

Philosophical Platonism:
Plato and the Problems of Philosophy

by

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For Old Aristocles, who from his perch could grasp the sun.

"When sundered from the noble and just, knowledge most certainly cannot be wisdom but seems rogue and villainous. Endeavour, therefore, for all time from the first to the last to surpass—most fervently, in merit and in worth—we who came before. And if you fail, if we stand above you, ennobled and great, our victory is truly our most shameful defeat. But if you overcome, this defeat is then our joyous victory." - Plato, Menexenus, 276e-277a

"Science is flourishing today and its good conscience shines in its face, while that to which the whole of modern philosophy has gradually sunk, this remnant of philosophy, arouses distrust and displeasure when it does not arouse mockery or pity. Philosophy reduced to 'theory of knowledge,' actually no more than a timid epochism and abstinence doctrine: a philosophy that does not even get over the threshold and painfully denies itself the right of entry—that is philosophy at its last gasp, an end, an agony, something that arouses pity. How could such a philosophy—rule!" - Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 204

*"'Tis better not to be
Than not to be noble."
- Alfred Lord Tennyson
The Princess, II.78-79*

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Abstract

In this thesis, I seek to provide an account of the function of philosophical practice as it arose in Classical Greece with the work of Plato. In Chapter 1, I argue for the plausibility of engaging in metaphilosophical discourse as separate from philosophical discourse by establishing a distinction between various levels of philosophical problems. Chapter 2 focuses in greater depth on the nature of problems as normative grounds for philosophical practice. I demonstrate there that problems may serve as the centrepiece of a teleological explanation in virtue of the demands they make on systems, such as that in which philosophical practice is an item. From here, I need only identify which problems are germane to the genesis of philosophy and how these problems translate into norms that regulate philosophical practice. Chapter 3 concerns the former effort by examining the political context of Archaic and Classical period Greece and the responses to *stasis* that ultimately culminated in philosophy. In Chapter 4, I examine the latter effort, demonstrating through an interpretation of Plato's early dialogues, primarily the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Gorgias*, that Plato was cognizant of the problems that I identified in Chapter 3. From there, I derive the central norms that Plato set out in response to those problems. This position is what I called Philosophical Platonism, but throughout the subsequent centuries, alternatives to Philosophical Platonism arose and ultimately overtook philosophical practice. I conclude in Chapter 5 with an examination of the process by which this occurred and an assessment of what we, far removed from these events, should take from it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis concerns *metaphilosophy*. I use this term advisedly: that we are engaged in a metaphilosophical investigation says something about the sorts of arguments that we will take to be legitimate. That is, the prefix "meta-" implies a distinction in the relevant domain of inquiry such that metaphilosophy seeks the fundamental principles of philosophy just as metaphysics seeks the fundamental principles that underlie physics. However, the plausibility of a metaphilosophical investigation is a matter of some dispute. Timothy Williamson, for example, has famously argued that there is no relevant distinction between philosophy and "metaphilosophy." The prefix is inappropriate on his view: it is not metaphilosophy but the *philosophy of philosophy* that is engaged with the nature and norms of philosophical practice just as the philosophy of science is engaged with the nature and norms of scientific practice. Williamson relies heavily on the analogy between the philosophy of science and philosophy of philosophy, and on this basis he proposes his primary objection to metaphilosophy:

The rethinking of philosophical methodology . . . involves understanding, at an appropriate level of abstraction, how philosophy is actually done. Philosophers of science know the dangers of moralising from first principles on how a discipline should ideally be pursued without respecting how it currently is pursued; the same lesson applies to philosophy of philosophy.¹

Metaphilosophy, because it "sounds as though it might try to look down on philosophy from above, or beyond,"² moralizes from some sort of first principles, and as such does

¹ Timothy Williamson, *Philosophy of Philosophy*, 6

² *Ibidem*, ix

not obviously demonstrate respect for philosophy and how it operates. Williamson, however, leaves it mysterious what he takes the shape of these first principle bogeymen to be. If he takes it that these first principles provide normative conditions on philosophical practice then his complaint is inappropriate. It is through a normative evaluation of some agent or object that we ultimately demonstrate our respect for it such as to say that an agent or object ought to be thus and so because it is valuable and significant.

There is also a second sense in which Williamson's complaint demonstrates a deficit in his understanding of the relevant issues here. Metaphilosophical investigation is not engaged in stipulating how philosophy operates in its ideal form. To proceed in this way is to presume to know fully the object of philosophical practice already, in which case there is no longer any need for metaphilosophical investigation. One generally does metaphilosophy in order to better philosophy, to defend it from criticism and optimise its operations; if one already knew how philosophy ought to ideally be done, then one would surely philosophise ideally, full stop. That this is not what tends to happen is indicative of a very different strategy within metaphilosophical discourse. Metaphilosophical investigations are engaged not in evaluating philosophy against some ideal; rather, such investigations seek to understand philosophical *problems* and how they relate to current philosophical practice. This strategy cannot possibly establish an ideal since, *prima facie*, solutions to problems are multiply realisable. On the other hand, evaluating the relationships between philosophical problems nevertheless

provides a means to evaluate the success of philosophical investigation, and this is plausibly important and useful.

It is possible that metaphilosophical investigation yields a trivial result, either in the sense of being obvious or of being uninteresting. This is a common objection to metaphilosophical investigation; clearly, one might think, the fundamental problems of philosophy centre around the fact that we are ignorant of the world and desire to know. Identifying this, however, does not obviously aid the work of philosophers in any way, since it is never clear how one might go about obtaining knowledge or when one has it.

A deceptively sophisticated version of this view is expressed by Michael Dummett:

Philosophers, unlike historians, do not have to solve problems that are clearly demarcated in advance; and so they make up their own problems—set themselves tasks, and then try to perform them. Disputes over philosophical methodology are largely about which are the right problems to set. One can hardly prove this or that is the right problem: that would be possible only if, behind the problems philosophers try to solve, lay further clearly defined problems, and solutions to the former were a means to a solution of the latter. The question is only a vague one: By solving which problems shall we gain philosophical illumination?³

In large part, this thesis will be an extended response to Dummett, so let us take a moment to appreciate some of Dummett's central themes here. On his view, the goal of philosophy is philosophical illumination. We might describe this as a particular species of insight, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, or some other central epistemic concept. However, unlike other academic disciplines which strive towards illumination with respect to some definite subject matter, such as history with the events in the human

³ Michael Dummett, "What Does the Appeal to Use Do for a Theory of Meaning?" in his *The Seas of Language*, Oxford University Press (Oxford, UK), 1993: 114; for more on Dummett's position, see his *The Nature and Future of Philosophy*, Columbia University Press (New York, NY), 2010

past, philosophy does not study a definite subject matter. The goal of philosophy is thereby illumination, but illumination about nothing in particular, about no precise subject. Philosophers legislate which problems ought to be solved; they argue amongst themselves about what sorts of problems are important, tractable, interesting, *et cetera*, and then go about solving those problems.

Importantly, for the present purpose, Dummett recognises that there are possibly different levels of problems. He alludes to at least two, but I want to propose here that there are three levels. I will denote them from the lowest to the highest level as *theoretical*, *pragmatic*, and *natural* problems. Theoretical problems concern the intelligible explanation of some explanandum by means of some appropriate explanatory method. If we want to understand philosophy in terms of paradigms, theoretical problems are the sort of problems that are the focus of *normal* philosophy. The problems that are beyond theoretical problems and that are the concern of *revolutionary* philosophy are pragmatic problems. These concern the identification of theoretical explananda and the methods with respect to which these explananda ought to be explained. It is the solutions to pragmatic problems that are, on Dummett's view, legislated by philosophers.

I want to argue that Dummett errs here. Pragmatic problems are not merely legislated, but determined by the third sort of problem: natural problems. Natural problems concern that which is essential to philosophy, what philosophy as a practice ought to solve. As such, they provide the means to determine what sorts of explanatory methods and theoretical explananda are appropriate for philosophical study. Dummett

holds that these natural problems are so vague as to be useless, and hence philosophers cannot appeal to them to determine what sorts of problems they ought to solve. What I want to do, in opposition to Dummett, is to identify precise natural problems that may be used towards the stipulation of legitimate pragmatic problems. That is, I want to eliminate the vagueness inherent in philosophical illumination. Philosophy does aim at philosophical illumination, yes, but illumination here is a very specific type of knowledge. It is knowledge about the proper ends of human behaviour. It is knowledge about the Good.

My project amounts to identifying the function of philosophical practice. For the present purposes, I will understand a practice to be a complex behaviour governed by some set of norms φ with respect to some normative grounds Φ . Philosophical practice has a function, further, if it is autonomous but not autotelic. A practice is autonomous, first, if and only if Φ differs in kind from the normative grounds of all other practices. Second, a practice is autotelic if and only if Φ is identical to φ . However, philosophical practice still may not be functional even if it is autonomous and not autotelic. What is necessary in addition is that philosophical practice be *directed towards* some end state. That is, Φ must be such as to demand that philosophical practice serve some end: Φ must be teleological.

Given these three conditions, we can divide my investigation into two broad stages. The first stage will be the subject of Chapter 2. There I will attempt to demonstrate that Φ is teleological by means of an analysis of philosophical problems. The second stage will then be the subject of Chapters 3 and 4 in which I will attempt to

identify precisely in what Φ consists. In Chapter 3, I will attempt to demonstrate the autonomy of philosophical practice by characterising what I will call the "antecedent problem space" of philosophical practice. That is, I will there be concerned with placing philosophy in its historical context in order that its function can be demonstrated to be an adaptation to specific sociopolitical stressors. In Chapter 4, I will attempt to demonstrate that philosophy is not autotelic by following the preceding historical analysis with the identification of φ , the set of norms that govern philosophical practice, in the work of Plato himself. I will show not only that philosophy is not autotelic, but Plato is also cognizant of this fact and invites his readers to build upon his work and the norms he specifies in order that the natural problems of philosophy be ultimately solved. Due to this connection to Plato, the function that I will be identifying for philosophy here will compel us to accept a metaphilosophical position that I will call Philosophical Platonism. There are, however, competitors to Philosophical Platonism, so I will close in Chapter 5 with a very brief characterisation of what these competitors are, how they differ, and how they ought to be evaluated.

Chapter 2: Problems and Purpose in Philosophical Practice

2.1 Introduction

Natural problems provide the normative grounds (Φ) of philosophical practice in virtue of two features of these problems: (I) they levy a demand on any object to which they are essential, and (II) they are essential to philosophical practice. This is to say that Φ *justifies* some set of norms φ that regulate philosophical practice in order that philosophers be disposed to and ought to solve those problems essential to philosophical practice *per se*. In this Chapter, I will justify (I) and (II) in order to explicate precisely how it is that Φ can justify φ . Following the construction of this foundation, I will precisely characterise Φ (Chapter 3), then derive from this φ (Chapter 4).

I want to begin with the quite general and move to the more particular. In 2.2, I will provide a brief explanation of Carl Hempel's schema for functional analysis in order to understand the orthodox requirements of teleological explanation and motivate thence a distinction between what I will call positive and negative teleology. I will then move in 2.3 to a criticism of the much more orthodox positive teleology, followed by an endorsement of negative teleology in 2.4. This will give us (I). Because negative teleology relies fundamentally on an analysis of problems, I will justify a relational account thereof by briefly commenting on the immanent and transcendent aspects of problems in 2.5 and 2.6, respectively. Next, in 2.7, I will comment on the genesis and structure of problems within philosophical practice. Thence we get (II). Finally, I will close in 2.8 by demonstrating that φ is justified in virtue of the teleological nature of

problems *per se* and the interaction of problems in the relevant domains of philosophical practice.

2.2 The Central Schema of Teleological Explanation

When philosophers talk about teleology, they often mean that there is some end *e* that is the reason for which some item *i* exists. As such, *e explains i*. However, teleological explanation of this form is by no means straightforward: *i* is temporally antecedent to *e*, and therefore when *i* comes about, it does so because of that which does not yet exist but which will presumably come to exist because of *i* in some yet unspecified way. Teleological explanation cannot thereby be causal in any ordinary sense, but with only *e* and *i* at our disposal, we do not have the resources to understand how it is that the former explains the latter.

Recognising this difficulty in this basic schema, Carl Hempel proposed a schema that has come to form the centrepiece of nearly every account of teleological explanation thereafter.⁴ For simplicity, I shall refer to it as the central schema of teleological explanation, or more simply as the central schema. In addition to *e* and *i*, Hempel's central schema admits of a number of qualifications. In its most basic iteration, the central schema states that *i is an element of some system s for the sake of e if and only if s is disposed to satisfy e in virtue of i given some normal condition c*.

There are two important moves here. The first is a change in explanatory context from

⁴ Carl Hempel, "The Logic of Functional Analysis" in his *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science*, The Free Press (New York, NY), 1965: 297-330

explaining the existence of *i simpliciter* to explaining *i as an element of s*. The former task is certainly included in the latter, but Hempel's move here provides more explanatory resources, namely *s* and *c*, to justify the existence of *i simpliciter* than were already present. The second move is perhaps the most important. Hempel adds a degree of normativity to teleological explanation by specifying that the disposition of *i* in *s* to bring about *e* occurs in some *normal* condition. What Hempel means here is that *c* is that condition which permits the satisfaction of some normative requirements levied on *s*: it is through these normative requirements that *e* may be determined and hence those which provide the explanatory resources for teleological explanation. That is, *e* explains *i* insofar as *e ought* to obtain and *i* provides a means by which *e can* obtain. The challenge then becomes identifying in what this normative requirement consists. This can be done in one of two ways. The first and most traditional means is by identifying the goodness of *e* with respect to *s*. I will call this *positive teleology*. The second way to identify the normative requirements placed on a teleological system is to identify those features of *c* which are antagonistic with respect to *s*. This I will call *negative teleology*. Let us now turn to a much deeper understanding of the differences and implications of positive and negative teleology.

2.3 Positive Teleology: Ends as Goods

Positive teleology holds that *e* in the central schema is the primary element in the explanation of *i*. As such, *e* must be determinate and definite. An ambiguous or otherwise imprecise end could not meet the explanatory demand placed upon it. If we

wish to explain my baking cookies, for instance, it is not sufficient to suppose that the end of my baking is food. The end must be the cookies lest the same premises explain my frying rice. We must then only determine how the cookies explain my baking.

This type of explanation is unlike causal or deductive-nomological explanation in that *e* explains *i* in virtue of identifying the *success conditions* of *s* that are met in virtue of *i* in *c*. There is thereby no physical or logical necessity involved in teleological explanation *per se*. Despite this, the dominant theories attempt to provide some causal or logical necessity to teleological explanation, and are often wrongly evaluated on those grounds. That is not to say that there are no problems with teleological explanation, as we shall see shortly, but we should not expect it to fill the role of other types of explanation.

Each of the dominant contemporary theories of teleological explanation owe their heritage to Larry Wright's 1976 work on the subject, so I shall concentrate my analysis here.⁵ Wright does not jettison the teleological aspects of teleological explanation in order to make it palatable to those who hold much more Humean sympathies. It is this that separates him from the plethora of other scholars of the mid-twentieth century who have worked on teleology. On Wright's view, the teleological explanation of *i* proceeds by way of identifying what he calls the *consequence etiology*

⁵ Larry Wright, *Teleological Explanations*, University of California Press (Berkeley, CA), 1976; see also Wright, "Functions" in Marjorie Grene and Everett Mendelsohn [eds.], *Topics in the Philosophy of Biology, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 27, pt. III, Problems of Explanation in Biology, 1976: 213-242, and his earlier "Functions," *Philosophical Review* 82, 1973: 139-168. For two examples of successor theories, see R.G. Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science* 4, 1989: 288-302, and Karen Neander, "Functions as Selected Effects: The Conceptual Analyst's Defense," *Philosophy of Science* 58(2), 1991: 168-184

of *i*, which places *e* at its conceptual centre. This consequence etiology entails a subtle modification of the central schema: *i* is an element of *s* for the sake of *e* if and only if *both* *s* is disposed to satisfy *e* in virtue of *i* given *c* and *i* is an element of *s* because *s* was disposed to satisfy *e* in virtue of *i* given *c* in the past. In this way, Wright places *e* antecedently to *i* as a teleological item and thereby resists objections from those who believe scientific explanation to require direct physical or logical necessity. Yet he also maintains the much more normative teleological aspects insofar as *e* still remains consequent to *i* while not necessarily connected to it. *e*, that is, is still a success condition that *s* may or may not actually meet in virtue of *i*. What Wright's account loses that earlier accounts of teleology maintained is only that the first few instances of *i*, on Wright's view, are not teleological because they do not yet have the appropriate etiology.

Wright's account of teleological explanation has been elaborated upon dozens of times in order to solve various conceptual problems that have arisen since its proposal, but none of these have addressed the central problem at play here. Hempel's primary objection to the teleological explanation of the central schema was not that it did not fit the paradigm of antecedent causal explanation but that it failed to produce a logically sound argument for the existence of *i* in *s*. He argued that for any *e* in *s* given *c*, there are multiple items that may satisfy *e*. That is, one could not deduce *i* from any conjunction of *e*, *s*, and *c* without affirming the consequent. This he called the *problem of functional equivalents*. *Prima facie*, Wright's emphasis on causal etiology dispatches this worry since it narrows the explanatory context to that in which only one item may

be considered in any given teleological explanation. *i* arises spontaneously in some way, and where it contributes to *s*'s satisfaction of *e*, it persists more readily and frequently in a given population.

This solution, however, obscures the way in which a causal etiology is constructed in the actual world: natural teleological systems scarcely have a single end that explains them, and indeed serve as a response to some confluence of ends, consistent or otherwise, depending upon the various contexts in which *i* is present. Circulating blood, for instance, is not the sole end of a heart. Maintaining appropriate supply and demand ratios with respect to oxygen, glucose, and the like is also important, as is facilitating waste removal, preventing the mixing of oxygenated and non-oxygenated blood, facilitating hormone transportation, and so on. Not all of these are consistent in certain contexts. The central problem here is that natural teleological systems are invariably integrated sets of items, all of which function toward the end of facilitating the functioning of other items, and so the problem of functional equivalents remains a problem at a higher level. Hence teleological explanation, on Wright's model, cannot account for *i* without first accounting for *s* as a teleological system in itself, which is a much more difficult task given the imprecision about what biological fitness is, for example, let alone any other analogous selective processes.

This upper level problem is reinforced by well known problems regarding the prospect of identifying an appropriate causal etiology for *i*. The persistent ambiguity of *e* disallows any clean demarcation between relevant and irrelevant causal processes. But more importantly, even if a relatively precise identification of *e* is possible, any

number of hypothetical causal stories can be given in which *e* explains *i*. There are also alternative, non-adaptationist accounts that can be given, and there is no non-question-begging means to prefer one over the others. In addition, Wright's account displays the explanatory limitations of positive teleology at its best. The existence of *i* is neither being explained *simpliciter*, nor as an element of *s*. *i* is taken primarily to be an element of *s* such that a consequence etiology can explain the *persistence* or *preponderance* of *i* in a population, but never its mere existence. While there may ultimately be some way to modify Wright's account here in order to avoid these problems, previous attempts have failed to adequately do so.

2.4 Negative Teleology: Ends as Solutions

Negative teleology likewise requires a minor revision to Hempel's central schema: *i* is teleological if and only if *s* is disposed to *solve some problem p* in virtue of *i* given *c*. *e* has completely vanished from the schema. Yet it remains in spirit: *e* is identical to the solution of *p*. Framing teleology in this way has a number of advantages. *e* may reasonably be ambiguous without compromising the explanatory power of a teleological explanation, for instance, and that *p* is antecedent to *i* allows for relatively simple, orthodox explanation.

However, negative teleology is not without its worries. That *p* is antecedent to *i*, for instance, may create difficulties in separating causal explanation from teleological explanation. This worry is not significant. A merely causal account of explanation is not sufficient to properly explain the existence of *i*. It is certainly necessary with regards to

how i has come to be; any correct teleological explanation must maintain causal elements, but causal explanation cannot alone provide the answer to *why i* exists in the manner that it does. As such, teleological explanation must provide something over and above mere causation, and this is the central importance of *p* here. That extra explanatory resource is the *demand*. Problems, that is, make a demand on *s* that *s* may or may not ever meet, but which it ought to meet. It is this demand that serves the explanatory role in teleological explanations.

Importantly, negative teleology does not suffer the same worries that positive teleology does. The antecedent demand that *p* places on *s* means that it may factor into the very first instance of *i*, and so appropriately explains the existence thereof. In addition, *p* may be characterised with sufficient precision that it provides a reliable means of delineating which causal processes are relevant and which are not. In this way, negative teleology also escapes Hempel's problem of functional equivalents quite handily on two levels. That *p* may be specified precisely allows a given teleological explanation to account for not only why *i* exists, but also how *i* came about. The first aspect of the explanation, like early accounts of positive teleology, leaves an ambiguity with regards to how many items may be adequately disposed to solve *p*, but since *p* makes a demand on *s* in a specific way, and since *s* has particular characteristics already, *i* can be deduced with a certainty comparable to that which Wright's consequence etiology allows. At a higher explanatory level, however, it is also notable that any given system will respond to the demands of some plurality of problems, together limiting which items may be consistent solutions. To adapt Wesley Salmon's example of the

jackrabbit, jackrabbits face the demands of not only temperature regulation, but also dehydration, predation, and the like.⁶ Their large ears are the only consistent solution: panting and perspiration are not disposed to solve all of the relevant problems, but having large, vascular ears is.

Negative teleology is predicated on p making a demand on s that motivates the coming into existence of i . This requires a very specific characterisation of what p is. p must be defined relationally between s and c , as we shall shortly demonstrate, in order that p is transcendent of both i and s . Let us turn first to the immanent characteristics of p , then to the transcendent characteristics thereof.

2.5 The Limited Immanence of Problems

p makes a demand on s in virtue, at least in part, of what s is. Despite how contemporary accounts of positive teleology would have it, teleology is therefore not immanent in i ; it is not *in* the thing. The importance here is with explanatory priority. p , as the explanatory locus of negative teleology, is held to be prior to all of the relevant features of i . This is not the case for positive teleology for which e is always antecedent to i , only the preponderance of i being explained by a suitable consequence etiology. Negative teleology thereby allows a full explanation of i without begging questions and relying heavily on an independently successful causal explanation. All that is required here is that p impacts in some way the confluence of processes involved in s .

⁶ Wesley Salmon, *Four Decades of Scientific Explanation*, Pittsburgh University Press (Pittsburgh, PA), 1989: 30-31

Despite that teleology is not immanent in i , there is a certain degree of immanence with respect to s . This allows our account to stand independently of some sort of universal cosmic order the likes of which early theorists such as Anaximander, Parmenides, and Plato have maintained but which has become quite implausible following the scholarship of the few most recent centuries. The demand placed upon s may therefore be inconsistent with the demand placed upon some relevantly different system s^* , and so the explanations of elements of s may be independent of s^* . Positioning teleology in this way accords rather well with not only common sense accounts of everyday teleology but also theoretical accounts in biology and elsewhere. The demands placed upon a system such as a member of the phylum echinodermata that have resulted, for instance, in the evolution of its rough dermis are wholly independent, and perhaps inconsistent with, the demands placed upon the mammalian echidna that have resulted in the evolution of its spines. Likewise, the demands placed upon a system such as a wooden barstool may be independent of the demands placed upon a fabric and metal office chair. Both are evaluated on different sets of standards.

2.6 Problems as Transcendent

Fully immanent accounts of teleology face a number of difficulties in maintaining some of the central aspects of teleology. The normativity derived from immanent teleology, for instance, is quite distant from how we tend to think about the matter. If teleology is immanent with respect to i or with respect to s then solving p is good only for i or s . The chairs, as it were, decide who among them is good, the hearts decide who among them

is good, and so on. Yet this is clearly false. In both cases, the goodness of *i* is often evaluated according to standards beyond *i* and *s*: teleology is transcendent of them. We as carpenters and sitters set the purpose of the chair by inviting problems for chairs to solve, and chairs are good only in virtue of their ability to solve those problems. For hearts, the matter is analogous but relevantly different. We do not set problems for hearts, nor is our evaluation of hearts germane to their nature. Rather, an organism's niche and physiology sets problems for hearts to solve and natural selection evaluates them on the basis of their ability to solve these problems.

That *p* is transcendent does not imply some rather mystical faculty on the part of natural selection, which is a common fear with regards to teleology. That negative teleology centres upon problems and not ends allows it to escape this worry. However, if teleology were immanent with respect to *s* or *i*, the set of processes involved in *s* or *i* could only experience *p* where these processes were in some way inconsistent if inconsistency here is undesirable. This may be the case in specific domains where the item in question is autotelic; mathematical problems, for instance, tend to be entirely immanent in this way insofar as *s* and *c* are coextensive. The vast majority of problems, however, do not fit this mold. But even for those that may, it is quite mysterious whence the evaluative component arises; in what way, for instance, is inconsistency in the items of a heart undesirable to the heart?

Where problems are transcendent, this mystery disappears. *p* is fundamentally a relation between *s* and *c* where the set of processes delimited by *s* are inconsistent with *c*, such that this inconsistency is deleterious. It is natural selection that then provides

the evaluative component far beyond but nevertheless in an intimate relationship with *s* and *i*. Changes in blood oxygen content, or ATP concentration, or cortisol concentration, *et cetera* constitute problems for hearts, but changes in these same features of *c* do not constitute problems for chairs.

2.7 Relations and Interrelations of Problems in Philosophy

Philosophical problems are continuous with what we have said thus far about problems generally: they are first a relation between imposed demands and some element of philosophy *per se*, and second that which makes a teleological demand on philosophers such that philosophers ought to and are disposed to solve them. But with philosophy, we are now able to start filling in what *s*, *i*, *p*, and *c* are in order that we can explain philosophy teleologically. *p* and *c* will be the central focus of Chapter 3, so I will focus here on only *s* and *i*.

Philosophy is not merely some unitary, unanalysable item of some more heterogeneous human social system. Philosophy is also composed of elements. As such, *s* and *i* are both quite variable depending upon the scale at which we regard philosophical practice. When we speak of philosophy as an element of human social practice, *s* is that social practice and *i* is philosophy. As such, the problems in virtue of which philosophy is teleological are relations between human social conditions and the processes involved in social practice. These I will call *natural* problems. In addition to these, however, are problems related to elements of philosophical practice with which philosophers themselves are much better acquainted. Philosophy is composed of

methods and traditions with their own success criteria. One clear illustration of this is the difference between Anglo-American, "analytic" philosophy and Continental, "speculative" philosophy. This division was at its most robust during the mid-twentieth century and has since weakened considerably, but both traditions held different methods to be appropriate, different subjects to be worthy of study, and different limits to what was considered acceptable philosophical discourse. Each arose due to differing problems in their respective academic and broader cultural environments and have been evaluated on the basis of those problems. These problems, however, are not natural problems. They are one step removed from them. I will call these *pragmatic* problems.

We have two sets of problems corresponding to two sets of *s* and *i* pairings. In the first, natural problems explain philosophy as an item in human social practice given some yet unspecified condition. In the second, pragmatic problems explain philosophical methodologies, traditions, *et cetera* as items of philosophical practice more generally given rather different relevant conditions. There is also a third sort of problem. Within a tradition or methodological practice, there are various theories, data, arguments, *et cetera* that are explained in virtue of a set of unique problems. I shall call these *theoretical* problems. The uniqueness of each of the three sets of problems does not, however, mean that they do not influence one another. Theories and traditions are elements of the whole of philosophical practice, and are thereby constrained and informed by it. The same principle carries over from the biological case. I have a heart, and my heart has semilunar valves. Those semilunar valves evolved in response to a

unique set of problems with respect to my whole heart, but my heart set the conditions in which those problems came about. Problems, recall, are essentially relations between s and c and are therefore determined to some degree by what s is. If s is the Anglo-American tradition, the same c will result in plausibly quite different problems than if s is the Continental tradition, geology, or a mammalian heart.

The relation here is unidirectional. The problems that explain the evolution of semilunar valves do not influence the problems that explain the evolution of hearts. The upward relation is only of solution. Semilunar valves contribute to the solution of those problems that influence the evolution of hearts and given static conditions, the general evolutionary trend would only be to equilibrium. Solutions to theoretical problems likewise do not influence pragmatic problems but to contribute to their solution. There is certainly an indirect influence here in that solving problems modifies c in ways that may alter higher level problems, but this is accidental to the phenomenon as a whole and contingent on how c changes. Ideal theory therefore need not concern itself excessively with such phenomenon and instead regard lower level items to be constrained solely by the systems of which they are elements and the conditions in which they are present. In that way, the set of norms, φ , relevant to philosophical practice may be more easily isolated and explicated. Let us now conclude by commenting briefly on the normative aspects of the present discussion.

2.8 Problems as Normative Grounds

When we suppose that p makes a demand on s , we are not only saying that p provides criteria according to which we can evaluate the success of s in solving p , but we are also saying that p regulates the conduct of s . p has real effects on the status and persistence of s . This means not only that p is an essential element in a teleological explanation of i but also that p serves as the normative grounds for regulating the conduct of s and i . In the case of philosophy as a whole, this means that natural problems are identical to Φ and from there, we can derive φ . To do this, we need only then identify precisely what the natural problems of philosophy are as well as what the social conditions are in which they were present. A full teleological explanation of philosophy requires each of these elements in their proper context. To this end, I will focus in Chapter 3 on the development of the natural problems of philosophy through the Archaic and Classical periods in Athens and then move in Chapter 4 to a discussion of the norms of philosophical practice in order to show that they are not identical to natural problems.

Chapter 3: Philosophical Problems before Plato

3.1 Introduction

Philosophy is not autotelic; it addresses very real, transcendent problems that arose in the social environments of Ancient Egypt, China, India, and Greece. Of these, our focus will be on the Greeks for two reasons. First, the problems that effected philosophy were most well recognised by the Greeks; second, we have at our disposal a greater breadth and depth of texts relating to the birth of philosophy in Greece than in any other region. We are able to focus in quite fine detail on a revolutionary period in Greek history spanning approximately five hundred years from the emergence of writing in the eighth century to the first philosophical writings of the mid-fourth century before the Christian era. This span of time saw the fall of monarchs, the struggle amongst noble families to fill that void, the resulting shift in political ideology, and the rise of democracy. Major wars ravaged Greece during this time, including the Persian invasions of the early fifth century to the Peloponnesian war only a few decades thereafter. Greece emerged as a global player, overseeing a shift in the centre of political and economic power from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean, creating a tradition that would last with greater or lesser fidelity right up until the present. Yet despite this, Greece also saw the beginning of a moderate decline from which it would never fully recover.

Through all of this, one of the most important and timeless developments was Plato's articulation of a self-consistent, autonomous philosophical practice in opposition and apposition to a number of related practices of his time. We shall focus more

particularly on the eccentricities of Plato's articulation of philosophy in Chapter 4 and Aristotle's revision in Chapter 5, but before these can be understood, we must concern ourselves with the antecedent problem space of philosophy, the very sordid history of the Greeks that posed the many problems that philosophy developed to solve. I want to analyse this history in four stages progressing in roughly chronological order beginning in 3.2 with the revolution of values instigated by the deposition of monarchs throughout much of Greece. 3.3 will then concern the means by which aristocrats competed for power in the changing conditions from the Archaic period to the Classical. The solutions that aristocrats offered, as I will demonstrate in 3.4, were inadequate, resulting in social change but no alleviation from *stasis*. As a result of this failure, philosophy developed in response to three problems that were left unaddressed by previous means of solution, which I will show in 3.5.

3.2 The Archaic Period and the Revolution of Values

The Archaic period was far removed from the tales of the heroic kings of aeons past and with that shift arose new problems for the Greeks to solve. Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* straddle the political and ideological shift that occurred over the course of the revolutionary events that ushered in the Archaic period.⁷ The former praised a king, providing a theological argument for the role of the monarchy in Greece. It was the king alone, Zeus first among them, who through wit created and preserved the *polis*

⁷ Gerard Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, State University of New York Press (Albany, NY), 2005: ch. 1

as it is. Without the king's mighty will, all falls into disorder as various factions compete amongst themselves for power. But with this came responsibility. It was the king's duty to rule nobly, consulting his subjects and maintaining order through wisdom and beautiful words as opposed to the force of his armies. The monarchs of Hesiod's day failed to do this well. The *Theogony* then served as something of a double edged sword for the Greek monarchies of the time. It upheld the monarchy while undermining the legitimacy of the kings of the day. Only a couple of decades would pass before this revolutionary side of the *Theogony* came to fruition. The kings of the Greek *poleis* would be violently overthrown throughout much of Greece and in turn, the resulting absence of a unified power engendered three centuries of increasingly intensifying political turmoil.

While the *Theogony* preceded the deposition of the kings, the *Works and Days* closely follows. This decidedly pessimistic work was in large part a response to the turmoil that grasped Greece throughout the Archaic period. It justified the revolution by commenting upon the wickedness of the monarchs while decrying the subsequent *stasis*, or social strife due to political revolution. Through all of this, however, Hesiod poses for us the beginning to a solution by recognising precisely what problems were at play in the monarchy. The monarchs failed to consult their subjects, they took the labours of their followers for granted, and they did not engage in the hard work that others did in order to gain a respect for it. They lived in luxury, dressing in dyed linens and eating the most succulent of foods. Most of all, the monarchs commanded a respect that they did not merit; they did not effectively order their *poleis*, and so had to

be replaced with those who would. These problems suggested a revolution in values within the Greek world away from the more conservative emphasis on divine heritage, luxury, and pleasures and towards a much more merit-oriented system of values.

Hesiod's complaints formed the foundation of one of two dominant political ideologies that arose in response to the changing political environment. Hesiod informed what Ian Morris has called the *middling ideology*. The other, what Morris calls the *elitist ideology*. These two contrasting ideologies arose largely in response to institutions that developed after the deposition of the monarchs to curtail infighting amongst a *polis*' aristocrats. The prohibition against hubris was one such institution,⁸ but another, one that is far more significant for our purposes, is the demand that an aristocrat *persuade* his inferiors to take up arms for his cause.⁹ This shift was important, for it placed ultimate power in the hands of those who would be doing the fighting, those who would ultimately become enshrined as important legal and political agents, namely the *politai*, or citizens, of their respective *poleis*. The middling and elitist ideologies were tailored to persuading the masses in distinctive ways. The initially dominant ideology was the elitist ideology, which appealed to traditional political and religious institutions, wealth, and luxury—ultimately anything that substantiated the robust *qualitative* distinction between mass and elite—in order to ground claims to legitimacy.¹⁰ In a very real and important sense, ostentation was the name of the game:

⁸ See Vernant, *Origins*, 64-70, for a discussion of how the Greeks conceived of hubris. See also Ian Morris, "The Strong Principle of Equality and the Archaic Origins of Greek Democracy" in Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick [eds.], *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ), 1996: 19-48

⁹ See Morris, "Strong Principle of Equality," 24-28; Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, ch.4; Vernant, *Origins*, ch.3

¹⁰ Morris, "Strong Principle of Equality," 31-36

one, after all, had to demonstrate to the very pious masses that one is favoured by the gods themselves in order to warrant appropriate legitimacy to rule. An aristocrat of some esteem, initially by blood but later by experience and influence, is better suited to hold political power than those of lesser esteem and his esteem demonstrates the agreement of the gods. As such, legitimacy was ultimately justified by forces external to the *polis*. This means of bolstering legitimacy, however, is somewhat dicey in conjunction with the prohibition against hubris amongst the aristocratic ranks. While the classes were held to be distinct not only by convention but by nature, individuals were held to be effectively equal within each class, and any deviation from accepting this was variously punishable.

As we can see, most of Hesiod's concerns are quite roundly ignored by the elitist ideology. His successors, however, posed a daunting challenge to elitist aristocrats. The middling ideology chided excess of all sorts, emphasising in response hard work, patriotism, and moderation.¹¹ The middling aristocrat strove to identify himself with an ideal citizen, the *metrios*, with whom even the *demos* could identify. The effect was that the middling aristocrat at least appeared to be sufficiently similar to the *demos* that he could claim to have their interests in mind when governing.¹² Thus, while the elitist aristocrat appealed to external grounds for legitimacy, the middling aristocrat appealed to grounds *internal* to the *polis*. This was a difficult position for an aristocrat to maintain. He had to out of one side of his mouth identify with those he sought to govern but out

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 28-31

¹² *Ibidem*, 21-24

of the other establish a sufficient qualitative difference from them that he was worthy of political power. Hubris, again, is the relevant fixture. The elitist aristocrat, because he maintains a robust class distinction, need only maintain a prohibition against hubris within the aristocratic class. The middling aristocrat, however, does not have this luxury. He is engaged in weakening the class distinction, and so the prohibition against hubris spills out from the aristocratic class upon the heads of the masses, nourishing them with political and legal esteem.

3.3 Contests of Wisdom

How the competition between these ideologies turned out is well known. That isonomic, or egalitarian, constitutions were even considered plausible, let alone instituted widely throughout Greece, was a direct result of the ultimate ideological domination of the middling ideology. How this victory occurred, however, is not exceptionally well known. The competition between elitist and middling aristocrats was initially quite bloody, but competition became quickly limited to approved fora, and outside that, a prohibition against hubris within the aristocratic caste served to maintain order in the *poleis*. Contests thereby became an important part of the political process in Greece, serving in large part to exalt nobles' status in the eyes of subjects and in the eyes of other aristocrats. The Olympic Games, for instance, are traditionally dated to the early eighth century and provided a peaceful outlet for inter- and intra-*polis* competition between (almost exclusively) aristocrats. Contests of these sorts were not exclusive to athletic pursuits: contests of wisdom likewise became common throughout the early Archaic

period, ranging from various artistic pursuits, poetry most notably, to knowledge about the *archai*, or elemental principles, of the world.¹³ These contests were often rather outlandish, with competitors speaking to an audience and then submitting to questions in an effort not only to educate an audience but also to entertain them. After each of the competitors had spoken, judges from the audience would select and announce a winner based not only on how likely the competitor was to be correct but how clear and precise his explanations were, how profound his thoughts, and how lively they were presented. The showmanship involved in the contests eventually turned them into something of a farce, but the ultimate subjects of the competitions were taken by the competitors themselves to be serious pursuits worthy of consideration. It took great investment of time and effort for many competitors to succeed in their craft, motivating intense dedication and some private contempt towards the lackadaisical nature of audiences. Nevertheless, it was this balance between elite competition and mass persuasion exemplified in the contests of wisdom that contributed to the progress of the Archaic period.

Let us narrow in on some key features of these contests of wisdom that arose courtesy of the conflict between the elitist and middling ideologies of the day, beginning with the most obvious. That the audience, composed largely of lower class citizens, was charged with selecting a victor in the contests was a practice unique to the Greek world.¹⁴ If there were contests of this sort elsewhere, such as in Babylon and Egypt,

¹³ See Vernant, *Origins*, esp. 45-48; G.E.R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom*, University of California Press (Berkeley, CA), 1989: 83-102; and Gerard Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, ch. 2

¹⁴ Lloyd, *Revolutions*, 87-88

their scale was much smaller and the victor was left to the gods to decide. That this was the case says a great deal about how the Greeks conceived of the role of the *demos*. The common people individually were not especially esteemed, but the collective was thought to correct for any individual's deficiencies, thus providing the *demos* as a whole a great deal more warrant than conceived previously.¹⁵

This conception provided the middling aristocrat with a slight advantage in contests of wisdom due to his emphasis on the *metrios*, but the elitist aristocrat was not without recourse. For instance, Pindar writes in a fragment that has generated some controversy among scholars:

Many swift arrows have I crooked beneath my elbow in their quiver for speaking to those who understand; but for the masses, interpreters are required. Wise is the man with much inborn knowledge; while those who learn by study, like a pair of greedy crows, spout indiscriminate chatter compared to the divine bird of Zeus.¹⁶

Pindar, an elitist praise poet, is making two substantive claims here that would have been received relatively well in the still rather hierarchical society of the late-Archaic period. The first is that there is a substantial intellectual gap between the aristocrat and the *demos*, one so large that the aristocrat can grasp immediately what requires interpretation for the masses to grasp at all. The application of this idea to contests of wisdom is straightforward. If an aristocrat speaks profoundly enough, the audience may not understand him, but will nevertheless consider him wise insofar as his intellect is

¹⁵ See Morris, "Strong Principle of Equality," 28-31; Naddaf, *Greek Concept of Nature*, 195-196, n.61; and Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, ch.5

¹⁶ Pindar, *Olympian Odes* II.83-9, translated by Steve Robinson, "Political Background of the Sophists at Athens" in Patricia O'Grady [ed.], *The Sophists: An Introduction*, Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd. (London, UK), 2008: 23

upon a plane far above that which can be reached by his lower class audience. This strategy was apparently somewhat successful—Pindar, at the very least, was an immensely successful and esteemed poet—but it is a strategy that is largely off limits to the middling aristocrat.

Pindar's second significant claim is where the controversy lies, for it is unclear whom he is criticising as greedy, chattering crows. Whoever they may be, they have attempted to exalt themselves by studying some matter about which they speak, and so admit immediately that they do not know by nature. Pindar scoffs at this. Not only is he leagues above the masses in understanding, but he is so by nature: he need not have laboured to learn what he understands. The middling aristocrat, of course, cannot make this move: he is compelled by consistency to trumpet the hard work he did in learning that about which he speaks.

It must be stressed that independently of which route an aristocratic competitor takes, the demonstrated wisdom is *his and his alone*. There is a profound egotism inherent in the Greek contests of wisdom. The strong "I" is omnipresent in nearly all of the extant writings from the period, from Hesiod onwards through the poetic tradition, medicine, and ultimately to science. The significance of this egotism should not be understated. It is through constant reminders that a given idea or technique is an author's that we come to fully appreciate the force that aristocratic competition had. Even if the idea or technique was given to an aristocrat by a Muse, it was made known that it was given to *him*. A great deal of esteem was at stake in these competitions, which could translate into political power for an aristocrat, his family, or his patrons. It

could also translate into increased wealth in the form of patronage or tuition, which indirectly supported a bid for power. Even so, the constant egotism of these contests was not always positive. It stressed the importance of innovation, for an aristocrat could not affix his name to an old idea. But innovation also decreased the familiarity and therefore plausibility that an audience would ascribe to an idea.¹⁷ It was therefore not always beneficial to aristocrats. The most obvious case here is that elitist aristocrats often appealed to tradition in order to justify their political legitimacy.¹⁸ They certainly did not need to do so, for they may still appeal to inborn knowledge, as we have seen, or wealth and luxury. Even so, tradition, especially with respect to religion, was crucial to elitist aristocrats. As such, elitist aristocrats often had to find new ways to justify, or at least express, old ideas and practices. They did this with only limited success against the very willingly innovative middling ideology. But even middling aristocrats, despite their willingness to innovate, did not always benefit from innovation. An audience expected some novelty, since even traditional answers had to be justified in response to innovations, but a competitor's proposals and explanations had to be easily understood and appear plausible to an audience, a task that increases in difficulty in proportion to the novelty and profundity of a given proposal or explanation. There had to be some recognition of tradition; innovation had to be done piecemeal.

One victim of this need for tradition was the early scientific tradition, which came to be ridiculed as superfluous and heretical. Greek scientists fit themselves quite

¹⁷ Lloyd, *Revolutions*, ch.2

¹⁸ Morris, "Strong Principle of Equality," 31-36

neatly into a niche in contests of wisdom as addressing the established concept of *phusis*. Gerard Naddaf rightly argues that by *phusis* the Greeks from Homer onward had in mind a complex relation between the origin of the world, the process involved in its unfolding, and its result as the present and future state of affairs.¹⁹ This understanding suggests that discussions of nature centre upon the articulation of cosmogonies not unlike that of Hesiod's *Theogony*. As Vernant persuasively argues, however, if this is the case then we cannot ignore the political dimension involved in this effort.²⁰ A cosmogony, that is, possessed a dual role: it was an account of how the world came to be as it is, but it also demonstrated how the world *ought to be*. Hesiod's *Theogony*, as we have already mentioned, was performed during the funeral games in honour of the late king Amphidamas of Chalcis and explicitly praised the Chalcian monarchy by associating it with that of Zeus.²¹ If middling aristocrats were to compete against the cosmogonical justification of the *status quo* political order, they would have to persuasively undermine cosmogonies such as Hesiod's, an effort that the canonisation of Hesiod attests to have been unsuccessful.

The early scientists and proto-scientists attempted to rise to this task with *naturalistic* cosmogonies. Naddaf's analysis of the Greek conception of *phusis* allows us to distinguish two elements of the *explanandum* of Greek naturalism. *Phusis* consisted of a commitment to identifying (I) the *aitia*, or causes of the world, and (II) the *kosmos*,

¹⁹ Naddaf, *Greek Concept of Nature*, ch.1

²⁰ Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought in Ancient Greece*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (London, UK), 1983; see also his "Greek Cosmogonic Myths" in Y. Bonnefoy and W. Doniger [eds.], *Mythologies*, University of Chicago Press (Chicago, IL), 1991: 366-378

²¹ Naddaf, *Greek Concept of Nature*, ch.2

or order engendered by those causes from the first to the last. Contrary to contemporary versions of naturalism, the gods were not excluded *per se* from naturalistic accounts. Indeed, the model upon which *phusis* is built is the divine will of Zeus from the *Theogony*, which is rational, impartial, and totalising. Each of the early scientists explicitly made a place for the gods in their accounts of *phusis*, from Thales supposing that there are gods in all things,²² to Xenophanes arguing that gods are not anthropomorphic but unitary and unchanging.²³ What differed is how these naturalistic accounts proceed in explaining the gods. It is not a commitment to *phusis* alone that characterises Greek naturalism but, rather, a method of explaining *phusis*. Contrary to the Hesiodic appeal to possession by the Muses, naturalism commits one to explaining *phusis* by way of *empeiria*, or common experience, and *logos*, or public reason. These commitments are paradigmatically middling, elucidating the connection here to the broader sociopolitical disputes of the Archaic period. Naturalism is the middling ideology's counterattack to the divine inspiration of the elitist ideology.²⁴

Even so, poetic genres such as praise poetry, epic, comedy, and tragedy remained the dominant media for aristocratic contests of wisdom, and as such, they branched off into their own much more specific contests such as the City Dionysia for tragedy and comedy. Unlike the cosmogonical speeches of the scientists, mythic poems were well regarded by aristocrats and the *demos* alike as model forms of moral

²² Thales, fr. 35. All Presocratic fragments are from Daniel W. Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, UK), 2005

²³ Xenophanes, frs. 35-38, 41

²⁴ See Naddaf, *Greek Concept of Nature*, ch.3; see also Herakleitos, frs. 19, 26, 29-41, 47, 60, 87, 95; Xenophon, frs. 6-8, 14, 29-31, 35-39, 41-44, 50, 54-62, 72-81, 83

instruction. Outside the institutions of law and order, the assemblies and courts, the theatre was the centrepiece of Greek political discourse, and for good reason. Scientific speeches often left much to be desired in terms of entertainment, for they concerned mundane experiences and fairly rigorous argumentation. Mythic poetry, conversely, concerned lofty tales that supplied great intrigue and excitement, despite the stories being already well known. Poetry played with an audience's prejudices and sensibilities in order to sway them one way or another, and so the spectacle was maintained even while the audience was being educated. This greater capacity for showmanship allowed the poets a much sturdier foothold in contests of wisdom than many of their competitors, and as such, they maintained a powerful hegemony throughout the Archaic period and into the Classical.

3.4 Failure and *Stasis* in the Classical Period

Competitors in contests of wisdom hoped that through their efforts, enough support would be generated for their political aspirations, or that of their family, friends, patrons, *et cetera*, that they could escape the prospect of prolonged future *stasis*. Finally, after three tumultuous centuries, the middling ideology squeezed out a victory. In order to accomplish this feat, however, middling aristocrats had to grant a monopoly on power to the newly enfranchised *demos* by drawing up isonomic constitutions. By all accounts, this ought to have been a success. Everyone to a greater or lesser degree held middling sympathies and the *demos'* monopoly on power disallowed aristocratic families from struggling amongst themselves for legitimacy. However, the Classical

The much less popular scientific and sophistic speech likewise did not contribute to a solution here. The scientists were ridiculed as dirty, useless figures that could not even care for themselves, let alone the *polis*. Once again, Aristophanes provides the popular criticism here:

I won't hear you speaking disrespectfully of such eminent scientists and geniuses. And, what's more, men of such fantastic frugality and Spartan thrift, they regard baths, haircuts, and personal cleanliness generally as an utter waste of time and money.²⁶

Strepsiades is speaking here, attempting to exhort his son, Pheidippides, to study at Socrates' *Phrontisterion*. The latter comments that these scientists are a bore and will tarnish his reputation, so Strepsiades responds with the above, supposing that Pheidippides' criticisms are actually a virtue of the scientists. That Strepsiades is quite the dullard, however, is enough to reinforce the audience's prejudices, which match those of Pheidippides. The scientists are dirty and smelly, and they are not the sort with which one should associate.

This popular criticism is reinforced by the tendency of common people to identify the sophists and the scientists. This was not unreasonable, for by the Classical period most of those engaged in sophistic teaching also engaged in scientific investigation and vice versa. Sophistry, however, garnered a much worse reputation than scientific investigation. Scientists lacked decorum, but the sophists were actively deleterious to the aims of the *polis*. Here again is Aristophanes:

RIGHT SPEECH:

I'll *invalidate* you!

WRONG SPEECH:

Invalidate *me*?

How, fossil?

²⁶ Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, 87

RIGHT SPEECH: My arguments are Truth and Justice.
 WRONG SPEECH: Then I'll disarm you and defeat you, friend.
 Your justice does not exist.
 RIGHT SPEECH: What?! No Justice?!
 Preposterous!
 WRONG SPEECH: Then show it to me. Where is it?
 RIGHT SPEECH: Where is Justice? Why, in the Lap of the Gods.
 WRONG SPEECH: In the Lap of the Gods? Then would you explain
 how Zeus escaped punishment after he imprisoned
 his father? The inconsistency is glaring.
 RIGHT SPEECH: Aaaagh!
 What nauseating twaddle! It turns my stomach!²⁷

The sophists, represented by Aristophanes as Wrong Speech, were conceived as nefarious foreigners who sought to empower revolutionaries and thereby destroy the democratic institutions. They did not see, in other words, the eminent justice that underlay the isonomic constitution and thereby sought to do away with it for their own personal advantage. As such, they needed to be fiercely opposed.

Aristophanes, in the above selection, is also telling us something else. The sophists may have been unjust and deceptive, but they were difficult to disagree with. Right Speech is the conservative voice, that which is spoken by the poets like himself and the *demos* in the assemblies and courts. Yet Right Speech does not counter Wrong Speech in reason. He reacts viscerally. He throws up his hands and resorts to insulting Wrong Speech. This reaction on the part of the *demos* is what kept scientific and sophistic discourse on the fringe and only allowed poetic discourse to flourish. Yet this can only get one so far. Poetic discourse only appeals to an audience's sensibilities and prejudices, making associations as desired by the poet. This, as Aristophanes gestures,

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 92-93

is what is lacking in democratic discourse as a whole. He does not move to solve it himself; that is not his role as a poet. Rather, it is the role of all those *politai* who were brought up in the traditions of the city. They were to innovate rightly, to maintain the virtue of tradition while providing a rational foundation. These men evidently did not do so. Philosophy would.

3.5 Philosophical Problems

Philosophical practice in Greece was inextricably political. Where *i* is philosophy, *s* is the Athenian *polis*. Ultimately, *p* is derivative of the *stasis* experienced in Athens and the remainder of the Greek world, but this *stasis* is also explanatory with respect to much of the poetry, science, and sophistic teaching that had inundated political discourse into the Classical period. Appropriately explaining philosophy teleologically requires a much more precise specification of *p* as a complex, which can be done by identifying the deficits in the existing responses to *stasis* that we have already briefly discussed.

Of the extant responses, poetry was the most apt at generating moral and political consensus. It whipped up an audience into a cathartic or comedic fervor unlike that produced by other forms of political discourse. Poetry played on an audience's prejudices in order to motivate action in this or that way, and was quite successful in that endeavour. In doing so, however, poetry was limited to expressing fairly conservative attitudes when even the poets themselves recognised that political innovation was needed. Let us call the problem that poetry failed to solve the *problem of justification*: the inability to effectively justify of any particular political innovation

outside those already supported by popular prejudice. This drastically limited the efficacy of poetic discourse to solve *stasis* in the Archaic and Classical periods.

Sophistic discourse as it was exercised in Athens faced a very similar difficulty. The sophists were seen as threats to the democratic regime, and as a result, they took up highly conservative positions in order to defend against these sorts of accusations. This was not always true of sophistic discourse, however, and hence a vulnerability to the problem of justification is accidental and not essential to it. Rather, the problem that sophistic discourse failed to adequately solve pertained to its image as threatening to the *polis*. Let us call this problem the *problem of benevolence*. Sophistic discourse allowed an individual to not only convince others, but to do so with reasons. However, the skills that the sophist exercised went unchecked by higher order moral concerns. It is dangerous for the democrat to allow an individual power over others' motivations when he does not necessarily have those others' best interest in mind. When competing individuals that have such abilities enter the mix, the result is not a solution of *stasis* but *stasis* itself.

This was no worry for the scientists. They were most concerned with the higher-order moral concerns that the sophists failed to consider. That is, the scientist was after the content of the divine will of Zeus, whatever he understood this to mean. This qualification is an important one. Few scientists of the day would consider themselves to be investigating the intentions of the traditional gods of the city. They frequently criticised conservative conceptions of such beings, replacing them with much more naturalistic, logically consistent entities. In doing so, however, the Greek scientists

struck upon heretical and often indecorous metaphysical and moral positions that the average Greek found distasteful. Let us call this problem the *problem of similitude*. The scientists, that is, were perfectly capable of justifying their positions, and doing so with moral concerns in the foreground. Their positions, however, and even many of the moral concerns that they believed to be important, were simply so different from the norm that the *demos*, by and large, did not take them seriously.

Philosophy is disposed to address all of these problems, as we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 4. The problem of *stasis* is essentially divisible into the problem of justification, the problem of benevolence, and the problem of similitude. To solve internal political conflict, moral and political consensus must be achieved. Consensus requires that relevant positions are justified, in everyone's best interest, and sufficiently familiar that all of the relevant parties can understand them and put them into practice. This is what philosophy aims to achieve. Let us now turn to how it is that philosophy was established to accomplish this feat.

Chapter 4: Philosophical Platonism: Reinventing the Gadfly

4.1 Introduction

The central sociopolitical problems that faced the Greeks were three: the problem of justification, the problem of beneficence, and the problem of similitude. These problems, unsolved, contributed to persistent *stasis* in the *polis*, and therefore made a demand on the *polis* to innovate. I will show in this Chapter that the result in Athens was Plato's philosophical practice. Philosophy alone was disposed towards solving the above problems.

Despite this, philosophical practice has been variously misunderstood, chided as oppressive, anti-democratic navel gazing. Part of this misunderstanding is derivative of an erroneous reading of Plato himself, and so we should endeavour here to rectify this. Plato, we shall see, is fully cognizant of the problems facing his *polis* that other means of democratic discourse were not able to solve, and so he fashioned philosophical practice towards those ends. As such, philosophy was established as a set of norms (φ), which we shall attempt to specify here. φ is derivative of the above problems by way of regulating the solutions thereto in the context of the Athenian sociopolitical environment. As such, we shall be concerned primarily with the relation between philosophy as practiced by Plato and its relationship to coeval events in Athens.

My analysis will take place in four stages. I begin in 4.2 with Josiah Ober, who proceeds in a manner typical of contemporary Anglophone Plato scholarship by relying

most heavily on the argumentative content of Plato's dialogues.²⁸ On this basis, he paints a picture of Plato as a dissident elite plotting against the democratic constitution of Athens. Philosophy, thereby, is a means of preparing to overtake the *demos*, ridding oneself of the demotic ideology and cultivating one's soul. In 4.3, I will examine Steven R. Robinson's recent response to Ober's claim, which concerns Plato's methodology.²⁹ That Plato wrote dialogues at all, he supposes, is discordant with Ober's characterisation of Plato's ends. With Plato's method in mind, Robinson argues that philosophy is a very specific type of dissent: one wholly dedicated to the betterment of a *polis*, and thereby committed to legitimately persuading the *demos* as to the nature of justice while obeying the laws all the while. That is, Robinson argues that Plato seeks to address the three problems with which we began. I will expand and defend Robinson's interpretation of Plato's works by considering the *Gorgias*, rounding out a full opposition to Ober's indictment of Plato in 4.4. From here, in 4.5 I wish only to derive what is possible about the norms that Plato has set for philosophy not only as an artefact created by Plato but as an autonomous practice beyond Plato's reach.

4.2 Ober Against Plato

²⁸ Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ), 1998: ch. 4; see also his *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ), 1989; and his *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ), 2008

²⁹ Steven R. Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*" in Jonathon Lavery, Louis Groarke, and William Sweet [eds.], *Ideas Under Fire: Historical Studies of Philosophy and Science in Adversity*, Farleigh Dickinson University Press (Plymouth, UK), 2013: 37-65

In *Letter VII*, Plato narrates at length his withdrawal from Athenian politics and subsequent effort to educate Dionysus of Syracuse in order that the latter become something of a philosopher king. Ober makes much of this period in Plato's life, supposing that it is that at which all his work had been directed. On Ober's view, this period was preceded by an overt withdrawal from Athenian politics that came about in two stages. The first occurred when Plato was still rather young. The institution of the regime of the Thirty Tyrants had a profound effect on the young man. Among the Thirty were Plato's own relatives, Critias and Charmides, and so Plato was filled with initial promise. He sought to engage in political life alongside them and was poised to do so. The regime, however, was brutal and vicious. It made the preceding democratic regime appear as an "age of gold" despite its many flaws and frequent turmoil. But once the Thirty Tyrants had been overthrown, Plato once again was filled with zeal for political participation. A second time, however, the viciousness of the rulers turned him away. This time, according to Ober, it was not a prolonged brutal and licentious tendency among the rulers *per se* but a singular crime, the trial and execution of the best of the Athenians, Plato's good friend and mentor: Socrates. Plato directly equates the evils of the thirty tyrants with the unjust execution of Socrates, and therefore the democracy was considered exactly as evil as the preceding tyranny. Thence Plato extracted himself from Athenian society and began to plot to overthrow it, constructing the most ideal constitution, which he attempted to institute in Syracuse with the education of young Dionysos.

The period intervening Socrates' execution and Plato's complete condemnation of the democratic constitution is of great interest here. It began with a full-blooded commitment to continue Socrates' project, accepting the injunction outlined in Plato's earliest dialogues, the *Apology* and the *Crito*, to serve as a gadfly to rouse Athens to greater virtue by engaging citizens in rather toilsome and dangerous conversation concerning the nature of virtue. The role of the gadfly is decidedly as an outsider to the steed, crafting Socrates, and therefore the young Plato, as a dissident of a noble genus. The nobility of this sort of dissent is ensured by an essential condition: the Socratic philosopher must dissent only insofar as he acts to *persuade* the *polis* about the nature of justice, and failing this, he is *obliged to obey* its dictates. This provides the Socratic with substantial liberty, but at a cost, for just as in Socrates' case, the Socratic philosopher may find himself at the mercy of a *polis* that he is unable to persuade, an eventuality that may cost him his life. "This is a pretty tough row to hoe for anyone," says Ober,

who lacked Socrates' immense physical and moral courage and the clearly audible inner voice that prevented him from engaging in wrongdoing. If the *Apology* represents Socrates' final attempt to educate the Athenian *demos*, then the *Apology* and *Crito*, read together, might be seen as his farewell wake-up sting for would-be Socratics.³⁰

Socrates' dangerous life ought thereby to have been expected for Plato too were he to have followed in his mentor's footsteps. But, as Ober continues,

Plato . . . did not closely imitate Socrates' own manner of life. He did not allow his private estate to fall into ruin in the philanthropic pursuit of the betterment of Athens, nor did he haunt public spaces intent on making himself available for engaging ordinary citizens and other polis residents in elenctic conversation.

³⁰ Ober, *Political Dissent*, 185-186

Instead, he withdrew to the Academy and apparently conversed seriously only with a few carefully chosen students, most of them non-citizens.³¹

Plato lacked the constitution to challenge that of Athens, quickly retreating from his previously accepted injunction. But it was not only cold feet that stopped Plato from imitating his mentor: Plato has reasons. And these reasons, according to Ober, are clearly evident already in the *Crito* with the argument that Socrates invents for the Laws, an argument that points forward to the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*.

The Laws in the *Crito* are a stand-in for the democratic assembly; their argument is fittingly rhetorical in nature. Yet despite everything that we know about Socrates' opposition to rhetoric, he affirms the argument of the Laws. For Ober, the Laws persuade Socrates illegitimately by crowding out any other argument, rendering him incapable of proposing an alternative thesis. The Laws argue that Socrates is duty-bound to either persuade the Laws to change or to obey their dictates, for it was the Laws that secured the conditions necessary for his birth, his education, and his subsequent livelihood. Furthermore, they afforded him the opportunity to leave the *polis* for another that he may have considered to be better governed, such as Sparta or Crete. Despite this, Socrates left the city only twice for military service. Socrates' agreement to this contract is therefore certain. He therefore possesses a duty to obey the legitimate exercise of the Laws or persuade them to change. His own trial was undertaken legitimately, and he failed to persuade the jury. He has no recourse available: he must abide by his sentence and take the hemlock. For Ober, the key

³¹ *Ibidem*, 186

features of this argument are the provisions to which the Laws refer, specifically their claim to have educated Socrates. This, he suggests, is where Plato is flagging some problems for the reader, pointing forward to the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, where he proposes the sorts of arguments that the Laws crowded out.

In the *Gorgias*, on Ober's view, Plato demonstrates that the Laws of Athens did not, in fact, educate Socrates: they have corrupted him just as they have Callicles. It was Socrates' own individual efforts to philosophise that drew him out of the grasp of the masses—but not completely, for through the course of the dialogue, "[i]t [becomes] increasingly clear that Socratic rhetoric is incapable of achieving perlocutionary effects in the *polis*-as-it-is."³² Even so, this is not the fault of Socrates' philosophical rhetoric, but of the democratic education that corrupts and insulates the *politai* against philosophical speech. As such, Ober goes on to argue, Socrates has not been educated by the Laws but corrupted.

The *Gorgias* is among the most complex of Plato's dialogues. As Ober has it, the entrée does not arrive until Callicles angrily bursts onto the scene. In an effort to defend the virtues of rhetoric, Callicles sets out the enslavement of the best of the Athenians in his origin story of the demotic conventions, or *nomoi*: the masses, by their superior numbers, overcame the natural superiority of the elite and provided them with political positions in which they could only placate the masses who ultimately rule over them, as Socrates established in his preceding discussions with Gorgias and Polus. But, says Callicles, a sufficiently strong man may break out of his enslavement, ruling over

³²*Ibidem*, 209

the masses as a tyrant. Socrates counters here, supposing that this would-be tyrant must then be concerned with what truly is as opposed to what appears to be, and thereby must engage in philosophical speech as opposed to rhetorical speech. Callicles rejects this, launching into an attack on philosophy reminiscent of Pheidippides' attack on Socrates' *Phrontisterion* in *The Clouds*.³³ That is, philosophers are unmanly, weak, and pale; they have no knowledge of public spaces, reputation, or contract, and so they certainly cannot have the requisite knowledge to overthrow the democracy. In this critique, however, Callicles shows precisely how deep the demotic ideology runs within him. Socrates has already shown that it is he who knows how the city affairs transpire, for he is engaged in public discourse. The visiting rhetores, conversely, have been ignorant all the while, shut up in the homes of the wealthy, pale as can be. Callicles thereby rests upon a popular criticism of philosophy that is very much divorced from the state of affairs of the world. So while philosophy seems useless, nothing could be further from the truth. Rhetoric likewise seems what it is not. It is the most useless practice of the two. Socrates points out that Callicles' reliance on appearance is precisely in line with democratic *nomoi* and that by those criteria, Callicles' best man is the *kinaidos*, the least manly figure in all of Greece. The philosopher, on the other hand, is decidedly the manliest.

³³ Aristophanes, *The Clouds* in Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. [eds.], *The Complete Greek Drama: All the Extant Tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and the Comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, in a Variety of Translations, Vol. II*, Random House, Inc. (New York, NY), 1938: esp. lines 100-120 (pg. 544-545)

Callicles has no response. He sees the logical strength of Socrates' position, but he cannot break with the demotic ideology and quickly retreats back to his former emphasis on appearances. It appears then that Socrates' philosophical rhetoric cannot effect change in Athens at all. He cannot convince individuals, nor can he convince mobs, and so Socrates is left with nothing to say and where he is silent he is vulnerable. But if Socrates is left vulnerable in this way, the Laws of Athens have not provided him with sufficient education or security to improve him in the manner that they claim in the *Crito*. And because the demotic ideology runs so deeply in the Laws, it bars alternative views and so Socrates is also incapable of persuading the Laws to change. Socrates thereby has no duty to obey their dictates.

To what, then, does Socrates owe his service? To Kallipolis. It is there where the philosopher finally frees himself from his vulnerable position: he must rule over the *polis* as Callicles' tyrant would, a connection made explicit by Thrasymachus' near-identical proposal in Book I of the *Republic*. Where Callicles refused to suppose that the tyrant ought to concern himself with *being* virtuous, Thrasymachus capitulates to Socrates' argument, setting up the foundationalist political discourse that follows. There is one significant qualification that must be made, however: the result of the discourse of the *Republic* is not precisely how it is familiarly put. True, Kallipolis is ruled by philosophers who are the true guardians and are serviced by auxiliaries that, like the philosophers, hold all property in common. True still, the masses are subordinated to the auxiliaries and therefore have no political power at all. The problem arises in instantiating Kallipolis in the world. Simply put, the ideal city cannot exist in the world. When it comes time to

explain the establishment of Kallipolis, Plato shifts from representing the masses as ideological and recalcitrant to sufficiently educable that they provide philosophers political power. That is, Kallipolis is born from the democratic constitution through the community of philosophers "rising up" against it by means of their superior intellect in a manner not unlike how Callicles describes such a revolution, complete with the naïve reliance upon the need for knowledge about the *nomoi* of the *polis*: from this base, they convince the masses through discourse to sacrifice for the ultimate betterment of the *polis*. But the conclusion of the *Republic* is decidedly pessimistic: the *demos* certainly isn't educable in that way. The demotic ideology runs too strongly within them. Yet Plato holds out hope that in the liberty of the democratic constitution, the political will of the *politai* becomes sufficiently weakened that philosophers may overcome the democracy and thereby establish Kallipolis, but this is yet a long way off. In the interim, the philosopher's duty, because the democratic *polis* was not responsible for his education and nurturing, is no longer to the democracy, but now wholly to Kallipolis. But since Kallipolis exists nowhere on Earth, the duty of the philosopher is to the *internal polis*, the soul. On these grounds the philosopher is duty-bound to retreat from the democratic *polis* in order to avoid its corrupting influence over the soul and thereby to lead a life of quietism and self-improvement in wait for the ultimate time at which he may strike out and overcome the democratic constitution.

For Ober, this is what Plato's philosophy itself is. Philosophy is a means of preparing for and carrying out an anti-democratic political revolution. As such, its emphasis is inherently political, building upon the tools of previous scientists for this

singular end. But Ober identifies a problem in Plato's effort. Ober's *coup de grace* is that the content of Plato's dialogues does not accord with his method. As he puts it, "[t]he means Plato used in his imaginative attempt to solve his 'Socrates and Athens' problem was exactly the performative, speech-act method characteristic of the democracy."³⁴ That this is the case, on Ober's view, undermines Plato's argument from the *Crito* through the *Gorgias* to the *Republic*. Plato is clearly reliant upon the individual freedoms guaranteed by the democracy and the political thought and action characteristic thereof. Plato could not even conceive of his elitist dissent were it not for the locutionary tools provided by the democracy.

Ober's appraisal here leaves much to be desired. Plato more than any other of his time shows a reflective understanding of his own role in political change and critique that must be considered. It is not simply that Plato has overlooked his own reliance on the *demos* of Athens, for he is clearly embracing it. This is the basis of Robinson's response to Ober, to which we now turn.

4.3 Robinson on Plato's Place in the *Apology* and *Crito*

On Ober's view, Plato is just another in a long tradition of disgraced and disenfranchised elites that have retreated from political engagement in order to cultivate their souls and eventually return to prominence as tyrants or oligarchs. The existence and prevalence of this tradition would seem only to bolster Ober's conclusion, but there is one significant difference between Plato and these nameless elites: Plato is not nameless. He wrote

³⁴ Ober, *Political Dissent*, 247

critical dialogues and published them under his own name. As Plato himself makes clear in the *Phaedrus* and in *Letter VII*, the scope of writing is such that an author cannot control his audience. His audience is very much distanced in time and place such that the author cannot properly explain his meaning or respond to objections, an eventuality that is liable to drum up retaliative fervor against a critical author. And yet Plato took this risk, and perhaps more. Diogenes Laertius, for instance, supposes that Plato considered himself more an orator than a philosopher and entered his dialogues as tetralogies into the City Dionysia to compete with tragedies and comedies.³⁵ For a life of quietism, this seems very loud.

Robinson reasons from considerations such as these to a very different conception of what Plato was doing in writing his dialogues:

Despite superficial appearances, Plato's dialogues are not part of a scheme to overthrow the Athenian democratic constitution, nor are they escapist fantasy for defeated aristocrats . . . They are the new, improved means by which Plato the gadfly provoked the democratic city of his own generation.³⁶

Ober and others have illicitly been separating Plato's Socrates from Plato, supposing that the latter was still strongly under Socrates' influence in the early dialogues but that Plato later diverged, disagreeing vehemently with his mentor's dedication to the democracy that eventually had him executed.³⁷ However, the question of whether

³⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* [tr. Robert Drew Hicks], W. Heinemann G.P. Putnam's Sons (London, UK), 1925: III.56-60; see also Dionysus of Halicarnassus, "On the Ancient Orators" in Stephen Usher [tr.], *Critical Essays II*, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA), 1985: §23-25

³⁶ Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*," 42

³⁷ For a competing account, see Gregory Vlastos, "The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy," *Political Theory* 11(4), 1983: 495-516; for an overview of related accounts, see Melissa Lane, *Plato's Progeny: How Plato and Socrates Still Captivate the Modern Mind*, Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd. (London, UK), 2001

Plato's Socrates is an accurate portrayal is by no means trivial, and a suitable comparison exists in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Apology of Socrates*.³⁸ Xenophon's Socrates possesses all of the elitism that Ober attributes to Plato and a very different account of why Socrates lost his trial: as opposed to serving as a gadfly to rouse Athens from its vicious stupor, Xenophon's Socrates had decided that seventy years had been enough and thereby resigned himself to his fate, for if not first the law, nature would soon deal him the same. All men die, but it was better for him to die while in a better physical state, a judgement with which Apollo apparently agreed.³⁹ The *prima facie* implausibility of this notion is only a testament to the success that Plato has enjoyed in providing a compelling image of the heroic dissident philosopher, one that he himself took as a moral exemplar not only before and shortly after Socrates' death but also after establishing his school at the Academy. It was from there that Plato carried on the Socratic injunction to improve his *polis*, albeit in quite a different manner than his predecessor.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Plato and Socrates agreed on every matter, but it would likewise be a mistake to hold that there is a robust distinction between them on the basis solely of Plato's dialogues. With this in mind, Robinson endeavours to show that Plato held firm to Socrates' ethics of criticism elucidated in the *Crito*.⁴⁰ Plato, like his Socrates, was committed to attempting to persuade his

³⁸ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* [tr. Amy L. Bonnette], Cornell University Press (Ithaca, NY), 1994; and "Apology of Socrates" in Mark Kremer [tr.], *Plato and Xenophon: Apologies*, Focus (Newburyport, MA), 2006: 29-38

³⁹ Xenophon, "Apology," §§5-9, 22

⁴⁰ It is notable here that Xenophon represents the events of the *Crito* in a very different light: "when his companions wanted to abduct him, he didn't go along with them, but actually seemed to be mocking

countrymen as to the nature of justice all while unfailingly obeying their legal dictates, even where he may disagree. Robinson's key move here is to identify why it is that Plato would be writing at all. What sorts of reactions might his writing engender? If he were merely writing escapist fantasy for other elites, there would be no reason for Plato to defend Socrates or himself in the manner typical of both the *Apology* and *Crito*. The elites, those "most reasonable people, to whom one should pay more attention, will believe that things were done as they were done,"⁴¹ as Plato has Socrates say in the *Crito*. Both the *Apology* and the *Crito* would be superfluous if only written for elite eyes. The *Apology* sets out the public value of the philosopher's service; the *Crito* that the philosopher presents no risk to the *polis* in this mission. Socrates' elite friends either already know this or they don't care. Why then is Plato emphasising these facts? Plato is writing for a much broader audience than merely the elites, as *Crito* makes clear when he objects to Socrates' rather blasé attitude:

You see, Socrates, that one must also pay attention to the opinion of the majority. Your present situation makes it clear that the majority can inflict not the least but pretty well the greatest evils if one is slandered among them.⁴²

Crito here is speaking also for Plato; Plato's reputation is on the line just as much as *Crito*'s. The motivation for publishing a defense not only of Socrates but of philosophy as a whole is clear, for Plato was risking the same fate as Socrates. And, indeed, representing Socrates as a proponent of a robust ethics of criticism would be actively harmful to Plato's reputation unless he both fully intended to carry through with the

when he asked them whether they in fact knew of some place outside of Attica inaccessible to death." (Xenophon, "Apology," §23)

⁴¹ Plato, *Crito*, 44c; quoted in Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*," 46

⁴² *Ibidem*, 44d

Socratic injunction and ostensibly did so. What must be allowed, however, is that Plato found a way to carry out this injunction in a safer and more effective manner than his mentor, and the results were the very dialogues to which Ober refers in order to suppose that Plato was a coward.

Placing Plato's dialogues in their own historical context as works written by Plato himself, we find that the robust distinction between Socrates and Plato largely collapses, and while Plato is likely still an elitist, he is demonstrating through his writing that he is openly attempting to persuade the *demos* to change. This rejection of quietism would have put Plato at risk of prosecution, just as it did for Socrates, but Plato had a spotless legal record, dying peacefully at an old age, indicating that he took the second aspect of Socrates' ethics of criticism seriously as well.

4.4 Plato in the *Gorgias*

If Plato were scheming to overthrow the democracy, it would serve him well not only to hide this fact but to actively pre-empt suspicion. Plato, that is, may have provided himself plausible deniability as he carried out his philosophical task newly invigorated against the democracy by Socrates' execution. If Ober's interpretation holds, the *Gorgias* and *Republic* become veiled answers to Plato's earlier deceit. Each dialogue, public and distributed as it is, serves an essential role in the scheme: Plato can no longer be said to be living a life of quietism.

But is Plato's dissent malicious, as Ober thinks? There is one significant hitch in Ober's picture here: the *Gorgias* and *Republic* do not, in fact, answer the Laws'

argument in the *Crito*. The *Gorgias* especially fails to do this, serving only to reaffirm Robinson's vision of Plato's reinvention of the gadfly. Ober's interpretation of the *Gorgias*, recall, holds that Plato there envisioned the democratic constitution as a master educator—that is, corrupter—of not only the *demos* but also the elites. The philosopher is therefore not only left without recourse to effect positive change in the *polis* but he is also threatened by the very *polis* that he seeks to better. The Laws fail to hold up their end of the bargain, and the philosopher is no longer under any duty to obey them.

This argument is predicated upon the dramatic relationship between Socrates and Callicles being symmetrical to the relationship between philosophy and the *demos* in the manner that Ober claims.⁴³ That is, because Callicles threatens Socrates while Socrates attempts to re-educate him, the *demos* must also threaten philosophy while the latter attempts to re-educate it. This symmetry exists, but there are complications that Ober has not considered and that invalidate his conclusion. First of all is the relation of being and seeming with respect to the represented symmetry of the dialogue. Callicles is a servant of the *demos*, but it seems as if he is in its command, serving as a guiding voice in the assembly and the courts. Likewise, Socrates is a servant of philosophy, but he seems (at least to Callicles) to be its master, proposing arguments as if a demagogue.

This symmetry, however, is rather benign. What is of greater interest is the relationship between Callicles and Socrates, the *demos* and philosophy. Callicles appears

⁴³ Ober, *Political Dissent*, 205-206

to tolerate Socrates' persistent questioning and apparent demagoguery, but the facts disagree: Callicles actually threatens Socrates with the power vested in him by the *demos*, as the persistent allusions to Socrates' trial demonstrate. Socrates, on the other hand, appears to submit to Callicles' leading of the discussion, only passively questioning what he proposes. Once again, the facts disagree: Socrates is actively dominating and re-educating Callicles throughout the dialogue. The same must then be true between the *demos* and philosophy: the *demos* appears to tolerate philosophy but actually threatens it, and philosophy appears to submit to the *demos* but is actually its master. The symmetry is two-dimensional. The relationship between philosophy and the *demos* is very much the same as that between the *demos* and Callicles: just as Callicles does not know that he is the servant of the *demos*, the *demos* does not know that it is the servant of philosophy, for it appears quite the opposite. But how could this be if philosophy as a whole, including Plato, has disavowed itself of the ethics of criticism present in the Laws' argument? If philosophy did not obey the Laws where it could not persuade them, it would appear to the *demos* that philosophy was a threat to the legal order of the *polis*. The *Crito* is thereby incorporated wholesale into the *Gorgias* not in order to invalidate the argument of the Laws, but to support it. Perhaps even more damning for Ober than this is that this conception no longer points forward to the *Republic*, for the guardian class, as demonstrated most clearly by the decay story, does not maintain an appearance of submission to the *demos*: it is ostentatious and possesses, in the least, honour worthy of envy.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See the account of the decay of Kallipolis at *Republic*, 545c-550b

This is not the end of the story, for we are met with two further complications. The first is a decisive asymmetry that Plato's fourth century audience would have recognised immediately. Calicles was not only a lover of the *demos*, but also of Plato's step-brother, Demos; Socrates, likewise, was both a lover of philosophy and of Alcibiades. So far so symmetrical. Demos was, as far as can be known, both quite beautiful and quite stupid, a characterisation exactly matching Plato's representation of the *demos*.⁴⁵ But here arrives our problem: Alcibiades was famously unruly, tempted by the lure of the *demos* and the pleasures of the world of appearance with which the *demos* is associated. Even so, he did not appear to submit to the *demos* at all, and as a recognised threat to the democracy, he did not dominate or re-educate the *demos* in any way that is analogous to what Socrates is purported to do. The symmetry holds here between Alcibiades and philosophy: like Alcibiades, philosophy was feared and admired but ultimately threatened by the *demos*. This is a strange thing for Plato, as a philosopher, to show his audience about philosophy. However, Alcibiades is explicitly compared not to philosophy throughout the dialogue but to sophistry and to democratic *rhetores* such as Pericles and Calicles himself. This asymmetry stands out to the reader, violating an otherwise complete symmetry, so we are compelled to ask why this is so. Is it merely an oversight by Plato? Or is the asymmetry only apparent, the truth of the matter validating the complete symmetry of the text? Plato has Alcibiades himself say in the *Symposium* that when he is in Socrates' company, he was just and moderate,

⁴⁵ On Demos, see Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. (Indianapolis, IN), 2002:124-125

dedicated to the philosophical project. But when he was away from his teacher, Alcibiades was lured by the *demos* and the associated world of appearances. Similarly, philosophy without Socrates' ethics of criticism becomes sophistry, the injustice of which Plato has well established for us in the *Gorgias* itself. Thus, the symmetry of the *Gorgias* holds throughout, and we are compelled to say that philosophy without Socrates is impious, threatening, and ultimately doomed just as Alcibiades was. This amounts to a second endorsement of Socrates' ethics of criticism, and Ober finds himself on the ropes, so to speak.

If Plato is, in fact, endorsing the Socratic position of the *Apology* and *Crito*, why has he retreated to the Academy away from public life? Like Alcibiades, Plato may have responded to Socrates' death by betraying his *polis* to the Spartans. Leaving aside the absurdity of avoiding the *demos* by retreating to a well-traveled public place only a few *stadia* outside of Athens' walls, the final complication firmly draws us back to Robinson's reflective considerations. This time, the asymmetry is not only apparent but also actual. Callicles is a veritable threat to Socrates. If he wished, he could have Socrates executed by the courts, and as such, the *demos* is a threat to philosophy itself. If the symmetry held, Socrates would respond to this threat by re-educating Callicles, and philosophy by re-educating the *demos*. Yet Socrates has been successful in neither venture, as Ober well notes. But instead of pointing forward to the *Republic*, this failure points decisively at Socrates himself. Socrates participates solely in dialectical reasoning, unconcerned with, and in fact dismissive towards, how things appear. His concern is nothing more than the real essence of justice and injustice, and if he is to convince an interlocutor, it is

through nothing more than reasoned argument. This disallows Socrates from speaking to the *demos* collectively, but also from penetrating into the appetitive and spirited parts of the souls of his interlocutors as individuals. Callicles, after all, sees Socrates' reasoning, but nevertheless cannot bring his feelings on side. Why? As Callicles objects:

By the gods! Just the thing I'm eager to do. Tell me, Socrates, are we to take you as being in earnest now, or joking? For 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?⁴⁶

The gulf between where Callicles stands and where he ought to stand is simply too large; he sees Socrates' reasoning, but the territory is so unfamiliar that he cannot bear to venture into it.

Ober moves from here to the need for proper philosophical rule like that of the *Republic*, but Plato is clearly doing more than merely laying in wait for Kallipolis. We must then ask what Plato aims to teach us with this very clear asymmetry in the *Gorgias*. Face-to-face dialectic about the true nature of justice has met with little success, but this claim is represented by a *written* dialogue that is very concerned with how it appears to readers, purposely drawing the audience's attention here or there, engaging their sense of dignity and respect, their base desires, and so on. Plato, unlike Socrates, is conversing with the *demos* as a collective. He is engaging their spirited and appetitive parts, in concert, of course, with the intellectual part of the soul. He is making the unfamiliar much more familiar. Where Socrates must be silent, Plato is speaking loud and clear: he alone has attempted to solve the problem of similitude. The *Gorgias*,

⁴⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 481b-c

as a result, does not point forward at all, but to itself as a continuation of and improvement on Socrates' project in the *Apology* and *Crito*.

4.5 Philosophy Beyond Plato

Plato means to insert philosophy into democratic discourse in order to effect positive change in the *polis*. But did democratic discourse really need another player amongst its many? Ober doubts this. Democratic Athens was a shining example of good governance, and

[t]he real key [to the maintenance of social harmony in democratic Athens was]: the mediating and integrative power of communication between citizens—especially between ordinary and elite citizens—in a language whose vocabulary consisted of symbols developed and deployed in public arenas: the people's courts, the Assembly, the theatre, and the agora. This process of communication constitutes the 'discourse of Athenian democracy.' It was a primary factor in the promotion and maintenance of social harmony, and it made direct democratic decision making possible.⁴⁷

By the fourth century, however, it became increasingly difficult to demonstrate any robust qualitative difference between the democratic regime and the preceding aristocracy. There was no reduction in civil war or political corruption; the Athenian economic and naval might of the fifth century had given way to the Theban hegemony; even the arts began to decline in Athens. Despite their best efforts, the success of Athens was beyond the control of the democratic assembly, and the *politai* began to

⁴⁷ Ober, *Mass and Elite*, 35; quoted in Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*," 56

feel alienated from politics, as surviving poetry from the period reflects in its increasingly domestic and pessimistic tone.

The failure of the democratic discourse of the time consisted in a varying treatment of the three problems with which we began. As we saw in Chapter 3, democratic discourse did little to simultaneously solve the problems of justification, beneficence, and similitude. No singular item of democratic discourse provided claims that simultaneously resisted doubts, concerned the good of the *polis* and *politai*, and were sufficiently persuasive. Speech that was familiar was often not justified, what was justified was often not beneficent and was feared as a result. And that speech that was both justified and beneficent, such as that of Socrates and the scientists who preceded him, was so strange and unfamiliar as to be dismissed at the outset. Even Socrates' lifelong devotion to elenctic conversation in the public spaces of the city did nothing to overcome this hurdle. That this was the case, however, provided Plato valuable precedent. The Athenians wanted innovation, and Plato could provide it. As Robinson writes of Socrates' trial and execution, "[o]ut of this one historical event, this one particular case of a dissident *philosopher* under fire, Plato manufactured a timeless symbol: *philosophy* under fire—philosophy itself as a dissident activity."⁴⁸ Both he and Ober agree here, but only Robinson rightly sees that Plato was playing the role of dissident to provide the innovation that Athenians desperately wanted and needed. Only he could provide a means to solve the three problems noted above, and he did so

⁴⁸ Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*," 39

by creating a whole new genre of writing, of speech, of *thinking* that quickly garnered supporters and opponents. We now need only examine in what this genre consists.

That Plato established philosophy as a dissident activity illuminates how he planned on tackling each of the three problems. The dissident faces a great deal of danger in the democratic *polis*. That Socrates was a public nuisance at least partially contributed to animosity against him. That he associated with problematic individuals—Charmides, Critias, Alcibiades, *et cetera*—filled in the rest. Plato would not follow suit. He did not pester his compatriots with questions or make his interlocutors out to be fools. He did not, likewise, associate with tyrants or criminals, but only with the best of the Athenians and *metiks*. His private estate remained strong, and he used his wealth for public service, such as by serving as *choregus* for the City Dionysia. In this, Plato is demonstrating his beneficence, that he is, in fact, a virtuous, well-regarded individual whose writings deserve to be also well-regarded. He is also demonstrating his similitude, for he is virtuous in the paradigmatic Athenian manner, by carrying himself with decorum and maintaining an appropriate balance between public and private life. He is no shoeless genius who regards bathing as a waste of time. He need now only demonstrate that his positions are justified, that where he dissents, he does so for good reason. This is the primary role of his dialogues, but certainly not the only role.

Plato's dialogues demonstrate how he views the aforementioned problems in just the same way that his life does. To focus only on those dialogues that we have heretofore discussed, the norms relevant to each of the problems of justification, beneficence, and similitude are apparent. The *Apology* focuses primarily on the first

and second. Socrates there recognises and accepts his role as a dissident. But in Athens, this is no crime on its own. The crime, he argues, is to do wrong in one's dissent, but also to fail to dissent when the majority does wrong. The *Apology* balances these two aspects perfectly, demonstrating that it is Socrates who knows how and when to act virtuously, and thereby dissents only for good reason. But there is a second dimension. Socrates is not only a virtuous dissident, but his dissent is a service to the city. Socrates was a gift from Apollo to Athens that they would be exhorted to virtue and left better than worse. This is all true also of Plato, to whom he has Socrates allude as one of his much more determined and effective successors. Plato, too, will dissent where he has good reason, and his dissent will be a service to the city given by the gods. The *Apology*, however, is a scarcely germinated seed of Plato's more mature conception of what it means to be justified in one's dissent. A clearer picture of his early view is provided in the *Euthyphro* where he has Socrates endorse a revolutionary view of the gods while also condoning a conception of piety that can be nothing but conservative, being derived from a dialectical process of reasoning about established concepts. The importance here is evident. Euthyphro is committing a clear act of impiety in prosecuting his father, but he can nevertheless justify this on the basis of conservative religious ideas. Wrong Speech has struck again, but this time, Socrates—Plato's Socrates, the philosopher and not the sophist—does not approve.

The *Crito* picks up precisely where the *Apology* leaves off. There must be a limit to one's dissent, even if justifiably done for the sake of virtue. One must also *appear* to be doing what is right when one dissents, and thus one must take care to cultivate this

image by either persuading others that he acts rightly or obeying when he fails to persuade. Once again, justification is emphasised here. Socrates throughout is concerned to ask Crito whether he can object, whether he has any doubts that might dissuade his adoption of the principle at question. Once he is certain that this is not the case, the dialogue comes to an end. But in the interim, there is something else going on. The concern with appearances was quite foreign to the scientific discourse of the time. Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Democritus, all denigrated appearance as false and misleading, to be cast aside lest it tarnish the search for the true *archai* of the *kosmos*. Appearances do not justify, yet they are inescapable and undeniably effect change in the world. This is the essence of Crito's complaint to Socrates that he is not taking the matter seriously enough. Plato has recognised a third problem that Socrates never did. Socrates can persuade Crito because both are philosophers. That Socrates failed to convince the jury of his innocence, however, speaks much more loudly. Socrates antagonised the jury, marking himself out to be different, to be better. He bears little similarity to the jurymen in that he is wise, and they are all arrogant in their ignorance. Plato has learned from this that it is not enough simply to *be* virtuous, but also that he must *seem* so. And so instead of marking out radically different positions and arguing their truth to an audience who will dismiss these as G.E. Moore does skepticism about the real world, he begins with common opinions and refines them, drawing out contradictions and implications. But what's more, he presents these arguments in a much more palatable format than Socrates' belligerence. The dialogue is charming. It entertains, drawing on elements common to the theatre and to rhetorical

prose. Plato demonstrates a masterful use of wit, of allegory, of irony, of other standard plot devices all while seamlessly integrating complicated philosophical argumentation that is nevertheless presented in simple, everyday language that required no formal education to understand.

The three problems are also immediately present in the *Gorgias*, as I have already alluded. Its image is much more mature, marking out the distinction between appearance and being, defending philosophy as a truly political form of rhetoric, making substantive claims about motivations, education, and corruption. In all this, however, there is something importantly missing. The dialogue ends with Socrates at an impasse, but not for lack of trying. He cannot get through to Callicles that he should be more concerned with being than with seeming just. We remarked earlier that this is an implicit criticism of Socrates' method of discourse, but it is so for a very specific reason. The *Gorgias* has no resolution. It is unclear whether rhetoric can be virtuous, and while there is much to say about its vice, the possibility is nevertheless left open. Contrary to Ober, however, this does not point forward to the *Republic*. Rather, the *Gorgias* demands that the audience make up their own minds. The *Euthyphro* employs a similar tactic, as do much of Plato's other dialogues. The resolution of the plot is nothing more than a call for the audience to find the mistake, to pick a side, to specify more precisely the relevant concept, to in effect resolve the plot for themselves. Plato is not in the business of propagating some doctrine.

The philosopher must first endeavour to know and be able to justify what *is* good, but also what *seems* good. The latter is important in maintaining appropriate

similitude that one effectively persuade others as to the nature of goodness. As such, justifications of what is good must begin with what seems good and move by reasoning with simple propositions, playing in large part to the lowest common denominator. This all must be presented to an audience or an individual interlocutor in an enticing and familiar manner in order that they do not dismiss it at the outset. Important here as well is the virtue of the philosopher as an agent unto himself. He too must conduct himself with the decorum that he would expect of his arguments in order that he not be dismissed. But finally, the philosopher is not a teacher of right action. It is not his duty to stand behind a lectern and delimit all those actions which are virtuous and those that are not. Rather, he is charged with cultivating the skills necessary for use in democratic discourse elsewhere; the philosopher challenges ideas and commits himself to detailed analysis of common mores in order that they be refined. Ultimately, the goal of philosophy is innovation towards good governance. This is the standard that philosophy sets and that we are measured against even today.

But what authority does Plato have over us? Mustn't our world be turned upside down with all those things that we do being that which we ought not, and vice versa? We ought not dismiss the Platonic conception of philosophy here because it differs substantially from our own practice. It is not merely Plato who fashioned philosophy in this way: philosophy was fashioned also by the whole of Athens, of the relationship between the *polis*, its *politai*, and the conditions in which it existed. Plato and his successors were merely the vehicles for the sociopolitical problems of Athens to have engendered a solution within the *polis*. So long as those problems persist, then,

there is a demand that they be solved. And Athens has not disappeared; it carries on within our own cities and states. *Stasis* continues, albeit to a lesser degree than the Athenians experienced. We should not, however, cease from our vigilance because political strife has no immediate bearing on our well being, just as we should not cease vaccination because polio has escaped our view. When we as citizens face such dire straits as global climate change, famine, nuclear annihilation, peak oil, and all manner of calamities, our duty to philosophise is underscored in the blood of our children. It is curious, however, how far philosophy has strayed from its infancy. This, as it happened, did not take a great deal of time after Plato's death. To better philosophy, then, let us close by turning to where it began to err.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

Boethius asks the following question in the *Consolation of Philosophy*: "How can it be that you know the beginning of things but don't know their end?"⁴⁹ The question is rhetorical, supposing that the beginning and end of everything is one, namely God, the creator and destroyer, the alpha and omega. Where this may be true of the *kosmos* and of humans, both themselves imbued with the image of God, the question becomes much more complicated when we consider the beginning and end of artifacts and practices, such as that practice in which Boethius himself is purportedly engaged. In the *Consolation*, Boethius is in dialogue with Philosophy, who serves as a physician to treat him in his darkest hour, and it is Philosophy that poses the above question in its effort to pull Boethius from his lethargy. This physician metaphor was not new, itself a common trope in Plato's dialogues.⁵⁰ However, there is something very different between the two. Boethius' philosophy treats the individual; Plato's, by contrast, treats the *polis*. Plato is the beginning of philosophy: he identified its central problems and set out a means of solving them. Boethius, by contrast, is its end as one of the final philosophers of the Platonic tradition. Philosophy soon after Boethius is no longer recognisable as the

⁴⁹ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* [tr. V.E. Watts], Penguin Press (London, UK), 1969: 51; see James Crooks, "Grief and Homecoming in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*" in Jonathon Lavery, Louis Groarke, and William Sweet [eds.], *Ideas Under Fire: Historical Studies of Philosophy and Science in Adversity*, Farleigh Dickinson University Press (Plymouth, UK), 2013: 67-87

⁵⁰ The physician metaphor is constant throughout the *Gorgias*, appearing no less than thirty times throughout the text, as well as significantly in the *Republic*. The physician metaphor is also implicit but not especially explicit in the *Lysis*, *Protagoras*, *Charmides*, and *Laches*.

practice that Plato set out, persisting only as its shade, moving about on Earth yet nevertheless residing in Hades. We have, then, a case in which the beginning and end of a thing differs quite substantially. Thence the next question opens up for us: if the *kosmos* or the human has a beginning identical to its end in virtue of God's perfection, then what is it that accounts for the change from beginning to end of human creations?

Before this question can be answered, we have to clear up an ambiguity in Boethius' question. Both "beginning" and "end" can relevantly refer to two distinct aspects of a thing, and it appears that Boethius may mean both. There is first the temporal aspect upon which I have focused thus far, but, second, there is also the teleological aspect. That is, a thing may have a function such that it is normatively directed towards some end and thereby away from some beginning state. For sake of clarity, I will henceforth use "*arche*" and "*telos*" to mean, respectively, "beginning" and "end" in the teleological sense. This distinction, as we will see, is important for the present case. I will argue that as the sociopolitical conditions changed in Greece, transitioning from the Classical to the Hellenistic period, the function of philosophy changed. As a result of this change, philosophy had a very minimal sociopolitical role to play and was soon clinging to life. This occurred in two stages that I will discuss in turn. First, Aristotle proposed a novel conception of philosophical practice, what I will call Philosophical Scholasticism, in opposition to Philosophical Platonism. This conception was not initially accepted by any of the major players in the philosophical world during Aristotle's tenure, but after the second stage, the invasion and expansion of the Macedonians across most of the known world, the dominant schools all began to

change dramatically, eventually giving way to an Aristotelian conception of philosophical practice. Yet before we can examine the events of each stage, we must understand the initial function of philosophy, so let us begin there.

5.2 Philosophical Platonism

The first recorded, technical usage of the word "*philosophia*" in Greek literature occurs in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. It is there where Plato set out his initial description of what a philosopher is and what sort of service he provides to the *polis*. He has Socrates describe himself as a gift from Apollo, a gadfly sent to rouse the sluggish steed that is Athens from its slumber in order that it find itself in lasting prosperity. What it means to be a gadfly in this context is not immediately obvious. It is clear that the philosopher is a dissident, for it buzzes around the horse and not within it, pestering it with painful bites. But the philosopher is much more than merely a dissident; he is a rebel with a cause. That is, the gadfly *qua* philosopher is not biting the horse in order only to hurt it or to feed itself: it has the horse's welfare in mind at all times. A number of conditions arise then on the activity of the philosopher *qua* gadfly. First, his bite must not endanger the horse. But, second, it must be hard enough that the horse be stirred at all. Finally, he must actively engage in the world of the steed in order that it know what is better for it and what is worse.

The first condition is most clearly conveyed in the *Crito*. There, Plato has Socrates resist Crito's attempts to break him out of jail, supposing that despite its injustice, Socrates is duty-bound to obey the sentence decided upon by the jury. This duty derives

from the relationship that holds between Socrates and the Laws such that the Laws are analogous but superior to his parents. It was because of the Laws that Socrates was born, nurtured, and educated, so he owes the Laws a debt, and since Socrates did not ever opt to leave the city but for military service, he implicitly agreed to pay this debt. But the Laws still grant Socrates a choice: he can either persuade them as to the nature of justice, or he can obey their edicts. Socrates failed to persuade the jury, so now he is holding up his end of the bargain by refusing to escape with Crito. Socrates here is standing in for all of philosophy: it is philosophy that must persuade or obey the dictates of a *polis* in which it is being practiced. If it does not, it is endangering the *polis*, the gadfly's bite being too strong for the horse.

There is, however, a very fine line to walk here, for the philosopher must balance obedience with dissent appropriate to motivate the *polis* to change as necessary. Socrates did this by elenctic conversations with his compatriots, spending nearly all of his time in public places intent on questioning anyone who might be willing to speak. But as Plato makes clear in the *Gorgias*, Socrates' method was not very effective at countenancing deeply ingrained customs in individuals or groups. It was due to this lack, and his growing unpopularity, that Socrates' project became a failure and resulted in his trial and execution. In response to this, Plato had a very different strategy. He wrote dialogues concerning matters central to public life, challenging and refining common opinions in reason while also emotively motivating the importance of the matter at hand. In this endeavour, it is scarcely deniable that Plato has had a much more profound effect than his mentor not only on his native Athens, but even into the present day.

Plato's efficacy was unmatched in Athens, and even in spite of this, the democracy carried on, prospering inasmuch as it could while standing in the ruins of the Peloponnesian war. Plato's bite, like Socrates', was not so hard as to harm the steed, but it was hard enough to plausibly stir it into action.

Finally, capturing people's attention and effectively persuading them about some matter is largely unhelpful unless the matter about which they are being convinced is not only true, but usefully so. Like the last condition, this is made most clear in the *Gorgias*. The central concern of the arguments of that dialogue, and not its dramatic structure like the previous condition, was that a concern solely with appearance is detrimental to an individual and to a *polis*. This is the primary objection to the use of rhetoric, for rhetoric concerns itself solely with appearances, thereby providing the rhetor with no power to effect change in the assembly or the courts. He can only flatter the *demos* and so cannot improve it. The analogy here is drawn between a physician, much like in Boethius' case with which we began, and a pastry chef. The physician benefits his patient much like philosophy benefits its *polis* insofar as the physician is concerned with the nature of the patient's malady and aims to return him to health. In doing so, the doctor may administer unpleasant treatments; but unpleasant as they are, a treatment is in the patient's best interest. Pastry cooking, by contrast, does nothing to better an individual, and indeed may harm him if the individual eats only pastries and nothing that is healthy but tastes unpleasant. Unlike the physician, the pastry chef need not know anything at all about the fundamentals of digestion or nutrition, and need only concern himself with what sorts of flavours people tend to enjoy. This task is

comparatively much easier than that of the physician, for the physician cannot determine merely by trial and error what sorts of treatments make people healthy. He must investigate what health itself is, and by extension, he must investigate how bodily systems function, what optimal functioning is, and how to correct any particular dysfunction in bodily systems. The philosopher is burdened similarly. The object of his inquiry is justice for the *polis* and thereby every individual within it, but one does not simply go out, find justice, and study it: the philosopher must study the soul, the relation between the soul and its worldly needs, the operations of politics, both within and without the *polis*, and so on. That is, the philosopher must be concerned with being.

The three above conditions on philosophical practice provide philosophy with a robust functional structure. Its *arche* is *stasis*. It concerns the affairs of the *polis*, but also by extension each of the *politai* inasmuch as they bear on the former. That is, the central question of philosophy is the Socratic one: how ought I live? The *telos* then follows as a solution to that question. It is the nature and implementation of justice in the *polis* and at the level of the individual. This means that philosophy is necessarily pragmatic, but also importantly foundationalist. Its foundationalism is an inheritance from the early Greek scientists, who were concerned primarily with the impartial truth of the *kosmos*. The philosopher, that is, must leave the cave to discover being *per se*, yet he must also return to guide the spelunkers. This is what makes it uniquely capable of stirring up the sluggish steed precisely when it is in need of being stirred.

5.3 The First Invasion: Intellectual

Plato's conception of philosophy was eroded by the invasion of the Macedonians in two stages. The first stage was an intellectual invasion in the form of Aristotle's tenure as a student and competitor of Plato. Aristotle, I will argue, completely reconceptualised the function of philosophy and that reconception is what has defined philosophical practice since the Medieval period. Whereas Plato's conception of philosophy was simultaneously practical and theoretical, Aristotle's conception of philosophy held that the object of philosophical study was nothing more than the knowledge of what is and what is not, despite its clearly expressed practical value.

Plato and Aristotle were in important ways the inverse of one another, but we should not overstate their difference. Despite their differences, they nevertheless went about their task in superficially identical ways. The pre-Socratic scientific *telos* of naturalistic knowledge was the foundation of Aristotle's philosophy just as it was of Plato's:

. . . [T]he point of our present discussion is this, that all men suppose what is called wisdom to deal with first causes and the principles of things. This is why, as we have said before, the man of experience is thought to be wiser than the possessors of any perception whatever, the artist wiser than the men of experience, the master-worker than the mechanic, and the theoretical kinds of knowledge to be more of the nature of wisdom than the productive. Clearly then wisdom is knowledge about certain causes and principles.⁵¹

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. I.1.981b26-982a2

For Plato, the first principles were the Forms, all of which participate in the Good.

Aristotle, however, firmly divorces these theoretical sciences from practical sciences due to his commitment to immanent realism, as opposed to Platonic, transcendent realism:

[L]et it be assumed that there are two parts [of the soul] which possess reason—one by which we contemplate the kind of things whose principles cannot be otherwise, and one by which we contemplate variable things; for where objects differ in kind, the part of the soul answering to each of the two is different in kind, since it is in virtue of a certain likeness and kinship with their objects that they have the knowledge they have. Let one of these parts be called the scientific and the other be called the calculative; for to deliberate and to calculate are the same thing, but no one deliberates about what cannot be otherwise. Therefore the calculative is one part of the faculty which possesses reason.⁵²

Unlike the practitioners of the pre-Platonic conception of science, however, Aristotle is still concerned with employing practical knowledge in the *polis*. He says, for instance, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that:

Surely, as is said, where there are things to be done, the end (*telos*) is not to survey and recognise the various things, but rather to do them; with regard to excellence, then, it is not enough to know, but we must try to have and use it, or try any other way there may be of becoming good.⁵³

Philosophy, that is, is not sufficient to make people good, for "[arguments] are not able to encourage the many to nobility and goodness," for "[the many] do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear."⁵⁴ This claim is similar to that made implicitly by Plato in the *Gorgias*, for Socrates' inability to convince Callicles, and thereby also the *demos*, as the many references to the *Apology* make clear, demonstrate the limits of the power of argument even in the hands of our hero Socrates. Plato's solution to this

⁵² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VI.1139a5-16

⁵³ *Ibidem*, Bk. X.9.1179a35-b4

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 1179b9-11

problem was to turn to writing aesthetic dialogues, to incorporate seeming into the education of the many about being. Aristotle, however, diverges also from Plato here. The success of Plato's dialogues rests upon the many being motivated by shame to behave rightly. These many, however, are not so motivated: only fear can motivate them. As a result, ethical knowledge is informative only for political practice, and therefore he who can better the *polis* must turn his efforts towards legislating, an activity in which Plato did not participate out of principle yet demanded of philosophers in the *Republic* (see below). We must then ask: is Aristotle's emphasis on legislative action then essential to his conception of philosophy, like Plato's dialogues were to his? I think not, but this is by no means obvious.

There are some indications that Aristotle is committed to treating politics as essential to philosophy. He says at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for instance, that the science concerned with the chief good

would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art. And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them . . . and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man. For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete both to attain and to preserve; for though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for *poleis*. These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry, being concerned with politics, aims.⁵⁵

The *telos* of practical study, then, is not simply knowledge, but the betterment of a *polis*, and as such, it constrains the other sciences to those *teloi*. However, Aristotle quickly

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, Bk.I.2.1094a26-1094b12

dissents. This political end is not essential to philosophy, on his view. Relevant here again is the difference in kind between the theoretical and practical sciences:

It is evident also that wisdom and the art of politics cannot be the same; for if the state of mind concerned with a man's own interest is to be called wisdom, there will be many wisdoms; there will not be one concerned with the good of animals (any more than there is one art of medicine for all existing things), but a different wisdom about the good of each species.⁵⁶

The sort of wisdom at which philosophy is directed is singular and universal: the *telos* is identical to the early presocratic scientists, although far more complicated. Aristotle specifies:

That [philosophy] is not a science of production is clear even from the history of the earliest philosophers. For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophise . . . therefore since they philosophised in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end . . . but as the man is free, we say, who exists for himself and not for another, so we pursue [philosophy] as the only free science, for it alone exists for itself.⁵⁷

This means that "[a]ll the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than [philosophy], *but none is better.*"⁵⁸ Practical study may therefore be the master art, but not in the sense of being the captain of a ship who commands his crew for his own ends; rather, it is the master art more like a pilot is the master of a passenger jet: it is in command but only insofar as it is in service of that which it regulates. Practical study is engaged in understanding and operating on the *polis* and, for Aristotle, the *polis* is in some sense in the service of philosophy. It is for this reason that "the wise person must not be ordered but must order, and he must not obey another, but the less wise must obey him."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VI.7.1141a29-33

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. I.2.982b11-28

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 983a10-11 (my italics)

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 982a18-19

On the basis of his understanding of the contemplative life as the best life, itself grounded by the fact that "[a]ll men by nature desire to know,"⁶⁰ Aristotle reinterprets all of the major Platonic commitments. The Socratic response to any proposed prohibition against philosophy, for instance, seems to be taken seriously by Aristotle, but not fully understood. The Socratic dissent there lies in the god's effort to help the city, and thereby a prohibition against philosophy is a form of self-harm. For Aristotle, however, the *polis* is not doing a direct injustice to itself by prohibiting philosophical practice, but to those most excellent, most god-like human beings, the philosophers, for it is ultimately for their sake that the *polis* functions in the first place.

This commitment to the order of priority of duties is where Aristotle makes the decisive break with Plato. As Plato has Socrates argue in the *Republic*, conjuring up the Laws' argument from the *Crito*:

SOCRATES: But when [the best natures have] made it [out of the cave] and looked sufficiently, we mustn't allow them to do what they're allowed to do today, . . . [t]o stay there and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labours and honours, whether they are of less worth or greater.

GLAUCON: Then are we to do them an injustice by making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?

SOCRATES: You are forgetting again that it isn't the law's concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through *persuasion or compulsion* and by making them share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community. *The law produces such people* in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction they want, but to make use of them to bind the city together.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 980b22

⁶¹ Plato, *Republic*, 519c-520a (emphasis added)

Contrary to Aristotle's insistence that the philosophical life is the highest life, and that thereby the activities of the *polis* ought to be directed towards achieving that *telos*, Plato argues that while philosophers are the best natured, they are nevertheless not only dependent upon the *polis* but also a product of it. The *polis*, in its privileged place, demands reverence greater than that of one's mother and father. However, the relationship here is not merely one of duty. The law has the power to bring citizens together by "persuasion or compulsion," and the philosopher, wise as he may be, is powerless against the *polis*. It is therefore better for the philosopher to descend back into the cave, for he can either descend willingly or be dragged, and it is preferable to descend willingly.

The claim of the *Republic*, however, is much weaker than the substantive claim of the *Apology* and the *Crito*. The *Republic* is engaged in convincing the philosopher as a citizen to return to the cave, whereas the *Apology* and *Crito* together argue that it is essential to philosophy that the philosopher return to the cave. The relevant difference between them is not that Plato has grown more weary of the democracy; it is that the philosophers of the *Republic* are legislators and in the *polis* of the *Republic*, dissent is not tolerated. There can be no gadflies in Kallipolis: the philosopher cannot simply return to the cave but by becoming a legislator. He need not do so on the basis of the Laws' argument in the *Crito*, however, for the Laws are answering there Socrates as a dissident philosopher, as a gadfly. In the *Republic*, the *polis* is no longer addressing those who are already dissidents, but, rather, those who merely possess wisdom, barring them from

dissent yet obligating them nevertheless to labour in service to the city. As such, the argument is slightly weaker, and no longer addressed to philosophy *per se*.

Aristotle in part accepts the conclusion of the *Republic*, although for different reasons than Plato's, but denies outright the argument of the *Apology* and *Crito*. The philosopher, for Aristotle, is no dissident. Quite the opposite, in fact. Aristotle is constantly conciliatory in his works between philosophical and common sense opinion.⁶² As such, Aristotle is left only with the weaker argument of the *Republic*, but even still there is a crucial difference. The *Republic*, we are constantly reminded, is about justice in the *polis* and is thereby unconcerned with optimizing a particular class inasmuch as that optimization might harm the harmony of the whole. Aristotle, conversely supposes that the *polis* exists for the sake of the contemplative life, and so he is concerned explicitly with optimizing a single class. As such, he loses Plato's justification for obligating the philosopher to return to the cave in virtue of his citizenship. Instead, Aristotle's justification is far weaker than even Plato's weakest argument: the philosopher, for Aristotle, must return to the cave only inasmuch as he is dependent upon the *polis* and seeks to better his own situation, either by improving economic and military stability, or by contributing to the birth and education of future philosophers. Outside these concerns, the philosopher simply has no reason to return to the cave, and may persist in the light of the sun wherever and however he wishes.

⁶² See, for instance, *Metaphysics*, Bk I.3.983a24-b29 for the foundations of Aristotle's surprisingly common sense metaphysics. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, UK), 1986: chs. 8-12, has also done a great deal to demonstrate Aristotle's theoretical pragmatism not only in ethics, but also metaphysics and physics.

One final remark before turning our attention to the second invasion: the difference between Philosophical Platonism and Philosophical Scholasticism is immediately explicable biographically in a way that demonstrates that it was Plato, and not Aristotle, who fully grasped the sorts of problems that philosophy faced. Plato was led to his conception of philosophy, if not by Socrates himself, by the trials of the Peloponnesian War, the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, and the instability that followed. The regime was in need of stability, and the democracy did not have the resources to provide it on its own. Thence emerged a conception of philosophy grounded in being but directed towards solving ethical problems. Aristotle, however, was a *metik* from Macedon living in Athens during one of the most stable periods of its history. He had no allegiance to any *polis*, much like Gorgias before him, nor did he need to contribute to establishing a stable *polis* in which he could investigate the nature of being. As a result, philosophy was only accidentally concerned with practical affairs insofar as they were relevant to the philosopher as a citizen. As history marched forward, his story would not be unique. Let us then turn to the far more general shift towards an Aristotelian conception of philosophy ushered in by the second Macedonian invasion: that of Philip II of Macedon.

5.4 The Second Invasion: Military

The century following the Peloponnesian War saw a rise in the relative power of peripheral states in the Greek world, and most importantly of Macedon.⁶³ In 359 BCE, after the deaths of his brothers, Philip II ascended to the throne and re-imagined the role of Macedon in the Greek world. He had learned as a hostage during the Theban Hegemony the art of statecraft and a number of novel military techniques. Following his return to Macedon, he improved on both, catapulting Macedon from a backwards northern state scarcely considered Greek at all to the hegemon of the Greek world. His strategy was deceptive yet powerful, and within only a few years, he had dispatched the traditional enemies of the Macedonians and secured for himself key resource-producing regions in order to finance his aspirations. He then set his sights on the Athenian controlled Bosphorus and Hellespont, but was unable to wrestle control there. In response, he motivated a powerful land invasion of the Greek peninsula, meeting a unified force of Athenians and Thebans at Chaironea in 338 BCE. The battle was decisive, and Philip took control of both Athens and Thebes. He then marched on Corinth, defeating it with ease.

While in Corinth, Philip compelled the Greek *poleis* to join into a unified league under his rule. The Corinthian League was established with the pretenses of maintaining the autonomy of the various member states while allowing peace to flourish in the Greek world. Membership in the League required no monetary tribute, but Philip did demand that each *polis* make military contributions to his army. Though reluctant, the

⁶³ I'm following here Eugene Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus: The Emergence of Macedon*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ), 1990: esp. chs. 11-12

Greek *poleis* agreed. This arrangement would last only two years. In 336 BCE, Philip would be assassinated and succeeded by his son, Alexander I of Macedon. The Greeks took the opportunity to revolt against Macedonian rule, and Alexander responded with shock and awe. He razed Thebes and enslaved its citizens, putting the Greek revolution indefinitely on hold. With this, however, the Corinthian League took a different turn. The autonomy of the member *poleis* was still enshrined in the agreement, but with the threat of Alexander's vastly superior army and his willingness to use it, the Greek *poleis* became, in effect, vassal states of Macedon.

The persistence of the *poleis* in Greece is somewhat controversial. Giovanni Reale, for instance, writes that "Alexander went far beyond Philip, destroying the city-state in every sense, every formal and substantial mark of its freedom for the purposes of his own rule."⁶⁴ Gary Reger disagrees, supposing that

[t]he *polis* remained the basic political unit, although earlier formations persisted, especially in Asia Minor and northern Greece, and new, or re-configured old, political arrangements like the federations of the Aetolians or Achaeans complicated the scene.⁶⁵

Mogens Herman Hansen concurs largely with Reger, supposing that "[*poleis*] did not come to an end abruptly by the city-state region being conquered by a neighbouring macro-state. The Macedonians allowed the Greek *poleis* to persist."⁶⁶ What seems to have happened is that Alexander maintained the existing political structures of the

⁶⁴ Giovanni Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy III: The Systems of the Hellenistic Age*, State University of New York Press (Albany, NY), 1985: 5

⁶⁵ Gary Reger, "Hellenistic Greece and Western Asia Minor" in Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, and Richard Saller, *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, UK), 2007: 460

⁶⁶ Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State*, Oxford University Press (Oxford, UK), 2006: 138

Greek world for local governance, but subordinated those institutions to federations like those Reger mentions. This is consistent with Reale's view that the *poleis* were effectively rendered ineffectual while maintaining that the *poleis* nevertheless persisted for at least a couple centuries after the Macedonian invasion.

The effect that this turn had on the everyday life of Greeks was substantial. The Athenian democracy, for instance, was disbanded and Athens was governed by a set of appointed officials, which turned the attentions of Greek citizens away from public concerns, and towards private concerns. With this, however, two decisive events occurred nearly simultaneously. First, Philosophical Platonism lost the major object of its action. No longer was there a *polis* that could be persuaded and obeyed, a steed that could be stung by the gadfly; while the Macedonian kingdom could be feasibly obeyed, it was not feasible to persuade it, and its functioning was so far removed from everyday life that even the need to do so was prohibitively distant. That is, due to the scale involved, the Macedonian kingdom did not directly affect any individual, nor did any individual (but those in executive positions) affect the kingdom. As such, Philosophical Platonism lost its *archai*. Second, Philosophical Scholasticism became quickly irrelevant in two ways. First, the erasure of the *polis* dislodged Greek thought from related metaphysical commitments and thereby Aristotle's metaphysics, to which his metaphilosophy was tied, became implausible. Further, the study of nature was replaced in importance by the dire need for moral and political guidance in a rapidly changing environment that Aristotle's philosophy simply couldn't offer.

The influence of the Peripatetic school waned for a century before it experienced a slight resurgence, and then fell back into obscurity. However, Plato's successors at the Academy quickly adapted to their new circumstances after the Macedonian invasion with some superficially Platonic guidance. As Josiah Ober says,

Plato's move from *polis* to soul [in the *Republic*] seems to open the way not only for later Academic philosophers, but also for Stoicism and Epicureanism. Each of these individual-soul-centred philosophies has its attractions . . . [b]ut Hellenistic philosophy, freed from a debate with democracy (by the historical events as well as by Plato's thinking, it is only fair to say) abandoned the search for social and political equality on the material plane.⁶⁷

While it is erroneous to believe that Plato is a strict ideological opponent of the democracy on the basis mostly of the *Republic*, there is something to be said about the later influence of the *Republic* in Hellenistic thought. The city-soul analogy therein permits the philosopher to apply political thought that once served to guide and challenge the *demos* of Athens to one's own soul in order to attain inner harmony, which was the ostentive goal of the Academic Skeptics, Epicureans, and the like.

The philosopher was not completely divorced from the old gadfly role, however. Lucretius, for instance, made it his stated purpose to shake his fellow Romans of their superstitions in order that less evil be done. The Stoics, too, were not fully inward, but they were not gadflies. Absent a clear *polis*, the Stoics directed their attention to the *kosmopolis*, or the city of the universe. Each individual, they thought, played a necessary role in this *polis*, and this was predestined from the beginning. Each individual must then be provided the resources to adequately fulfill their role. It was philosophy that

⁶⁷ Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent*, 244 n. 149

provided these resources, for its then focus on inner harmony permitted the Stoic to go about happily performing his duty, as opposed to doing so resentfully. The Socratic imperative to either persuade or obey was thereby altered to the persuasion of the soul to faithfully obey the *kosmopolis*: the role was that of a therapist, and not a gadfly. These somewhat rare outward expressions, however, were the final strikes of a dizzy boxer against whom a worthy opponent was gaining momentum. As a result, even this substantially weakened form of Philosophical Platonism would be reduced to a mere germ of its former self within the millennium.

The expansion of the Macedonian kingdom into a full-fledged empire had other effects than merely removing the *polis* from everyday life. Due to the vast size of the empire at its largest extent, stretching from Macedon to India, movement and trade were greatly facilitated. As a result, ideas flowed into Greece from all over the world, furnishing an already complicated theoretical discourse with many more resources. Very quickly, the intellectual plane became very much a shiny, whizzing wonderland of ideas and amazements. It is no wonder that educated people were so drawn to this strange world, even if initially to furnish their ethical theories. But there was also a second impetus here, although slightly less common. In the often oppressive environment of the Hellenistic world, first under the Macedonians and then their successor kingdoms, and finally under the Romans, the initial therapeutic reaction of philosophy in bringing individuals in harmony with their external circumstances was turned on its head and directed against the world without. Of the Gnostics, Hans Jonas writes:

[The Gnostics' universe] is still *kosmos*, an order—but order with a vengeance, alien to man's aspirations. Its recognition is compounded of fear and disrespect,

of trembling and defiance. The blemish of nature lies not in any deficiency of order, but in the all too pervading completeness of it. Far from being chaos, the creation of the demiurge, unenlightened as it is, is still a system of law. But cosmic law, once worshiped as the expression of reason with which man's reason can communicate in the act of cognition, is now seen only in its aspect of compulsion which thwarts man's freedom. The cosmic *logos* of the Stoics, which was identified with providence, is replaced by *heimarmene*, oppressive cosmic fate.⁶⁸

We do not normally consider the Gnostics amongst the philosophical canon due to their rejection of Classical naturalism, but it is undeniable that they were influenced by and subsequently influenced philosophers. Their appropriation of the Platonic demiurge, for instance, does much to demonstrate that they were influenced by philosophers. In addition, like the therapeutic notions of the Stoics, the Epicureans, Sceptics, and later even Boethius, the Gnostics held that knowledge above all was that which would deliver them from the world and back to God. The type or knowledge they sought was relevantly different from the philosophical tradition, however, which was largely concerned with knowledge of the world and the philosopher's own relation thereto: The Gnostics shunned knowledge of the world as deceit, and concerned themselves with knowledge of their "true" selves in observance of the Delphic commandment. In this, however, they served as a source of inspiration and frustration to later, largely Christian, philosophers such as Boethius. While the philosophical tradition never did fully act in defiance of the world as the Gnostics did, there was a growing tendency throughout the later Hellenistic period for philosophy to engage in therapy by inward psychological discovery as against more outwardly directed naturalistic study characteristic of the

⁶⁸ Hans Jonas, "Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism" in his *The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology*, Northwestern University Press (Evanston, IL), 1966: 219-220

philosophers of the beginning of the Hellenistic period such as the Platonists and the Peripatetics. As such, philosophers in the Platonic tradition, divorced from being to a much greater degree than previous, were decreasingly able to demonstrate the success of their labours, clearing the way for more Aristotelian philosophers once the political environment stabilised, as it did during the *Pax Romana* and later in the Muslim Caliphates.

The case of the Gnostics also demonstrates the third major factor that favoured Aristotle's conception of philosophy over Plato's. The Gnostics conceived of the *kosmos* as oppressive, a conception that reflects the political realities of many people of the Hellenistic world, especially throughout the densely populated eastern Mediterranean. Hellenistic regimes, while permitting citizens liberty with regards to their own lives, largely shut down political dissent of the sort towards which Philosophical Platonism is directed. The Athenian democracy provided a modicum of liberty to political dissidents that facilitated Socrates' and Plato's role as a gadfly, but the Macedonians provided no such liberties. The artists were tamed, and so too were the philosophers. This contributed to the inward turn that philosophy took, but also the eventual end of even that more therapeutic effort. As the Hellenistic period itself was coming to an end, political rulers attempted to consolidate their power in the face of social and economic decline, and this often meant creating a relatively homogeneous ideology within the populace. Boethius himself was one such victim of this, although for his political and not his philosophical activities. The Aristotelian conception of philosophy, which was more

entrenched in the east than the west, weathered this decline, but the same could not be said of Philosophical Platonism.

5.5 The State of the Practice

The dissolution of the *polis*, the influx of novel ideas, and the tendency towards political and later ideological suppression of dissent were each facilitated by the growing imperial nature of states during the Hellenistic period as well as a number of other contingencies. This historical circumstance made the function of philosophy, on Plato's conception, obsolete and ultimately antithetical to productive human life as a citizen of empire. In a sense, philosophy in the Platonic tradition was selected out of the population inasmuch as the analogy between historical and biological evolution is appropriate. But there was variation in the population, so while Platonic philosophy was selected out of the population, Aristotelian philosophy was selected for, despite the floundering of the Peripatetic school. As a result, by the middle of the Medieval period, Philosophical Scholasticism was all that remained of the intellectual world of Classical Greece.

Similarly to change in the historical circumstances surrounding philosophy throughout the Hellenistic period, there was a vast change from the Medieval period to the present. Democratic regimes have returned in force, and governments are thereby much more responsive to the demands of their subjects. Unlike Classical Athens, however, contemporary nation-states are vast in size and power. Despite their democratic overtones, nation-states are little different than the empires of the

Hellenistic period. Jonas cites Spangler in this regard, who supposes that this environment in which the Gnostics developed was "contemporaneous" with his own.⁶⁹ The philosophical dissident, then, seems also to be drawn away from political issues now, which is largely what has been observed with regard to the scientific revolution at first and the subsequent growth of scientific discourse throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The mid-twentieth century, however, saw a vast change in the sociopolitical environment. The rise of communications technology and rapid transportation has effectively compacted our vast nation-states into very manageable sizes, distinct from Athens only in virtue of population and constitution. And just like Athens, contemporary society ebbs and flows, moving from outrage to outrage with only moderate consistency and forethought. While the structure of contemporary governments does not permit this popular outrage the sort of political power that Athens did, there are instances in which popular outrage has effected important change, perhaps for good, but also perhaps for ill. The recent drive to permit abortions, for instance, is an issue of some dispute. So too with same-sex marriage, the rise of internet misogyny, the sudden and broad opposition to the confederate flag in the United States, and so on. The facts of the matter are scarcely clear, and polarisation on the topic has only increased political polarisation as well. Philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition, which notably includes scholars in the sciences and the humanities, have much to say on these topics and others, but aside from those matters about which the public cares deeply, their statements are largely cast into the void, and

⁶⁹ Jonas, "Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism," 217

thereby scarcely have an effect. As a result, universities are being neglected by the political establishment, and often treated as a sort of training centre for future employees and entrepreneurs. The Aristotelian conception of philosophy, that is, is being selected against, albeit very slowly. Yet the time is ripe for Plato to return from his grave, to direct the energies of present scholars to public issues in the public eye. The *archai* of Philosophical Platonism have returned, and so too must its *telos*. Philosophy must begin again.

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