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Erminia Di Iulio & Francesco Aronadio

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Epistemology of Testimony in Early Greek Thought¹

Abstract: Although ‘epistemic justification’ is one of the main concerns within forensic contexts, questions such as ‘under what conditions testimonial speeches can be regarded as true?’ are much more ancient than lawcourts. Indeed, they are as ancient as Greek culture itself, for the problem of ‘knowledge-transmission’ worries Greek culture from its very beginning, being essentially linked to the familiar question of ‘poetic authority’. My aim is to investigate the development of ‘poetic/epistemic authority’ in ancient Greek thought: I will take Antiphon as my starting point, and I will work backward. Indeed, Antiphon is particularly significant, for he represents an ‘in-between’: he is the endpoint of a story beginning with Homer and the starting point of another story leading to the formalization of oratory (forensic oratory) as a separate discipline. The paper is divided into 5 sections: section 1 shall consider a significant passage from Antiphon’s *On the Chorus Boy*; section 2 takes into consideration the ‘Homeric paradigm’ arguing that it puts forward an extreme ‘Preemption Thesis’; section 3 lingers on Hesiod and his role in the evolution of Early Greek epistemology; section 4 takes Xenophanes as the turning-point in pre-platonic epistemology (of testimony); section 5 addresses Parmenides’ *Poem*.

Keywords: epistemology of testimony; poetic authority; Greek poetry; early Greek philosophy; oratory.

Introduction

I think that no one will jump on their chair if I claim that ‘epistemic justification’ is one of the main epistemic concerns within forensic contexts. Indeed, I take this claim to be uncontroversial because it seems sufficiently clear that – whether or not the plaintiff and the defendant do speak the truth – the main (epistemic) purpose of someone who speaks in front of the jurors is persuading them that their claims are, so to speak, both justified and justifying (as far as possible). That is, the speaker needs to prove that their assertions are

¹ This paper constitutes a substantial extension of what I argued in Di Iulio (2022).

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a) supported by evidence and therefore b) adequately justified and also c) justifying – at least partially. Obviously, by saying so, in no way do I wish to dismiss the relevance of ‘truth’; I just aim to stress that, because the jurors cannot know the truth of facts, for they lack the appropriate access to them, the only way in which they can hope to assess the truth of beliefs is to establish whether such beliefs are appropriately justified or not.

To be clear, from the jurors’ point of view three main related epistemic issues (whose significance clearly goes beyond forensic contexts) can be identified: 1) how is it possible to come to know something about which first-hand experience is lacking? 2) under what conditions a belief is appropriately or adequately justified and therefore justifying, at least partially? 3) under what conditions knowledge-transmission (or justification-transmission) and knowledge-generation (or justification-generation) are possible, if any? Because all these questions fall under ‘epistemology of testimony’, we are entitled to conclude that forensic contexts have a lot to say about it.

Despite this, my focus will not be on ‘legal epistemology’ or ‘forensic oratory’ strictly speaking – although I understand that both would be more than worthy of a careful analysis. Instead, I shall focus on Antiphon and early Greek thought. In more detail, I will take Antiphon as my starting point, and I will work backward. To my eyes, Antiphon is particularly significant, for he represents a sort of an ‘in-between’: he is the endpoint of a story beginning with Homer and the starting point of another story leading to the formalization of oratory (forensic oratory) as a separate discipline.

The paper is divided into 5 sections: section 1 shall consider a significant passage from Antiphon’s *On the Chorus Boy*; section 2 takes into consideration the ‘Homeric paradigm’ arguing that it puts forward an extreme ‘Preemption Thesis’; section 3 lingers on Hesiod and his role in the evolution of Early Greek epistemology; section 4 takes Xenophanes as the turning-point in pre-platonic epistemology (of testimony); section 5 addresses Parmenides’ *Poem*.

1. Antiphon

In Antiphon's *On the Chorus Boy*, the speaker is charged with homicide and offers a speech, written by Antiphon, to defend himself. At some point he claims:

[...] ὅπου μὲν γὰρ λόγῳ τις διδάσκει περὶ τῶν πραχθέντων, μάρτυρας δὲ μὴ παρέχειτο, μαρτύρων ἂν τις τοὺς λόγους τούτους ἐνδεεῖς φαίη εἶναι: ὅπου δὲ μάρτυρας μὲν παρέχειτο, τεκμήρια δὲ αὖ τοῖς μαρτυροῦσιν ὅμοια μὴ ἀποφαίνοι, ταῦτά ἂν τις ἔχοι εἰπεῖν, εἰ βούλοιτο. [31] ἐγὼ τοίνυν τοὺς τε λόγους ὑμῖν εἰκότας ἀποφαίνω, καὶ τοῖς λόγοις τοὺς μάρτυρας ὁμολογοῦντας καὶ τοῖς μάρτυσι τὰ ἔργα, καὶ τεκμήρια ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων [...]. (Antiph. 6, 30-31; text after Gagarin 1997)

[...] If someone should tell you with words what happened without presenting any witnesses, you would say his words are in need of witnesses; and if someone should present witnesses without providing any evidence in support of the witnesses, you could make the same objection, if you wanted. [31] But I am now presenting you with a plausible account, with witnesses who support this account, with facts supporting the witnesses, and with evidence derived from these very facts [...]. (trans. Gagarin 1998, slightly modified)²

§ 30 is a peculiar passage, for it seems as though the speaker is suspending his narration in order to reflect upon how the epistemology of testimony works, enumerating the conditions that must be met for a testimony to be reliable; accordingly, § 31 is aimed at showing that the speaker's own speech meets all these conditions. Such conditions seem to be three:

- 1) There must be a 'content of testimonial speech' – that is, the *information*;
- 2) There must be 'eyewitnesses' – that is, the *epistemic authority*;
- 3) There must be other 'evidence' (τεκμήρια) supporting the eyewitness – that is, *non-testimonial evidence* supporting the reliability of the authority;

² Although Gagarin translates τεκμήρια with 'arguments', I opted for rendering it with the more neutral 'evidence', in order to emphasise that τεκμήρια might and might not point to a linguistic content.

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Let us focus on each separately.

The *information* is a λόγος which is εἰκός, that is a ‘plausible account’ or, we might say, a ‘coherent reconstruction of events’. Obviously, what is relevant here is the meaning of εἰκός which Gagarin translates with ‘plausible’ and I rendered also with ‘coherent’. Although I am fully aware that ‘plausible’ and ‘coherent’ are not (necessarily) synonym, I suggest that the understanding of εἰκός with ‘coherent’ is supported by Hoffmann (2008), where it is persuasively argued that εἰκός denotes something which is reasonable, likely, and plausible, inasmuch as *it meets the expectations of the community*. Thus, it seems that, when the speaker says that the information he is communicating is εἰκός, he means that it is not inconsistent – *prima facie*, it is not denied – by the doxastic background of the jury. The eyewitnesses are brought into play, due to their epistemic superiority – where such a superiority depends on the fact that they do possess a direct access to what happened.

To sum up, the jury is called to judge the truth-value of the speaker’s testimony; even in absence of immediate defeaters, the jury needs evidence supporting the testimony in order to establish whether it is true. Because the jury cannot rely upon the speaker – for the reliability of the speaker is precisely what must be ascertained –, it needs further evidence. Such evidence surely includes the eyewitnesses who should confirm or deny the testimony. However, eyewitnesses constitute testimonial evidence and therefore a non-conclusive one: eyewitnesses can lie. At this point, τεκμήρια come into play. That τεκμήρια points to *non-testimonial evidence* is remarked by the expression ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων.

To conclude, what kind of epistemology of testimony is this? There are three main options: reductionism, non-reductionism and holistic coherentism. Surely, we are not dealing here with ‘non-reductionism’ that is built upon the ‘presumptive right’, according to which:

A hearer is justified (or warranted) in believing what a speaker says if they do not have an undefeated defeater that indicates that the speaker’s testimony is false or unlikely to be true. (Leonard 2021)

Obviously, in law-courts ‘not having undefeated defeater that indicates that the speaker’s testimony is false’ is not enough.

It seems then that we are left with ‘evidential reductionism’ and ‘holistic coherentism’. What should we pick up? ‘Holistic coherentism’ claims that

[...] beliefs are justified only insofar as they cohere well with a broad system of beliefs that is itself coherent. A sufficiently coherent system of beliefs will include beliefs about the reliability of belief sources (testimony, perception, reason). But these reliability beliefs are themselves justified by their coherence with the rest of the system, not by some antecedent source of justification. [...] – beliefs *about* testimony and beliefs *based on* testimony becoming justified by fitting together into a broad and coherent system of beliefs. (Smith 2019: 168)

Evidential reductionism states that

[...] reliance on non-testimonial evidence is the only way testimony can give us justified beliefs. If you believe *p* on the basis of testimony, then you had better have reason – derived from personal experience – for thinking that the person who told you that *p* is reliable (in the present circumstances, anyway). (Smith 2019: 167)

The question we are facing is that: is the speaker’s testimony epistemically significant *per se*? That is, does it constitute a reason or evidence (although perhaps one among others)? Or does its epistemic value need to be further grounded on non-testimonial evidence?

According to the passage quoted above, τεκμήρια ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων seems to function as the ground of testimonial epistemic chain. If this is true, Antiphon is displaying a kind of Reductionism. Nonetheless, I believe that this is not the case. Let me spell this out. On the one hand, I mentioned earlier that the fact that the speaker’s testimony is εἰκός (viz. coherent and undefeated) does not constitute a sufficient reason to the jury for taking it as true (as non-reductionism wishes). On the other hand, however, the jury does not seem to judge only on the basis of τεκμήρια ἐξ τῶν ἔργων (as reductionism calls for). Indeed, as § 30 states quite clearly, non-testimonial evidence needs to be consistent with the speaker’s testimony and *vice versa*: testimonial and non-

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testimonial evidence need to support each other and therefore both are necessary. If so, holistic coherentism and not reductionism is in play.

Although in no way does this analysis of Antiphon aim to be conclusive, it is still significant for present purposes, because it illustrates how ‘fine-grained’ the testimonial account provided by Antiphon is. Once again, this is unsurprising when we realize that forensic contexts are essentially concerned with questions which regard the *reliability of testimony*. However, and this is precisely my point, questions such as ‘under what conditions testimonial speeches can be regarded as true?’ are much more ancient than lawcourts. Indeed, they are as ancient as Greek culture itself, for, as a matter of fact, the problem of ‘knowledge-transmission’ worries Greek culture from its very beginning, being essentially linked to the familiar question of ‘poetic authority’.

Indeed, when it comes to early Greek epistemology, it is well known both a) that ‘eyewitnesses’ and ‘first-hand knowledge’ play the main role and b) that ‘masters of truth’ (to borrow an effective expression from Detienne) – whether poets or philosophers³ – ground their own authority in their privileged

³ As for early Greek culture, we need to resist the temptation to draw a strong distinction between ‘poetry’ and ‘philosophy’. As Glenn Most (1999: 332-362) puts it: ‘philosophy did not yet exist as a largely separate segment of social discourse, and the authors we call philosophers wrote not only for one another but also for the larger society of which they were a part. Hence it is not surprising that they had a more conscious, and perhaps more fruitful, dependence upon the basic texts of their culture (which in the case of Greek culture were poetic texts) than many modern philosophers do’ (1999: 336). Indeed, it is only with Aristotle that philosophers and poets are distinguished once and for all: ‘as far as we know, Aristotle was the first author to distinguish terminologically between what he called *mythologoi* and *theologoi* on the one hand and *physikoi* or *physiologoi* on the other. On his view, the former group were really storytellers, poets narrating myths about heroes and gods, and any views about the nature of the world that might be extracted from their works were incidental, obscure, and philosophically uninteresting; the latter group, beginning with Thales, were engaged in basically the same kind of investigation of the physical world as Aristotle himself was and, even though their theories were, unsurprisingly, deficient in comparison with his own, nonetheless they were philosophically serious, that is, they were worth studying, pillaging, and refuting. Only such a distinction, combined with specific views about the true nature of *poiesis* as the telling of *mythoi*, could permit Aristotle to declare famously in the opening chapter of his *Poetics* that Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except their meter, so that it would be right to call the one a poet and the other a *physiologos* rather than a poet (1447b17-20).’ (1999: 332-333). Along the same lines, Shaul Tor in his book notably entitled *Mortal and Divine in Early Greek*

relationship with the gods. Besides, these two points are deeply related: gods' knowledge exceeds humans' both qualitatively and quantitatively, precisely because gods are paradigmatically understood as 'eyewitnesses'. In short, at the beginning, 'epistemology' and 'epistemology of testimony' are deeply related. Let us call this the 'Homeric paradigm'.

2. The 'Homeric Paradigm' and the 'Preemption Thesis'

Before proceeding, I wish to spell something out. In saying that, according to the 'Homeric paradigm', external validation by the gods is a (necessary) requirement for human knowledge I do not mean to claim that Homeric individual is *completely* incapable to acquire *any* piece of knowledge whatsoever. Likewise, in emphasising the epistemic relevance of 'eyewitnesses' I do not intend to affirm that Homeric and archaic knowledge is to be reduced to 'seeing' or 'having seen', strictly speaking⁴. Instead, what I wish to stress is that 'knowledge' is first and foremost 'first-hand knowledge', such that any other kind of knowledge is to be grounded in it. To put it roughly, this means that it is not 'knowledge without any specification' which is unattainable for humans, but, more rightly, 1) that knowledge whose objects exceed humans' cognitive abilities and 2) that knowledge directed toward objects and events that are not present or available to the knowing subject (e.g., because those objects or events are

Epistemology. A Study of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides: 'we have sometimes tended to imagine that early philosophers engaged with other, earlier philosophers in a primary or consciously distinctive way, and we have often marginalised their engagements with figures and attitudes not conventionally classified as "philosophical", as though the early philosophers knew when they were and when they were not responding to fellow philosophical colleagues' (Tor 2017: 54).

⁴ As convincingly argued by Leshner (1981, 2008, 2009), in both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* it is repeatedly stated that humans can variously acquire knowledge. Such various routes to knowledge a) are independent from the gods and b) are not reducible to pure and simple observation. More in detail, Leshner identifies three routes to knowledge: 1) direct observation, 2) reliable testimony of others, 3) setting of a test or trial.

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located in a remote past). Such knowledge thus depends upon the gods⁵ and the privileged connection ‘masters of truth’ entertain – or pretend to – with them.

All of this is masterfully depicted in the renowned ‘catalogue of ships’:

Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσιν
ὕμεις γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα,
ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν·
οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοῖρανοι ἦσαν·
πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
οὐδ' εἰ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἴην,
φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,
εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
θυγατέρες μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον· (Il. II, 484-492)

Tell me now, you Muses who have dwellings on Olympus— for you are goddesses and are present and know all things, but we hear only a rumour and know nothing— who were the leaders and lords of the Danaans. But the multitude I could not tell or name, not even if ten tongues were mine and ten mouths and a voice unwearying, and the heart within me were of bronze, unless the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who bears the aegis, call to my mind all those who came beneath Ilios. (trans. Murray)

As Benzi rightly points out:

[...] in the passage, the poet's ignorance is contrasted with the goddesses' omniscience, which derives from their having been direct witnesses of the events. Given such a rigid dichotomy between divine and mortal knowledge, the only way for the poet to fulfil his task is to ask the Muses for their assistance in providing him with the information that he lacks. Thus, despite the epistemic gap between gods and humans, the inspired poet can have access to that knowledge from which other mortals are debarred and thereby communicate it through his poetry. (Benzi 2018: 18, emphasis mine)

⁵ ‘For being able to tell the truth entails the capacity of speaking of details in their proper order, as in the case of a sequence of events. But this requires, as a necessary condition, that the poet knows the exact course of events. According to the archaic visual model of knowledge, however, human beings can only claim to know what they have seen and that to which they have been perceptually present. As a consequence, without divine aid, the poet is epistemically incapable of narrating the spatio-temporally remote events which constitute the object of his song.’, Benzi (2018: 18).

Indeed, the catalogue of ships is clearly built upon the opposition between 'being present-knowing' and 'not being present-not knowing'⁶: it is the link between 'being present' and 'knowing' which grounds the epistemic superiority of the Muses. Because they are, in some sense, everywhere, their experience transcends humans', narrowly bound to 'here' and 'now':

[...] the *noos* of mortals is still constrained to operate within a narrow set of circumstances. Most people are unable to expand their understanding beyond the immediate environment in which they find themselves and no one – without some form of divine assistance – can possibly know anything about events or state of affairs in distant realms and periods. (Leshner 2008: 464)

Wholly specular to the linkage between 'being present' and 'knowing' is the alleged identification between 'not being present', 'relying upon hearsay' and 'knowing nothing'.

For present purposes, this latter identification is cogent. Besides, not only is this remarkable *per se*, but, as a matter of fact, it might also be quite problematic, for it seems to cast ambiguity on Homeric poetry⁷. Following Leshner and Cornford⁸, it is easy to note that Homer himself does not possess any autoptic knowledge of the events he tells about: he relies upon hearsay and spreads the word accordingly. To put it clearly, if the poet *acquires (and transmits)* his own knowledge by means of and thanks to 'testimony', the reduction of 'testimonial knowledge' to 'knowing nothing' is, at very least, quite humorous, for the epistemic authority of the poet should be guaranteed precisely by relying upon gods' words.

This being the case, should we conclude that Homer is promoting a radical scepticism according to which each and every human being (he himself included) – inasmuch as they know nothing autoptically – knows nothing at all?

⁶ Contra Zellner (1994), who takes this passage as only religiously connoted, I believe that it is epistemically worthy of analysis.

⁷ 'In one sense, the Homeric poet places himself on an epistemological par with his audience ("we know nothing"). In another sense, however, this common ignorance procures for him an authority which is difficult to contest: we are all ignorant, but his inquiries are answered by knowledgeable goddesses' (Tor 2017: 82).

⁸ Leshner (2008: 460, 478, n. 11)

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And what about those characters from the poems who are said to know something either first-hand or second-hand? In order to solve these puzzles, few considerations are in order.

To begin with, v. 486 seems to claim that *all* humans (note that Homer uses the first plural person here) lack a specific kind of knowledge, i.e., *that* knowledge denoted by the verb οἶδα – thus making room, at least in principle, for other possibilities. This might mean that, whereas humans lack first-hand knowledge, because it belongs only to the gods, they do have access to second-hand knowledge. The dichotomy would therefore be not between ‘autoptic knowledge’ and ‘ignorance’, but precisely between ‘first-hand knowledge’ and ‘second-hand knowledge’⁹. Such a reading however faces objections, the most intuitive being that it is inconsistent with all those passages in the Homeric poems, where characters do exhibit that kind of knowledge denoted by the verb οἶδα.

There are other options. The first one, which is, on my view, the less convincing, consists in distinguishing, so to speak, ‘narration’ and ‘meta-narration’. The second one, which seems to be more solid, attempts to weaken the passage, by denying that it rules out any possibility for humans to grasp autoptic knowledge. That is to say, the sense would be that humans cannot know *autoptically those things* only the Muses can know (autoptically). Besides, the passage emphasises that the gap obtaining between the cognitive capacities of humans and those of the Muses depends on the *objects* such capacities are directed toward: in the following lines, Homer points to his incapacity to grasp and verbalize such a huge amount of information, for they exceed human capacity. To put it clearly, it seems that the epistemic gap between gods and humans cannot be understood as either exclusively quantitative (for the are cases in which humans do produce a catalogue) or exclusively qualitative (for

⁹ At stake would be ‘[...] una evidente contrapposizione tra la sfera della visione, e quindi il contatto diretto con la realtà degli eventi che costituiscono la materia del canto, e la sfera dell’udito, coincidente con il racconto di quegli stessi eventi, a cui possono accedere gli uomini grazie alla mediazione operata dall’aedo’ (Serra 2012: 255). After all, the poet is ‘professionista dell’ascolto, non della visione’ (Ioli 2018: 97).

there are cases in which humans do know autoptically): these two things *taken together* open the gap.

If this reading makes any sense at all, it means that, true, humans – Homer included – do not have a direct access to what Homer tells, but, true as well, thanks to his privileged connection with the gods, Homer himself can obtain testimonial knowledge of what the Muses tell him. In a nutshell, even though Homer's knowledge of what happened in Troy is merely testimonial, he cannot have doubts that what the Muses tell him is true, for they possess the purest form of knowledge – about that, we cannot over emphasise that the epistemic connection between the Muses and Homer is essentially *asymmetric*. To sum up, not only is divine communication true, but it also assures the receiver (Homer in the present case) with an excellent reason to take/recognise it as such.

In the face of it, I would take it reasonable to understand the 'Homeric paradigm' along the line of the 'Preemption Thesis', according to which 'testimony' by (epistemic) authority transmits both (true) information and (appropriate) justification. More exactly, it seems that 'Homeric paradigm' submits – in its own way – each and every thesis of the famous (and controversial) 'Preemption Thesis' put forward by Linda Zagzebski (2012):

Content-Independence: An authoritative utterance gives the subject a reason to follow the directive which is such that there is no direct connection between the reason and the action for which it is a reason (...) there are cases in which an authoritative person or community's belief gives the subject a content-independent reason for belief. If the epistemic authority had believed a different proposition, the subject would have had reason to believe the other proposition instead. (Zagzebski 2012: 106-107)

Pre-emption Thesis: The fact that the authority has a belief *p* is a reason for me to believe *p* that replaces my other reasons relevant to believing *p* and is not simply added to them. (Zagzebski 2012: 107)

Dependency Thesis: If the belief *p* of a putative epistemic authority is authoritative for me, it should be formed in a way that I would conscientiously believe is deserving of emulation. (Zagzebski 2012: 109)

Justification Thesis: The authority of another person's belief for me is justified by my conscientious judgment that I am more likely to form a true belief and avoid a

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false belief if I believe what the authority believes than if I try to figure out what to believe myself. (Zagzebski 2012: 110)

In a nutshell, if my doctor tells me that ‘P’, I am entitled – or, more strongly, I am required – to believe that ‘P’. Indeed, as Keren already pointed out in (2007: 373) ‘by expressing her belief that *p*, a person who has authority on *p* does not merely give us a reason to likewise believe that *p*. More than that, she gives us a second-order, preemptive reason for disregarding other relevant evidence which we may have concerning *p*’.

As I mentioned, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that the ‘Homeric paradigm’ meets all the constraints required by the Preemption Thesis¹⁰. Besides, such a picture is helpful in drawing the line between ‘(authoritative) testimony’ and ‘rumour’ or ‘hearsay’: in the former case, it is a necessary condition that the speaker does possess knowledge of what they are talking about, in the latter case, obviously, it is not. Surely, this does not mean that the information conveyed by the rumour is always and necessarily false, (indeed, there are many cases in which rumours turn out to be true), however it is neither justified nor justifying – such that the receiver cannot claim to know that it is true. Zellner (1994) effectively pointed out that *kleos* can denote both ‘testimony’ and ‘false rumour’: in my view, the distinction between these two is not, so to speak, intrinsic, but extrinsic, in that it depends on the source who pronounces it: hearsay can be both justified (and therefore it constitutes testimony) and unjustified or not properly justified (in this case it is mere rumour).

This examination on Homer’s epistemology and epistemology of testimony, albeit rapid and somewhat rough, should be sufficient to validate the first impression I mentioned earlier, that is, that in archaic Greek culture, epistemology and epistemology of testimony really go hand in hand. Indeed, Homer exploits the gap between humans and gods, sets the distinction between

¹⁰ It might be convenient to mention that Zagzebski’s account is largely based upon Joseph Raz’s account of political and practical authority. Without linger on this, I would just suggest that the fact that Zagzebski’s conception of epistemic authority is so deeply indebted to ‘political authority’ might partially explain why it fits so properly with Homer’s conception of epistemic authority.

first-hand knowledge and second-hand knowledge, establishes the condition under which ‘true testimony’ and ‘false rumour’ are to be distinguished. In short, he raises fundamental questions (and provides answers) concerning humans’ epistemic capacities and justification-conditions. Finally, he paves the way to Hesiod’s ground-breaking challenge: ‘what if the authority tells lies?’.

3. Hesiod and the ‘Ambiguous Interpretation’

The underlying conviction of this paragraph is that Hesiod plays a key role in the evolution of the conception of ‘epistemic authority’ and in the evolution of Greek epistemology more broadly¹¹. As for my specific point of view, Hesiod is the one who instils doubts that ‘authority’ does not guarantee *per se* that the information conveyed is true – indeed, authority can lie. In Strauss Clay’s words: ‘whereas Homer gave us no reason to question his Muses’ veracity, Hesiod has his goddesses vaunt their own ambiguity; their tales resemble those of Odysseus: some may be true, but others may not be; and as human beings we cannot discern the difference’ (2015: 109).

This is notably stressed by Hesiod himself:

αἶ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδαξαν αἰοιδὴν,
ἄρνας ποιμαίνονθ' Ἑλικᾶνος ὑπο ζαθέοιο.
τόνδε δέ με πρῶτιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,
Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·
- ‘ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,

¹¹ Shaul Tor has enthusiastically and persuasively argued in favour of ‘Hesiod epistemologist’: ‘[...] Hesiod crystallises the major contours of an emerging religious enterprise of systematic reflection on the conditions of speculative inquiry. We will find in Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles illuminating polemical responses to Hesiod, which are nonetheless influenced by, and essentially continuous with, this epistemological breakthrough. Indeed, it may be plausibly argued that Xenophanes and Parmenides pitch their polemical responses as reactions specifically to the way in which Hesiod first articulates and introduces the Muses’ relation to him’ (Tor, 2017; 53). In short, according to Tor, Hesiod is ‘our earliest extant thinker who critically isolates the question of the conditions of human speculation, articulates a coherent framework within which to consider it and integrates it into a broader conception of the human condition. In short, we must not say that ‘Before [Xenophanes] there is no reflective discussion about knowledge.’ (2017: 52).

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ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρῦσασθαι.
- ὥς ἔφασαν κοῦραι μεγάλου Διὸς ἀρτιέπειαι,
καί μοι σκήπτρον ἔδον δάφνης ἐριθιλέος ὄζον
δρεψασαι, θηητόν· ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν
θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τὰ τ' ἐσόμενα πρὸ τ' ἐόντα,
καί μ' ἐκέλονθ' ὕμνεῖν μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων,
σφαῖς δ' αὐτὰς πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν αἰεῖειν. (Th. 22-34)

One time, they taught Hesiod beautiful song
while he was pasturing lambs under holy Helicon. And this
speech the goddesses spoke first of all to me, the Olympian
Muses, the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus: 'Field-dwelling
shepherds, ignoble disgraces, mere bellies: we know
how to say many false things similar to genuine ones, but
we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things.'
So spoke great Zeus' ready-speaking daughters, and they
plucked a staff, a branch of luxuriant laurel, a marvel, and
gave it to me; and they breathed a divine voice into me, so
that I might glorify what will be and what was before, and
they commanded me to sing of the race of the blessed ones
who always are, but always to sing of themselves first and last. (trans. Most)

As Benzi points out:

[...] the Muses' words leave Hesiod, and thereby his audience, in a state of unsolvable ambiguity concerning the truth-value of the content of their revelation. For, given their epistemic limitations and their total dependence on the Muses, both the poet and the audience are deprived of any means to judge about the truth or falsity of what they apprehend from the divinity. Indeed, for the ignorant audience, the false things which the Muses are able to inspire are, in fact, indistinguishable from the truth. (Benzi 2018: 19, emphasis mine)

This very ambiguity regarding the truth-value of the Muses' words and its relationship with the poet's cognition has been variously understood. Following Tor (2017), we might say that this passage can be read either 'positively' or 'negatively'.

The 'positive reading' entails two possibilities, that is, the a) 'truth-only interpretation' and b) the 'divine knowledge interpretation'. According to the first, Hesiod would be remarking his own privileged poetic status, for the Muses

would have chosen *only* him to reveal their truth, whereas to the other poets (Homer included) they would have tell lies resembling truths¹²; the second option adds to this picture that Hesiod would actually possess knowledge of the truths he is telling. Even the ‘negative reading’ entails two possibilities: a) the refutation of the truth-only interpretation, such that Hesiod would be acknowledging that not everything he is telling is true and b) the so-called ‘ambiguous interpretation’, according to which neither Hesiod nor his audience are really able to assess the truth value of the Muses’ words.

As we have seen, both Strauss Clay (2015) and Benzi (2018) embrace the ambiguous interpretation. Moreover, Tor points out that ‘we cannot over emphasise the textual fact that at no point do the Muses say that to Hesiod they will dispense only truths and never verisimilitudinous falsehoods’ (2017: 72-73), such that:

It is only due to the divine origin of his poetry [...] that the subsequent account could indeed comprise truths. That, however, Hesiod’s own voice – his own authority – remains human [...] coheres with his lack of means to exclude the prospect of falsehoods. Hesiod’s transformation through the Muses’ inspiration does not amount to the acquisition of the Muses’ own capacity to articulate, and to discriminate between, truths and falsehoods which lie beyond the reach of human cognition. (Tor 2017: 80)

All in all, even though Hesiod’s *Theogony* surely is meant to convey truths, Hesiod himself is not in the position to guarantee (to his audience) that his own words do *not* contain falsehoods at all. In the face of it, it seems reasonable to conclude that Hesiod is pointing out that ‘testimony’ – even ‘testimony’ pronounced by the authority, such that the epistemic relation between the speaker and the hearer is still asymmetrical – does not automatically transmit information *plus* justification. In short, testimony does not transmit ‘knowledge’. This is because the hearer 1) cannot be sure that the source is reliable and 2) cannot verify on their own the truth-value of the speaker’s words; but, in order

¹² See among others Arrighetti (2018: 28): ‘la sua [di Esiodo] posizione di privilegiato delle Muse non si fonda sul fatto che le Muse, in quanto divinità, sanno tutto, ma in quanto esse scelgono proprio Esiodo per trasmettergli un messaggio di verità che può venir negato a tutti gli altri poeti. Esiodo dunque contrappone sé, non a tutti gli altri uomini, ma a tutti gli altri poeti’.

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to acquire knowledge, the hearer should be able to do either of them. That is, the hearer should be in the position to know *either* if the source is reliable or if what the source is conveying is true.

Such a dilemma has been recently pointed to by Nicholas D. Smith. His view is that

Reliable Source Doctrine (RSD). A belief source K can produce justified beliefs for S only if S is justified in believing that K is reliable (Smith, 2019: 159).

When it comes to testimonial knowledge, this principle means that:

Reliable Source Doctrine for Testimony (RSDt). Testimony can produce justified beliefs for S only if S is justified in believing that testimony is reliable (Smith 2019: 161).

Once we assume that RSDt is correct, an aporia necessarily follows: in order to establish whether testimony is reliable we should be able to assess *either* whether the source is reliable before knowing if their testimony is or whether the testimony is reliable before knowing if the source is¹³.

It should be clear, or so I hope, that such a dilemma is the same displayed in the *Theogony* by Hesiod: because the Muses can tell lies resembling truths and because we cannot verify the truth-value of their assertions (because they denote things which exceed human cognitive capacities), we are not entirely justified in taking them (and their testimony) to be reliable. Recalling the example I used above, this means that if my doctor tells me that 'P', I am entitled to believe that 'P' and to take my doctor's word as a reason for assent to 'P', but, being unable to verify if 'P' is true, I cannot say to know that 'P'.

¹³ More in detail (2019: 161): '1. Testimony can produce justified beliefs for us only if we are justified in believing that testimony is reliable. 2. We can be justified in thinking that testimony is reliable only if we have justified beliefs that derive from testimony, which provide support for this conclusion. 3. Either (i) we must have justification for thinking that testimony is reliable prior to gaining justification for the beliefs we derive from testimony, or (ii) we must have justification for the beliefs we derive from prior to gaining justification for thinking that beliefs we derive from testimony are reliable. 4. By 2, (i) cannot be the case. 5. By 1, (ii) cannot be the case. 6. Hence, testimony cannot produce justified beliefs.'

Let us briefly take stock. As we have seen, one of the conditions required by Antiphon's testimonial account is that testimonial evidence needs to be supported by non-testimonial one, in order to settle the reliability of witnesses/authority (because they can lie). In some sense, we might argue that Hesiod's muses are the ancestors of Antiphon's witnesses, for they can lie too. The result is that even Hesiod, despite his privileged status (for he has been personally chosen by the Muses), could be deceived by them – that is, by those who should precisely guarantee and ground his superior status. The 'eyewitness/authority', then, becomes a 'myth'. By saying so, by claiming that 'Hesiod raises the concern of authority telling lies', thus generating the 'myth of the eyewitness', I do not mean that such a concern is raised by Hesiod, so to speak, 'out of the blue': as a matter of fact, in Homer there are many cases of gods deceiving or lying to humans. The main difference between Homer and Hesiod, in my view, lies in the impact of such concern: that is, the (more or less explicit) awareness that gods are not always epistemically reliable does not impact *Homer's own* relationship with the Muses in the same way as it impacts Hesiod's.

4. Xenophanes and the 'Evidentialism Reductionism'

We have seen in the previous section that Hesiod's epistemology widens the gap between human and divine: the poet is unable to recognise the truth-value of the gods' words¹⁴.

The incapacity of the knowing subject to discern the truth-value of their own beliefs is, as is well known, the core of Xenophanes' epistemology (B 34 DK), which has been variously understood in the philosophical tradition. For the sake of clarity, we might say that Xenophanes has been understood either as promoting some kind of scepticism (or 'proto-scepticism' as Long 1966 put it) or as submitting a fallibilist (perhaps empiricist and naturalist) epistemology¹⁵. As a

¹⁴ See Leshner (2009).

¹⁵ In no way do I aim to address Xenophanes's thought conclusively. I shall confine myself to take into consideration those elements that are significant for my objectives. On Xenophanes see Leshner (1978, 1991), Ioli (2003), Bryan (2012), Sassi (2011, 2015), Aronadio (2005, 2016), Tor (2017).

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matter of fact, in order to establish whether Xenophanes is sceptic or fallibilist, it is crucial to identify his own view on epistemic authority, for it is not possible to evaluate Xenophanes' epistemology without making clear what is the relationship obtaining, according to him, between 'knowledge', 'certainty' 'humans' and 'gods'.

Indeed, both the issues of 'epistemic authority' and 'testimonial knowledge' obtain on a twofold level: vertically, they pertain to the relationship between mortals and gods; horizontally, they concern the relationship between Xenophanes and his audience. Indeed, we might ask whether and to what extent these two questions can actually be distinguished: both Homer's and Hesiod's authority among their peers (horizontal) were grounded in their privileged relationship with the gods (vertical). Once we get rid of the former, what is left of the latter?

It seems then that we need to answer two questions: 1) does Xenophanes break the link human-gods? and 2) if yes, on what is his 'epistemic authority' built upon? And therefore, what kind of 'epistemology of testimony' does Xenophanes submit?

Whatever reading of Xenophanes' thought we are inclined to embrace, we can hardly provide a negative answer to the first question: Xenophanes' philosophy does constitute a strong rejection of traditional theology and of the traditional interpretation of poetic authority. However, in no way does this mean that the divine dimension is completely, radically and anachronistically ruled out. As Shaul Tor (2017) persuasively argued, it seems fair to conclude that Xenophanes' gods do play a role along the human route to knowledge – they just do not function as ground for poetic authority. According to Tor, Xenophanes is committed to reject the traditional account of divine revelation (i.e., via divination¹⁶) in order to make room for his own account:

¹⁶ Tor focuses extensively on B 18 DK (οὗτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν, ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον) that he translates as follows: 'Indeed gods did not from the beginning intimate all things to mortals, / But as they search in time they discover better' (2017: 116). The sense is that: 'given Xenophanes' qualification of the manner of disclosure (*hypedeixan*), the markers "from the beginning" and "all things" do not restrict a rejection of disclosure simpliciter, but further qualify the particular notion of indirect, cryptic disclosure, which Xenophanes rejects. That

Xenophanes rejected the view that the gods cryptically communicate any and every truth. He retained, however, the core principle that, *by disclosing objects of experience to them, the divine purposefully enables mortals to reason out conjectures about states of affairs external to their experience, the world around them and their place within it. Xenophanes most probably reconceptualised disclosure as the purposive facilitation of mortal judgement through the facilitation of mortal experience as a whole* ('universal disclosure'). (Tor 2017: 144, emphasis mine)¹⁷

It would thus be incongruous to say that the gods are not involved in human epistemological endeavour, for, by equipping humans with their cognitive abilities, the gods make *zētēsis* and its (fallibilist) fulfilment possible¹⁸. As I mentioned above, this means, on the one hand, that Xenophanes' gods are, somehow, linked to humans, but, on the other, that they are not linked to some individual specifically. If this is the case, if Xenophanes rules out the possibility of grounding one's own (epistemic) authority in the privileged connection to the gods¹⁹, how can his claims of superiority be vindicated?

It seems reasonable to suggest that Xenophanes' authority is to be understood in terms of *epistemic superiority*: this is the first time that a poet (we need to bear in mind that Xenophanes writes in verses) does not need the external validation of the gods, for his own superiority is wholly intrinsic:

is, Xenophanes does not severally reject the isolated claims that the gods disclosed (i) from the beginning, (ii) everything and (iii) cryptically. Rather, the qualifications (i)–(iii) combine to express a unified view of how disclosure works, i.e. the view that from the beginning gods cryptically disclosed everything, which Xenophanes rejects' (2017: 118–119). And further: 'the Homeric poet uses the usually mantic *deiknymi* to express a notion of poetic inspiration. Xenophanes, in employing the very same phrase, with the conspicuous addition of the prefix *hypo*, may thus be reacting critically also to the elusive notion of poetic inspiration, itself [...], often closely associated with divination' (2017: 123).

¹⁷ 'Like his opponents, Xenophanes takes it that the nature of divine disclosure determines the epistemic potential of mortals. But, whereas divination and poetic inspiration enable those individuals who experience them to transcend the limitations of other mortals, Xenophanes most probably rendered disclosure the fundamental condition of all mortal discursive activity (universal disclosure)' (Tor 2017: 146).

¹⁸ Tor is thinking of B 28, 36 e 38 DK. Cf. Tor (2017: 133–143).

¹⁹ 'By contrast with tradition, then, divine inspiration can no longer be the means through which mortals can overcome their epistemic limitations. As a consequence, poets cannot rely on divine inspiration to lay their claims to knowledge and thereby authority' (Benzi 2018: 23).

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Xenophanes is so confident in his own wisdom that he harshly criticizes and ridicules peoples' beliefs as well as some of the most renowned wise men of Greece, like Homer, Hesiod and Pythagoras. Given humans' confinement to opinion though, what is Xenophanes' claim to authority and consequent criticism of rival wisdom practitioners based upon? I suggest that the answer to this question is found in Xenophanes' emphasis on the importance of enquiry. [...] through empirical enquiry, men are able to improve their beliefs about the world around them. This means that they can discard opinions which do not match empirical data and thereby advanced new and improved explanations of phenomena. (Benzi, 2018: 24)

Such that:

According to Xenophanes, then, poetic authority derives from the capacity of providing an account which approximates the result of experience better than others, but which nonetheless remains subject to continuous revision and improvement. (Benzi, 2018: 25)

If this picture makes sense, what about Xenophanes' audience? Does the fact that it is Xenophanes who is speaking constitute a preemptive reason to take his words as true? Does his audience acquire *both* (true) information and justification? I do not possess a conclusive answer, but I can propose the following conjecture. My guess is this: the emphasis Xenophanes puts on the empirical verification presumes that the hearer is able to verify on their own the accuracy of the information they receive. This means that the hearer/reader is not expected to be wholly dependent on Xenophanes (epistemically speaking), so that the epistemic relation between Xenophanes and his audience is not that of radical *deference* – at least, not in the same way as it was that between Homer and Hesiod and their audience.

Besides, the nature of Xenophanes's philosophical message requires that the reader/hearer is capable of evaluating it by comparing the new pieces of information with their pre-existent set of beliefs and, above all, with empirical evidence.

All in all, I would suggest that, thanks to Xenophanes, the Preemption Thesis embraced by both Homer and Hesiod gives way to some kind of Evidentialism, according to which an external validation – namely, a validation which is

external to the testimonial relation – is required in order to transform a piece of information into knowledge. In short, testimony is not a basic source of knowledge (anymore), for the possibility for the hearer to acquire knowledge by means of testimony is bounded to the availability of other, non-testimonial, evidence²⁰. If this is the case, what kind of ‘epistemology of testimony’ is coming into play?

My suggestion is that Xenophanes is promoting a kind of ‘evidential reductionism’, along the following lines:

Reductionists maintain that because a hearer must have positive reasons for accepting a speaker’s testimony, testimonial justification can be reduced to a combination of other epistemic resources that the hearer possesses, i.e., the hearer’s memorial, perceptual, and inferential capacities. For this reason, *Reductionists can maintain that a hearer’s testimonial-based beliefs are justified by evidence, where this evidence comes from the hearer’s inferences, i.e., inferences from the premise that the speaker said that p, to the conclusion that p is true.* (Leonard 2021, emphasis mine)²¹

On this view, what is relevant in the testimonial dynamic is the hearer who is urged to evaluate on their own the truth-value of the information they are receiving, not the source – whose epistemic authority is (strongly) dismissed.

To sum up, we have seen how, at the beginning, the testimonial dynamic counts two elements: the authoritative speaker and the hearer (that is, the Muses and Homer/Hesiod). Testimony constitutes a basic source of (second-hand) knowledge, for it transmits *both* true information and justification. From Xenophanes onward, ‘authority’ gives way to ‘evidence’ and testimony is no longer understood as providing ‘justification’ to the hearer. In other words, whereas testimony conveys ‘(true) information’, ‘justification’ stems from further evidence. As a consequence, ‘testimony’ ceases to be a basic source of knowledge, because in fact the hearer does not acquire knowledge *solely* on the basis of testimony.

²⁰ This seems to be consistent with Keren (2007: 375, 381).

²¹ By contrast, non-reductionists maintain that ‘testimony’ alone does constitute (at least *prima facie*) justification for the hearer.

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5. *Parmenides and Holistic Coherentism*

As we have seen, Xenophanes – in dismissing the Preemption Thesis, according to which the fact that the authority believes that ‘P’ constitutes a preemptive reason for me to believe that ‘P’ – represents a turning-point in the history of ‘epistemic/poetic authority’. As we are about to see, Parmenides (even though his philosophy can be understood, under many respects, as a response to Xenophanes’ objections) is wholly consistent with Xenophanes²². Let me spell this out.

To begin with, we need to remark that Parmenides speaks in verses. This is by no means an accident:

Rather, the epic mode appeared ‘naturally’ available to Parmenides as the most suited to convey especially serious subjects. In particular, the use of the hexameter signals (as it will in Empedocles) that the author himself is godlike; it is worth remembering that the Greek gods expressed themselves through poets as well as oracles, and the latter were also composed in verse, almost exclusively dactylic hexameter. In conclusion, the reasons for Parmenides’s formal choice are inseparable from the object of his thought, presented as a transcendent truth revealed by a goddess. (Sassi 2018: 153)

Many scholars have been remarking the poetic character of Parmenides’ *Poem* and his debt (although a nuanced one) toward the previous poetic tradition and Hesiod in particular²³. Benzi recently pointed out how Parmenides’

²² Once again, nothing of what I am going to say about the relation between Parmenides, Hesiod and Xenophanes is meant to be conclusive or exhaustive.

²³ See Mourelatos: ‘what we have from Parmenides is not a philosophical treatise but a poem in hexameters. On the face of it, the very form of the work places him in the tradition of Greek epic poetry. It stands to reason that before we can begin analyzing his thought as that of a philosopher, we must understand his relation to this older tradition. A comparative study of the Parmenides fragments against the background of Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric Hymns provides, at the very least, a key toward understanding the syntax and semantics of Parmenides’ poem, the precise sense of his metaphors and images, and the wider context of his mythical allusions’ (2008: 1). On poetry and philosophy in Parmenides see, among others, Havelock (1958), Cerri (1995), Tulli (2000), Mourelatos (2008: 1-46), Ioli (2018: 75-79), Sassi (2018: 151-160).

epistemic authority is defined in contrast to Hesiod, in that, on the one hand, like Hesiod, Parmenides alludes to some kind of ‘divine investiture’²⁴, but on the other, he is prone to solve Hesiod’s ambiguities. I completely agree with Benzi when he says that

Parmenides solves the problem of poetic ambiguity by redefining truth in terms of logical deduction. In this way, Parmenides also justifies his claim to authority and superiority over competitors [...] Parmenides’ proem stands as a statement of authority, since it constantly emphasizes the philosopher-poet’s special status, eventually sanctioned by the goddess’ favourable reception and her promise to reveal a truth undisclosed to other mortals. However, in contrast to Hesiod, the guarantee of the truth of divine revelation does not derive from Parmenides’ having been chosen by the goddess, but rather from the fact that the account of What-Is expounded in the poem is the result of logical deduction. (Benzi 2018: 31, emphasis mine)

Benzi’s analysis takes its starting-point B1 DK:

χρεὼν δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι
ἤμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος ἀτρεμέος ἦτορ
ἦδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθίης. (B1 DK, 28-30)

You must be informed of everything,
both of the unmoved heart of persuasive reality and of the beliefs of
mortals, which comprise no genuine conviction. (trans. Coxon)²⁵

Benzi remarks that this passage from Parmenides’s *Poem* recall quite evidently Hesiod’s proem with the precise aim of displaying the distance

²⁴ It may seem curious that, whereas Hesiod wants to have his voice heard, and starts his theogonic song with a sudden change of scene (with the likely proverbial expression of line 35: ‘but why should I talk about a rock or a stone?’), the speech of Parmenides’s goddess unravels without a break and coincides with the contents of the poem itself. One would be tempted to conclude that Parmenides’s persona is set aside in giving the floor to a superior authority. But if we consider the context of performance, in which the wise man strove to present his personal experience and the revelation that ensued, we must maintain that it was still his voice that was being echoed, and that the listeners ended up seeing themselves in the ‘you’ to whom the goddess is speaking (Sassi 2018: 155).

²⁵ Text Coxon (2009).

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between Hesiod's Muses who tell lies resembling truths and Parmenides's Goddess, for:

[...] first, the truths and the falsehoods resembling genuine things are replaced, respectively, by the heart of truth and opinions; secondly, and most significantly for the present enquiry, the goddess is explicit about what she will tell Parmenides and does not leave room for ambiguity, since Parmenides will learn *both* truth *and* opinions but having being warned beforehand of the truth value of what he will apprehend. (Benzi 2018: 27)

Despite this:

[...] the goddess' declaration per se is not sufficient to ensure that she is not deceiving Parmenides. For, as shown by Hesiod, the gods can tell humans lies without them being able to detect them. How, then, can Parmenides ground his claim to authority? (Benzi 2018: 27)

Benzi's reasonable suggestion is that even though he claims to be part of the poetic tradition, still, Parmenides is extremely careful in providing his audience with the appropriate instruments to recognise the truth-value of this assertions.

In Sassi's words:

To be sure, Parmenides is the addressee of a revelation, but he presents this revelation as the result of a personal inquiry. An indication of this is given by the long series of stops he makes prior to arriving before the goddess, whose welcome speech then develops in the space of relatively few lines. Conversely, at the beginning of the Theogony, the arrival of the Muses is introduced by a long preamble in which the goddesses themselves approach the poet, who realizes his privileged position from a quasi-aggressive apostrophe before receiving the symbolic gift of the laurel branch and an inspired voice. (Sassi 2018: 155)

This is crucial. I mentioned that, when it comes to epistemic authority and epistemology of testimony, Parmenides follows in the footsteps of Xenophanes. As we have seen, Xenophanes's main claim is that the hearer is urged to judge the content of testimony on their own, without relying upon the authority of the source. To a large extent, Parmenides agrees, for, although his message is communicated by a goddess, his hearer is supposed to judge on their own. This

is because Parmenides's philosophical message is displayed as an *argumentation*:

Parmenides' decisive move to solve the issue of poetic ambiguity consists in *redefining the criteria of truth by shifting them from narration to logical argumentation*. For, as long as poetry was conceived as a means of reporting events distant in place and time, as in Homer, there always remained the possibility that what the poet sang did not correspond to actual state-of-affairs. The same consideration holds in the case of Hesiod, as the truths to which the Muses inspired him still related to events of which humans could not have knowledge, and thus were devoid of any guarantee. By contrast, *if poetry is used to illustrate a truth which is the result of a logical argument, there is no room for uncertainty*. (Benzi 2018: 30-31, emphasis mine)

Such that:

since the truth revealed by the goddess consists in the conclusions of a deduction, *Parmenides (and the audience) can actually check the validity of what he has been told*. Indeed, the goddess herself invites him to put to the test her account by judging it through reason. Parmenides' characterization of *alêtheia* as the result of rational deduction thus provides the poet with that independent criterion of truth whose absence condemned Hesiod's poetry to unsolvable ambiguity. (Benzi 2018: 28, emphasis mine)

Contrary to Xenophanes, however, Parmenides's hearer does *not* need an external validation (that is, as we have seen, a validation which is external to the testimonial relation) in order to transform a piece of information into knowledge. Contrary to Xenophanes, the possibility for Parmenides's hearer to acquire knowledge is *not* bounded to the availability of other, non-testimonial, evidence. All they have to do is to check *on their own* the logical validity of Parmenides's words.

In the face of it, my suggestion is that while Xenophanes promotes some kind of evidential reductionism, Parmenides is submitting a kind of Holistic Coherentism. In Smith's words:

Holistic coherentists do not think that the justification for either sort of belief is prior to the other – it is only when we have enough together in a coherent way that

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any of them become justified; and then they become justified all at once. (Smith, 2019: 160)

When it comes to testimony, as we have seen, Holistic Coherentism claims that:

neither our justification for our testimonial beliefs nor our justification for thinking that testimony is reliable needs to be prior to the other. According to holistic coherentism, beliefs are justified only insofar as they cohere well with a broad system of beliefs that is itself coherent. A sufficiently coherent system of beliefs will include beliefs about the reliability of belief sources (testimony, perception, reason). But these reliability beliefs are themselves justified by their coherence with the rest of the system, not by some antecedent source of justification. [...] – beliefs *about* testimony and beliefs *based on* testimony become justified by fitting together into a broad and coherent system of beliefs. (Smith 2019: 168)²⁶

The basic idea is that, contrary to Homer's, Hesiod's and Xenophanes's audience (let alone Antiphon's jurors!), Parmenides's reader/hearer cannot doubt that Parmenides is telling the truth, because his message is consistent – at least, potentially – with their own pre-existent sets of beliefs. It is not by accident, perhaps, that Parmenides speaks of 'persuasive truth', thus suggesting that truth is *justifying per se* (i.e., there is no further need for a reassurance from the authority of the speaker). I wish to be very clear on this, because in no way am I claiming that all Parmenides does is to say that his truth is persuasive. On my view, the reason why he is *entitled* to say so is that his truth is a *truth of reason*²⁷, whilst Homer's, Hesiod's, Xenophanes's, and Antiphon's were not. I mentioned at the beginning that according to 'Homeric paradigm' the epistemic gap humans-gods pertain those things which exceeds (spatial-temporally speaking) humans' cognitive abilities. In those cases, where *truths of facts* are

²⁶ In more detail: 'The holistic coherentist suggests that justification for a belief is generated by the overall coherence of the system of beliefs within which it is situated and the degree to which the belief fits into (or coheres with) that system. After enough time in the world, we will form an overall picture of ourselves and our environment (a system of beliefs). If this system has a high degree of coherence, then particular beliefs within the system earn their justification by adding to the overall coherence of the system' (Smith 2019: 169).

²⁷ I take this to be fully consistent with Benzi *et al.* talking about 'logical argumentation'.

involved, it is much harder to imagine that the hearer really can be in the appropriate position to determine *on their own* the truth-value of the testimony²⁸.

²⁸ Besides, such a distinction between ‘truths of facts’ and ‘truth of reasons’ should also explain the difference between Antiphon’s holistic coherentism and Parmenides’s. Although both seem to advance an epistemology of testimony that calls for a scrutiny of the information by the hearer, Antiphon’s account presumes five elements: 1) the speaker 2) the hearer 3) the information 4) the authority supporting the speaker (testimonial evidence) 5) non-testimonial evidence supporting the authority, whereas Parmenides’s simply requires 1) the speaker 2) the hearer 3) the information. Instead, the difference between Homer and Hesiod and Antiphon rests upon the religious element and, above all, the ‘infallibilism’ of the formers in contrast to the ‘fallibilism’ of the latter.

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Socrates and the Epistemology of Testimony

Abstract: Does the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues have a view about the epistemology of testimony? Despite the apparent anachronism of even asking this question, in this paper I show that there is evidence in our texts that Socrates actually has a quite sophisticated view about the epistemology of testimony. Indeed, as I put the evidence together, I believe that the view of testimony we find in the texts is one that is both defensible and also plausible. I build my argument in stages. I first look at a few passages in which Socrates seems to be extremely skeptical about the value of testimony. I next turn to examples that show his willingness to accept some testimony as justification for belief. I then explain how and why Socrates could distinguish reliable testimony from unreliable kinds. I close with a few observations about how Socrates' responses to testimonial evidence fit into contemporary debates on the epistemology of testimony. I will claim that the best sense of Socrates' position is that he accepted a version of what has come to be known as "holistic coherentism" about the epistemology of testimony.

Keywords: Socrates; Epistemology; Testimony; Holistic Coherence; Justification; Reliability

Introduction

Does the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues have a view about the epistemology of testimony? Despite the apparent anachronism of even asking this question, in this paper I show that there is evidence in our texts that Socrates actually has a quite sophisticated view about the epistemology of testimony. Indeed, as I put the evidence together, I believe that the view of testimony we find in the texts is one that is both defensible and also plausible.

I build my argument in stages. I first look at a few passages—familiar to most scholars—in which Socrates seems to be extremely skeptical about the value of testimony. But I will then turn to examples that seem clearly to show his willingness to accept some testimony as justification for belief, and so, I will claim, Socrates cannot simply be a skeptic about the epistemic value of

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testimony. I will then explain how and why reliable testimony can be distinguished from the unreliable kinds: what makes testimony reliable, and how can an epistemic agent discern that it is the reliable kind? I will close with a few observations about how Socrates' responses to testimonial evidence fit into contemporary debates on the epistemology of testimony. I will claim that the best sense of Socrates' position is that he accepted a version of what has come to be known as 'holistic coherentism' about the epistemology of testimony.

II. *Skeptical Responses to Testimony*

In his discussion with Polus in the *Gorgias*, Socrates dismisses Polus's attempt to appeal to what the latter claims nearly everyone would say about the topics they are discussing. As they do in courtrooms, Socrates proclaims, so, too, the kinds of witnesses Polus wants to call into his discussion with Socrates will all give testimony that is worthless when it comes to the truth.

My wonderful man, you're trying to refute me in oratorical style, the way people in law courts do when they think they're refuting some claim. There, too, one side thinks its refuting the other when it produces many reputable witnesses on behalf of the arguments it presents, while the person who asserts the opposite produces only one witness, or none at all. This 'refutation' is worthless, as far as truth is concerned, for it might happen sometimes that an individual is brought down by the false testimony of many reputable people. Now, too, nearly every Athenian and alien will take your side on the things you're saying, if it's witnesses you want to produce against me to show that what I say isn't true. (*Gorgias* 471e2-472a5)¹

The discussion with Polus also reveals another reason why Socrates might be seen as regarding testimony as too unreliable to justify belief. The problem, as Socrates puts it so bluntly to a flustered and annoyed Polus, is that the person giving the testimony—in this case Polus—while not actually trying to deceive, might be saying things that even that person does not believe:

¹ All translations from Cooper (1997).

Socrates: I say, Polus, that both orators and tyrants have the least power in their cities, as I was saying just now. For they do just about nothing they want to do, though they certainly do whatever they see most fit to do.

Polus: Well, isn't this having great power?

Socrates: No, at least Polus says it isn't.

Polus: I say it isn't? I certainly say it is!

Socrates: By ... , you certainly don't! (*Gorgias* 466d6-e6)

Later in the discussion, Socrates claims that everyone—including Polus—considers doing injustice worse than suffering it. Polus again resists:

Polus: I believe that I don't, and that no other person does, either. So you'd take suffering what's unjust over doing it, would you?

Socrates: Yes, and so would you and everyone else.

Polus: Far from it! I wouldn't, you wouldn't, and nobody else would, either. (*Gorgias* 474b6-10)

From passages like these, we might be tempted to conclude that Socrates thought that testimony in general was worthless as evidence or justification, since he thinks that most people actually have no clear idea about what they believe on some issue about which they report their views. Most testimony is worthless because it reflects the opinions of 'those people who easily put men to death and would bring them back to life again if they could, without thinking; I mean the majority of men' (*Crito* 48c5-6).

III. *Reliable and Unreliable Testimony*

Despite the ubiquity of passages in which Socrates scorns common opinions, however, there are other passages in our texts that show he was not entirely dismissive of all testimony. To get a sense of what kind of testimony Socrates would accept as reliable, we may consider what Socrates says to his old friend, Crito, about this issue.

Socrates: Do you not think it a sound statement that one must not value all opinions of people, but some and not others, nor the opinions of all people, but those of some and not of others? [...]

Crito: It is.

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Socrates: One should value the good opinions, and not the bad ones?

Crito: Yes.

Socrates: The good opinions are those of wise people, the bad ones of foolish people?

Crito: Of course. (Crito 47a2-11)

Some testimony, it seems, is quite valuable, epistemically. A fully adequate account of Socrates' view of the epistemic value of testimony, accordingly, must explain not only how the good kind of testimony differs from the bad kinds, but also how an epistemic agent receiving such testimony can tell the difference. Without the ability to distinguish the good from the bad, even the good kind of testimony cannot be a reliable mode of transmission of information, since it seems the reliable kind is nowhere near as ubiquitous as the unreliable kind. Epistemic value can only be obtained if the reliable part of an otherwise unreliable medium is discernable. This, then, is the task that I propose to take up in the following sections of this paper.

IV. *Ethical Ignorance*

In response to the oracle given to Chaerephon, which declared that 'no one is wiser than Socrates', Socrates seeks to understand the oracle's response by questioning others he supposes must surely be wiser than he is, and is shocked to find that none of those he speaks to really are wiser than he is. The closest he gets to finding others wiser than he is are the craftsmen, who really do know things that Socrates does not. Even this advantage, however, does not make them wiser than Socrates because they also suppose that because they are good at their crafts, they also know 'the most important pursuits' (*Apology* 22d7), but actually do not. Socrates is wiser than even the craftsmen, because even though he, too, does not know 'the most important pursuits', he also recognizes that he does not know them, and is thus wiser than those who think they do.

From this general explanation of the oracle, it seems that Socrates is especially skeptical about testimony when it comes to 'the most important pursuits', which seem to be ethical in nature. But it does not follow from this fact that Socrates is skeptical about the epistemic value of testimony more generally.

Given that Socrates actually acknowledges that craftsmen do know their crafts, we have explicit evidence that there are examples of testimony (for example, statements about crafts made by those skilled in them) that Socrates seems quite ready to accept as true and not treat with the same sort of skepticism he shows when it comes to testimony about ethical subjects.

The difference between what craftsmen say about their crafts and what the many say about ethically important issues aligns precisely with what Socrates says to Crito in the passage quoted above (*Crito* 47a2-11) about which opinions deserve credence and which do not: testimony by those with knowledge is worth accepting, whereas testimony from those without knowledge is worthless. It is clear enough in the early dialogues that Socrates believes that anyone who claims to have any significant knowledge in ethical matters is not to be believed, and no claims alleged to derive from such ethical expertise are left unrefuted in the dialogues in which Socrates subjects them to elenctic examination.

From many things that Socrates says in the *Apology*, it is clear that although he is willing to grant to others some level of expertise (for example, craftspeople in regard to their crafts), he regards almost everyone as so ignorant and confused about what he calls ‘the most important pursuits’ as generally not credible on such subjects. Since the question of whether he should escape from prison involves an ethically significant judgment, Socrates dismisses the testimony of the majority of people in the *Crito* as unworthy of consideration. But this limits the scope of Socrates’ skeptical response to testimony to statements about ethical issues². Outside of the domain of ethics, Socrates holds a very different view.

² I am not claiming that Socrates was entirely skeptical about all ethical claims. For example, in the *Apology* he famously claims to **know** that it is ‘wicked and shameful to do wrong, to disobey one’s superior, be he god or man’ (*Apology* 29b6-7). Scholars have debated how Socrates might suppose he came to have such knowledge, but it need not be supposed that it was through testimony. Moreover, as I will show below, Socrates is not even a global skeptic about ethical testimony, even some given by non-experts (under special circumstances).

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V. Testimony and Matters of Fact: The Primacy of Craft-Knowledge

In contemporary studies of the epistemology of testimony, the model of knowledge is always propositional or informational knowledge: knowledge *that* such-and-such is the case. As I have recently argued at length³, this is not the model of knowledge that was Socrates' main focus⁴. Instead, Socrates was much more interested in the kind of knowledge constituted by expertise, know-how, or craft: *technê*. Socrates at least compares the kind of knowledge that he is interested in—the kind that counts as wisdom and constitutes virtue—to craft; this is his so-called 'craft-analogy', and scholars disagree as to whether he really intends it to be only an analogy, or whether Socrates thinks of virtue as a kind of craft, perhaps the most important kind of all. At the very least, the 'craft-analogy' assures that the kind of knowledge Socrates is interested in is a kind that can be achieved in degrees, and this is not typically what people think about propositional or informational knowledge⁵: when it comes to knowing *facts*, we suppose that either one has such knowledge or one does not. Some of the necessary conditions of knowledge may be gradable: justification, reliability, and perhaps even belief. But knowledge itself is not taken to be gradable, but is regarded, instead, as a threshold condition. One has either met the conditions of knowledge, or not met them.

The question I wish to raise now, however, takes us away from the kind of knowledge that Socrates thinks would constitute wisdom or virtue, and concerns instead the kinds of cognitive conditions we might achieve with respect to matters of fact. Given his focus on craft-knowledge, the evidence of Socrates' views on testimony regarding factive conditions is more difficult to find in our texts, but what is there also shows a clear distinction between factual

³ In Smith (2021).

⁴ I understand that this contention is controversial. Compare, for example, Gail Fine, who insists that the kind of knowledge that Socrates is interested in is 'a truth-entailing cognitive condition that is appropriately cognitively superior to mere true belief' (Fine 2008: 53).

⁵ The claim that even propositional knowledge might come in degrees has been proposed by contextualists, but as far as I know, no one has supposed that we should understand Socrates' epistemology as a kind of contextualism.

claims intended to persuade others of some ethically significant view, and those without specific ethical implications. When Socrates talks about persuasive speech—whether in forensic contexts or in political settings more broadly—we find him giving the same skeptical responses as we found in testimony that is directly about ethical evaluation. So, in the *Apology*, for example, Socrates insists that he must try to defend himself ‘against the first lying accusations made against me and my first accusers, and then against the later accusations and the later accusers’ (*Apology* 18a8–b1). Socrates insists to his jurors that he will tell them only the truth (17b8), but he also makes clear that in being committed to telling only the truth, he marks himself off as a relative ‘stranger to the manner of speaking here’ in the courtroom (17d4), where those giving the testimony tell their lies in ‘embroidered and stylized phrases’ to add to its persuasive appeal (17c1–2). Ironically, jurors in courtrooms are required to judge the truth of testimony. Socrates seems to think that there is relatively little truth to be heard in testimony given in legal cases. As we saw in the quotations I gave at the beginning of this paper, Socrates also seems to think that this same flaw infects persuasive speech more broadly, and especially in the domain of politics. The problem seems to be, in cases where judgments of value and particularly justice are concerned, even testimony that is repeated and affirmed by great numbers of witnesses is often false.

Socratic conversations often become focused on the giving of definitions, and scholars have seen the pursuit of definitions in the texts to be such a prominent feature of so many of them as to argue that it is really this sort of knowledge—definitional knowledge—that Socrates regards as constitutive of wisdom⁶. I have recently argued that Socrates’ interest in trying to get his interlocutors to give definitions of the terms under debate should not be understood as his main philosophical aim⁷. But however this debate may come out, the texts do not show that Socrates is skeptical about all definitional claims, but only those made about ethically significant terms. Not a single instance can be found in our texts in which Socrates agrees to a proposed definition of some

⁶ See, for example, Benson (2000).

⁷ Smith (2021).

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virtue-term, for example—and not just those, but also other ethically significant terms (such as ‘friendship’ in *Lysis*). But in a couple of places, where Socrates is explaining to an interlocutor the sort of thing he is asking for them to provide, he shows that he readily accepts some definitions, only the ones he gives are of non-ethical terms, for example at *Laches* 192a9–b3 on quickness, and *Meno* 76a4–7 on shape.

It is not clear, however, whether Socrates’ willingness to accept non-ethical definitions is based on testimony, though perhaps testimony might have played some role in his acquiring the information provided in such definitions. But on another issue which directly requires understanding the meanings of words, Socrates seems to recognize a reliable role for testimony. In dialogues that concern the question of the teachability of virtue, Socrates’ interlocutors sometimes compare the teaching and learning of virtue to the teaching and learning of Greek (see *Protagoras* 327e3–a1; *Alcibiades I* 111a1). All of us learn to speak our native languages (and any subsequent languages that we may learn) through teaching that qualifies as testimony: parents and teachers tell us what words to use and explain their meanings to us, and by accepting and practicing what they tell us, we become increasingly proficient. In this way, learning language is a model of learning a skill, and so is directly pertinent to the kind of knowledge that I claim is Socrates’ primary focus. But this skill also plainly involves a great deal of factive cognitive achievement, as well. Such factive conditions, it seems plain, are achieved by the transmission of information via testimony. Accordingly, language-learning seems to provide an excellent example of the epistemology of testimony that Socrates regards as reliable and effective. He cannot, therefore, be a complete skeptic about cognitive achievement via testimony. On the other hand, although he does not at all object to the claim that language can be taught and learned in this way, he rejects the applicability of language-learning to the teaching and learning of virtue. Precisely because there are many who have great skill in Greek and can teach it to others, there is no problem with supposing that this is a skill that can be taught and learned (via testimony). But Socrates insists that there is a problem with teaching and learning virtue, since no experts in that skill can be found (*Protagoras* 319a10–320b5). And the best evidence that virtue is not taught or

learned, or at least not in the same way that language is taught and learned, is that people generally don't disagree about which words refer to which objects or other facts about proper Greek language-use. But people very much disagree about 'just and unjust people and actions' (*Alcibiades* I. 111e11-112a3), which proves that those who disagree do not share knowledge about the subject (*Alcibiades* I. 111b6-8, 112c8-d3). Those who can teach something must first know it themselves (*Alcibiades* I. 111a11-b2), and people who share knowledge about something won't disagree about what they know (*Alcibiades* I. 111b3-5).

So testimony, to be reliable, must have its basis in expertise in the subject matter. Given that Socrates finds no significant expertise in ethical matters, he is skeptical of testimony related to ethical evaluation. On the other hand, as I had noted earlier, Socrates shows a significant willingness to accept the testimony of those who have demonstrable expertise in some subject-area, and the clearest example of this would be when experts in crafts give testimony about their crafts. This same openness to testimony appears when Socrates talks about factive claims in regard to speaking Greek. Those who have demonstrable expertise in speaking Greek may give testimony about the meanings of Greek words and such that Socrates would find reliable and useful.

The principle that Socrates seems to follow, then, is one that puts heavy emphasis, when it comes to factive testimony, on whether or not the one giving it has the kind of expertise that assures the reliability of the testimony. I consider subsequently just what this principle tells us about where Socrates would fit into contemporary debates about testimony, but before I do that, two further points are worth making.

The first of these concerns the relative ubiquity and undemandingness of the achievements that Socrates' basic principle about the primacy of expertise requires. To give just a sense of just how easy it is to have at least some skill that would convey to the one who had it relative trustworthiness as a giver of testimony, consider the discussion between Socrates and Callicles about the kind of skill necessary to preserve one's life, in the *Gorgias*.

Socrates: Well, my excellent fellow, do you think that expertise (*epistēmē*) in swimming is a grand thing?

Callicles: No, by Zeus, I don't.

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Socrates: But it certainly does save people from death whenever they fall into a situation that requires this expertise. (*Gorgias* 511c4-9)

That swimming—at a level of expertise that only requires being able to avoid drowning—counts as the kind of knowledge that would make one a credible expert, allows us to see just how widely available Socrates thinks the epistemic requirement is for one to qualify to give expert testimony. In addition to swimming and language mastery, accordingly, we can confidently add any number of ordinary skills whose possessors can and should be trusted when they talk about what they know.

Expertise might be ubiquitous, however—as Socrates seems to think that it is—but not shared by everyone, and it could still be that Socrates would hold that those who lack a given expertise would not be in any position to judge the value of testimony given by someone alleged to be a credible expert. This, too, would be a significant obstacle to the transmission of factive cognition via testimony. But our texts also do not present this as a problem; non-experts can, in many cases, judge the expertise of those said to have it—even when the non-expert doing the judging does not have that expertise. For this, a different kind of expertise is needed—the knowledge by which to judge putative experts in some area—but this knowledge may be had without having the expertise under judgment.

Texts that allow this kind of judgmental ability in regard to the specific expertise of others refer both to negative indicators of expertise, and also to positive indicators. Example of negative indicators of expertise are more common in the texts, and, again, are sufficiently familiar to readers of Plato not to need much citation. One such text, to give readers a reminder of this kind of negative judgmental expertise, may be found soon after the one just quoted about the expertise of swimming. The text is especially noteworthy for my project herein, because it actually begins with doubt being expressed about testimony, which is then followed by an example of something that Socrates claims to ‘know clearly’. Socrates begins by reporting something he has heard said about Pericles.

Socrates: [...] I hear, anyhow, that Pericles made the Athenians idle and cowardly, chatterers and money-grubbers, since he was the first to institute wages for them.

Callicles: The people you hear say this are brain-damaged⁸, Socrates.

Socrates: Here, though, is something I'm not just hearing, but do know clearly, and so do you—that at first Pericles had a good reputation, and when they were worse, the Athenians never voted to convict him in any shameful deposition. But after he turned them into 'admirable and good' people, near the end of his life, they voted to convict Pericles of embezzlement and came close to condemning him to death, because they thought he was a wicked man, obviously.

Callicles: Well? Did that make Pericles a bad man?

Socrates: A man like that who cared for donkeys or horses or cattle would at least look bad if he showed these animals kicking, butting, and biting him because of their wildness, when they had been doing none of these things when he took them over. Or don't you think that a caretaker of any animal is a bad one who will show his animals to be wilder when he took them over, when they were gentler? (*Gorgias* 515e4–516b2, translation slightly modified)

In this passage we find two of the features of what Socrates thinks about the epistemology of testimony and what can be known by non-experts. Here, it is Callicles who is skeptical about value judgments reported via testimony, and note that Socrates does not simply grant the testimony he reports having heard. Instead, Socrates provides additional evidence—evidence that he claims to 'know clearly' and says Callicles also knows—for thinking that Pericles was no expert when it came to politics. Just as one who is not an expert in caring for animals can judge that such an expert would not make the animals in her care wilder and more unruly than they were before she cared for them, so, too, judges Socrates, an expert politician would not lead those governed into less, rather than greater, civility. Socrates later claims to be the only one among his contemporaries to have taken up the 'true political craft', on the ground that he alone always speaks in such a way as to aim at what is best, rather than at simply gratifying those to whom he speaks (*Gorgias* 521d6–e1). So by this measure, as

⁸ The translation given for this word in Cooper (1997) says 'have cauliflower ears'; the literal meaning of the phrase—sometimes applied to boxers—is 'broken-headed'. I see no reason to think that Callicles means to single out athletes in using the expression here, however. On the other hand, Callicles probably uses this expression to characterize the kinds of people who admire the physical culture of the Spartans and thus regard Pericles as taking Athens in the wrong direction.

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well, a non-expert can judge the expertise of a politician—at least in cases where the actual aims of the politician can be recognized.

The feature of craft-knowledge that allows non-experts to appraise the expertise of practitioners is that crafts produce specific products or results. In at least some cases—the productive crafts—the products are ones that those using them might not be able to produce themselves, but are things that many people know well how to use⁹. One does not need to be an expert shoe-maker to know when a pair of shoes chafes and doesn't fit, nor does one need to be a skilled physician to know that one's illness has continued despite treatments received. In the case of ill-fitting shoes, we might well blame the shoe-maker who made them for incompetence or sloppiness of workmanship. In the case of treatments that don't seem to be working, we may simply assume the physician is doing her best, but has not yet figured out the best treatment for the problem. So we do not always and in every instance require perfection from craftspeople: our judgments of their performances are balanced by at least some degree of understanding the limitations of expertise in a given area. But even given this contextualization of judgment, non-experts may be in quite secure positions when it comes to judging the reliability of some putative expert.

Given enough experience in the world, accordingly, a non-expert might be in a very good position to judge the reliability of testimony, according to Socrates, provided that the non-expert has sufficient experience with the products of some craft. Obviously, however, this does not apply to situations in which someone is inexperienced with the products of some craft: one who did not know how to play the flute would be in no position to judge whether some

⁹ Plato has Socrates discuss the proper use of tools by craftspeople who need such tools in the *Euthydemus* 280b7-281a6, but does not extend this discussion of expert use to non-craftspeople. The kind of example I discuss here is brought out in *Republic* X (601c11-d2), where Socrates talks about the different skills of makers of things and users of those things: 'a user of each thing has the most experience of it and he can tell a maker which of his products performs well or badly in actual use' (601d8-10). Plato goes on to give the example of an expert flautist advising a flute-maker (601d10-e2). This same distinction also appears at *Cratylus* 388c and following. By noting several instances of where this distinction appears in Plato, I am not claiming that he is making the same point in each case, or even that Plato's use of the distinction must always be interpreted in the same way.

specific flute was well or poorly made. But even in this kind of case, such a judgment could be made with justification by one who receives the testimony of an expert flautist. If I overhear James Galway praising the quality of some flute, I have excellent reason to think that the flute he has praised is, indeed, an excellent one. Nothing in what Socrates says about testimony blocks this sort of case, which shows that one need not be either an expert in the making of a certain object, nor in its use (as would be the case of me with respect to flutes), in order to judge the quality of a given object. The testimony of a recognizably reliable source will suffice at least for some level of justification.

This last case, notice, shows that testimony alone can convey information reliably and can confer justification. All that is needed for testimony to function in this way is some basis for thinking that the one giving the testimony has relevant expertise. The examples I have given above show that such relevant expertise can come in different forms. But what can one do if one has no basis for judging whether the one giving the testimony has relevant expertise?

VI. Reliable Testimony from Unreliable Witnesses

So far, I have tried to put together a picture of how Socrates would have accepted testimony as a source of information and justification, and have focused on cases in which the one giving testimony can be reliably recognized as a qualified expert. The position for which I have assembled evidence so far is by itself enough to show that Socrates was not a skeptic about testimony—at least with respect to testimony about factual issues. Requiring that the one giving testimony have the relevant expertise might seem like a very high standard, but I have also argued that Socrates readily accepted that all kinds of expertise—of the sort that would sustain reliable testimony—were available to human beings, as was the ability to discern who might be qualified to give reliable testimony on a given subject.

But now another feature of Socrates' view of testimony deserves to be recognized, one that allows non-experts to establish reliable testimony even from those who are generally unreliable sources. At the close of his discussion

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about doing and suffering injustice with Polus in the *Gorgias*, for example, he makes an important distinction:

Socrates: So you see, Polus, that when one refutation is compared with the other, there is no resemblance at all. Whereas everyone but me agrees with you, you are all I need, although you are just a party of one, for your testimony and agreement. It's you alone whom I call upon for a vote: the others, I disregard. (*Gorgias* 475e7-476a2)

The entire significance of this passage requires some interpretation, but at least on the face of it, Socrates is not simply dismissing all testimony as failing to bear evidential weight. Instead, he is contrasting a kind that does not bear weight with a kind that does. Polus had been calling in testimony of the former kind; Socrates claims to have produced testimony of the latter kind.

What is especially significant about this passage, however, is that it reveals that Socrates is actually prepared to recognize not only that there can be reliable testimony given by otherwise unreliable sources, but that even on matters of ethical import, this kind of testimony will bear evidential weight.

So first, note that the one whose testimony Socrates says he will accept in this instance is Polus, who in the rest of the discussion is obviously revealed as a most unreliable source—even with respect to what his own actual opinions are. But Socrates says here that he is willing to accept what Polus says and not disregard what he says (or how he ‘votes’ on a subject), in the way that he would disregard everyone else. Moreover, it is also plain that the topic under discussion in this passage is one of considerable ethical significance: whether it is preferable and better to suffer or to do injustice.

Socrates has also made clear in the discussion leading to this conclusion just what it is about the discussion itself that has ‘converted’ Polus from an unreliable witness to a reliable one: what Polus had said prior to elenctic examination by Socrates was as worthless as the testimony of all those Polus wanted to call as witnesses; but what Polus says in response to Socrates’ careful elenctic scrutiny proves to be worthy of Socrates’ regard. This is a most important result, because it also shows that Socrates is not, after all, a complete skeptic about testimony *even in the moral realm*. Socrates is famous for saying

that ‘the unexamined life is not worth living for human beings’ (Apology 38a5-6¹⁰). Given what he says to Polus in the passage just quoted, we can now recognize one very important reason for why he thinks this is true. In assessing the testimony of people speaking about matters of ethical significance generally, we find that Socrates regards what they say with complete epistemic disregard: he pays all of it no attention and counts it all as worthless. But, as he shows here with Polus, what someone might say when under examination of the right kind will not be worthless, but will be worth even Socrates’ attention.

Scholars have debated whether Socrates’ questioning should be seen as generating positive outcomes—that is, conclusions Socrates and his interlocutors (and perhaps also Plato’s readers) would be justified in believing—or whether all it produces would be demonstrations of ignorance and *aporia* (perplexity)¹¹. While this is not the place to try to resolve this famous debate, it is worth noticing that the conversion of Polus from an unreliable to a reliable witness certainly qualifies as constructive progress, and not just in terms of Polus as an epistemic agent, but also in terms of what he testifies under examination: Socrates indicates that he can now rely on Polus and also trust what Polus says. It is enough herein, however, simply to note that this form of testimony, under these specific conditions, can produce reliable testimony even from otherwise unreliable sources. It is not that somehow Polus has himself become a more reliable witness generally. Rather, it is his role in the form of inquiry in which he engages with Socrates that makes this specific instance of his testimony reliable in a way that merits Socrates’ trust¹². Obviously, neither

¹⁰ Translation slightly modified, since the Greek does not specify a specific gender.

¹¹ This is the debate between so-called constructivists about the Socratic *elenchus* and anti-constructivists. For good examples of constructivist readings, see especially Vlastos (1983); Santana (2007, 2009); Brickhouse and Smith (1994); for good examples of anti-constructivist readings, see Benson (1987, 1990, 1995, 2002); Adams (1998). A comprehensive review of the entire literature on this issue may be found in Wolfsdorf (2013).

¹² I have argued elsewhere that this form of inquiry tends to bring people to a position where they find themselves agreeing to things that they would not earlier have professed to believe, and which are, indeed, as Socrates insists at 474b9-10, what *everyone* actually believes (which, I assume, Socrates thinks could be established simply by subjecting them to the same kind of inquiry). For details, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994, sections 3.2-3.3).

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this nor any other kind of testimony cannot be trusted if there is reason to suppose the one giving the testimony is being dishonest or deceptive. But when his interlocutors obey what is often called the ‘doxastic constraint’ of elenctic inquiry (Socrates’ requirement that his interlocutors only answer by giving their actual opinions)¹³, this potential problem does not arise.

VII. Socrates and Current Debates about Testimony

Current debates about the epistemology of testimony mostly focus on how or whether testimony can support knowledge—that is, how it can be that one can come to know that *p* on the basis of testimony that one has received to the effect that *p*. On the one hand, it would be difficult to overestimate just how much information each of us gains through testimony—so much so that to claim that nothing gained that way can count as knowledge seems likely to result in vastly less knowledge than we might suppose we have.

In the contemporary literature on the epistemology of testimony, two approaches have been widely discussed, and one other has seen support from at least a few theorists. The two dominant approaches may be seen as simple opposites: reductionism and anti-reductionism. Reductionist accounts do not see testimony by itself as ever providing justification (and thus cannot support knowledge); instead, beliefs that arise from testimony are justified only if there is evidence from a distinct and more reliable source (such as perception) that the testimony is reliable¹⁴. Anti-reductionist accounts take a dogmatist stance when it comes to testimony: the receipt of testimony that *p* is at least *prima facie* justification for believing that *p* is true. Only if one has some independent reason to doubt that *p* is true, or to think that the one giving the testimony is unreliable, is this justification neutralized¹⁵. In this view, testimony is no different

¹³ See, for example Benson (2002: 105).

¹⁴ Good examples of reductionist accounts of the epistemic value of testimony may be found in Adler (1994); Fricker (1994); and Lyons (1997).

¹⁵ Good examples of the anti-reductionist approach may be found in Coady (1992); Burge (1997); Foley (1994); and Audi (2002).

from any other source of information, each of which confers (at least) *prima facie* justification for belief¹⁶.

From the various passages discussed above, it seems implausible to think that Socrates would qualify as an anti-reductionist about testimony. His dismissive attitude towards what anyone—or even everyone—else might say about whether doing or suffering injustice is worse, in his discussion with Polus in the *Gorgias*, seems too strong for this approach. Socrates seems to think that a great deal of testimony has no epistemic value at all. Moreover, what he says to Crito in the passage I quoted above in section III seems to indicate that testimony by those who lack wisdom provides no reason for belief. On the other hand, it may be that Socrates' position is no more resistant to the epistemic merits of testimony than anti-reductionist accounts require, on the ground that Socrates' dismissive responses to so much testimony may be grounded in his having some independent reason for thinking that those giving the testimony are unreliable. Socrates may be understood as being more skeptical about the reliability of most people when it comes to the testimony they provide, than he is about testimony as a medium for the transfer of information. What seems critical to how his views might compare to those of anti-reductionists is whether Socrates' very negative views about the ethical wisdom of most people can comfortably fit within the otherwise dogmatist approach anti-reductionists take towards the medium of testimony itself. I am inclined to think that the medium cannot be counted as 'innocent unless proven guilty' if most examples of the medium end up being discredited by some trumping standard. But I leave it to others to consider if perhaps Socrates' views fit better with anti-reductionism than I am inclined to think they do.

Given that Socrates clearly accepts that there is some trumping standard—which, in his view, as we have seen, is the standard of expertise or craft-knowledge—we might thus be inclined to place him among reductionists with respect to testimony. Here, too, however, the fit between Socrates' view and this contemporary approach is questionable. The problem in this case is that

¹⁶ I say 'at least' in order to set aside controversies about what may be exceptions to this rule, such as (for one example) *a priori* sources.

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Socrates cannot be rightly said to think that the epistemic value of testimony can be *reduced* to the epistemic value of some other information source (in this case, putatively, that of demonstrable expertise) because of the last passage I discussed from our tests, above, where Socrates showed that he was prepared to accept testimony from a non-expert, so long as the testimony was given as a result of elenctic examination. Only if we count the practice of elenctic examination as an example of expertise would this example fit the reductionist requirement, but this approach to the Socratic *elenchus* is controversial—even if only my own testimony on the subject is brought into play!¹⁷ But even if we allow this, it seems that Socrates does not require independent confirmation of each instance of testimony in the way the reductionist approach demands. Instead, once one observes some relevant expertise (or wields it oneself), then individual items of testimony do not seem to require separate confirmation.

I have argued that there are at least two ways in which Socrates allows testimony to qualify as bearing evidential weight: one would be in cases in which the giver of testimony has relevant expertise, and the recipient also has the kind of expertise that is required to assess the expertise of the giver of the testimony. The other way in which Socrates will accept testimony is when it is offered as a response to elenctic examination (not as a premise, but as a conclusion of such examination). These two modes may be put into epistemic maxims:

M1: Testimony given by experts in their fields of expertise will justify belief by those receiving such testimony when and only when the recipient is in a position to recognize the relevant expertise of the one giving testimony.

M2: Testimony given by those who give it in response to conclusions reached as a result of elenctic examination may justify belief for those who receive¹⁸ such testimony.

¹⁷ In Brickhouse/Smith (1994: 5-8), I argued that the *elenchus* does not amount to a kind of craft. More recently, I have acknowledged that Socrates did seem to think of himself as engaging in a craft (albeit one that is incompletely realized; see Smith 2021: 21-35).

¹⁸ As I said above, those I include as such recipients may also include the ones giving the testimony, by (however reluctantly!) observing themselves giving such testimony, and others who merely observe the testimony being given without taking direct part in the elenctic examination that produces it.

If the acceptances of M1 and M2 are included in one's background system of beliefs, then individual examples of testimony can convey information in a way that will yield justified belief. This way of framing the constraints Socrates puts on testimony invites a third way to position Socrates' view in contemporary debates.

I have elsewhere argued that one way to see the important differences between the various approaches to testimony by contemporary epistemologists is through the lens of what has been called 'the problem of the criterion'¹⁹. This problem, applied to the issue of testimony, can be represented as follows:

1. Testimony can produce justified beliefs for us only if we are justified in believing that testimony is reliable.
2. We can be justified in thinking that testimony is reliable only if we have justified beliefs that derive from testimony, which provide support for this conclusion.
3. Either (i) we must have justification for thinking that testimony is reliable prior to gaining justification for the beliefs we derive from testimony, or (ii) we must have justification for the beliefs we derive from prior to gaining justification for thinking that beliefs we derive from testimony are reliable.
4. By 2, (i) cannot be the case.
5. By 1, (ii) cannot be the case.
6. Hence, testimony cannot produce justified beliefs²⁰.

Reductionists with regard to testimony reject premise 2. Anti-reductionists reject premise 1. But another approach that has been argued, for all sources of information and justification, including testimony, rejects premise 3²¹. This

¹⁹ In Smith (2019).

²⁰ Smith (2019: 161).

²¹ For examples of this general approach, see Lehrer (2000); Cohen (2002); and Evans/Smith (2012: 86-106). For examples of this approach directly applied to the epistemology of testimony, see Lehrer (2006); Evans/Smith (2012: 104); and Smith (2019).

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approach, known in the literature as holistic coherentism, rejects that the justification for accepting testimony must come either before or after one comes to possess justified individual beliefs that are based on testimony. Instead, justification is something that is possessed by a cognitive system (or sub-system)²², such that its achievement will also confer justification on one's beliefs about the reliability of an information source and also the trustworthiness of specific beliefs that derive from that source, *all at once*. Justification of some candidate for belief, to put it somewhat differently, will derive from whether or not the candidate fits into the justified cognitive system in the right sort of way²³.

If we understand Socrates' view of testimony in this way, we should suppose that Socrates would count the reception of some testimony from an expert that the recipient is able to recognize as an expert in the relevant field as something that the recipient is justified in believing. But in the same moment, the receipt of that testimony will itself reinforce one's antecedent belief in M1, so that the appropriate justificatory 'fit' for each of them is achieved reciprocally and at the same moment²⁴. Similarly, upon the acceptance of some new belief that derives

²² The condition in the parentheses here is intended to accommodate that there may be coherent sub-systems of non-coherent larger cognitive systems, such that the sub-systems may qualify as justified even if the entire system as a whole may not be. An example to use for this might be the sub-system of medical beliefs held by a well-educated physician. The physician may also have other non-medical beliefs that are unjustified. As long as these other beliefs are epistemically independent of the physician's medical beliefs, their lack of justification will not infect the sub-system of medical beliefs.

²³ Exactly how this 'right sort of way' must be construed is obviously not an appropriate topic for my project herein, but the basic idea of 'fit' here applies both to the receiving of evidential support from other beliefs within the relevant cognitive system and to the conferring of evidential support to the other beliefs already within that system. Since this notion of 'fitting' is not linear, holistic coherentism is not open to the circularity objection that is sometimes made against coherence theories of justification (for example, in Klein 1999). See Evans/Smith (2012), who actually claim that this objection against coherence theory actually does not apply to *any* of the coherence theories that have actually been proposed by epistemologists (Evans/Smith 2012: 81).

²⁴ Presumably, the belief in M1 was already justified—already a 'fit' in the relevant cognitive system (or sub-system). My claim is that with the addition of one further justified belief from testimony, this 'fit' is further secured and confirmed in the same moment as the belief that M1 serves to justify the new belief. His, according to holistic coherentists, is how justified cognitive systems work.

from an elenctic examination, Socrates' own cognitive system would recognize that accepting the new belief was justified while the support for accepting M2 would also be strengthened and confirmed within that system. Importantly, justification, in this picture, is neither a matter of inference from prior belief(s) (per reductionism), nor a default condition (per anti-reductionism), but rather a matter of coherence within an existing cognitive system (or sub-system). I said above that in order to gain justification from either of the kinds of testimony that Socrates regards as epistemically valuable, the recipient must already believe the relevant maxim (M1 or M2). This shows, accordingly, that there is thus no formal difference between when testimony from a recognized expert or from an interlocutor at the conclusion of an elenctic examination generates justification, and any other instance in which testimony achieves the right kind of 'fit' into an existing cognitive system. So while M1 and M2 are important to Socrates' view of the epistemology of testimony, they function entirely within his overall holistic coherence view of justification.

In the *Crito*, Socrates says of himself, 'I am the kind of man who listens only to the reason that on reflection seems best to me' (46b4-6). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates contrasts his own cognitive condition with what he sees in Callicles': Socrates proclaims that he believes what philosophy says, and 'what philosophy says always stays the same' (482a7-b1) whereas unless and until Callicles also follows philosophy, 'Callicles will not agree with you, Callicles, but will be dissonant with you all your life long' (482b5-6). These statements, I contend, are the kinds of things that a holistic coherentist might say about his own epistemic processing (and also that of those who do not seem to be functioning properly as epistemic agents). When presented with a new candidate for belief (in this case, 'I should allow Crito to help me escape from jail' or 'it is better to do than to suffer injustice'), the virtuous epistemic agent checks the new candidate's justificatory 'fit' against one's existing background system of beliefs. If it fits, the virtuous epistemic agent should accept it and will be justified in doing so; if it does not fit, he or she must either reject the new candidate or create a better fit in his or her background system that includes it by jettisoning one or more other beliefs that do not create as coherent a system as this one will, once adjustments to the system have been made. Obviously, what determines which of these

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responses is best will not be determined by testimony, but by the various factors that sustain the cognitive system more generally (and which might be accounted for differently in different specific theories of coherence). Given the reasons I gave earlier for thinking that Socrates' position did not seem smoothly conformable to either reductionist or anti-reductionist approaches to testimony, I submit that the best way to conceive of Socrates' position, in contemporary terms, is as an example of holistic coherentism with respect to the justification of beliefs acquired via testimony.

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Intentionality and Referentiality in Plato's Conceptual Apparatus

Abstract: The notions of intentionality and referentiality are applied to Plato's conceptual apparatus in the conviction that they can profitably shed light on some aspects of Plato's epistemology and ontology and that, conversely, their use as an exegetical tool in Plato's thought can provide some interesting insights into their nature and function. From this perspective, the Platonic notions of *dianoia* and *nous* will be considered in succession: they will be read in the light of the fundamental concept of *syngeneia* and the idea that for Plato the deep structure of reality is configured as a network of elementary ontological units (Forms and *gene*). Consequently, the notions of intentionality and referentiality will also be applied to this structure of reality. In conclusion, a comparison will be proposed between the results of these analyses and Tim Crane's use of the notions in question, and from the outcome of this comparison some implications will be drawn, by way of example, with reference to two themes of contemporary epistemology.

Keywords: Intentionality; referentiality; Plato; *dianoia*; *nous*; *syngeneia*; *logos*; mind-world relation

1. Intent

The belief at the heart of this paper is that the notions of intentionality and referentiality can profitably shed light on some aspects of Plato's epistemology and ontology¹. In order to justify this belief, I will pursue here the intent to highlight if and how these notions are applicable to Plato's conceptual apparatus.

I am also convinced that the notion of intentionality can receive from the comparison with Plato's thought cues for the clarification of its nature and its multiple aspects; but I will only provide some hints on this.

¹ I wish to thank Erminia Di Iulio: some of the considerations presented here, in particular on the contemporary side, are her suggestions. Many thanks also to Nicholas Smith and Lorenzo Giovannetti for their questions during the Seminar 'Ancient Philosophy in Dialogue'.

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This being the intent, my paper will not provide an exegesis of Platonic passages to elaborate a philological analysis; rather, I will refer to the cornerstones of Plato's epistemology and, occasionally, to passages that represent them emblematically.

This naturally implies and presupposes a specific interpretation of Plato's thought, among the many possible and debated ones; but – as is well known – this 'interpretative prejudice' can never be done without, although in this case its weight will be more evident. In other words: my intent here is not to defend my interpretation of Plato's thought over others; it is simply assumed here, with the intention of making it dialogue with contemporary conceptual tools (but, as one might easily expect, my hope is that my interpretation will come out corroborated by the following analyses).

2. A General Definition of Intentionality

The notion of intentionality is one of the thorny issues in contemporary philosophy. It has been so much debated that one could say that 'intentionality *pollachos legetai*'. In an effort to avoid, as far as possible, theoretical presuppositions, my starting point will be a general definition of intentionality. By 'general' I mean a definition so broad as to be valid for all or (more prudently) almost all theoretical perspectives on the subject. A definition, in short, that is not compromised (or not entirely compromised) with any theoretical option on the subject and is therefore merely descriptive in nature.

Hence, I will take 'intentionality', as 'the attitude of mind of being about or directed towards objects'².

² Cf. Searle's 'preliminary formulation' in the incipit of his influential volume on intentionality: 'Intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world' (1983: 1). Two clarifications on this 'general definition': 1) obviously, the notion of intentionality played an important role in 19th and 20th century philosophy (particularly in phenomenology), but the intention here is to start with a definition that is as 'innocent' as possible, i.e. one that only indicates an orientation towards something (and, indeed, Searle's formulation is only called into question because of its preliminary nature); 2) since the path that will be followed in applying the notions of intentionality and referentiality to Plato's thought goes from the mental to the ontological, the initial 'general definition' refers to an 'attitude

Indeed, 'intentionality' so broadly understood is involved in, or underlies, any cognitive act.

2.1. Aboutness vs Reference

However, even this definition is not entirely uncontroversial: at least, it requires some clarifications and distinctions. For instance, we could, or we should, distinguish between 'aboutness' and 'reference, that is between 'intentionality' as generally 'possessing a mental content' and 'intentionality' as 'referring to an external object'.

This point was clearly and efficaciously made by Tim Crane:

I take reference to be a real relation, and accordingly I distinguish between aboutness and reference. A thought can be *about* something non-existent, but such thought *fails to refer*. 'Reference' in this sense is a technical term for the relation between a word, or thought, and an existing thing. 'Aboutness' is the mere representation of some thing in words or thought, whether or not it exists. (Crane 2013: 9)³.

In other terms, we could distinguish between 'intentionality' as the aboutness of every mental or linguistic act and another kind of intentionality – referentiality – as the peculiar relation between some mental or linguistic acts and their respective objects. I will come back to this and another related point later.

3. The Hypothesis of Applicability

As anticipated, what I am about to argue is based on a 'hypothesis of applicability', according to which the notion of intentionality is applicable to the way in which Plato describes the cognitive relationship and the structure of language (in a word: *logos*).

of mind', but it will gradually be shown that, in order to remain faithful to the conceptual framework of Plato's thought, it will be necessary to abandon this reference to the mental alone.

³ This distinction is rooted in a semantic conception of intentionality; on this Crane (forthcoming).

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3.1. Plato on *Dynameis*

I believe that many passages from Plato's dialogues offer a solid basis in support of this starting hypothesis. For, in my opinion, the whole Platonic epistemology moves from the idea that knowledge is an intentional relation between the *psyche* and an object⁴.

In this regard, I will limit myself here to two emblematic passages. They are taken from the central books of the *Republic*. In fact, at the end of Book V of the *Republic* Plato outlines the conceptual framework within which the arguments of the next two books are placed: the statements in those pages have the simplicity, clarity and generality of paradigmatic theses.

At stake is the distinction between opinion and science. To address it, Plato chooses an approach that is illuminating for the purposes of this paper. The first step of the Platonic argument – its logical starting point, the one from which one must begin when interacting with an interlocutor unwilling to accept the Platonic point of view – consists in the following question: 'Does he who knows know something or nothing?' (*Resp.* 476e7; here and below, translations from the *Republic* are mine). The objective Plato wants to achieve by moving from this question is clear and widely known: the argument will conclude with the assurance of the necessary connection between *episteme* and *on*, between authentic science and what is. But what is relevant here is that in view of the pursuit of this objective, this question is rhetorical (from Plato's point of view, of course) and is only formulated so that the interlocutor explicitly agrees on a point that is considered uncontroversial. Even before knowing that *episteme* is referred to *ta onta*, indeed in order to reach such an awareness, one must recognise that 'to know' is always 'to know something'.

Being addressed or directed towards some object is, therefore, for Plato an inherent characteristic of knowing as such: every cognitive act, whatever its

⁴ I have argued in this sense, more extensively than possible here, in Aronadio (2002: 172–221).

nature and object, is understood as an intentional relation, which is ineffective unless it is completed in something, to which it is structurally oriented⁵.

Having gained consensus on this point (a consensus he took for granted), Plato takes his argument to a more general level with the introduction of the notion of *dynamis*, starting from the claim that knowledge, opinion, and perception are all *dynameis*⁶. As is well known, *dynameis* are characterized this way: 'In the case of a *dynamis*, I only look at one thing, namely what it is directed at and what it produces, and in this way I call each one a *dynamis*' (Resp. 477d1-2). Plato does not use the term 'intentionality', but it seems clear to me that the processes thus described and labelled by him under the name of *dynameis* fall perfectly within the notion of intentionality, at least in the general version assumed here. Plato's aim was to distinguish knowledge from opinion: they are different *dynameis* because they are directed at different objects and achieve different results; they are different *dynameis* because the one who knows deploys a different *dynamis* from the one deployed by the one who is opining, but this does not detract from the fact that in both cases intentional states are at stake.

3.1.1. Knowledge and Reality: 'Platonic' Intentionality

Of course, Plato considers various types of mental acts: their intentional objects can be sensible things, but mental acts that provide knowledge are understood by Plato as acts whose intentional objects are not things of such a nature. As is well known, for Plato the true object of knowledge is not the empirical world, but the deep structure of reality, which takes the shape of a

⁵ Cf. Resp. 477B7-8: 'Then opinion is directed at one thing and science at another, each according to its own distinctive *dynamis*'. *Doxa*, which is a cognitive act inferior to *episteme*, shares with it the trait of intentionality, although the term of the intentional movement is different; from an epistemological point of view, *doxa* cannot be effective because its intentional object is not an *ontos on*, i.e. a real entity, whereas *episteme* can be effective because its intentional objects are the Forms, i.e. real entities (and is effective insofar as it refers to them).

⁶ *Dynamis* can be translated into different English words (e.g. power, faculty, capacity, action): transliteration is adopted here in order to preserve the broad semantics of the term.

‘network’ of interconnected Forms (hereafter, the domain of reality) ⁷. Only Forms are intelligible (in the sense of being ‘knowable’), whereas sensible objects are not really knowable, as they are unstable aggregates.

This concept presupposes that, on Plato’s view, there is no gap between knowledge and reality (or between mind and world). On the one hand, the knowing subject is ontologically familiar with the domain of reality: the human mind (the *psyche*) is ontologically *syngenes* (i.e. of the same family, cognate, akin) to the components of reality, although it does not have knowledge at birth (Aronadio 2002 and 2005). On the other hand, only reality is capable of being known since its components are knowable in their essence⁸. In short, Plato establishes a priority of ontology over epistemology and includes cognitive relationships in the domain of reality. This implies that 1) cognitive relationships can be explained and must be justified on the basis of ontological relationships and 2) that a certain kind of intentionality must be found, first of all, in the domain of reality, as we shall see.

But let us start from the epistemological side. Recalling that in the *Line of the Republic* the segment of *episteme* is divided into two segments, representing *dianoia* and *noesis*, I will only focus on these two forms of cognitive attitude, or rather on the respective mental acts they entail. I will call the one who is capable of *noesis* ‘dialectician’. The distinctive character of the dialectician is the fact that she has full access to the object of her intentional state.

4. *Dianoia*

4.0. *Mediation as a Distinctive Character of Dianoia*

Unlike *noesis*, *dianoia* does not allow direct access to reality: some form of mediation between the knowing subject and the object must play a role in the dianoetic acts. Indeed, it can be said, with a tolerable degree of approximation,

⁷ Platonic Forms are not universals, nor hypostatized properties, although some scholars maintain that they are (for example, Ryle 1939). However, Plato is very clear about that: a Form is a *ἓν* (one) and an *ὄν* (existing entity), i.e. a singular object, provided with its own *dynamis*, as we shall see later. On this, see Giovannetti (2022: 93–112).

⁸ Cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 439–440.

that the Platonic concept of *dianoia* corresponds to the notion of ‘inferential thought’. Therefore, dianoetic acts are characterised by a lower degree of clearness (*sapheneia*) than noetic acts⁹. In a word, *dianoia* can establish an indirect relationship with the object, which involves that intentionality and referentiality assume specific features, as we are going to see.

Moreover, a distinction can be made between two kinds of dianoetic acts according to whether the intentional object is real or fictitious. They will be labelled here as ‘Dianoetic, experience-related act’ and ‘Dianoetic, imagination-related act’, respectively, and will be treated separately.

4.1. *Dianoetic, Experience-Related Act*

In a famous passage of the *Republic* we read that *dianoia* is the cognitive state that requires *hypotheseis* in order to address its intentional object: Socrates is describing the segments of the Line and is saying that in the upper segment, that of *episteme*, there are two subdivisions. Then he continues, speaking about the first subdivision:

[...] the soul, using things previously [*scil.*: in the lower segment] imitated as images, is forced to investigate from *hypotheseis*. (*Resp.* 510b4-5)

And a few lines later, about ‘those involved in geometry’:

They make use of the visible forms and conduct their arguments on them, but they do not think (*dianooumenoi*) not of these, but of the things they resemble; not of the figures which they draw, but of the square itself and the diameter itself, and so on; as for the figures that they model or draw, and that project shadows and images of themselves in the water, they use them as images, in their attempt to see the things themselves which cannot be seen otherwise than by means of *dianoia*. (*Resp.* 510d5-511a1)

⁹ The adjective *saphes* and the noun *sapheneia* recur several times in the pages of the *Republic* devoted to the Line and the Cave and express the degree of fullness and effectiveness of the cognitive act. Cf. Smith (1996); Aronadio (2006).

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So, these *hypotheses* are ‘visible images’, ‘which cast shadows and images of themselves’; therefore, they are objects of experience, adopted as mediation to represent the real objects, the Forms. In this sense, and only in this sense, I will call the cognitive acts of *dianoia* ‘experience-related dianoetic acts’.

4.1.1. *Incomplete, Completable Intentionality*

Experience-related dianoetic acts are the ordinary cognitive and linguistic acts performed by a non-dialectician who relies on data of experience.

Because of the lack of direct access to real entities, a non-dialectician is unable to acquire full knowledge, and she can only work on conjectures. The intentionality of her acts is aimed at Forms but only by means of images (i.e., empirical things) of the fundamental real objects (i.e., the Forms)¹⁰. Since they are based on these images, the experience-related dianoetic acts are oriented towards their intentional object, but do not reach completion in grasping it. Although the non-dialectician strives to relate to a component of the domain of reality, she cannot know it in all its determinateness, because she is forced to turn her gaze to the images. Therefore, the intentional object of an experience-related dianoetic act remains ultimately undetermined or not fully determined: it is an undetermined or not fully determined *ti* (a ‘something’) rather than an *ontos os* (a real entity, a Form). In this sense the intentionality of the experience-related dianoetic acts can be labelled as ‘incomplete intentionality’¹¹.

Nonetheless, it is not impossible that experience-related dianoetic acts are a good starting point for the subject to come to full knowledge. Nor is it impossible for the dianoetic image of the object to bear an overall similarity to

¹⁰ Emblematic are, for example, the passages of Plato’s *Meno*, 98b1-5, where dianoetic thinking is described as an *eikazein*, which means at the same time ‘portray’, ‘represent by an image or a likeness’, and ‘form a conjecture’. On this verb, see Picciafuochi (2022).

¹¹ Some scholars (recently Thomas 2008) interpret Plato’s claim that ‘*logos* necessarily [...] is *logos* of something (*tinis*)’ (*Soph.* 262e6-7; cf. also *Resp.* 476d-477b and *Parm.* 132b-c) in a strongly referential way. I argue, instead, that in order to justify the epistemological difference between representation (*dianoia*) and presentational thought (*noesis*) from a Platonic point of view, it is necessary to interpret the indefinite pronoun *ti* as referring to an undetermined or not fully determined ‘something’ and differentiate intentionality from referentiality (on this cf. Aronadio, 2018 and 2021).

the real object, so that it can work as the right path to the acquisition of the noetic 'contact' with the object. In this sense, the incomplete intentionality of the experience-related dianoetic acts is capable of being completed.

4.1.2. Opaque Referentiality

However, since the *dianoia* has no direct access to the object towards which it is intended, the experience-related dianoetic acts lack the transparent referentiality which is proper to *noesis*. Their actualisation is rather (and at best) the indication of certain qualities of the Forms or the formulation of descriptions of them, or, in summary and with a modern word, representations. Their actualisation can be labelled as 'opaque referentiality', as it lacks full knowledge of the intended object and is based on an indirect and tentative representation of it¹². To the one who represents it appears as a plausible referentiality because the data of experience are not considered in their empirical character, but are used as mediating elements for the understanding of the real intentional object (i.e. the Form); and yet, precisely because of the use of mediating elements, the one who represents cannot have any certainty about the effectiveness of his act in grasping the object. Only the dialectician can assess this, as we shall see.

¹² A use of the opposition 'transparent/opaque' can be found in Le Morvan (2005). The use of this pair of terms, here and hereafter, presents similarities and differences to that of Le Morvan: the similarity consists in the fact that transparency and opacity concern, respectively, the occurrence and non-occurrence of an actual relation of the knowing subject to the intended object; the dissimilarity rests on the fact that for Le Morvan the distinction between transparent and opaque descends from the difference between 'objectual knowledge' and 'factive knowledge', whereas in Plato's perspective there can be no such difference; in fact, given the aforementioned priority of ontology over epistemology, from Plato's perspective authentic knowledge has Forms as its object and knowing Forms implies knowing the relations they have with something other than themselves (in Le Morvan's terms, objectual knowledge implies factive knowledge, and knowledge that is not objectual is not authentic knowledge). This in turn implies that it cannot be the case that intentionality is both existentially transparent and referentially opaque: this is, moreover, why in the context of Platonic thought it does not make sense to include the third element of Le Morvan's triad, namely 'translucent intentionality'. More pertinent is the use of the 'transparent/opaque' pair in Ray's article (1980), on which, *infra*, footnote 25.

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4.2. *Dianoetic, Imagination-Related Act*

Although Plato did not thematise the issue of fictitious entities, it is legitimate to ask how a mental act directed towards a fictitious object fits into the conceptual framework outlined so far (all the more so since Plato frequently adopts fictitious characters or mythological figures in his dialogues)¹³.

Dianoetic acts oriented towards this type of objects are labelled here as ‘imagination-related acts’, to emphasize the pivotal role played by mental images in this case, and without any reference to something like a ‘faculty of imagination’.

Dianoia works here as in the case of the experience-related acts, the only difference being that imagination-related acts are not directed towards any empirical thing. The intended object does not exist (or is supposed to not exist)¹⁴.

4.2.1. *Incomplete, Incompletable Intentionality*

Therefore, besides being incomplete, as in the case of experience-related acts, the intentionality of imagination-related dianoetic acts is incapable of being completed: their indirect relation to their object is accompanied by the absence of any presumption of the possibility of a direct relation to this object, since the latter is not experience-related and/or is considered implausible.

¹³ Many scholars hinted at this issue, although it was not an explicit Platonic concern: cf. Thomas (2008), Centrone (2008: lx–lxviii). Prudently, Crivelli (2012: 8) states that it is unclear what position Plato would have taken on the issue of fictitious entities since he never takes an explicit position on the matter; but this prudent consideration is already indicative of the fact that it is not illegitimate to pose the question addressed here, if not from a historical perspective, at least from a theoretical one.

¹⁴ This clarification is not superfluous: for example, the mental act of an inhabitant of the northern hemisphere in the 15th century representing a black swan was an imagination-related act even though black swans already existed in the southern hemisphere.

4.2.2. Transparent Non-Referentiality

Accordingly, the actualisation of these acts differs from that of the experience-related acts. Although incomplete, the intentionality of the experience-related acts is such that it can be completed once a noetic vision gains direct relation to the previously only represented object. In this sense these mental acts are characterised by a possible, albeit opaque, referentiality. On the contrary, as imagination-related acts by definition have no referent, their referentiality must be qualified as ‘impossible’.

However, precisely because of this impossibility, the lack of any possible referentiality is transparent for the subject performing these acts: she is aware of the fictitious character of the object.

5. Noesis

As well known, in the aforementioned page of the *Republic* the *nous* is described as capable of going beyond the *hypotheseis* and grasping Forms directly. Whatever ‘grasping’ exactly means in this context, it is clear that only *nous* guarantees that a cognitive act gives rise to a true and full *episteme* (cf. *Resp.* VI 510b–511d). This is characterized by an apprehension of the object to be known that takes place without any filter¹⁵.

¹⁵ The epistemological characteristics of *nous* are highly debated. One thing, however, is indisputable: that in the image of the Line and in the allegory of the Cave Plato is very clear in positing a discontinuity between *dianoia* and *nous* and in making the noetic activity the culmination of the cognitive ascent that allows the intelligible entities to be directly grasped. As is well known, in Plato’s view one of the most qualifying features of *episteme* is infallibility: this characterisation finds its justification precisely in the absence of any mediation between the knowing subject and the known object.

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5.1. *Complete Intentionality*

It is worth recalling a couple of passages (among others) where Plato clarifies that the condition of knowledge is the ‘natural familiarity’ (the *syngeneia*) of human mind with the deep structure of reality.

For since all nature is of the same kin (*syngenes*) and the soul has learned everything, there is no reason why someone who has recollected only one thing – which is what people call ‘learning’ – should not discover everything else, as long as one is brave and does not give up on the search. (*Men.* 81c9-d4)

[...] it is the nature of the true lover of knowledge to strive for being; he does not dwell on the multiplicity of particulars, which are only opined as real, but he goes on his way, and he does become discouraged or give up his love until he grasps the true nature of each thing through that part of his soul to whom it suits to attain such a reality, namely the part cognate (*syngenes*) to it. (*Resp.* 490a8-b4)

The knowing subject is cognate, *syngenes*, to the domain of reality: although the human mind (the *psyche*) does not have knowledge at birth, nevertheless – Plato claims – it is *syngenes* to the components of reality.

The noetic act is the full expression of this condition of human *psyche*. Thanks to the *syngeneia*, the intentionality of the noetic acts can be labelled as ‘complete’, in the sense that it reaches completion in grasping its objects (Smith 1996; Fronterotta 2006).

5.2. *Necessary and Transparent Referentiality*

Therefore, the noetic act has full effectiveness. Its intentionality gives rise to referentiality: the noetically knowing subject refers directly to a component of the domain of reality. But for a full understanding of the noetic referentiality we must turn towards the ontological side of Plato’s perspective.

5.3. *Syngeneia as the ontological condition of the possibility of the noetic act by the human psyche*

Let me go back to the notion of *syngeneia*. If we do not want to transform Plato in Kant, if we do not want to pass off Plato's notion of *syngeneia* as something like a transcendental structure, we must admit that *syngeneia* is not only an epistemological condition of knowledge, but also an ontological one. In other terms, the image of family connection, on which the notion of *syngeneia* relies, means that in Plato's perspective mind and world are intimately connected: the quoted passages from the *Meno* as well as from the *Republic* show that in Plato's perspective all things are connected and the human *psyche* is – in some, admittedly not very clear way – part of this connection (at the end, this is the meaning of the myths that tell of the prenatal vision of the Forms by the soul).

6. *The Domain of Reality*

The notion of *syngeneia* makes it necessary to broaden the horizon of the present considerations to include the domain of the real. The 'kinship' between *psyche* and Forms finds, after all, a correspondence (or should it be better said: its foundation) in the relationality that characterises the elementary units of the real. This is the theme that must now be addressed.

6.1. *Being as Dynamis, i.e. Relationality as a Characteristic of the Domain of Reality*

In *Sophist* 251d-253a Plato describes the domain of reality in terms of *dynamis koinonias*, that is, mutual combination capacity.

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The reason why Plato attributes this capacity to the elementary units of the domain of reality (i.e., the Forms or the *gene*)¹⁶ lies in his conception of the *genos* of Being:

[...] a thing genuinely is if it has some capacity (*dynamis*), of whatever sort, either to act on another thing, of whatever nature, or to be acted on [...]. That is, what marks off the things that are as beings, I propose, is nothing other than *capacity* (*dynamis*) (*Soph.* 247d8–e4, transl. Rowe).

Being is *dynamis*, which implies that if something exists, it has the capacity to combine with something else. Consequently, the whole domain of reality is conceived of as a network, a huge system of selective relations: relationality is its hallmark. The nodes of this network are the Forms.

6.2. Intentionality and Effectiveness of Forms

The network metaphor helps to highlight two fundamental aspects of Platonic ontology¹⁷: first, each node of the network, i.e. each component of the domain of reality, *inasmuch as it exists as an individual entity*, has, besides its own nature (goodness, motion, rest, etc.), its own *dynamis*, which is a propensity to selectively combine with something else (a few of these nodes combine with all others). In this sense it is legitimate to consider the *dynamis* as a sort of ‘intentionality’. This intentionality is precisely the relationality that characterises the domain of reality: in other words, it is the *capacity* (*dynamis*) of each *ontos on* to be in at least some relationships with other *onta*.

Second, each component of the domain of reality, *inasmuch as it is part of the network of relationships* is *actually* connected to other Forms: and this is the

¹⁶ This is not the place to discuss the possible difference between Forms and *gene*. I personally believe that what Plato states in the *Sophist* about the five *megista gene* should be extended to all Forms, i.e. to all the elementary units that make up the domain of reality in its authentic and deep structure (where ‘deep’ means the opposite of ‘empirical’).

¹⁷ These are, in my opinion, two aspects that can be found in the background of any formulation of the notion of Form found in Plato’s dialogues, regardless of the date of their composition; however, they become clearest and most explicit precisely in the *Sophist*.

effectiveness of the *dynamis* of the components. The intentionality of the components of the deep structure of reality (i.e., the *dynamis* of Forms) is always effective, because the network of Forms as well as every Form is *aei on*, always existing, to use an expression typical of Plato. Therefore, in this case effectiveness can be labelled as ‘actuality’, to indicate that the relationships between the Forms necessarily obtain.

7. The Genos Logos

Among the entities characterised by *dynamis koinonias* Plato counts the *genos logos*: ‘logos is one of the *gene* among the things that are (*ta onta*)’ (*Sophist* 260a5–6). Here ‘*genos logos*’ is not just the name of human language and thought; primarily, it is one among the components of the domain of reality. The *genos logos* (hereafter *Logos*) is the deep structure that functions as the *paradeigma* that defines the nature of every human linguistic and cognitive act (hereafter *logos*).

7.1. Intentionality and Effectiveness of Logos

A few lines before the passage just quoted Plato states: ‘logos is born for us from the interweaving of Forms’ (*Soph.* 259e5–6). Indeed, qua *genos*, *Logos* possesses its own capacity for connection, but in this case *dynamis* is not a selective capacity: since the relationality of *Logos* is rooted in the interweaving of Forms, it extends to all components of the domain of reality. And this in turn implies that everything is speakable and/or thinkable¹⁸.

¹⁸ Plato’s thought (or, at least, the interpretation of it proposed here) differs significantly from contemporary forms of (so-called) Platonism. The Fregean conception of a Third Realm (Frege 1918) and the successive forms that the Fregean suggestion assumes (for example: Katz 1981) presuppose an ontological difference between language/thought and reality (conceived of as the physical domain). On the contrary, in the *Sophist* Plato clearly and explicitly presents an ontology based on the *koinonia* between all the components of the deep structure of reality, including *Logos* (to be understood as the paradigmatic Form of every linguistic and cognitive act).

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What has been said about each node of the network can be obviously applied to *Logos*. Inasmuch as it exists as an individual entity, *Logos* has, besides its own nature (language/thought), its own *dynamis*, which is its *capacity* (*dynamis*) be in relation with other *onta*. This propensity can be labelled as the ‘intentionality’ of *Logos*. Inasmuch as it is part of the network of relationships, *Logos* is actually connected to the other Forms. This is its effectiveness, that can be labelled as ‘actuality’, in accordance with what was said earlier about each component of the deep structure of reality. Since the own nature of *Logos* is language/thought, its being in actual relation with the *onta* is nothing other than referring to them. Therefore, the actuality of *Logos* is referentiality, a sort of ‘ontological referentiality’.

7.2. Digression: The ‘*tinós/peri tinós*’ Structure and its Instantiations ¹⁹

As with every other component of the deep structure of reality, all instantiations of *Logos* are copies of it; these instantiations are the *logoi* (discourses, or more generally mental acts, which have a linguistic form)²⁰. Therefore, the formal structure of *Logos* will be replicated, albeit with different levels of imprecision, in all *logoi*.

It is clear from pages 261c6–262e10 of the *Sophist* that every *logos* possesses three essential characteristics: a) it is related to something/someone (it is *tinós*, i.e. about something/someone, *Soph.* 262e6–7); b) it is an intertwining (*symploke*, *Soph.* 262c6) of at least one noun and one verb (*onoma* and *rhema*) which are ‘signs that show’ (*deloma*) a subject and an action or fact, respectively (*Soph.* 262a1–7); c) it possesses a quality (*poion*, *Soph.* 262e9), which is nothing other than its truth-value (as explicitly stated in *Soph.* 263b2–3). Since *logoi* are

¹⁹ The topic addressed in this section of the paper is among the most studied and debated in studies on Plato’s *Sophist*. Since its discussion here has the sole aim of showing how the use of the notions of intentionality and referentiality as interpretative tools has positive effects on Plato’s reading of linguistic phenomena, I will limit myself to describing them, without any references to the extensive critical literature, which would require much more space.

²⁰ As is well known, for Plato, thought is nothing other than internalised language: *Theaet.* 189e6–190a6, *Soph.* 263e3–9.

instantiations of *Logos*, the combination of these three essential characteristics has its foundation in the formal structure of *Logos*.

To illustrate how the aforementioned three essential characteristics are to be understood, Plato gives the example of two *logoi*: these are the famous sentences ‘Theaetetus sits’ and ‘Theaetetus flies’. With regard to them, Plato distinguishes a side of *tinós* (i.e. about something/someone) from a side of *peri tinós* (i.e. concerning something/someone): I think that in order to grasp the reason and function of this distinction, it is fruitful to interpret the side of *tinós* in terms of intentionality and the side of *peri tinós* in terms of referentiality.

In 262e6–7 it is clearly stated that if *logos* were not *tinós* it would not be at all²¹: being *tinós* is a necessary and essential characteristic of every *logos*. On the basis of what has been stated in § 7.1, such an essential characteristic is to be interpreted as the intentionality of every *logos*: actually, it is in the very being of *Logos*, i.e. in its *dynamis*, the propensity to be directed towards an object. In light of this, the indefinite pronoun *tinós* indicates the intentional object towards which the *logos* is directed: in both examples, Theaetetus²².

On the side of *peri tinós*, passage 263d1–4 clarifies what was already implicit in 262e9–263b3:

When things are said about you (*Peri de sou legomena*), then, but different things as if the same, and things that are not as if they are – that definitely seems to be the sort of combination of verbs and names (*synthesis ek rhematon gignomene kai onomaton*) that turns out really and truly to be false speech. (transl. Rowe)

Leaving aside for the moment the specific nature of falsehood, what is now relevant is that it is the *synthesis ek rhematon gignomene kai onomaton* that is called into account this time: thus, the side of *peri tinós* concerns the relation between a noun and a verb, which, as seen, are *deloma* of a subject and of an

²¹ *Soph.* 262e6–7: *logon anankaion, hotanper e, tinós einai logon, me de tinós adynaton* (‘Speech, when there is speech, must necessarily say something of something; it’s impossible for it to say something of nothing’, transl. Rowe).

²² *Soph.* 263c5–8: [‘Theaetetus flies is a *logos*’] *tinós*. [...] *Ei de ne estin sos, ouk allo ge oudenós*. (‘It [scil. the sentence ‘Theaetetus flies’] is necessarily of something. [...] But if it is not of you, it is certainly not of anybody or anything else’, transl. Rowe).

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action or fact. On the basis of what has been stated in § 7.1, such a relation can be interpreted as the (potential)²³ referentiality of every *logos*: actually, it is in the very being of *Logos*, as part of the network of reality, its being in relation with other *onta*. In light of this, the construct '*peri tinos*' concerns both the intended object and its relation to something else; more precisely, the side of *peri tinos* expresses the relationship as a whole²⁴: in the examples, the relationship between Theaetetus and sitting and the relationship between Theaetetus and flying.

Returning to the question of falsehood and, more generally, to the *poion* of *logoi*, i.e. their being true or false, consider the definition of true speech given in 263b4-5: 'And the true one [scil. the true *logos* 'Theaetetus sits'] says the things that are (*onta*), as they are, concerning you (*peri sou*)' (transl. Rowe, slightly modified). Two aspects deserve attention in this definition: on the one hand, the plural *onta* appears and, on the other hand, reference is made to the side of *peri tinos*, while that of *tinis* is not taken into account. This is explained by what has just been seen: the side of *peri tinos* involves the relationship as a whole. Moreover, it is to this complex that the compound names *symploke* and *synthesis* employed by Plato in this page of the *Sophist* refer: the real object (the referent) of the *logos* is the relation that its *symploke* of *onoma* and *rhema* is intended to describe.

The relation delineated in a *logos* has a *poion*, in the sense that it can be true when, about someone/something (*tinis*, e.g. Theaetetus), the *logos* refers to an existing relation concerning him/her/it (*peri tinos*, e.g. Theaetetus sits) or it can be false when, about someone/something (*tinis*, e.g. Theaetetus), the *logos* says things concerning him/her/it (*peri tinos*, e.g. Theaetetus flies) other than how they are.

Indirect proof of the usefulness of the notions of intentionality and referentiality as an exegetical tool for understanding the formal structure of

²³ This specification is necessary: whereas in the case of *Logos* referentiality is always actual, in the case of *logos* there may be a lack of an effective referentiality, as will be seen shortly.

²⁴ The *tinis/peri tinos* structure is often interpreted in terms of subject/predicate; here, as is easy to see, a different reading of it is proposed.

discourse/thought comes from the fact that these notions make it possible to justify two linguistic phenomena proper to the ordinary use of language, to which Plato paid attention, albeit occasionally and marginally. The first phenomenon consists in the formulation of sentences concerning fictitious entities. A situation analogous to the one considered in §§ 4.2, 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 arises here: these sentences are *logoi* with an intentionality that is, however, incomplete and incompletionable: in fact, because of the deliberately fictitious character of their object, they lack a referent and are, therefore, characterised by transparent non-referentiality; nevertheless, they are *logoi* that are perfectly intelligible to speakers. Without the distinction of intentionality from referentiality, this dual aspect of this type of *logoi* – namely their being without a referent and their communicative practicability – would not be explicable. An example of this type of sentences can be found in the *Sophist*: on pages 237b7–239a11 Plato examines sentences concerning the *medamos on*, emphasising precisely that twofold aspect, namely the fact that the *medamos on*, being something absurd, cannot be a referent and the fact that, nevertheless, sentences concerning it are formulated and comprehensible to speakers.

The other typical phenomenon of ordinary language is misunderstanding. Speaker A utters the sentence P referring to x, but receiver B hears P and understands it as if it refers to y. In this case too, it seems to me that the key of interpretation proposed here comes to the rescue: if every *logos* had not only intentionality but also referentiality, then misunderstanding would not be possible (because B, hearing P, could not fail to understand it as referring to x); on the other hand, the sentence P is not mere noise, but is a well-formed *logos* (as such it is received by B, even if he misunderstands its meaning). One way to make these two data compatibles is to differentiate the capacity of a *logos* to address something (its intentionality, which both A and B recognise as characteristic of P) from its actual referentiality (which, since the *logos* in question is evidently the result of a dianoetic act – at least for B –, takes the form of an opaque referentiality)²⁵. Analogous to the case of misunderstanding is the

²⁵ More generally, the interpretation proposed here of the *tinós/peri tinós* structure is also in line with the distinction between transparent and opaque referentiality. As anticipated (*supra*, footnote

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case of a misuse of a part of a sentence, which, however, does not endanger the communication: the misunderstanding case concerns an erroneous perception of the speaker's intentions by the receiver; the misuse case, on the contrary, concerns a correct understanding of the speaker's intentions by the receiver despite the error contained in the speaker's message. An example of the latter type of sentences can be found in the *Cratylus*: in 434e6-8 the character Socrates envisages a situation in which one person greets another using an incorrect name, but it is clear that the receiver understands that he/she has been greeted by the speaker despite the misuse his/her name.

Up to this point, following Plato's examples, we have considered language as practised by humans or, so to say, the empirical use of language. But, of course, such use finds its possibility and justification on the ontological level of Forms: as mentioned, *logoi* are instantiations of *Logos*. Consider now how the formal structure of language/thought is configured at the level of *Logos*. As has already been argued, *Logos* has overall relationality, since it is related to all the nodes in the network (including Not-Being), and overall referentiality, since, as *genos*, it has actuality. This corresponds to a fundamental theoretical

12), this pair of adjectives is used here in a manner similar to that of Ray (1980), who, roughly speaking, reformulates Donnellan's (1966) distinction between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions in terms of transparent and opaque reference; thus, unlike Donnellan, Ray argues that reference occurs even in the cases of attributive uses of definite descriptions. He argues that one refers to something transparently if one's sentence respects two rules: the identifiability of the subject it refers to within the context in which it is formulated and the fact that the connection between that subject and what the sentence attributes to it occurs. If either of these two conditions is not met, the sentence has opaque referentiality. This distinction between opaque and transparent referentiality applies well to Platonic thought, as we have seen, and – it is now possible to add – is well suited to the *tinós/peri tinós* structure of *logos*. Let us consider the assertion 'The square is divisible into two isosceles triangles': this is clearly a case of *logos tinós* (about the square, or, more Platonically, about the Form of the square) *peri tinós* (the relationship between the square and the isosceles triangle). If it is formulated by an expert in geometry (*dianoetic act*) it is referentially opaque, since, according to Ray's perspective, the expert cannot be certain either that the copies of the square he uses are actually congruent with the square itself or that the square itself is divisible into two isosceles triangles. If, on the other hand, the assertion is made by a dialectician, then the referentiality is transparent, because both requirements are fulfilled, since the dialectician has direct insight into the square itself and its relations to something else.

requirement of Plato's thought: the distinguishability of truth from falsehood (i.e., of the dialectician's *logoi* from those of the sophist) requires an ontological justification of falsehood, which presupposes that a false sentence has referentiality. Indeed in the *Sophist*, Plato argues that both true and false *logoi* are referential: the former refers to a relation that is among those included in the *dynamis* of the *tinis* (the relation between Theaetetus and sitting [let us disregard the contingency of this *logos* here]); the latter refers to a relation that is not among them, and thus to a 'triangulation' that passes through the *genos* of *heteron* or Not-Being (the 'triangular' relation Theaetetus – *heteron* – flying)²⁶.

To sum up, since *Logos* is the *genos* that serves as a paradigm for all linguistic and thought acts, it is: a) *tinis*, in the sense that it has as its peculiar *dynamis* the propensity to refer to the other nodes of the network of reality; b) a *symploke* or a *synthesis ek rhematon kai onomaton*, in the sense that it refers to the relations between the other nodes of the network of reality (the relations called into question by the side of *peri tinis*); c) such that it has two opposite qualities (true/false, i.e. the aspect of the *poion*), in the sense that it refers both to relations included in the *dynamis* of the *tinis* and to relations not included, which call into question the *heteron*. This formal ontological structure of *Logos* is what, from Plato's perspective, makes it possible to explain how and why 'Theaetetus flies' is a false sentence: at the ontological level of *Logos*, the necessary completion of intentionality in referentiality guarantees the possibility of falsehood; at the ontological level of the *logoi*, the difference between intentionality and referentiality guarantees the distinguishability of true from false judgements.

7.3. *Logos as Paradeigma of Acts of Knowledge*

Let me go back to *noesis*. We have just seen that each component of the deep structure of reality is characterised by its own intentionality and by the

²⁶ Cf. *Soph.* 263b7: 'The false [*logos* says] things different from things that are (*hetera ton onton*)': as is well known, the entire Platonic justification of false speech hinges on the rejection of the *medamos on* and the conception of the Not-Being as different.

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effectiveness of this intentionality, that is the actualisation of the relations in which each of them is involved. But, as said, the noetic act is the expression of the ‘natural familiarity’ (*syngeneia*) of human mind with the deep structure of reality. Therefore, we can now understand why it is not by chance that noetic intentionality is a complete intentionality and resembles the intentionality of the nodes of the mentioned network: when performing a noetic act, the human *psyche* is, in a way, part of that network. Thanks to this, the noetic act has full effectiveness, precisely because its intentionality reaches completion in grasping its object (Smith 1996; Fronterotta 2006), as already said. This is the reason why the dialectician acquires not only full knowledge of the intentional object, but also the certainty about the effectiveness of her cognitive act: the noetically knowing subject²⁷ refers directly and infallibly to a component of the domain of reality, which in turn implies that noetic referentiality is not opaque, like that of *dianoia*, but is necessary and transparent.

The model and the ontological basis of the relationality of knowledge is the relationality of the domain of reality. It is possible to invert perspective and say that knowable entities are necessarily related to the *psyche*: Forms are intelligible in their essence.

To sum up, referentiality is a necessary feature of the noetic act. Moreover, transparency is a further essential quality of any noetic act in so far as it is characterized by *sapheneia*²⁸ (i.e. the absolute clearness with which the object manifests) because of the ‘anhypothetic’ character of *noesis* (Resp. 511b3–c2) or, in other terms, because of the directness of noetic acts.

²⁷ For the purposes of this theoretical reformulation of certain aspects of Platonic epistemology and its ontological background, it is not relevant to settle the question of whether the noetically knowing subject is only the disembodied *psyche* or can also be the embodied *psyche* of a human being. The aim here is merely to provide, on the basis of the ‘hypothesis of applicability’, an account of the nature of cognitive processes and their finding justification in the ontological articulation of the domain of reality.

²⁸ Cf. *supra*, footnote 9.

8. *Plato in Dialogue*

8.1. *Plato's Epistemology and Ontology through the Lens of Intentionality and Referentiality*

The following table summarises what has been said so far:

	Intentionality	Effectiveness
The network of Forms	(Selective) Relationality	Actual relations between Forms
Logos	Overall relationality	Overall referentiality
Noesis	Complete intentionality	Necessary and transparent referentiality
Experience-related dianoetic act	Incomplete, completable intentionality	Opaque referentiality
Imagination-related dianoetic act	Incomplete, incompletable intentionality	Impossible and transparent referentiality

The order of exposition followed so far has been reversed in this table: the ontological aspect, which has founding value, has been given priority over the epistemological aspect, which, Platonically, ranks lower.

This different order makes it clearer the reason why, in my opinion, looking at Plato's conceptual framework through the lens of intentionality helps to clarify the peculiar interrelationship between ontology and epistemology in Plato's thought. The notions of intentionality and effectiveness (or referentiality) are a successful way-in to understand Plato's view of the structure of both reality and knowledge, and, consequently, to understand a thought that is an onto-epistemology. In particular, the difference between intentionality and referentiality allows the primacy of ontology to be illuminated, insofar as it is

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the relationality of Forms that makes knowledge possible and, by virtue of this, that justifies noetic knowledge as well as all other kinds of cognitive acts²⁹.

Moreover, making use of the notions of intentionality and referentiality, focusing on their difference, opens a perspective to understand the role Plato assigns to *logos*, both in its ontological nature (that is the *Logos*) and in its instantiation in human thought and language. As already noted, the adoption of this perspective is essential in order to understand how a speech or a mental act can make sense despite being deficient in terms of reference; it is essential to understand how it is possible to speak about a non-existent thing like the *medamos on*, the absolute, 'Parmenidean' not-Being (an allusion is made here to the famous and crucial passage on the *medamos on* in the *Sophist*, on which something more in Aronadio 2018 and 2021, where it is argued that the difference between intentionality and referentiality allows to account for the possibility of falsehood in Plato's onto-epistemological thought).

8.2. *The Notions of Intentionality and Referentiality through the Lens of Plato's Epistemology and Ontology*

I believe that the dialogue between Plato and issues in contemporary philosophy may have also been fruitful in the other direction: the distinctions made to account for Plato's conceptual framework could shed light on elements of the contemporary debate. I will try to justify this statement with a couple of examples.

²⁹ An anonymous reviewer points out to me that reading the article one might get the impression that there is a homonymy in the way the notion of intentionality is used, since in the general definition, from which I start, it concerns the mind while, when Plato's ontology comes into play, it concerns the Forms. I am grateful for this observation because it helps me to clarify that one of the purposes of the paper is precisely to highlight how from Plato's point of view intentionality understood as 'attitude of mind' has its *ratio essendi* in the relationality intrinsic to the elementary units of the domain of reality. Rather than being homonymous, the notion of intentionality is here progressively subjected to a necessary enlargement to the ontological dimension; or, if one prefers, to a rooting in an ontological 'intentionality', understood as an intrinsic disposition of the elementary units to enter into a relationship with something other than itself.

8.2.1. Aboutness and Reference

As already seen, from Crane's point of view, 'aboutness' is a notion that exclusively concerns the mental domain, whereas 'reference' concerns the relation between mind and world. Along with this, we can say that, from Crane's point of view, intentionality, as the mind's attitude of being about something, belongs to the mental domain, while referentiality is a notion that concerns the connection between a mental act and its object.

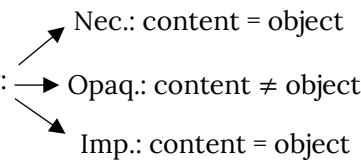
This distinction already supposes a great difference with respect to Plato's philosophical approach: because of the onto-epistemic character of Plato's thought, and because of his notion of *syngeneia*, the intentionality of any mental act with cognitive claims³⁰ is always oriented towards an existing object, whether successful or not. Therefore, within Plato's conceptual framework, intentionality and referentiality must be thought of as being in continuity, the latter being the completion of the former, as seen. The consequence of this conceptual premise was the need to distinguish between an opaque referentiality and a necessary and transparent referentiality.

If now, in addition, imagination-related dianoetic acts are also taken into account, then Platonic intentionality can be rephrased in this way: 'the intentionality of a mental act is always directed towards the presence or absence of an existing object, successful or not, or towards a non-existent object'.

Based on this premise, let me try to compare. In Crane's view, 'aboutness is the mere representation of something in words or thought, whether it exists or not', while 'reference is a technical term for the relationship between a word, or a thought, and an existing thing'. This distinction implies a distinction between 'content', or, better, 'mental content' and 'object' of a mental act. If we apply this pair of notions to Plato's view, the result is the following list:

³⁰ The restriction to mental acts with cognitive claims is necessary for the purposes of the present argument, on the one hand, to include mental acts resulting from *doxa* (since these also have cognitive, albeit unfounded, claims) and, on the other hand, to exclude imagination-related dianoetic acts, which, being oriented towards objects known as non-existent, are consciously performed without any claim to provide knowledge.

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	CRANE	PLATO
CONTENT	Aboutness: representation	Intentionality: mind oriented towards an object
OBJECT	Reference: mind- object relationship	Referentiality: <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; margin-left: 10px;">  </div>

In the case of necessary referentiality, the mental content is identical to the object, for noetic acts are at stake here, and these have real entities as their object and are always successful. In the case of impossible referentiality the mental content is, again, identical to the object, for this time imagination-related dianoetic acts are at stake, and these deliberately have fictitious entities as their object and, consequently, are always successful³¹. Only opaque referentiality implies a gap between the mental content and the object, but we have seen that it is not impossible for this gap to be bridged: in the case of dianoetic mental acts (in the sense and role Plato attributes to the *dianoia* in the image of the Line) their intentionality is indeed incomplete, but completable.

What does this comparison imply? In Plato's conceptual framework the possibility of referentiality is presupposed because it is ontologically grounded: it is based on the primacy of ontological relationality and on the *syngeneia*. Consequently, Plato's problem is how to restore the natural identity of object and content. On the contrary, in Crane's conceptual framework it is precisely the possibility of referentiality that is the problem, since object and content are different aspects of the mental act. In other words, for Crane aboutness is unproblematic, whereas reference is; for Plato reference is unproblematic,

³¹ It is not possible to open up here the question of the truth value of mental acts having as their object a fictitious entity: it is clear that 'Pegasus is winged' and 'Pegasus is not winged' are sentences that must be treated differently, but it is beyond the scope of the present considerations to examine this aspect.

whereas the aboutness of human acts may not be successful and this raises problems.

8.2.2. *Singularism and Descriptivism: Possible Compatibility?*

Just a few words on the second example. Another important distinction is often addressed in contemporary debate: the opposition between singularism and descriptivism. Roughly speaking, singularists maintain that we refer to an object directly, by entertaining singular thoughts. What is established by singular thoughts is a direct relationship between the object of thought and the thinking mind, which rests on relations of 'acquaintance'. Differently, descriptivists claim that we refer to objects only indirectly, by means of a description: the object is taken as a properties-bearer.

Perhaps what has been said about necessary referentiality in Plato's conception allows a glimpse of a terrain on which these two opposing theses can be shown to be compatible. Noesis is surely acquaintance, but it makes also possible to have knowledge of both its objects and the relations with other objects, by virtue of the fact that, as already mentioned, the very identity of the object incorporates its own *dynamis*, in the sense that it is already determined with which other entities that object enters into relation and with which it does not. From a contemporary point of view this implies that acquaintance can be descriptive while being a singular thought. In other terms, Plato's perspective can suggest a way to consider singularism and descriptivism as compatible, by conceiving of presentations which both *pick out* the object and *describe* it (or at least some features of it).

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Plato and Raz on Rule of Law

Abstract: Plato's *Statesman* offers an epistemic critique of law while at the same time defending the rule of law as an important safeguard against tyranny. The thesis of rule of law that Plato defends is qualified with the implicit proviso that the laws in question are in the interests of the population. Plato is not, however, vulnerable to the critique articulated by Joseph Raz of theorists who conflate the rule of law with the rule of good laws, or who indiscriminately credit rule of law with every virtue of a political system. While Plato would agree with Raz that robust protection against tyranny requires not just rule of law but good laws, the same can be argued for Raz's own proposal that the rule of law respects human dignity.

Keywords: Rule of Law; Plato; Raz; Tyranny; Autonomy

Abstract: *Le Politique* de Platon présente une critique épistémique de loi, tout en défendant la souveraineté de loi comme garantie importante contre la tyrannie. La doctrine de souveraineté que défend Platon est nuancée par la condition implicite que les lois en question soient dans l'intérêt des gouvernés. Platon n'est cependant pas vulnérable à la critique formulée par Joseph Raz à l'encontre des théoriciens qui confondent la souveraineté de loi et la souveraineté de bonne loi, ou qui attribuent au principe de souveraineté de loi toutes les vertus d'un système politique. Alors que Platon serait d'accord avec Raz sur le fait que toute protection efficace contre la tyrannie nécessite non seulement la souveraineté de loi mais aussi de bonne loi, il en va de même pour la propre proposition de Raz selon lequel un régime respecte la dignité humaine dans la mesure où la loi y est souveraine.

Mots clefs: Souveraineté de Loi; Platon; Raz; Tyrannie; Autonomie

Introduction

The philosophical defense of the rule of law in the European tradition is typically traced back to Aristotle, with Plato listed as a critic rather than a

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defender of the principle¹. However, Plato gives an unambiguous endorsement to rule of law in the *Laws*; and even in the *Statesman*, where he argues that in the one true constitution expert rulers will have the authority to override the law, he insists that the rule of law is many times better than the alternative, if expert rulers are not available. One might worry that, in the *Statesman*, the critique of law is so effective that it undermines the defense². However, the *Laws* presents the defense without the critique, so there is no question that Plato counts among the defenders of the rule of law.

My focus in this paper will be on the defense of rule of law offered in the *Statesman*. Once we disentangle the defense from the critique, which I undertake in §2 through §4, it may appear that Plato is vulnerable to an influential critique formulated by Joseph Raz³, even though Raz did not have Plato in mind as his target. In §5 and §6, I explore the critique and defend Plato against it. Finally, in §7, I propose that Raz's own account of the value of rule of law is not as far from Plato's as it might appear. To begin with, let us clarify what we mean by rule of law.

1. Two Principles of Rule of Law

The thesis of rule of law under discussion in the *Statesman* is a principle of constitutional design. It concerns the limits placed by law upon the exercise of political authority (*archē*— literally 'rule') and prohibits those who wield such authority (*archontes*)⁴ from issuing directives to citizens which either conflict

¹For example, Waldron (2020) traces that tradition back only to Aristotle. For simplicity of exposition, I shall sometimes attribute to Plato the views expressed by the main speaker in Plato's dialogues, e.g., Socrates in the *Republic*, the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman*, and the unnamed Athenian in the *Laws*.

²See, for example, Rowe (1995: 230–231) and (2000).

³Raz (1977). I am grateful to Meir Rosenzweig for help with this framing.

⁴Translated literally, *archontes* are 'rulers', but 'officeholders' is often the more appropriate translation. On the significance of 'office' and 'officeholders' as renderings of *archē* and *archontes* in contexts of constitutional governance, see Lane (2023: § 2).

with the law or which the law does not authorize them to make⁵. Where rule of law obtains, law is the ultimate political authority. Rule of law so construed may be characterized as *sovereignty of law*. It should be distinguished from a different but related principle, which to which we may give the label *law and order*. The latter concerns not political authorities (rulers or *archontes*), but political subjects (*archomenoi*), mandating that they comply with the laws of the polity⁶.

Two Principles of Rule of Law

- LAW & ORDER
Subjects must follow the laws of the polity.
- SOVEREIGNTY OF LAW
Political authority must be exercised within the limits of the laws.

We find both principles articulated in Plato's dialogues. In the *Protagoras*, for example, they are expressed in tandem as a piece of conventional wisdom:

T1: The city writes down the laws discovered by good lawgivers in the past and compels [people] to both rule and be ruled (*kai archein kai archesthai*) in accord with them (*kata toutous*). (*Protag.* 326d5-7)

In the *Laws*, Plato deploys the slogan of 'servitude to the laws' (*douleia tois nomois*) to express both principles. In some contexts, the slogan is a metaphor for the law-abiding behaviour of political subjects (e.g. 'we lived in willing service to the laws of the time' 698b6; cf. c1-3, 700a5; 762e4-5), described earlier as 'the

⁵ Under directives I would include both commands and permissions. Rule of law so construed does not forbid authorities to exercise their own judgment when carrying out their duties, but it does demand that any scope for discretion be authorized by law. I thank Rupert Sparling for pressing for clarity on this point.

⁶ These two principles correspond roughly to the two 'meaningful' senses of rule of law identified by Raz (1977: 212), who labels them, in reverse order, the (1) 'law and order' sense and (2) 'political and legal' sense.

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rule of law over willing subjects...' (*tēn tou nomou hekontōn archēn* - 690c3). In such cases, it stands for the principle of law and order. In other contexts, it characterizes the subordination of rulers or officeholders (*archontes*) to the laws ('[law] is master over the rulers, and the rulers are slaves of the law' 715d4-5)—in which case it captures the principle of sovereignty of law. In the *Statesman*, for example, when the Eleatic Stranger shocks his interlocutor with the suggestion that a ruler can govern correctly 'without laws' (292a5-10, 293e7-9) he frames the question as whether an expert ruler, or the laws, should 'prevail' (*ischuein*, 294a7), or whether the expert ruler should be 'more powerful than' or 'superior to' (*kreittō*, 297a5) the laws. Expressed in those terms, it is a dispute about the sovereignty of law. Henceforth when I refer to the rule of law, I shall use it in the sense of sovereignty of law.

2. Plato's Epistemic Critique of Rule of Law

When the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* discusses the merits of the rule of law, he offers first a critique and then a defense of the principle. In the critique, he argues that law, due to its generality and stability, is a poor fit for the variable and changing world to which it applies (294a10-c8). As a result, there will inevitably be cases where what the law mandates will be different from, and deliver worse governance than, what an expert would command in light of the specific particulars of the situation (295b-296a).

As a matter of practical necessity, expert rulers will typically employ written laws, since they can't issue individually tailored instructions to every citizen (295a10-b5). Still, such general rules can only imperfectly approximate the directives of an expert ruler. In distinctly Platonic language, laws are 'imitations' of that expertise (300c5; cf. *Laws* 713e6-714a2). For this reason, the Stranger argues, the best constitution—indeed the only 'true' or 'correct' constitution—will not conform to rule of law. Surely it would be ridiculous, from an epistemological standpoint, to forbid an expert in governance to make exceptions to the (epistemologically imperfect) laws (295d8-e3, 296a1-3). Or so the argument goes.

We may call this line of argument Plato's *epistemic critique of the rule of law*. It is initially presented at 294a10–c8 and 295b10–296a3, and later developed at considerable length and with evident glee (perhaps also some hyperbole) at 298a11–299e10. But paired with that critique, and immediately following on its heels (297d3–e7, 300a1–301c5), is a full-throated *endorsement* of the rule of law. While interpreters of the *Statesman* disagree about whether the endorsement is undercut or undermined by the critique⁷, the endorsement itself is stated emphatically and unequivocally.

3. Plato's Anti-Tyrannical Defense of Rule of Law

In the parts of the *Statesman* where Plato is endorsing rather than critiquing rule of law, he contrasts it not with credentialed experts making exceptions to the law, but with inexperienced and unprincipled scoundrels abusing public office for personal gain. We are invited to consider the scenario in which an official elected or appointed to execute a city's laws (300a1–4) fails to carry out that public trust:

T2: [What then] if this person disregards what is written down and—for the sake of some profit or to do a personal favour—he undertakes to do something different and contrary, even though he knows nothing: wouldn't this be an even greater evil than the previous one? (Plt. 300a4–7, trans. Rowe)⁸

'Surely we must call such a person a tyrant' the Eleatic Stranger will later say (301c3–4). Here in T2 he asserts that the scenario in which such a ruler is authorized to make exceptions to the laws would be 'an even greater evil' than

⁷ The defense of the sovereignty of law announced at 297d–e proceeds by first developing an even more elaborate version of the epistemic critique in the context of a democratic constitution with strict rule of law (298a–299e), and only then stating the reasons why allowing rulers to make exceptions to the law 'would be many times worse' (300a–301c).

⁸ Translations from the *Statesman* are from Rowe (1995), sometimes slightly adapted. All other translations are my own. Line references to the Greek text of Plato will be to the most recent Oxford Classical Text, except the *Laws* will be cited according to the Budé text of Des Places and Diès.

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the scenario in which expert rulers are bound by laws⁹. On this basis, he concludes that the rule of law, while not the *best* constitutional principle, is still a strong second-best:

T3: The second-best method of proceeding, for those who establish laws and written rules about anything whatever, is to allow neither individual nor mass ever to do anything contrary to these—anything whatsoever. (*Plt.* 300c1-3)

It is important to recognize that T3 states a constitutional principle¹⁰. The ‘individual’ and ‘mass’ invoked here (*mēte hena mēte plēthos*, 300c2-3) and a few lines later (*anēr hostisoun heis ē plēthos hotioun*, 300d4) are the rulers or office holders (*archontes*) in a monarchical and democratic constitution, respectively¹¹. So T3 forbids *rulers* to issue directives that are contrary to the laws. The principle invoked is sovereignty of law, not law and order¹².

In sum, Plato ranks the following three scenarios in the *Statesman*, urging that the second is inferior to the first, but that the third is far worse than the second:

⁹ The Eleatic Stranger asserts this claim at 300a-b, but does not there defend it. I take it that his subsequent argument that rule-of-law constitutions are better imitations than their non-rule-of-law counterparts (300c-301c) and his further reflections on legislative practice (301c-302a) are intended to support the claim at 300a-b.

¹⁰ When elaborated at 300c4-301a4, the context of T3 explicitly concerns which constitution best imitates the ‘true constitution of one man ruling with expertise’ (300e12-301a1).

¹¹ In the classification of constitutions by number of rulers (*archontes*): one, few, or many (292a6-7; cf. 293a3, 297c1-), democracy is rule by the *plēthos* (291d7-8, 300e8; cf. 292a1, 297b7) or by the *polloi* (292a7).

¹² Similarly for the earlier statement ‘that no one in the city should dare to do anything contrary to the laws, and that the person who dares to do so should be punished by death and all the worst punishments’ (297e1-3) as the second-best scenario (e4). It is not a mandate of the death penalty as a one-size-fits all penalty for all law-breaking, but a statement that *archontes* seeking to rule in disregard of the law are to be given the ultimate penalty.

Three Constitutional Scenarios

1. BEST *Epistocracy:*
Expert rulers who employ laws, but can issue directives contrary to the laws.
2. SECOND BEST *Rule of law:*
Rulers who cannot issue directives contrary to the laws.
3. WORST *Tyranny:*
Inexpert and corrupt rulers who can issue directives contrary to the laws.

How well does this ranking serve as a defense of the rule of law? One might object that Plato fails to consider the possibility that the ruling experts might be scoundrels (a less attractive version of the first scenario) or that inexperienced officials might be nonetheless honest and civic minded (a more attractive version of the third scenario). This set of objections is not, however, fatal—if we are concerned with Plato's *defense* of rule of law, rather than his critique of it.

Plato addresses the first possibility (scoundrel experts) when he states that popular advocates of rule of law (mistakenly) consider it best, rather than second best, because they think anyone entrusted with unchecked ruling power will abuse it for corrupt ends:

T4: They have no trust that there would ever be anyone worthy of such authority, someone willing and able to rule with virtue and knowledge, correctly meting out justice and sanctity to all. Rather, they think anyone of us in such a position will invariably savage and kill and mistreat whomever they wish. (*Plt.* 301c10-d3; repeating concerns raised at 298a1-b7, and in T2)

The concern here is not with petty corruption on the part of minor officials, but with tyrannical government, a point made explicitly a few lines earlier (301c3-4). This 'popular' argument for rule of law may be analysed into two elements: a concern to avoid tyranny coupled with a pessimistic theory of

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human nature—the latter distilled two millennia later in the famous dictum of Lord Acton that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

In Plato's last dialogue, *Laws*, he endorses that pessimism about human nature, arguing that human nature is corrupted by great and unchecked power (691c5-d4, 693b2-6). However, a legislative prelude later in that work, like the present context in the *Statesman*, seems to allow at least the possibility of benevolent ruling expertise (875c3-6). That is why the Eleatic Stranger says that the popular praise for rule of law is mistaken in ranking it best rather than second-best (Plt. 297d3-e5). In any case, the possibility of scoundrel experts only counts as an objection to Plato's epistemic critique of rule of law. It poses no problem for his anti-tyrannical defense of rule of law. Indeed, it strengthens rather than undermines that defense, since it opens the route to an argument that rule of law is not just second-best, but best *tout court*.

As for the possibility that the rulers in the third-ranked scenario might be decent and public-spirited rather than corrupt, Plato also has a response. At 300c9-e2, he gives an argument for his earlier thesis that constitutions that fail to mandate rule of law are 'bad imitations' of the one true constitution specified in the first scenario (293e1-6, 297b9-c4). We may summarize his argument as follows: Rulers who make exceptions to the laws either have the expertise to make exceptions that will *improve upon the law*, or they do not. If they do, then those rulers belong the first-ranked scenario, not the third (and he has already argued for the superiority of the first). If, on the other hand, the exception-making rulers are inexpert, then they are trying to do what the expert ruler would do (improve upon the laws), but will do it badly—since they lack expertise. That is, the decent-ruler version of the third scenario lacks the epistemic advantages of the first scenario, even if it avoids the evils of the tyrannical version of the third.

We may conclude that while the three scenarios Plato ranks best, second best, and worst do not exhaust the logical possibilities, they do capture what we might call the *decision space* for defenders of rule of law. The first scenario captures the strongest reasons counting against the rule of law (the epistemic considerations), and the third scenario captures the strongest reasons in favour of it (the anti-tyrannical reasons). In another idiom, we might say that the first

highlights the (potential) epistemic costs of rule of law, while the third highlights the (potential) anti-tyrannical benefits. Rule of law, the second scenario, is defensible as long as the potential benefits of the first are *outweighed* by the potential harms introduced in the third. This is what I think Plato means when claims that the third scenario embodies a ‘an evil still greater’ than the second (300b6).

4. Rule of Law, or Rule of Good Law?

At this point an objector might raise concerns about the goodness of the laws in the three scenarios. Is it Plato’s position that the third-ranked scenario is much worse than the second *no matter how good or bad the laws are*? That is, *no matter how well or badly the laws serve the interests of those who are subject to them*? If so, his defense of rule of law would be considerably weakened. While one might still plausibly argue that a polity’s well-being is never *improved* by the introduction of tyranny, the claim that the third scenario is obviously worse than the second seems less plausible in cases where the laws in force in the second scenario are horribly exploitative of the population. Moreover, the more egregious the laws in the second scenario, the less plausible it is to assume, as the Stranger does in the argument at 300c9–e2, that an inexperienced but public-spirited ruler is unqualified to make exceptions that will be beneficial to the city.

Interpreters of Plato are divided on how strong a principle of rule of law he is defending in the *Statesman*. The issue here is not what degree of conformity to rule of the law Plato requires¹³. Rather, it is whether the principle of rule of law is intended to apply no matter what the content of the laws, or only to a restricted class of lawcodes, i.e., those that are good, or good enough¹⁴. The interpretive options range between:

¹³ Raz states that conformity to the principle of rule of law comes in degrees, and that it is possible to have too much of it: ‘maximal possible conformity [with rule of law] is on the whole undesirable (some controlled administrative discretion is better than none)’ (Raz 1977: 222).

¹⁴ The issue tends to be framed in the philosophical scholarship as the question, what is it about ‘law abiding’ constitutions that makes them good imitations of the expert constitution, as claimed at 293e3–6, 297c1–4? The traditional interpretation, e.g. Skemp/Ostwald (1957: xxiv), Brisson/Pradeau

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UNQUALIFIED Sovereignty of Law:

Political authority must be exercised in accordance with a polity's laws, no matter how good or bad the laws are.

and

QUALIFIED Sovereignty of Law:

Political authority must be exercised in accordance with a polity's laws, provided the laws are good (or good enough).

My own view is that Plato intends to defend the weaker, qualified, principle. To be sure, some statements of the principle in the *Statesman* may, in isolation, sound like statements of unqualified Sovereignty of Law (i.e. not qualified by a restriction to *good* laws). For example, when the third-ranked scenario is introduced (300a1-7) there is no caveat about the content of the laws¹⁵. But the first time rule of law is claimed to be second best (297d-e) after expert rule—the thesis for which 300a-c functions as the argument—the laws in the rule-of-law scenario are explicitly identified as ‘the written documents [i.e. laws] that the [genuine constitution] would employ’ (297d6-7). That is, they are laws that an expert ruler would formulate as the best approximations of governing expertise. And that governing expertise, we are consistently told in the *Statesman*, is an expertise of care (*epimeleia*, 265e7, 305e2-6); like the craft of medicine, to which it is regularly likened (293b1-c3, 295b10-296c3, 297e11-13, 298c3-e3), it is

(2003: 261-262), newly defended by Sørensen (2016) and Horn (2021), is that Plato has in mind laws that, even if not formulated by a political expert, are nonetheless good ones. By contrast, Rowe (1995: 227, 230-31) and (2000: 249), Lane (1998: 158), and El Murr (2014: 255) have argued that the beneficial features of the rule-of-law constitutions are purely formal. I count the latter as attributing to Plato the unqualified version of sovereignty of law, while the traditional interpretation takes Plato to be defending the qualified version.

¹⁵ Although many readers read the characterization of those laws at 300b1-4 as an endorsement: ‘established on the basis of much experiment, with some advisers or others having given advice on each subject in an attractive way, and having persuaded the majority to pass them.’ See Sørensen (2016: 88, 96), against Rowe (1995: 230).

expertise in promoting the interests of the governed (not of the ruler) (296e2–297b3)¹⁶. These passages are therefore evidence that the *Statesman* defends a qualified version of rule of law, on which the laws in question are ‘good laws’— a qualification made explicit in the description of monarchic version of a rule-of-law constitution: ‘monarchy yoked in good written rules, which we call laws’ (302e10–12).

Of course one might worry that the epistemic critique, especially as it is deployed in the hyperbolic caricature of democratic rule of law at 298a1–299e10, is incompatible with the thesis that the laws in the second scenario are good ones (or good enough to support Plato’s claim that the third scenario is a greater evil than the second). I set this interpretive controversy aside, however, in order to focus on a philosophical critique to which Plato’s defense of rule of law seems to be vulnerable, if he is in fact defending the qualified version of the principle. If that is his position, then he must take the three ranked scenarios in the *Statesman* to involve the same set of laws, or at least equally good laws. His defense of rule of law would presuppose that the laws to which political authorities are subordinate are at least a rough approximation of expert governance. His claim would be that, given such a body of law, rule of law delivers governance that is considerably better than tyrannical government. If that is Plato’s position, then he appears to be a perfect target for an influential critique articulated by Joseph Raz.

5. Raz’s Critique of the Anti-Tyrannical Defense

While the epistemological critique of rule of law in the *Statesman* is distinctively Platonic, the anti-tyrannical defense of that principle is neither

¹⁶ Political expertise is also characterized as knowledge of what is just and good and fine for the citizens (294a10–b2, 295e4–6, 296c5–7, 297a7–b1, 301d1–2). It is wisdom about what will preserve (*sōzein*) the polity (293d9, 297b2) or prevent its destruction, modelled on a shepherd’s care for their flock (275b4–7)—the shepherd as on model of the 23rd Psalm, or the Homeric figure of the *poimēn laōn*, rather than on Thrasymachus’ model of the shepherd as exploiter of the flock (*Rep.* 343b; cf. 345c–d). On ruling as a form of *epimeleia* in Plato, see Lane (2021: 210–216) and Lane (2023: 118–120, 389–397).

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original to nor distinctive of Plato. It was widespread among Greeks, especially Athenians, of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Consider, for example, the famous lines of Euripides:

T5: Nothing is more hostile to a city than a tyrant—where what is supreme (*prōtiston*) is not common laws (*nomoi koinoi*), but a single person who on his own holds power and prevails (*kratei*) over the laws. (Eur. *Suppl.* 429–32)

What Greeks of Plato's era called 'tyranny' might today be called authoritarianism (or in Raz's formulation, 'arbitrary rule'—where rule is arbitrary if it is exercised without regard to the interests of the ruled)¹⁷. Plato thus is part of a long line of theorists who defend rule of law as a safeguard against what Raz calls arbitrary rule.

In an elegant and influential criticism of that tradition, Raz has argued that rule of law is a purely formal feature of a legal system and provides only limited protection against arbitrary rule. The specific principle of rule of law on which we have focussed (sovereignty of law) corresponds roughly to what Raz calls rule of law 'in the political and legal sense'—the principle 'that government should be ruled by the law and subject to the it' and that is expressed in the slogan 'a government of laws, not men' (Raz 1977: 212). This is the principle of rule of law that Raz is concerned to elucidate in this essay¹⁸.

In Raz's precise formulation, rule of law is the principle that 'the making of any particular laws [i.e. directives by the state or its agents] should be guided by open and relatively stable general rules' (1977: 213). Such rules correspond to what Raz dubs law in the 'layman's sense'¹⁹, which is narrower than the legal

¹⁷ Arbitrary rule, as demarcated roughly by Raz (1977), would be a broader notion (including incompetent rule), but it includes what I am calling tyrannical rule.

¹⁸ 'I shall proceed on the assumption that we are concerned with....the conception of rule of law which applies to government and to law and is no mere application of the law and order conception' (Raz 1977: 212)

¹⁹ Here I am using 'laws' in what Raz (1977) calls the informal layman's sense, where laws are general and stable principles, as distinct from the particular regulations and executive or judicial decisions that execute or enforce those Laws, the latter being included along with the former in the category of law in the formal theorist's sense, according to Raz, where any *command* meeting the formal requirements of validity with a legal system counts as law.

theorist's conception of law, on which any edict meeting the formal conditions of validity in a legal system would count as law. Raz's 'open, stable and general rules' corresponds to what Plato has in mind by laws in the *Statesman*, where the generality of the laws is what exposes them to epistemological critique.

What Plato in the *Statesman* calls the *sungrammata* or *gegrammena* of a polis in T2 and T3 would count as law in this layman's sense. Applied to the Greek city states known to Plato, Raz's version of rule of law would require that any directives from the assembly, the lawcourts, and any officials (*archontes*) comply with the written laws (*sungrammata*, *gegrammena*). Thus Razian rule of law coincides with the principle of rule of law defended in the *Statesman*.

Raz allows that in a polity where the open, stable, and general laws are not themselves arbitrary—that is, if they are not indifferent to the interests of the laws' subjects—the requirement that all state authorities execute and enforce those laws without exception will protect citizens from arbitrary rule. So the rule of law does importantly *reduce the scope for arbitrary rule*, according to Raz. In Jeremy Waldron's paraphrase, it 'takes the edge off the power that is necessarily exercised over [subjects] in a political community'²⁰.

Nonetheless, Raz insists, the principle of rule of law—being a purely formal principle—places no constraints on the content of the laws [*sungrammata* for Plato], and so does nothing to prevent the laws themselves from being 'arbitrary.' Where those laws are arbitrary, Raz allows, conformity to rule of law would protect against any *additional* arbitrariness being added to the legal system by subordinate officials or organs of the state; however, adherence to the rule of law has no power to ensure that the laws themselves serve the interest of the citizenry rather than a self-interested lawgiver (or a lawgiver captured by special interests).

Raz's specific critique here is an instance of a more general critique that he levels against theorists who credit rule of law with protecting human rights, equality, freedom, and so forth— all of the 'many virtues a legal system should

²⁰ Waldron (2000: §6).

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possess' (1977: 219)²¹. As Raz notes, it is perfectly possible to enshrine into law gross abuses of human rights and to institutionalize inequality: for example laws instituting slavery, apartheid, and segregation. Thus rule of law, as a formal feature of a legal system, is compatible with systematic violation of human rights, gross inequalities, and so forth. Such over-promise for rule of law amounts to what Raz diagnoses as a failure to distinguish *rule of law* from *rule of good law*.

Raz does identify a second virtue of rule of law which he claims is independent of the content of the laws, to which we will return below. But for now, let us focus on Plato's anti-tyrannical defense of rule of law in the *Statesman*. Is he guilty of conflating *rule of law* with *rule of good law*?

6. Plato's Methodological Disagreement with Raz

One observation to make here is that Plato's concern with laws in the *Statesman* is rather different from that of Raz's in 'The Rule of Law and its Virtues'. Raz is giving an abstract analysis of rule of law with a view to distinguishing it from other valuable features of a political system. Plato, by contrast, is taking the perspective of a legislator or constitution framer, someone tasked with framing a lawcode and the structure of political authority for a polity (this is a familiar ancient model of the lawgiver, exemplified by Lycurgus in Sparta or Solon and Cleisthenes in Athens, rather than by members of a present day legislature). A lawgiver, so conceived, must face the constitutional question: are the political authorities to be bound by the laws, or shall they be given the authority to substitute their own judgment for the laws? But as lawgivers, they also are charged with framing *good laws*. A legislator's task, so conceived, is to figure out rules for conducting the affairs of the polity well. This is because, for Plato, legislation is an expression of political expertise (*Plt.* 294a6-8), which is itself, as we noted above, a discipline of care (*epimeleia*).

²¹ For a recent example, see the four principles of rule of law articulated by the World Justice Organization: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/about-us/overview/what-rule-law>.

Raz, by contrast, takes the perspective not of the legislator but of the legal theorist who conceives of law as an instrument for guiding the behaviour of citizens. If we were to take such an instrumental stance toward medicine, Plato's paradigm of a discipline of care, it would yield the conception of medical directives as instruments for directing the behaviour of patients—which would be ridiculous, because as a kind of *epimeleia* (care) medicine is in the business of issuing directives for the sake of the patient's health. From Plato's perspective, it is equally ridiculous to conceive of law (and the political expertise that it expresses) in such instrumental terms.

From the Platonic perspective—on which law is not just for guiding behaviour, but for guiding that behaviour to good ends—good law and rule of law are part of a 'package deal'. Rule of law is evaluated as an add-on to good law, and is approved as a feature of a constitution that protects law's ability to perform its function of benefitting the population. Rule of law, if observed, prevents the subversion of that function by unscrupulous rulers or office-holders. Plato therefore does not share Raz's methodological presupposition that rule of law, if it is a virtue of a political system, must be valuable in isolation from other virtues of that system.

This is not to concede that Plato is engaging in the lax thinking, rightly criticized by Raz, that uses 'rule of law' promiscuously to apply to 'all the virtues of a state' (1977: 214). 'One of the merits of the doctrine of rule of law I am defending,' states Raz, 'is that there are so many values it does not serve' (1977: 219). On the interpretation I am offering, Plato is concerned with rule of law in as precise and restricted a sense as Raz invokes, one that substantially coincides with what Raz classifies as rule of law in the political sense. Nor is Plato guilty, on this interpretation, of confusing or conflating rule of law with some other virtue of the state. From the point of view of the legislator, the value of rule of law is not independent of the goodness of the Laws.

7. Rule of Law and Respect for Human Dignity

Raz, by contrast, is interested in distinguishing rule of law from other ideals of a political system and then identifying its virtues as such. In his view, there

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are two. The first is the limited protection against arbitrary rule that we considered above—limited because of the essentially instrumental nature of law, in Raz’s view. The second and more important virtue of rule of law, for Raz, is also integral to that instrumental nature. The point of *law as such*, he argues, is to guide human behaviour²². And in order for law to succeed at this task, individual agents must know what the law requires of them. And if they know this, and the laws are open, stable, and general, individuals will be able to engage in long-term planning. Rule of law delivers this stability and predictability:

T6: [T]here are more reasons for valuing the rule of law. We value the ability to choose styles and forms of life, to fix long-term goals and effectively direct one’s life towards them. One’s ability to do so depends on the existence of stable, secure frameworks for one’s life and actions. (Raz 1977: 220)

Rule of law, Raz claims, ‘help[s] to secure’ such ‘fixed points of reference’ (1977: 220). In so doing, Raz claims, it respects human dignity:

T7: [R]ule of law is necessary if the law is to respect human dignity. Respecting human dignity entails treating humans as persons capable of planning and plotting their future. (Raz 1977: 221)

Changing the rules without notice ‘insults’ that dignity (Raz 1977: 221) and fails to respect autonomy:

T8: A legal system which does in general observe the rule of law treats people as persons at least in the sense that it attempts to guide their behaviour through affecting the circumstances of their actions. It thus presupposes that they are rational autonomous creatures and attempts to affect their actions and habits by affecting their deliberations. (Raz 1977: 222)

Raz is clearly right that predictability and stability in the ‘circumstances of [one’s] actions’ (T8) are necessary conditions of autonomous agency. Thus we might agree that rule of law provides the predictability that is a necessary condition for the exercise of autonomy by political subjects. But is it a sufficient

²² Raz (1977: 213, 214, 218, 221, 222, 225, 226).

condition for that autonomy? As Raz notes, ‘the law can violate people’s dignity in many ways’ (1977: 221). Indeed, laws that institutionalize chattel slavery effectively deprive the enslaved of their ‘ability to choose styles and forms of life, to fix long-term goals and effectively direct one’s life towards them’ (T6). The stability and predictability yielded by the statutes regulating the institutions of slavery would do nothing to mitigate the offense against human dignity committed by those statutes.

Still, one might defend Raz’s claim by distinguishing the massive offence to human dignity entailed by the institution of slavery—which puts out of reach of the enslaved all the desirable ‘styles and forms of life’—from the additional indignity that a chattel slave would suffer by being subject to capricious and unpredictable command and punishment. To the extent that an orderly and predictable condition of servitude is preferable to the capricious and unpredictable alternative, it is arguably because of the minimal scope for agency that the orderly scenario affords. (Knowing what behaviour is expected and the penalty for not performing it, one can navigate the least miserable path through the hazards and degradations that circumscribe such a life). And to the extent that there is dignity in agency, we must agree with Raz that rule of law as a purely formal feature of a system does respect that dignity.

Still that agency, and the attendant dignity, is extremely thin; it is agency one can exercise even under conditions of extreme coercion and exploitation. If a rule of law regime is to provide the laws’ subjects the broader scope of agency suggested by Raz’s formula—‘ability to choose styles and forms of life, to fix long-term goals and effectively direct one’s life towards them’ (T6)—then it must provide the conditions for the more robust (and more dignified) level of agency and self-direction involved in uncoerced behaviour. In Plato’s vocabulary, this would be a regime in which ‘law rules over willing subjects...’ (*Laws* 690c2-3, also quoted above)²³. Both Plato and Raz can agree that to achieve this more robust political ideal, a regime must have not only rule of law but good laws.

²³ While the Eleatic Stranger in *Statesman* notoriously claims that willing subjects are not a criterion of expert rule, (293a6-b1, c5-d2), the Athenian in *Laws* insists that a genuine politeia will have willing subjects (832c2-4). Trivigno (2021) proposes to reconcile the apparent tension between these two views with the proposal that willing subjects are a ‘mark’ rather than a ‘criterion’ of correct rule.

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Where does this leave the Platonic defense of rule of law and the Razian critique? Raz is right that any robust anti-tyrannical benefits from rule of law depend on the goodness of the laws in question, but this is a point on which Plato would agree. On the other hand, Plato would also be right to charge Raz with over-stating the degree of dignity and autonomy afforded by the rule of law when it is divorced from good laws. If citizens are to have the dignity compatible with being willing subjects to the law, the laws must be ones they can endorse as good.

Lane (2023: 392) proposes that *Statesman* 293a-e treats the operations of expert rule from a 'black box standpoint' that focusses on the goal of expert rule (benefit to the ruled) rather than the detail of how it will be implemented.

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Peripatetic Grounding

Abstract: Aristotelian ontology is often a source of inspiration for modern and contemporary ontologies. Recently, it has been used as a starting point by some exponents of the so-called ‘metaphysical grounding’, one of the most famous contemporary ontological theories. The aim of this article is to show that the version of Aristotelian ontology used by these philosophers is the one developed by Alexander of Aphrodisias, a famous Aristotelian who lived in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.

Keywords: Aristotle; Alexander of Aphrodisias; Beings; Ontological Dependence; Grounding

Introduction

Aristotelian ontology is often a source of inspiration for modern and contemporary ontologies. Recently, it has been used as a starting point by some exponents of the so-called ‘metaphysical grounding’, one of the most famous contemporary ontological theories¹. The aim of this article is to show that the version of Aristotelian ontology used by these philosophers is the one developed by Alexander of Aphrodisias, a famous Aristotelian who lived in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. In fact, much more than is believed (and known), modern and contemporary philosophy presents interpretations of Aristotelian thought that owe much to the elaboration and transmission of Alexander’s Aristotelianism. Alexander of Aphrodisias, a still underestimated author, exerted a great influence on the transmission of Aristotelianism, often anticipating solutions proposed by contemporary philosophers without acknowledging it.

¹ Enquiries into so-called ‘metaphysical grounding’ seek to investigate the structure of reality in terms of the concept of non-causal priority. In controversy with Quine’s position (1953), which limited the study of metaphysics to ‘what there is’, metaphysical grounding, rather than considering *what* there is, privileges *how* what there is is, investigating relationships of dependence (Schaffer 2009). For a comprehensive analysis of metaphysical grounding see Bliss/Trogdon (2014).

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The Science of Being qua Being

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* presents a relatively unified version of the so-called 'ontology'². According to this version, 'the science of being qua being' deals with primary causes and principles of all beings; now, since 'being' covers many senses, all, however, in relation to the substance (the being in a priority sense, which all the others depend on), building the theory of substance means doing the theory of the whole being and, correspondingly, looking for the principles and primary causes of beings means looking for the principles and primary causes of substances (*Metaphysics Gamma* and *Zeta*).

This has been a brief description of Aristotle's 'ontological project'. In the rest of this article, I will try to investigate two concepts that have given rise to very significant developments in contemporary ontology:

- the concept of being;
- the concept of ontological dependence.

1. The Concept of Being

Some proponents of so-called 'metaphysical grounding', such as Shaffer (2009), an eminent supporter of the grounding theory in a neo-Aristotelian key, recognise the existence not only of individual physical entities, but also of mathematical entities, fictive entities, universals, etc.³, and recognises the Aristotelian authorship of this theory⁴. This is undeniable, but I think that the

² An advocate of a strong unity of Aristotelian metaphysics is for example Reale (1994⁶); more cautious Donini (1995: 16). On the great limits of this unification see Barnes (1995: 66-69).

³ Shaffer (2009: 356-359) presents arguments that prove the existence of numbers (there are prime numbers, so there are numbers), properties (there are properties that you and I have in common, so there are properties), body parts (my body has appropriate parts (e.g., hands), so there are things with appropriate parts), fictional characters (A.C. Doyle created Sherlock Holmes).

⁴ Shaffer is an advocate of a rediscovery of an Aristotelian approach in an anti-Quinean key (see *supra*, n. 1). Indeed, Aristotle does not express himself so clearly, but it is reasonable to believe that

ontological version used by grounding theory comes directly from Alexander of Aphrodisias.

In fact, when Aristotle in *Metaphysics*'s *Gamma* 1003a33-34 states that:

Τὸ δὲ ὄν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἓν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐχ ὁμωνύμως.

The being is said in many senses, but with reference to one thing, one particular nature, not homonymously.

it is unclear how to understand the meaning of the expression τὸ ὄν, 'the being'. In particular, interpreters have disagreed on the meaning of the formula τὸ ὄν, because of the ambiguity of the verb to be⁵.

Now, to my knowledge, Alexander of Aphrodisias was the first to give an existential value to this formula, i.e. in the sense of 'all that exists'. Indeed, in Alexander's commentary on Aristotelian *Metaphysics* we can find three fundamental passages that allow us to establish with certainty that he interpreted the Aristotelian τὸ ὄν as ὑπαρξίς, to be understood in an existential sense.

The first passage is Alex., in *Metaph. Gamma*, 247, 18-20⁶:

κατὰ διάφορον δὲ ἐπίνοιαν τό τε ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐν κατηγοροῦμεν, διὰ μὲν τοῦ ὄν εἰπεῖν τι τὴν ὑπαρξιν σημαίνοντες αὐτοῦ, διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἐν τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων χωρισμὸν καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους·

he was thinking of an existential dependence of numbers and universals on particulars (see *infra*, notes 13 and 15). However, not all scholars agree with this interpretation. See *infra*, note 5.

⁵ Some scholars, especially from the Anglo-Saxon area, have adopted the 'existentialist' interpretation of 'to be' without acknowledging that it was anticipated by Alexander of Aphrodisias. Others, however, have denied that in this passage, and in *Metaphysics Gamma* in general, the sense of 'being' is so restrictive. For a recent and incisive analysis of the meaning of 'being' in *Metaphysics Gamma* and *Epsilon*, see Berti (2015: 15-24).

⁶ Ad Aristotle, *Metaph. Gamma*, 1003b22-25 εἰ δὴ τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐν ταὐτὸν καὶ μία φύσις τῷ ἀκολουθεῖν ἀλλήλοις ὥσπερ ἀρχὴ καὶ αἷτιον, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς ἐνὶ λόγῳ δηλούμενα ('Suppose it is true, then, that that which is and that which is one are the same thing—i.e. one nature—in that each follows from the other as origin and cause do, not as being indicated by one formula' trans. Kirwan).

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we predicate 'being' and 'one' according to a different concept: saying 'being', we mean its ὑπαρξίς, saying something is 'one', we mean its separation from other things and from multiplicity.

The second passage is *Alex. in Metaph. Delta*, 371, 22-26. Here Alexander comments *Metaphysics Delta*, 1017a22 following, where Aristotle says that

καθ' αὐτὰ δὲ εἶναι λέγεται ὅσαπερ σημαίνει τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας
all things which signify the figures of category are said to be in their own right⁷.

Alexander says:

τὴν γὰρ οἰκείαν ὑπαρξίν ἐκάστου σημαίνει τὸ ὄν ὁμώνυμον· εἰ δὲ δέκα αἱ κατὰ τὰ ἀνωτάτω γένη διαφοραί, δεκαχῶς καὶ τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ εἶναι ῥηθήσεται. τὸ μὲν γὰρ τῇ οὐσίᾳ συντασσόμενον εἶναι τὴν οὐσιώδη ὑπαρξίν σημαίνει, τὸ δὲ τῷ ποσῷ τὴν ὡς ποσοῦ, καὶ τῷ ποιῷ τὴν ὡς ποιοῦ, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων γενῶν ὁμοίως.

'the being, which is homonymous, means the ὑπαρξίς appropriate to each thing. But if there are ten differences according to the ten supreme genera, 'being' and 'to be' also will be said in ten ways. Indeed, 'to be' united to the substance means substantial ὑπαρξίς, 'to be' united to the quantity, the ὑπαρξίς of quantity, 'to be' united to the quality, the ὑπαρξίς of quality, and equally in the case of other genera'.

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaph. Delta*, 1017a22-30: καθ' αὐτὰ δὲ εἶναι λέγεται ὅσαπερ σημαίνει τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας· ὅσαχῶς γὰρ λέγεται, τοσαυταχῶς τὸ εἶναι σημαίνει. ἐπεὶ οὖν τῶν κατηγορουμένων τὰ μὲν τί ἐστι σημαίνει, τὰ δὲ ποιόν, τὰ δὲ ποσόν, τὰ δὲ πρὸς τι, τὰ δὲ ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν, τὰ δὲ πού, τὰ δὲ ποτέ, ἐκάστῳ τούτων τὸ εἶναι ταῦτ' σημαίνει· οὐθὲν γὰρ διαφέρει τὸ ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνειν ἔστιν ἢ τὸ ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνει, οὐδὲ τὸ ἄνθρωπος βαδίζειν ἔστιν ἢ τέμνων τοῦ ἄνθρωπος βαδίζει ἢ τέμνει, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ('All things which signify the figures of category are said to be in their own right; for 'to be' signifies in the same number of ways as they are said. Since, therefore, among things predicated some signify what a thing is, some a qualification, some a quantity, some a relative, some doing or being affected, some where, some when, 'to be' signifies the same thing as each of these. For, there is no difference between 'a man is one that keeps-healthy' and 'a man keeps-healthy' or between 'a man is one that walks, or cuts' and 'a man walks, or cuts', and equally in the other cases' trans. Kirwan, slightly modified).

It is clear that Alexander uses ὑπαρξίς in the sense of ‘existence’⁸. So, in the first passage, Alexander says that we predicate ‘being’ when we mean the existence (ὑπαρξίς) of one thing. In the second passage Alexander explains that ‘being’ means the ὑπαρξίς appropriate to each thing, according to the ten supreme genera (namely, categories).

So, when I say ‘Socrates is’, I mean the substantial existence, when I say ‘white is’, I mean the existence of a quality, and so on for each category.

There is a further passage very important for us, in which Alexander says (in *Metaph. Delta*, 371, 29-36)⁹:

[...] δεικτικὸν δὲ τοῦ τὸ ἔστιν, ᾧ ἂν συντάσσεται, ἐκείνην σημαίνει τὴν φύσιν, παρέθετο τὸ μηδὲν σημαίνει ἄλλο τὸ ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνων ἔστιν ἢ τὸ ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνει, τουτέστι τὸ ἔστιν, ὃ ἐπὶ τῇ ὑγείᾳ συντέτακται, μηδὲν ἄλλο ἢ τὴν τῆς ὑγείας ὑπαρξιν σημαίνει· ὁμοίως καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ βαδίζων τὴν τῆς βαδίσεως, καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ τέμνων τὴν τῆς τομῆς, καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων ὁμοίως. ὥς γὰρ εἶπεν ἐν τῷ Περὶ ἔρμηνείας, αὐτὸ μὲν οὐδὲν ἔστι, προσσημαίνει δὲ σύνθεσιν τινα, ἣν ἄνευ τῶν συγκειμένων οὐχ οἷόν τε εἶναι.

[...] for the purpose of showing that ‘is’ means that nature it is united to, Aristotle added that ‘a man is one that keeps-healthy’ (ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνων ἔστιν) means nothing but ‘a man keeps-healthy’ (ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνει), namely that the ‘is’ which is united with health means nothing but the existence of health (τὴν τῆς ὑγείας

⁸ See Bonelli (2001: 89-95). That Alexander uses ὑπαρξίς in an existential sense seems clear to me also from his use of ὑπόστασις, a term reserved either to controversial entities such as Platonic ideas (see for example in *Metaph.*, 83, 31-33; 92, 19; 233, 21-24), or to numbers and geometric figures (for example in *Metaph.*, 199, 19-21; 230, 19-21; 230, 34-231, 1), or to universals (for example in *Metaph.*, 234, 33-34; in *Top.*, 161, 27-30; 355, 12-16). In Bonelli *op. cit.*, 94, notes 45 and 46, I point out that ὑπαρξίς sometimes means ‘existence’ (ex. *De Anima* 90, 4; in *Metaph. Gamma*, 323, 7-10; 326, 5-9; in *Metaph. Delta*, 410, 24-25), sometimes does not, when the term is used in logical works (ex. in *Apr.*, 26, 16-18; 38, 3-5). But in these last cases we can invoke a technical usage. In the light of the passage in *Top.*, 301, 19-25 (see *infra*, 116-117), I would argue that Alexander identifies ὑπαρξίς (‘existence’) as the general meaning of ‘being’, and ὑπόστασις as the dependent mode of existence of certain beings (Platonic Ideas, numbers, universals in general). Sirkel (2011: 301-302) explains that Alexander treats universals as accidents and clearly shows (2011, p. 303) that he subordinates the existence of universals to the existence of particulars (at least more than one) that instantiate it (cf. the definition of *katholou* in *De interpretatione* 7).

⁹ Ad Aristotle, *Metaph. Delta*, 1017a22-30, see *supra*, note 7.

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ὑπαρξιν) (...) and equally for other cases as well. Indeed, as Aristotle said in *De interpretatione*, the 'is' in itself is nothing, but it means a combination that cannot exist without the components.

Alexander gives three examples in order to prove that the copula is nothing but a sign of conjunction between the subject and the predicate. The three examples are:

- 1) ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνων ἐστίν ≡ ἄνθρωπος ὑγιαίνει
'ἐστίν' means nothing but the ὑπαρξίς τῆς ὑγείας;
- 2) ἄνθρωπος βαδίζων ἐστίν ≡ ἄνθρωπος βαδίζει
'ἐστίν' means the ὑπαρξίς τῆς βαδίσεως;
- 3) ἄνθρωπος τέμνων ἐστίν ≡ ἄνθρωπος τέμνει
'ἐστίν' means the ὑπαρξίς τῆς τομῆς.

So, Alexander says that also in propositions such as 'S is P' (which is equivalent to the proposition noun *plus* verb) we have the introduction of the 'existence' (ὑπαρξίς), because 'is' is a sign of conjunction, expressing the existence of the property in the substance.

But what beings exist? Alexander in *in Topics*, 301, 19-25 claims that:

[...] πᾶν τὸ ἐν ὑπάρξει ὄν καὶ ὄν καὶ ἓν ἐστίν. οὕτω δεικνύοις ἂν ὅτι μὴ καλῶς τὸ τί οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς γένος τοῦ ὄντος τίθενται· εἰ γὰρ τί, δηλον ὅτι καὶ ὄν (...) ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι νομοθετήσαντες αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄν κατὰ σωμάτων μόνων λέγεσθαι διαφεύγοιεν ἂν τὸ ἡπορημένον· διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ τὸ τί γενικώτερον αὐτοῦ φασιν εἶναι, κατηγορούμενον οὐ κατὰ σωμάτων μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ ἀσωμάτων [...].

[...] everything that is in existence (ἐν ὑπάρξει) is being and one. So, you could prove that Stoics incorrectly place 'the something' (τὸ τί) as a genus of the being: if, in fact, <there is> something (τί), it is clear that it also exists (ὅτι καὶ ὄν) (...) But those would escape the difficulty by stipulating for themselves that 'being' is said only of bodies; because of that, in fact, they affirm that the 'something' (τὸ τί), which is predicated not only of bodies, but also of incorporeals, is more general than the being [...].

The passage is extremely interesting because Alexander, as it often happens, uses an Aristotelian thesis to reject an opposing theory, in this case, that the something ($\tau\acute{o}\ \tau\acute{\iota}$) is the supreme genus. Here, invoking the Aristotelian thesis of the reciprocal implication of the being and the one¹⁰, Alexander argues against Stoics, who place an even more general genus, ‘the something’, above the being. The objection is that, since everything that exists, exists and is one being, the ‘something’ will also exist, and there will be no place for beings that are something without existence (Galluzzo 2012: 31). Alexander, therefore, repeats the Aristotelian thesis according to which $\tau\acute{o}\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$ is the most general category of things, and criticizes the Stoics who, thanks to a stipulation, limit the existence to bodies only, inventing another category (‘the something’) that can encompass both bodies and incorporeals, such as time, space, and the like. So, Alexander applies the category of $\tau\acute{o}\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$ as ‘existence’ to bodies and incorporeals. Consequently, all things exist. But how?

2. The Concept of Ontological Dependence

In *Metaphysics Gamma* Aristotle proposes a way of considering the being in a unitary manner. In fact, in the already quoted passage 1003a33-34, Aristotle claims that ‘the being ($\tau\acute{o}\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$) is said in many senses, but with reference to one thing, one particular nature, not homonymously’. In particular, ‘being’, says Aristotle, has different meanings, one of which is primary and the others derivative or dependent.

We will analyse how the dependence between beings can be understood in ‘Peripatetic’ terms. What we can already say is that

- 1) many and disparate things are called ‘beings’ (Aristotle) in the sense of ‘existent’ (in the Alexander’s interpretation)¹¹;
- 2) they are subsumed in few categories¹².

¹⁰ On the relationship between being and one see *supra*, 113-114 and note 6.

¹¹ See *supra*, 113-116.

¹² See *supra*, Aristotle, *Metaph. Delta*, 1017a22-30 (note 7) and Alexander in *Metaph.* 371, 22-26; 29-36.

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Another important aspect to consider is that. In Aristotle, there are primary, independent, and fundamental beings and dependent beings. Fundamental beings are the individual substances, while all the others are dependent on them, including universals and mathematical entities. Indeed, in *Categories* 2b5-2b6b Aristotle says that

[...] μὴ οὐσῶν οὖν τῶν πρώτων οὐσιῶν ἀδύνατον τῶν ἄλλων τι εἶναι· πάντα γὰρ τὰ ἄλλα ἤτοι καθ' ὑποκειμένων τούτων λέγεται ἢ ἐν ὑποκειμέναις αὐταῖς ἐστίν.

[...] if the primary substances are not, it would be impossible for any of the other things to be. For, all the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or are in them as subjects.

In Aristotelian jargon, ‘primary substances’ are the individual perceptible objects, ‘things that are said of primary substances as subjects’ (i.e. that are predicated) are universals, ‘things that are in primary substances as subjects’ are the individual properties. We have seen that, in the interpretation of Alexander, ‘to be’ is to be understood in an existential sense. We will therefore speak of independent existence of primary substances and dependent existence of secondary substances and properties. Now, we have also seen that the Aristotelian position has been interpreted by some contemporary metaphysicians just as a theory according to which all things do exist¹³. Schaffer (2009), for example, interprets the Aristotelian being in an existential sense¹⁴, but it should be specified that this theory is not exactly Aristotelian but certainly attributable to Alexander. According to Schaffer, it is possible to consider as

¹³ Schaffer 2009, see *supra*, nn. 3 and 4.

¹⁴ Schaffer (2009: 352) refers to *Metaphysics* My, 1076a36-37; 1077b31-34. These passages are fundamental for the ‘realist version’ of grounding theory: the first because Aristotle states that the goal of his research is not whether mathematical entities are, but how they are (ὥσθ' ἡ ἀμφισβήτησις ἡμῖν ἔσται οὐ περὶ τοῦ εἶναι ἀλλὰ περὶ τοῦ τρόπου); the second because he establishes that mathematical objects are insofar as there are both separable and inseparable things (ὥστ' ἐπεὶ ἀπλῶς λέγειν ἀληθὲς μὴ μόνον τὰ χωριστὰ εἶναι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ μὴ χωριστὰ (...) καὶ τὰ μαθηματικὰ ὅτι ἔστιν ἀπλῶς ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, καὶ τοιαῦτά γε οἷα λέγουσιν). On the first passage see Corkum (2008: 73); on the second see Schaffer (2009: 352).

fundamental in the ‘Aristotelian’ ontology (and in that contemporary ontology inspired by Aristotelianism, which he shares) the hierarchy of beings, that is, the fundamentality or derivation of things that exist. And we have seen that, in Aristotelian metaphysics there is the thesis according to which substances, qualities, quantities, etc., ‘are’ in a different way. Aristotle and Alexander do not specify the question further, but it is sure, as we will also see later, that we can infer from their texts the distinction between the independent being (or existence, in the Alexander’s interpretation) of individual substances and the dependent being (or existence, always according to Alexander) of all the other things (universal substances, properties, relationships, qualities, etc.). This is the perspective that will be recovered and valued by some grounding theorists. Shaffer, for example, states that the task of metaphysics is to say what grounds what and the method consists in identifying precisely what is fundamental and founding¹⁵. The advantage of the Aristotelian position is that it presents a hierarchical and ordered ontology, able to focus on dependencies that arise in the world.

An extremely interesting aspect highlighted by Schaffer¹⁶ is that the great traditional disputes (many of them of Aristotelian origin) can be treated not as concerning the existence of entities but concerning their ‘fundamentality’. Issues such as metaphysical realism vs idealism, realism of universals vs nominalism, or the theory of substrate vs bundle for objects, do not question the existence for example of a rock, a number, a universal or an object and his properties. The question, if anything, will be to establish whether rocks, numbers, universals exist independently of my mind or not, or whether or not objects exist prior to their properties¹⁷.

¹⁵ According to Schaffer, the Aristotelian method consists of: ‘to deploy diagnostics for what is fundamental, together with diagnostics for grounding’ (2009: 351).

¹⁶ Schaffer (2009: 362–365).

¹⁷ See on that Schaffer (2009: 362–365); F. Correia/B. Schnieder (2012: 1) and in general all the volume they edited. It must be said, however, that the foundationalist approach (which authors such as Schaffer take up, inheriting it to some extent from Aristotelianism) is not the only one defended by grounding theorists. Indeed, some scholars deny that ground relations can or should be grounded in independent entities. See on this Bliss/Trogon (2014), paragraph 7: *Grounding the facts about what grounds what*.

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This approach, as we will see, is ascribable to Aristotle's reflections, but once again mediated by Alexander's exegesis.

2a. Peripatetic Grounding

According to the grounding theory, the 'grounding' is a primitive and intuitive notion such:

x is fundamental =df nothing grounds x

x is derived =df something grounds x¹⁸.

The notion of grounding is useful in analysing metaphysical structural concepts, like fundamental entities (characterized by priority, primarity, independence and foundation) and derived entities (characterized by posteriority, secondarity and dependence). As we have seen, in the perspective of the grounding, the task of the 'Aristotelian metaphysics' consists just in saying what grounds what, through a 'diagnostic' that identifies what is fundamental and founding¹⁹. Now, we can find in Aristotle and in Alexander many passages trying to identify basic and founding beings, (i.e., individual perceptible substances), called, not by chance, primary substances. The characteristics defining basic and founding beings are precisely the priority and the independence.

In *Metaphysics Gamma*, 1003b5-9 Aristotle claims that:

τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλὰ καὶ μὲν ἀλλ' ἅπαν πρὸς μίαν ἀρχὴν [...] τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὅτι οὐσίαι, ὄντα λέγεται, τὰ δ' ὅτι πάθη οὐσίας, τὰ δ' ὅτι ὁδὸς εἰς οὐσίαν ἢ φθοραὶ ἢ στέρησεις ἢ ποιότητες ἢ ποιητικὰ ἢ γεννητικὰ οὐσίας ἢ τῶν πρὸς τὴν οὐσίαν λεγομένων.

The being is said in many senses, but all with reference to one principle [...]. Some are called 'beings' because they are substances; some because they are affections of a substance; some because they are a route to a substance, or destructions, or lacks, or qualities, or productive, or generative of a substance or of things called [being] with reference to substance. (trans. Kirwan)

¹⁸ See on that Correia/Schnieder (2012: 10-13); Schaffer (2009: 373).

¹⁹ See *supra*, 119 and note 15.

Aristotle claims that being is said in many senses, all in reference to a single principle (ἀρχή). We know from *Metaphysics Delta* that the common character of the different meanings of ‘principle’ is what is the first (τὸ πρῶτον), from which a thing is, derives or is known²⁰. Adopting the Alexander’s position, we consider the ‘is’ in an existential sense: in this way, the principle, in the case of beings which exist, is the individual substance, which establishes (or ‘explains’)²¹ the existence or knowledge of all the other beings. If we privilege the ‘derivation’ of things which exist from the individual substance, accepting the existential sense of ὄν and εἶναι, we will affirm that the individual substance exists in the first sense, while accidents of substances (qualities, weights, actions, etc.) exist in the secondary sense, because they depend on the substance for their existence (meaning that they do not exist if the substance does not exist).

If, on the other hand, we privilege the knowledge of beings depending on the substance, we could perhaps adopt the ‘definitional’ interpretation of ὄν and εἶναι according to which, in order to know and define a being (let’s say, the white), we will have to provide a reference to the being on which it depends for its definition (e.g., the white surface)²².

In any case, the passage in *Gamma* establishes the ontological priority of individual substances and its founding role. In fact, in *Metaphysics Zeta*, Aristotelian ‘ontology’ is explained with reference to a central question: Aristotle affirms that when we ask: ‘what is being?’ (τί τὸ ὄν), in fact we ask: ‘what is

²⁰ Arist., *Metaphysics Delta*, 1013a17–19: πασῶν μὲν οὖν κοινὸν τῶν ἀρχῶν τὸ πρῶτον εἶναι ὅθεν ἢ ἔστιν ἢ γίγνεται ἢ γιγνώσκεται.

²¹ On the ‘existential explanation’ in Aristotle see Sirkel R., *Ontological Priority and Grounding in Aristotle’s Categories*, 20ss (for the exact reference and URL, see *infra*, References). See *infra*, Conclusions.

²² On this interpretation see Owen 1960.

substance?’ (τίς ἡ οὐσία)²³. This question, in Alexander’ interpretation, should be understood as: ‘what exists primarily?’²⁴.

So, individual substances ground universals: for example, the wisdom exists (or is definable) only because there are wise substances. And the same for all kinds of categories that are not substances; for example, numbers and geometric figures, since they exist (or are definable) only because there are substances which are countable or framed in geometric shapes. Indeed, the relationship will also exist (or will be definable), because there are two substances that are in a relationship: for example, paternity exists because x and y are in a father-son relationship²⁵.

In this way we can establish an asymmetry between the existence of individual substance and the existence of accidents (individual and universal) of the substance²⁶. The dependence of categories from individual substances²⁷ and the dependence of all categories from the category of the substance legitimate an ordered structure of reality in which individual substances are basic entities, which establish both the existence of other entities (universal, substantial, and non-substantial) and their relationships²⁸.

The asymmetry of the substance is still a much-debated issue today²⁹. It is normally analysed according to characteristics of priority identified by Aristotle in the *Categories* and in *Metaphysics*: the individual substance, in fact, is first

²³ Aristotele, *Metaphysics Zeta*, 1028b2-4: καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἡ οὐσία.

²⁴ The beginning of *Metaphysics Zeta* (1028a10-15), in fact, establishes 1) the multiplicity of meanings of ‘being’, corresponding to the categories, and 2) the priority of the meaning of ‘being’ relative to substance.

²⁵ On the dependence of other beings on the individual substance see Arist., *Cat.* 2b5-2b6b, *supra*, note 13.

²⁶ For a very articulate discussion of the *Asymmetry Thesis*, concerning individual substances on the one hand and non-substances and universal substances on the other (especially with reference to *Categories*), see Corkum (2008: 67-72).

²⁷ The reduction of individual substances and their accidents to categories is an ‘ontological reduction’ that is not eliminative: see Barnes (1995: 81-89).

²⁸ Schaffer (2009: 354-356).

²⁹ See for example Barnes (1995: 77-101), G. Fine (1984), Corkum (2008).

(*proton*)³⁰, substrate (*hypokeimenon*)³¹ and separable (*choriston*)³². According to Alexander, all characteristics establishing the asymmetry of the substance must be considered in terms of existence. The priority of the substance is to be understood as an existential priority³³. The same kind of priority is attributed to the substance as a *hypokeimenon*³⁴, and as a *choriston*³⁵.

An even more debated question, especially by contemporary metaphysicians³⁶, is the existential dependence of all existing beings from the individual substances. Once again, the responsible for this interpretation is Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander, commenting Aristotle's passage seen above (1003b5-9)³⁷, accepts the Aristotelian theory of being as a *πολλαχῶς λεγόμενον*, and claims that (in *Metaph.*, 242, 10-12):

[...] ὃν γὰρ λέγεται κυρίως μὲν ἡ οὐσία, λέγεται δέ γε ὄντα καὶ τὰ τῇ οὐσίᾳ συμβεβηκότα, ἃ ἔστι τὰ ἐννέα γένη.

[...] in fact 'being' in the proper sense is said the substance, but 'beings' are said accidents of substance too, namely the nine genera.

Alexander adds that here Aristotle would be using 'the first of the divisions of the being operated in the *Categories*, thanks to which he distinguishes beings

³⁰ See for example Aristotle, *Metaph.* Delta, 1019a1-4.

³¹ See Aristotle, *Cat.* 2a11-19; *Metaph.* Delta, 1017b24.

³² See Aristotle, *Metaph.* Delta, 1017b25.

³³ Alexander in *Metaph.*, 387, 8-10: τὸ κατὰ τὸ εἶναι πρῶτον καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὑπαρξίν φησιν εἶναι τὸ πᾶσιν ὑποκείμενον τοῖς ἄλλοις, τοιοῦτον δὲ τὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι («Aristotle says that what is first respect to being, namely respect to existence (τὴν ὑπαρξίν), is the subject (ὑποκείμενον) of all other things, and substance is this kind of thing». I consider εἶναι existentially and κατὰ τὴν ὑπαρξίν as explanatory of κατὰ τὸ εἶναι.

³⁴ See *supra*, previous note.

³⁵ Alex., in *Metaph.* 376, 7-9: μόνον γὰρ τῶν ὄντων χωριστόν καὶ καθ' αὐτὸ ὃν ἡ οὐσία («among the things that exist, only substance is separated (χωριστόν), namely exists by itself»). Here, too, I consider ὃν existentially, and take καθ' αὐτὸ ὃν as explanatory of χωριστόν, the sense of which would then be 'existing in itself, independently'.

³⁶ See for example K. Fine (1995); Schaffer (2009); Thanko/Lowe (2015).

³⁷ See *supra*, 121.

between substance and accidents'³⁸. The reference to *Categories* (although the distinction mentioned by Alexander is not in the text)³⁹ is important because it allows Alexander to introduce both the asymmetry between substance and individual accidents and the 'reduction' of individual accidents to categories⁴⁰. Recognizing the existential priority of the individual and perceptible substance, Alexander also recognizes the existential dependence of his accidents. In fact, in his commentary to *Metaphysics Delta* about the Aristotelian εἶναι καθ' αὐτό, we have seen that Alexander, in an extremely original way, states that even in the case of propositions consisting of subject and predicate, the copula expresses the ὑπαρξίς of the predicate. The theory of the role of trait-d'union of the copula is a well-known Aristotelian theory⁴¹, but Alexander's originality consists in giving it an existential meaning, which precisely expresses the existential dependence of the propriety from the substance.

Conclusions

Alexander opted for an existential dependence of accidents from individual substances⁴². Concerning universals (the Aristotelian genera and species),

³⁸ Alex. in *Metaph.*, 242, 15-17: καὶ εἴη ἂν τῇ πρώτῃ διαίρεσει τῶν ἐν Κατηγορίαις τοῦ ὄντος γεγονυῶν μᾶλλον χρώμενος, καθ' ἣν διαίρει τὰ ὄντα εἰς οὐσίαν καὶ συμβεβηκότα.

³⁹ For this reason, perhaps one should not take the formula ἐν κατηγορίαις τοῦ ὄντος as a reference to the work *Categories*, but as a simple reference to the Aristotelian distinction of beings into categories.

⁴⁰ Alexander in fact tries, admittedly with some difficulty, to fit the examples of dependent existents given by Aristotle in 1003b5-9 into categories, warning, however, that Aristotle does not attempt to give an example for every category, since many of the examples he presents actually fall under the same category (see in *Metaph.*, 242, 12-15).

⁴¹ Alexander himself refers immediately afterwards to *de int.*, 16b24-2 (see in *Metaph.* 371, 34-36). On the difficulties with the copula theory see Barnes (2012: 154-159).

⁴² It should not be concealed that Alexander, as an accurate commentator, also envisaged the other type of dependency mentioned, the definitional one (see in *Metaph.* 241, 18-21/243, 33-244, 6; Alex. in *Top.*, 301, 9-10. On these passages see Bonelli 2001: 113-118). However, the two explanations do not seem to be considered by the commentator as really alternatives: there are in fact passages in which Alexander seems to subordinate definitional dependence to existential dependence (see for example Alex. in *Metaph.* 243, 27-8: οἷς δὲ οὐ κατὰ τοῦνομα μόνον ἐστὶ κοινωνία, ἀλλ' ἡρτῆται ἢ κατὰ τοῦτο

Alexander identifies their existence in many individual substances of which they are predicated⁴³, and the same holds for mathematical objects, whose existence is found in perceptible objects⁴⁴.

Many historians of philosophy and contemporary metaphysicians have found very serious problems in the relationship between the asymmetry of substance and the existential dependence. Indeed, to consider ontological dependence in terms of existential dependence is to undermine either the independence of individual substances or the dependence of universals. For if we consider the dependence between A and B in the sense that A cannot exist without a given B, we will have the unfortunate result that universals can exist independently of individual substances: for example, generosity can exist without Callias.

If, on the other hand, we consider the dependence between A and B in the sense that A cannot exist without any B, we will solve the problem of universals (indeed, generosity cannot exist without any generous individual), but we will have the consequence that individual substances cannot exist independently of universal accidents: Callias, for example, can exist without white, but not without colour. In any case, existential dependence will be insufficient for the theory of substance asymmetry⁴⁵.

Is it possible to find in Alexander a position which avoids these problems? The question of the existence and of the status of universals in Alexander is a

κοινωνία τῆς τῶν πραγμάτων κοινωνίας, τούτων καὶ ἐπιστήμη μία («It is things whose commonality is not limited to the name, whose commonality of name depends on a commonality among the objects themselves, that belong to one science», transl. Madigan).

⁴³ On this see Barnes (2003: 47).

⁴⁴ Alex., in *Metaph.* 200, 37-38. On this see Barnes (2003: 47, n. 89).

⁴⁵ See on that Corkum (2008: 72-73), who merely makes explicit objections already raised by Burnyeat *et al.* (1979). For an overview of contemporary positions and an attempt to avoid the existential interpretation of 'being' see R. Sirkel, *Ontological Priority* cit. Sirkel in my opinion presents a very convincing solution to the problem in Aristotelian *Categories*. According to her, in fact, individual substances and accidents of substances reciprocate in existence (indeed the one cannot exist without the other) but the existence of the one explains the existence of the other, because primary substance is the subject (*hypokeimenon*) of other beings. In fact, the way of existence of other beings consists in 'be said of' (in the case of universals) or 'being in' (in the case of accidents) subjects (see Sirkel *op. cit.*, 27).

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controversial issue⁴⁶. However, we have some indications of a solution of ontological dependence. In *in Top.* 355, 12-14, Alexander says that:

ἐπεὶ τὰ γένη οὔτε καθ' αὐτὰ ἐστὶν ὑφεστώτᾳ που οὔτε ἐστὶ ψιλὰ χωρὶς ὑπάρξεως νοήματα, ὥς ἱπποκένταυρος, ἀλλ' ἐστὶν ἢ ὑπόστασις αὐτῶν ἐν τούτοις ὧν κατηγορεῖται.

Genera are neither items somehow subsisting by themselves nor are they bare thoughts without existence, like a centaur. Rather, their subsistence (ὑπόστασις) is in the items of which they are predicated. (trans. Barnes)⁴⁷

Alexander supports the thesis that the genus subsists only in the items of which they are predicated. More interesting still is what Alexander states shortly afterwards:

[...] ἀπλῶς μὲν οὖν συμφθείρεται τοῦτο, ᾧ συμβέβηκεν εἶναι γένει, πάντων τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸ φθαγέντων· ὥς δὲ γένος φθείρεται, εἰ ἐν τι μόνον ἢ κατ' ἀριθμὸν ἢ κατὰ εἶδος τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸ σώζοιτο. (*in Top.*, 355, 18-21)

[...] a genus corrupts tout court if all things under it are corrupted; but it corrupts as a genus if one thing only is saved among those under it, either by number or by kind⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ On that see Tweedale (1984); Barnes (2003: 47, n. 89); Sharples (2005); Sirkel (2011); Militello (2017: 112-115).

⁴⁷ See also Alex. *in Metaph.* 180, 3-6: ἐκεῖνοις γὰρ ἔλεγον ταῦτα συμβεβηκέναι τό τε ἐν καὶ τὸ ὄν. ἔτι πότερον αἱ ἀρχαὶ ἐν οἰκείᾳ ὑποστάσει εἰσὶ καὶ καθ' αὐτάς ὥς τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα τῶν ὄντων, ἢ οὐ, ἀλλ' ὥς τὰ γένη καὶ τὰ καθόλου καὶ κοινά, οἷς ἐν τῷ κατηγορεῖσθαι τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα τὸ εἶναι ('Do the principles have a subsistence of their own and in their own right, like individual entities? Or is it not rather that, like genera and universals and common items, their being lies in being predicated of individuals?').

⁴⁸ See also Simplicius *in Cat.*, 85, 13-14: ἀλλὰ κοινόν, φησὶν, οὐδὲν εἶναι δύναται χωρὶς ἀτόμου, ἄτομον δὲ ἔστιν χωρὶς κοινοῦ, οἷον ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη καὶ κόσμος ('It is impossible, [Alexander] says, for there to be anything common without the particular, but there are particulars without the common, ex. the sun, the moon, the universe'). Simplicius seems to attribute to Alexander the thesis that, although there is a sun, there is no corresponding universal, since there are not many suns of which 'sun' can be predicated. On that see Sirkel (2011: 303) who reports and discusses the passage of Simplicius.

Alexander affirms that the genus corrupts either all things under it are corrupted or if at least one thing under it (either species or particulars) survives. First, this position avoids the problem of the separate existence of universals: generosity, in fact, will perish if all generous individuals perish. But the genus corrupts also if one thing under it survives. Alexander's position leads to make a distinction between the universal (which must be predicated of more particulars) and the form or nature of particulars, that remains in them even if the universal perishes or doesn't exist (as in the case of the moon⁴⁹). So, for Alexander individuals are bearers of forms, and forms, according to the commentator, are not identified with universals. In this way it must be just concluded that every property of Callias, whether essential or accidental, does not depend in any way on the existence of the universal.

In any case, the notion of contemporary grounding is strongly connected to the existential dependence and this latter is unanimously characterized in terms of priority. This characteristic is widely recognized as Aristotelian, but it must also and above all be recognised as belonging to the great commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ See *supra*, previous note.

⁵⁰ Thanks to audience of 'Ancient Philosophy in Dialogue'. Special thanks to Francesco Aronadio, Erminia Di Iulio, Lorenzo Giovannetti.

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Il Commento al primo libro della Metafisica di Alessandro di Afrodisia come fonte del trattato II 4 [12] delle *Enneadi*

Abstract: In chapter XIV of the *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry tells us that Plotinus made use of Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentaries for his lectures. The scholarly debate focused on Alexander's influence on Plotinus' doctrine of intelligible matter as is exposed in *Ennead* II 4, with particular regard to Aristotle's conception of nous in the *De Anima*. The main purpose of this paper is to further analyse the usefulness of Alexander's *Commentary* on the first book of *Metaphysics* for understanding *Ennead* II 4. For if it is appropriate to read Plotinus' doctrine of intelligible matter in light of the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Alexander's mediation allows us to view additional elements that remain implicit in the Aristotelian text. In particular, Alexander's *Commentary* will prove to be useful in understanding three points. Firstly, the implicit doxographical references in the introductory chapter of Plotinus' treaty. Secondly, the Plotinian genesis of an interpretation of Plato that clearly distinguishes between two sorts of matter: one sensible, substratum of bodies; the other intelligible, substratum of ideas. Finally, the different type of composition of form and matter in the sensible and the intelligible, illustrated by Plotinus in the third chapter of the treaty.

Keywords: Plotinus; Alexander of Aphrodisias; Aristotle; Intelligible Matter; Indefinite Dyad; Intellect

1. L'architettura del capitolo II 4 [12], 1 delle *Enneadi*

Il primo capitolo del trattato II 4 [12] delle *Enneadi* è volto a introdurre il tema del trattato: la materia (o, più specificamente, le due materie).

Il modo di procedere adottato da Plotino, che Narbonne ha definito ‘en quelque sorte doxographique’¹, consistente nel presentare e criticare le interpretazioni della materia fornite dai predecessori, è tipicamente aristotelico. D'altronde, lo sfondo aristotelico dell'architettura del trattato emerge in più luoghi. Uno dei possibili esempi è offerto dal secondo capitolo, dove, dando

¹ Narbonne (1993: 311).

inizio all'indagine vera e propria, Plotino enuncia tre domande alle quali la ricerca dovrà fornire risposta: se la materia intellegibile esista, che cosa sia e come sia (εἰ ἔστι, καὶ τίς οὐσα τυγχάνει, καὶ πῶς ἔστιν)². Aristotele pone le stesse domande nel IV libro della *Fisica*³ (εἰ ἔστιν ἢ μή, καὶ πῶς ἔστι, καὶ τί ἔστιν), dando avvio alla ricerca sul luogo⁴.

La struttura del primo capitolo può essere allora divisa come segue:

1. Tutti coloro che sono giunti, nella propria ricerca filosofica, alla nozione di materia, l'hanno concepita come un certo sostrato (ὑποκείμενον) e ricettacolo (ὑποδοχή) delle forme (II 4 [12] 1.1-4).
2. Nonostante questo punto d'accordo comune, i filosofi sono però entrati in contrasto gli uni con gli altri nel determinare quale sia la natura soggiacente, quali cose accolga e in quale modo (II 4 [12] 1.4-6).
3. Alcuni hanno sostenuto che vi sia una materia corporea (II 4 [12] 1.6-14).
4. Altri hanno sostenuto che la materia sia incorporea. (II 4 [12] 1.14-16).

Quest'ultimo gruppo si distingue a sua volta in due posizioni:

- 4a. Alcuni sostengono vi sia una sola materia incorporea.
- 4b. Altri sostengono vi siano due materie incorporee: l'una quale sostrato dei corpi sensibili, l'altra quale sostrato delle forme e delle realtà incorporee.

² Enn. II 4 [12], 2.1-2.

³ Phys. IV 1, 208a28-29.

⁴ La tematizzazione aristotelica principale delle cose che devono essere ricercate (τα ζητούμενα) si trova negli *Analitici Posteriori* (II 1), dove Aristotele afferma che esistono quattro tipi di oggetti di ricerca e di conoscenza scientifica organizzati in coppie ordinate. I quattro tipi di ricerca corrispondenti ai rispettivi oggetti sono: 1. la ricerca del che (ὅτι), 2. la ricerca del perché (διότι), 3. la ricerca del se è (εἰ ἔστι) e, infine, 4. la ricerca del che cos'è (τί ἔστιν). La domanda πῶς ἔστι compare in Aristotele nei casi in cui la modalità d'esistenza dell'oggetto ricercato non è immediatamente comprensibile ma merita un esame (cfr. Phys. IV 1, 208a27-29).

2. L'identificazione tradizionale delle correnti filosofiche distinte nel primo capitolo

Per quanto riguarda il primo gruppo (che comprende i sostenitori della corporeità della materia), tutti gli studiosi concordano unanimemente sul fatto che Plotino si stia riferendo agli stoici.

Vi è una significativa somiglianza, di lessico e di contenuto, fra quanto scritto da Plotino nel breve passo di II 4 [12], 1.6-14 e quanto afferma invece in VI 1 [42] 27-30⁵, ove muove alcune significative critiche allo stoicismo⁶.

Infatti, non solo si richiama la nota tesi stoica secondo la quale tutto ciò che è è corpo⁷ e quella che identifica⁸ dio con la materia⁹, ma Plotino fa anche riferimento al $\pi\omega\varsigma \ \xi\chi\omicron\nu$, una delle quattro categorie o generi primi dell'essere degli stoici (divisione riconducibile, probabilmente, a Crisippo¹⁰), i quali, come informa Plotino stesso in VI 1 [42], 25.1-4, dividono le cose in sostrati ($\acute{\upsilon}\pi\omicron\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$), qualità ($\pi\omicron\iota\omicron\nu$), modi d'essere ($\pi\omega\varsigma \ \xi\chi\omicron\nu$) e modi d'essere relativi ($\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \ \tau\iota \ \pi\omega\varsigma \ \xi\chi\omicron\nu$). L'unica altra testimonianza della forma quadripartita dei generi dell'essere nel pensiero stoico è presente in Simplicio (in *Categ.*, 66, 33-67= SVF II, 371, 373, 369).

⁵ Si veda Isnardi Parente (1994: 154-159, 309-326).

⁶ Plotino non nomina esplicitamente gli stoici né in questo trattato né in altri (nel *Lexicon Plotinianum* non compare alcuna occorrenza delle voci $\Sigma\tau\omega\iota\kappa\omicron\acute{\iota}$, $\Sigma\tau\omicron\acute{\alpha}$ e simili). Ma anche nel caso dei peripatetici – l'altro principale obiettivo polemico dei trattati *Sui generi dell'essere* – Plotino si riferisce alla dottrina delle dieci categorie senza esplicitare il nome dei suoi sostenitori ($\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\omicron\nu \ \tau\omicron\iota\acute{\nu}\nu\tau\omicron\nu \ \tau\eta\nu \ \delta\iota\alpha\iota\phi\omicron\rho\omicron\upsilon\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta \ \epsilon\iota\varsigma \ \delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha \ \tau\grave{\alpha} \ \delta\omicron\nu\tau\alpha \ \Lambda\eta\pi\tau\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\nu \ \acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\omicron\upsilon\acute{\nu}\tau\alpha\varsigma$ V 1 [42], 1.15-16).

⁷ Dottrina attribuita a Zenone in SVF I 90, 98 e che sembra permanere come dottrina stabile dello Stoicismo: è attribuita in generale agli stoici, ad esempio, da Diogene Laerzio (II 299), Alessandro di Afrodisia (SVF II 310) e Aezio (SVF II 325).

⁸ Si veda Donini/Ferrari (2005: 227-228).

⁹ Anche in tal caso, la commistione di dio e materia è attribuita esplicitamente a Zenone (SVF I 155,156) e viene estesa allo stoicismo in generale, ad esempio, da Alessandro di Afrodisia (SVF II 310, 1038, 1044, 1047, 1048), Plutarco (SVF II 313, 1045), Olimpodoro (SVF II 1030), Servio (SVF II 1031), Eusebio (SVF II 1032), Tertulliano (SVF II 1034, 1036), Clemente Alessandrino (SVF II 1035, 1039, 1040), Lattanzio (SVF II 1041). Proclo, criticando tale dottrina, accusa Crisippo (Proclus in *Plat. Timaeum*. 297 Schneider = SVF II 1042).

¹⁰ Si veda Reesor (1958).

Se l'identificazione del primo gruppo menzionato da Plotino non comporta problemi, ben altre difficoltà si pongono per il secondo.

Come già detto, il secondo gruppo comprende al suo interno una prima posizione monista (secondo la quale vi sarebbe una sola materia incorporea) e una seconda posizione dualista (secondo la quale vi sarebbero due materie incorporee). Alcuni commentatori inseriscono tanto Aristotele quanto Platone nel sottogruppo dualista, lasciando per lo più anonimo il sottogruppo monista¹¹. Altri, invece, tendono ad identificare il sottogruppo monista con Aristotele e il sottogruppo dualista con Platone o con gli accademici¹².

Per quanto riguarda l'attribuzione ad Aristotele di una teoria secondo la quale la materia sarebbe incorporea, essa è, sebbene problematica e non immediata, pur tuttavia sostenibile¹³: nel *De Anima* (5, 19-22) Alessandro d'Afrodisia distingue fra corpo e materia; anche Simplicio (*in Phys.* 228.29ss) afferma che il primo sostrato aristotelico non sarebbe il corpo.

L'identificazione di Aristotele come rappresentante del sottogruppo monista risulta tuttavia problematica: anzitutto, la nozione stessa di ὅλη νοητή è di derivazione aristotelica¹⁴ (sebbene essa abbia un ruolo ben diverso¹⁵ da quello della materia intellegibile trattata da Plotino nel trattato II 4 [12]). In

¹¹ Ad esempio, Gerson (2018), Faggin (2000). Invece, Casaglia (1997) sostiene che il sottogruppo monista comprende i platonici e gli aristotelici, mentre il sottogruppo dualista sarebbe da intendere come un riferimento a quella linea di pensiero che, sorta a partire dalla dottrina platonica e senocratea, fu poi rielaborata dal medioplatonismo e dal neopitagorismo.

¹² Narbonne (1993), Igal (1982-1998), Dufour (in Pradeau/Brisson 2003), Armstrong (1966-1988). Corrigan (1996) sostiene che il sottogruppo monista sia da identificare con il pensiero stoico, aristotelico ed epicureo.

¹³ Dufour (in Pradeau/Brisson 2003: 262, n. 7) suggerisce che l'incorporeità della materia nel pensiero aristotelico potrebbe dedursi da *De Gen. Corr.* II 1, 329a33, in cui Aristotele afferma che la materia è principio primo degli elementi e costituisce quel sostrato che accoglie i contrari. Vi sarebbero dunque tre principi: la materia, i contrari e gli elementi. Nel passo citato, la materia è chiamata τὸ δυνάμει σῶμα αἰσθητόν (il corpo sensibile in potenza). Da ciò si potrebbe dedurre che la materia è corpo solo nella sua attualizzazione negli elementi della natura, ma che nella sua forma ancora potenziale e non determinata sarebbe incorporea.

¹⁴ Vi sono tre occorrenze nel corpus aristotelico: *Metaph.* VII 10, 1036 a 9-12; 11, 1037 a 4-5; VIII 6, 1045 a 33-37. Si veda Rist (1962: 99-107).

¹⁵ Thorp (2010: 1-6).

secondo luogo, lo schema stesso utilizzato da Plotino deriva (come si mostrerà a breve) da un paradigma aristotelico, il che rende poco probabile l'inclusione di Aristotele nel sottogruppo monista. Ciò significherebbe, infatti, che Plotino avrebbe ripreso uno schema aristotelico per poi includere la sua stessa fonte fra gli obiettivi polemici.

Se Aristotele è presente nello schema plotiniano, è quindi probabile che egli sia da inserire, piuttosto, nel sottogruppo dualista di cui Platone è esponente principale¹⁶.

Se però si esclude Aristotele dal primo sottogruppo, occorre allora interrogarsi su quale sia il riferimento lasciato implicito da Plotino. Un indizio importante lo si trova nel I libro della *Metafisica* di Aristotele. Indizio che, come si vedrà, viene meglio sviluppato da Alessandro.

3. Confronto con il testo aristotelico

La distinzione fra i sostenitori di una materia corporea e coloro che affermano l'incorporeità della materia trova la propria origine nel testo aristotelico. Essa, infatti, viene introdotta da Aristotele nel I libro della *Metafisica*, nell'ambito della ricapitolazione delle dottrine dei precedenti filosofi. In *Metaph. I 7*, 988a23-29 leggiamo quanto segue:

οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὡς ὕλην τὴν ἀρχὴν λέγουσιν, ἂν τε μίαν ἂν τε πλείους ὑποθῶσι, καὶ ἔαν τε σῶμα ἔαν τε ἀσώματον τοῦτο τιθῶσιν (οἷον Πλάτων μὲν τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν λέγων, οἱ δ' Ἰταλικοὶ τὸ ἄπειρον, Ἐμπεδοκλῆς δὲ πῦρ καὶ γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ ἀέρα, Αναξαγόρας δὲ τὴν τῶν ὁμοιομερῶν ἀπειρίαν· οὗτοί τε δὴ πάντες τῆς τοιαύτης αἰτίας ἡμμένοι εἰσί).

Alcuni infatti indicano il principio come materia, sia che ne ammettano **uno** sia che ne ammettano **molti**, e sia che li concepiscano come **corpo** o come **incorporei** (per

¹⁶ Il passo platonico da cui meglio si deduce l'incorporeità della materia è *Tim.* 51a. Qui Platone afferma che descriveremmo correttamente il ricettacolo dicendo che è un genere invisibile (ἀνόρατον εἶδος), privo di forma (ἄμορφον) e che non è nessuno dei corpi elementari né nessuna delle cose che derivano da questi né di quelle da cui questi derivano. Poiché i corpi sensibili si compongono dei quattro elementi e sono visibili (31b-32b), la χώρα platonica sarebbe dunque incorporea.

esempio Platone indica **il grande e il piccolo**, gli Italici l'illimitato, Empedocle **fuoco, terra, acqua e aria**, Anassagora **l'infinità degli omeomeri**; tutti dunque hanno attinto a questo tipo di causa¹⁷.

Aristotele introduce due criteri secondo i quali il principio materiale può essere indagato: unità/molteplicità e corporeità/incorporeità.

3.1. Il criterio della corporeità/incorporeità

Stando al passo citato, non è immediatamente chiaro come vadano identificati i filosofi nominati da Aristotele. È plausibile, anzitutto, porre Platone e i Pitagorici fra i sostenitori dell'incorporeità del principio materiale, ed Empedocle e Anassagora fra i sostenitori della corporeità di quest'ultimo. Questo emerge più chiaramente nel terzo libro della *Fisica*, dove, a proposito della ricerca sull'illimitato, la posizione platonica e pitagorica è posta in contrasto con quella dei φυσικοί in senso stretto.

οἱ μὲν, ὥσπερ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι καὶ Πλάτων, καθ'αυτό, οὐχ ὡς συμβεβηκὸς τινὶ ἑτέρῳ ἀλλ' οὐσίαν αὐτὸ ὃν τὸ ἄπειρον. (*Phys.* III 4 203a4-6)

Alcuni, come i pitagorici e Platone, hanno posto l'illimitato per sé, cioè non come l'accidente di un altro, ma come fosse esso stesso sostanza¹⁸.

οἱ δὲ περὶ φύσεως πάντες [ἀεὶ] ὑποτιθέασιν ἑτέραν τινὰ φύσιν τῷ ἀπείρῳ τῶν λεγομένων στοιχείων, οἷον ὕδωρ ἢ ἀέρα ἢ τὸ μεταξὺ τούτων. (*Phys.* III 4 203a16-18)

È pur vero che tutti i cultori della scienza fisica hanno attribuito l'infinito ad una qualche natura diversa scelta fra quelle dei cosiddetti elementi, come ad esempio l'aria, l'acqua o qualcosa di intermedio fra di esse.

L'esposizione si articola dunque in due parti: da un lato vi sono Platone e i pitagorici, i quali hanno inteso l'illimitato come una realtà in sé; dall'altro i fisici in senso stretto, che hanno inteso l'illimitato come una proprietà. Ciò dipende

¹⁷ Riporto la traduzione di Berti (2017).

¹⁸ Riporto la traduzione di Radice (2011).

dal fatto che, secondo Aristotele, Platone e i pitagorici hanno fatto un uso inaccettabile della matematica all'interno della fisica, poiché essi hanno ipostatizzato gli oggetti della matematica e non li hanno intesi come attributi degli enti fisici, come i φυσικοί veri e propri.

3.2. I sostenitori della corporeità del principio materiale

Il riferimento plotiniano agli stoici quali esponenti della tesi della corporeità della materia deve essere inteso come la riattualizzazione del testo della *Metafisica*, dove Aristotele menziona a tal proposito la posizione dei presocratici (come Anassagora ed Empedocle).

Ciò appare evidente anche mediante un confronto lessicale: in *Metaph.* I 8, 988b22-24 Aristotele parla di questi ultimi come di coloro i quali pongono (τιθέασι) che tutto è uno (ἐν τε τὸ πᾶν), che vi è una sola natura (καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν) concepita come materia (ὡς ὕλην) e che tale natura è corporea e dotata di grandezza (καὶ ταύτην σωματικὴν καὶ μέγεθος ἔχουσιν).

Il contenuto del passo appare molto simile a quanto afferma Plotino a proposito degli stoici (*Enn.* II 4 [12]1.6-14), i quali ritengono che i corpi siano le sole cose che sono (καὶ οἱ μὲν σώματα μόνον τὰ ὄντα εἶναι θέμενοι) e che in questi consista la sostanza (καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἐν τούτοις); affermano inoltre che la materia è unica (μίαν τε τὴν ὕλην λέγουσι) e che essa stessa è sostanza (καὶ αὐτὴν εἶναι τὴν οὐσίαν). Attribuiscono alla materia anche un corpo (διδόασι δὲ καὶ σῶμα αὐτῇ), affermando che esso è privo di qualità, ma dotato tuttavia di grandezza¹⁹ (ἄποιον αὐτὸ σῶμα λέγοντες καὶ μέγεθος δέ).

¹⁹ L'ottavo e il nono capitolo del trattato II 4 [12] saranno volti alla confutazione della tesi secondo cui la materia è di per sé dotata di grandezza, in quanto sia la grandezza sia la qualità pervengono a essa solo in un secondo momento.

3.3. Il criterio dell'unità/molteplicità

Il criterio dell'unità/molteplicità non viene ripreso da Plotino nel capitolo introduttivo del trattato II 4 [12], mentre nel settimo capitolo²⁰ criticherà le posizioni dei presocratici pluralisti (come Anassagora e gli atomisti, esaminati da Plotino alla luce dell'atomismo epicureo). Stando al passo della *Metafisica* citato, sembrerebbe che Aristotele attribuisca ai Pitagorici una posizione monista, mentre Platone (come anche Empedocle e Anassagora) avrebbe affermato la molteplicità del principio materiale. Questo emerge anzitutto in un passo della *Metafisica* di poco precedente (I 6, 987b25-26), in cui Aristotele afferma che, a differenza dei pitagorici (i quali poserò l'illimitato come unità), Platone pose la diade del grande e del piccolo (τὸ δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀπείρου ὡς ἐνὸς δυάδα ποιῆσαι, τὸ δ' ἄπειρον ἐκ μεγάλου καὶ μικροῦ, τοῦτ' ἴδιον). Ma ancor più esplicitamente si esprime Aristotele in *Phys.* III 4, 203 a 10-16:

καὶ οἱ μὲν τὸ ἄπειρον εἶναι τὸ ἄρτιον (...) Πλάτων δὲ δύο τὰ ἀπείρα, τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν.

Inoltre, per i Pitagorici l'infinito è il pari (...). Per Platone, invece, esistono due infiniti: il grande e il piccolo.

Indispensabile, in tale contesto, la menzione della netta critica plotiniana (presente proprio nel trattato II 4 [12]) al passo aristotelico appena citato:

διὸ οὐτε μέγα λεκτέον χωρὶς οὐτε μικρόν αὖ, ἀλλὰ μέγα καὶ μικρόν. (*Enn.* II 4 [12], 11.33-34)

Perciò non si deve dire separatamente che la materia è grande o piccola, ma che è grande e piccola.

Si deve tener fermo il fatto che la dualità del principio materiale platonico presentata da Aristotele non può essere ciò a cui fa riferimento Plotino nel momento in cui presenta la posizione del sottogruppo dualista: quest'ultimo,

²⁰ *Enn.* II 4 [12], 7.20-28

infatti, non è caratterizzato dall'aver posto un principio materiale diadico (il grande e il piccolo), bensì dall'aver posto due principi materiali, l'uno nell'ambito dei sensibili e l'altro nell'ambito degli intellegibili.

3.4. Conclusioni sulla ripresa plotiniana del testo aristotelico

Plotino riprende dunque lo schema aristotelico presente in *Metaph.* I, distinguendo fra i sostenitori della corporeità e dell'incorporeità del principio materiale. Nel caso dei sostenitori della corporeità di quest'ultimo, richiama la trattazione Aristotelica dei presocratici, accostandola però alla dottrina stoica e aggiungendo elementi distintivi di quest'ultima, come la tesi secondo la quale dio sarebbe materia disposta in un certo modo (αὐτὸν αὐτῶν τὸν θεὸν ὕλην ταύτην πῶς ἔχουσιν εἶναι).

Proseguendo, possiamo inferire che fra i membri del secondo gruppo vadano annoverati proprio Platone e i pitagorici, come il testo aristotelico mostra.

Si pone ora un problema principale: se è vero che Aristotele stabilisce una distinzione fra materia corporea e incorporea e sembra inserire Platone e i Pitagorici fra i sostenitori della materia incorporea, non v'è però un riferimento alla distinzione – che troviamo invece in Plotino – fra una sola materia incorporea (posta nei sensibili) e due materie incorporee (l'una posta nei sensibili e l'altra negli intellegibili). Infatti, sembrerebbe che sia Platone sia i Pitagorici pongano un solo tipo di materia incorporea: Platone introdurrebbe il grande e il piccolo, mentre i Pitagorici l'illimitato.

Il mio intento consiste nel mostrare come la mediazione del commento alla *Metafisica* di Alessandro di Afrodisia si ponga come necessaria per una migliore comprensione del significato e della genesi del testo plotiniano, soprattutto per quanto concerne la comprensione del capitolo introduttivo del trattato e, in secondo luogo, per lo sviluppo di una teoria delle due materie attribuita, del tutto verosimilmente, a Platone. Il ruolo di Alessandro nello sviluppo della teoria della materia intellegibile plotiniana, infatti, è stato tenuto in considerazione

dagli studiosi soprattutto in riferimento alla noetica sviluppata nel *De Anima*²¹. Tuttavia, non risulta che in relazione all'intero trattato II 4 [12] sia stato tenuto conto del commento di Alessandro alla *Metafisica* di Aristotele. Tale commento però, come si cercherà di mostrare, aggiunge elementi ulteriori rispetto al testo aristotelico, i quali potrebbero indicare il fatto che Plotino vi attinse.

4. La mediazione di Alessandro di Afrodisia

Anzitutto, Alessandro esplicita senza margine di dubbio il fatto che Platone e i Pitagorici rientrano fra i sostenitori dell'incorporeità del principio materiale:

Καταριθμεῖται ὅτι τῶν ὡς ὕλην τὴν ἀρχὴν θεμένων οἱ μὲν μίαν οἱ δὲ πλείους ἔθεντο, καὶ οἱ μὲν σῶμα οἱ δὲ ἀσώματον. εἰπὼν δὲ τὴν ὕλικήν ἀρχὴν τοὺς μὲν σωματικὴν τοὺς δὲ ἀσώματον ὑποθέσθαι, πρῶτου ἐμνημόνευσε τῶν ἀσώματον ὑποθεμένων Πλάτωνος, ὅς τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν ἔλεγεν, ἔπειτα καὶ τῶν Πυθαγορείων, οἳ τὸ ἀπειρον, τοῦτο δὲ ἦν τὸ ἄρτιον· οὗτος γὰρ ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῖς ἐν ὕλῃ τιθέμενος· ὁ γὰρ περισσὸν πεπερασμένος τε καὶ εἶδους ἐπέχων χώραν. (in *Metaph.* 61.9-16)

Aristotele nota che, tra coloro che posero il principio come materia, alcuni lo considerarono unico, altri molteplice, alcuni corporeo, altri incorporeo. Dopo aver detto che alcuni pensatori consideravano il principio materiale come corporeo e altri come incorporeo, Aristotele, tra quelli che ne sostenevano l'incorporeità, richiama per primo Platone il quale denominava tale materia 'grande e piccolo', e poi i Pitagorici che la chiamavano illimitato, e questo era il numero pari. Per loro, infatti, questo era il numero posto nella materia, mentre il numero dispari era limitato ed aveva la funzione di forma²².

Occorre ora comprendere in cosa differiscano fra loro la posizione pitagorica e quella platonica. Stando al testo aristotelico (*Metaph.* I 6, 987b18-988a17), emerge quanto segue:

²¹ Fra gli studi principali si vedano ad esempio Rist (1962), Szlezák (1979), Narbonne (1993), Corrigan (1996); Lavaud (2008: 399-414) prende in considerazione il ruolo della prima *Quaestio* di Alessandro in relazione alla materia intellegibile plotiniana.

²² Riporto la traduzione di Movia (Alessandro di Afrodisia 2007), apportando talvolta lievi modifiche. Si veda anche il passo in *Metaph.* 60.2-5, contenutisticamente molto simile.

- Caratteristica peculiare di Platone è aver posto anziché l'illimitato come unità (come fecero i pitagorici), una diade del grande e del piccolo da cui l'illimitato deriva (987b25-26).
- Platone pone i numeri oltre le cose sensibili (παρὰ τὰ αἰσθητά), mentre i pitagorici sostengono che i numeri siano le cose stesse (ἀριθμούς εἶναι φασιν αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα, 987b27-28).

Alessandro scrive:

τοῦτο τε οὖν παραπλησίως φησὶ Πλάτωνα ἐκείνοις λέγειν, καὶ τὸ ἀρχὰς καὶ αἷτια τῶν ὄντων τοὺς ἀριθμούς τίθεσθαι, εἰ καὶ μὴ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον· οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἐνυπάρχοντας τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ ὡς ὕλην (ὡς γὰρ αὐτῶν πάντων τῶν ὄντων συγκεκμημένων), Πλάτων δὲ ἐκτὸς αὐτοὺς ἐποίει τῶν οἷς εἰσὶν αἷτια· ὡς παραδείγματα γάρ. (in *Metaph.* 53.19-24)

Platone, dunque, dice Aristotele, si avvicina ai Pitagorici sia su questo punto sia nel porre i numeri come principi e cause degli enti, sebbene **non lo faccia allo stesso modo**. I pitagorici, infatti, consideravano i numeri **immanenti alle cose**, come loro **componenti materiali**, essendo tutti gli enti costituiti da numeri; Platone, invece, li poneva **al di fuori** delle cose di cui sono causa, in qualità di modelli.

Alessandro afferma dunque che i pitagorici pongono i numeri come immanenti alle cose (ὡς ἐνυπάρχοντας τοῖς πράγμασι) e come materia delle cose (ὡς ὕλην). Platone, invece, li pone fuori (ἐκτὸς) dalle cose di cui sono causa. Si esprime in modo molto simile poco dopo:

ἔτι Πλάτων μὲν τοὺς ἀριθμούς ἔξω τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀπέλιπεν, οὐχ ὡς ὕλην αὐτοὺς τοῖς οὖσιν ὑποβάλλων, οὐδὲ οὕτως αὐτῶν αἰτίους τιθεὶς αὐτοὺς· οἱ δὲ Πυθαγορικοὶ τὰ πράγματα καὶ τὰ ὄντα ἐκ τῶν ἀριθμῶν ἔλεγον συγκεῖσθαι, ἐξ ὧν εἴπετο αὐτοῖς τὸ πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἀριθμούς λέγειν. (in *Metaph.* 54.13-18)

Platone, inoltre, lasciò i Numeri al di fuori delle cose sensibili, giacché **non li pose in esse in qualità di materia**, non essendo questo il modo in cui li considerava cause degli enti. I pitagorici, d'altra parte, sostenevano che le cose e gli enti sono costituiti da numeri e, in conseguenza di ciò, **affermaivano che tutti gli enti sono numeri**.

La concezione trascendentalista di Platone viene posta in contrasto con quella immanentista dei pitagorici alla luce dell'esclusione dei numeri quali principi materiali degli enti sensibili, perché i numeri platonici vengono posti al di là degli enti (e quali paradigmi degli enti).

Si è visto come la distinzione fra Platone e i pitagorici come sostenitori, rispettivamente, del trascendentalismo e dell'immanentismo, si trovi già in Aristotele²³. Ma Alessandro, per ben due volte a distanza di poche righe, riprende questa distinzione già aristotelica inquadrando la questione alla luce della funzione materiale dei numeri: se per i pitagorici, i quali identificano i numeri con gli enti, i numeri (o, più precisamente, l'illimitato) sono materia delle cose, Platone pone i numeri fuori dalle cose stesse ed essi non possono avere funzione materiale nei sensibili.

Questa specificazione ci è utile per chiarire quali siano i riferimenti del testo plotiniano. Infatti, se per i pitagorici i numeri e le cose del mondo coincidono, allora anche la causa materiale dei numeri e la causa materiale delle cose sensibili saranno un'unica, identica causa: l'illimitato. Nel caso di Platone, invece, il quale pone due ordini di realtà – le cose sensibili e le idee, realtà ontologicamente distinte –, anche le materie dell'uno e dell'altro ambito saranno distinte. Vi saranno, quindi, due materie incorporee: l'una quale sostrato delle idee, l'altra quale sostrato delle cose sensibili.

Si può dunque riconoscere innanzitutto ad Alessandro di aver ripreso ed esplicitato la distinzione aristotelica fra corporeità e incorporeità del principio materiale ed aver inquadrato le differenze dottrinali fra i pitagorici e Platone alla luce della funzione materiale dei numeri nel mondo sensibile. Sembrerebbe dunque opportuno inserire i pitagorici entro il sottogruppo monista e Platone entro il sottogruppo dualista. Nessun commentatore delle *Enneadi* che mi è stato possibile consultare individua i pitagorici come sostenitori della dottrina del sottogruppo monista²⁴.

Occorre però considerare un ultimo passaggio: la testimonianza aristotelica circa la presenza di due principi materiali distinti nel pensiero platonico e,

²³ *Metaph.* I 6, 987b18-988a17.

²⁴ Igal (1982: 414, n. 8) esprime la possibilità, piuttosto, che 'alcuni neopitagorici' siano implicati nel sottogruppo dualista.

nuovamente, l'utilità di considerare il commento di Alessandro di Afrodisia quale medium fra il testo aristotelico e l'elaborazione plotiniana.

5. *Una breve parentesi: la diade indefinita nella tradizione medioplatonica e neopitagorica*

Com'è noto, la diade indefinita assume un ruolo importante nella dottrina dei principi nella tradizione neopitagorica e medioplatonica²⁵; si può osservare il suo uso, in particolar modo, in Plutarco²⁶, Eudoro, Numenio.

Eudoro, secondo la testimonianza di Simplicio²⁷, avrebbe affermato che i pitagorici posero anzitutto l'Uno, e in seguito due principi: l'Uno (che si differenzia dal primo uno ed è anche detto monade) e la Diade Indefinita.

L'espressione 'diade indefinita' è utilizzata anche da Numenio come indicante la materia²⁸. La posizione di Numenio è peculiare, in quanto egli sostenne l'autonomia²⁹ della diade e criticò la posizione (di cui testimonia anche Eudoro) che rende la diade un principio che deriva dall'Uno.

In questa tradizione, però, non sembra esservi³⁰ una netta distinzione fra la diade indefinita e la materia del mondo sensibile, come avviene invece in Plotino:

²⁵ Sull'uso di queste due categorie storiografiche e l'impossibilità di una distinzione netta fra esse, si veda Centrone (2015: 399-424).

²⁶ Interessante il passo 428E-429F di *Def. Orac.*, ove i principi dell'unità e della diade indefinita agiscono entrambi sulla materia. Si noti, inoltre, il passo 1002A in *Plat. Quaest.*, dove compare il 'metodo elementarizzante', il quale riduce i corpi sensibili alle superfici, alle linee, ai punti, ai numeri e infine ai principi della monade e della diade indefinita. Di tale metodo offre una testimonianza anche Alessandro (in *Metaph.* 55,20 ss.).

²⁷ in *Phys.* 181.10-30.

²⁸ Fr. 11 *des Places*.

²⁹ Secondo la testimonianza di Calcidio, in *Tim.* CCXCV.

³⁰ Interessante, a tal proposito, è la testimonianza di Giovanni Lido (*Mens.* IV 76, 128-15-17) su Aquilino, il quale avrebbe utilizzato l'espressione aristotelica 'materia intellegibile' per indicare la diade indefinita. Ciò potrebbe essere ancor più significativo se tale Aquilino coincidesse proprio con quello nominato da Porfirio in *Vita Plotini* 16.3. Si veda Kalligas (2014: 307, n. 17).

Numenio applica la distinzione dei principi al Timeo³¹, affermando³² che il secondo dio si associa alla materia, che è diade, e la unifica (συμφερόμενος δὲ τῇ ὕλῃ δυάδι οὕσῃ ἐνοῖ μὲν αὐτῇν), ma è da essa diviso (σχιζέται δὲ ὑπ' αὐτῆς). Anche se entro certi limiti questa tendenza all'interscambiabilità fra la diade indefinita e la χώρα è presente anche in Plotino³³, è pur vero che nel trattato II 4 [12] troviamo una distinzione netta ed esplicita.

Dunque, sebbene la diade indefinita intesa quale principio insieme alla monade godette di ampia fortuna nella riflessione medioplatonica e neopitagorica, si devono considerare due fattori principali:

- a. La natura frammentaria delle testimonianze medioplatoniche e neopitagoriche rende difficile una piena ricostruzione delle posizioni teoriche espresse da tali autori e, di conseguenza, il possibile legame esistente fra queste ultime e la riflessione di Plotino.
- b. Plotino sembra fare un uso diverso della nozione di diade indefinita, sia perché egli dà alla diade la funzione di materia intellegibile (essa è, dunque, dimensione sostrativa degli intellegibili), sia perché tale materia intellegibile viene nettamente distinta da quella sensibile.

6. Due materie: le testimonianze aristoteliche e il commento di Alessandro

Si deve ora porre l'attenzione al modo in cui Aristotele tratta il principio materiale platonico e come quest'ultimo venga ulteriormente esaminato da Alessandro. Vi sono, in particolare, due passi fondamentali³⁴, il primo dei quali fu individuato da Philip Merlan³⁵ quale fonte per l'elaborazione plotiniana delle due materie.

³¹ Trattasi, chiaramente, dell'azione ordinatrice del demiurgo sul mondo. Ciò è anche reso più esplicito dalla testimonianza di Calcidio (*In Tim.* CCXC).

³² Fr. 11 *des Places*.

³³ Si veda *infra*, n. 39.

³⁴ Per una discussione generale della testimonianza aristotelica nel primo libro della *Metafisica*, si veda Berti (1991).

³⁵ Merlan (1964: 45-47).

ἐπεὶ δ' αἰτία τὰ εἶδη τοῖς ἄλλοις, τὰ κεῖνων στοιχεῖα πάντων ᾠήθη τῶν ὄντων εἶναι στοιχεῖα. ὥς μὲν οὖν ὕλην τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν εἶναι ἀρχάς, ὥς δ' οὐσίαν τὸ ἓν. ἐξ ἐκείνων γὰρ κατὰ μέθεξιν τοῦ ἑνὸς τὰ εἶδη εἶναι <καὶ> τοὺς ἀριθμούς. (*Metaph.* I 6, 987b18-22)

Ma poiché le Forme sono cause delle altre cose, <Platone> pensò che gli elementi di quelle fossero elementi di tutte le cose. Come materia, dunque, <pensò> che fossero principi il grande e il piccolo, invece come essenza l'Uno, perché <pensò che> le Forme, derivando da quelli per partecipazione dell'Uno, fossero i numeri.

φανερὸν δ' ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι δυοῖν αἰτίαιν μόνον κέχρηται, τῇ τε τοῦ τί ἐστὶ καὶ τῇ κατὰ τὴν ὕλην (τὰ γὰρ εἶδη τοῦ τί ἐστὶν αἰτία τοῖς ἄλλοις, τοῖς δ' εἶδεσι τὸ ἓν, καὶ τίς ἡ ὕλη ἢ ὑποκειμένη καθ' ἧς τὰ εἶδη μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν τὸ δ' ἓν ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι λέγεται, ὅτι αὕτη δυάς ἐστὶ, τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν. (*Metaph.* I 7, 988a9-14)

Risulta chiaro da quanto detto che egli ha fatto uso soltanto di due cause, quella del 'che cos'è' e quella secondo la materia (le Forme infatti sono cause del 'che cos'è' per le altre cose, mentre per le Forme lo è l'Uno), e <risulta evidente> qual è la materia sottostante di cui le Forme si dicono nel caso delle cose sensibili, e l'Uno nel caso delle Forme (cioè che questa è una Diade, il Grande e il piccolo).

Aristotele sembra parlare di una sola materia, la quale funge da ὑποκείμενον e della quale si predicano (καθ' ἧς ... λέγεται) le idee e l'uno (rispettivamente nell'ambito sensibile e nell'ambito intellegibile). Questa materia (la quale si predica dei due ambiti distinti) è detta essere la diade, ovvero il grande e il piccolo (δυάς ἐστὶ, τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν). È del tutto plausibile che l'unità del principio materiale (nelle idee e nei sensibili) sia un'unità per analogia: ciascuno dei due principi materiali svolge, nel proprio ambito, la medesima funzione³⁶.

In 987b34 Aristotele afferma che i numeri derivano per natura dalla diade come da un materiale molle (ὥσπερ ἔκ τινος ἐκμαγείου). Com'è noto, il termine ἐκμαγεῖον è ripreso dal *Timeo*, dove viene impiegato per descrivere la χώρα (*Tim.* 50c).

A tal proposito, sono degni di nota i passi del quarto libro della *Fisica* dove lo Stagirita fa un esplicito riferimento agli ἀγραφα δόγματα:

³⁶ Berti (2004: 212-213).

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διὸ καὶ Πλάτων τὴν ὕλην καὶ τὴν χώραν ταὐτὸ φησιν εἶναι ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ· τὸ γὰρ μεταληπτικὸν καὶ τὴν χώραν ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸν. ἄλλον δὲ τρόπον ἐκεῖ τὲ λέγων τὸ μεταληπτικὸν καὶ ἐν τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀγράφοις δόγμασιν, ὁμῶς τὸν τόπον καὶ τὴν χώραν τὸ αὐτὸ ἀπεφρήνατο. (Phys. IV 2, 209b11-16)

Perciò Platone dice nel Timeo che la materia e lo spazio sono la stessa cosa; infatti il partecipante e lo spazio sono una sola e identica cosa. **E pur parlando in termini diversi, sia là sia in quelle che si usano chiamare le ‘opinioni non scritte’, del partecipante**, afferma allo stesso modo che il luogo e lo spazio sono tutt’uno.

δοκεῖ δὲ αἰεὶ τὸ ὄν που αὐτὸ τε εἶναι τι καὶ ἕτερον τι ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ. (Πλάτωνι μέντοι λεκτέον, εἰ δεῖ παρεκβάντας εἰπεῖν, διὰ τὸ οὐκ ἐν τόπῳ; τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοί, εἶπερ τὸ μεθεκτικὸν ὁ τόπος, εἴτε τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ τοῦ μικροῦ ὄντος τοῦ μεθεκτικοῦ εἴτε τῆς ὕλης, ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ γέγραφεν). (Phys. IV 2, 209b11-16)

Sembra dunque che debbano trovarsi sempre in un luogo sia l'essere sia quel qualcos'altro che è fuori di esso. Bisognerebbe tuttavia chiedere a Platone (se a questo punto è permesso fare una digressione) perché, in tal caso, non dovrebbero trovarsi nel luogo anche le idee e i numeri, dal momento che il partecipante si identifica col luogo – **si intenda poi per partecipante il grande e il piccolo, oppure, come ha scritto nel Timeo, la materia**³⁷.

Emergono due considerazioni fondamentali:

- a. Platone avrebbe parlato in termini diversi (ἄλλον δὲ τρόπον) del partecipante (μεταληπτικὸν) nel Timeo e nelle dottrine non scritte.
- b. Il partecipante si identifica con il luogo, sia che si intenda il grande e il piccolo, sia, come Platone ha scritto nel Timeo, la materia.

Sembrerebbe che tanto nella *Metafisica* quanto in questi passi della *Fisica*, Aristotele tenda ad appiattire³⁸ entro un'unica nozione la χώρα del Timeo e il

³⁷ Per quanto riguarda la discussione concernente la natura e la validità dell'obiezione aristotelica, si vedano Ross (1936: 567), Morison (2002: 113-119), Algra (1995: 116-117).

³⁸ Una tendenza a schiacciare la materia sensibile sulla nozione del principio diadico sembra comparire anche nella prima Accademica, come testimonia il fr. 101 Isnardi Parente di Senocrate (Aet. Plac. I a 3, 23, 288 a Diels), in cui leggiamo che 'Senocrate disse che il tutto consta di uno e di perenne

grande e piccolo delle dottrine non scritte. Come si è detto, è plausibile che i due principi materiali coincidano da un punto di vista analogico³⁹.

La distinzione fra i due principi viene meglio esplicitata da Alessandro. Commentando il passo 988a 9-14, Alessandro scrive:

Εἰπὼν δύο αἰτίας εὐτὸν κεχρησθαι, καὶ μνημέουσας τῆς κατὰ τὸ εἶδος αἰτίας, καὶ δείξας πῶς αὕτη ἐστὶν αἰτία, προστίθῃσι τὴν δευτέραν, καὶ φησι ταύτην εἶναι τὴν ὑλικήν. τίς γὰρ ἦν ἡ ὕλη ἢ ὑποκειμένη, καθ'ἣς τὰ εἶδη ἔν τε τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς ιδέαις, λέγεται ὑπ'αυτοῦ. εἰπὼν δὲ τὰ γὰρ εἶδη τοῦ τί ἐστὶν αἰτία τοῖς ἄλλοις, τοῖς δὲ εἶδεσι τὸ ἔν, λέγων καὶ περὶ τῆς ὕλης τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν προειρημένων εἰδοποιουμένης, **τῆς ἐν ἀμφοτέροις ἐμνημόμενευσεν** εἰπὼν καθ'ἣς τὰ εἶδη τὰ μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν τὰ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς εἶδεσι λέγεται, ἴσον λέγων τῷ καθ'ἣς τὰ εἶδη λέγεται τα τε ἐπὶ τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς εἶδεσι, τουτέστι ταῖς ιδέαις· **λέγεται**

non uno (ἀέναν); con tal termine alludeva alla materia, in quanto essa è non-unità (ἄ-έν), in virtù della molteplicità che le è propria'. Anche Ermodoro, stando al fr. 8 *Isnardi Parente* (*Simpl. in Arist. Phys.*, 256, 31 ss. Diels) negava che vi fossero due principi in quanto indenticava il secondo, opposto all'Uno, alla materia: 'realtà instabile e priva di forma, indefinita e che addirittura non è, per privazione di essere'.

³⁹ Si deve notare che anche in Plotino compare una certa interscambiabilità fra le nozioni di χώρα e il grande e il piccolo: vi sono passi in cui la diade del grande e del piccolo è utilizzata per descrivere la materia del mondo sensibile (II 4 [12], 11.33-36; III 6 [26], 7.10-23); al contempo, accade che elementi caratterizzanti la χώρα del *Timeo* vengano utilizzati per parlare della materia intellegibile (un esempio piuttosto importante e ricorrente nelle *Enneadi* è quello del termine traccia: ἵχνος. Com'è noto, il termine è fortemente connotato in ambito platonico, in quanto Platone se ne serve per descrivere la χώρα nel suo stato 'precosmico' (*Tim.* 53b2). Plotino sfrutta tale termine nell'ambito della spiegazione della generazione ipostatica, per cui vi sarebbero tracce dell'Uno nel Nous e tracce del Nous nell'Anima. Si vedano ad esempio *Enn.* III 8 [30], 11.15-24, I 8 [51], 11.17, II 3 [52], 18.17, V 1 [10], 7.44, V 3 [49], 3.12. Credo questo dipenda non tanto da un uso analogico del principio materiale – come avviene invece in Aristotele –, ma piuttosto dal fatto che la materia intellegibile plotiniana, prima fuoriuscita dall'Uno (insieme all'alterità e al movimento, secondo quanto leggiamo in II 4 [12], 5.28-31), si pone come quel principio di indefinitezza e illimitatezza che caratterizza in modo crescente le ipostasi e che trova nella materia del mondo sensibile piena espressione. Il fatto che la materia del mondo sensibile sia in un certo senso principiata dalla Diade Indefinita e ne sia l'esito più estremo sembrerebbe spiegare il motivo per cui Plotino utilizza in modo interscambiabile elementi che descrivono la χώρα ed elementi attinenti alla diade del grande e del piccolo. Una lettura al contempo orizzontale e verticale dei generi del *Filebo* potrebbe aver favorito tale interpretazione (per cui da un lato ἡ ἀπειρον potrebbe essere un elemento interno all'intellegibile (*Phil.* 16c), ma d'altro lato caratterizzerebbe il sostrato materiale del mondo sensibile, rispetto a cui l'intellegibile ha la funzione di ἑράς).

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γὰρ καὶ ἐν ἐκείναις καὶ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς εἶναι τις ὕλη ὑποκειμένη, καθ' ἧς τὰ εἶδη, **τουτέστιν ἡ εἰδοποιουμένη**. ὅτι γὰρ **δυάς** ἐστὶν αὕτη, δυάς δὲ ποταπή, διὰ τῆς προσθήκης ἐδήλωσεν· οὐ γὰρ ἡ **ὠρισμένη** καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς, ἀλλ' ἡ **ἀόριστος**· τοιαύτη γὰρ τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν. γράφεται καὶ οὕτως καθ' ἧς τὰ εἶδη μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν, τὸ δὲ ἐν ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι λέγεται, καὶ εἴη ἂν τὸ λεγόμενον, καθ' ἧς τὰ μὲν εἶδη ἔστι τε καὶ λέγεται **ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς (ἐν γὰρ τῇ ὕλῃ ταύτῃ τὰ εἶδη ἐστὶ τὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν)**, τὸ δὲ ἐν ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι καὶ ταῖς ιδέαις· ἡ γὰρ ἐν **ἐκείνοις ὕλῃ** ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐνὸς εἰδοποιεῖται. (in *Metaph.* 59,10-28)

Avendo detto che Platone si è servito di due cause, dopo aver menzionato quella formale e aver mostrato in che modo essa è causa, Aristotele introduce la seconda causa, che è – dice – quella materiale, di cui si predicano le forme, tanto nell'ambito dei sensibili quanto nell'ambito delle Idee. Dopo aver detto 'infatti le Idee sono cause formali delle altre e l'Uno è causa formale delle Idee', mentre parla della materia che acquista una forma in virtù delle Idee, **Aristotele ricorda la materia che si trova sia nei sensibili sia nelle Idee**, dicendo: 'della quale si predicano le forme, alcune nell'ambito dei sensibili, altre nell'ambito delle Forme', il che equivale a dire: 'della quale si predicano le forme, sia nell'ambito dei sensibili, sia nell'ambito delle forme, cioè le Idee'. Platone, **infatti afferma che tanto in queste quanto nelle cose sensibili dev'esserci una materia che funge da sostrato della quale si predicano le forme, una materia cioè che ha ricevuto una forma**. Con la frase successiva, Aristotele chiarisce che questa materia è la **diade**, indicando poi a quale tipo di diade si riferisca. Non si tratta, infatti, della diade **definita**, che si trova nei numeri, ma della **diade indefinita**, poiché tale è il grande e il piccolo. La frase si trova riportata anche nel seguente modo: 'la materia della quale si predicano le Forme, nell'ambito dei sensibili, e della quale si predica l'Uno, nell'ambito delle forme', e il significato sarebbe: la materia della quale le Idee sono forme e si predicano nelle cose sensibili (infatti le forme delle cose sensibili si trovano **in questa materia**) e della quale l'Uno si predica nelle Forme e nelle Idee: **in esse**, infatti, **la materia** viene informata dall'Uno.

Il passo è molto denso e solo mediante un'attenta lettura emergono gli elementi aggiunti al testo aristotelico. Anzitutto, se Aristotele parla della diade in termini predicativi (affermando che il principio materiale si predica – λέγεται – tanto dell'intelligibile quanto del sensibile), Alessandro si esprime, più concretamente, in termini locativi (ἐν ἀμφοτέροις; γὰρ καὶ ἐν ἐκείναις καὶ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς εἶναι; ἐν γὰρ τῇ ὕλῃ ταύτῃ τὰ εἶδη ἐστὶ τὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν; ἡ γὰρ ἐν ἐκείνοις ὕλῃ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐνὸς εἰδοποιεῖται): tanto nei sensibili quanto negli intellegibili dev'esserci una materia che funga da sostrato.

Inoltre, Alessandro aggiunge una specificazione degna di nota: tale materia soggiacente non consiste nella diade definita (ὠρισμένη) la quale si pone nei numeri (ἐν τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς), bensì nella diade indefinita (ἡ ἀόριστος) la quale è infatti il grande e il piccolo.

Ciò è significativo per almeno due ragioni: anzitutto, Aristotele non menziona mai la diade indefinita nel I libro della *Metafisica*, ma la nozione di δυάς ἀόριστος emerge in *Metaph.* XIII⁴⁰ (1081a15, 1081b21, 32, 1082b30, 1085b7) e in *Metaph.* XIV⁴¹ (1088b28, 1089a35, 1091a5).

Certamente il testo di *Metaph.* XIII non era ignoto a Plotino⁴². Ancor più importante, però, è il tipo di diade a cui Alessandro contrappone quella indefinita: la diade ὠρισμένη, della quale si dice che si trovi ἐν τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς.

Della coppia δυάς ἀόριστος/δυάς ὠρισμένη n'è una sola occorrenza nel testo aristotelico, in *Metaph.* XIII 1082a14, ove Aristotele scrive che i platonici sosterebbero che la diade indefinita, ricevendo la diade definita (λαβοῦσα τὴν ὠρισμένην δυάδα), genera due diadi (δύο δυάδας ἐποίησεν), poiché la diade indefinita duplica ciò che riceve (τοῦ γὰρ ληφθέντος ἦν δυοποιός). Poiché la distinzione fra la diade quale principio e la diade quale numero ideale viene qui indicata da Aristotele mediante la distinzione fra δυάς ἀόριστος e δυάς ὠρισμένη, essa viene ripresa da Alessandro nel commento al I libro della *Metafisica*, dove tale distinzione terminologica risulta invece assente⁴³.

⁴⁰ Bonitz (1870).

⁴¹ Bonitz (1870).

⁴² Ad esempio, la nota frase presente in *Enn.* V 4 [7], 2.7-8: 'ἐκ τῆς ἀορίστου δυάδος καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοὶ' (dalla diade indefinita e dall'uno <provengono> le idee e i numeri) sembrerebbe ricalcare un passo di *Metaph.* XIII 7, 1081a14-15: 'ὁ γὰρ ἀριθμὸς ἐστὶν ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ τῆς δυάδος τῆς ἀορίστου' (il numero infatti <è derivato> dall'uno e dalla diade indefinita).

⁴³ La distinzione aristotelica in *Metaph.* XIII è inquadrata alla luce della funzione duplicatrice (δυοποιόν) della diade. Tale funzione viene meglio spiegata da Alessandro che, basandosi probabilmente sul *De Bono*, dichiara quanto segue (in *Metaph.* 57.3-11): 'Questo perché, secondo Platone, la Diade è atta a dividere tutto ciò a cui si applica; perciò la chiamava anche duplicatrice. Infatti, raddoppiando ciascuna delle cose alle quali si applica, in un certo senso la divide, non permettendole di restare ciò che era. Tale divisione è la generazione dei numeri. Come le matrici e gli stampi rendono simili a sé tutte le cose che in essi sono state poste, così anche la Diade diventa generatrice, quasi fosse una matrice, dei numeri che vengono dopo di lei, facendo due e duplicando

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Alessandro ha quindi il merito di esplicitare la distinzione fra diade definita e indefinita in merito al commento del passo 988a9-14 della *Metafisica*, ove Aristotele sta esponendo la concezione platonica del principio materiale e afferma esclusivamente che il principio materiale è la diade del grande e del piccolo.

La distinzione fra lo stato indefinito e quello definito della diade viene ripresa da Plotino a proposito del processo della generazione dell'Intelletto dall'Uno. Le forme del verbo *ὀρίζω* sono infatti frequentemente utilizzate in riferimento al processo di determinazione tipico dell'ἐπιστροφή che consente alla diade indefinita di divenire propriamente Nous, essendosi volta al proprio principio, l'Uno. Troviamo occorrenze del verbo *ὀρίζω* in relazione al processo di determinazione della diade già nei trattati V 4 [7] e V 1 [10], i quali sono cronologicamente anteriori al trattato II 4 [12], ma presentano esplicitamente quella dottrina che, a partire dal dodicesimo trattato, possiamo chiamare dottrina della materia intellegibile.

Νόησις δὲ τὸ νοητὸν ὁρῶσα καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἐπιστραφεῖσα καὶ ἀπ'ἐκείνου οἶον ἀποτελουμένη ἀόριστος μὲν αὕτη ὥσπερ ὅψις, **ὀριζομένη** δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ. Διὸ καὶ εἴρηται ἐκ τῆς ἀορίστου δυνάδος καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοὶ τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ νοῦς. (Enn. V 4 [7], 2.4-8)

Il pensiero contempla l'oggetto pensato e si rivolge ad esso ed è da esso, per così dire, perfezionato; esso è indeterminato come la vista e riceve la sua **determinatezza** dall'oggetto intellegibile. Perciò si è detto anche: dalla dualità indefinita e dall'uno nascono le idee e i numeri, cioè l'intelligenza.

ὁ γὰρ ἀριθμὸς οὐ πρῶτος· καὶ γὰρ πρὸ δυνάδος τὸ ἓν, δεύτερον δὲ δυὰς καὶ παρὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς γεγεννημένη ἐκεῖνο **ὀριστήν** ἔχει, αὕτη δὲ **ἀόριστον** παρ'αὐτῆς· ὅταν δὲ ὀρισθῇ, ἀριθμὸς ἤδη· ἀριθμὸς δὲ ὡς οὐσία. (Enn. V 1 [10] 5.6-9)

tutto ciò cui sia stata applicata' (τοῦτο δὲ ὅτι δοκεῖ αὐτῷ ἡ δυὰς διαιρετική παντὸς εἶναι ᾧ προσήγετο· διὸ καὶ δυοποιὸν αὐτὴν ἐκάλει. δις γὰρ ἕκαστον τῶν οἷς προσάγεται ποιούσα διαιρεῖ πως αὐτό, οὐ ἔωσα μένειν ὁ ἦν· ἥτις διαίρεσις γένεσις ἐστὶν ἀριθμῶν. ὥσπερ τὰ ἐκμαγεῖσα καὶ οἱ τύποι πάντα τὰ ἐναρμολοθέντα αὐτοῖς ὅμοια ποιοῦσιν, οὕτω καὶ ἡ δυὰς ὥσπερ τι οὐσα ἐκμαγεῖον τῶν μετ'αὐτὴν γεννητική ἀριθμῶν γίνεται, ἕκαστον ᾧ ἂν προσαχθῇ δύο τε καὶ διπλοῦν ποιούσα).

E infatti il numero non è primo: prima della diade è l'uno, e per seconda è la diade, che nasce dall'uno ed è **definita** da esso, essendo lei di per sé **indefinita**. Quando viene definita, è già numero: numero **come sostanza**.

Anche nel trattato II 4, precisamente nel passo che consente di legare la trattazione della materia intellegibile al processo della genesi dell'Intelletto a partire dall'Uno affrontata in altri trattati⁴⁴ delle *Enneadi*, troviamo l'utilizzo del verbo *ορίζω*.

καὶ γὰρ ἡ ἑτερότης ἢ ἐκεῖ ἀεί, ἢ τὴν ὕλην ποιεῖ· ἀρχὴ γὰρ ὕλης αὕτη, 30 καὶ ἡ κίνησις ἢ πρώτη· διὸ καὶ αὕτη ἑτερότης ἐλέγετο, ὅτι ὁμοῦ ἐξέυσαν κίνησις καὶ ἑτερότης· ἀόριστον δὲ καὶ ἡ κίνησις καὶ ἡ ἑτερότης ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου, κάκεινου πρὸς τὸ **ὀρισθῆναι** δεόμενα· **ὀρίζεται** δὲ, ὅταν πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐπιστραφῇ. (*Enn.* II 4 [12], 5.28-34)

E, infatti, l'alterità⁴⁵ di lassù, la quale produce la materia, è sempre: infatti essa è il principio della materia, e il primo movimento. Perciò anch'esso veniva chiamato alterità, perché alterità e movimento nacquero insieme. Indefinito è sia il movimento, sia l'alterità che dal primo, e del primo hanno bisogno per **essere definiti: si definiscono** quando si voltano verso di lui.

Alessandro, dunque, anzitutto esplicita meglio quanto affermato da Aristotele, utilizzando complementi di stato in luogo per posizionare la materia tanto nei sensibili quanto negli intellegibili e distinguendo più nettamente questa materia (la materia sensibile informata dalle idee, che si predicano dei sensibili) dalla materia posta nelle idee (la quale viene informata dall'uno). In secondo luogo, specifica che il principio materiale platonico non è semplicemente la diade, ma la diade indefinita, mentre la diade definita (*ὠρισμένη*) si troverebbe nei numeri.

⁴⁴ Come i già citati trattati V 1 [10] e V 4 [7].

⁴⁵ La nozione di alterità come dimensione interna al *Nous* era già stata introdotta nel decimo trattato (V 1 [10] 4.33-35) come forza che divide pensiero e pensato; la nozione è ripresa non solo dal *Sofista*, ma anche dal *Parmenide* (143b1-8); nel ventiduesimo trattato, Plotino afferma che 'il *Nous* è molteplice per l'alterità, non in modo spaziale, uno in tutto' (καὶ νοῦς πολὺς ἑτερότητι, οὐ τόπω, ὁμοῦ δὲ πᾶς, VI 4 [22] 4.25). Ancora, nel trattato 27 (IV 3 [27], 4.9 ss.) il concetto di alterità torna sempre nella stessa accezione. Essa viene infine trattata in modo più completo e sistematico nel secondo trattato *Sui generi dell'essere* (VI 2 [43], 8).

SYNTHESIS

Poiché per Plotino il Nous è composto da forme e numeri (τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοὶ τοῦτο γάρ ὁ νοῦς, V 4 [7] 2.7-8), sostenere che la diade definita si trovi nei numeri è perfettamente sensato: i numeri (ciò che compone la seconda ipostasi) sono l'esito del processo di determinazione di quel sostrato indefinito, la diade indefinita (o materia intellegibile) che per prima emerge dalla potenza infinita dell'Uno e che, voltandosi verso il genitore, ottiene determinazione, divenendo in tal senso numero (e quindi Nous).

ὁ οὖν ἐκεῖ λεγόμενος ἀριθμὸς καὶ ἡ δυὰς λόγοι καὶ νοῦς· ἀλλὰ ἀόριστος μὲν ἡ δυὰς τῷ οἷον ὑποκειμένῳ λαμβανομένη, ὁ δὲ ἀριθμὸς ὁ ἐξ αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ἑνὸς εἶδος ἕκαστος, οἷον μορφωθέντος τοῖς γενομένοις εἶδεσιν ἐν αὐτῷ. (Enn. V 1 [10], 5.13-16)

Pertanto quello che lassù si dice numero e diade corrisponde ai principi razionali e all'Intelletto. La diade è indeterminata se la si considera identica a una specie di sostrato, ma il numero che deriva da essa e dall'Uno corrisponde ad ogni singola forma, come se l'intelletto fosse stato modellato dalle forme sopraggiunte in esso.

Certamente il passo di Alessandro – nonostante l'affinità terminologica e contenutistica che subito desta l'attenzione del lettore avvezzo al testo plotiniano – vuole rendere conto di una teoria differente da quella plotiniana. Alessandro, infatti, testimoniando quanto avrebbe scritto Aristotele nel Περί τὰγαθοῦ, rende conto della generazione dei numeri ideali distinguendo fra la Diade indefinita, la quale è principio insieme all'Uno, e la diade posta nei numeri (la diade come numero ideale). Se nel caso della diade indefinita le parti costitutive (il grande e il piccolo, l'eccedente e l'ecceduto) sono indefinite, nel caso della diade definita, invece, tali parti costitutive sono state determinate dall'uno divenendo doppio e metà⁴⁶.

Plotino invece, anzitutto adotta un sistema emanazionistico tale per cui la diade non è principio insieme all'Uno, ma deriva dall'Uno stesso⁴⁷ e si caratterizza come un momento di indeterminazione nel processo di

⁴⁶ in *Metaph.* 56, 21-35.

⁴⁷ 'Il numero infatti non è primo; prima della diade è l'Uno, e la diade, seconda e derivata dall'Uno, ha l'Uno come suo determinatore, essendo per sé indeterminata' (ὁ γὰρ ἀριθμὸς οὐ πρῶτος· καὶ γὰρ πρὸ δυάδος τὸ ἓν, δεύτερον δὲ δυὰς καὶ παρὰ τοῦ ἑνὸς γεγενημένη ἐκείνο ὀριστὴν ἔχει, αὕτη δὲ ἀόριστον παρὰ αὐτῆς, Enn. V 1 [10], 5.6-8).

generazione della seconda ipostasi. In secondo luogo, la coppia Uno/Diade non è utilizzata da Plotino in senso matematizzante⁴⁸: anche se si fa riferimento ai numeri, si devono intendere i numeri come ciò che caratterizza l'intelligibile (τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοὶ τοῦτο γάρ ὁ νοῦς, V 4 [7], 2.7-8). I numeri vanno intesi, quindi, 'come sostanza' (ὅταν δὲ ὀρισθῇ, ἀριθμὸς ἤδη· ἀριθμὸς δὲ ὡς οὐσία, V 1 [10], 5.9).

6.1. Un indizio ulteriore: il ruolo unificante della materia

Nel terzo capitolo del trattato II 4 [12] vi è un passo in cui Plotino descrive il diverso modo in cui la forma è presente nella materia del mondo sensibile e nella materia intelligibile⁴⁹. Se la materia del mondo sensibile può accogliere solo una forma alla volta, la materia intelligibile invece possiede tutte le forme contemporaneamente.

ἡ δὲ τῶν γιγνομένων ὕλη αἰεὶ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο εἶδος ἴσχει, τῶν δὲ αἰδίων ἡ αὐτὴ ταῦτόν αἰεὶ. τάχα δὲ ἀνάπαλιν ἡ ἐνταῦθα. ἐνταῦθα μὲν γὰρ παρὰ μέρος πάντα καὶ ἐν ἐκάστοτε· διὸ οὐδὲν ἐμμένει ἄλλου ἄλλο ἐξωθοῦντος· διὸ οὐ ταῦτόν αἰεὶ. ἐκεῖ δὲ ἅμα πάντα· διὸ οὐκ ἔχει εἰς ὃ μεταβάλλοι, ἤδη γὰρ ἔχει πάντα. (Enn. II 4 [12], 3.9-14)

Del resto, la materia degli esseri generati sempre possiede una forma e poi un'altra, la materia degli esseri eterni è sempre la stessa. Senza dubbio l'inverso avviene per la materia di qua. Qui, infatti, la materia è, parte per parte, tutte le cose ed è ogni singola cosa di volta in volta. Perciò nulla permane, poiché una forma scalza l'altra. Per questo la materia non è sempre la stessa cosa. Lì invece la materia è contemporaneamente tutte le cose; perciò non ha nulla in cui mutare, infatti ha già tutto. (traduzione mia)

⁴⁸ Non a caso, Plotino non riprende la questione, presente in Aristotele e in Alessandro, riguardante la generazione dei numeri primi e dei numeri pari (*Metaph.* I 6, 987b33 ss. e in *Metaph.* 55-57); si veda inoltre Chiaradonna (2009: 57-62).

⁴⁹ La questione trae origine da un'obiezione possibile alla materia intelligibile, presentata da Plotino nel secondo capitolo (2.5-6), secondo la quale se tutti gli intelligibili sono degli esseri semplici, non vi sarà allora bisogno di materia, la quale caratterizza i corpi composti. Nel terzo capitolo Plotino risponde all'obiezione affermando che negli intelligibili il composto si trova 'in altro modo, non alla maniera dei corpi' (3.5-6). Il passo che mi appresto a citare nel testo è volto a specificare maggiormente il modo peculiare in cui si caratterizza la composizione nel mondo intelligibile.

Studiosi quali Narbonne e Dufour⁵⁰ citano a tal proposito il passo 320b16-17 di *De generatione et corruptione*: '[...] ἡ ὕλη, ἣν οὐδέποτε' ἄνευ πάθους οἶον τε εἶναι οὐδ' ἄνευ μορφῆς' ('[...] la materia, ed essa non può esistere senza affezioni e forma', trad. M. Migliori).

Tuttavia, mi pare che il commento di Alessandro al passo 988a1-7⁵¹ della *Metafisica* possa spiegare altrettanto bene l'origine del passo plotiniano.

Εἰπὼν ὡς ὕλην ἀρχὴν εἶναι κατὰ Πλάτωνα τὴν ἀόριστον δυάδα, καὶ ἔτι ὅτι ἡ δυὰς αὐτῷ ἀρχὴ ὕλικὴ δοκεῖ, προσθεῖς ὅτι γὰρ ἄπειρος τῇ αὐτῆς φύσει καὶ γεννητικῇ πλήθους, αἰτιᾶται τῆς δόξης τοῦτο ὡς μὴ τοῖς φαινομένοις τε καὶ γινομένοις ὁμολογουμένως λεγόμενον. οἱ μὲν γὰρ τὴν δυάδα ὡς ὕλην ἀρχὴν τιθέμενοι πολλῶν αὐτὴν ποιούσι γεννητικὴν· αὕτη γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἡ αὐτὴ λαμβανομένη τοῦ πλήθους καὶ τῶν ἀρτίων ἀριθμῶν πάντων γεννητικῇ, τοὺς μὲν συντιθεῖσά τε καὶ οὕτως γεννώσα, τοὺς δὲ διαιροῦσα δίχα· ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῖς ἀρχὴ ἐνοποιός ἐστι τῷ ἔν τι εἶναι πᾶν τὸ εἶδος πεπερασμένον τε καὶ ὠρισμένον κατὰ τὸ εἶναι. καὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀριθμῶν ἕκαστος ἔν τι ἐνοποιὸν μὲν γὰρ τι τὸ ἐν αὐτό, διχοποιὸς δὲ ἡ ἀόριστος δυὰς. οὐ μὴν οὕτως ἐπὶ τῶν γινομένων ἔχει, ἃ ἐκείνοις ὁμοίωται καὶ πρὸς ἐκείνα τὸ εἶναι ἔχει, ἀλλ' ἔμπαλιν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ὕλη ἡ μία κατ' ἀριθμὸν ἐνός τινος εἶδους ἐστὶ δεκτικὴ τε καὶ γεννητικῇ· οὐ γὰρ οἶόν τε ἐπὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ὕλῃ κατὰ τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἅμα εἶδη πλείω εἶναι, ὡς εἶναι τὸ αὐτὸ ξύλον καὶ κλίνην καὶ τράπεζαν καὶ βάθρον, ἀλλ' ἡ μία ὕλη ἔν τι εἶδος ἐνεργεῖα μόνον ἔχει. τὸ μέντοι εἶδος ἐν ὃν τῷ ἀριθμῷ πλείονα εἶδη ποιεῖ. (in *Metaph.* 58.1-18)

Dopo aver detto che per Platone la Diade indefinita è principio nel senso di materia e che gli sembra un principio materiale, avendo aggiunto che la Diade per sua natura è infinita e produce molteplicità, Aristotele critica questo punto della dottrina in quanto non concorda con le cose quali appaiono e che sono generate. I Platonici, infatti, considerando la Diade principio materiale, la rendono capace di

⁵⁰ Narbonne (1993: 319), Dufour (in Pradeau/Brisson 2003: 264, n.9).

⁵¹ 'Tuttavia le cose vanno in modo almeno contrario, perché così non è ragionevole. Oggi, infatti, fanno derivare molte cose dalla materia, mentre la forma genera una sola volta, laddove è invece evidente che da una sola materia deriva un solo tavolo, mentre colui che applica la forma, pur essendo uno solo, ne produce molti. Allo stesso modo si comporta anche il maschio verso la femmina: questa infatti è fecondata da un solo accoppiamento, mentre il maschio ne feconda molte; tuttavia queste sono immagini di quei principi' (καίτοι συμβαίνει γ' ἐναντίως: οὐ γὰρ εὐλογον οὕτως. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς ὕλης πολλὰ ποιοῦσιν, τὸ δ' εἶδος ἅπαξ γεννᾷ μόνον, φαίνεται δ' ἐκ μιᾶς ὕλης μία τράπεζα, ὁ δὲ τὸ εἶδος ἐπιφέρειν εἰς ὧν πολλὰς ποιεῖ. ὁμοίως δ' ἔχει καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ: τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ μιᾶς πληροῦται ὀχείας, τὸ δ' ἄρρεν πολλὰ πληροῖ: καίτοι ταῦτα μιμήματα τῶν ἀρχῶν ἐκείνων ἐστίν).

generare i molti, essendo per loro questa la stessa diade assunta come produttrice della molteplicità e di tutti i numeri pari, alcuni dei quali sono da essa combinati e, in tal modo, generati, altri sono divisi in due. Quello che per loro è il principio formale, invece, è unificante, poiché ogni forma, essendo limitata e definita nel suo essere, è qualcosa di uno. Ogni numero, in effetti, è qualcosa di uno, e mentre lo stesso Uno unifica, la Diade indefinita divide in due. Ma, riguardo agli elementi che si generano, i quali sono resi simili alle forme e hanno il loro essere in riferimento a queste, le cose non stanno certo in questo modo, bensì al contrario. Una materia unica dal punto di vista numerico può accogliere e generare una sola forma, giacché non è possibile che nella stessa materia numericamente una ci siano contemporaneamente più forme, come se uno stesso pezzo di legno potesse essere allo stesso tempo letto, tavolo e sedia; una materia, al contrario, possiede in atto solo una determinata forma. La forma, invece, pur essendo numericamente una, produce molte forme.

Alessandro, nell'esporre la critica aristotelica, mostra una differenza fra ciò che avviene nell'ambito numerico e ciò che caratterizza il mondo sensibile. Nell'ambito numerico è possibile intendere la diade come principio di molteplicità, mentre l'Uno è principio di unità. Nell'ambito sensibile, tuttavia, sembrerebbe avvenire il contrario: la materia può accogliere una sola forma (non è possibile che vi siano contemporaneamente più forme), mentre la forma può produrre molte forme. Così, sembrerebbe che la materia sia responsabile dell'unità e la forma della molteplicità.

Plotino accetta il fatto che nell'ambito intellegibile (così egli traduce l'ambito numerico) il rapporto fra materia e forma si configuri in modo diverso rispetto all'ambito sensibile. Tuttavia, sembra capovolgere l'argomentazione di Alessandro: proprio perché la materia del mondo sensibile accoglie una forma dopo l'altra e non può accogliere insieme l'intera dimensione intellegibile, essa è causa di molteplicità. Nell'ambito intellegibile, invece, ove la materia può accogliere contemporaneamente tutte le idee di cui l'Intelletto si compone, essa viene descritta come un sostrato che, permettendo la differenziazione e la definizione delle idee e permettendo, dunque, la molteplicità eidetica, fornirebbe l'unità che rende possibile tale molteplicità. In tal modo Plotino risponde alla critica mossa da Aristotele a Platone per come essa è stata riportata da Alessandro.

SYNTHESIS

ἀμερὲς μὲν γὰρ παντελῶς πάντα αὐτό, μεριστὸν δὲ ὅπως οὖν. καὶ εἰ μὲν διασπασθέντα ἀπ' ἀλλήλων τὰ μέρη, ἢ τομή καὶ ἡ διάσπασις ὕλης ἐστὶ πάθος· αὕτη γὰρ ἡ τμηθεῖσα· εἰ δὲ πολλὰ ὄν ἀμέριστόν ἐστι, τὰ πολλὰ ἐν ἐνὶ ὄντι ἐν ὕλῃ ἐστὶ τῷ ἐνὶ αὐτὰ μορφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὄντα· τὸ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ [τὸ ποικίλον] νόησον ποικίλον καὶ πολύμορφον. (*Enn.* II 4 [12], 4.11-17)

Da un lato la forma è dappertutto, interamente priva di parti, d'altro lato è in qualche maniera divisa. E se le parti risultano separate le une dalle altre, il taglio e la separazione sono un'affezione della materia: è questa, infatti, che è stata tagliata. Ma se, pur essendo molteplice, una forma è indivisibile, questa molteplicità che è nell'unità, è nella materia che è quell'unità, costituendo le figure di quest'ultima. Questa unità, infatti, è pensata come varia e multiforme.

È proprio negli intellegibili, dunque, che la materia costituisce una qualche forma di unità⁵², poiché capace di accogliere l'intera dimensione ideale. Tale unità, nondimeno, è varia e multiforme (ποικίλον καὶ πολύμορφον): aggettivi che lo stesso Alessandro ha impiegato⁵³, nel *De Anima*⁵⁴, per descrivere l'intelletto come abito.

⁵² Proprio sulla natura unificante della materia intellegibile si interrogava Armstrong (1940: 66-68): 'Nous here does not seem to function as Mind, and the conception of the interpenetrability of the intellectual-intelligible beings is absent. The principle of unity in the intelligible world is simply its matter. This is not only difficult to fit in with Plotinus's general thought. It is also difficult to reconcile with the next chapter of the same treatise'.

È noto che da quest'aporia individuata da Armstrong prende inizio l'articolo di Rist, il quale ad Armstrong risponde: 'Plotinus is not examining at this point the gener Second Hypostasis, but the constitution and elements of it once generated. Armstrong's remark that "Nous here does not seem to function as Mind" is irrelevant, for the role of the hypostasis as Mind is not under discussion. We can thus say that Plotinus thinks of Intelligible Matter in two aspects, and that these aspects must be kept apart. First, it is that effluence from the One which we may call the Dyad, from whose return to it Source is generated the "fully-fledged" Second Hypostasis; secondly, it is that same Matter now viewed as the base of the World of Forms constructed on semi-Aristotelian lines as a complex of Form and Intelligible Matter. Provided one accepts the theory taught by Plotinus to explain the generation of the Second Hypostasis from the One, these two aspects of Intelligible Matter are thus seen to be not contradictory but complementary' (Rist 1962: 105).

⁵³ Come hanno notato, anzitutto, Henry/Schwyzler (1951-1973).

⁵⁴ *De An.* 85.23-24.

7. Conclusioni

Si è dunque mostrato, anzitutto, che il capitolo introduttivo del trattato II 4 [12] segue lo schema aristotelico per come lo si trova in *Metaph.* I 988a23-29.

Si è poi visto come il *Commento* di Alessandro di Afrodisia costituisca un medio importante fra la *Metafisica* aristotelica e il testo plotiniano: anzitutto, esso consente di individuare chiaramente i riferimenti impliciti del sottogruppo monista e del sottogruppo dualista distinti da Plotino nel capitolo introduttivo; in secondo luogo, esso delinea con più chiarezza le due materie platoniche situate l'una nei sensibili e l'altra negli intellegibili, ed esplicita che la materia posta negli intellegibili (distinta dunque da 'questa materia', ἐν γὰρ τῇ ὅλῃ ταύτῃ, presente nei sensibili) sia la diade indefinita, la quale diviene definita nei numeri.

Infine, il testo di Alessandro sembra plausibilmente essere alla base del passo II 4 [12], 3.9-14 a proposito della differente modalità d'accoglimento delle forme da parte delle due materie, ove Plotino risponderebbe ad un'obiezione aristotelica che è solo implicitamente presente nel testo aristotelico e che, piuttosto, viene riferita dal commentatore.

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**Tradere/Tradire Gamma 1-2: spunti per una nuova interpretazione
dell'ontologia in epoca moderna***

Abstract: Book *Gamma* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* becomes, within the tradition of the *Schulmetaphysik* of the 17th century, a reference text for the starting point of any discussion about the science of being. Although in most cases it is interpreted faithfully, a certain current advocates a reading that gives rise to a more original and clearly more radical interpretation of the science of being. *Gamma* is thus 'betrayed' and restored without taking into account the correlation, necessary within the Aristotelian framework, of chapter 1, i.e. the one that presents the science of being as being, with chapter 2, i.e. the one that converges all the meanings of being in the substance. To clarify this point, we take as a case study the German Calvinist Johannes Clauberg (1622-1665) and his doctrine of the three meanings of being contained in the *Ontosophia* of 1647 and later editions.

Keywords: Aristotle; Clauberg; Plato; Metaphysics; Book Gamma; Ontology

Il libro *Gamma* della *Metaphysica* di Aristotele diviene, nell'alveo della tradizione della *Schulmetaphysik* del Seicento, un testo di riferimento per l'avvio di qualsivoglia discussione intorno alla scienza dell'essere. Citato assiduamente da più autori, *Gamma* 1 è il passo con cui gli esponenti della scolastica moderna si confrontano maggiormente per definire qual è l'oggetto della metafisica, quali sono i suoi confini e in che modo esso si distingue dagli oggetti delle altre scienze. Benché nella maggior parte dei casi esso venga per lo più letto e interpretato fedelmente, *Gamma* 1 viene altresì 'tradito' e restituito senza che di esso si tenga adeguatamente in considerazione la correlazione, necessaria nell'ambito dell'impianto aristotelico, con il capitolo che lo segue, *Gamma* 2. Questo è il caso, a nostro avviso, di una certa corrente della *Schulmetaphysik*, che, nel solco della confessione riformata calvinista, dà origine a una

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interpretazione nettamente più radicale della scienza dell'ente. Il richiamo a *Gamma* diviene allora un fatto di scuola e l'esito di una prassi – lo scolasticismo è prima di tutto un metodo – che tuttavia viene, almeno parzialmente, smentita nei contenuti.

Dopo aver dedicato una prima parte all'analisi del contesto storico-filosofico e all'esposizione degli aspetti generali della *Schulmetaphysik*, prendiamo in considerazione il caso di Johannes Clauberg, per mostrare il modo in cui la nascita dell'ontologia si compie attraverso un certo 'tradimento' di *Gamma* 1-2. Clauberg (Solingen 1622-Duisburg 1665), figura a metà strada tra lo scolasticismo e il cartesianesimo¹, trascorre la maggior parte della sua vita insegnando teologia e filosofia al ginnasio di Duisburg, di cui diviene il primo rettore quando la scuola viene trasformata in università nel 1655. Al ginnasio di Brema è allievo di Gerhard de Neufville (1590-1648), tramite il quale studia la filosofia di Bacone e di Comenio. Nel 1644 si iscrive all'Università di Groningen, dove rimane fino al 1646. Nei due anni successivi intraprende una *peregrinatio studiorum* a Saumur, Parigi e Londra. La prima prova dell'incontro di Clauberg con la filosofia di Descartes risale al 20 aprile 1648 e si tratta del resoconto della conversazione tra Descartes e Burman avvenuta a Egmond il 16 aprile 1648. Dal 1649 al 1651 Clauberg è professore di filosofia e teologia a Herborn, dove, insieme all'amico Christoph Wittich (1625-1687), viene attaccato per la sua simpatia verso la nuova filosofia cartesiana. In seguito all'adozione dell'aristotelismo da parte dell'università, si trasferisce a Duisburg, dove rimane fino alla morte, avvenuta nel 1665 all'età di 42 anni.

1. La *Schulmetaphysik* e la nascita dell'ontologia

Con il termine *Schulmetaphysik*, ossia la 'metafisica di scuola', ci si riferisce all'insegnamento della filosofia – e alla tradizione di trattati e manuali – nelle scuole e nelle università protestanti che, a partire dagli ultimi anni del XVI

¹ Su questo aspetto più generale si veda Ragni (2019).

secolo, hanno accompagnato la ripresa dello studio della metafisica². Il dibattito intorno alla natura della metafisica segue, infatti, al fenomeno dell'esclusione prima (1520-1590) e della reintroduzione poi della disciplina all'interno dei *curricula* delle istituzioni accademiche protestanti. Come hanno ben mostrato i lavori di Joseph Freedman³, la reintroduzione della metafisica, che fa seguito all'orientamento nettamente anti-metafisico suscitato dal divieto di Lutero e alla diffusione nelle accademie e nei ginnasi riformati del ramismo e di una spiccata preferenza nei confronti della logica e dell'esegesi delle Scritture, si basa su diversi elementi, fra i quali vanno ricordati almeno la rinascita dell'aristotelismo, come avviene nel caso della scuola di Padova e della scuola di Altdorf, l'influenza delle scuole gesuite presenti in Germania, in cui si insegna la metafisica di Aristotele, e soprattutto la diffusione delle opere della scolastica gesuita spagnola, come le *Disputationes metaphysicae* (1597) di Suárez, che sono pubblicate per la prima volta in Germania (a Mainz) nel 1600 e divengono rapidamente un modello di riferimento per l'interpretazione della metafisica nell'intero corso della *Schulmetaphysik*. Una volta reintrodotta lo studio della metafisica, emerge l'esigenza di distinguerla dalle altre parti della filosofia, per chiarire i suoi rapporti con la logica, vale a dire la scienza che, nella precedente fase anti-metafisica, aveva assunto un ruolo guida nell'indagine sull'ente (impiego qui di preferenza il termine 'ente' in luogo di 'essere' in conformità al significato tecnico del termine latino *ens*).

Il ritorno della metafisica è ufficialmente inaugurato dall'avvio del primo corso di metafisica all'*Academia Julia* di Helmstedt, tenuto dal luterano

² Su questo argomento si vedano i grandi lavori di sintesi: Petersen (1921), Jansen (1937), Wundt, (1939), Sparr (1976), Leinsle (1985, 1988). Sull'influsso della metafisica di Suárez nel contesto accademico tedesco, protestante e riformato, si veda Courtine (1990).

³ Freedman si è occupato ampiamente della questione dell'esclusione e della reintroduzione della metafisica all'interno dell'insegnamento universitario, così come della questione della classificazione delle discipline filosofiche all'interno dei *curricula* universitari delle istituzioni accademiche cattoliche e protestanti dell'Europa centrale tra XVI e XVII secolo. Si veda dunque Freeman (1983, 1984, 1999, 2003, 2010). Freedman (2011) ha analizzato l'ipotesi di una correlazione diretta tra confessione religiosa – e tipologia di confessione religiosa – e filosofia accademica scolastica e in che misura l'organizzazione dei *curricula* dipenda dall'orientamento religioso delle singole istituzioni.

Cornelius Martini nel 1597. Tuttavia, è innanzitutto la partecipazione dei calvinisti al dibattito della prima stagione della *Schulmetaphysik* a rivelarsi decisiva. Appare evidente, dai casi di Rudolph Göckel (Goclenius) e di Clemens Timpler, che nel loro ritorno allo studio della metafisica i calvinisti si mostrano assai meno influenzati dei luterani da conflitti di ordine confessionale e ideologico. Queste più deboli interferenze permettono ai calvinisti, alla fine del XVI secolo, di giungere a una prima ‘importazione’ in Germania dei modelli metafisici dei gesuiti (Pedro da Fonseca, Francisco Suárez e Benet Perera), ed è precisamente in tale contesto che nasce l’ontologia moderna come disciplina generale autonoma, ben presto segnata da una forte caratterizzazione come scienza ‘noetica’, cioè come una scienza il cui oggetto universale non è più inteso come ciò che esiste realmente, bensì, e prima di tutto, come ciò che è concepito dall’intelletto⁴.

Goclenius è l’autore della prima opera di metafisica redatta non solo negli ambienti riformati, ma anche protestanti in generale – si tratta dell’*Isagoge in peripateticorum et scholasticorum primam philosophiam* del 1598 – come pure del *Lexicon philosophicum* del 1613, nel quale si incontra una delle prime occorrenze, ancora in lingua greca, del termine ὀντολογία⁵ (in una nota

⁴ Secondo Jean-François (1990), con Goclenius (1598), con Timpler (1604) – e poi con Clauberg – si accentua il tratto fondamentale del procedimento suáreziano, vale a dire l’ontologizzazione della metafisica. Secondo Courtine in questi autori è ravvisabile la tendenza a fare della ‘cogitabilità’ il tratto fondamentale di qualsiasi entità, facendo sì che l’oggetto in generale della metafisica non sia più definito in base a ciò che esiste realmente, ma in base a ciò che l’intelletto concepisce (‘oggettività senza oggetto’). Sull’ipotesi della metafisica come scienza noetica si veda anche Carraud (1999: 17): ‘Un premier point se trouve donc confirmé: à la suite de Timpler et de Goclenius, Clauberg témoigne bien – sans originalité – de ce que nous pouvons peut-être appeler une “noétisation” de la métaphysique. Du moins l’ontologie est-elle dès son origine, en tant qu’ontologie de l’intelligible, une “hyper- ontologie”’. Anche Jean École (1999: 64) parla di una lunga evoluzione che ha condotto gli scolastici a sostituire all’ente concepito come l’atto che fa esistere tutto ciò che è, l’ente considerato come il denominatore comune di tutto ciò che è rappresentabile: ‘c’est la conception de l’être désexistentialisé qui est à l’origine de ces manuels, qu’on les appelle *Ontologia*, *Metaphysica*, *Sapientia* ou encore *Ontosophia*’.

⁵ La prima occorrenza del termine *ontologia* è presente negli *Ogdoas scholastica* (1606) di Jacob Lorhard. Per una analisi delle occorrenze del termine rimandiamo a Lamanna/Devaux (2009), aggiornata da Devaux (2021).

marginale, per indicare la *philosophia de ente*) e dell'aggettivo ὄντολογική (per designare il genere di astrazione che appartiene alle matematiche). Nel 1604 vede la luce il *Metaphysicae systema methodicum* di Timpler, uno dei manuali di metafisica maggiormente presenti nelle accademie e nei ginnasi riformati dell'Europa centrale, che diverrà opera di riferimento per l'intero XVII secolo in ragione dell'identità che vi è stabilita fra l'intelligibile e l'oggetto della metafisica. La nascita dell'ontologia moderna è d'altra parte associata alla separazione fra *metaphysica generalis* e *metaphysica specialis*⁶. L'idea di dividere la metafisica emerge già nel Medioevo, ma è nel *De communibus omnium rerum naturalium principiis et affectionibus* (Roma 1576) di Perera che si trova introdotta, con una cesura più radicale, la separazione fra la *prima philosophia*, che concerne le cose più universali, e la metafisica nel senso di *scientia divina*, che si occupa di Dio. Una simile distinzione è tuttavia fissata per la prima volta dal luterano Christoph Scheibler nel suo *Opus metaphysicum* pubblicato a Giessen nel 1617 e resa corrente da Johannes Micraelius nel suo *Lexicon philosophicum* pubblicato a Jena nel 1653, in cui appaiono già i segni di una separazione, che è ormai vera e propria dissociazione, fra la dottrina dell'ente (ontologia o *ontosophia*) e la dottrina delle sostanze immateriali che vanno a costituire la *theologia*, l'*angelographia* e la *psychologia* e, più in generale, fra l'ontologia e la *pneumatica*⁷. Lo statuto dell'ontologia moderna è dunque quello di una dottrina generale

⁶ Per la storia di questa partizione, si veda Vollrath (1962). L'idea di dividere la metafisica è già presente durante il Medioevo, tuttavia è nel *De communibus omnium rerum naturalium principiis et affectionibus* (Roma 1576) di Pereira, che si introduce con un taglio nettamente più radicale la separazione tra la *prima philosophia*, che tratta delle cose più universali, e la metafisica nel senso di *scientia divina* che si occupa di Dio. Anche per Rompe (1968: 200) il gesuita spagnolo deve essere considerato come 'der Urheber einer Trennung von Seins- und Gotteslehre'. La distinzione, tuttavia, viene fissata per la prima volta da Christoph Scheibler nell'*Opus metaphysicum* edito a Giessen nel 1617 e consacrata da Johannes Micraelius nel *Lexicon philosophicum* edito a Jena nel 1653. Marion (1986) giunge a formulare l'ipotesi che Descartes abbia visto nella denominazione di *prima philosophia* di Pereira un incitamento lessicale per la sua filosofia, ma non certamente un'acquisizione teorica. Per una riflessione più generale sulla natura della metafisica come unità di due aspetti o come dualismo di due scienze, rimando a Berti (2004a), il quale offre una ricostruzione storica sullo statuto della metafisica a partire dalla riflessione di Aristotele sino all'epoca moderna.

⁷ Per un esame della nascita dell'ontologia in epoca moderna attraverso i lessici filosofici, rimandiamo a Ragni (2017).

dell'ente e delle sue proprietà universali che si situano al di là della divisione categoriale dell'ente in sostanza e accidente – ecco perché essa è anche 'trascendentale': il suo oggetto è supremamente generale, astratto e indeterminato, indifferente a qualunque distinzione ontica; ed ecco perché essa è una scienza autonoma dalla teologia naturale: Dio vi rientra, al limite, come un caso particolare di sostanza.

Questo processo dipende anche dal mutamento di significato dell'espressione *prima philosophia*. La filosofia è detta 'prima' tanto in virtù dell'universalità (l'ente in quanto ente) quanto dell'eminenza (Dio e le intelligenze separate) dell'oggetto esaminato, ed è dall'unione di questi due aspetti che deriva il fatto di intendere la metafisica come una teologia naturale, senza dubbio il senso più comune nel quadro della scolastica, ricavato dalla lettura della *Metafisica* di Aristotele. Ma la filosofia è detta 'prima' anche solo nel senso dell'universalità dell'*ens quatenus ens est* e poiché è la disciplina che ha per oggetto ciò che di comune può essere attribuito a Dio e alle creature, si presenta come un'ontologia, come una metafisica 'ontologizzata'.

2. Johannes Clauberg e la *Metaphysica* di Aristotele

In tale prospettiva bisogna collocare uno dei primi trattati di ontologia sistematicamente compiuti, nel quale è assente ogni riferimento alla teologia. Si tratta degli *Elementa philosophiae sive Ontosophia* del calvinista Johannes Clauberg, pubblicati una prima volta nel 1647, e in seguito largamente rimaneggiati nelle edizioni del 1660 (*Ontosophia nova*) e del 1664 (*Metaphysica de ente*). Lasciando da parte la questione, pur importante, delle modifiche apportate a questa opera in seguito all'adesione del suo autore al cartesianesimo⁸, quanto ci interessa qui è la riflessione sul libro *Gamma* della *Metafisica* di Aristotele, quindi la sua rilettura in termini più generali. Nell'*Ontosophia* del 1647 la filosofia è detta 'prima' nel senso dell'universalità, nella misura in cui concerne ciò che è comune a Dio e alle creature. Questa scienza, che Clauberg chiama *ontosophia*, è detta anche 'metafisica' in ragione

⁸ Su questo si veda Savini (2011).

del titolo dei trattati di Aristotele. La comunanza fra Dio e le creature – di ascendenza scotista – trova così la sua giustificazione: anche se non vi è nulla che sia primo o superiore a Dio, vi è tuttavia qualcosa nel nostro intelletto che è talmente comune che Dio può esservi compreso in qualche modo, e allo stesso tempo, *insieme con le altre cose*:

Atqui hinc facile infertur, Deum et Creaturam habere quaedam praeter nomen communia, ad Scientiam superiorem et priorem pertinentia, qualis quidem ea est quae Prima Philosophia vel ex Aristotelicorum librorum inscriptione *Metaphysica* appellatur. Tametsi enim Deo nihil est prius aut superius, est tamen aliquid in intellectu nostro ita commune, ut Deum simul cum aliis aliquo modo comprehendat. (Clausberg, 1647: § 4, 2)

Nella *Metaphysica de ente* del 1664, la stessa *communitas* dell'*ens quatenus ens est*, e dunque la sua universalità, viene a consistere nel fatto di essere (*inest*) nelle cose materiali e immateriali, in Dio e nelle creature sino agli enti singolari:

Est quaedam scientia, quae contemplatur *ens quatenus ens est*, hoc est, in quantum communem quandam intelligitur habere naturam vel naturae gradum, qui rebus corporeis et incorporeis, Deo et Creaturis, omnibusque adeo et singulis entibus suo modo inest. (Clausberg 1691: § 1, 283)

La *communitas* che il nostro intelletto può cogliere rende conto dell'universalità della filosofia prima e della sua differenza dalle altre scienze; la sua definizione è ripresa letteralmente da Clausberg dal capitolo 1 del libro *Gamma* (1, 1003a20-25) della *Metafisica* di Aristotele: 'Vi è una scienza che studia l'ente in quanto ente e le proprietà che gli appartengono per sé. Questa scienza non è identica a nessuna di quelle dette particolari, perché nessuna delle altre esamina l'ente in quanto ente nella sua totalità, ma ne ritagliano una parte'.

Ex dictis nunc liquet, quae sit necessitas primae huius Philosophiae ponendae, quid illa sit et quomodo ab aliis scientiis distincta: quae omnia Aristoteles lib. 3. Met. cap. I. sic breviter expressit: est quaedam scientia quae speculatur Ens, prout ens est, et quae ei per se insunt. Haec autem nulli earum, quae in parte dicuntur, eadem est: nullae namque caeterarum universaliter de Ente, prout Ens est, considerant, sed partem ejus aliquam abscindentes. (Clausberg, 1647: § 10, 4)

Bisogna osservare in primo luogo la posizione insolita che Clauberg assegna al libro *Gamma*, collocato come libro III della *Metafisica* di Aristotele. L'edizione alla quale egli fa verosimilmente riferimento è quella di Pacius-Casaubonus, in cui *Gamma* è in effetti il libro III e non il IV, come nella disposizione canonica dell'opera come oggi la leggiamo, verosimilmente per l'omissione del libro II (*Alpha elatton*), la cui autenticità è stata messa in dubbio e che è stato talvolta considerato come un 'doppione' del libro I (*Alpha meizon*); ma la questione, certo di estremo interesse, ci allontanerebbe eccessivamente dal nostro tema⁹.

Il valore che Clauberg attribuisce al sintagma *ens, prout ens est* – oppure *ens inquantum ens* o ancora *ens quatenus ens est* –, non si distanzia molto, concettualmente, da Aristotele, come avviene pure nella gran parte dei manuali di metafisica della prima metà del XVII secolo. Per Aristotele l'espressione τὸ ὄν ᾧ ὄν indica infatti l'ente per sé, senza nessuna qualifica supplementare e congiuntamente a tutte le sue proprietà e a tutti i suoi attributi. L'ente in quanto ente non rimanda, secondo Aristotele, a un unico genere – perché il genere si predica delle sue specie, ma non anche, come l'ente, delle loro differenze – giacché è l'ente preso per sé, insieme con tutto ciò che a esso si riferisce, per necessità, in molti modi. Infatti, la nozione di ente presa semplicemente non ha un solo significato, ma molti, in modo che, con l'espressione 'ente in quanto ente', non si fa soltanto allusione a ciò che tutti gli enti hanno in comune, ma a tutti i loro aspetti, quelli che hanno in comune come anche quelli per cui si distinguono l'uno dall'altro. L'espressione non evoca quindi un genere particolare dell'ente, che sarà oggetto di una scienza particolare, bensì tutti gli enti, vale a dire tutto l'essere in tutti gli enti. Alla stessa maniera, per Clauberg, il concetto di ente indica l'*ens* per sé senza ulteriori precisazioni, sicché di esso si può parlare congiuntamente a tutte le proprietà che gli appartengono per sé. Per quanto riguarda l'universalità, la filosofia prima non considera una realtà particolare e determinata, un 'questo' o un 'quello', ma la realtà in quanto realtà, l'ente in se stesso; ecco perché si distingue dalle altre scienze, che si occupano esclusivamente di una parte dell'ente. Tutte le altre scienze studiano una parte,

⁹ Per uno studio sulla questione della trasmissione e dell'ordine dei libri della *Metafisica* di Aristotele, si veda Franceschini (1956: 152-153).

un aspetto, dello stesso ente. Il *quatenus*, che lo si intenda in senso ‘reduplicativo’ (intensivo) o ‘specificativo’ (estensivo), non soltanto implica, come alcuni interpretano, che l’ente deve essere trattato, in filosofia prima, secondo i suoi aspetti essenziali, ma impedisce allo stesso tempo che si parli di questo ente come di un ente particolare:

Ex Arist. Sola Metaphysica speculatur *Ens quatenus ens*: caeterae scientiae omnes partem sibi aliquam Entis abscondunt. Illa sive reduplicatio sive specificatio (ens quatenus ens) non tantum indicat Ens in prima Philosophia secundum propriam essentiam et quidditatem spectandum esse, ut quidam interpretantur; sed etiam vetat de Ente agi, quatenus hoc aut illud, tale aut tale Ens est. (Clauberg, 1647: § 53, 263-264)

Se, dal punto di vista dell’universalità, la lettura di Aristotele non sembra sollevare problemi, la questione diviene più complessa quando si prende in considerazione la relazione $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$. È noto che, per Aristotele, la sostanza, che è introdotta nel capitolo 2 del libro *Gamma*, rappresenta il centro di unificazione dei differenti significati dell’essere (o dell’ente, dal momento che Aristotele impiega indifferentemente la forma sostantivata dell’infinito del verbo essere, $\acute{\epsilon}\iota\upsilon\alpha\iota$, e il participio dello stesso verbo, $\acute{\omicron}\nu$), nella misura in cui l’essere si dice in molti sensi, tutti, tuttavia, in relazione a uno e a una qualche realtà che è una e la stessa ($\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \mu\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu\ \tau\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}\ \varphi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\nu$)¹⁰. Esaminiamo dunque brevemente il libro *Gamma*, e soprattutto la transizione dal primo al secondo capitolo, per valutare se e come questo fondamentale passaggio teorico, evidentemente necessario per Aristotele, sia mantenuto nel quadro dell’ontologia moderna.

Come Aristotele spiega in apertura del capitolo 2 del libro *Gamma* della *Metafisica*, l’essere si dice $\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$, in molti sensi, ma appunto, come già ricordato, $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \mu\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu\ \tau\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}\ \varphi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\nu$, cioè in relazione a un’unità o, piuttosto, a ‘una cosa una’ e a un’unica natura o realtà. La sua pluralità di sensi non si configura quindi come una semplice omonimia ($\omicron\upsilon\chi\ \acute{\omicron}\mu\omega\nu\acute{\nu}\mu\omega\varsigma$), nella misura in

¹⁰ Si tratta della nota tesi del *focal meaning* della sostanza, secondo la denominazione introdotta da Owen (1960), una tesi che non bisogna confondere, come spesso è accaduto nella tradizione neoplatonica tardo-antica, nella filosofia medievale araba e nella scolastica cristiana, con la dottrina dell’analogia di attribuzione; su questo punto si veda Aubenque (1978).

cui tutti questi sensi sono in qualche modo posti in relazione, o perfino unificati, da un riferimento comune, proprio come avviene al termine ‘sano’, che può significare più cose (è ‘sano’ ciò che produce la salute, ciò che la conserva, ciò che può riceverla e così via), ma tutte in relazione con la ‘salute’. Tutti i sensi di essere rinviano perciò a un unico principio (ἅπαν πρὸς μίαν ἀρχήν) e questo principio è la sostanza (οὐσία), perché si dice che ‘è’ la sostanza, ma anche che ‘sono’ le affezioni della sostanza e le vie che conducono alla sostanza, come pure la generazione, la privazione, le qualità della sostanza, le cause che producono o generano la sostanza e tutto ciò che si riferisce alla sostanza, ivi comprese le negazioni della sostanza e delle sue proprietà. Ora, per le cose che si dicono in molti sensi, tutti, però, in relazione con una sola realtà, come è il caso dell’essere, si dà un’unica scienza che avrà dunque come oggetto tutte le cose che ‘sono’, precisamente in quanto ‘sono’. Se, pertanto, tutti i sensi di essere sono unificati dal riferimento alla sostanza, sarà allora la sostanza a esprimere l’essere in quanto essere di tutte le cose che sono e appunto la sostanza costituirà di conseguenza primariamente l’oggetto della scienza dell’essere¹¹. Inoltre, nel libro *Epsilon* 2-4 (come anche nel libro *Delta* 7), Aristotele presenta e discute i quattro principali significati dell’essere: l’essere per accidente, l’essere come vero (e il non essere come falso), l’essere delle figure delle categorie e l’essere come potenza e atto. Esaminati i primi due significati, Aristotele li esclude dall’analisi, perché l’essere per accidente ha una causa indeterminata e l’essere come vero (e il non essere come falso) si situa esclusivamente nel pensiero. Sono quindi, e nuovamente, i significati di essere che fanno riferimento alla sostanza, in primo luogo le figure delle categorie, a porsi come ‘primari’ e a costituire l’oggetto della scienza dell’essere¹². Ecco perché l’ ‘ontologia’ aristotelica si traduce concretamente, nel seguito della *Metafisica*, in una scienza della sostanza, in una *ousiologia*.

¹¹ Per una esposizione più dettagliata ed esaustiva di questa sezione del libro *Gamma* della *Metafisica*, la cui ricchezza e difficoltà sono ben note e che qui abbiamo presentato in modo schematico, rinviamo a Berti (2004b: 456-473) e, in una prospettiva più generale, a Berti (1965).

¹² Per uno studio di questi capitoli di *Epsilon*, si veda la recente traduzione introdotta e commentata da Berti (2015: 32-37).

3. Una nuova proposta di lettura

Per Clauberg, l'oggetto della metafisica – o, meglio, dell'*ontosophia* – è ciò che è comune a tutte le cose e tutte le trascende. L'oggetto della metafisica è solamente ciò che, per la sua ampiezza e per la sua *communitas*, trascende tutte le cose e tutte le oltrepassa:

Subjectum Metaphysicae, si ad Praedicamenta respiciamus, solum illud est, quod latitudine et communitate sua transcendit et excedit omnia. Propter hanc amplitudinem quaecunque in prima Philosophia tractantur Transscendentium nomine venire solent: ita Unitas, Veritas, Bonitas, Numerus, Relatio omnesque aliae Entis passiones transscendentales cognominantur, ut ab aliis minus communibus distinguantur. (Clauberg 1647: § 55, 265)

Questo oggetto, che si identifica con l'ente, ha nondimeno tre significati: l'ente è, innanzitutto, l'*intelligibile* o *cogitabile* ('Intelligibile est, quicquid quovis modo est, cogitari ac dici potest'¹³), al quale nulla può essere opposto, in quanto esprime il contenuto di tutto ciò che è *cogitabile* nella misura in cui può essere oggetto dell'intelletto (*esse objectivum*), un oggetto in generale, di per sé indifferente, indeterminato e neutro rispetto a ogni divisione (o distinzione) ontica. In secondo luogo, l'ente è ciò che si oppone al nulla (*aliquid*) come non contraddittorio, perché può possedere l'*esse reale* al di fuori dell'intelletto e può esistere *in rerum natura*. L'ente è infine l'ente reale, o *res*, che si pone concretamente al di fuori dell'intelletto che lo pensa, come la sostanza e i suoi attributi. L'ente come *intelligibile* non possiede l'essere se non per il fatto che diviene oggetto dell'intelletto; esso include anche di conseguenza, e per necessità, il *nihil*, che, pur non possedendo nessun *esse reale*, rimane nondimeno, in base alla definizione di *intelligibile*, un ente-*objectum*¹⁴, poiché

¹³ Clauberg (1647: § 55, 265).

¹⁴ Clauberg (1647: § 2, 37): 'Intelligibile est, quicquid quovis modo est cogitari ac dici potest. Ita dico Nihil, et dum dico cogito, et dum cogito, est illud in intellectu meo'. Su questo punto di veda Leinsle (1988: 100): 'Da "nihil" unter "intelligibile" fällt, nimmt Clauberg mit Timpler eine Intelligibilität des Nichts an'. Rispetto all'inclusione del *nihil* all'interno dell'*intelligibile*, Clauberg segue la posizione di Timpler (1604) e di Göckel, che in una nota alla stessa opera di Timpler (1608: 8) scrive: 'Intelligibile

rappresenta il *repugnans* puro e semplice. L'*intelligibile* o resta soltanto al livello dell'esse *objectivum* presente nell'intelletto, e l'inclusione del *nihil* garantisce allora l'ambito illimitato di ciò a cui nulla può essere opposto; oppure, ed è la seconda alternativa, l'*intelligibile* riceve l'esse *reale extra intellectum* e si distingue quindi come ciò che può esistere *in rerum natura*, ossia come un *aliquid*. L'*aliquid*, in quanto possiede l'esse *reale* al di fuori dell'intelletto, si caratterizza per la non-contraddizione interna e per l'opposizione al *nihil* – una proprietà di cui l'*intelligibile tout court* non gode, nella misura in cui rappresenta la pensabilità pura, cioè il grado più debole dell'essere stesso – e partecipa per questa ragione della *ratio entis* e delle sue proprietà, in quanto è 'qualcosa'. La *res* o *ens reale* corrisponde infine all'ultimo grado concettuale secondo il quale l'ente può essere pensato, giacché gli si possono riferire gli attributi reali non soltanto *extra intellectum*, ma anche *in seipso*. Tali attributi possono essere classificati sulla base dell'*essentia*¹⁵ (si tratterà allora dei *transcendentia*, ossia *unum, verum, bonum*), sulla base dell'*existentia*¹⁶ (*localitas, temporalitas et duratio*) e sulla base della *productio*¹⁷ (*multitudo, distinctio et unio*). All'ente reale, oggetto dell'*ontosophia*, appartengono dunque l'esse *objectivum* presente nell'intelletto, in quanto è *intelligibile*, l'esse *reale* al di fuori dell'intelletto, in quanto è 'qualcosa' (*aliquid* come *non-nihil*), e in ultimo gli attributi reali, in quanto è 'ente' in senso proprio¹⁸. Poiché i diversi gradi secondo i quali l'ente può essere concepito corrispondono ai diversi livelli di intellegibilità, tutte le sue divisioni interne sono stabilite all'interno dello stesso *intelligibile seu cogitabile*,

est Ens, Graece τὸ ὄν, vel non Ens, μὴ ὄν'. D'altronde, il fatto di dover ammettere un fondo nichilistico alla base del progetto ontologico in epoca moderna è la tesi di Courtine (1990).

¹⁵ Clauberg (1647: § 47, 48): 'Essentia est attributorum realium primum, per quod Res et est, et est id quod est'.

¹⁶ Clauberg (1647: § 81, 56): 'Existentia est attributum reale antecedens, per quod Ens actu est, seu habet Essentiam actu in rerum natura constitutam: unde et *Essentie actualitas*, item *Actus entitativus cognominatur*'.

¹⁷ Clauberg (1647: § 119, 63): 'Productio est attributorum respectivorum primum, per quod ens enti esse quoddam reale communicat et largitur'.

¹⁸ Clauberg (1647: § 33, 44): 'Ex dictis tandem liquet, Enti non tantum convenire. 1. esse *objectivum* in intellectu, quatenus est *Intelligibile* 2. esse *reale extra intellectum*, quatenus est *Aliquid*; sed etiam 3. attributa realia quatenus ens est'.

sicché l'ente in quanto *intelligibile* è ciò che possiede soltanto l'esse *objectivum*, l'*aliquid* possiede l'esse *objectivum* insieme con l'esse *reale* e l'*ens reale* possiede da parte sua sia la prima sia la seconda proprietà, alle quali vanno aggiunti gli attributi reali¹⁹. Le divisioni dell'ente che si sommano a quelle appena evocate, dedotte dagli attributi reali, sono classificate, a partire dalla distinzione primaria fra Dio e creatura, come assolute (*completum et incompletum*; *permanens et successivum*; *substantia et accidens*) e relative (*absolutum et respectivum*, *spirituale et corporeum*; *vivens et vitae expers*). Ne consegue pertanto che la metafisica o filosofia prima si occupa degli oggetti primi e più elevati dell'intelletto, che si possono acquisire attraverso le operazioni dell'intelletto e, in primo luogo, attraverso l'astrazione. Il fatto che l'unico oggetto della metafisica, sia esso (1) *intelligibile*, (2) *qualcosa* oppure (3) *reale*, trascenda tutte le cose fa sì che le altre scienze siano subordinate all'*ontosophia* e che essa sia, rispetto a tutte le altre, in una posizione di assoluta autonomia:

Sola prima Philosophia, quia suprema est, *nullam habet scientiam oppositam, nullam coordinatam; sed sibi subordinat* reliquas omnes, quatenus de uno illo subjecto, quod in Metaphysicis ut *Intelligibile*, ut *Aliquid*, ut *Ens real* consideratur, omnes omnino participant. Caeterae disciplinae habent oppositas et coordinatas, neque ullas alias ita sibi subordinant, ut et ipsae aliis vicissim non subordinentur. (Clauberg, 1647: § 56, 265-266)

A ben vedere, è insita nella dottrina claubergiana del triplice significato dell'ente una significativa difformità rispetto alla posizione di Aristotele, dalla quale il filosofo tedesco sembra distanziarsi al punto di rendere legittima l'ipotesi che si debba riesaminare la tradizionale tendenza, da parte della storiografia, di scorgere nella *Schulmetaphysik* una matrice esclusivamente aristotelica. Nel libro *Gamma* della *Metafisica*, infatti, tutti i pertinenti significati di essere, senza eccezione, rimandano alla sostanza come loro principio unitario ($\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma\ \xi\nu$), al fine di costruire una coerente e rigorosa scienza dell'essere. Per Clauberg, al contrario, l'intellegibilità o 'cogitabilità' dell'essere precede la sua

¹⁹ Clauberg (1647: § 152, 195): 'Ut in prima Philosophiae tria sibi gradatim succedunt: *Intelligibile*, quod habet tantum esse *objectivum*; *Aliquid*, quod esse *objectivum* et esse *reale*; *Ens reale*, quod esse *objectivum*, esse *reale* et attributa *realia* obtinet'.

realitas in senso proprio e non rimanda necessariamente alla sostanza come tale; in altre parole vi è una porzione di essere pre-sostanziale che si dà indipendentemente dalla sua realizzazione in un ente determinato; diversamente, nessun ente determinato, cioè nessun ente reale, può essere concepito al di fuori dell'intellegibilità, appunto perché è l'intellegibilità o 'cogitabilità', e non la sostanzialità, a costituire il 'criterio' dell'essere e dell'appartenenza a esso di tutti gli enti, che siano semplicemente (1) intellegibili, (2) intellegibili e possibili o, infine, (3) intellegibili, possibili e reali. Ora, pur con le cautele del caso e affidando a lavori futuri una più solida e argomentata illustrazione di tale ipotesi, la posizione di Clauberg, con la sua peculiare lettura di *Gamma* 1-2, dal cui testo, di fatto, egli prende le distanze, pare piuttosto compatibile con un certo platonismo – Clauberg dà prova a più riprese in altri scritti di conoscere le opere di Platone – nella misura in cui, per Platone, non soltanto l'essere si costituisce attraverso una piena identità con il pensiero ($\tau\acute{o}$ $\acute{o}\nu$ equivalendo interamente e senza residui a $\tau\acute{o}$ νοητόν, secondo una tesi pressoché onnipresente nei dialoghi), ma, soprattutto, l'estensione del suo ambito si rivela certamente più ampia della sfera dell'essere in quanto essere di Aristotele, che è circoscritta al dominio della 'sostanzialità' (intesa, ancora una volta, nel senso di Aristotele) e, solo in seconda battuta, di ciò che a essa fa riferimento ed *esclusivamente* in quanto a essa fa riferimento. Vediamo brevemente in che modo.

Innanzitutto, si può facilmente, e alquanto banalmente, constatare che, se, come a più riprese spiegato, l'aristotelica scienza dell'essere in quanto essere appare focalizzata sulla *realitas* in senso proprio, sulla sostanza²⁰, risulta invece del tutto chiaro che l'ambito dell'essere intellegibile per Platone comprende tanto enti 'sostanziali' quanto enti 'non sostanziali' (in senso aristotelico): vi sono

²⁰ E proprio per questo motivo, vale la pena ribadirlo ancora una volta, Aristotele esclude dall'indagine della scienza dell'essere in quanto essere, in *Epsilon* 2-4, l'essere accidentale e l'essere inteso come vero e subordina in generale la comprensione dei sensi dell'essere secondo le categorie che sono altre dalla sostanza nella scienza dell'essere in quanto essere al loro necessario rinvio πρὸς ἓν alla sostanza, perché non è in quanto tali e autonomamente che questi significati di essere altri dalla sostanza rientrano nella scienza dell'essere e si pongono come altrettanti enti in senso proprio, bensì, appunto, in quanto rinviano alla sostanza.

infatti, per esempio, enti intellegibili corrispondenti a 'sostanze', come l'uomo in sé, il fuoco in sé o l'acqua in sé, ma anche enti intellegibili corrispondenti a 'qualità' morali, come il buono in sé o il giusto in sé, o estetiche, come il bello in sé, e ancora enti intellegibili corrispondenti a 'relazioni', come l'identità in sé e la diversità in sé, la somiglianza in sé e la dissomiglianza in sé, l'uno in sé o i molti in sé; persino di enti spregevoli, come il fango, i capelli e la sporcizia, si evoca, pur dubitativamente, la presenza nell'ambito dell'essere intellegibile; ed è ammesso financo un ente intellegibile del non essere, benché non nel significato del nulla assoluto²¹. Ciascuno di questi enti, o genere di enti, 'è', autonomamente e di per sé, precisamente allo stesso titolo degli altri, dunque indipendentemente dal fatto che si configuri come 'sostanza' in senso aristotelico, sicché l'ambito dell'essere deve considerarsi come più ampio di quello delle 'sostanze' in senso proprio. Ma ciò dipende da una motivazione più fondamentale e dalle decisive implicazioni 'ontologiche', vale a dire dalla tesi, più volte argomentata da Platone nei suoi dialoghi, secondo la quale l'essere va concepito come una dimensione prioritaria rispetto alle specifiche determinazioni dei singoli enti che 'sono', di cui stabilisce ed esprime un tratto comune che tutti li caratterizza al di là del loro statuto individuale: si tratta dell'eterna permanenza e immutabilità di ciò che 'è' (τὸ ὄν αἰεί ... αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτ' ὄν, *Tim.* 27d-28a), in quanto è esente dalla generazione, dalla corruzione e dal divenire, in modo che appunto soltanto di ciò che è eternamente permanente e immutabile si può dire che 'è' davvero (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, *Resp.* V 477a). Ed è proprio nell'alveo di questa fondamentale e primaria concezione dell'essere, e nel comune orizzonte che essa tratteggia, che si collocano i singoli enti, che 'sono' in quanto condividono tale proprietà 'ontologica': i singoli enti, infatti, non 'sono' in quanto 'uomo in sé', 'bello in sé' o 'identico in sé', bensì nella misura in cui si pongono, tutti, come eternamente permanenti e immutabili. E, non per caso, l'eterna permanenza e immutabilità di ciò che 'è', che ne costituisce, come detto, il tratto 'ontologico' fondamentale, si pone pure come, di ciò che 'è',

²¹ Cfr. soprattutto *Parmenide* 130b-d e, in proposito, Ferrari (2004: 52-56); quindi *Cratilo* 389d; *Menone* 72b-c; *Fedone* 65d, 70d-71e, 76d, 100c-d, 103c-105d; *Simposio* 210e-211d; *Repubblica* V 475e-476a, 479a-b, X 596b; *Sofista* 254d-255e, 258d; *Timeo* 51b-c.

giustifica e garantisce l'intellegibilità, se è vero che, come Platone ripete di frequente, solo ciò che permane stabilmente ed è esente da mutamenti si rivela pienamente conoscibile (παντελῶς γνωστόν, Resp. V 477a; cfr. Tim. 28a) e pensabile (νοητόν) e può essere pertanto oggetto della vera conoscenza e della scienza²², sicché l'intellegibilità di ciò che 'è', che dipende dalla stabile permanenza e immutabilità di quest'ultimo, si configura in ultimo come il carattere equivalente del suo essere.

Emerge dunque in Platone, con una certa coerenza e linearità, una concezione pre-sostanziale dell'essere, fatto coincidere con l'intellegibile *tout court* e inteso perciò, diversamente da Aristotele, come comprensivo di più enti rispetto alla sola sostanza e ai suoi attributi considerati in riferimento a essa, perché basato su una nozione, quella di intellegibilità, che appunto precede la sostanzialità ed è più universale di questa. Si manifesta quindi così, nel confronto con la posizione di Aristotele, tanto una differenza di estensione quantitativa della scienza dell'essere (anche se neanche Platone ammette, come farà Clauberg con il suo primo significato di ente, il *nihil* o qualunque ente, anche impossibile, purché oggetto dell'intelletto), quanto, soprattutto, una differenza nel criterio che delimita tale estensione: per Platone e per una parte degli ontologi moderni, infatti, l'essere come tale comprende allo stesso titolo tutti gli enti intellegibili in quanto sono intellegibili e che per ciò stesso sono enti allo stesso titolo, in quanto intellegibili; mentre, secondo Aristotele, l'essere come tale comprende tutte le cose che sono, che non sono però enti allo stesso titolo, ma in quanto 'sostanza' o attributi della sostanza, con la sola sostanza a porsi come ente in senso proprio e primario, i suoi attributi configurandosi come enti esclusivamente in quanto riconducibili alla sostanza e in relazione a essa.

²² Per la concezione platonica dell'essere nei termini dell'eterna permanenza e immutabilità di ciò che 'è', a loro volta considerate come fondamento della sua intellegibilità, si vedano innanzitutto i libri V-VI della *Repubblica* (specie V 476e-480a) e, in proposito, Fronterotta (2007), quindi *Timeo* 27d-28a. Cfr. inoltre *Cratilo* 439b-440c; *Fedone* 65d-66a, 74a-b; *Simposio* 210e-212a; *Fedro* 247c-e, 249b-c, 250b-c.

4. Conclusioni

L'ipotesi fin qui argomentata suppone dunque che l'ontologia moderna, di cui non si è presa in considerazione che la corrente claubergiana, debba necessariamente 'tradire' *Gamma* 1-2 accostandosi al platonismo e mutuandone alcune tesi di fondo, per includere nell'essere tutti gli enti che non corrispondono esattamente alla sostanza di Aristotele e all'ambito delimitato dal $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$ in relazione alla sostanza. Per Clauberg, infatti, il centro di unificazione dei differenti sensi di essere è l'*ens* stesso, che significa, per gradi successivi di 'contrazione', tutto ciò che può essere pensato, poi tutto ciò che può esistere, infine tutto ciò che si determina in qualcosa, come appunto la sostanza. L'ambito della pura 'cogitabilità' si costituisce in virtù del semplice fatto di divenire oggetto dell'intelletto e questa possibilità è condivisa non solo dalle cose che sono *possibilia* e *vera*, ma anche dagli enti di ragione, dalle negazioni e dalle privazioni, dai *ficta*, dagli *impossibilia* e persino dal *nihil*, l'assolutamente impensabile, che è compreso da Clauberg nel primo senso dell'*ens*. Tutto questo non è certamente sufficiente per completare l'ambito dell'ontologia, che è, in senso proprio, una scienza della *res*, perché prende in considerazione gli enti reali e i loro attributi. Ma il riferimento alla 'cogitabilità' pura è comunque necessario, giacché il fatto di essere 'oggettivato' da parte dell'intelletto – l'*esse objectivum* –, cioè il fatto di essere conosciuto (*esse cognitum*), vale, seguendo su questo punto Platone, per tutti gli enti.

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