry (which is associated with the appetitive part) and by the law or reason, which says he shouldn't do it.²⁶⁶⁸ Tragic situations in general present such a kind of conflict. One simply

²⁶⁶³ Cp. in particular *Rep.* 351c ff., where Socrates argues that no entity (be it individual or collective) can act if it does injustice to itself. It can only be unjust towards other entities. For this idea of division, cp. also *Rep.* 422e: “ἐκάστη γὰρ αὐτῶν πόλεις εἰσὶ πάμπολλαι ἀλλ’ οὐ πόλις, τὸ τῶν παιζόντων. δύο μὲν, κἂν ὅτιοῦν ἢ, πολεμία ἀλλήλαις (...).”

²⁶⁶⁴ Cp. in particular *Chap.* 13, Sects. 1 and 2.3.

²⁶⁶⁵ See 439c-d.

²⁶⁶⁶ See 439e-440e.

²⁶⁶⁷ See 440e-441c.

²⁶⁶⁸ See 603c ff.

does not know what to do. But this may also happen in situations that we tend to recognize as good or meaningful. Even the experience of being fascinated with someone or falling in love (ἔρωϑ) may imply strong conflicts between our drives, as Plato illustrates in *Phaedrus*, when he portrays our bad horse and the charioteer arguing with each other, bargaining, and even trying to force the other to obey.²⁶⁶⁹

It is important to bear in mind that, although these conflicts tend to be described as pure manifestations of our drives, these drives are always affected and transformed by each other – and this means that they all have a philosophical or logical character.²⁶⁷⁰ This is particularly clear in the passage from *Phaedrus*, where even the bad horse is depicted as presenting arguments. The inner conflict is thus a conflict between views or standpoints that are motivated by different drives, and our weak love of knowledge does not allow us to solve the contradictions. We do not know what to do, we become disoriented or paralyzed and we may even despair. Our pursuit of the good becomes blocked and we do not know how to proceed. And this is not the only problem. As Plato stresses, we may be convinced of certain views at some point and our views may change or fluctuate, according to the situation and how it stimulates our drives (particularly the non-rational ones). Thus, despite always following our views about what is best, we may come to regret what we did and interpret the situation as a loss of control (ἀκράτεια) or as a case of being weaker than oneself (ἥττων ἐαυτοῦ), and this may cause us to be deeply disappointed with ourselves.²⁶⁷¹

In sum, these inner conflicts may paralyze us and they may also lead us to bad actions. This is already very significant, especially since we often experience such an inner illness in the unexamined life. As Plato writes in the *Republic*, our life is full of these conflicts.²⁶⁷² However, they are for the most part circumstantial, localized, and temporary, and their immediate consequences also tend to be circumscribed. In general, they do not significantly change the inner arrangement of drives (i.e., our inner πολιτεία), and thus they do not affect the system of our life (i.e., our representation of the good and of how we should pursue it, as well as the role things around us should play in this pursuit). The particular modality of

²⁶⁶⁹ See 253d ff.

²⁶⁷⁰ Cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 5.1.

²⁶⁷¹ See e.g. *Prt.* 352d ff. and *Rep.* 430e ff. For more on the topic of ἀκράτεια, cp. Chap. 12 Sect. 5.5, and Chap. 13 Sect. 5.3.

²⁶⁷² See 603d: “ (...) μυρίων τοιούτων ἐναντιωμάτων ἅμα γιγνομένων ἡ ψυχὴ γέμει ἡμῶν.”

unexamined life we adopted is not brought into question. We keep pursuing gain or honor, although the weaker drives may sometimes cause temporary problems.²⁶⁷³

Yet, the patent conflicts between our drives (i.e., the patent illness of our soul) does not need to be so localized. Plato also considers in the *Republic* a much deeper patent conflict, which may affect one's whole life. When describing the changes of political regime, Plato considers the case of young men who – influenced by those around them – are initially torn apart between two drives and two inner πολιτεῖαι, and at least for a while they are unable to decide how they should live.²⁶⁷⁴ In this case, one's entire life and the whole pursuit of the good will be indeterminate. To be sure, Plato is here talking about young people, but this may happen also when we are older (even though our inner πολιτεία tends to be relatively stable). A possible example of this can be found Alcibiades' speech in *Symposium*, where he describes how he is often divided between philosophy (represented by Socrates and his λόγοι) and his pursuit of honor.²⁶⁷⁵ At these moments, one is wholly paralyzed and there is a sort of complete breakdown of the unexamined life. One may then return to the previous configuration or adopt a new one (which will usually be as unexamined as the previous).²⁶⁷⁶

The patent illness of the soul may thus be more superficial or deeper, and this affects its intensity or how much it disturbs us. However, this kind of conflict is always difficult to bear, even if it concerns only a particular action. An ill soul is at war with itself, and its ability to act (i.e., to pursue or preserve what is perceived as good) is severely diminished. One can thus recognize one's own misery. In fact, if this kind of conflict becomes common enough and attacks the most important structures of our life, we may even start considering that our life is worthless and wholly undesirable. Plato's description of the life of a tyrant sometimes seems to suggest precisely this. His life will be full of disturbances, regrets, pains and wailing.²⁶⁷⁷ However, not all unexamined lives come to this extreme, and for many of them life seems to run much more smoothly – and thus to be more valuable and more desirable.

²⁶⁷³ This already indicates that there might be a deeper conflict or problem in our soul (as we will consider in Sect. 4.1 below), but this problem does not become patent as such.

²⁶⁷⁴ See e.g. 549e-550b, 559d ff.

²⁶⁷⁵ See *Smp.* 215e-216c.

²⁶⁷⁶ For more on this, cp. Chap. 13 Sect. 4.4 c), and Chap. 15 Sects. 3.5 and 3.6.

²⁶⁷⁷ See in particular *Rep.* 577a ff.

3.2. The patent deformity of the soul

We saw that the deformity of the soul is characterized as a deviation or swerving off of the soul in its movement towards the truth. The soul fails to hit its target, which means that there is something that eludes it or that it does not know. This ignorance is something of which we are often aware. Indeed, there are many things that we are conscious of not knowing. We may see something from afar and not know what it is, we may notice that we do not know certain attributes of things, we may ask ourselves what someone is thinking, we hear languages we do not know, and we are also faced with the fact that there are certain forms of expert knowledge that we do not possess. However, if we consider these frequent experiences of ignorance, we see that in many cases we do not appear to be particularly disturbed or unsettled by them. This only happens if not knowing something directly interferes with our pursuits. If that is not the case, we tend not to think much about this ignorance, and we certainly do not deem ourselves miserable because of it.

But we saw that this is not the only form of ignorance we have. We also possess false knowledge claims, which constitute a form of double ignorance, and according to our previous analysis, the unexamined life is full of this form of ignorance.²⁶⁷⁸ The problem with this ignorance, however, is that we are unable to perceive that we are actually ignorant. We are convinced of knowing it and the soul simply regards itself as shapely or as commensurate with truth. It thinks it is simply seeing things as they are or seeing life as it is, without any distortion.

Yet, we may also become conscious of our false knowledge claims. We may realize that what we previously supposed to know (either tacitly or expressly) actually eludes us. Things (and even the most important things) may suddenly reveal themselves as an enigma we cannot solve. This happens frequently in everyday life. For instance, we often realize we were deceived by appearances or by what others said.²⁶⁷⁹ Still, such discoveries of our false conceit of knowledge tend to be very localized, and most of our false knowledge claims remain untouched. But there is another form of discovering our false knowledge claims that may reveal how we lack knowledge even in the most important matters – namely, by submitting our beliefs to philosophical examination. This is precisely what we see illustrated

²⁶⁷⁸ For the notion of false knowledge claims, see Chap. 7 Sect. 1, and for its presence in the unexamined live, cp. Chap. 16, Sect. 5.

²⁶⁷⁹ Cp. e.g. *Prt.* 356d: “(...) αὐτή [sc. ἡ τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις] μὲν ἡμᾶς ἐπλάνα καὶ ἐποίει ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω πολλάκις μεταλαμβάνειν ταῦτά καὶ μεταμέλειν καὶ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς αἰρέσεσιν τῶν μεγάλων τε καὶ μικρῶν (...).”

throughout the Platonic corpus. Many characters are asked to put forward and explain their views, and they end up not knowing what to say.²⁶⁸⁰ Philosophical examination produces astonishment and perplexity, and it may also produce the suspicion that we are ignorant of many other things besides those that were directly examined.²⁶⁸¹

The way this process is depicted in Plato's writings is very revealing about our relation to the patent deformity of our soul. As the examination proceeds, the characters grow frustrated and angry. The examination produces a state of disturbance and perplexity (ταραχή καὶ ἀπορία), from which one needs a release (ἀπαλλαγὴ).²⁶⁸² One may blame the examiner, which implies disregarding one's ignorance, or one may accept that one had a false knowledge claim. In the latter case, one will be worried.²⁶⁸³ In fact, Plato even stresses that in this case one will long for knowledge and start inquiring and seeking out what one does not know.²⁶⁸⁴ It is true that the intensity of the experience may vary according to the scope and importance of the matters in question. Moreover, one may try to avoid the experience of being faced with one's ignorance and try to avoid Socrates and his kind of examination (as Alcibiades confesses he does).²⁶⁸⁵ We may indeed distract ourselves from the disturbance caused by the contemplation of our ignorance. But we cannot simply accept it.

This is an important manifestation of our love of knowledge (φιλοσοφία). There are many things that we want or need to know, and when we realize we do not know them, we become very dissatisfied. We regard ourselves as being in a bad state, and if the matter at hand is important enough, and we have no expectation of discovering the truth about it, we may even regard ourselves as miserable. But even if the experience is normally much less intense, it still reveals that we care about knowledge and truth. To be sure, there are many things whose ignorance apparently does not bother us, as was mentioned above. But even those cases of apparent indifference are problematic. It is possible that we are still being guided by the tacit knowledge claim that these things are actually irrelevant, which would

²⁶⁸⁰ For an analysis of this process, see Chap. 7, Sect. 1.2 above.

²⁶⁸¹ Cp. *Sph.* 267e-268a: "(...) διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις κυλίνδῃσιν ἔχει πολλὴν ὑποψίαν καὶ φόβον ὡς ἀγνοεῖ ταῦτα ἃ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ὡς εἰδῶς ἐσημιάτισται."

²⁶⁸² Cp. *Tht.* 168a and *Ap.* 39c-d.

²⁶⁸³ Cp. in particular *Tht.* 148e: "ἀλλ' εὖ ἴσθι, ὦ Σώκρατες, πολλάκις δὴ αὐτὸ ἐπεχείρησα σκέψασθαι, ἀκούων τὰς παρὰ σοῦ ἀποφερομένας ἐρωτήσεις. ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὔτ' αὐτὸς δύναμαι πείσαι ἑμαυτὸν ὡς ἱκανῶς τι λέγω οὔτ' ἄλλου ἀκοῦσαι λέγοντος οὕτως ὡς σὺ διακελεύῃ, οὐ μὲν δὴ αὖ οὐδ' ἀπαλλαγῆναι τοῦ μέλειν."

²⁶⁸⁴ See *Men.* 84c: "[ΣΩ.] οἶει οὖν ἂν αὐτὸν πρότερον ἐπιχειρῆσαι ζητεῖν ἢ μανθάνειν τοῦτο ὃ ᾤετο εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδῶς, πρὶν εἰς ἀπορίαν κατέπεσεν ἠγησάμενος μὴ εἰδέναι, καὶ ἐπόθησεν τὸ εἰδέναι; [ΜΕΝ.] οὐ μοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες." For more on this, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.2 e) above.

²⁶⁸⁵ Cp. *Smp.* 216b: "(...) ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτον μόνον αἰσχύνομαι. σύννοια γὰρ ἑμαυτῷ ἀντιλέγειν μὲν οὐ δυναμένῳ ὡς οὐ δεῖ ποιεῖν ἃ οὕτως κελεύει, ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἀπέλθω, ἠττημένῳ τῆς τιμῆς τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν. δραπετεύω οὖν αὐτὸν καὶ φεύγω, καὶ ὅταν ἴδω, αἰσχύνομαι τὰ ὠμολογημένα."

mean that our indifference to our ignorance is actually based on supposed knowledge. Thus, if we were to lose this supposed knowledge, we would be much more disturbed by not knowing these allegedly irrelevant things.

It seems therefore clear that knowledge is very relevant for us and that we abhor ignorance. This becomes even clearer if we suddenly find ourselves not knowing what to do. In such moments of disorientation, we realize how far we are from attaining what we desire, and we may even fear we will never be able to attain it. Our misery thus becomes patent. Now, this is something that may happen in any modality of unexamined life, no matter how weak its love of knowledge might be. The disturbance caused by ignorance may be directly related with the ruling drive of the soul, or at least it may be amplified by it. It is because we are deeply interested in gain or honor (i.e., because we identify them with the good) that we become so concerned with our ignorance in certain cases – namely, when it harms our possibilities of attaining what we desire. Moreover, we may also become quite disturbed if we suddenly realize that we do not really know what we desire in life – i.e., that we do not know what is the real good. This disturbs us so much because, as is stressed in the *Republic*, we do not just want apparent goods – we want what is really good.²⁶⁸⁶

Thus, despite having other interests, we are also deeply interested in truth – at least in those matters that regard as being more directly relevant for our life. We need at least a certain degree of truth. Adopting indeterminate or false views is not sufficient for us. In fact, Plato affirms that we would never willingly accept a falsehood or lie.²⁶⁸⁷ This shows how there is always some φιλοσοφία present in our soul and how it pervades everything. However, Plato is also aware of how this love of knowledge (and consequently our soul) is usually very weak (or maimed). As he says, one's soul “hates the willing lie [or falsehood: ψεῦδος], both finding it hard to endure in itself and becoming incensed when others lie, but is content to receive the unwilling lie and, when it is caught somewhere being ignorant, isn't vexed but easily accommodates itself, like a swinish beast, to wallowing in ἀμαθία.”²⁶⁸⁸ This does not mean that we can easily and consciously accept something untrue, because

²⁶⁸⁶ See 505d: “τί δέ; τόδε οὐ φανερόν, ὡς δίκαια μὲν καὶ καλὰ πολλοὶ ἂν ἔλοιντο τὰ δοκοῦντα, κἄν εἰ μὴ εἴη, ὅμως ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ κεκτηῖσθαι καὶ δοκεῖν, ἀγαθὰ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἔτι ἄρκεῖ τὰ δοκοῦντα κτᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσιν, τὴν δὲ δόξαν ἐνταῦθα ἤδη πᾶς ἀτιμάζει; καὶ μάλα, ἔφη.”

²⁶⁸⁷ See in particular 382b: “(...) ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὅτι τῇ ψυχῇ περὶ τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι καὶ ἀμαθῆ εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτηῖσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος πάντες ἥκιστα ἂν δέξαιντο, καὶ μισοῦσι μάλιστα αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ.”

²⁶⁸⁸ See 535d-e: “οὐκοῦν καὶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, ταῦτόν τοῦτο ἀνάπηρον ψυχὴν θήσομεν, ἣ ἂν τὸ μὲν ἐκούσιον ψεῦδος μισῇ καὶ χαλεπῶς φέρῃ αὐτὴ τε καὶ ἐτέρων ψευδομένων ὑπεραγανακτῆ, τὸ δ' ἀκούσιον εὐκόλως προσδέχεται καὶ ἀμαθαίνουσά που ἀλισκομένη μὴ ἀγανακτῆ, ἀλλ' εὐχερῶς ὥσπερ θηρίον ὕειον ἐν ἀμαθίᾳ μολύνηται; παντάπασιν μὲν οὖν, ἔφη.”

according to Plato we are not able to willingly deceive ourselves. Rather, Plato is here alluding to the fact that we are not very demanding with our views. We normally do not examine them and even if others show us our ignorance, we can easily disregard it and pay no attention to it. Thus, we unwillingly (i.e., unwittingly) accept being deceived or we unwittingly deceive ourselves. Our ignorance goes unnoticed, and we keep thinking we know things. This is precisely what characterizes the unexamined life.

This unwilling acceptance of falsehood is, however, very problematic. It might suggest that we do not really have a love of knowledge. As Nietzsche says, our will to truth may be based on a will to appearance (*Schein*), illusion (*Illusion*) or deception (*Täuschung*).²⁶⁸⁹ If the problem is only becoming aware of our deformity in some important matters, then this is all we would require to be happy – namely, deceptions strong enough for us never to realize that something is amiss. In particular, we would need the illusion that we really attained what we really desire – i.e., the real good.

The question, then, is what happens when we do not realize the deformity of our soul. When we lead an unexamined life and do not examine things, thus being convinced that we know much more than we really do, are we also leading an undesirable life, simply in virtue of our soul's cognitive defects and latent deformity? This kind of latent inner disagreement (as well as the latent disagreement corresponding to the soul's illness) is what we must now consider.

4. The soul's latent badness as an essential feature of the unexamined life

Although the unexamined life is exposed to experiences of patent badness, which reveal the soul's disagreement with itself, it may however happen that these experiences are localized and weak. One may also have some success steering clear of them. Therefore, we cannot say that all modalities of unexamined life are undesirable or “unlivable” just on the account of such self-disagreements. If this were what Socrates means when he says that the unexamined life is not worth living, he would be wrong.

However, Plato also recognizes the possibility of latent badness (or latent self-disagreements). Our soul may be terribly ill or full of deformity without realizing it. This

²⁶⁸⁹ See KSA 13, 522: “Der Wille zum Schein, zur Illusion, zur Täuschung, zum Werden und Wechseln (zur objektive Täuschung) gilt hier als tiefer, ursprünglicher, metaphysischer als der Wille zur Wahrheit, zur Wirklichkeit, zum Sein: – letzteres ist selbst bloß eine Form des Willens zur Illusion.” Cp. also e.g. KSA 5, 15-16.

illness and this deformity may have different degrees, and they may be much worse in certain cases (such as when one is a tyrant). But all modalities of unexamined life are significantly marked by these defects, and this is what renders them miserable. The problem is that we are normally ignorant of our own state and have a bad self-diagnosis.²⁶⁹⁰ In other words, we do not know ourselves and do not know our own defects. It is indeed difficult to look at the soul and see the exact state it is in. The inner arrangement or πολιτεία of the soul, which determines our life, lies in the depths of our being (i.e., we do not see it directly, even if it underpins our whole life), and most of our views are tacit and unexamined. Consequently, we do not see any inner disagreements. We simply consider whether or not we attain our declared goals, or whether or not we expect to attain them in the future. In some cases, we may be satisfied with what we have and deem ourselves happy. But, as will be shown, this diagnosis is already an expression of the soul's latent illness and deformity, which prevent us from recognizing our state. We can only recognize it if acquire a different perspective over ourselves – one that is aware of our inner constitution and is able to see what happens with us. This is precisely what the Platonic corpus tries to present.

Let us then see Plato's description both of the soul's latent illness and of its latent deformity, and also how this description determines his appraisal of the unexamined life.

4.1. The latent illness of the soul

In most moments of the unexamined life, one's inner being seems to be completely free from seditions (στάσεις), and one is not at risk of losing control (or at least appearing to lose control) and being guided by one's irrational parts. One's soul is apparently healthy, our inner πολιτεία seems stable, our constitutive drives have a stable arrangement, and our actions take place without problems or conflicts of motivations. It is true that there can be many different arrangements, and some of them (especially the life controlled by the love of gain) are more prone to seditions than others. But there can also be arrangements that can avoid most, perhaps even all seditions.

If this were the only form of sedition or inner conflict Plato had identified, then we would not be able to say that all modalities of unexamined life are essentially ill. But Plato considers another form of inner sedition or inner illness, which lies deeper and is more decisive. We saw that the unexamined life is always characterized by a weak love of

²⁶⁹⁰ See e.g. *Alc. I* 127d: “(...) κινδυνεύω δὲ καὶ πάλαι λεληθέναι ἑμαυτὸν αἴσχιστα ἔχων.”

knowledge (φιλοσοφία). This means that the soul is ruled by a non-philosophical drive (either one's love of gain or one's love of honor), and the philosophical drive is subordinated to this ruling drive and helps it attain its ends. Indeed, one's love of knowledge helps the ruling drive create a certain way of seeing things and a certain way of living. This inner arrangement, however, is characterized by Plato as a form of illness. It constitutes a different form of inner conflict or, as Plato says in the *Republic*, a form of inner injustice. This becomes particularly clear in 444b, when Socrates says: "Mustn't it, in its turn, be a certain faction (στάσις) among those three [namely, the three parts of the soul] – a meddling, interference, and rebellion of a part of the soul against the whole? The purpose of the rebellious part is to rule in the soul although this is not proper, since by nature it is fit to be a slave to that which belongs to the ruling class. Something of this sort I suppose we'll say, and that the confusion and wandering of these parts are injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, lack of learning [or, more properly, stupidity: ἀμαθία], and, in sum, vice [κακία] entire."²⁶⁹¹ The problem, therefore, is the fact that all non-philosophical πολιτεῖαι go against our inner constitution and the constitution of the soul's drives. Our different parts or our different drives do not all have the same abilities and value. Some are better than others and φιλοσοφία in particular is the best. Consequently, this outlines which one should rule and what the proper or the best inner πολιτεία is.²⁶⁹² If this is the πολιτεία of our soul and the best part rules, our soul is healthy. If, however, we go against our constitution (φύσις) and the best part is ruled by one of the worst, then our soul is ill.²⁶⁹³

But why is our love of knowledge the best part of the soul? This is partially owed to its object of desire. Our love of knowledge is directed at objectivity or true being, which transcends our self-interest and its limitations, whereas the object of the other drives (gain and honor) is much more limited. But their difference in value is also determined by their ability to rule and to guide us to the superlative good. Whereas the other drives are

²⁶⁹¹ “Οὐκοῦν στάσιν τινὰ αὖ τριῶν ὄντων τούτων δεῖ αὐτὴν εἶναι καὶ πολυπραγμοσύνην καὶ ἀλλοτριπραγμοσύνην καὶ ἐπανάστασιν μέρους τινὸς τῷ ὅλῳ τῆς ψυχῆς, ἢν ἄρχῃ ἐν αὐτῇ οὐ προσῆκον, ἀλλὰ τοιοῦτου ὄντος φύσει οἴου πρέπειν αὐτῷ δουλεύειν, τῷ δ' οὐ δουλεύειν ἀρχικοῦ γένους ὄντι; τοιαῦτ' ἄττα οἶμαι φήσομεν καὶ τὴν τούτων ταραχὴν καὶ πλάνην εἶναι τὴν τε ἀδικίαν καὶ ἀκολασίαν καὶ δειλίαν καὶ ἀμαθίαν καὶ συλλήβδην πᾶσαν κακίαν.” I follow once more A. Bloom's translation.

²⁶⁹² See e.g. *Rep.* 431a and *Phd.* 79e-80 (taking into consideration that the soul is here identified with the love of knowledge). Cp. also Chap. 13, Sect. 6.5 above.

²⁶⁹³ Plato expressly states this immediately after the passage just quoted, in 444d-e: “ἔστι δὲ τὸ μὲν ὑγίειαν ποιεῖν τὰ ἐν τῷ σώματι κατὰ φύσιν καθιστάναι κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ' ἀλλήλων, τὸ δὲ νόσον παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ' ἄλλου. ἔστι γάρ. οὐκοῦν αὖ, ἔφην, τὸ δικαιοσύνην ἐμποιεῖν τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κατὰ φύσιν καθιστάναι κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ' ἀλλήλων, τὸ δὲ ἀδικίαν παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ' ἄλλου; κομιδῆ, ἔφη. ἀρετὴ μὲν ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὑγίειά τε τις ἂν εἴη καὶ κάλλος καὶ εὐεξία ψυχῆς, κακία δὲ νόσος τε καὶ αἰσχος καὶ ἀσθένεια. ἔστιν οὕτω.”

constitutively blind, the love of knowledge is what allows us to see where we are going. In this sense, it is more fit to rule. In fact, we saw in the previous chapter that it always rules somehow, insofar as it determines itself and thus determines the whole inner arrangement of the drives. However, it can relinquish control, and in that case it will be controlled by the other drives. When this happens, it still shapes our way of seeing and acting, but it will do so in a limited or distorted manner. In other words, it will be contradicting itself. It is still related to knowledge, but it follows the dictates of something other than reality as if it were reality. The other drives, in turn, also contradict themselves. Although they are blind and unfit to rule, they come to control the soul. They rise above their station, they do not mind their business, and are marked by *πολυπραγμοσύνη* and *ἀλλοτριοπραγμοσύνη*. These terms have strong political connotations and imply an overturn of the social order.²⁶⁹⁴ The people less qualified to govern take control, and this corresponds to a kind of rebellion or insurrection (*ἐπανάστασις*).

In sum, the unexamined life is essentially characterized by the fact that the soul does not follow its proper guide. The other parts (although blind) resist this guide, and start controlling the soul.²⁶⁹⁵ The best part is then enslaved to one of the other two, which are worse, and this enslavement renders the whole soul slavish. As Plato says, the soul is weaker than itself and cannot control itself.²⁶⁹⁶ In a way, it is in a permanent state of *ἀκράτεια* (even though the ruling drive is always contaminated by the love of knowledge and, in this sense, our soul never loses rational control and is never purely controlled by irrational drives, as we saw above).²⁶⁹⁷ The soul is thus poorly governed, and it becomes a soul that governs and cares badly. This means that it is unable to correctly perform its function (*ἔργον*), which according to the *Republic* lies precisely in taking care of things, ruling, deliberating, and living.²⁶⁹⁸ Indeed, the wrong arrangement of drives has an impact on the whole pursuit of the good – i.e., on the practical system of life, as well as the cognitive system that underlies it.

²⁶⁹⁴ For more on *πολυπραγμοσύνη*, see footnote 188 above.

²⁶⁹⁵ The soul has thus a *τυφλὸς ἡγεμών*, as is said in *Rep.* 554b. Although Plato is here talking about the pursuit of possessions, this applies in a way to all unexamined forms of life.

²⁶⁹⁶ For the notion of being weaker than oneself (*ἥττων ἑαυτοῦ*) in the context of the tripartition, see in particular *Rep.* 430e-431b.

²⁶⁹⁷ Cp. Chap. 13, Sect. 5.3.

²⁶⁹⁸ See 354d: “ἴθι δὴ, μετὰ ταῦτα τόδε σκέψαι. ψυχῆς ἔστιν τι ἔργον ὃ ἄλλω τῶν ὄντων οὐδ’ ἂν ἐνὶ πράξει, οἷον τὸ τοιόνδε· τὸ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ ἄρχειν καὶ βουλευέσθαι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, ἔσθ’ ὅτῳ ἄλλω ἢ ψυχῇ δικαίως ἂν αὐτὰ ἀποδοῖμεν καὶ φαίμεν ἴδια ἐκείνης εἶναι; οὐδενὶ ἄλλω. τί δ’ αὖ τὸ ζῆν; οὐ ψυχῆς φήσομεν ἔργον εἶναι; μάλιστα γ’, ἔφη.”

One's whole life is turned upside down.²⁶⁹⁹ On the surface everything will appear to be fine, the soul will appear to be healthy, but at its core it will be profoundly ill.²⁷⁰⁰

According to the *Republic*, this is precisely what injustice in human soul consists in, and it is also the basis of all other forms of badness or vices (κακία): namely, unrestraint, ignorance, and cowardice.²⁷⁰¹ It is true that there are still degrees of vice, and only the worst soul (the one where the worst drive has the greatest power) reaches the height of vice.²⁷⁰² However, all non-philosophical or unexamined lives are marked by a constitutive badness or defectiveness – and this is then expressed in all views and acts of those lives. All the acts of the souls leading an unexamined life will be to a certain extent unjust, since they are based on this inner disposition (even if there are degrees of injustice, and only the most extreme forms of injustice and the acts resulting from it tend to be regarded as unjust or vicious by us). To make matters worse, any unjust act tends to render the soul's inner disposition even more unjust, by stimulating its worst parts.²⁷⁰³ This is more clearly seen in the case of the most unjust actions, which nurture our love of gain, and end up rendering one's soul tyrannical. Thus, an apparently healthy course of life may actually correspond to a constant increase of the soul's illness.

We have thus identified a modality of latent badness. Because of the φιλοσοφία's weakness, one's soul becomes worse than it could be and even slavish, and this inner state is then reflected in one's whole life. Everything will be an expression of one's badness, and thus one will be miserable, even if one does not notice it. This is why Plato says that injustice is the greatest evil.²⁷⁰⁴ It is indeed the cause of the greatest misery, as can be seen in the case

²⁶⁹⁹ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 442a-b: “καὶ τούτω δὴ οὕτω τραφέντε καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς τὰ αὐτῶν μαθόντε καὶ παιδευθέντε προστήσεσθον τοῦ ἐπιθυμητικοῦ – ὃ δὴ πλεῖστον τῆς ψυχῆς ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἐστὶ καὶ χρημάτων φύσει ἀπληστότατον – ὃ τηρήσετον μὴ τῷ πίμπλασθαι τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα καλουμένων ἡδονῶν πολὺ καὶ ἰσχυρὸν γενόμενον οὐκ αὖ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττει, ἀλλὰ καταδουλώσασθαι καὶ ἄρχειν ἐπιχειρήσει ὧν οὐ προσήκον αὐτῷ γένει, καὶ σύμπαντα τὸν βίον πάντων ἀνατρέψει.”

²⁷⁰⁰ This corresponds precisely to what Socrates says in *Grg.* 464a-b: “[ΣΩ.] τί δέ; δοκοῦσαν μὲν εὐεξίαν, οὖσαν δ' οὐ; οἷον τοιόνδε λέγω· πολλοὶ δοκοῦσιν εὖ ἔχειν τὰ σώματα, οὐς οὐκ ἂν ῥαδίως αἰσθοιτό τις ὅτι οὐκ εὖ ἔχουσιν, ἀλλ' ἢ ἰατρός τε καὶ τῶν γυμναστικῶν τις. [ΓΟΡ.] ἀληθῆ λέγεις. [ΣΩ.] τὸ τοιοῦτον λέγω καὶ ἐν σώματι εἶναι καὶ ἐν ψυχῇ, ὃ ποιεῖ μὲν δοκεῖν εὖ ἔχειν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἔχει δὲ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον.”

²⁷⁰¹ See 444b. The relation between the inner στάσις and vices in these sense is also stressed in the *Sophist* (see 228e), as we saw in Sect. 2.2 above.

²⁷⁰² See in particular the description of a tyrannical soul and the catalogue of its vices in *Rep.* 589c ff.

²⁷⁰³ See e.g. *Grg.* 480a-b (which can be interpreted in light of what Plato says in the *Republic* about the soul's inner sedition and illness): “ἐὰν δέ γε ἀδικήσῃ ἢ αὐτὸς ἢ ἄλλος τις ὧν ἂν κήδηται, αὐτὸν ἐκόντα ἰέναι ἐκεῖσε ὅπου ὡς τάχιστα δώσει δίκην, παρὰ τὸν δικαστὴν ὡσπερ παρὰ τὸν ἰατρόν, σπεύδοντα ὅπως μὴ ἐγγχρονισθῆν τὸ νόσημα τῆς ἀδικίας ὑποῦλον τὴν ψυχὴν ποιήσει καὶ ἀνίατον (...).”

²⁷⁰⁴ See e.g. *Rep.* 366e (which is what Socrates will try to prove throughout the *Republic*). Cp. also *Grg.* 469b, 479c-d, 480d.

of the tyrant, according to *Gorgias* and the *Republic*.²⁷⁰⁵ But even the less unjust lives will be seriously harmed by their inner injustice, which will compromise their ability to attain the superlative good they desire. The soul will have no true harmony, no true oneness of mind (ὁμόνοια), no true unity. This would only be the case if each part were to perform its proper role and were not in contradiction with itself. Only then would the soul be truly one and truly healthy.

This also means that only at this point would the soul be completely free from the patent illness or the patent seditions we considered above. Indeed, although an unjust life may spend much time without being manifestly torn apart by its drives, its inner πολιτεία will still be defective and in conflict with itself, and thus it will still be exposed to the possibility of patent seditions, which are actually a sort of fit or attack (καταβολή) of the soul's latent illness. As Plato says in the *Republic*, “a sick body needs only a slight shock (μικρὰ ῥοπή) from the outside to become ill and is sometimes at civil war with itself even without this.”²⁷⁰⁶ Likewise, one's soul may easily fall in a patent and intensely felt civil war. But this is not the only problem. The latent illness of the soul is also directly connected with the soul's deformity, insofar as our inner πολιτεία expresses itself in our beliefs. However, our inner πολιτεία is also affected by the beliefs we have, and the badness of the latter has its own specific traits and its specific importance. Hence, it is important to consider it in isolation from what we just saw.

4.2. The latent deformity of the soul

The second kind of latent badness – namely, the soul's latent deformity – is easier to conceive. Indeed, it does not necessarily presuppose the partition of the soul, and although in some texts (such as the *Republic*) it is directly connected with what was just seen (especially with the weakness of the soul's love of knowledge), it can also be conceived independently of this conception of inner illness. This is why we find many more references to it throughout the corpus. In a way, all Plato's texts are concerned with this kind of latent badness.

²⁷⁰⁵ See in particular *Rep.* 580b-c: “μισθωσώμεθα οὖν κήρυκα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἢ αὐτὸς ἀνεῖπω ὅτι ὁ Ἀρίστωνος υἱὸς τὸν ἄριστόν τε καὶ δικαιοτάτον εὐδαιμονέστατον ἔκρινε, τοῦτον δ' εἶναι τὸν βασιλικώτατον καὶ βασιλεύοντα αὐτοῦ, τὸν δὲ κάκιστόν τε καὶ ἀδικώτατον ἀθλιώτατον, τοῦτον δὲ αὖ τυγχάνειν ὄντα ὃς ἂν τυραννικώτατος ὦν ἑαυτοῦ τε ὅτι μάλιστα τυραννῆ καὶ τῆς πόλεως; ἀνειρήσθω σοι, ἔφη.”

²⁷⁰⁶ See 556e: “(...) ὡσπερ σῶμα νοσῶδες μικρᾶς ῥοπῆς ἔξωθεν δεῖται προσλαβέσθαι πρὸς τὸ κάμνειν, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἄνευ τῶν ἔξω στασιάζει αὐτὸ αὐτῷ (...).”

Let us then see what characterizes the soul's latent deformity and how it affects the unexamined life. Some important aspects of this question were already considered. We saw that in the *Sophist*, Plato says that the soul is directed at truth, but it may miss its target, and this deviation constitutes ignorance – which is what the soul's deformity consists of. One may be aware of this deviation (i.e., one's deformity may become patent). However, the soul is not necessarily aware of having missed the target and lacking knowledge of things. In fact, Plato stresses how most of our ignorance is unconscious or latent – and not because we are totally oblivious to the things in question, but rather because we have the firm conviction (be it express or tacit) that we know them. We are full of knowledge claims and many (perhaps even most or all of them) are false or baseless. We have much conceit of wisdom – i.e., we are full of folly or stupidity (ἀμαθία). Moreover, this is not just another form of ignorance. It actually constitutes the highest form of deviation from the target. Stupidity is a hidden (and therefore double) ignorance. We are much further away from things than if we were simply ignorant of them, and we are not even able to seek them out them, because we do not notice any defect in our access to them.²⁷⁰⁷ We mistake a mere image (i.e., a defective version of something) for the actual thing, and in this sense we are (according to Plato) dreaming about this thing.²⁷⁰⁸

It is also important to remember that, according to Plato's diagnosis, one is not just dreaming about a few things when one leads an unphilosophical life. The whole unexamined life is a dream. We attribute many predicates wrongly, we do not have a clear understanding of what they consist in, and our entire ontology (which tends not to recognize the existence the general predicates or εἶδη) is incorrect. This is not only a cognitive problem, but it also has strong practical implications, insofar as the whole complex system of practical beliefs that compose our life and guide our every step (namely, the beliefs about what is the good, how we can achieve it, and what role everything plays in this pursuit) is distorted. There is thus a global concealment (λήθη). Our access to things, to life in general, and to ourselves is defective, and the reality that appears to us is to a great extent a mere illusion. Everything is

²⁷⁰⁷ When this happens, we become a particular form of being in-between (μεταξύ). We saw above that the soul's desire is characterized in *Symposium* as lying between several pairs of opposites, including simple ignorance and full knowledge. This latter intermediacy corresponds to the soul's desire for knowledge (φιλοσοφία), but in the case of knowledge claims, the soul already thinks it possesses full knowledge – hence it becomes a stationary in-between or an intermediate being that has forgotten its intermediate status. For more on this, cp. Chap. 12 Sect. 4.3, and Chap. 14 Sect. 3.1.

²⁷⁰⁸ As we saw, for Plato the dream state consists precisely in this mistake. Cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 2.4, and Chap. 16, Sect. 5.2 f).

shadowy (including ourselves), and we live in a sort of Hades – i.e., our life is a sort of death.²⁷⁰⁹ In sum, we are not what we think we are and we are not where we think we are.

Yet, our ignorance escapes our notice (λανθάνει).²⁷¹⁰ We do not know ourselves and how deficient our cognitive state is.²⁷¹¹ Our weak love of knowledge is not strong enough to notice this, and the ruling drive of the soul also prevents us from noticing it. Consequently, we are not disturbed or distressed by this ignorance, and we are also not ashamed of it. There seems to be no problem. Our love of gain or our love of honor may be satisfied (or at least they may think they are satisfied), even if we do not possess actual knowledge. In other words, we can think we are happy or on our way to happiness, despite the latent deformity of our soul.

But is this really something to which we are indifferent? The characters in the dialogues state several times that we desire truth and knowledge and reject untruth and ignorance. A few of these passages were already considered above. In the *Sophist*, he writes: “every soul is unwillingly ignorant of everything.”²⁷¹² In the *Republic*, it is said that everyone would least accept (and in fact hates) having a falsehood in the soul.²⁷¹³ Later in the same text, it is also agreed (among other things) that being deceived about the truth is bad, and to possess the truth is good.²⁷¹⁴ A false δόξα (at least if it is about the most important things in life) is even considered the greatest evil for human beings.²⁷¹⁵ Inversely, things becoming manifest is a good for all human beings.²⁷¹⁶ In *Philebus*, it is said that φρόνησις and νοῦς (usually understood as forms of perfect knowledge or perfect access to the truth) are never

²⁷⁰⁹ Cp. e.g. *Men.* 100a, *Grg.* 492e, *Rep.* 534c-d.

²⁷¹⁰ Cp. *Sph.* 249e: “ὦ μακάριε, οὐκ ἐννοεῖς ὅτι νῦν ἐσμεν ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ τῇ πλείστη περι αὐτοῦ, φαινόμεθα δὲ τι λέγειν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς;”

²⁷¹¹ For the relation between knowing oneself and one’s ignorance, cp. in particular *Phlb.* 48c-49a.

²⁷¹² See 228c: “ἀλλὰ μὴν ψυχὴν γε ἴσμεν ἄκουσαν πᾶσαν πᾶν ἀγνοοῦσαν.” I follow once more S. Benardete’s translation: S. BENARDETE, *The Being of the Beautiful. Plato’s Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

²⁷¹³ See 382b: “ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὅτι τῇ ψυχῇ περι τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι καὶ ἀμαθῆ εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτηῖσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος πάντες ἥκιστα ἂν δέξαιντο, καὶ μισοῦσι μάλιστα αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ.”

²⁷¹⁴ See 413a: “ἢ οὐ τὸ μὲν ἐψεῦσθαι τῆς ἀληθείας κακόν, τὸ δὲ ἀληθεύειν ἀγαθόν;” Cp. also *Euthd.* 281e: “(...) τῶν μὲν ἄλλων οὐδὲν ὄν οὔτε ἀγαθόν οὔτε κακόν, τοῦτοι δὲ δυοῖν ὄντοι ἢ μὲν σοφία ἀγαθόν, ἢ δὲ ἀμαθία κακόν (...).”

²⁷¹⁵ See *Grg.* 458a-b: “οὐδὲν γὰρ οἶμαι τοσοῦτον κακόν εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅσον δόξα [458β] ψευδῆς περι ὧν τυγχάνει νῦν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ὧν.” Cp. also *Phd.* 83c: “(...) ὁ πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν ἐστι, τοῦτο πάσχει καὶ οὐ λογίζεται αὐτό. τί τοῦτο, ὦ Σώκρατες; ἔφη ὁ Κέρβης. ὅτι ψυχὴ παντὸς ἀνθρώπου ἀναγκάζεται ἅμα τε ἡσθῆναι σφόδρα ἢ λυπηθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι περι ὃ ἂν μάλιστα τοῦτο πάσχει, τοῦτο ἐναργέστατον τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον· ταῦτα δὲ μάλιστα τὰ ὀρατά· ἢ οὐ; πάνυ γε.”

²⁷¹⁶ Cp. *Chrm.* 166d: “ἢ οὐ κοινὸν οἶε ἀγαθόν εἶναι σχεδόν τι πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, γίγνεσθαι καταφανὲς ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ὅπῃ ἔχει; καὶ μάλα, ἦ δ’ ὅς, ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες.”

shameful (αἰσχρός).²⁷¹⁷ In *Laws*, truth is said to be not only the greatest good, but also what renders us happy.²⁷¹⁸ There are also several other passages that declare that those that have φρόνησις are good and those that have ἀφροσύνη are bad.²⁷¹⁹ In fact, φρόνησις and knowledge in general is associated with ἀρετή, practical success and happiness.²⁷²⁰

Several of these passages seem to be mostly concerned with the usefulness of truth for our practical success or our happiness, and they stress the fact that our psychic deformity is not just something that is hidden from us – it can actually have very serious practical consequences. We may commit serious mistakes that prevent us even from attaining what we think we want. Moreover, we may have a very wrong idea of what we really want.²⁷²¹ In sum, our life is guided by a blinded principle and not by true insight.²⁷²² We rush into things without proper education, just like Alcibiades.²⁷²³ Consequently, we may easily fail to attain the good we so deeply desire.

To be sure, we may fail to notice any practical mistakes, or we may not associate them with ignorance, and instead blame other things. In fact, much of our satisfaction with gain or honor (if we have any) depends on our ignorance. Therefore, it may seem that we can be benefited by this ignorance, and also that we are not necessarily miserable in virtue of it. However, according to Plato, this is not the case. Our relation with truth runs much deeper. We may have a wrong idea of what we really want and we may think we attain it, but as is emphasized in the *Republic*, we do not pursue apparent goods, but rather the real good.²⁷²⁴ We may thus be missing out and failing to fulfill ourselves, even if we are convinced we are attaining what we desire and are therefore happy. The state in which we just think we are happy (i.e., the state of δοκεῖν εὐδαίμονα εἶναι, as is said in the *Apology*) is an inferior state and it falls very short of the true best state. To use Plato's image in the *Republic*, this state is at best a relative upper region (i.e., an intermediate state, better than others), and not the true

²⁷¹⁷ See 65e: “ἀλλ’ οὖν φρόνησιν μὲν καὶ νοῦν, ὃ Σώκρατες, οὐδεὶς πώποτε οὔθ’ ὕπαρ οὔτ’ ὄναρ αἰσχρὸν οὔτε εἶδεν οὔτε ἐπενόησεν οὐδαμῆ οὐδαμῶς οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ὄντα οὔτε ἐσόμενον.”

²⁷¹⁸ See 730c: “ἀλήθεια δὴ πάντων μὲν ἀγαθῶν θεοῖς ἡγεῖται, πάντων δὲ ἀνθρώποις· ἧς ὁ γενήσεσθαι μέλλων μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων ἐξ ἀρχῆς εὐθὺς μέτοχος εἶη, ἵνα ὡς πλεῖστον χρόνον ἀληθῆς ὦν διαβιοῖ.”

²⁷¹⁹ See *Cri.* 44d, *Alc. I* 121a, *Cra.* 386b, 398b, *Grg.* 489e,

²⁷²⁰ See *Chrm.* 173b-d, *Men.* 88c ff., *Euthd.* 281a-c,

²⁷²¹ Cp. the distinction between what one wants and what seems best or what one thinks is best for oneself, in *Grg.* 466b ff.

²⁷²² Cp. *Rep.* 554b.

²⁷²³ See *Alc. I* 118b: “βαβαῖ ἄρα, ὃ Ἀλκιβιάδη, οἷον πάθος πέπονθας· ὁ ἐγὼ ὀνομάζειν μὲν ὀκνῶ, ὅμως δέ, ἐπειδὴ μόνω ἐσμέν, ῥητέον. ἀμαθία γὰρ συνοικεῖς, ὃ βέλτιστε, τῇ ἐσχάτῃ, ὡς ὁ λόγος σου κατηγορεῖ καὶ σὺ σαυτοῦ· διὸ καὶ ἄττεις ἄρα πρὸς τὰ πολιτικὰ πρὶν παιδευθῆναι.”

²⁷²⁴ See once more 505d: “τόδε οὐ φανερόν, ὡς δίκαια μὲν καὶ καλὰ πολλοὶ ἂν ἔλοιντο τὰ δοκοῦντα, κἂν εἰ μὴ εἶη, ὅμως ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ κεκτησθαι καὶ δοκεῖν, ἀγαθὰ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἔτι ἀρκεῖ τὰ δοκοῦντα κτᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσιν, τὴν δὲ δόξαν ἐνταῦθα ἤδη πᾶς ἀτιμάζει· καὶ μάλα, ἔφη.”

upper region, which corresponds to real fulfillment or fullness (πληρώσις).²⁷²⁵ Thus, if the soul does not attain knowledge and being (i.e., if it is still deformed and its love of knowledge is frustrated), it cannot be satisfied. It still lacks the knowledge it longs for, but it does not realize it, and thus it does not seek the truth. In this sense, our soul is in a bad state. It lacks knowledge, and this is a form of emptiness with respect to what it wants and needs.²⁷²⁶ All this means that knowledge does not only help us attain the superlative good we desire – it is an essential part of the good. Plato goes even further, and seems to affirm that what we really desire and what really fulfils us (and to this extent, what corresponds to the real upper region) is also that which partakes more in pure being – namely, the εἶδη.²⁷²⁷ This strongly suggests that, according to him, we can only be happy (and our life can only be really worth living) if we are contemplating the truth – and especially εἶδη such as the good and beauty.²⁷²⁸ But whether or not this is the superlative good, we are directed at truth, and if the soul fails to attain it, it will be miserable and its life will be undesirable or worthless. We will be like shadows in Hades, or our life will be a sort of sleeping state.²⁷²⁹ We will not be really here, and we will not be fully what we are. An essential component of our desire – our love of knowledge – will contradict itself, and so will we.

It is, of course, easy to accept this state, but only because we are not aware of it. At best, we have an abstract notion of its possibility. But according to Plato, we would never accept it if we were to recognize it.²⁷³⁰ We would not be able to consider ourselves fulfilled without possessing the truth and without possessing a real superlative good. Lacking truth is always a deep frustration of our being. We want to possess it – or at least we want to be as close to it as possible. Thus, being convinced that we know what we do not know only makes matters worse, since we grow more distant from the truth. As seems to be indicated in *Philebus*, the best thing is to know everything, and the second best thing is not to be unaware of oneself – i.e., to be aware of one's ignorance.²⁷³¹ This state of conscious ignorance is characteristic of Socrates, and he clearly states in the *Apology* that this is a better state – even

²⁷²⁵ Cp. *Rep.* 583b ff. (and especially 584d-585a).

²⁷²⁶ See *Rep.* 585b: “ἄγνοια δὲ καὶ ἀφροσύνη ἄρ’ οὐ κενότης ἐστὶ γῆς περὶ ψυχὴν αὐτῆς ἕξεως; μάλα γε.”

²⁷²⁷ See *Rep.* 585b ff.

²⁷²⁸ See in particular *Smp.* 211c-d: “(...) ἐπ’ ἐκεῖνο τὸ μάθημα τελευτῆσαι, ὃ ἐστὶν οὐκ ἄλλου ἢ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα, καὶ γινῶ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν ὃ ἐστὶ καλόν. ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου, ὃ φίλε Σώκρατες, ἔφη ἡ Μαντινικὴ ξένη, εἴπερ που ἄλλοθι, βιωτὸν ἀνθρώπων, θεωμένω αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν.”

²⁷²⁹ Cp. once more *Rep.* 534c-d.

²⁷³⁰ This is precisely what is expressed in *Rep.* 382b and 535d-e (as we saw in Sect. 3.2 above).

²⁷³¹ See 19c: “(...) καλὸν μὲν τὸ σύμπαντα γινώσκειν τῷ σώφρονι, δεύτερος δ’ εἶναι πλοῦς δοκεῖ μὴ λανθάνειν αὐτὸν αὐτόν.”

in comparison with a state that has some knowledge, but also much conceit of wisdom.²⁷³² It is also said in *Gorgias* that it is better to be refuted and thus delivered from false beliefs.²⁷³³ Finally, in *Charmides* Socrates declares his fear of not noticing that he does not know what he thinks to know.²⁷³⁴ In sum, patent deformity – i.e., simple ignorance – is preferable to latent ignorance. It is closer to truth and it allows us to search for it. We are thus less miserable if we are aware of not knowing. Inversely, we are extremely miserable when we wrongly think we know everything (or at least everything that matters) – and this is precisely what happens in the unexamined life.

This is decisive for Plato’s judgment of this life as worthless, undesirable or unacceptable, and we can already see why. Still, it is important to reconsider all the inner disagreements (both patent and latent) we just considered, discuss their meaning in more detail, and consider how the unexamined life tends to react to such a diagnosis (as well as what guides this reaction). In doing so, we will be able to determine more clearly the true meaning of Plato’s appraisal of the unexamined life.

5. The significance of this diagnosis for us

According to the Platonic corpus, the unexamined life is a life full of bad things (κακά), which are primarily based on the inner badness, defectiveness or vice (κακία) of the soul that leads such a life. Most of this κακία is latent, and the misery of such a life is also mostly latent. We fail to attain what we desire, we are very far from the superlative good – in fact, we are not even on our way to it. Because of our inner state, we are completely deviated from what we desire and going on the opposite direction. Our access to the good is blocked and we can only attain bad things – i.e., attain things we do not really desire and that help prevent us from attaining what we desire.

This inner defectiveness of the unexamined life derives from its own structure – namely, from the weakness of its love of knowledge, which results in a complete (or almost complete) absence of philosophical examination. One is ruled by a non-philosophical drive and simply accepts the views suggested by it. As a result, one is often faced with cases of inner sedition and ignorance – and, more than that, one’s soul is

²⁷³² See *Ap.* 22e: “(...) ὥστε με ἐμαντὸν ἀνερωτᾶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ χρησιμοῦ πότερα δεξαίμην ἂν οὕτως ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν, μήτε τι σοφὸς ὢν τὴν ἐκείνων σοφίαν μήτε ἀμαθὴς τὴν ἀμαθίαν, ἢ ἀμφοτέρω ἀ ἐκείνοι ἔχουσιν ἔχειν. ἀπεκρινάμην οὖν ἐμαντῷ καὶ τῷ χρησιμῷ ὅτι μοι λυσιτελοῖ ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν.”

²⁷³³ See *Grg.* 458a, 461a.

²⁷³⁴ See *Chrm.* 166d: “(...) φοβούμενος μή ποτε λάθω οἰόμενος μὲν τι εἰδέναι, εἰδὼς δὲ μή.”

constitutively marked by sedition and the worst kind of ignorance. As we will discuss in the following chapter, if one were to devote oneself to philosophical examination, much of this could perhaps change. But as it is (and if we are to trust this description), the soul's case seems hopeless.

The Platonic diagnosis of the unexamined life is therefore very harsh. But what exactly does this mean for us – i.e., for human beings in general, who for the most part (if not in their entirety) lead an unexamined life? One will hardly agree with the diagnosis, and even if one admits that it might be right, one might still be tempted to think that, since most of the badness and misery in question are latent, they are not really important, and it is actually better not to be aware of them. This is how the unexamined life tends to react to its own diagnosis. To a certain extent, we already considered this reaction and tried to show its senselessness, but now we have to consider in more detail the significance the patent and the latent conflicts have (or should have) for us. We must also consider one last time the criteria and motivations behind the unexamined life's reaction to the diagnosis and see how Plato challenges their validity.

5.1. The significance of the soul's patent badness

Let us start by considering once more the patent forms of inner badness. We saw that we can experience patent seditions and patent ignorance, and when this happens we cannot deny our inner defects or inner badness. However, these experiences can vary greatly, we can interpret them in different ways, and we can also react to them in different ways. First of all, patent sedition and patent ignorance can have very different scopes. They can concern some moment or question of our life that we regard as important, or they can concern something we deem irrelevant, and this determines their impact on us. In some cases, we may be greatly unsettled, because our ability to attain the good we desire is seriously limited or destroyed by these inner defects, while in others we will not be worried at all, and we will not think much about the matter. The former are thus the most significant cases for us. They render us patently miserable, and if we do not find a solution, they can lead us to reject our life. But this is not what normally happens. These problems tend to be easily overcome. The patent conflict between our drives is usually solved by the victory of one drive or by a change of circumstances. As for our ignorance (and especially the realization that we had false knowledge claims about something, which is what tends to unsettle us the most), it can also

be overcome by adopting new views or even by readopting one's old views. Thus, the patent badness of the soul may seem to be something that is in general not very relevant for us – and even when it is relevant, we seem to be more concerned with what results from it than with the inner badness itself.

Plato, however, calls our attention to the fact that this patent badness is indicative of a kind of badness that is usually latent. This is particularly clear in the case of patent seditions. According to Plato's description, our drives would not fight with each other if our love of knowledge happened to rule the soul. In the case of patent deformity, the matter is more complex. To be sure, it does not always presuppose latent badness. We may simply not know something and be aware of our ignorance. But this is not what usually disturbs us. We are particularly unsettled by the discovery of our false conceit of knowledge, and this discovery is only possible because the deformity of our soul was latent. Moreover, we tend only to notice a small part of our ignorance and our vain conceit of knowledge, although these experiences should make us wonder what else we do not know. Plato indeed calls attention to the way these patent self-disagreements may reveal something more important about us.

5.2. The significance of the soul's latent badness

What about the latent badness of the soul? Does it make one's life undesirable, and should it cause us to reject it? It constitutes a kind of latent misery, but one may still wonder whether latent badness and latent misery should be a matter of concern for us. If we become aware of them or if they manifest themselves in localized moments or questions, we may be disturbed by them and we may even come to regard our life as bad and miserable. But what happens when we are not aware of any of this? Should we bother with a badness and misery that are latent or hidden? Our inner being may seem healthy and shapely. Our motivations may seem harmonious and we may think we have a clear access to reality and a clear awareness of what matters in life. Moreover, our life as a whole may seem to be good, and we may have attained many things that we regard as good. Then why should we reject it? Assuming Plato is right, wouldn't it be acceptable (and perhaps even preferable) simply to avoid becoming aware of our latent badness and latent misery, and go on living as we do? It might be true that we would never accept psychic illness or psychic deformity if we were aware of them, but wouldn't our lack of consciousness of our inner defects equally solve all our problems?

Plato strongly denies this possibility. Being oblivious to our inner badness does not render our life good or desirable, and much less happy. This would actually be worse than realizing our inner defectiveness or inner badness, because it only increases it. The state of oblivious satisfaction or oblivious hope is therefore an intrinsically bad and undesirable state. The unexamined life is in itself not worth living, regardless of how we experience it or how we interpret it. We may or may not suffer fits or attacks of our latent illness and our latent deformity. Our badness may or may not reveal itself and disturb us. It may or may not cause suffering, loss, and dishonor. It may or may not keep us from what we think we desire. But none of this is the real problem. Our soul's latent illness and deformity are in themselves undesirable. They are a state of inner disagreement or self-contradiction. We do not attain what we desire and we are not who we think we are. We are in a state that is in itself miserable and pitiable.

In this respect, the Platonic perspective follows a general trait of Greek culture. One's life is objectively good or bad, regardless of what one thinks of it. If we look at Sophocles' plays, we notice that Oedipus and Ajax are equally miserable and their lives are equally undesirable whether they know what they did and what their current state is or not. The tragedy of their situation does not lie solely in the eye of the beholder. It lies in this life itself and in the way it fails to satisfy its constitutive desire. This failure does not need to be seen by oneself or others in order for one's life to be miserable. The criterion is objective, given by life itself, and it is not affected by one's self-diagnosis and one's self-deception. Life may have a merely apparent value, but this is always referred to its true value and must get mistaken for it.

The same pattern is found in the Platonic appraisal of the unexamined life. We saw that the unexamined life is characterized by constitutive badness, and this renders it worthless and miserable. Indeed, any soul that lives an unexamined life is ill and in a permanent state of sedition, insofar as its best drive, the one that is more fit to rule, is removed from power and subjugated to a less able drive that revolts against the proper state of the soul. This is a state of permanent inner injustice, and Plato endeavors to show that the problem with injustice is not only its consequences. Injustice is its own punishment, insofar as it shapes one's whole life and prevents it from being much better. Moreover, the unexamined life is also marked by a deep deformity or ignorance, which is heightened by the fact that we have no awareness of it. But our life is philosophical, we are directed at truth, we desire it, and we do not want to be deceived. We need knowledge, both to guide ourselves in life and simply for its own sake.

Consequently, our soul's latent deformity goes against our desire and against our constitution (φύσις). The vain conceit of knowledge is an extremely bad state, and it is actually better to be aware of one's own ignorance. In sum, latent illness and latent deformity (i.e., the vain conceit of knowledge) are intrinsically undesirable and much worse than any intense manifestation they may have.

We can thus understand why Plato rejects all modalities of unexamined life. As we saw, they all have an unjust inner arrangement of drives and a completely distorted way of seeing things. To be sure, there can be many differences between them, and especially differences in the degree of injustice and of untruth that characterizes them. To this extent, there can also be degrees of misery, and some of them may be more easily “cured” and enlightened than others. Some may even be incurable, as we considered above.²⁷³⁵ However, this does not change the fact that they are all defective, they all fall short of what we desire, and they all prevent us from ever attaining it. None of them can satisfy our desire (namely, the τοῦ ὄλου ἐπιθυμία καὶ δίωξις mentioned in the *Symposium*) and none of them can provide us a superlative good.²⁷³⁶ They can only give the appearance of doing so or of being able to do so. But we do not want an apparent good, as was said. We can only be happy if we attain the real good, and this depends essentially on the soul's justice and its education, as Socrates stresses in *Gorgias*.²⁷³⁷ Only with justice and knowledge can we fulfill our φύσις and lead a properly human life. Only then can we be fully free and fully what we are.

The criterion for the quality or worth of one's life is thus objective, and this appraisal requires an objective standpoint that is not affected by the illusions of the unexamined life. Such a standpoint is sometimes represented in the dialogues – and especially in the eschatological myths of *Gorgias* and the *Republic* – by the figure of a judge who is able to see the soul of someone and suitably decide whether it deserves punishment or rewards.²⁷³⁸ But Plato himself tries to present such a standpoint by defining our inner constitution or φύσις. Thus, he is not simply referring to a standpoint that is external to our own (and as such apparently arbitrary). He is describing a possibility of transformation of our own standpoint – namely, the possibility of we coming to know ourselves. Moreover, what he tries to do (namely, to make an objective judgment about the value of our life) is something we are

²⁷³⁵ Cp. Chap. 17, Sect. 5.1.

²⁷³⁶ See *Smp.* 192e-193a, and for the analysis of the whole passage, see Chap. 12, Sect. 4.2 above.

²⁷³⁷ See 470e: “[ΠΩΛ] δῆλον δὴ, ὃ Σώκρατες, ὅτι οὐδὲ τὸν μέγαν βασιλέα γιγνώσκειν φήσεις εὐδαίμονα ὄντα. [ΣΩ] καὶ ἀληθῆ γε ἐρῶ· οὐ γὰρ οἶδα παιδείας ὅπως ἔχει καὶ δικαιοσύνης. [ΠΩΛ] τί δέ; ἐν τούτῳ ἢ πᾶσα εὐδαιμονία ἐστίν; [ΣΩ] ὡς γε ἐγὼ λέγω, ὃ Πῶλε· τὸν μὲν γὰρ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα εὐδαίμονα εἶναί φημι, τὸν δὲ ἄδικον καὶ πονηρὸν ἄθλιον.”

²⁷³⁸ See *Grg.* 523b ff., and *Rep.* 614c.

always doing (or to be more precise, it is something we always think we are doing). This is a structural component of our life. Plato is simply revising the way we normally appraise it, and he is also saying that we would never gladly accept it if we were clearly aware of its true worth. At best, we would resign ourselves to living such a life, if we were absolutely convinced that there was no chance of attaining something better – i.e., no chance of attaining truth and the real superlative good.²⁷³⁹ However, we would not be able to fully extirpate our love of knowledge. Therefore, we would also be aware of the fact that this life is defective, and this would make us wonder whether such a life really is good enough for us to go on living.

All this means that the soul's illness and its deformity can never be the real object of our desire. They are always undesirable and a form of misery – even if we do not notice them and they produce no noticeable bad effects. It is true that latent illness and latent deformity may not disturb us directly, but they are much worse than their manifestations (i.e., the different occurrences of patent illness and the patent deformity), and the fact that we do not notice them only makes us more miserable, and not less. Indeed, if we notice the problem we will already have strengthened our love of knowledge and decreased our ignorance (otherwise we would not be able to notice it). Moreover, noticing the problem is necessary for us to do something about it and try to solve it – i.e., try to cure us. As Epicurus supposedly said, “[i]nitium est salutis notitia peccati.”²⁷⁴⁰ Therefore, we have the greatest interest in rendering our latent badness as patent as possible, in the hope of correcting it – i.e., of strengthening our inborn φιλοσοφία and reducing the distortions of our way of seeing things.²⁷⁴¹ This requires us to submit and even devote ourselves to philosophical examination, as we will discuss in the follow chapter. But before considering this in more detail, it is still important to consider one last time the basis of our natural resistance to such a diagnosis and how Plato tries to disarm it.

5.3. The questionable basis of the unexamined life's reaction to its own diagnosis

We made constant reference to the way we (i.e., human beings in general, who usually lead an unexamined life) react to these analyses. We tend to resist Plato's entire diagnosis and

²⁷³⁹ We will consider this question in more detail below. See Chap. 20, Sect. 3.3 and 3.4.

²⁷⁴⁰ See fr. 522 in H. USENER (ed.), *Epicurea*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1887 (repr. Cambridge/etc., Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁷⁴¹ For this idea of being better to render our badness manifest, cp. in particular *Grg.* 480a-d.

its implications, and Plato is very aware of this. In fact, he tries to disarm the prejudices or assumptions that cause us to resist such a characterization and appraisal. Let us then briefly see how he does this.

The main reason for resisting this diagnosis is precisely the fact that we normally do not examine ourselves. Thus, we tend do not notice any limitations or defects of the kind Plato is talking about, and it is even difficult for us to understand what he might be referring to. We tend to see his arguments as abstract or fallacious. If, however, we happen to catch a glimpse of what he is talking about, it will still be difficult for us to see the real magnitude of the problem – i.e., of our psychic illness and our psychic deformity. This illness and this deformity may be more obvious in some cases, but we become easily convinced that some of the lives that are not devoted to philosophical examination are already sufficiently guided by the love of knowledge and possess enough correct δόξαι for them to attain what they desire. It is only a matter of trying to attain it or trying to preserve it.

Yet, when we look at the question from this angle, we are still being guided by our love of gain or our love of honor, and this is also what normally guides our appraisal of our life. We desire above all pleasure, wealth, victory or honor, and our life will be good or bad according to whether we attain it or not. Hence, we only regard psychic illness and psychic deformity as something that renders our life undesirable and miserable if they manifest themselves as something that blocks our pursuit of gain or honor, or as something that we see as the opposite of a gain and of honor – for instance, if they cause pain or dishonor. In this case, we will tend to regard patent badness as worse than latent badness, and the latter will seem insufficient for making us unhappy. Hence, it is very important to render our inner defects patent – although the Platonic corpus also shows how being faced with one's bad inner state is not sufficient to change our state and to cause us to abandon the unexamined life. Indeed, Socrates revealed Alcibiades how ignorant and slavish his soul was (as we see in *Alcibiades I*), he was convinced of this, and still (as he himself confesses in *Symposium*) he tried to avoid him and not to think about this, instead pursuing honors.²⁷⁴²

But there is more. Besides denouncing our love of gain and our love of honor as the causes of our resistance to his diagnosis of the unexamined or unphilosophical life, the Platonic corpus also directly criticizes these criteria, by arguing that they are not good criteria to decide the value of anything – and much less of our life in general. We saw many aspects of this above, especially in Chapters 15 and 16. By themselves, our love of gain and our love

²⁷⁴² Cp. 216b-c.

of honor are too imprecise and even blind. They can only guide our life and our perspective if they use our love of truth. In particular, we need knowledge to be aware of what gain and honor are, and to pursue them. Indeed, if we were to be guided exclusively by gain and honor, we would miss out on the greatest gains and the greatest honor. They are thus bad rulers and bad criteria to guide our appraisal of the unexamined life.

Still, we are sensitive to gain and honor, and we dislike pain and dishonor. This means that in some cases we may be tempted to avoid the pursuit of truth – especially if it causes us pain or shame, and seems to offer no truth and no superlative good in return. But this is a question to which we will have to return below, after considering what this diagnosis means for our relation to philosophical examination.

CHAPTER 19

The imperative of philosophical examination

“(…) pereat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus, *fiam!*...”

F. Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, III.7²⁷⁴³

After seeing in what sense the unexamined life can be considered “not worth living” or undesirable, we must now consider what seems to be the direct consequence of this harsh appraisal – namely, that we need to examine or, to be more precise, that we need to devote ourselves to philosophical examination. Socrates himself stressed this in the *Apology*, immediately before condemning the unexamined life, by saying that “this does happen to be the greatest good for a human being, to talk every day about excellence and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining myself and others”.²⁷⁴⁴ It is indeed important to remember that Socrates’ attack on the unexamined life is part of his own defense and the defense of his life. Socrates is trying to justify his devotion to philosophical examination, as well as his attempt to extend this examination to people around him. But this kind of argument is not exclusive of the *Apology*. Throughout the corpus, Socrates often tries to convince others to examine or to keep examining particular matters.²⁷⁴⁵ At some points, he even says that something must be examined. In other cases, he formulates it in a broader manner – for instance, by saying that we must philosophize or it is necessary to philosophize.²⁷⁴⁶ He also speaks of the need to examine or inquire things in general – and especially what we do not know.²⁷⁴⁷ These and other passages directly allude to a command, a prescription, or an “ought”, and they are not isolated moments in Plato’s writings. The whole corpus tries to show that there is a sort of duty (as McPherran says) or an imperative to

²⁷⁴³ See *KSA* 5, 351.

²⁷⁴⁴ See 38a: “(…) ἐάντ’ αὖ λέγω ὅτι καὶ τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὃν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἐμοῦ ἀκούετε διαλεγόμενου καὶ ἑμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος, ὃ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ (...).” The translation is mine.

²⁷⁴⁵ See e.g. *Men.* 96d (ζητητέον) and *Rep.* 599a (ἐξεταστέον).

²⁷⁴⁶ See in particular *Euthd.* 275a (χρὴ φιλοσοφεῖν), 282d (ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι φιλοσοφεῖν) and 288d (φιλοσοφητέον).

²⁷⁴⁷ See e.g. *Men.* 86c: “(…) ζητητέον περὶ οὗ μὴ τις οἶδεν (...).”

examine, and that this duty or imperative is embedded in our own constitution or φύσις.²⁷⁴⁸ To be sure, such a terminology may suggest models of morality from later authors that are not (or at least seem not to be) present in Plato's texts, but these terms are not supposed to be taken in such a strict and technical sense here. Their ordinary usage aptly expresses the fact that, according to Plato, philosophical examination is something required of us, something we need to do, although we are not inclined to do it. In fact, we strongly resist doing it. In other words, Plato's indications on the importance of philosophical examination are indications on how we should live, and even on how we should relate to others (in short, they are ethical in a broad sense of the word), but they are far from being obvious and easily accepted. Thus, Socrates and Plato are required to explain themselves and to show why we should examine.

This is what we must now consider. In order to do so, we will not direct our attention to the different texts and try to see how the need to examine is explained in each one. We will rather try to identify what results from the combination of the different relevant passages – i.e., we will try to see how the imperative of philosophical examination works and what is its basis according to the Platonic corpus. Moreover, we must consider what is contained in the imperative – in particular, the kind of examination it requires, the protreptic strategies it calls for, the way it determines our relation with others, and the need for effectiveness. All these aspects will allow us to better understand not only the role philosophical examination should play in our life, but also who we are – or, better still, who we should be.

1. The conflict between a religious and a rational foundation of the imperative in the *Apology*

Before considering the general basis of the imperative of philosophical examination, it is important to consider a problem that emerges from the way Socrates presents the imperative in the *Apology*. There is indeed a tension between the personal experience that led Socrates to fully embrace philosophical examination – which is, among other things, a religious experience – and the conclusions he takes from this experience, which he presents as valid for all human beings. Since we took the *Apology* as our point of departure, we need to better understand the relation between the religious and the rational domains, and also how

²⁷⁴⁸ See M. McPHERRAN, Socrates and the Duty to Philosophize, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1986), 541-560.

this relation determines the imperative of philosophical examination. This will prepare us to consider the foundation of the imperative in the broader framework of the Platonic corpus.

Let us first consider the problem in more detail. During the whole *Apology*, Socrates tries to explain why he must examine himself and others. This is something he understood after learning about the oracle given by the God at Delphi. By declaring that no one is wiser than Socrates, the oracle ultimately validated Socrates' self-examination and, according to Socrates, ordered him to continue examining himself, as well as to extend philosophical examination to others.²⁷⁴⁹ In fact, he argues that his activity was “ordered by the god (...) both in oracles and in dreams and in every way in which any other divine dispensation has commanded a man to do anything at all” – and thus he stands in direct contrast with the youths that examine others simply because it is fun to refute them.²⁷⁵⁰ This description reminds us of the beginning of *Phaedo*, when Socrates says that throughout his life he was ordered by dreams to do μουσική (which here has the broad sense of devoting oneself to culture), and he regarded this as an order to do philosophy.²⁷⁵¹ In sum, Socrates says he received divine instructions about the necessity of examining things, and in this sense his activity had (at least in his own eyes) an absolute or infallible basis. Indeed, he took god to be wise and not deceitful.²⁷⁵² Hence, if the god ordered him to examine, this is what he should do.

But what was really Socrates' motivation? Why did he examine himself and others? Was it simply because he was told to – and hence out of piety or respect for the god? Or was it because he understood (even if with the help of the god) that examining was the best thing to do? And what does this mean for other people? If Socrates examines because he was ordered to do so, it is not clear why others should examine, unless they were also ordered to do so. If, however, the oracle led him to understand the importance of philosophical examination, then we can see how this could also be valid for others, if they are in similar circumstances. Why does Socrates examine, then? And what does this mean for us?

²⁷⁴⁹ See e.g. 28e: “(...) τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τάττοντος, ὡς ἐγὼ φήθηγν τε καὶ ὑπέλαβον, φιλοσοφοῦντά με δεῖν ζῆν καὶ ἐξετάζοντα ἑμαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους (...).”

²⁷⁵⁰ See 33c: “(...) ἀκούοντες χαίρουσιν ἐξεταζομένοις τοῖς οἰομένοις μὲν εἶναι σοφοῖς, οὓσι δ' οὐ. ἔστι γὰρ οὐκ ἀηδὲς. ἐμοὶ δὲ τοῦτο, ὡς ἐγὼ φημι, προστέτακται ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πράττειν καὶ ἐκ μαντείων καὶ ἐξ ἐνυπνίων καὶ παντὶ τρόπῳ ἧπέρ τις ποτε καὶ ἄλλη θεία μοῖρα ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ ὀτιοῦν προσέταξε πράττειν.” I follow Stokes' translation (M. STOKES, *Plato – Apology of Socrates*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1997).

²⁷⁵¹ See 60d-61a. Although Socrates does not say it explicitly, it is strongly suggested that he regarded this dream as having a divine origin.

²⁷⁵² See 21b: “οὐ γὰρ δῆπου ψεύδεται γε· οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῷ.”

A full discussion of this question would require a consideration of how divinity (and especially the god at Delphi), religion and piety are understood both in Plato's *Apology* and throughout the corpus. However, that would take us too far afield, and therefore we will confine ourselves to a few brief remarks that are more directly relevant for our question.

It is true that we find in the *Apology* and in other works a tendency to accept certain aspects of traditional religion. However, the corpus treats religious matters as something that must also be rationally examined – i.e., Socratic and Platonic religion is a rational religion. Therefore, any signs given by the gods must be deciphered and rationally interpreted. This is also what happens in the *Apology*. Socrates is left perplexed with the oracle and is unable to understand its meaning. Consequently, he examines it by examining other people and their claims to wisdom, and this is how he comes to understand central aspects of human life, such as our false conceit of knowledge, our self-neglect, the drowsy state we find ourselves in, and our false semblance of happiness. Furthermore, he understands that the only way to counteract this bad state is by doing precisely what he did – to examine. This is precisely why everybody should examine. We can therefore see that rational insight is the ultimate basis for his devotion and for his attempts to convince others that they should examine. This insight can very well be separated from religious questions (even if both things are closely connected in the *Apology* and in other passages of Plato's writings), and everybody may understand it, even without having Socrates' religious experiences.

This is in keeping with what we saw in Part I above, where we tried to identify this insight. However, we also saw that Plato's arguments in the *Apology* were somewhat vague. Thus, we must now consider how the question is posed in the whole Platonic corpus.

2. The complex basis of the imperative of philosophical examination and the ethical status of this imperative

Let us try to determine why, according to the Platonic corpus, we need to examine. As was said, we will not consider in detail all passages that argue about the need to examine, but we will try to identify the firmest basis for an imperative of philosophical examination. In order to do so, we will have to reconsider some of the analyses we previously made – in particular the analyses of the soul's desire, of the soul's relation to knowledge, and of the value of the unexamined life. This will then let us see why we need to devote ourselves to philosophical examination.

2.1. The need for the superlative good and for real happiness

The soul is constitutively marked by desire and it can only be happy if it satisfies this desire. But it is necessary to bear in mind that the soul does not simply desire something good. The soul wants something maximally or superlatively good, and this want can only be fulfilled if the soul attains such a good.²⁷⁵³ Otherwise, one will be miserable (even if there can be different degrees of misery, according to how distant one is from what one desires). It is true that we are normally not aware of having such an oversized desire. We tend to distract ourselves from this pursuit and we tend to settle for less – often thinking that we are leading a good life and that we are happy (or at least thinking we know what a good life is and how to attain it). But this does not mean we are ever truly settled. If something we recognize as better overall comes along, we accept it without hesitation, and the process can repeat itself innumerable times. This means that we only thought we were settled. Indeed, we may think we are happy, or at least that we are on our way to the satisfaction of our desires, but we may have (and in general we do have) a wrong understanding of what we desire. What we experience as the good (and perhaps even as the superlative good) is only a surrogate of the real superlative good. Hence, we cannot be really satisfied with it, since such a surrogate good is not what we really desire.

This is the ultimate basis for the rejection of the unexamined life. As was shown, from Plato's perspective, the unexamined life is constitutively bad and miserable. It has an improper arrangement of drives, and it has a deeply distorted way of seeing things – and this is actually worse than having no inner arrangement at all or having no views, because the wrong arrangement and the wrong views actually move us further away from the good and prevent us from properly pursuing it. Thus, we cannot attain what we desire if we lead an unexamined life. In light of our desire for a superlative good, the unexamined life is undesirable and worthless, and if we become aware of what we truly desire, we will realize that it is so. Moreover, we will also become aware that we do not want to be deceived about this. We do not want to think we are happy – we want to be happy. Our relation to knowledge and reality is thus at the center of the rejection of the unexamined life and, consequently, of the imperative of philosophical examination.

²⁷⁵³ For more on this, cp. Chap. 12 Sect. 4 above.

2.2. The need for knowledge and for a stronger philosophical drive

Our relation to the good clearly points to the fact that the soul is essentially characterized by its love of knowledge (φιλοσοφία). We saw above several passages in which Plato stresses that the soul does not want to be deceived, and that knowledge or truth is always good, whereas ignorance or untruth is always bad for the soul.²⁷⁵⁴ Therefore, one cannot really desire to be ignorant or to be falsely convinced of knowing something, since that would contradict the soul's inner structure. The soul desires knowledge and this renders knowledge good in itself. In other words, we do not just want to know for certain that something is the superlative good. The superlative good we desire must necessarily include truth, and truth is part of happiness. Inversely, not finding out the truth implies not attaining the good the soul desires. An ignorant soul is constitutively unhappy and a deceived soul (insofar as deception is an increased form of ignorance) is even more unhappy.

This means that our interest in knowledge and truth is not purely instrumental. We do not want knowledge and truth simply as means to pursue and attain a particular good that is independent from them (even if this is what is stressed in several passages of the corpus).²⁷⁵⁵ Knowledge and truth are an essential part of the good we desire. This does not necessarily mean that our interest in them is purely contemplative or speculative – i.e., that all we want from life is to know the truth. Our constitutive relation to truth may include an active dimension, but that active dimension will have to be constitutively pervaded by knowledge or truth. Moreover, it is also not clear whether we need to know absolutely everything (i.e., the whole truth), or just the most important things (which would then require us to define the criterion according to which we can determine the value of the objects of knowledge). The corpus often points to the latter alternative, and it presents two criteria that may, to a certain extent, be reconciled: we need to know what is most relevant for our life and we need to know what is most true or most real.

In any case, truth is indispensable for us. This is the structure of our desire. We may be deceived and think we are happy without knowledge and truth, and we may unconsciously accept much ignorance and many deceptions, but our love of knowledge can never be fully extirpated, and this means that any cognitive defect is a form of inner contradiction. Indeed, cognitive defects stem from the weakness of one's love of knowledge, which surrenders the

²⁷⁵⁴ Cp. Chap. 18 Sects. 3.2 and 4.2.

²⁷⁵⁵ Cp. e.g. *Men.* 88c: “[ΣΩ.] οὐκοῦν συλλήβδην πάντα τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιχειρήματα καὶ καρτερήματα ἡγουμένης μὲν φρονήσεως εἰς εὐδαιμονίαν τελευτᾶ, ἀφροσύνης δ’ εἰς τὸναντίον; [ΜΕΝ.] ἔοικεν.”

control of the soul to other drives and lets them dictate how we see things. Hence, one fails to realize the soul's illness and its deformity. However, we are still directed at truth and we need to find it, which implies (since both things are intimately connected) strengthening our love of knowledge and changing our inner *πολιτεία*. There is, therefore, an imperative of knowledge or truth in our soul, which is also an imperative of inner health (i.e., of inner order or inner justice, which corresponds to an inner *πολιτεία* ruled by the love of knowledge). If we are to fulfill our soul's deepest longing and be happy, we need to pursue and attain knowledge, and we also need to pursue and possess the best inner arrangement of drives. Normally, however, we tend to resist doing so, especially because we are not aware of lacking truth and the best arrangement of drives. Hence, Plato tries to show us that we are marked by an imperative of knowledge and truth, which is also an imperative of being ruled by the philosophical drive.

2.3. The need for philosophical examination

Speaking of an imperative of knowledge or an imperative of truth presupposes that knowledge and truth are not something we already possess and at our disposal. It is true that normally we think we already possess all the knowledge and all the truth we need – which makes speaking of an imperative somewhat strange. However, we saw in Chapters 7 and 16 that the life almost all of us (if not all of us) lead – the unexamined life – is full of cognitive defects or distortion, and that there is even the possibility that we do not know anything at all. Thus, the imperative of knowledge is the imperative of something absent, something we lack, and this is decisive for our question. If we do not possess knowledge, we must seek it, and in order to seek knowledge we must examine. Indeed, philosophical examination is the best instrument we can use to pursue knowledge.²⁷⁵⁶ It is the basis of all real learning – at least with respect to the most important matters. Moreover, philosophical examination is also the way to exercise or strengthen our love of knowledge, thereby counteracting or weakening our other drives and changing both the inner *πολιτεία* of the soul and the kind of life we live. But this is not all. As was said, normally we do not notice the soul's illness and its deformity. Despite all our false conceit of wisdom and being ruled by inferior drives, we think that we

²⁷⁵⁶ Even other experiences of truth mentioned by Plato, such as art, romantic love or religion, are intrinsically dependent on philosophical examination in order to avoid significant distortions and thus the loss of their cognitive potential.

are living as we should. Hence, we must first realize the significant defects or the deep-lying badness of our soul – and this requires philosophical examination.

In sum, philosophical examination allows us to realize what we need and it also allows us to pursue and possibly attain it. This is why we need philosophical examination. The need for philosophical examination – or the imperative of philosophical examination – is based on our need for knowledge and, ultimately, on our need for happiness. Philosophical examination is conducive to happiness and indispensable for us to be happy. We need it in order to overcome the limitations of the unexamined life and thus render our life intrinsically valuable or desirable. Only by examining can we hope to satisfy or fulfill ourselves, and thus be truly happy.

This certainly implies that philosophical examination has only an instrumental value, and to be able to examine is not – in the strict sense of the word – the greatest good, as Socrates expressly says in the *Apology*, and as is suggested by his description of the afterlife in the same text.²⁷⁵⁷ It would be better to be in such a state that one's philosophical drive is fully developed and one fully possesses the truth. This would probably imply the contemplation of the εἶδη (and especially of the most important εἶδος), which seems to be what constitutes the happiness of philosophers, at least according to the *Republic*.²⁷⁵⁸ Likewise, Diotima says in *Symposium* that human life is only worth living (if at all) when one is contemplating τὸ καλόν.²⁷⁵⁹ This does not necessarily exclude action. One may still try to generate something based on this knowledge.²⁷⁶⁰ In fact, one may even be required to engage in politics, although this limits one's ability to contemplate and is thus a limitation of one's happiness.²⁷⁶¹ At any rate, the state of happiness clearly presupposes a fully successful examination. Philosophical examination in itself is not the absolute greatest good. It is only the best thing available to us at the moment, given our circumstances. If we are to have hope of finding the truth and being happy, we absolutely need to examine. Our real goal is thus something beyond philosophical examination, and the latter is just a promise of happiness – or the hope of happiness. It awakes us from our dream, it makes us aware of what we really lack, and it allows us to pursue it. In this sense, it renders our life less ἀβίωτος and less miserable. However, within this framework, philosophical examination cannot be

²⁷⁵⁷ See 38a and 40e-41c, and cp. also Chap. 3 Sects. 2 and 3.1 above.

²⁷⁵⁸ Cp. 498b-c and 519b-c.

²⁷⁵⁹ See 211d: “ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου, ὃ φίλε Σώκρατες, ἔρη ἡ Μαντικὴ ξένη, εἶπερ που ἄλλοθι, βιωτὸν ἀνθρώπων, θεομένῳ αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν.”

²⁷⁶⁰ See *Smp.* 212a, where Diotima says that at that point we will give birth to true excellence. Cp. also 206c ff., where Diotima explains that all living beings are pregnant and need to give birth to something.

²⁷⁶¹ For more on this, cp. Sect. 5.2 below, as well as Chap. 12 Sect. 6.2.

conceived as an end in itself, because that would imply severing our relation to what we actually desire. We would never be able to say, like Lessing, that we are not interested in the truth, but only in its pursuit.²⁷⁶² The meaning of the pursuit is intrinsically referred to possession of what we pursue.

2.4. The ethical or moral status of the imperative of philosophical examination

The question of our relation to philosophical examination is clearly an ethical question, as is stressed by the very notion of “imperative.” It directly concerns how we should act or behave, and even how we should live. We should not accept the state we are in, but we should care for ourselves, try to improve ourselves, and this requires above all philosophical examination. The imperative of philosophical examination thus determines our relation to ourselves – and, as we will see below, it also determines how we should relate to others, or how and why we should care for them.²⁷⁶³ The ethical meaning of these reflections is therefore undeniable.

But what is the status of this imperative? It was shown that is not simply an external commandment that one must follow blindly. It is something we can identify and justify rationally. But what kind of imperativeness is here implied? To borrow Kant’s terminology (though employing it in a looser sense), is this a sort of categorical imperative (i.e., something required only for its own sake) or is it a hypothetical imperative (i.e., something we must do for the sake of something else)?²⁷⁶⁴

In a way, the need to examine is based on our own constitution or φύσις, and we could therefore say it is objectively required. However, it is at the same time based on our self-interest and on what we want to attain. To be more precise, we need to examine because

²⁷⁶² See G. LESSING, *Eine Duplik*, in: IDEM, *Werke und Briefe*, edited by W. Barner *et al.*, vol. 8, Frankfurt, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, 510: “Nicht die Wahrheit, in deren Besitz irgend ein Mensch ist, oder zu sein vermeinet, sondern die aufrichtige Mühe, die er angewandt hat, hinter die Wahrheit zu kommen, macht den Wert des Menschen. Denn nicht durch den Besitz, sondern durch die Nachforschung der Wahrheit erweitern sich seine Kräfte, worin allein seine immer wachsende Vollkommenheit bestehet. Der Besitz macht ruhig, träge, stolz – Wenn Gott in seiner Rechten alle Wahrheit, und in seiner Linken den einzigen immer regen Trieb nach Wahrheit, obschon mit dem Zusatze, mich immer und ewig zu irren, verschlossen hielte, und spräche zu mir: wähle! Ich fiel ihm mit Demut in seine Linke und sagte: Vater gib! Die reine Wahrheit ist ja doch nur für dich allein!”

²⁷⁶³ See Sect. 5 below.

²⁷⁶⁴ Cp. e.g. I. KANT, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, Berlin, Georg Reimer, 1903, 414: “Alle Imperativen nun gebieten entweder hypothetisch, oder kategorisch. Jene stellen die praktische Notwendigkeit einer möglichen Handlung als Mittel, zu etwas anderem, was man will (oder doch möglich ist, daß man es wolle), zu gelangen, vor. Der kategorische Imperativ würde der sein, welcher eine Handlung als für sich selbst, ohne Beziehung auf einen andern Zweck, als objektiv-notwendig vorstellte.”

we need knowledge or truth (along with the inner arrangement of drives that allows us to attain knowledge or truth), and also because we need the superlative good, which includes or requires truth. Philosophical examination is above all an instrument to attain truth and the good, and this means that the imperative of philosophical examination is hypothetical.

This would become particularly clear if we were to attain knowledge or truth. At that point, we would not need to examine any longer. In fact, we would probably realize what we must truly do in life, and thus the ethics of philosophical examination would be replaced by the ethics of truth. The former is indeed a sort of provisional ethics or a second-order ethics, and it shows us what to do until we reach the truth, which will then dictate a first-order ethics. This is the formal model that pervades the corpus and it is also what accounts for Socrates' strong moral convictions, despite his lack of knowledge. His devotion to philosophical examination is precisely the necessary result of his lack of knowledge, but not yet a full-blown knowledge of things and of what we should ultimately do in life.

In this context, it is also important to briefly consider the question of whether and in what sense not following the imperative may render us morally reproachable. As we saw above, we are to blame for adopting the unexamined life – or, to be more precisely, our inborn φιλοσοφία determines itself and thus determines whether or not we examine. But this is not an act like our other acts, and we do not fully control it. On the contrary, we ourselves are the result of this act and in a way it controls us. Thus, we are not guilty of not following the imperative in the sense in which we normally talk of guilt. It is rather a question of being intrinsically bad (i.e., having a bad love of knowledge, that does not determine itself to fully examine things). The decision happens ultimately at the depths of our being, though it affects our entire life. However, this also means that examining or not depends solely on our inner being, and if the latter is good (i.e., if it determines itself to be good), we may also do the right thing and live the right way.

3. The kind of examination required by the imperative and the difficulties it entails

We have shown that there is some need for philosophical examination, but we have not yet determined exactly what kind of philosophical examination is required by the imperative. This opens the door to a defective understanding of what this need entails. To be more precise, we may have a naive conception of the commitment, range and methodology of examination required. There can indeed be many ways of philosophizing. The history of

philosophy offers us many possibilities, and the kind of philosophical examination we outlined in Part II is just one among them. So we must consider what indications on this matter are given by the arguments above mentioned or what kind of requirements can be inferred from the structure of the imperative of philosophical examination – i.e., we must see (even if only in a brief manner) whether or not the structure of our life requires an examination as complex as the one described in Part II.

3.1. The insufficiency of the modalities of examination found in the unexamined life

We considered above that the unexamined life admits many forms of ordinary examination. We may think about many things, especially if we do not know exactly how to pursue our goals. To be more precise, our ruling drive often examines in order to better attain pleasure or honor, and it can easily recognize the usefulness of philosophy and philosophical examination – though it will also strongly limit one’s dedication to this examination. One may thus dabble in philosophy in one’s youth, but this will go only up to a point, as Callicles says it should be.²⁷⁶⁵ One may also develop elaborate forms of empirical knowledge (such as the forms of ἐμπειρία or τριβή mentioned in *Gorgias*), but only in order to better attain one’s non-philosophical goals.²⁷⁶⁶ Finally, one may even devote oneself to philosophical examination, but in an inauthentic manner – i.e., while one is still guided by one’s love of gain and love of honor, thereby distorting both one’s relation to philosophical examination and its results.²⁷⁶⁷

All these forms of examination are thus limited or defective, and to a certain extent they are no different from performing no examination at all. In other words, a partially examined life is still a form of unexamined life. It employs some examination and this examination may allow us to improve our life (or at least think we have improved it), it may even give rise to a more genuine form of examination in some cases, but in general things stay fundamentally the same. These unexamined forms of examination are not enough to strengthen and empower our philosophical drive, and hence they do not allow philosophical examination to attain what is required by the imperative – namely, truth and the superlative good.

²⁷⁶⁵ See *Grg.* 484c ff.

²⁷⁶⁶ See *Grg.* 463a ff.

²⁷⁶⁷ For more on this, cp. Chap. 15, Sect. 4.2.

3.2. The commitment required by the imperative

Let us then consider the kind of examination that is required by the imperative. One central aspect of this examination is our mode of relation to it. Indeed, examining things in the proper manner requires a certain inner disposition. In particular, our love of knowledge cannot be weak and ruled by other drives. It must start developing, and it must be trained, in order to become strong and come to rule the soul – thereby rendering the soul less ill. At the same time, the other drives must also grow weaker, which means that we must abstain from their objects of desire. In other words, we need to have leisure (σχολή) from all other pursuits (such as the pursuit of necessary things, of appetites, and of honor) and pay attention only to philosophical examination. This will become – as much as possible – our only occupation or ἀσχολία, we will spend all our time examining, and this will be all that matters. We will lead a philosophical life and everything will be determined according to whether or not we know it, or whether or not it helps us to know other things. Only when this happens will philosophical examination be completely free from the rule and the practical goals of the other drives, as well as from the distortion caused by them. One will be guided solely by the pursuit of knowledge and by the knowledge one finds.

Such a state is not attained immediately, though. The dedication to philosophical examination requires several stages of development. At first, one will probably be unable to start or continue examining things by oneself. One will be mostly passive and need to be examined by others. Then, after much practice, one will become more able to guide the examination. But even this is not enough. More than knowing what to do, one must desire to do it. This requires one to realize how ignorant one is, how much one needs to attain knowledge, and how that is much more important than our other pursuits. Thus, one cannot immediately follow the imperative, at least not entirely. One can start examining things philosophically, but this is a long process – and one will be constantly tempted to give up and follow other interests and their views.

3.3. The range and methodology of examination required by the imperative

The mode of relation to philosophical examination is not the only thing determined by the imperative. The latter also outlines the scope of the examination. Indeed, we could think

that the examination concerns only some matters – especially what we should do in life and what our immediate situation is. However, even these matters can be very complex, and we saw above that our beliefs are intrinsically intertwined and constitute an extremely complex system. Hence, we cannot simply examine some practical questions and leave others completely untouched, because they affect each other in a decisive manner. This is particularly true of the εἶδη, which determine the way we see everything else (including what we should do in life). Moreover, the εἶδη themselves relate to each other in a complex manner and some of them are also more fundamental than others. Plato even admits a sort of first principle.²⁷⁶⁸ Consequently, even if we do not need to examine absolutely everything (for instance, it may not be necessary to know all the details of particular beings), we will need to consider many questions in order to decide any particular one (including whether or not something is irrelevant for us). In other words, the imperative demands us to perform an extraordinarily vast examination, and this is another reason why we need to have leisure (σχολή) from other occupations.

It is also important to bear in mind the fact that we cannot simply start examining things as if it was absolutely obvious what we have to examine. Examination requires λόγος, which renders matters clear and discusses them rationally. However, most of our beliefs are tacit, as was shown above, and we need to make a significant effort to identify them and render them explicit.²⁷⁶⁹ Furthermore, we will have to put them to the test and see if they withstand scrutiny. If they do not (which will often be the case), we will have to expel them from our soul, and then we will have to seek out the truth about things. The latter task implies methods such as the ones we described in Chapter 9 – especially the hypothetical method, which may allow us to identify more plausible views and use them to make progress in our search for the truth. But this will not be enough, since we actually need to attain truth and the superlative good. The problem, then, is whether we can really bring the whole process of examination to its end. As was already mentioned, a good outcome seems necessary for philosophical examination to make sense. We must acquire knowledge and our life must become the best life possible, since that is what we desire.

²⁷⁶⁸ For more on the complex intertwinement of our beliefs, cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 2.

²⁷⁶⁹ Cp. Chap. 6, Sect. 1.

3.4. The difficulties entailed in the imperative of philosophical examination

From what was just said, we start to understand the extraordinary demands that the imperative of philosophical examination places on us. The active pursuit of truth and of the superlative good requires many sacrifices and risks. It is, however, very difficult to abandon the unexamined life, its priorities and its beliefs. We may try, but we continue to be disturbed by the other drives and their views.²⁷⁷⁰ We must insist, in order to gradually reshape our inner πολιτεία and our life. At the same time, we must identify many views, examine them, and reformulate them. This requires an extremely long process. As Plato portrays it, we will be lost at sea, roaming about, and being blown by the wind from one place to the other.²⁷⁷¹ To put it differently, philosophical examination is a labyrinth and – as we will see in the following chapter – it is not even clear whether we can ever exit it.²⁷⁷² The difficulty of what is required of us is extreme, and it is not clear whether anyone was ever able to fully carry out such a project (i.e., whether anyone ever attained full inner health and full inner shapeliness).

But fully carrying out the examination is not the only problem. It is also very difficult to start examining, and – as was shown – this is not immediately under our control. Our love of knowledge must determine itself to be more demanding – and it is not clear how this happens. Moreover, we will be constantly tempted to return to the unexamined life. Indeed, philosophical examination may require us to suffer greatly or be shamed by others, and at that point the other drives will press us to abandon the examination. We will also be discouraged by the difficulty in seeing things clearly – as the prisoner in the cave, who is dazzled by the excess of light when he turns around, and feels inclined to return to his place and believe that his previous views were true and that reality was as he saw it.²⁷⁷³ In sum, any attempt to fulfill the imperative implied in Socrates' words in the *Apology* will be a constant and extreme struggle.

²⁷⁷⁰ Cp. e.g. *Phd.* 66d-67b.

²⁷⁷¹ Plato constantly uses these images when referring to philosophical examination. Cp. Chap. 4, Sect. 2.4 above. This brings to mind all the hardships involved in Odysseus' travels, as well as Odysseus' own words about wandering about, which stress how difficult it is to endure this state. See HOMER, *Odyssey*, XV.343: “πλαγκτοσύνης δ’ οὐκ ἔστι κακώτερον ἄλλο βροτοῖσιν (...).”

²⁷⁷² For the idea of labyrinth, cp. *Euthd.* 291b.

²⁷⁷³ See *Rep.* 515e.

4. How to convince someone of the imperative. Plato's protreptic strategies and the question of their effectiveness

After considering why we need to devote ourselves to philosophical examination and how difficult it is to do so, we must now consider the question of how the imperative can be communicated to someone that is not yet following it – and, more specifically, we have to consider how this imperative is communicated in the Platonic corpus. Indeed, the situations portrayed in the corpus usually have a protreptic character, and the corpus itself tries to “turn” (i.e., to urge, incite or convert – προτρέπειν) its readers to philosophical examination, and thus change their life. In other words, the corpus has a strong rhetoric component, insofar as it tries to convince us of the importance of philosophical examination. But this does not mean that the corpus simply presents the arguments we considered above. In fact, Plato employs several different protreptic strategies, and the arguments we identified are just one of them. We will not be able to consider here all questions associated with Plato's protreptic, but it is important to see at least some aspects of the relation between Plato's arguments for the importance of philosophical examination and the other protreptic strategies of the Platonic corpus, because that will let us better understand Plato's presentation of these arguments.²⁷⁷⁴

4.1. The different protreptic strategies of the *corpus*

The whole corpus seems to be meant as an attempt to convince people to examine things. In fact, these writings may have been written with the intention of recruiting students, affecting society in general, or simply as manual for students, in order to prepare them for more advanced doctrines. But regardless of the real intentions behind them, the texts showcase a complex set of protreptic techniques, which constitute a complex τέχνη προτρεπτική – and this is what we will now try to identify.

First of all, it is important to consider that Plato's strategies are not as direct as, for instance, what we find in the fragments of Aristotle's *Protreptics*, which present a series of arguments of why we should devote ourselves to philosophy.²⁷⁷⁵ It is true that Plato also

²⁷⁷⁴ There are several important studies on the matter. See e.g. K. GAISER, *Protreptik und Paränese bei Platon. Untersuchungen zur Form des platonischen Dialogs*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1959; S. SLINGS (ed.), *Plato – Clitophon*. Cambridge, University Press, 1999; J. COLLINS II, *Exhortations to Philosophy. The Protreptics of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle*, Oxford/etc., Oxford University Press, 2015.

²⁷⁷⁵ See e.g. I. DÜRING (ed.), *Aristotle's Protrepticus. An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Stockholm/etc., Almqvist & Wiksell, 1961.

presents arguments for the need to examine – both direct and indirect.²⁷⁷⁶ But Plato also depicts many situations in which someone (usually Socrates) tries to make other people feel the need to examine things without fully explaining why they should do so. In fact, by refuting others and showing them their ignorance, Socrates (as well as the other characters that perform a similar role) is also trying to convince them to continue the examination. Socrates may then add some reflections about what is happening and what they need to do, but usually these reflections are brief and superficial.

It is true that there are also many passages in which Socrates and the other main interlocutors present arguments to convince others to examine. However, these arguments vary greatly. Some of them are closely associated with images of the philosopher or of the unphilosophical life, in order to show the glamour of the former and the repellant character of the latter. The myths in particular often portray philosophers as having the best life and, especially, the best destiny after death.²⁷⁷⁷ Indeed, Plato often uses contrasts to show the importance of philosophical examination, and he also explicitly opposes philosophy to other cultural practices, such as poetry or sophistry, which he strongly criticizes.

Some dialogues, such as *Alcibiades I* and *Euthydemus*, have a more explicit protreptic nature – and they include both a series of acts and a series of arguments to convince others to examine. But there are many other passages that present more elaborate arguments on why we should examine. Many of these arguments seem to be specifically directed to the interlocutor and his interests, since they argue that examining things will bring either much gain or much honor.²⁷⁷⁸ There are also some arguments that seem to be more straightforward and come closer to what we discussed above. This happens especially in those situations in which Socrates must justify himself or his views (such as in the *Apology*, in *Phaedo*, and in the *Republic*). In these cases, he tends to consider our inner constitution, in order to show why we need to devote ourselves to philosophical examination.

This is what we find at the level of the conversations portrayed by Plato. In addition, some of the literary devices employed by Plato to depict these conversations have themselves

²⁷⁷⁶ Indeed, Plato employs not only an explicit protreptic, but also an implicit protreptic, to use S. Slings' distinction. Slings says: "Any argument, description of behavior, apology, myth or other type of philosophical text can be designed to cause its readers or characters to change their moral conduct or to pursue philosophy. I call 'explicit protreptic' all texts which purport to state, prove or convince by other methods that one must adopt a certain line of behavior or pursue philosophy; all texts which have a similar intention but in which these aims are achieved indirectly will be called 'implicit protreptic'." Later, when discussing an example, he clarifies what this indirectness consists in by saying: "the conclusion that philosophy is necessary in order to obtain happiness is here left to the reader." See S. SLINGS, *Plato – Clitophon*. Cambridge, University Press, 1999, 61f.

²⁷⁷⁷ See e.g. *Grg.* 526c and *Rep.* 619d-e.

²⁷⁷⁸ See e.g. *Prt.* 351b ff. and the entire *Alcibiades I*.

a protreptic character (regardless of how aware of this Plato was). For instance, the way he portrays Socrates' character and presents him as a kind of a hero is very alluring and easily motivates us to try to imitate Socrates' example. Moreover, the fact that Plato shows Socrates in different phases of his life (and especially as an immature philosopher) helps us understand that the figure of Socrates is not an unattainable ideal, but rather a possibility of ours that we can attain if we put as much effort into it as he did. But we do not identify only with Socrates when we are reading the dialogues. We may easily see much of us in the other characters, and when their views are refuted, we may be surprised and forced to question any similar views we may have. In addition, the very structure of the arguments presented throughout the corpus has a provocative nature. We have already considered this.²⁷⁷⁹ We saw that, among other things, the language used is ambiguous, the arguments are full of fallacies, and often passages of the same dialogue or of different dialogues directly contradict each other. This, along with the fact that we do not know what exactly the character Socrates (and much less the author Plato) thought, forces us to be very attentive to everything that is said and to double-check everything. In other words, these and other features of the corpus force us to examine the texts (and consequently ourselves) much more than what we would normally do while we read a philosophical text.

The explicit and implicit arguments for the need of examining things are thus just a part of this complex network of protreptic strategies. All these strategies help us readers understand the importance of philosophical examination, and they also help us start and continue examining – i.e., they let us train our philosophical ability and develop our philosophical drive. As a result, we will be better able to understand the more complex arguments that are presented in the corpus, or the arguments that we can infer from it by comparing the different passages and thinking about their meaning. Indeed, in order to understand arguments such as the ones we considered above, we need to already have had much philosophical training, and at that point we may also examine these arguments and see their possible weaknesses (as we will try to do in the following chapter).

4.2. The factors that condition the effectiveness of Plato's protreptic strategies

All these strategies raise the question of their effectiveness – both in the dramatic situations portrayed in the corpus, and over us as readers. We must therefore consider

²⁷⁷⁹ See Sect. 4.1 of Introduction.

whether they are really able to convince us that we need to devote ourselves to philosophical examination, and also whether they are all equally effective. The question is difficult, because this effectiveness may be influenced by many different factors. Still there are a few general remarks we can make, especially in light of what we saw in Chapter 17, when we discussed what is the ultimate responsible for our adoption of an unexamined life. We saw that philosophical examination, the growth of our love of knowledge (φιλοσοφία), and the adoption of a philosophical life cannot be forced from the outside. It depends on the way our own inborn φιλοσοφία determines itself, and this self-determination is what may allow us to listen to others, follow what they say, think about it, and perhaps notice our ignorance and the need to examine further. Consequently, the effectiveness of protreptic strategies is always limited, and this may even suggest that they have no effectiveness at all, since it all depends on what happens at the depths of our being.

However, the central role of our φιλοσοφία's self-determination does not mean that protreptic strategies are totally irrelevant, because they may still facilitate or help another soul's self-determination. Thus, the question of their effectiveness concern their ability to help someone turn to philosophical examination – and in this respect it is important to note that the different strategies do not all have the same effectiveness. Indeed, if characters (and we ourselves as readers) do not already have a sufficiently strong love of knowledge, abstract arguments about the need to examine tend not to be accepted or even understood. This is directly related to Plato's criticism of the written word and its ability to communicate complex ideas.²⁷⁸⁰ If one is not prepared to understand the arguments, one will have a distorted access to them and, as a result, one will easily attack them. In the case of writings, this will almost certainly happen, because they are not able to defend themselves. It is only in conversation that one can apply other techniques. But what are these other techniques?

The dialogues show us that direct strategies (such as teaching, arguing, advising or chastising) tend not to be very effective. Indirect strategies are actually preferable – in particular, trying to submit someone else to philosophical examination without exhaustively arguing for the need to do so. If others accept the examination and are able to follow it, then it is possible to reveal their ignorance and produce an internal crisis. It all depends on whether the examination is done properly (without simply trying to refute the others at all costs) and on whether the examinees realize that their inability to answer is their own fault

²⁷⁸⁰ For more on this criticism and for bibliographical references, see the end of Section 4.1 of Introduction.

and not the fault of the examiner.²⁷⁸¹ If this happens, the examinees (be they characters in the dialogues or readers who are led to examine what they are reading) will hate themselves and try to change. Of course, the extent of this crisis will vary according to the importance of the views under scrutiny. Hence, it is important to attack the most fundamental views (i.e., our basic assumptions or ὑποθέσεις) – and especially the views that guide our life. This will make us feel a strong need for further examination, and it will also allow us to better understand the arguments that show that we should devote ourselves to philosophical examination.

Yet, this is still not sufficient to ensure that one will adopt a philosophical life – and the Platonic corpus considers two ways the process can go wrong. First, it is possible to attain only a superficial understanding of what philosophical examination consists in, and as a result one will do a bad or superficial imitation of it. In particular, one will gladly refute others and oneself, and this may ultimately lead to misogyny, skepticism, or a sort of nihilism, as Plato warns.²⁷⁸² Second, we may follow the example of Alcibiades. He was submitted to much examination (as is shown in *Alcibiades I*) and he realized the bad state he was in. He was also fascinated with Socrates and his λόγοι, as he himself confesses in *Symposium*. However, he was still internally divided and this led him to run away from Socrates and from philosophical examination, thereby aborting the process of abandoning the unexamined life.²⁷⁸³

These possibilities show how important it is to exercise and fortify one's love of knowledge, in order to avoid a superficial understanding of what one is doing. If one examines sufficiently, one will then be able to understand the arguments that show why we should examine, and these arguments may then guide one's activity. One will be able to understand how and why one should examine. It is true that this does not yet guarantee that one will live a philosophical life (since the other drives may still resist or grow back again), but at least it will make it easier for that to happen.

5. The relation with others in the framework of the imperative of philosophical examination

The question of the protreptic character of the corpus and of the different ways of trying to exhort others to philosophy is closely associated with another important question.

²⁷⁸¹ Cp. e.g. *Tht.* 167d-168b.

²⁷⁸² See in particular *Rep.* 538d ff.

²⁷⁸³ See 215d-216b.

We saw that the imperative of philosophical examination gives us a clear indication of how we should live and what we should do. In order to attain the superlative good, we must care for ourselves, and we do so by examining our beliefs. However, this indication concerns only one's own life, and it may therefore seem to be self-centered and egoistic. One will care for oneself, and apparently nothing else will matter. However, we are surrounded by many others and we interact with them. In fact, we may interact with others in different ways, and this may have different effects on their life. We may harm them, we may benefit them, or we may leave them as they were. But this is not simple, because we may for instance set out to harm them and actually benefit them, or we may appear to be benefitting others when we are actually harming them. The latter is the case of what Plato calls adulation (κολακεία), which stands in contrast with the proper care of others – i.e., with a care that properly benefits or improves them. But this is not all. We deal with many individuals, and we may also engage politically and affect the whole political community in some way. There are, therefore, many possibilities of interaction with others. But what results from the imperative of philosophical examination with respect to this question? How does the imperative affect or determine our individual relation to others and what might it require from us in political terms? The Platonic corpus gives many indications about these questions, and this is what we must now briefly consider.

5.1. The problem of whether we should try to persuade others to examine

We saw that the unexamined life is constitutively bad and undesirable, and because we want to be happy, we must examine ourselves. Since we all have a similar constitution or φύσις, this applies to everybody. Thus, if some of us realize their own deficiencies and adopt philosophical examination, they will be faced with the fact that others have similar deficiencies, and should likewise devote themselves to philosophical examination in order to attain what they desire. Assuming that this whole diagnosis is correct, should one then try to submit others to philosophical examination or try to convince them to examine? Is the imperative of philosophical examination associated with an imperative to intervene and try to change other people's lives? What would be the exact foundation for such an imperative? And what would its scope be? Would it be restricted only to a group of people (such as those closest to us, or the most talented people)? Or would it require us to try to extent

philosophical examination to everybody in our political community, or even the whole of humanity?

These are difficult questions, and a satisfactory answer to them would require us to consider what our motivation to help others can be – especially in a context in which we recognize philosophical examination and knowledge as fundamental goods. If we look at the Platonic corpus, it seems that we can have several motivations to lead others to philosophical examination. First, we may be moved by self-interest. Others may indeed help us examine, and thus they may help us attain truth and be happy.²⁷⁸⁴ Second, we may be moved by benevolence (εὐνοία) or compassion (ἔλεος).²⁷⁸⁵ It is true that in many cases our benevolence or compassion may still be conciliated with our self-interest.²⁷⁸⁶ However, it may also require us to sacrifice our own good for the good of others. Third, we could try to help others because we owe them something.²⁷⁸⁷ Fourth and finally, we could discover by examination that helping others is what we must objectively do – i.e., it is a sort of duty. This duty could be based on anthropological, political, cosmic, religious, or even eidetic considerations (and the dialogues seem to point in all these different directions).

All these possibilities are somehow suggested in the Platonic corpus, and we would have to examine them in full detail in order to decide if and to what extent we should try to lead others to examine themselves. We will not be able to enter into this question here, but it seems at any rate clear that the imperative of philosophical examination may require us to intervene in other people's lives.

If this is the case, there are still other problems we must consider. For instance, we may wonder how effective our intervention must be. Must we really convince others to examine, or is it only important for us to try? And how far may we go when trying to convince them? Should we try to release them at all costs, employing all methods (including more violent ones), or are there limits? And what if the others resist, become aggressive, and try to get rid of us? Should we go as far as Socrates and die trying to examine them? What if this attempt conflicts with one's own pursuit of the good (for instance, by causing our death before we find the truth)?

These are all complicated questions, and we must examine them very carefully in order to determine our behavior towards others. This is, indeed, the most direct indication

²⁷⁸⁴ See e.g. *Hp. Ma.* 286c-e, *Grg.* 486d., *Phd.* 78a, 89c, *Phdr.* 230d.

²⁷⁸⁵ See e.g. *Euthd.* 288d, *Hp. Ma.* 293d, *Tht.* 151c-d, *Plt.* 262c.

²⁷⁸⁶ See e.g. *Carm.* 166d.

²⁷⁸⁷ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 520a-c.

given by the imperative of philosophical examination: we must examine our relation to others.

5.2. The problem of whether the philosopher should enter politics

A problem closely connected with this one concerns the relation between the imperative of philosophical examination and one's political engagement. Does the imperative exclude political engagement (insofar as it does not directly increase one's knowledge), or is one still required (and perhaps even more required) to partake in politics if one embraces philosophical examination? Is the imperative of philosophical examination associated with an imperative of political action?

In this respect, the corpus is once more ambiguous. On one hand, some passages suggest that one should live a quiet life, and devote oneself to contemplation. This is particularly clear in *Theaetetus*. One will contemplate the whole cosmos, and pay no attention to what happens in the πόλις.²⁷⁸⁸ On the other hand, we also find the idea of being engaged in the πόλις, as well as the discussions about what true politics consists in. In some passages, Socrates suggests that true politics is to submit others to philosophical examination and to try to improve them.²⁷⁸⁹ Thus, one would improve all or at least those that are more able to govern. In other texts (and especially in the *Republic*), Plato defends that philosophers should rule the πόλις – which is indeed an outrageous idea, insofar as philosophers seem useless and blind to more immediate practical matters.²⁷⁹⁰ However, Plato defends politics should be based on knowledge, and the only way to attain it is by devoting oneself to philosophical examination. Those that examine should then abdicate from the contemplation of truth and govern the political community. This of course presupposes that these philosophers have already found the truth and can guide themselves by it. Otherwise, they would not be qualified to govern.

But what could be the motivations for governing one's political community, especially given the fact that one would have to abdicate from what seems to constitute happiness – namely, the contemplation of truth? The *Republic* gives several indications, which are similar to those we considered in the previous subsection. One could accept to rule out of self-interest, because one is more qualified to rule than others and does

²⁷⁸⁸ See 172c ff.

²⁷⁸⁹ See in particular *Grg.* 521d-e.

²⁷⁹⁰ See in particular *Rep.* 473c-474a.

not want to suffer the consequences of being ruled by those less qualified.²⁷⁹¹ One could do it out of benevolence or compassion, because one saw that others need help.²⁷⁹² It could be out of gratitude, because one's philosophical development and one's contemplation was only possible thanks to others, and now it is time to give something in return.²⁷⁹³ Finally, it could also be a sort of duty (for instance, insofar as it is the just thing to do) – i.e., it may be something required by one's constitution or by the structure of reality.²⁷⁹⁴

But this is not all. The imperative to rule raises several other questions. For instance, must one really become the ruler of the political community, or is it sufficient to try to do so – i.e., try to convince others that ruling should be based on knowledge and that one should rule them? And how much effort should one put into trying to become the ruler? If the others resist, should one fight for control? These questions are never raised in the *Republic*, because the existence of a philosophical state is already presupposed, but in other states the question becomes relevant. Furthermore, it is important to always bear in mind that this imperative only applies if we really acquire knowledge and are thus qualified to correctly guide the πόλις. However, since we are usually full of false knowledge claims, we may easily deceive ourselves into thinking that we are qualified to rule, and if this is the case, the consequences may be catastrophic. It is therefore crucial to wonder whether we examined in the proper manner and whether we really attained truth.

Finally, if we depart from the *Republic*, we must also face another question: namely, once we were to attain power – or at least political influence – what should we do? Should we simply tell others what to do or, at best, impart them correct views, without caring for the fact that they do not have actual knowledge and do not dedicate themselves to philosophical examination (which would imply that they would never be truly happy), or should we try to use our power to free other people from the shackles of the unexamined life? The second possibility seems to be clearly preferable, but such a universal liberation may be undesirable or unfeasible for several reasons. The question is very complicated, and it is closely related to the question of whether we should restrict the imperative of philosophical examination – which is precisely what we must consider in the following section, in order to conclude our analysis of the imperativeness of philosophical examination.

²⁷⁹¹ See 347b-d.

²⁷⁹² Plato indeed alludes to compassion in the allegory of the cave. See 516c.

²⁷⁹³ See 519c ff.

²⁷⁹⁴ See 520e.

6. The possible restriction of the universality or even of the validity of the imperative

If we consider the foundation of the imperative of philosophical examination, it seems clear that the imperative applies to all human beings – at least insofar as they lead an unexamined life. The unexamined life is structurally defective, it lacks inner justice and truth, and it cannot be the superlative good we desire. Hence, we all need to examine in order to correct these defects. However, this does not necessarily mean that there are no restrictions to the imperative. In fact, the argument that justifies the need to examine also requires philosophical examination to be effective in its efforts to attain knowledge and the good. Consequently, we must wonder whether we are really able to attain these goals. If for some reason some of us – or even all of us – are not able to do so, then the validity of imperative may have to be restricted. This is the question we must now consider, both to determine the imperative in more detail and to prepare the following chapter, where we will consider the question of the effectiveness of philosophical examination in more detail.

6.1. The possibility of restricting the universality of the imperative and the problematic character of such a restriction

Let us start with the possibility that some people (or even many people) might not be required to examine. There is indeed a tension in the Platonic corpus between texts in which the imperative of philosophical examination seems to be universal (such as the *Apology*) and others where it seems to be confined to a particular class in the πόλις, and all other people are actually supposed not to examine (as is the case in the *Republic*). But what allows these people to override the imperative? Why are there any exceptions?

There are two possible explanations, which to a certain extent may be conciliated. First, one may restrict the imperative based on pragmatic considerations. Indeed, we all need to satisfy our basic needs, and this requires much work, which might be incompatible with a universal dedication to philosophical examination. Hence, there can be only a few philosophers in each community in order for people to survive and have at least some quality of life. This argument would be particularly strong in Ancient times. In the present day, industrialization and technology allow us to work much less. We can have much more σχολή and thus there can be many more philosophers. Moreover, it is possible to conceive a time in

which we will all be free to examine – and if the reason for restricting the imperative is only pragmatic, then we should all do so.

But this is not the only reason used to justify the restriction of the imperative in the *Republic*. Plato bases the division of work in the πόλις on the fact that, despite all our similarities, human beings can also be said to have different constitutions or φύσεις. Indeed, we may be born and grow with different aptitudes and predispositions – i.e., we may have more or less intellectual talent, and we may be more inclined to one or other arrangement of drives. This means that some of us will more easily examine things and adopt a philosophical life, while others would find it very difficult to start examining things and would be very ineffective at it. This distinction is primarily based on empirical observation, but it may very well be a constant of human life, and Plato seems to assume so in the *Republic*. We cannot really be forced to examine, we must determine ourselves to examine, and apparently some would always resist doing so. This, of course, would not change the imperative as such, insofar as one would still need philosophical examination in order to find truth and be happy. Some, however, would not be able to do so, and they would therefore be constitutively condemned to a bad and miserable life (although the degree of badness and misery in their lives could still vary).

It is, however, important to bear in mind that both these reasons for restricting the imperative of philosophical examination present their own problems. The first reason raises the question of how we should decide who must work and who can philosophize, and what allows us to exclude some from what seems to be the only doorway to the superlative good we desire. If we appeal to the second reason, we are also faced with several questions. First, we must wonder whether there really are different constitutions or φύσεις and whether we can properly identify them. Second, we must consider whether they really determine how good one can be at examining things. Third, we must determine whether they really are unchangeable. Plato admits that one may try to raise children in the best way possible, but he places limits on one's ability to change their natural constitution – and this is what we must examine. These are indeed important questions in this context, especially because hindering someone who is able to examine from doing so (and even not helping them, if we were able) would imply preventing this person from being happy, and this would be particularly cruel and inhumane.

6.2. The possible general ineffectiveness of philosophical examination and the problem of its meaning for the imperative

We saw that philosophical examination is required for us to develop our philosophical drive, to find the truth, and thus to attain the superlative good and be happy. But, as was mentioned, this complex structure raises several questions, which cast doubt on the validity of the imperative. For instance, we must wonder whether philosophical examination really allows us to find out the truth, or at least come closer to it. Likewise, we must wonder if pursuing and attaining truth will also allow us to attain the superlative good. If any of these two clauses is wrong, then we would lose the reason we had for examining. Of course, we may still find some reason for examining in these circumstances, but this reason would be very different from what we just considered, and the kind of examination required by it could also be very different. It is, therefore, very important to know what we can attain through philosophical examination – and especially whether we can really find truth and the superlative good by examining things. However, this is not an easy thing to do, especially before carrying out the examination in question. In such a situation, we can only consider different possibilities and see how they would affect the imperative of philosophical examination. Therefore, this is the task we must undertake in the final chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 20

The possible outcomes and the risks of philosophical examination

“Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.”
Hölderlin, “Patmos”²⁷⁹⁵

In the previous chapters we discussed why, according to the Platonic corpus, we should reject the unexamined life and devote ourselves to philosophical examination. But we also saw that the imperative of philosophical examination requires philosophical examination to be effective in its pursuit of truth and the superlative good. Thus, if philosophical examination is unable to attain its goals, the imperative of examination (and perhaps even the rejection of the unexamined life) becomes problematic. Hence, it is important to consider this question in more detail. Assuming we really embrace philosophical examination and adopt a philosophical life, what might happen? What can philosophical examination attain?

In the following, we will briefly discuss the possible outcomes of philosophical examination (i.e., what we might discover if we examine), and afterwards we will specifically consider the risks we incur if we abandon the unexamined life and dedicate ourselves to philosophical examination (or, to be more precise, we will see what might go wrong and prevent philosophical examination from having the outcome it aims at). This will allow us to consider the effects philosophical examination may have in our life – namely, whether it leads to a desirable state or rather to something bad, perhaps even worse than the unexamined life. It will also allow us to discuss the meaning of these possibilities for the imperative of philosophical examination, and for our decision of whether or not we should devote ourselves to this examination.

²⁷⁹⁵ See F. HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, edited by F. Zinkernagel, vol. 1, Leipzig, Insel, 1922, 355.

1. The map of possible outcomes of philosophical examination according to Plato

Let us then start by considering the possible outcomes of philosophical examination – namely, what we might find out if we examine. We already tackled some aspects of this question in Part II above, but now we will have to complement the previous considerations, in order to outline (even if only in broad strokes) a full map of possibilities.²⁷⁹⁶ Such a map will help us understand the many roads philosophical examination may follow and the different destinations it may have. We must, however, remember that philosophical examination is a long and complex process, and it may have different stages. This means, for instance, that some negative results may be only provisional. Likewise, we may be deluded and think we have attained good results, only to later discover that this was not the case. However, these illusory results are not what we will consider here. We will focus on the real results of a correctly performed philosophical examination.

As we saw in Chapter 8, the initial phase of philosophical examination tries to identify the defects of the views or beliefs that we espouse. In general, these views contain a formal defect, because we did not fully examine them and did not really exclude the possibility that things could be different from what we think.²⁷⁹⁷ Then, upon close inspection, we may identify many material defects. We may have attributed wrong predicates to things and we may have failed to understand these predicates. These cognitive defects may affect just some of our beliefs or many of them. In fact, it is even possible that they are all distorted – either because every single one of them is in itself defective, or because some fundamental beliefs, which underpin all others, are defective and thus extend their defect to all other beliefs. We will then have to abandon the views that are defective, which will produce a decrease in ignorance and a negative expansion of our knowledge, insofar as we will at least be aware of what we do not know.

But this is only the negative part of the examination. We must also inquire into things and try to discover the truth about the things we do not know. This positive part of the examination is indeed essential, because according to Plato our beliefs are globally defective.²⁷⁹⁸ This means that our ability to attain the superlative good and be happy depends on our ability to find the truth via philosophical examination. But here there are also several possibilities. We may be completely at a loss and unable to find anything; we may find some

²⁷⁹⁶ See in particular Chap. 7 Sect. 1.3 and Chap. 8 Sect. 3.

²⁷⁹⁷ See Chap. 7, Sect. 1.1.

²⁷⁹⁸ See Chap. 16, Sect. 5.

plausible views; we may find some truths (either more peripheral or more central to our way of seeing things and to our life); and we may find all the truth. All these possibilities are open and it is difficult to know what exactly may result from this positive or constructive examination. We do not even know if someone has carried it out to the end, and it is not clear whether Plato himself did so (or even if he thought he did). We have no way of knowing this about him, given the lack of direct communication. However, he isolates some meaningful possibilities in the corpus, and this is what we must now briefly explore.

2. Plato's elaboration of some possible outcomes

Plato presents various possible outcomes of philosophical examination in different passages of the corpus, and we will consider three in particular, which show us how different the outcomes of philosophical examination can be and how they can affect our life in very different manners.

2.1. Human wisdom (ἄνθρωπίνη σοφία)

One possible result of philosophical examination is the realization that we do not know anything – or at least that we do not know any of the most important things (τὰ μέγιστα). This seems to correspond to Socrates' self-presentation in the *Apology* and in other texts. Despite devoting his life to philosophical examination, he disavows any knowledge – or at least any important knowledge.²⁷⁹⁹ He has simply realized his ignorance, and this is all the wisdom he has. As we saw, he calls this the human wisdom (i.e., the wisdom proper of the finite or mortal being), and it stands in contrast not only with the wisdom of those that allegedly know what ἄρετή is (who have, therefore, a more than human knowledge), but especially with the wisdom of the god.²⁸⁰⁰ To be sure, we may question whether Socrates is really being sincere when he professes his ignorance, but this is in any case a possible result of philosophical examination. We may simply realize that we do not know anything.

Such a result may still have different meanings, though, because it may be regarded as either provisional or definitive. This is precisely what corresponds to the difference between

²⁷⁹⁹ See e.g. *Ap.* 21b, 23b, *Euthd.* 293b.

²⁸⁰⁰ See Chap. 2 Sect. 1.3 above.

the Skeptics and the Academics, according to Sextus Empiricus. The first still seek out the truth and are marked by a persistence of inquiry (ἐπιμονή ζητήσεως), whereas the second declare that truth cannot be grasped.²⁸⁰¹ We could also borrow Kant's terms and speak of a *suspensio iudicii indagatoria* and a *suspensio iudicii sceptica*.²⁸⁰² The question, then, is whether we are in a position to declare that we will never be able to know anything. Plato never fully develops the possibility that we might be constitutively unable to know, but he sometimes points in that direction (for instance, when he presents Protagoras' radical relativism in *Theaetetus* or when Socrates suggests in *Phaedo* that we will not be able to know anything for certain during our lives).²⁸⁰³

2.2. Τέχνη περὶ τὸν βίον

In general, Plato gives more attention to positive outcomes of philosophical examination – i.e., to the possibility of attaining knowledge. In this respect, he considers two distinct possibilities. The first one, which we will now consider, admits that we may attain a core of knowledge that allows us to guide life effectively and attain what we desire. Plato normally presents this kind of knowledge as a τέχνη (and in this sense he anticipates the later notion of τέχνη περὶ τὸν βίον).²⁸⁰⁴ Τέχναι are based on an insight into the φύσις of the things they deal with, which allows them to intervene effectively (or infallibly) in a particular domain of reality. In other words, they know what things are, and hence they can change them in order to improve them or improve our own life. This is what a τέχνη is and in certain passages Plato assumes that something of this sort can be found with respect to how we live.

The presentation of this idea may vary, though. Sometimes, Plato simply considers the possibility of a particular τέχνη that will allow us to guide our actions and attain what we desire – such as the measuring τέχνη in *Protagoras*.²⁸⁰⁵ Other times, Plato recognizes that there are many restricted domains of knowledge or many τέχναι, but he also considers the

²⁸⁰¹ See *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes*, I.1, in: H. MUTSCHMANN (ed.), *Sexti Empirici opera*, vol. 1, Leipzig, Teubner, 1912, 4.

²⁸⁰² See in particular I. KANT, *Logik*, in: IDEM, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 9, Berlin, Georg Reimer, 1923, 74: “Die Zurückhaltung des Urtheils kann in zwiefacher Absicht geschehen: entweder, um die Gründe des bestimmenden Urtheils aufzusuchen, oder um niemals zu urtheilen. Im erstern Falle heißt die Aufschiebung des Urtheils eine kritische (*suspensio iudicii indagatoria*), im letztern eine skeptische (*suspensio iudicii sceptica*). Denn der Skeptiker thut auf alles Urtheilen Verzicht, der wahre Philosoph dagegen suspendirt bloß sein Urtheil, wofern er noch nicht genügsame Gründe hat, etwas für wahr zu halten.”

²⁸⁰³ Cp. *Tht.* 152d ff., and *Phd.* 66d-67a.

²⁸⁰⁴ For more on this notion, see e.g. J. SELLARS, *Art of Living*. The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy, London, Bristol Classical Press, 2009² (Aldershot/etc., Ashgate, 2003¹), 5f., 55f.

²⁸⁰⁵ See 356a ff.

possibility of a guiding or royal knowledge (τέχνη βασιλική) that will allow us to use them in our advantage.²⁸⁰⁶ This is a variation of the sophistic idea of rhetoric as a τέχνη that is able to rule the other τέχναι, insofar as it convinces everybody to act in a certain way.²⁸⁰⁷ Plato, however, is more concerned with the fact that the individual τέχναι cannot determine what they should be used for, and this means that they may either benefit us or harm us. Therefore, one needs a τέχνη that is able to determine what we need and, in light of this knowledge, may direct and rule all τέχναι, thereby rendering them beneficial and improving our life.

We will not explore this idea here, but there is one other question associated with it that we must nevertheless consider. In order to guide our life, we need to have some knowledge of the circumstances we find ourselves in and also of what we need to attain. Plato, however, seems to be talking about a minimalistic version of knowledge in these passages. There are many things one will not be required to know, or at least things one will not be required to know in detail – such as the εἶδη. At the most, one will have knowledge of the forms of excellence, and it may be the case that we just need to have some correct δόξαι about them. But is it really so? Can we really guide our life with a minimalistic knowledge? Or can it be that in order to guide our life effectively we need to know a great number of things or even everything? In the *Republic*, Plato considers the fact that sailing (itself a model of a practical knowledge) requires us to know many things that may seem useless, including astronomy.²⁸⁰⁸ Thus, the extent of knowledge we would require in order to attain the superlative good is unclear.

2.3. The highest form of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)

Another possible outcome of philosophical examination (and indeed the best possible outcome) is to attain the highest form of knowledge. This may correspond to a perfect and full knowledge of everything, but usually Plato conceives it as a knowledge of the fundamental beings of reality – namely, the general predicates (εἶδη) that pervade everything.²⁸⁰⁹ If one attains such a knowledge, one will understand the content of these

²⁸⁰⁶ See in particular *Euthd.* 288d ff.

²⁸⁰⁷ See in particular *Grg.* 455d ff.

²⁸⁰⁸ See *Rep.* 488a ff.

²⁸⁰⁹ For more on this, cp. Chap. 11 Sect. 2.5.

predicates, how they relate to each other, and what they are based on (i.e., what the first principle of reality is).²⁸¹⁰

The representation of this knowledge of the fundamental structures of reality presents several problems, though. From our usual standpoint, it is difficult to see what exactly it corresponds to. Plato often refers to this in the context of myths, and he seems to describe it as a contemplation or θεωρία of some ineffable truth. On the other hand, he also presents this as the cornerstone of dialectics, which means that it is something must attain through λόγος. But regardless of how we attain knowledge of the εἶδη and what it consists in, it is important to bear in mind that this knowledge does not concern a different world, completely separated from our own. The εἶδη are presented as objective and even unchangeable contents, but they are also something that pervades everything, and thus the access to the εἶδη also concerns the appearance of all empirical reality. Everything is transformed by this access – including our own understanding of what we should do in life. This does not exclude that there will be some problems of application of this eidetic knowledge to empirical beings, and that some non-eidetic knowledge of the empirical domain may be required. But these are still questions one must solve through philosophical examination – and their solution will then be an important part of the highest form of knowledge.

Plato describes the possession of this knowledge – and especially the knowledge of the most important εἶδος (be it goodness or beauty) – both as a state of wakefulness and a state of fullness or perfect (i.e., proper) happiness. It is the best state one can attain. It is also described as the highest pleasure in the *Republic*.²⁸¹¹ In *Symposium*, Diotima says that life can only be worth living (if at all) when we come to contemplate τὸ καλόν.²⁸¹² This may then be conceived as a state of mere contemplation, or it may also include some action. For instance, one may need to generate something, as is said in *Symposium*.²⁸¹³ It may even imply political engagement, as we considered above (with all the problems that this engagement raises).²⁸¹⁴ Be that as it may, if one attains such a knowledge, one will then lead a philosophical life in a new sense of the word – i.e., one will no longer lead a life of pursuing the truth, but a life of full knowledge, which is actually the best (or, as Plato says, the true) life.²⁸¹⁵ Thus, one's experience will be wholly transformed. One's soul will be healthy (because it will be

²⁸¹⁰ The question of the first principle is indeed very important in this context, as was shown above. See Chap. 9 Sect. 3.2.

²⁸¹¹ See 583b ff.

²⁸¹² See 211c-d.

²⁸¹³ Cp. footnote 2760 above.

²⁸¹⁴ See Chap. 19, Sect. 5.2 – and for more on this notion of philosophical life, cp. Chap. 14 Sect. 5.

²⁸¹⁵ See *Rep.* 490b and *Lg.* 730c.

completely ruled by the love of knowledge) and shapely (because its way of seeing things will include no deviation or distortion), and one will have attained the superlative good one constitutively longs for – all this owing to the performance of philosophical examination.

The question, then, is whether a state with these characteristics is really within the reach of philosophical examination.

3. The map of risks involved in the abandonment of the unexamined life and their presuppositions

We have seen how philosophical examination admits very different outcomes, and these are not simple academic possibilities (as if it were at any rate clear what the real outcome of philosophical examination is). Before undertaking the examination we cannot really know the outcome. Many factors may influence the result and they may also seriously restrict the effectiveness of philosophical examination. In other words, several things may prevent philosophical examination from reaching the truth and the superlative good. Thus, we may remain ignorant and miserable. This calls into question the decision to abandon the unexamined life and to embrace philosophical examination. Are the rejection of the unexamined life and the imperative of philosophical examination still valid in face of these possibilities or these risks? To what extent?

This is what we will now focus on. We will outline a map of the main risks associated with the philosophical enterprise, and we will see how they may affect the imperative of philosophical examination and the rejection of the unexamined life. In order to identify these main risks, we will consider not only what is said in the Platonic corpus, but also some analyses of notorious critics of Platonism, which help us cover possible blind spots in Plato's thought.

3.1. The risks associated with one's personal circumstances

At first, we might be inclined to think that philosophical examination will always have the same outcome, regardless of who performs it and the circumstances one finds oneself in. In other words, we easily assume that if all of us were to devote ourselves to philosophical examination, then we would all be equally successful or equally unsuccessful. However, it is not necessarily so. The effectiveness of philosophical examination may depend

on one's personal circumstances.²⁸¹⁶ Obviously, the circumstances in which one examines may vary greatly from person to person, and some of them may prevent us from examining in a proper manner and thus reaching the truth. In this case, philosophical examination would still be undeniably good for human beings in general, but its value would be problematic for those that were not able to carry it out properly.

Plato clearly admits this possibility in several passages, and he identifies several reasons for it. First, one may not have the necessary material conditions, such as health and leisure.²⁸¹⁷ Second, one's milieu, education and cultural background may also render it particularly difficult for us to examine.²⁸¹⁸ Third, one may already be too old to begin examining.²⁸¹⁹ Fourth (and perhaps most importantly), one may have a natural constitution or φύσις that renders one unfit to examine. Indeed, human beings seem to be born and to grow with different characteristics – and some of them make it easier for us to examine.²⁸²⁰ Plato calls the attention to this by saying that philosophical examination requires us to have a certain moral character. Among other things, one should be steadfast, courageous, keen at studies, a lover of hard work, moderate and averse to lies. Moreover, one should have good intellectual capabilities – such as good memory or quickness of apprehension.²⁸²¹

These four factors, and especially our natural disposition, may thus prevent us from attaining truth and the superlative good, and it may be important to take this into consideration when determining both whether or not we should examine and whether or not we should urge others to examine.²⁸²² However, it is also important to bear in mind that some of these personal limitations may change. We may acquire better material conditions, we may change our milieu or overcome its influence over us, and we may perhaps change our natural features (at least up to a point). Moreover, as far as we know, these factors may still be insufficient to condemn our efforts of examining things to failure. Even age may be no obstacle. Indeed, it may happen that we are never too old to philosophize and be happy, as

²⁸¹⁶ The expression “personal circumstances” is here used in a broad sense, to designate any factor (be it intrinsic or extrinsic) that is not characteristic of all human beings as such and may determine the way a particular person examines.

²⁸¹⁷ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 406a, which also applies to philosophical examination.

²⁸¹⁸ See e.g. *Rep.* 491c ff.

²⁸¹⁹ See e.g. *Alc. I*, 127c-d.

²⁸²⁰ Cp. e.g. *Rep.* 370a-b: “(...) πρώτον μὲν ἡμῶν φύεται ἕκαστος οὐ πᾶν ὁμοίος ἐκάστω, ἀλλὰ διαφέρων τὴν φύσιν, ἄλλος ἐπ’ ἄλλου ἔργου πράξει.”

²⁸²¹ See *Rep.* 485a ff., 535a ff., *Tht.* 144a-b, *Ep. VII* 343e ff.

²⁸²² Indeed, this is intimately connected with the above discussed question of whether philosophical examination should be restricted just to a few people or to a particular class in the πόλις. For the discussion of this question, see Chap. 19, Sect. 6.1.

Epicurus says (even though his philosophical project is very different from Plato's).²⁸²³ Likewise, the other limitations do not immediately determine how far we may come. Hence, none of this immediately invalidates the rejection of the unexamined life and the imperative of philosophical examination. Finally, the fact that one is not able to find truth does not change the fact that the unexamined life cannot satisfy our desires, and philosophical examination may still bring us closer to the truth, at least insofar as it allows us to become aware of our ignorance. We may therefore have no reason to abandon philosophical examination, although in this case our reason for performing it will no longer be the same.

3.2. The risks associated with the time available to examine

The second kind of risk we incur when we devote ourselves to philosophical examination concerns all human beings. There may indeed be a constitutive disproportion between the duration of our life and the time required to bring philosophical examination to a satisfactory conclusion. As Hippocrates says: “[ὁ] βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ (...).”²⁸²⁴ This is particularly valid for philosophical examination. We saw above that the kind of examination required by the imperative is extremely vast and difficult.²⁸²⁵ It may therefore take us our entire life, or it may even be a task for many people and multiple generations. However, the general duration of our life time is not the only problem. Human beings are ἐφήμεροι and, as we saw, this does not just mean that our life is relatively short. We are also fragile beings, exposed to what the day may bring. Our life may change at any time, and in fact every moment may be our last.²⁸²⁶ Hence, we can never guarantee that we will live long enough to discover the truth. The time available may be insufficient, and we must still factor in the time we need to take care of other things – especially our survival.

Furthermore, we do not just want to attain truth and the superlative good at the end of our life. We want to have it now. Our desire is urgent and extreme. We want to guide ourselves correctly and see things as they are, and this is only possible at the end of the examination. But philosophical examination (at least as Plato conceives it) does not promise

²⁸²³ See *Ad Menoeceum*, in: H. USENER (ed.), *Epicurea*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1887, 59: “Μήτε νέος τις ὄν μελλέτω φιλοσοφεῖν, μήτε γέρον ὑπάρχων κοπιᾶτω φιλοσοφῶν. οὔτε γὰρ ἄωρος οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν οὔτε πάρωρος πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον. ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ὥραν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν, ὁμοίος ἐστὶν τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μήπω παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτ’ εἶναι.” On this matter, see also *La.* 188b.

²⁸²⁴ See *Aphorismi*, 1.1.

²⁸²⁵ See Chap. 19 Sect. 3.

²⁸²⁶ For more on this, cp. the preface to Part III above.

to be quick. It will probably take long and we may never conclude it. In the meanwhile, our life will have been put on hold. Indeed, we cannot simultaneously examine and go on with our life. Examination causes us to delay action, and as a result we may fail to do many important things, or we may do them too late, because we had not yet established that we should do them. We may thus make serious mistakes or miss out on important things.

Finally, the question of time affects not only the relation between life and philosophical examination, but also philosophical examination itself. We may not be sure that we should examine, and we may spend most of the time examining this question. We may also be already devoted to philosophical examination, and still fail to see what we should examine first and in what way. As a result, we may spend much time examining the very process of examination, and this may greatly increase the time we need to find out the truth.

In sum, philosophical examination may be an endless process and this may prevent us from ever attaining the truth and the superlative good. We may invest our whole life in a project that will never come to fruition, or that will do so only too late. If this happens, we may at that point think that it would have been better not to examine at all and to have enjoyed life while we could. However, such a view is very different from Plato's. As was said, the unexamined life is still unsatisfactory, and philosophical examination may at least remove our delusions. The question that we have to consider then is whether that is enough for us to accept a life of unsuccessful philosophical examination.

3.3. The risks associated with the possibility of a bad or tragic truth

The previous risks concerned the possibility of failing to complete philosophical examination, and thus failing to attain the truth and the superlative good we desire. Now, we must consider risks that are related to what we might attain at the end of the examination. We may start by considering a particular risk that pertains to the relation between truth and the superlative good we desire. Indeed, the imperative of philosophical examination was based on the view that truth allowed us to attain and was also part (perhaps even the essential part) of the superlative good we desire. However, there is also the possibility that truth might somehow be bad and undesirable. This is something we can clearly see in everyday life (i.e., in the context of the unexamined life), and it was also at the center of many Greek tragedies (such as Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*). Many empirical truths are very far from

corresponding to a good or desirable state, and much less to a superlatively good state. Knowing the truth may then cause great suffering, and one may even desire to die.²⁸²⁷

It is true that, in most of these cases, such empirical truths are only undesirable and tragic because our soul is ruled by a non-philosophical drive. For a philosophical soul, these truths could be much less dramatic or even irrelevant. However, the possibility we are now considering might not be circumscribed to empirical truths. The philosophical or real truth might also be tragic or terrible, and cause great frustration and suffering. In the context of Plato's thought, this could happen if we ended up discovering that there is actually no superlative good, that this is nothing more than a mirage, and that we are condemned to an eternal or transcendental dissatisfaction. This would render our life self-contradictory or absurd, and being fully conscious of this would render life unbearable.

At this point, we could doubt whether having devoted ourselves to philosophical examination was really what we should have done. We could indeed be tempted to agree with what Erasmus writes in *Moriae encomium id est stultitiae laus* – namely, that it is bad to be deceived, but it is superlatively bad not to be deceived.²⁸²⁸ Throughout her whole self-praise, Folly (or, as it could perhaps be better rendered, of stupidity or ἀμαθία) tries to show the lack of meaning of all of life's pursuits and how we can only find any joy in life because of our stupidity. In other words, we can only accept life if we are deceived about it. Hence, even if being deceived is not the greatest good, it would still be preferable to a complete rejection of life, and we could therefore settle for a deceived life – at least according to the personification of Folly. But according to Plato's thought, this does not seem to be a meaningful possibility. Our inborn love of knowledge would not be able to expressly desire not to know (not even to satisfy our love of gain and the desire not to suffer) – also because this would not really make our life worth living. At best, it would only make it seem worth living.

But if the realization that we cannot be happy is all that expects us at the end of the examination, should we still examine? Does it make any difference whether we examine or not? Probably not. In such a context, probably nothing would be worth our effort. However, we must bear in mind that from our standpoint this is only a possibility and before confirming it (i.e., before knowing whether it is so or not), Plato's imperative still applies. We still have

²⁸²⁷ Cp. e.g. EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 247-249: “τὸ γὰρ ὀρθοῦσθαι γνώμην ὀδυνᾶι, τὸ δὲ μαινόμενον κακόν· ἀλλὰ κρατεῖ μὴ γιγνώσκοντ' ἀπολέσθαι.”

²⁸²⁸ See D. ERASMUS, *Opera omnia*, series 4, vol. 3, Amsterdam/Oxford, North-Holland, 1979, 130: “Sed falli, iniquum, miserum est. Imo non falli miserrimum.”

to examine in the hope of finding the truth and thus attaining the superlative good. Indeed, this is too important a pursuit to neglect or give up on because there is a possibility that it might all be in vain.

3.4. The risk associated with the possibility that truth is inaccessible or that there is no truth

In the possibility previously considered we would still be able to determine how things are and – more importantly – what is our situation. Now, however, we will discuss the possibility that we cannot even do that. This may happen in two different ways.

First, it is possible that all philosophical examination only allows us to realize our own cognitive limits – i.e., that we cannot attain the truth. This partly corresponds to the above considered possibility of ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία (i.e., of scepticism in general) as an outcome of philosophical examination – although, as we saw, ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία may be both a provisional or a definitive outcome. If it were provisional, one could still continue to examine. But the possibility we are now considering involves the discovery of a constitutive limitation that prevents us from knowing things. We would only know that we cannot know, and we would therefore be certain that we cannot attain truth nor the superlative good we desire. This would render the imperative of philosophical examination weaker. We could still reduce our ignorance by examining, and this would still be better than being deluded, but our life would not become truly happy and truly worth living by examining. Consequently, we would have to consider whether a small improvement of our situation is worth the effort (i.e., whether we would resign ourselves to it and accept to live in such conditions).

But this is not the only way in which philosophical examination may fail to attain truth. The other way is even more aggressive and its consequences much deeper, because it attacks the very notion of truth – not just the Platonic identification of truth (to wit, that there are εἶδη, that they have certain features, that they pervade empirical reality, and so on), but also truth in general (i.e., any knowledge and any reality we may conceive in any way). Indeed, one may find that there is no truth at all, no true version of things. One may even find that the very notion of truth is absurd or self-contradictory. In a way, such a possibility was outlined by Gorgias in his work on non-being, which argued that nothing is, and if something were to be, it would be ungraspable, and if it could be grasped, it would not be

communicable.²⁸²⁹ One of the greatest developments of this view, however, can be found in Nietzsche's works. Nietzsche criticizes not only what we normally represent as truth, but he also tries to show that our conceptions of knowledge, truth, and reality is full of absurdities – such as the idea of something existing objectively or “in itself”, when all we can conceive are perspectives and the relations established in the these perspectives.²⁸³⁰ These and other arguments present an interesting challenge to the Platonic philosophical project, but we will not be able to discuss them here. We will just consider some of the consequences of Nietzsche's criticism, and especially its consequences for the imperative of philosophical examination.

The first thing we must consider is that this is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to conceive, in virtue of the essential role the notions of truth, knowledge and reality play in our experience of things. If these notions were to be invalidated, our entire way of seeing things would collapse. It would not simply happen that all our views would be false and all things would be mere appearances. As Nietzsche stresses, the very notion of mere appearance (and thus the associated notions of falsehood or untruth) would also be invalidated.²⁸³¹ What would be left then? And would a state without truth be bearable for us?²⁸³² What would that mean for our superlative desire? Would we be able to satisfy it in a different way, or would this desire of ours also be invalidated in virtue of the collapse of truth? It is very difficult to tell. As far as we know, we could become entirely rudderless, or our own identity could collapse.

If this were the case, would it not be better to be deceived and think that there is truth? In the context of Plato's thought, we would never be able to say such a thing, because we would always be contradicting ourselves. We would love knowledge, but this love would never be fulfilled. The only possibility left would be to extirpate our love of knowledge, although it is not clear how we could ever do so. At any rate, if truth really is an illusion, then philosophical examination as the pursuit of truth would become absurd. At best, it could only serve as a way to extirpate our love of knowledge. But we also do not know if this is possible

²⁸²⁹ See DK B3: “ἐν γὰρ τῷ ἐπιγραφομένῳ Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ Περὶ φύσεως τρία κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς κεφάλαια κατασκευάζει, ἓν μὲν καὶ πρῶτον ὅτι οὐδὲν ἔστιν, δεύτερον ὅτι εἰ καὶ ἔστιν, ἀκατάληπτον ἀνθρώπῳ, τρίτον ὅτι εἰ καὶ καταληπτόν, ἀλλὰ τοῖ γε ἀνέξοιστον καὶ ἀνερμήνευτον τῷ πέλας.”

²⁸³⁰ See e.g. KSA 12, 140-141, 353, 580.

²⁸³¹ See KSA 6, 81: “Die wahre Welt haben wir abgeschafft: welche Welt blieb übrig? die scheinbare vielleicht?... Aber nein! *mit der wahren Welt haben wir auch die scheinbare abgeschafft!*”

²⁸³² Cp. F. NIETZSCHE, KSA 2, 53-54: “Eine Frage scheint uns die Zunge zu beschweren und doch nicht laut werden zu wollen: ob man bewusst in der Unwahrheit bleiben *könne*? oder, wenn man diess *müsse*, ob da nicht der Tod vorzuziehen sei?”

or more desirable than our current state. In fact, it could simply be the case that life is altogether absurd and unviable, and so it does not really matter what we do.

If, however, we are just talking about the possibility that truth might be an illusion and have not yet confirmed it, then the imperative of philosophical examination seems to hold. It is not be certain that we will ever be able to attain truth and the superlative good by following the imperative, but we must still try, under pain of missing out on a good life.

3.5. The risk of having misdiagnosed the unexamined life

All the risks hitherto considered were concern the question of whether or not philosophical examination is able to provide what it is supposed or expected to provide, thereby allowing us to overcome the constitutive limitations of the unexamined life. In doing so, we did not question the diagnosis of the unexamined life (i.e., its defectiveness and undesirability). But if we did not yet complete philosophical examination, how can we be sure that the appraisal of the unexamined life, as well as the identification of our ψυχή on which it is based, are correct? Is it not possible that the previous analyses were somehow distorted or were still unexamined in some respect?

If we take a cursory glance at the history of philosophy (and even at some passages of the Platonic corpus), we find that there are many other ways of understanding our inner constitution and, consequently, many other appraisals of the unexamined life. We will not consider most of these possibilities here. We will just name a few, to see how this is also a risk we incur when we devote our lives to philosophical examination.

First, it is possible to conceive that there is no common and stable human constitution or φύσις, as we assumed. We may be different from one another, and our constitution may be fluid and malleable. If this is the case, then any analysis similar to the one we carried out would have a restricted validity or it would even be invalid.

Second, it may also happen that we do not actually have a desire of a superlative good, or if we do, it may be something we may change. If this is the case, then we could be satisfied with something that is defective. It would depend on what we would then desire.

Third, it is possible that the love of knowledge is actually not that central in our life or at least not irreducible to the other drives. In other words, Nietzsche may be right in saying that our will to truth (i.e., our love of knowledge) is a variation of a more fundamental drive – namely, what he calls “will to power” (which, as a drive, has some affinity to the love

of gain and the love of honor, but cannot be identified with one or the other).²⁸³³ This would mean that our love of knowledge is actually irrational and even self-contradictory, insofar as it fights against irrationality. In fact, we could argue (following Nietzsche) that an excessive development of our love of knowledge is actually a form of disease of the will, because it consists in a self-contradiction of the will to power.²⁸³⁴ One should therefore submit this will to power to therapy and try to develop a form of wisdom that accepts this irrationality. Such a wisdom could resemble (at least formally) what we find in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where two forms of wisdom are opposed and it is said about the more rational one that “τὸ σοφὸν δὲ οὐ σοφία.”²⁸³⁵

Fourth and finally, it is also possible that the unexamined life (at least in some of its modalities) has much more truth than we admitted. In particular, it may have many ὀρθαὶ δόξαι and this may be enough for it to guide itself correctly and attain what it desires. This is actually the way traditions and religions are often understood (which is particularly relevant, since this was at the basis of the accusations against Socrates). Artistic experiences may also be interpreted in light of such categories. Indeed, art and religion make constant appeal to inspiration and possession, and correct δόξαι are understood by Plato precisely in these terms.²⁸³⁶ Thus, by rejecting the unexamined life in all its forms, we may also be losing other forms of truth.

All these possibilities present a challenge to the imperative of philosophical examination, at least in the terms it was presented above. If they were confirmed, they could refute the imperative. But it is not easy to confirm them. They are not absolutely self-evident, and our reflection about them may very well be based on false knowledge claims. Therefore, any serious decision on these matters would require much more examination. Still, the mere possibility that these and other alternatives to Plato's views might be right (or at least have some truth in them) should lead us to examine more carefully what was said before, in order to confirm the appraisal of the unexamined life and the imperative of philosophical examination. In fact, this is required by the very imperative of philosophical examination.

²⁸³³ See e.g. *KSA* 5, 145: “Ihr ‘Erkennen’ ist *Schaffen*, ihr Schaffen ist eine Gesetzgebung, ihr Wille zur Wahrheit ist – *Wille zur Macht*. – Giebt es heute solche Philosophen?”

²⁸³⁴ This is one of the main arguments of the third essay of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* – see *KSA* 5, 339ff. Cp. also e.g. *KSA* 3, 581-583.

²⁸³⁵ See v. 395.

²⁸³⁶ Cp. Chap. 7 Sect. 2.3 above.

4. The risks involved in remaining in the unexamined life and not embracing philosophical examination

Before concluding this analysis, it is important to consider one final time the opposite risks – namely, the risks we incur if we remain in the unexamined life. According to Plato, this is a bad and miserable life, essentially marked by illness and deformity, and it constitutively prevents us from attaining what we really desire. Hence, by remaining in it, we lose the possibility of having a truly meaningful life and of satisfying our desire. We will be frustrated and not even realize it. We may think we are leading the best life possible and be very far from doing so. We may be completely deluded with respect to ourselves and everything else. We may be in a state of madness, but at peace with ourselves, which will prevent us from any significant change. The only possibility of realizing this may be by embracing philosophical examination. But by turning our back to it, we will be condemning ourselves to a life of inapparent, but all-pervasive self-disagreement or self-contradiction.

It is also possible that we will come to be convinced of this one day, but that by then it will be already too late to fully carry out the examination. As we saw, philosophical examination is extremely demanding, and it is very important to begin it as soon as possible. Hence, by resisting it, we might be losing precious time and condemning ourselves to failure.

However, we may also stop examining because we become conscious of one – or even several – of the risks mentioned above. But these may be false risks – i.e., it may be possible for us to attain truth and the superlative good via philosophical examination. It is true that at many points the examination may seem hopeless, but we never know what will happen at the next turn, and any sudden discovery may change everything.

In sum, philosophical examination is in itself very difficult, and the fact that we must perform it without being assured of a good outcome renders it even more difficult. However, the fact that something is difficult does not mean it is not good and desirable. It is always important to remember a saying that Plato sometimes quotes – namely, that “admirable things are difficult” (χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ).²⁸³⁷ This is a common trait of Greek thinking. Life is not supposed to be easy. If all desires were to be automatically satisfied, then we would have no pleasure and there would be no merit. We are supposed to break a sweat in order to succeed.

²⁸³⁷ See *Hp. Ma.* 304e, *Cra.* 386a-b, *Rep.* 435c-d, 497d. On the meaning of the saying, see e.g. A. ADLER (ed.), *Suida Lexicon*, 5 vols., Leipzig, Teubner, 1928-1938, *sub voce*; W. GREENE (ed.), *Scholia Platonica*, Haverford (PA), American Philological Association, 1938, *ad Cra.* 384b, *Hp. Ma.* 384e, *Rep.* 435c. Cp. also A. MINTZ, “Chalepa Ta Kala”, “Fine Things are Difficult”. Socrates’ Insights into the Psychology of Teaching and Learning, *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29 (2010), 287-299.

Life is supposed to be difficult. This does not necessarily mean that it is impossible to be successful or to attain what we desire. However, we will only be able to be happy if we admit that it is possible. We must have hope of finding the truth and attaining the superlative good. Only so will we ever be able to fare well.

CONCLUSION

Let us briefly reconsider the main results of this dissertation, focusing particularly on its final part, where we tackled the central questions concerning the unexamined life. The whole discussion was centered on the problematic assertion that the unexamined life is not worth living. Our goal was to see what is implied in this assertion and to determine its validity. In order to do so, we started by considering what is said in the *Apology*, but then we extended our consideration to the whole Platonic corpus, which allowed us to develop a much more refined discussion of the problem.

The main structure of the argument can already be found in the *Apology*, though. As we saw in Part I, Socrates shows that the life we ordinarily live is characterized by having many false knowledge claims, by neglecting the quality of our ψυχή or its ἀρετή, and by being a bad life overall (although we may interpret it as being a good and happy life). Indeed, such a life is not what it normally seems and it is very far from attaining what it wants. This is why philosophical examination is so important. By examining, we may counteract these defects. Philosophical examination brings awareness of one's ignorance and of the need to pursue knowledge, it shows us the need to care for our ψυχή and its ἀρετή, and it may therefore lead us to a better and happier life.

In order to gain a deeper understand of this, we identified several main questions and tried to see how these questions are handled in the entire Platonic corpus. Such an approach is somewhat problematic, especially because the indications given by Plato's texts can be quite diverse, and sometimes even contradictory. However, we tried to bring these different indications together and identify the main tendencies of Plato's writings.

In Part II, we tried to define the notion of philosophical examination, which is what is supposed to determine the value of one's life, according to the *Apology*. We saw that when we look at the dialogues, there seem to be many different forms of examination, but they can all be understood as belonging to the same unitary project of examination. Indeed, they all have the same object – to wit, views in general, and especially to the views we adopted (i.e., our beliefs). These views determine how we see things, and they are much more numerous and much more complex than we may immediately think. Moreover, they can be (and often are) defective. In fact, our access to things can be entirely distorted, especially if we fail to

understand the main predicates of reality (i.e., the εἶδη). Hence, it is important to examine our whole way of seeing things, and this examination has a negative (or destructive) and a positive (or constructive) side. On the one hand, we must verify the views we adopted and cast away all those that are defective. On the other hand, we must find new and better views. These two sides of philosophical examination are constitutively interrelated, although the negative side has precedence, especially because all the beliefs we already have when we start examining may distort any positive examination we undertake.

This whole discussion of philosophical examination showed how complex and difficult the examining process is according to Plato. We may carry out some philosophical examinations without ever being aware of how complex this examination is supposed to be. This means that the examined life is also much more difficult to reach than we may think.

But how exactly is the difference between the unexamined life and the examined life to be understood? To answer this question, we had to consider the kind of being that we are and the main structures of life. This was precisely the subject of Part III. We started by seeing that according to Plato we are primarily a soul (ψυχή). This term denotes a sort of inner being, which cumulates several functions, both cognitive and practical. We considered each kind of function separately, but we also saw how they are deeply intertwined.

First, we focused our attention on the cognitive structure of the soul. We saw that the soul always includes the appearing of something that is primarily indeterminate. But at the same time, the soul moves beyond this simple appearance, and determines what appears as being something determinate – i.e., it determines a certain version of truth. This means that the soul is related to some being and its access to it is seen as knowledge. In fact, even if the soul is not able to determine what appears to it, it is still related to truth (i.e., to being and knowledge) as what is to be determined. Next, we saw that the soul's access to things is based on several cognitive powers. Besides having sensation and memory, the soul makes judgments (δόξαι) – i.e., it tries to determine things – and it also has διάνοια, λογισμός or νοῦς, which is what allows us to know the general predicates (εἶδη) we use to determine things.

Second, we focused on the practical side and determined the fundamental structure of our desire according to Plato – namely, the fact that we are always directed at a superlative good, whose attainment would make our soul actually happy. This fundamental desire is the basis of all our other desires and pursuits. Everything is integrated in the pursuit of the superlative good, as a moment of it, and everything is seen in light of this pursuit. Thus, the

pursuit of the good brings about a kind of practical system, which – as was shown – is also dependent on a complex system of views. These two systems are indeed a central structure of the soul and together they are what constitutes a life or a βίος.

Third, we considered how Plato sometimes describes our soul as having different constitutive drives. We paid special attention to the distinction of three main drives: namely, love of gain, love of honor, and love of knowledge or φιλοσοφία. These drives deeply shape our pursuit of the good. They are always combined in some way, under the dominance of one of them, and this constitutes the inner arrangement or inner πολιτεία of the soul. Moreover, they are never experienced in their pure state. Rather, they deeply “contaminate” or transform each other. This means that they can assume many different shapes, according to the relation of forces between them, and it also means that the love of knowledge or φιλοσοφία pervades the entire soul, including the other drives. Everything is somehow related to views and to truth (or at least to the desire of truth). This is an essential characteristic of the ψυχή, and it also shows how the cognitive and practical sides of the ψυχή are deeply intertwined.

These are the main traits of Plato’s philosophical anthropology. We are constitutively related to the truth and to the good, and we can make different identifications of them, mostly due to the fact that the soul’s drives may be arranged in different ways. But Plato not only alludes to this diversity of identifications. He also tries to determine the proper identification of the truth and of the superlative good, in order to determine what is the best possible life – i.e., the life we constitutively desire.

It is precisely in this framework that the whole appraisal of the unexamined life and of philosophical examination must be understood. But in order to consider such an appraisal, we still had to define what exactly constitutes an unexamined life, and this was the objective of Part IV. We saw that the notion of unexamined life is quite complex. It encompasses many different lives, including lives that have some dedication to philosophical examination. However, all these lives are characterized by a particular arrangement of the soul’s drives – namely, one in which the soul’s love of knowledge is weak and dominated by a non-philosophical drive. This constitutes a particular identification of the good and a practical system that do not result from examination and do not give any special role to examination. But this does not mean that such a life is irrational, because the drive that rules it is still pervaded by love of knowledge and, as a result, it creates many views, which not only underpin the practical system of such a life, but also constitute a general way of seeing things. These views are accepted by the soul’s love of knowledge due to the weakness of the latter,

but they can well be – and in general are – defective. In fact, according to Plato, the unexamined life is full of distortions, especially because it cannot grasp the meaning of the main predicates of reality, and it is precisely in this sense that it is compared to an all-encompassing dream state, in which nothing is seen as it really is.

In this context, we also discussed the question of what is ultimately responsible for the unexamined life. We saw that what decides the kind of life the soul lives is the soul itself, and more precisely the soul's φιλοσοφία. The latter cannot be directly determined by anything else. It determines itself to be stronger or weaker, and this in turn determines the soul's arrangement of drives, our desires or “will”, and the way we see things. The origin of the unexamined life lies therefore at the depths of our being. We do not directly control it, but this also means that nothing external to us can prevent us from abandoning the unexamined life. Just as our love of knowledge determines itself to lead an unexamined life, it may also determine itself (with or without external stimuli) to become stronger and abandon such a life. This confirms once more the central importance of the soul's love of knowledge and how our entire life depends on it.

Finally, in Part V, we discussed once more Plato's appraisal of the unexamined life, now in light of what is said in the entire corpus. According to Plato, the unexamined life is a bad or undesirable life, and therefore not worth living. This means that such a life does not allow us to attain what we desire (namely, the superlative good), even if we think that we already attained it or are on our way to attaining it. Indeed, the badness and misery of the unexamined life tend to be inapparent or latent, but this makes them no less real. As we saw, the badness in question comes from within, and it assumes two forms. On the one hand, there is a form of badness that is like a disease or a sedition and ultimately consists in the fact that our drives do not perform their natural functions (i.e., the parts that should be ruled try to rule the soul, whereas the love of knowledge, which should rule the soul, submits itself to a non-rational drive). On the other hand, there is a form of badness that is like deformity or unfitness and comes from the fact that our soul fails to attain the truth to which it is essentially directed, being instead full of false knowledge claims. Because of these two forms of badness that are characteristic of the unexamined life, our soul is found to be in disagreement or in contradiction with itself, and this self-disagreement or self-contradiction pervades the whole unexamined life, in all its forms. This is why such a life cannot correspond to what the soul desires and is always miserable, even if we do not realize it.

This diagnosis of the unexamined life thus outlines a particular kind of imperative of philosophical examination, as we saw in Chapter 19. Although Plato's writings present several different arguments why we should philosophize, the most developed argument we can extract from these writings is the one that grounds the need to examine on the soul's intrinsic desire for a superlative good, as well as for the truth as a fundamental component of the good (and this is precisely what the unexamined life is constitutively unable to provide). Philosophical examination is therefore the means to attain the truth and the superlative good (which also implies strengthening the soul's love of knowledge and bringing about the best and most healthy arrangement of the soul's drives). In sum, it is our inner structure, as well as the constitutive defectiveness of the unexamined life, that require us to examine things (and to examine them so exhaustively as we saw in Part II).

This is the justification we find in the whole Platonic corpus for Socrates' assertion in the *Apology*. However, this justification also raises a question that casts doubt on the imperative of philosophical examination as it is conceived by Plato. The argument we laid out assumes that philosophical examination can be effective and can actually help us attain the truth and the superlative good. This is why an examined life is better than the unexamined life. However, we saw in Chapter 20 that the effectiveness of philosophical examination is quite problematic. The Platonic corpus admits that philosophical examination can have a negative or a positive outcome, and we cannot know how it will turn out before actually carrying it out. We may thus be unable to find the truth and the superlative good only by examining things, and there are several factors that may be responsible for this: our circumstances may be inadequate, we may not have sufficient time, the truth may not give us access to a superlative good (in fact, it may even show that there is no such a thing), the truth may be inaccessible, or it may even be something that does not exist. In addition, there is also the risk that Plato's identification of life's structures and his diagnosis of the unexamined life is somehow wrong. All this renders the imperative of examination highly questionable – although there is still the possibility that Plato is right and that our life can only be meaningful if we devote ourselves to philosophical examination. We are thus forced to continue examining the problem of the unexamined life, at least if we want our life to have a solid ground. It is true that we may miss out on many important things (and even on the most important things) while we do this. However, it is also important to bear in mind that the dedication to the examination that is thus required is not unconditional, but rather provisional. We must question the very imperative to examine. This does not mean we will be any less

committed to it. In fact, examining the imperative to examine is a way of remaining faithful to the very idea of examination and what it requires of us. The result of the whole dissertation is thus partially aporetic, but it also shows what we should do if we really want to find out what we should do in life. According to Plato, this is not something to which we can renounce or which we can choose not to know, but in general we are already convinced of knowing it. We must therefore ask ourselves if we can trust our knowledge claims in such an important matter.

Regardless of this, one thing seems to have become absolutely clear: namely, that the problem we have been discussing is very important. We mentioned this in the Introduction, and now we can better understand what was then said. Plato shows how the decision on whether or not to examine shapes our entire life – i.e., both everything we do and the way we see everything. Moreover, he shows that such a decision determines the value of our life. This is so even if Plato is wrong and we should not examine. Now, it is true that according to Plato this decision does not exactly depend on us, as if we were completely free to choose one way or the other. The kind of life we lead stems from the way our soul's love of knowledge determines itself. However, even if this is the case, it does not mean that thinking about it is irrelevant, because doing so may somehow prompt our love of knowledge to determine itself differently.

It has likewise become clear that this problem is at the center of Plato's writings. It is directly considered in several passages, and it is related to many others. Indeed, most of the Platonic corpus contributes decisively to the discussion of this question. In addition, the status of the whole corpus and of what is presented in it is fundamentally determined by this question. It is because we need to philosophize that all the discussions in the dialogues are important, and it is also because we need to philosophize that the whole corpus tries to stimulate the readers to dedicate themselves to this examination.

Finally, it was also mentioned at the beginning that this problem is at the center of philosophy in general, and we now can better understand why it is so. Plato shows that this problem is crucial to determine the kind of being that we are and what our life is about. As we could also say, it is a central problem of philosophical anthropology.²⁸³⁸ At the same time,

²⁸³⁸ It is no accident that Plato defines the human being as the animal that reviews what it sees – i.e., that examines. Examination in general and philosophical examination in particular are indeed at the center of what we are, even if only as a rejected possibility. Cp. *Cra.* 399c: “σημαίνει τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὅτι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θηρία ὧν ὄρα οὐδὲν ἐπισκοπεῖ οὐδὲ ἀναλογίζεται οὐδὲ ἀναθρεῖ, ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἅμα ἐώρακεν – τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ ὄπωπε – καὶ ἀναθρεῖ καὶ λογίζεται τοῦτο ὃ ὄπωπεν. ἐντεῦθεν δὴ μόνον τῶν θηρίων ὀρθῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἄνθρωπος ὀνομάσθη, ἀναθρῶν ἃ ὄπωπε.”

he shows how any philosophical examination is essentially determined by its relation to our own life. More precisely, he shows how the inner arrangement of our drives and the strength of our love of knowledge determine both the way we perform the examination and the final content of any inquiry. Hence, philosophical anthropology (and within it the question of what role philosophical examination plays – or should play – in human life) is a decisive (even if mostly tacit) component of any philosophical inquiry.

The problem of the unexamined life is thus very far from being an invented problem. We may normally not be clearly conscious of it, but it shapes who we are and what we do, even after we decide to dedicate ourselves to philosophical examination. This, of course, only renders the inconclusive character of this dissertation all the more frustrating. Our results were only provisional and called for more examination, but we will not be able to continue examining the question at this moment. What we can still do is briefly consider the directions in which this dissertation could be developed, which also allows us to better situate and appraise what has been done.

First of all, there is still much we could explore in Plato's writings. Many of the passages we considered are more complex than what was shown in the previous analyses. A deeper analysis or an analysis from different angles could therefore reveal important aspects that we did not take into account, and these aspects could render Plato's arguments clearer, more persuasive, or more nuanced. Furthermore, there are many passages to which we did not pay close attention (especially passages concerning political, cosmological and religious matters), and these could also be brought into the discussion.

But this is not all. We should also go beyond the Platonic corpus and see how other authors develop or oppose Plato's perspectives. The whole history of philosophy can indeed be read as a long discussion of this problem (or at least of questions that are directly relevant to this problem). Some authors and movements, as for instance Aristotle, Stoicism, Neoplatonism, Scholasticism, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, German Idealism, Husserl attempted to establish some sort of absolute or perfect knowledge, on which our life could be grounded. It would therefore be quite instructive to see how these attempts relate to the question of the unexamined life. On the other hand, there are many authors who do not think we can attain real knowledge, but nevertheless try to determine how we should live (or at least give some indications about it). One of the best examples of this is Kant's moral project. Pragmatist and existential philosophers have also tried to determine how we should live without resorting to such a complex cognitive project. Some authors, both Christian (such as

Pascal and Kierkegaard) and non-Christian, tried to find religious solutions to life, while others (such as Nietzsche) defended a kind of redemption through art. It would be interesting to see what these and many other authors have to say and how they conceive the role philosophical examination should play in our life. Finally, we should also consider if there is any significant possibility that has not yet been explored by any philosopher.

One might certainly wonder why we need such an exhaustive analysis, especially because nothing seems to prevent us from solving the problem we must solve without considering all possible perspectives. However, when we try to do so, we realize how difficult the problem of the unexamined life is. Moreover, it is very easy to become falsely convinced of having solved the problem. To avoid this, it is important to confirm that our solution can resist all possible attacks and that we have no blind spots. It is the very idea of philosophical examination that demands this, and Plato's dialogues render this very clear. If we want to have a full insight into how we should live, we must question everything, including examination itself, and we must consider all possible views, insofar as it is possible. In this sense, the Platonic corpus is not only at the basis of pretty much all subsequent history of philosophy (at least in its Western variant), but it also requires us to seriously engage with this history (including what came before Plato and what is not related to him in any way), in order to develop (and perhaps one day complete) the discussion we find in the Platonic dialogues.

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