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ON THE "GOLD - EXAMPLE" IN PLATO'S TIMAEUS (50A5 - B5)

At Tim 50A5-B5, Plato presents a concise, enigmatic illustration of the "Receptacle" or "All-Receiving Nature." He imagines someone moulding figures of all kinds in a lump of gold, and continually remoulding each and all into all the others. Someone else then points to one of these shaped pieces of gold and asks, "What is it?" (τί ποτ' ἐστί) Plato comments on three possible replies to this question:

- (i) μακρῶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀσφαλέστατον εἰπεῖν ὅτι χρυσός,
- (ii) τὸ δὲ τρίγωνον ὅσα τε ἄλλα σχήματα ἐνεγίγνετο, μηδέποτε λέγειν ταῦτα ὡς ὄντα, ἅ γε μεταξὺ τιθεμένου μεταπίπτει,
- (iii) ἀλλ' ἐὰν ἄρα καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον μετ' ἀσφαλείας ἐθέλη δέχεσθαι τινος, ἀγαπᾶν.

In the present paper, I shall discuss the interpretation of these three replies. By far the fullest account of them to date is by Prof. Cherniss.¹ He has effectively refuted many earlier views, but I am not fully persuaded by his own interpretation, and in Part I of this paper I attempt to show some difficulties in his reading. Then (II) I shall advance and defend an alternative interpretation of my own. To conclude (III), I shall comment briefly on the place of the example in its wider context in the Timaeus.

I

I find four major difficulties with Cherniss' reading. First, it involves an equivocal view as to the relation between the three main components. On the one hand, Cherniss holds that (i) and (ii) go closely together as contrasted answers to the one question posed in the context:

1. Cherniss, Harold, "A Much Misread Passage of the Timaeus (Timaeus 49C7-50B5)," AJP 75 (1954), pp. 113-130, at pp. 125-127. Henceforth all references to Cherniss' view will be to this article - usually by page and line number, thus: "128.6" = page 128, line 6.

"[(ii)] being the forbidden reply to the question τί ποτ' ἐστί, to which [(i)] is the correct answer"². But, on the other hand, he also holds that (ii) and (iii) go closely together as contrasted answers to some other question to which (ii) is the forbidden answer, and (iii) the correct reply: "τὸ τοιοῦτον here [in (iii)] is the abbreviated alternative to the forbidden ταῦτα ὡς ἄλλα [in (ii)]."³ He thus finds two correct alternatives to (ii) - which is to say, his view of (ii) is basically equivocal. To support his reading of (ii), Cherniss requires a certain shift in the reader's understanding of the question to which (i), (ii) and (iii) provide answers. The initial question is specifically asked about some one thing that the asker points at (50A7-B1). On the recommended answer (i), we are to say that that is gold (for it remains gold, in the midst of all its changes); what we are not to say, is (ii) that what the questioner points at is a "triangle," "square," or any other of the passing shapes.⁴ But in order to progress beyond this point in the text, Cherniss needs to take the basic question in a somewhat different sense: that question must now specifically concern the shapes that come to be in the gold, for it is only as an answer to that question that (iii) can be called for, as a new corrective to (ii). To support such a shift in sense, Cherniss accords a rather marked, subject-switching force to 50B2 δέ, and punctuates his translation so as to convey the shift by placing a semi-colon between (i) and (ii), with only a comma between (ii) and (iii). I believe we can fairly bring the required shift into relief by slightly

2. 126.4-6; cf. n.18, lines 3-7.

3. 127.25-26; cf. n. 19, sub fin.

4. This is the first of Cherniss' views of (ii) referred to earlier. Cf. his n. 17, lines 3-18, and last 3 lines; also n. 18, lines 3-7.

amplifying upon his translation. (The arrow-brackets are in the original; only the words in square brackets are my additions:)

[When the questioner asks what it is that he is pointing at,] by far the surest answer so far as truth is concerned is to say "gold"; but as to the triangle and all the other figures that were coming to be in it, [if it is those he means to ask about,] <the surest thing is >never to say "these are," since they < i.e. what would be denoted by "these" > [i.e. those things that he is pointing at] are changing even while one is making the statement, but to be content if with some assurance he may be willing to accept <the statement> "What is such and such <is>." [i.e., if he really wishes to know what the square or triangle is, then be content if he will agree that "what is such and such is - the triangle and the other figures."]

The following dialogue may help to make these answers, and the necessary shift, more clear:

- (Y is moulding all sorts of shapes in some gold.)
- X.1 - (X, pointing to the thing in Y's hands, asks,) "What is that?"
- (i) Y.1 - "This is gold."
- X.2 - "Why don't you say that it's a triangle? It looks like one."
- (ii) Y.2 - "Just then it did, but look: I have made it into something else even while you were speaking, so I couldn't properly have said, 'what you are pointing to is a triangle.'" "
- X.3 - "I see, but what about those figures that you are moulding in the gold?" [τὸ δὲ τρίγωνον read with subject-shifting adversative force; cf. Cherniss' "but as to the...figures".]
- (ii) Y.3 - "What about them? What you are pointing at is clearly not the triangle, the square, or any other figure, for I make it into something different even as you speak."
- X.4 - "But if that is not (a? the?) triangle, what is? What would you refer to by the term "triangle"?"
- (iii) Y.4 - (Remembering the contents of Tim 49D-E) "What is such and such. I mean (cf. 49E5) what is permanently of such and such a nature, and always recurs alike in all these cases: that is what I mean by 'triangle,' and I would be content if you would accept that answer too."

In this schema, Y.2 and Y.3 represent the two interpretations of (ii), one set in contrast to (i) (= Y.1), and the other to (iii) (= Y.4). To secure both senses of (ii) in the context, we require the shifts in the understanding of the question at issue that are represented here by X's questions. Since, on Cherniss' view⁵, the entire gold-example serves as a

5. Cf. 125.1-2, 127.2⁴ and 128.1-6. Against this part of Cherniss' view, see my third objection below.

brief illustration of all the preceding lines since 49C7, these required shifts would of course receive support from the wider context. None the less, it seems to me that they strain our passage to the limit. Though that might not be decisive in itself, some other difficulties combine with it to weigh strongly against Cherniss' reading.

My second difficulty with Cherniss' reading is the plural ταῦτα in answer (ii). The vivid emphasis on pointing in 50A7-B1 clearly showed that some one thing is denoted, and one question asked about it (δεικνύντος δὴ τινος αὐτῶν ἐν καὶ ἐρομένου τί ποτ' ἐστί). The first reply prescribed is clearly singular⁶, and Cherniss sees that (ii) must also have a basically singular force: "[(ii)] must mean 'never to say that these are' in the sense 'never to say "this is triangle," "this is square," etc.'"⁷ But despite the singular question so vividly imagined in the context, Cherniss maintains that Plato's mention of the various possible shapes (τὸ δὲ τρίγωνον ὅσα τε ἄλλα σχήματα ἀνεγίγνατο) abruptly attracts the deictic pronoun into the plural. Many interpreters have held that ταῦτα refers specifically to those most obvious plurals in the context (τὸ δὲ τρίγωνον ὅσα τε ἄλλα σχήματα) but Cherniss rejects that reading⁸ and must accordingly hold that the ταῦτα is drawn into the plural by those terms, though referring not to them, but to some one subject which (in each case) we would point at and inquire about.⁹

6. As Cherniss says, "ὅτι χρυσός stands for τοῦτο χρυσός ἐστί "(126.7).

7. Note 17, end of first paragraph; my emphasis. Cf. lines 4-5 of second paragraph (quoted n. 9 below), and note 18, lines 5-7.

8. Note 17, second paragraph.

9. To appreciate the difficulty here, compare these passages in Cherniss: (a) n.17, para. 2, lines 4-5 (a quote from A.E. Taylor, with Cherniss' comment in brackets): "the figure [i.e., the golden figure to which one would point and say: 'this is...'] would be actually changing as you spoke."

(b) n.18, lines 3-5: "the golden shapes (i.e. the phenomena) [note the plural] to which the naïf answerer is likely to point and say 'these are triangles, squares, etc.'" Here compare 50A7 δεικνύντος δὴ τινος αὐτῶν ἐν , and Cherniss 125.2-4.

My third, and most general difficulty with Cherniss' reading is the supposed parallel with 49D-E which he relies upon at every turn in his interpretation. (In particular, it underlies his view of the (ii)-(iii) antithesis as saying that not ταῦτα but τὸ τοιοῦτον should be called "triangle," "fire," or whatever.¹⁰) In point of fact, that parallel is quite defective: (a) in 49D-E, we find four different complex references to the qualitatively invariant aspect of becoming (49D5-6 τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀεί and the other τὸ τοιοῦτον phrases in D6-7, E5-6, and E6-7¹¹). Cherniss takes 50B4 τὸ τοιοῦτον as an abbreviated allusion to these phrases¹², but he gives no explanation why Plato here omits the essential temporal modifiers so carefully retained and varied in all four instances in 49D-E. Furthermore (b), to secure a (ii)-(iii) antithesis "exactly parallel"¹³ to 49D-E, Cherniss has to omit 50B4 ἐὰν ἔρα, B4 καί and B4-5 μετ' ἀσφαλείας...τινος. He provides no explanation for the presence of these terms, nor does he explain the precise force of B5 ἀγαπῶν in this context. For all these reasons - and because I feel that the entire (ii)-(iii) antithesis based on 49D-E requires a strained equivocation in our understanding of the context (see the first objection above) - I find it difficult to believe that the parallel with 49D-E is proper to our passage.¹⁴

Still another reason for this view, and my fourth and final difficulty with Cherniss' reading, concerns the lines immediately following the gold-example. In 50E5,ff, Plato says that ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος holds of the Receptacle. He then explains his meaning in a way that fits only the (i)-(ii) antithesis,

10. Cf. p.127, last 5 lines: τὸ τοιοῦτον replaces ταῦτα as the subject of the statement.

11. Cf. Cherniss, p.115, n.3 on these phrases.

12. Cf. p.128, bottom paragraph. Also AJP 78 (1957), p. 246 (top).

13. 128.3.

14. On my own view - cf. II and III below - that parallel is dropped, and τὸ τοιοῦτον has a different role. -I am well aware that Cherniss' whole interpretation of 49D-E has been challenged by Gullett (AJP 81[1960], 53-64). I have shown elsewhere that his challenge fails completely, but I cannot deal with that point here; (see my paper, "On Plato's Timaeus 49D4-E7," forthcoming in the AJP).

and makes no use of (iii) at all. His remark at 50B6-8 (it must always be called the same...) parallels answer (i) in the gold-example: we are always to reply, "it is gold," for that much about it remains the same. In addition, 50B8-C4 parallels comment (ii): the Receptacle never truly takes on any of the characters that it receives, although it may appear to do so. Cornford brings out the parallel clearly:

The Forms, 'in some strange manner that is hard to express', impress their characteristic qualities on the Receptacle. But the Receptacle does not itself possess any of these characters or qualities, any more than gold in itself possesses a triangular shape. The qualities do not belong to it; they only pass in and out, like images crossing a mirror. ¹⁵

Plato's own explanation in 50B8ff thus seems to undercut one of Cherniss' arguments for a parallel with 49D-E. Cherniss supports that parallel by comparing B3-4 ἄ γὰρ... μετασπίπτει with 49E2-4 φεύγει... φάσις .¹⁶ They are indeed similar passages, but Plato's explanation shows that the clause within the gold-example makes a special and rather different point. At 49E2-4, Plato cited the "fugitivity" of phenomenal individuals as a reason why they cannot provide a stable, definite referent for such terms as "this" or "fire" or "water" or the rest. At that point, his aim was to say that we should properly refer these terms to something else (to τὸ τοιοῦτον αἰτί). But at 50B3-4 he is explaining why we should not speak of the gold as being of-any-particular-shape: not because we should refer such shape-words elsewhere (though Plato does believe that) but because these transitory shapes have no real hold upon the nature of the gold, and cannot be said to be what it is (i.e. cannot rightly answer the question τί ποτ' ἐστί). In 50B2-4 Plato is concerned with talk about the Receptacle, not about triangle or fire.

¹⁵ Cornford, Plato's Cosmology, p. 184, my underlining; cf. also p.181.

¹⁶. Page 125, n.17, lines 7-11, and page 126, n.18, lines 5-8.

II

The cumulative effect of the difficulties I have indicated is to leave me unconvinced by Cherniss' reading of the gold-example. My own interpretation will be very different from his, yet my basic orientation toward the passage follows a principle which Cherniss himself has done more than any other commentator to establish. As Cherniss emphasized,

The whole sentence from 50A7 to the end... is determined by the hypothesis that someone asks a question... and is framed as the recommendation of a reply to that questioner...; and consequently the person who asks the question, not the thing about which he asks, must be thought of as the one who will accept or decline to accept this answer [i.e. as the subject of 50B5 ἐθέλη].¹⁷

In other words, the passage depicts in miniature a specific dialectical situation of question-and-answer; it presents the schema of a dialectical encounter, and it is in the context of that encounter that Plato's recommendations are made.¹⁸ This fact is the key to the passage, as I shall try to show. I first set forth the main lines of my reading, and then offer a defense of its details.

The basic antithesis or contrast in our passage is not between (i) and (ii), nor (ii) and (iii), but between (i) and (iii); or rather - since (i) and (ii) go closely together as two sides of the same coin - between the (i)-(ii) complex and (iii). It is a contrast between the best reply (μακρῶς πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀσφαλέστατον) and a second-best reply (one to be

17. Cherniss, pp. 126-127.

18. Details will be added below, but the dialectical character of the passage is sufficiently proved by the question posed (ἐρομένου τί ποτ' ἐστί), and by the language of (iii): Plato often uses ἐθέλειν of dialectical readiness to say something, answer a question, or participate in a discussion; he usually uses ἀποδέχεσθαι for accepting an answer, but δέχεσθαι is also found (n.b. Soph 247D6 ἐθέλοιεν ἂν δέχεσθαι καὶ ὁμολγεῖν [cf. 247E6]). We shall see that ἀγαπᾶν and ἀσφάλεια also fit this dialectical orientation.

offered only under the specific dialectical circumstances cited, and to be accepted only μετ' ἀσφαλείας... τινος). That (iii) is only a second-best reply is shown particularly by the καί (indicating that the point which follows is an addition to the "surest" answer stipulated in [i]-[ii]), as well as by ἀγαπᾶν (as often in Plato, the force of the verb is "to settle for" or "acquiesce in" something - "to be content with it," even though it falls short of the ideal one might desire¹⁹). But what is the answer that we may, in certain cases, be content with? What does the τὸ τοιοῦτον in (iii) signify? I believe the phrase is not, as it were, in quotation-marks; it is not itself the content of the answer to be made, but refers back to the kind of answer meant: the very one proscribed in (ii), an answer in terms of τὸ τρίγωνον ὅσα τε ἄλλα σχήματα. (For this kind of use of τὸ τοιοῦτον, see particularly Laws VIII.838E2-3: ὅπως δὲ αὖ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐθέλοντας λέγειν πάντας δυνατὸν ἔσται ποτὲ παρασχεῖν; ["How can he ever make everyone willing to say that sort of thing"] where τὸ τοιοῦτον refers to the views about sexual relations discussed earlier.) In sum, our passage depicts a dialectical encounter, a context in which only one sort of answer is strictly correct, but where - if our questioner is of a certain sort, a person willing to accept another kind of answer as well - we should be content to speak to him at his level, and reply to his question in that other way. If someone points toward something appearing in a place before him and asks, "What is that (to which I am pointing)?" the strictly sure and true reply (i) would be to say that it is the Receptacle (= gold

19. Cf. especially Tim 29C7-D1: ἀλλ' εἰ μὴ μὴδενὸς ἦττον παρεχώμεθα εἰκότας, ἀγαπᾶν χρὴ, μεμνημένους ὡς... φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν, κτλ. . Remarking upon ἀγαπᾶν here, A.E. Taylor spoke of "its usual sense in classical Greek, 'to put up with', 'not to grumble at'. We should prefer exactitude to approximation, and certainties to probabilities, but where the former are not to be had, we must 'put up with', 'be decently contented with' the nearest approximation we can get." (Commentary on Plato's Timaeus, p. 75)

in the example). If we wish to speak "most securely with respect to truth" we must (ii) avoid replying with the name of the particular appearance that happens to present itself (for that term will not tell what that to which he is pointing [i.e. the Receptacle] is). However (iii), in the event that our questioner is someone willing to accept that sort of answer too, in that special dialectical situation, we may be content with (settle for) that strictly improper reply (ii), instead of insisting on the proper answer (i). I shall now offer more detailed support for this interpretation, support first for my analysis of the language in 50B1-5, then for my attribution to Plato of the doctrine that I find in the passage.

Answer (i) poses no problems. In answer (ii), in accord with the majority of commentators, I take ταῦτα to refer directly to the preceding plurals, and would translate the passage thus: "but as for the triangle and all the other figures that were coming to be in it, never to speak of those - which alter even while one speaks - as being." However, the exact force of the B3 phrase μηδέποτε λέγειν ταῦτα ὡς ὄντα needs to be carefully explained. Both (i) and (ii) are given here as guides for answering the single question τί ποτ' ἐστί, asked about some single thing to which the questioner is pointing. We cannot construe the B3 phrase to mean "never to speak of those as being" in the sense "never to answer with the words 'those exist' [nor even, in each separate case, with the words 'the triangle exists' or 'the square exists' or whatever]." We cannot, for such bare assertions of existence would be an absurdly incongruous reply to the question τί ποτ' ἐστί. What else can then be meant by the phrase "to speak of something as being"? I believe the answer is provided by Sophist 263B9,

a passage closely parallel to 50B3.²⁰ Plato there defines a false statement as one which says about X things other than what is (the case about X) (263B7 ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων). It is one which τὰ μὴ ὄντ' ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει (B9): "says that not-beings are beings" in the sense that it "states things which are not (the-case-about-X) as being (the-case-about-X)."²¹ In this passage, "to speak of something as being" is not "to say of it, 'it exists'", but rather "to speak of something else's being it." (I.e., it is to speak of its being what-something-else-is, or, better, of its being-the-case-about [holding true of] some subject specified in the context.) I believe Tim 50B2-4 is very similar. There "to speak of the triangle (etc.) as being" does not mean "to say that they exist" (which would be no answer to the question in the context); rather, it means "to say that they are what the-object-that-the-questioner-points-to is"; in short, it is to give "triangle" (etc.) as the answer to the question τί ποτ' ἐστί. The gist of the relation between (i) and (ii) is thus the following: "if someone should point and ask you such a question, the surest answer is to tell him that it is gold, and never to reply that it is a triangle or any other of those changing shapes." ²²

20. Cherniss (at 126.10) cites Soph 263B9 to support his reading, but his other examples there significantly differ from the Sophist passage, and are closer to his view of 50B3. At Laws 643D8-9 the ὄντα is clearly copulative, and accompanied both by an explicit subject and predicate term: λέγομεν ὡς τὸν μὲν πεπαιδευμένον ὄντα, τὸν δὲ ἀπαιδευτον (cf. Laws 886D4-8); that is not the case at Soph 263B. (At Laws 641C8-D1, the verb is not εἶναι.)

21. As Moravcsik points out, περὶ σοῦ is understood from 263B5 (cf. B11) in both B7 and B9 (his "Being and Meaning in the Sophist," Acta Philosophica Fennica 14 [1962], at pp. 76-77). Instead of his "relational being," however, I would speak (as above) of the being of facts: of its being (or not being) the case that so-and-so. Cf. Cornford, Plato's Theory of Knowledge, p.213, n.1: "τὰ μὴ ὄντα, things which are not the fact", and p.214, lines 5-6: "what is (the fact)"; also Moravcsik (op. cit.), p. 63 with n.1.

22. This is of course the same (i)-(ii) antithesis that Cherniss sees in the passage (see Part I above). The reading of 50B3 given here was also that of Moreau in his 1939 book, L'Âme du Monde..., p.16: "quant au triangle et à toutes les autres figures que cette masse revêt, jamais il ne faut donner ces attributs comme étant ce que la chose en question est" (my emphasis).

On Cherniss' view, the ἀλλά introducing (iii) is parallel to those in 49D5 and D6. It sets up a (ii)-(iii) antithesis "exactly parallel" (128.3) to that in 49D-E, and has what Denniston calls its "eliminative" role, "substituting the true for the false." On my view, there is no such (ii)-(iii) antithesis; no parallel to 49D-E. The ἀλλά introduces an affirmation opposed to the earlier clauses as a conditional exception to the general rule they state.²³ The whole collocation εὖν ἄρα καί might be taken together²⁴, but I believe the καί belongs with τὸ τοιοῦτον, not with the verb; it emphasizes the questioner's willingness to accept the answer cited in (iii), over and above the strictly "safest" answer given in (i).²⁵ With the εὖν ἄρα collocation ("emotional," not inferential ἄρα), notice Denniston's remark: "ἄρα in a conditional protasis denotes that the hypothesis is one of which the possibility has only just been realized: 'If, after all.'"²⁶ We cannot make a mechanical application of such judgments, of course, but Plato's use of the particles here does seem (to me) to mark a somewhat sudden or "just realized" quality about the exception that he abruptly allows for in (iii).²⁷

23. Cf. the passage from Aristotle cited in n. 27 below.

24. Cf. Charm 168A10: an ἐπιστήμη of itself as well as others is absurd, "if, indeed, there really is such a science" (εὖν ἄρα καὶ ἔστιν). Also Phaedrus 257C3 εὖν ἄρα καὶ ἔθελήσῃ ("if he should be willing, after all" [Cf. Verdenius ad loc. in Mnem. ser.4,8 (1955), at p.283, with pp. 266-7 ad 228E1]).

25. The καί might just possibly, though I think this less likely here, be taken to mean "even": "If he is willing to accept even that sort of answer..."

26. Denniston, The Greek Particles², p. 37.

27. We may perhaps compare a passage in Aristotle (Cat 8.11a26-29): particular branches of knowledge are not properly spoken of as relative to something else, but if, after all, they are to be spoken of thus, it is in virtue of their genus (knowledge) that they too can be called relative: ἀλλ' εἰ ἄρα κατὰ τὸ γένος καὶ αὐταὶ πρὸς τι λέγεται. -In Tim 50B4-5, there seems to me to be a strong cumulative force from the exception-marking ἀλλά, the "sudden" or just-realized εὖν ἄρα, and καί denoting the addition of something over and above the earlier items. These, coupled with the contrast between μακροῦ... ἀσφαλέστατον and μετ' ἀσφαλείας τινος, and the particular force of ἀγαθῶν (see below), all suggest a much looser relation between (iii) and (i)-(ii) than that which Cherniss finds.

As noted in Part I above, 50B4 τὸ τοιοῦτον lacks the temporal qualifiers so carefully varied but consistently conjoined with that phrase in 49D-E. That fact appears to me to undermine any parallel with 49D-E, and I take it instead that τὸ τοιοῦτον refers back to the preceding answer (one in terms of "triangle" and so forth).²⁸ The words μετ' ἀσφαλείας...τινος stand (as indicated by the τις) in contrast to 50B1 μακρῶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀσφαλέστατον. The word ἀσφάλεια seems here to mean an inward feeling of security or confidence, the qualified (τις) sense of certainty with which someone might accept the less-than-safest reply. I have found no exact parallel for such a subjective meaning of the term, but it easily and naturally takes on that connotation from the context here.²⁹ Though the word ἐθέλειν often functions as a mere auxiliary, it has a more important role here. The nuance conveyed by the use of both ἐθέλειν and δεῦροσθαι is an emphasis upon the voluntary, the spontaneous and sincere character of the questioner's acceptance: it is not for form's sake nor argument's sake that he accepts the answer, but because it represents the degree of dialectical insight this speaker can attain.³⁰ Εθέλειν

28. For τὸ τοιοῦτον as a loose backward reference to the sort of thing said just before, cf. Laws 838E2-3 (quoted p.8 above), Parm 131B9, Meno 75E4 (cf. Laws 683E8). Sometimes, of course, it is a more specific reference to the preceding words (cf. Phdrs 261E5, Rep. 8.562E6, Laws 694C9 and Soph 241D8), but that is not the case here.

29. The words δεῦροσθαι (close to ὁμολεγεῖν, cf. Soph 247D6) and ἐθέλειν permeate the clause with a subjective air that readily infuses itself with ἀσφάλεια. Compare the controversy over ἀσφάλεια in Ev. Luc. I.4. J.H.Ropes persuasively argued that the ἀσφάλεια there "is that of the person who is to know, not...the facts or doctrines"; and that "the mind of a Greek, when he associated 'security' with 'knowing,' naturally turned to the security of the knowledge itself, rather than that of something else which was in some way related to the knowledge" (Jnl Theol. St. 24 [1923] at p.69 and p.70). In light of the adverbial function of the μετὰ phrase qualifying δεῦροσθαι we might also compare Soph. O.T. 613, γνώσῃ τὰδ' ἀσφαλῶς.

30. We shall return to the connection between this voluntariness, Platonic Peitho, and the ἀσφάλειά τις when examining the meaning behind Plato's inclusion of the third component.

in Plato often has such a dialectical role, indicating readiness to engage in an argument or to maintain (or agree to) some position.³¹ Perhaps the best example is Parm 133B: the problems about "participation" can be surmounted only by a man of wide experience and natural ability, willing to follow through a long and difficult argument (ἐθέλοι δὲ...ἔπεισθαι). There is perhaps also a nuance to the use of δέχεσθαι here. It stands in contrast to the fuller dialectical security of answer (i)-(ii), and so conveys the idea of simply accepting or agreeing to answer (iii), without pressing on to scrutinize those weaknesses that make the statement strictly invalid. Compare Crat 421D7-9: Λέγω γὰρ οὖν εἰκότα. οὐ μέντοι μοι δοκεῖ προφάσεις ὀγῶν δέχεσθαι, ἀλλὰ προθυμητέον ταῦτα διασκέψασθαι. So too, in Tim 50B5, δέχεσθαι signifies one's passive acquiescence in a kind of reply that has not been subjected to (and could not withstand) full dialectical scrutiny.³²

31. Various dialectical cases: Tht. 170C6, 172B3, 177C9 (with διαμάχεσθαι, etc.); Tht 184E8, Soph 247D1,6, Crat 431A6 (with ὁμολογεῖν, συγχωρεῖν); Tht 196D5, Parm 131C9 (εἰπεῖν); cf. Rep 506C5, E4. Often, Plato uses the term ἐθέλειν in methodological discussions strongly colored by a background of ethical evaluations. The "digression" in the Tht has two good examples: if an orator can be made to forsake his petty bickering and is then willing to turn his attention to abstract moral traits in themselves, he will see what a poor thing his usual chatter is: ἐθέλειν at 175C1 and 177B3. With the latter, and B2 λόγον δέη δοῦναί τε καὶ δεῖσθαι, cf. Crat. 426A2-3: an appeal to foreign-language origins to "explain" the meanings of words is a dodge (like a deus ex machina) used only by τῶ μὴ ἐθέλοντι λόγον διδόναι κτλ.

32. With Crat 421D, quoted just above, compare Tim 29C-D, quoted (in part) in n.19 above; Plato there continues, saying it is fitting men accept a "likely account" in these matters (τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους). The myth in the Timaeus is one level of approach to the truth, a possible stopping-point for those willing to accept it, though there are more abstract or advanced degrees of insight to be had, for those "willing" and able to pursue them. The εἰκὸς μῦθος has (at least) the function of πειθῶ, inducing certain kinds of people to accept a reverential feeling for the cosmos, much as the Prefaces of the Laws have the role of πειθῶ, inducing acceptance of the laws. (N.b. Laws IV.723A4-7, with A5 δέξεται and 684C2-3, τοὺς νόμους οὓς ἐκόντες οἱ δῆμοι...δέξονται. Cf. H. Gørgemanns, Beiträge zur Interpretation von Platons Nomoi [1960], 30-56 and passim. As at Laws IX.875A-D [notice ἐθέλειν there] the techniques of Peitho are a concession to the ἀσθένεια of human nature [Laws 875A2,B7, Tim 29D1, 68D-69A, etc.] - or at least that of the many [Laws 875D2-3, 718D-E; cf. Tim 51E5-6, 53D6-7].)

The verb ἀγαπᾶν appears to me to give the strongest support for the present reading. It can, of course, mean "to delight in fully," "cherish," or "be (wholly) content with."³³ Very often, however, and especially in dialectical contexts and in conjunction with a conditional clause, the verb (and its relations) have the sense "to rest content with" or "to settle for" something less than the ideal. Here are various examples, first from non-dialectical, then from dialectical contexts:

- (A)
1. Rep V.475A9-B2: If men desirous of honors cannot get them from the great, they are content to get them from the small: κᾶν μὴ ὑπὸ μειζόνων...ὑπὸ μικροτέρων...τιμῶμενοι ἀγαπῶσιν
 2. Prot 328A8-B1: ἀλλὰ κᾶν εἰ ὀλίγον ἔστιν τις...ἀγαπητόν.
 3. Laws IV.684C7-9: Men wish that their treatment should be pleasant, but should be thankful if it takes only small pain: τὸ δέ γ' ἔστιν ἀγαπητόν...εἰ καὶ τις μετὰ λύπης μὴ μεγάλης δύναίτο κτλ
 4. Laws IV.705A1-2: a city-site is too close to the sea, ὅμως δὲ ἀγαπητόν καὶ τοῦτο.
 5. Laws IV.718D5-7: εἰ καὶ μὴ μέγα τι, μικρὸν δέ, ...πᾶν ἀγαπητόν.
 6. Laws V.735D7: a tyrant could take the best and strongest measures, but someone without such power, if he can so much as (Ὅβ εἰ καί) effect the mildest measures, will be quite content to do even that much - ἀγαπῶντως ἂν καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον ὀράσειεν (Cf. England ad loc.)
 7. Rep V.472B-473B: we cannot fully realize the forms in actions, but should be content to come as close as we can; (ἀγαπᾶν in 472C1, C3, and 473B2).
- (B)
1. Tht 207A3-7: we cannot list all the parts in a wagon, but would be content, when asked to define it by enumerating its parts, if we could list a few: ἀλλ' ἀγαπῶμεν ἂν ἐρωτηθέντες ὅτι ἔστιν ἅμαξα [cf. 206E6-7 τί ἕκαστον, and the question in Tim 50A7-B1], εἰ ἔχοιμεν εἰπεῖν κτλ
 2. Tht 164C9: Socrates chides himself for being content with (ἀγαπᾶν) a purely verbal argument.
 3. Crat 439B6: What method men should use to discover truth is too much to decide; ἀγαπητόν δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὁμολογήσασθαι - that they ought not to go about it through names, etc.³⁴
 4. Soph 241C7-9 and Meno 75C1 (less clear cases).

33. A.E. Taylor's statement quoted earlier (n. 19 above) does express one common sense of the verb, but is of course too limited; cf. LSJ s.v.

34. Rather different is Crat 430A1: Ἄλλ' ἀγαπητόν καὶ τοῦτο, which approaches an impersonal statement of sufficiency: if Cratylus will admit even this much, Socrates has enough to refute him. (Cf. 430A3 καὶ γὰρ ἂν καὶ τοῦτο ἔξαρκῶς, and the similar passage at Soph 247C9-D1: εἰ γὰρ τι καὶ μικρὸν ἐθέλουσι συγχωρεῖν...ἐξαρκεῖ (sc. for refuting them).)

This small selection of cases will suffice to show the sense "to settle for" or "acquiesce in" somewhat inferior circumstances.³⁵ That sense fits easily with the exception-making force we found for ἀλλά and the additive force of καί, as well as the other details. However, it seems to me difficult to take ἀγαπᾶν here in the sense required by Cherniss' reading of a (ii)-(iii) antithesis that parallels 49D-E, the sense of a true, full contentment with the dialectically proper answer - full satisfaction with the ideal. Even if we do read B4 ἀλλά as parallel to those in 49D5 and D6, the reasons for the εὖν ἄρα conditional, and especially for B4 καί, remain most unclear. Furthermore, 49D-E gave a schema for talking about fire and water (or whatever) in a manner ἀσφαλοστάτα μακροῦ (49D5). If there is a (ii)-(iii) antithesis parallel to 49D-E, why is the ideal answer said to be accepted only μετ' ἀσφαλείας...τινος? And why ought we to be content if it is only accepted thus?

To defend the present reading further, I shall now attempt to show support for the doctrine we found expressed in the passage. We have seen that the gold-example gives the schema of a dialectical encounter. The most proper answer there is that prescribed in (i)-(ii), but (I have argued) Plato advises in (iii) that we may be content with a strictly improper answer under certain conditions: we may agree (for agreement's sake) in cases where our questioner does not perceive the need to seek the fuller, stricter truth of the matter. Clause (iii) advises a concession, instead of a rigid insistence on the strictly true account. In short, it advises a

35. Cf. Ingemar During's observation on Plato's use of ἀγαπᾶν, "expressing an attitude of philosophic resignation" (Aristotle in the Biographical Tradition [Goteborg, 1957] p. 351). The clearest cases of that use seem to be Rep V.472B-473B and Tim 29C-D (with Critias 106B-107D).

reply which is "more dialectical," in exactly the sense of Meno 75D5-7: ἔστι δὲ ἴσως τὸ διαλεκτικώτερον μὴ μόνον τάληθῆ ἀποκρίνεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἐκείνων ἄν ἂν προομιολογῆ εἰδέναί ὁ ἐρωτῶν. Moreover, precisely that manner of agreement was, as many have remarked, the hallmark of Socratic dialectic, epitomized at Xenophon, Mem. 4,6,15: ὁπότε δὲ αὐτός (sc. Socrates) τι τῶ λόγῳ διεξίτοι, διὰ τῶν μάλιστα ὁμολογουμένων ἐπορεύετο, νομίζων ταύτην τὴν ἀσφάλειαν εἶναι λόγου. . Part of the point here is no doubt the every-day examples used in his talk (Gorgias 490E-491A), but central too is his reliance on the step-by-step agreement and response of interlocutors, and the consequent accommodation of his teaching to their capabilities. Such accommodation remains a basic principle of Plato's later dialectic, as of his theory of persuasion. We find it in the "midwife" speech of the Theaetetus: just as midwives are the best match-makers (Theaetetus 149D-150A), so Socrates can judge which students deserve to stay with him, and which may be sent off to Prodicus (151A-B). At Politicus 277C the principle is stated clearly: for those who are able to follow it, a verbal definition of any living creature is much better than a picture or model; but for others, those will suffice:

γραφῆς δὲ καὶ συμπάσης χειρουργίας λέξει καὶ λόγῳ
δηλοῦν πᾶν ζῷον μᾶλλον πρέπει τοῖς δυναμένοις
ἔπεισθαι· τοῖς δ' ἄλλοις διὰ χειρουργιῶν.

Still another version of the principle is indicated soon after in the Politicus. At 285D-286A, Plato distinguishes between Forms that have sensibly apparent images and those (by far the more important cases) that do not. In the case of the former, he says, if someone asks for an account of them, we can - if and when we want to reply without taking pains and without going into a discussion - simply indicate the sensible likeness:

τοῖς μὲν τῶν ὄντων ῥαδίως καταμαθεῖν αἰσθηταί τινες ὁμοιότητες
πεφυκασιν, ἃς οὐδὲν χαλεπὸν δηλοῦν, ὅταν αὐτῶν τις βουληθῆ τῷ λόγον
αἰτοῦντι [sc. by asking τί ποτ' ἐστὶ?] περὶ του μὴ μετὰ πραγμάτων
ἀλλὰ χωρὶς λόγου ῥαδίως ἐνδείξασθαι·

Plato clearly does not believe that any terms can really be ostensively defined, nor that any matters can be adequately dealt with χωρὶς λόγου (n.b. Soph 218C1-5). It is not the same thing at all to say that some Forms have readily discernible sensible images, and to say that one can adequately treat those matters just by pointing those images out. Plato does maintain the first, but all he says about the latter is that, when we want to, we can deal with certain questioners just by ostensive presentation of an image, χωρὶς λόγου. When would we want to do so? Presumably, when (as said at Polit. 277C) our questioner is not one of those who is able to follow out a lengthy logos. If one of those "able to follow" asks us, "what is fire?"³⁶ we may embark on a logos of the lengthy mathematical sort that Plato gives in Tim 53Cff. But if one of "the others" inquires, we may simply strike a match or point to some flame, and show him some of that stuff, saying, "this is fire."³⁷ By the same token, if one of those "others" points at some fire and asks us, "what is that?" we may be content to say that it is fire. (We may be content, because he is marked as one of those "others" precisely by his willingness to accept that sort of answer with the sort of ἀσφάλειά τις realized in dialectical agreement at an unexamined verbal level.³⁸) The genuinely proper, strictly secure reply [sc. that given in (i)-(ii)] is reserved for τοῖς δυναμένοις ἔπεσθαι.

According to Phaedrus 275E, one of the major faults with written works is that they cannot thus accommodate their message to their readers' specific capabilities (cf. 276A6-7, E6). According to Phaedrus 271C10-272B2, the art

36. E.g., by asking τί ποτ' ἐστί, τὸ πῦρ; Cf. Polit. 285E2 τῷ λόγον αἰτοῦντι.

37. "τοῦτο πῦρ ἐστὶ" Cf. Polit. 277C ...πρέπει τοῖς δυναμένοις ἔπεσθαι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοις... With Polit 277C and 285E, compare Parm 133B8-9 (cited p.13 above) ἐθέλοι δὲ πάνυ πολλὰ καὶ πόρρωθεν πραγματευομένου τοῦ ἐνδεικνυμένου ἔπεσθαι, and notice Tim 53C3 συνέψαθε. See also the earlier references for "dialectical" ἐθέλειν given above.

38. N.b. χωρὶς λόγου in Polit 285E and Soph 218C1-5, with which cf. Phdrs 263A, and (especially) Tim 48B6-8 (with 51B7-C5).

of persuasion rests precisely on such an accommodation of one's logos to the hearer's aptitudes. It must adjust thus to his level, for it achieves its end of ψυχαγωγία (261A) not by force, but by his voluntary acquiescence.³⁹ If that acquiescence must to some extent be won by various irrational devices⁴⁰, yet it must also make some plausible appeal to whatever degree of rationality the hearer has. For the great majority of men, capable of right opinion but not of νοῦς (Tim 51E), a partial or mythical account will serve (cf. Tim 29C-D). Such devices as the noble lie of the Republic, the Timaeus' myth of a creation or the theology of Laws X are Plato's "way of getting across to the masses veracities and sanctities whose formal essence was beyond their grasp."⁴¹ We may deal thus with those masses who τῇ φήμῃ μόνον τῶν νόμων συνακολουθοῦσιν (Laws XII.966C5-6), so long as the ruling segment διαπονήσῃται τὸ πᾶσαν πίστιν λαβεῖν (C7) on all important matters. So long as the devices of persuasion win the wills of unenlightened, "unawakened" men to voluntary compliance with the law, we must be content with that, and not insist upon accounts too elevated for their understanding.⁴² Indeed, were we to force on them the strictly true account - if we told everyone they are but dreaming and that their image-world is not truly real (n.b. Tim 52B3-C5) - we might only make ourselves appear ridiculous and so relinquish any influence upon events. (Men must live together, and τοῖς γε κοινῇ τι πράττουσιν ἀγαπητὸν ὁμονοεῖν Polit 260B7-8 - at whatever level possible.) Therefore a skillful dialectician, a man who understands the weakness and complexity of mortal human nature, will be content with

39. N.b. Philebus 58A8-B2: ἡ τοῦ πείθειν [τεχνῆ]... δοῦλα δι' ἐκόντων ἀλλ' οὐ διὰ βίας ποιοῖτο. On the entire subject, see C.P. Segal's stimulating paper, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos," HSCP 66 (1962), 99-155.

40. Cf. Segal *passim* on ἀπάτη, γοητεία and τέρψις. Think too of ἐπῶδειν in the Laws, and the "psychagogic" role of the liver at Tim 71A-72C!

41. Gregory Vlastos, in Rev. of Religion 13 (1949), at p. 277.

42. Cf. n. 32 on p. 13 above, and Gørgemanns' book (cited there) on peitho and its role as a concession to human ἀσθένεια (pp. 155-161 and passim).

what agreement he can get, and not force on his interlocutors truths more advanced than they are ready to accept. In the dialectical encounter visualized in the gold-example, the most proper answer is that specified in (i)-(ii). When someone points at an appearance and asks its nature (τί ποτ' ἐστί), the only genuine, perduring nature that he really points to is the "Receptacle" (Tim 49E7-50A2). There is no form or character truly existing there where he is pointing [for the Form itself cannot be "there" (cf. 52A3) nor be a "this," while the phenomenon does not truly in-form the Receptacle (50C1-2), and itself has only fleeting image-being, not that of the really real (52C2-D1)]; hence no reply in terms of forms or characters (τὸ δὲ τρίγωνον ὅσα τε ἄλλα σχήματα ἐνεγίγνωστο) can truly tell the nature of that-which-is-pointed-out. The proper answer therefore should avoid such predicates entirely. However, these considerations are more than most people can accept⁴³, and in the event that our questioner is someone willing to accept that improper kind of reply (in addition to the best or surest one), we may be content to give him that as an answer: ἀλλ' ἐὰν ἔρα καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον μετ' ἀσφαλείας ἐθέλη δέχεσθαι τινος, ἀγαπᾶν.

III

Even if my argument is accepted, misgivings may no doubt remain as to why Plato makes this passing concession in this context. I have no real answer to that, and can only reply that any interpretation of the gold-example leaves it somewhat enigmatic. As we noted in Part I (pp. 5-6), Plato goes on to deal directly with the Receptacle (at 50B5ff ὁ αὐτὸς δὴ λόγος), and in doing so he makes use of (i) and (ii), but not of (iii). Thus he himself did not wholly integrate the passage in its context. Nor do ancient testimonies

43. Only few achieve clear conviction about the Forms (cf. Parm 133B-C, Tim 51E); the many remain within that "dreaming" state (Tim 52B-C) in which we fail to draw the requisite distinctions.

seem to help. Aristotle only once refers to the gold-example, but he is puzzled by it, too, and comments only on clause (i).⁴⁴ Simplicius quotes at length from the gold-example⁴⁵, but he stops at 50B4 μεταπίπτει, and thus omits clause (iii) entirely! The explanation he provides in the context clearly shows that he took the gold-example as an illustration of the Receptacle.⁴⁶ He quotes lines 49E6-50A4 with it, and apparently takes it that αὐτοῦ περὶ in 50A5 refers back only to lines 49E7ff, in which the subject of the Receptacle (ἐν ᾧ) was introduced. Cornford took much the same view,⁴⁷ but Cherniss holds⁴⁸ that it illustrates all of 49C7-50A4.

None of this really dispels the enigma, nor is anything likely to do so. We can say that at Tim 49-50 Plato is concerned with the logic of statements involving ostension.⁴⁹ He seeks to distinguish the stable or invariant factors which enter into the constitution of the transitory occurrences at which we point. With characteristically vivid imaginative force, he does this - not by imagining the effects of slow, relentless processes of change (cf. Melissus B7), nor by contemplating the "certain uncertainties" over vast extents of time (cf. the ode in Sophocles' "Ajax" 646-683); instead he imagines an artisan ceaselessly moulding some gold (why gold?) into all varieties of shapes. Around this vivid image he then builds a dialectical encounter in which various possible replies are discussed, and then adapts the whole to his exposition of the obscure "all-receiving nature." Perhaps - given such a complex array of purposes - the enigmatic character of the passage was quite unavoidable.

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44. de gen. et corr. II.1, 329a13-21. See Shorey, AJP X (1889), pp. 63-65.

45. In De Caelo, p. 636, 22-27 (Heiberg).

46. Ib., 636, 27-637, 19 (n.b. 636, 28-29).

47. Plato's Cosmology, pp. 181-185 (n.b. 181 [bottom], 183 [top], and 184 [bottom - quoted on p. 6 above]).

48. 125.1-2.

49. Compare Stilpo's argument in Diog. Laert. II.119 (107, 18-20 [Long]); and cf. Crat 429B-431A and Polit. 285D-286E.