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Disease and Difference in Three Platonic Dialogues:
Gorgias, Phaedo, and Timaeus

by

Chiara Teresa Ricciardone

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Rhetoric

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Professor Marianne Constable
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Abstract

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Gorgias, Phaedo, and Timaeus

by

Chiara Teresa Ricciardone

Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric

with the designated emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professors G.R.F. Ferrari and Ramona Naddaff, Co-chairs

This study traces a persistent connection between the image of disease and the concept of difference in Plato's *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Timaeus*. Whether the disease occurs in the body, soul, city, or cosmos, it always signals an unassimilated difference that is critical to the argument. I argue that Plato represents—and induces—diseases of difference in order to produce philosophers, skilled in the art of differentiation. Because his dialogues intensify rather than cure difference, his philosophy is better characterized as a “higher pathology” than a form of therapy.

An introductory section on *Sophist* lays out the main features of the concept of difference-in-itself and concisely presents its connection to disease. The main chapters examine the relationship in different realms. In the first chapter, the problem is moral and political: in the *Gorgias*, rhetoric is a corrupting force, while philosophy purifies the city and soul by drawing distinctions. In the second chapter on *Phaedo*, the problem is epistemological: if we correctly interpret the illness of misology, as the despair caused by the inability to consistently distinguish truth and falsity, we can resolve the mystery of Socrates' cryptic last words (“We owe a cock to Asclepius; pay the debt and do not neglect it”). In the third chapter on *Timaeus*, Plato treats diseases of the soul, the body, and the cosmos itself. There, the correlation between disease and difference actually helps humans situate themselves in the vast universe—for in both cases, proper differentiation is the key to a healthy, well-constructed life.

My emphasis on Plato's theory of difference counters the traditional focus on his theory of Forms. Elucidating the link between the concept of difference and the experience of disease has broader impact for the ageless question of how we should live our lives. In Plato's system, neither disease nor difference is a wholly negative element to be eradicated. Instead, difference and disease, in their proper proportions, are responsible for the fullness of the world and the emergence of the philosophical subject.

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Note on Translations and Transliterations

Greek translations of Plato are my own unless otherwise noted. I provide the Greek original and also transliterate Greek words which are commonly introduced into the English lexicon or which are an object of significant analysis.

Introduction: Rhetorical and Philosophical Perspectives

Will we have any way of winning him over and gently persuading him, if we conceal how unhealthy he is? ἔξομέν τι παραμυθεῖσθαι αὐτὸν καὶ πείθειν ἡρέμα, ἐπικρυπτόμενοι ὅτι οὐχ ὑγιαίνει;

-- Socrates, *Republic* 476e

My inquiry into Plato's diseases began with an ordinary cold. It was early spring in Berkeley, and I was reading the *Gorgias* for the first time. A volley of sneezes forced my attention to Plato's language of disease. In that dialogue, Socrates condemns rhetoric for corrupting the city and the soul, and offers philosophy as a cure for both. But there was something very troubling about the way that Socrates denounces rhetoric while using it himself. I was lured by the dialogue's promise of a philosophical therapeutics, but repelled by its threat of philosophical authority. And I was uncertain whether one could be disassociated from the other. No matter how I interpreted the dialogue's ambiguity, I found myself positioned as the diseased patient. Long after my body vanquished that cold, I remained infected with the germ of the dialogue's questions. What disease does Plato's philosophy cure—and at what cost?

Nearly everyone wants to be healthy: as Glaucon points out in *Republic*, health is good both in itself and for the rewards it brings (Book II, 357c). Good health is the prize that Plato's philosophy offers; it has long been recognized that medicine is fundamental to his formulation of an authoritative ethical and political "science."¹ If Plato's philosophical therapeutics has any relevance today, I reasoned, it will be for those who suffer from the same problems he addresses. In this study, I combine rhetorical and philosophical approaches to Plato's *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Timaeus* to demonstrate that the concept of difference lies at the heart of his notion of disease. I argue that this link proves decisive for defining Plato's philosophical project, affecting his political, ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical theories. Disease is the unexamined core of Plato's philosophical system. This dissertation sets out to track down its source.

The typical view glosses disease in Plato as a metaphorical image for "disorder", but treats the corresponding image of medicine as having real philosophical substance.² My

¹ For example, Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986): 3, 21. G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1935): 122-3.

² For example, G.E.R. Lloyd, whose chapter on diseases in Plato is the most useful in the tiny English language literature, repeatedly suggests that disease, whether in body, soul, or the state, is a matter of disorder, and health of good order. *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 142-157. Kurt Goldstein also adopts this view with respect to biology in his influential 1934 book *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man* (New York: Zone, 1995). For why I disagree, see below.

study is therefore surprising in two respects. First, I find that Plato's diseases are not only a metaphor, but signal a philosophical difference that must be recognized and worked out. Unlike disorder, which is only a negation of order, difference is a philosophical concept that Plato treats with detail and rigor. Second, Plato did not simply describe existing illnesses. Instead, his dialogues often induce the very diseases that he diagnoses. The "contagion effect" I experienced in reading the *Gorgias* is a pattern and a deliberate strategy in many of his dialogues: they are pathogenic as much as therapeutic.

Tracing the link between disease and difference requires a flexible use of both rhetorical and philosophical methods and perspectives, because the objects are of two kinds. Difference is a philosophical concept—Plato called it one of the greatest kinds (*megista gene*) in the *Sophist*—brought to special prominence by Structuralist and Post-Structuralist European philosophy in the late 20th and 21st century. Difference is the opposite of sameness or identity, and is thought to have received less philosophical attention than its counterpart. It is an interesting philosophical problem, for one thing, because it is at the core of so many other questions. When we ask the traditional philosophical question "What is F?", we are partly asking "What makes F different from any other X?"³ But when we turn this question back on difference, it is difficult to answer: "What is difference? What makes difference different from any other X?" Plato often argues that an account of something must resemble that thing. If we accept that principle, then difference requires a *different* mode of elucidation.

Plato's language of disease offers that other mode. Although doctors might define a concept of disease, disease is first of all an experience of the body and/or mind, an experience that is partly biological (let us say) and partly historical and cultural. In ancient Greece as now, it is a term with a considerable degree of semantic range. When Plato describes the corrupting effects of rhetoric in *Gorgias*, or diagnoses and cures misology in *Phaedo*, or defines ignorance as the gravest disease in *Timaeus*, it is hard to say whether he is speaking metaphorically or literally. He builds his case for diseases of the soul, such as vice and ignorance, through explicit comparisons with diseases of the body. Does this mean that he was thinking metaphorically, or that he was working from accepted precedents to establish a new kind of diagnosis? Plato's usage strikes me as no more and no less metaphorical than the contemporary use of "disease" to describe depression or alcohol addiction. Instead, I tend to use the terminology "rhetoric of disease" to express that Plato employs a set of interlocking ideas (disease, decay, deformity, corruption, and their contraries) that evoke an image and/or experience of difference.

To claim a connection between a concept (difference) and an experience (disease) is perhaps only to say something very basic about language: that words are inevitably connected to one another in (as we like to say today) a web of associations.⁴ Yet the ways in which those associations build up over time, and how we accept, challenge, or construe them, is well worth examining. What I have found helpful is to approach the connection at first from each of its sides. That is, I treat disease and difference as equally giving access to meaning that is shared between them. This double perspective yields a richer and truer account than assuming that disease casts difference in a certain light, or that difference

³ *Theaetetus* 209d-210a.

⁴ Heidegger frequently says something along these lines, about language as the passage between thinking and being. E.g. Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

forms the true content of disease. Put simply, I employ both rhetorical and philosophical perspectives to explore the sense and significance of this nexus.

Beginning with the rhetorical perspective reveals that in Plato, *disease marks a difference*. The difference between disease and health is so paradigmatic that Socrates employs it when he wants to establish that objective differences exist (*Theaetetus* 159b⁵). In particular, disease frequently signals the difference between rhetoric and philosophy.⁶ Sophistry, because it proliferates and obscures differences, leads to corruption, unsoundness, and disease. This clearly the case in *Gorgias*, where tyrants and rhetors endanger their immortal souls because of their inability to distinguish between pleasure and the good (Chapter 1). It is also what happens in *Phaedo*, when Socrates blames the sophists for causing misology (the despair of truth) by producing contrary arguments on a single topic (Chapter 2). In contrast, for Plato, philosophy cures and purifies by separating out differences, and putting them into proportion (Chapters 1, 2, 3).

Now, beginning with the concept of difference, and placing it in the subject position of the sentence, I would say that in Plato, *difference causes disease*. In the *Timaeus*, which contains Plato's most literal account of bodily disease, he categorizes disease by the kind of difference that interrupts the natural functioning of the organism (Chapter 3). In that same dialogue, Timaeus says that the Demiurge created the universe to be all-encompassing, because allowing any thing different from the universe to exist would lead to its disease and decay. In *Phaedo*, the *pathos* of misology is caused by successively and repeatedly coming to believe different, even opposing arguments about the same topic, so that one finally despairs of truth altogether (Chapter 2). The illness is particularly acute when the difference at stake goes unrecognized, leading to the illness of ignorance (Chapters 1, 3).

The connection between disease and difference is succinctly but richly expressed in a line from the *Sophist*, a strong foundation for this rhetorical-philosophical study. In that dialogue, which sets out to define the title character, the Visitor from Elea explains clearly that disease, like civil war, is nothing but a difference among naturally related kinds. In the course of the fifth definition of the sophist, he says to Theaetetus:

Presumably you consider disease (*nosos*) and civil war (*stasis*) the same thing, don't you? ... Do you think that civil war is anything other than the difference (*diaphora*) among things that are naturally akin, coming from some kind of decay (*diaphthora*)?

νόσον ἴσως καὶ στάσιν οὐ ταύτων νενόμικας;...πότερον ἄλλο τι στάσιν ἡγούμενος ἢ τὴν τοῦ φύσει συγγενοῦς ἕκ τινος διαφθορᾶς διαφορὰν; (228a4-8)

This network of meanings begins with the widespread association (aptly referenced by the verb νομίζω) between *nosos* and *stasis*, and pinpoints their common element as difference (*diaphora*).⁷ What does this core concept mean? The root of the word *diaphora*, deriving

⁵ Against the Protagorean view that “man is the measure of all things.” See also *Theaetetus* 171e.

⁶ See Andrea Nightengale's classic *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* for an account of how Plato separates philosophy from other genres while borrowing from them. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷ For more discussion of the trope associating disease and *stasis*, see Chapter 3.

from the verb *diapherô* and like the Latin verb *differ-re* (the ancestor of the English verb “to differ”), means “to carry or bear apart, disjoin, delay, defer.” Intransitively, it can be translated “to differ or to make a difference”, and also, “to quarrel or struggle.” This list of possible definitions shows us that the word invokes both a basic sense of difference, a sense of spatial or temporal distance, and a polemical sense of conflict and dissension. This third sense of conflict strengthens the extension from the accepted interchangeability of *nosos-stasis* to the new conceptual term, difference (*diaphora*). The similarity of *diaphora* to the word for corruption (*diapthora*) completes the semantic circle, linking in disease in such a way that it is difficult to tell whether difference or disease is prior. Into this dense web, the Visitor then adds vice: “so we’d be right if we said that wickedness is a conflict and disease of the soul” (στάσις ἄρα καὶ νόσον τῆς ψυχῆς πονηρίαν λέγοντες ὀρθῶς ἐροῦμεν, 228b8-9). Ignorance, he specifies, is a disproportion (ἀμετρία) and deformity (αἰσχος) of the soul: a more enduring deviation in form rather than a temporary deviation from form (228b, e). Together, the Visitor and Theaetetus condense what this dissertation will show at greater length: what makes disease, civil war, and vice interchangeable is a basic condition of difference.⁸

Equating diseases of the soul with difference is important because it justifies the Visitor’s further claim: that there is a process of discrimination (διάκρισις) that cleanses and purifies (καθαρός) these illnesses (226c-227a). Discrimination is the special art of the general category of *diairesis*: the famous Platonic process of dividing or separating. The Visitor has been using *diairesis* all along, and it was also known as a technique of Hippocratic medical science.⁹ So it is not altogether unexpected when the Visitor claims that the worst deformity of soul, which is the ignorance of not knowing but thinking that you know (229c), is “cleansed” only when someone refutes you, removes the bad opinions, and exhibits it cleansed (230d). The diseased and deforming differences (*diaphora*) in the soul are properly treated by the art of dividing differences (*diakrisis* or *diairesis*.)

The problem of disease-difference turns out to be central to finally pinpointing the difference between the sophist and the philosopher, and thus to the dialogue as a whole. The Visitor stops short of attributing the art of discrimination to the sophist, suggesting through innuendo that it is the philosopher (i.e., himself) who really knows how to divide.¹⁰ But in order to define the sophist as an imitator of the art of refutation, as he wishes to do, the Visitor needs to prove the reality of the false, or the existence of non-being. This is a

⁸ In *Republic* IV, Plato makes the same analogy, but emphasizes that health is a matter of the natural relationship among the elements and disease an unnatural relationship, without calling out specifically the concept of difference (444c-e).

⁹ See *Phaedrus* 270b-d; and Ludwig Edelstein, “Review: On M. Pohlenz, *Hippokrates und die Begründung der wissenschaftlichen Medizin*”, in *Ancient Medicine*, 116.

¹⁰ The Visitor implies that the sophist is similar to the philosopher in the way that the wolf is similar to the dog (231a). The names of the sophist and the philosopher both derive from the adjective *sophos* (wise), as wolf and dog both belong to the modern taxonomic genus *Canis*. But the joke has many layers. “By the dog” is the Socrates’ favorite epithet, associating the philosopher with the domestic animal. Moreover, dogs were used in ancient Greece for hunting, which is how the Visitor repeatedly describes their attempt to define the wily sophist-wolf. Having scored the comic point, however, the Visitor lets the definition of the sophist stand, calling it a “fine line” (*smikrôn horôn*), or mere semantics, as we would say today. For whether he intends to or not, the Sophist might teach us about the difference between true and false knowledge—if we are sufficiently on guard.

substantial project, for his proposition contravenes Parmenides' famous denial of non-being: "Never shall this force itself on us, that that which is not may be; while you search, keep your thought far away from this path."¹¹ The Visitor's approach is to argue that non-being exists, as *different* from being, rather than as the negation of anything at all. This strategy requires him to substantially develop a concept of difference-in-itself. In the course of the discussion, the Visitor articulates four main features of the concept that are useful to reiterate for this study.

The first of these features is that *difference is always in relation*. Even though the Visitor is attempting to articulate difference as a kind in itself, he points out that it is always *different-from* something (255d). The relationality of difference is key to distinguishing difference from being in general: if difference were equivalent to what-is (or if being were pure difference, as indeed the world sometimes seems to be), then difference could subsist on its own, without standing in relation (255d-e). As it is, we shall see that physical diseases are caused by a divergence from the natural relationship of the body's parts or processes. Above all, it is frequently the difference between the soul's intrinsic state and its embeddedness in the body that leads to its disorders.

The second point is that *difference is all-pervasive—yet finite*. Difference is so omnipresent in what we see, feel, and experience that the Visitor feels the need to distinguish it from being in general. Indeed, even all the other "greatest kinds" (being, non-being, change, rest, and even sameness) have a share in difference: it is what differentiates them from each other (*Sophist* 255e). Still, difference is limited. There are other things besides difference, and all the other kinds also have a share in being and the same. It is *through* the pervasiveness of difference that we are able to separate change from the same, from rest, from being, and so on. Like the modern concept of energy, difference is all-pervasive and at the same time limited. In the same way, diseases exist everywhere that life exists, yet we would never be tempted to believe that disease is everything. In the myth of *Phaedo*, only the heavens are disease-free, while disease and decay are rampant on earth (Chapter 2).

Thirdly, the Visitor takes care to underline that *difference is diverse, not dual*. The pervasiveness of difference means that difference *must* be diverse (*Sophist* 257c-d).¹² There is the part of the different that is set against the beautiful (the not-beautiful), the part that is set against the large, and so on. But the relationship of difference to not-being does not

¹¹ οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆ, φησὶν, εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα: ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ' ἀφ' ὁδοῦ διζήμενος εἶργε νόημα. Parmenides Fr. 7.1. As translated in Cooper. Quoted twice in the dialogue, at 237a, 258d.

¹² This point seems to bring up the contentious issue of the self-predication of the Forms: that is, the question of whether Plato believed that we can or must predicate beauty of the Beautiful itself. In fact the diversity of Difference is a feature of its broad influence, rather than its status as a Form, so the problem can be side-stepped here. Some highlights of the extensive literature on self-predication are R.E. Allen, "Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues." *The Philosophical Review* 69. 2 (1960); Gregory Vlastos, "" Self-Predication" in Plato's Later Period," *The Philosophical Review* (1969); Alexander Nehamas, "Self-Predication and Plato's Theory of Forms," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16. 2 (1979): 93-103; 147-164. John Malcolm, *Plato on the Self-Predication of Forms: Early and Middle Dialogues*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

reduce the former to dualism. Opposites are just one extreme form of difference. Rather, the difference between the beautiful and the not-beautiful means that the latter is something *other* than the beautiful (257c, 258b). Even though Plato’s demonstrations of division very often proceed by twos, the Visitor insists on difference as variance and range, not simple contrariety. This indeed is a valid meaning of *heteron*, his term for difference as a kind or in-itself. Likewise, we see both opposition and diversity in Plato’s theories of diseases. In *Phaedo*, it is the repeated exposure to opposites that causes misology (Chapter 2); but in *Timaeus*, he moves away from Hippocratic theories that focus on opposites and innovates a theory of the diverse differences that lead to disease (Chapter 3).

Despite the diversity of difference, the fourth and perhaps most important point underlines the unity of the concept: *difference is essentially related to non-being*. Because the “not” introduces such a variety of othernesses, the whole range of difference is intricately tied to non-being—though not equivalent to it (256d-257b). Contra Parmenides, the different proves the reality of that-which-is-not: it explains non-being as only different, not contrary to, that-which-is. The Visitor says:

Since we showed that *the different* is, chopped up among all beings in relation to each other, we dared to say that *that which is not* really is just this, namely, each part of the nature of the different that’s set over against *that which is*.

τὴν γὰρ θατέρου φύσιν ἀποδείξαντες οὐσάν τε καὶ κατα κεκερματισμένην ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ὄντα πρὸς ἄλληλα, τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἕκαστον μόριον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον ἐτολήσαμεν εἰπεῖν ὡς αὐτὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν ὄντως τὸ μὴ ὄν (258d7-e3).¹³

Since non-being is “set over against” or different than being, there is no contradiction in saying that non-being exists. In exchange, the form of *what-is-not* provides a unity to the diversity of difference, collecting all its instances and variations under the rubric of the *not*. In essence, the reality of *the different* is necessary to positing the reality of being and non-being as distinguishable modes. This makes difference great even among the greatest kinds: it adheres to both to being and non-being in a determining way that ‘change’ and ‘rest’ do not. For Heidegger, the contemporary thinker most responsible for reviving the problematic of difference, non-being “belongs” essentially to difference, and accounts for its oblivion or forgetting in the history of philosophy.¹⁴ We get a glimpse of this deepest aspect of difference in the concluding myth of *Phaedo*, in the chasm of Tartarus that splits the earth and is the primordial source of the contrary pairs of rivers.

For the Visitor, the takeaway of this highly abstract discussion is that, since difference is real, we ought to be able to have precise knowledge of the respect in which two different things are the same, or the same things are different (259d). Since there can be knowledge about similarities and differences—that is, about the relations between beings—then there can be ignorance about them. And so we must *also* be able to know when someone ignorant is spouting false resemblances or untrue differences. The Visitor would not agree that things only *appear* to be like or unlike. According to his ontologically-grounded epistemology, relationships between beings are determined by Difference and

¹³ Translated by Nicholas White, in *Plato: Collected Works*, ed. JM Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997): 235-93.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics”, in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, 50-51.

Sameness themselves, and so are accessible to regulations of proof and falsity in the realm of knowledge. Diseases like vice, ignorance, and civil war follow from the confusion of these important distinctions, and the sophist is the one who spreads such disorder.

*

In the chapters that follow, these essential dimensions of difference and its relation to disease play out concretely in the political, ethical, and cosmological realms. Looking first at the *Gorgias*, I track the metaphor of health and disease in the ancient *polis*. I show how Plato uses the image to establish a difference between rhetoric and philosophy, which would otherwise both seem to be arts of argument, or *logos*. The point of this metaphor is not disciplinary but political: Plato uses it to invert the balance of power between the rhetor and the philosopher. He promotes the moral authority of the philosopher to supreme importance because it ensures the health of the soul, while denigrating the rhetors' power to persuade the assembly or jury as worse than useless: it is corrupting. Plato's metaphors do not stay calmly on the page, but leap into the reading experience to put the reader in a *krisis*—a decision point—about her own health and power.

My second chapter takes the *Phaedo*, Plato's depiction of Socrates' last day, as an exemplification of the ethical care of the self to which Socrates is always urging his listeners. In his final hours, during the course of a discussion of the immortality of the soul, Socrates diagnoses and cures his friends of "misology", or the despair of truth. The disease is caused by repeated exposure to opposing arguments—first believing something is true, then false, then true again. Opposites are the most extreme form of difference, and disorder the soul unless they are organized by dialectic and narrative to preserve the self's sameness and soundness. I argue that Socrates successfully cures his friends of this disease, and urges them to protect their souls against it, by internalizing a rigorous schema for the organization of differences. It is this cure that incurs the famous debt to Asclepius that Socrates mentions with his last breath.

In my third chapter, I turn to *Timaeus*, Plato's narrative about the genesis of the cosmos. He depicts the universe as a single living whole, because the existence of anything different from it would lead to disease and decay. The dialogue begins by marking the difference from yesterday's conversation with the absence of a fourth interlocutor, who is ill. The text concludes with a long catalogue of physical diseases. According to my interpretation of *Timaeus*' theory, diseases are caused by four types of difference: differences in bodily composition, reversals in bodily processes, variations in the way substances pass in and through the body, and disproportions within and between body and soul. The gravest disease is psychic and epistemological: it is ignorance, especially of what is the same and what is different. In a direct corollary, the treatment for all disorders depends on restoring the proportionality of same and different elements within the organism, by imitating the motions of the universe.

Quite by accident, the chapters proceed from Plato's earlier to latest dialogues, as the best guesses at chronology hold. In this way, their order shows an increasingly sophisticated and explicit articulation of the concept of difference and its relationship to disease. Taken together, or synchronically, the chapters suggest that the consistent function of Plato's rhetoric of disease is to embed the philosophical question of difference in his readers. Layering the rhetorical and philosophical perspectives provides a three-

dimensional view: that *disease in Plato is a symptom of difference*. This reading overturns the traditional view that disease is a metaphor for disorder, and that Plato's philosophy is a therapeutic enterprise. Rather, Plato's goal is to produce philosophers, trained in the twin arts of division and combining (*diaeresis* and *sunagogê*), by introducing a dis-ease about differences of all kinds. Plato's diseases of difference generate the need for the philosophical "therapeutics" that only perpetuate the illness.

Chapter 1: The Politics of Care in *Gorgias*

Abstract: This chapter tracks the metaphors of disease and health in *Gorgias* to show that they are one of Plato's primary means of distinguishing (corrupting) rhetoric from (curative) philosophy. In addition to this definitional difference, disease also injects a power differential into the dialogue. Whereas the rhetors typically wielded the power to persuade the Athenian assembly and juries, Plato suggests that the moral power of the philosopher to guarantee the health of the soul is far more important—so important that the philosopher ought to exert political as well as moral authority. Because Socrates openly uses rhetoric in his attempt to persuade his listeners away from rhetoric, the reader is exposed to rhetoric's corrupting and differentiating effects, introducing a peculiar "double accent" to the dialogue. I examine different possible interpretations for this ambiguity before offering a way for modern readers to re-navigate the dialogue's authoritarian politics of care.

I. Introduction

The moral and political force of the *Gorgias*, Plato's most famous and extended diatribe against the sophists, derives from analogies of disease and doctors.¹ At the simplest level, Socrates represents himself as a doctor who aims to treat his patients—both his interlocutors and the Athenians as a whole—with bitter but healthful truths. Opposite him are the rhetors, who with their speeches spread corruption and the disease of injustice in the city and people's souls. The metaphor of disease and health thus crucially serves to distinguish the practice of rhetoric from the art of philosophy. This is my first point.

The stakes of Plato's medical analogies are explicitly political. In *Apology*, Socrates is on trial for corrupting the youth, but sees himself as caring for his fellow citizens' souls as if they were his kin. In *Gorgias*, it is the rhetors who are tried for corruption, and who are convicted by Socrates and, in his tale of the afterworld, in the court of the dead. This inversion of power, by which the influential rhetors are turned into the guilty and helpless, is accomplished largely by Plato's language of disease. He demotes the material power of the rhetors as a corrupting force, while promoting the philosopher's authority as the doctor of the soul. This is my second point.

However, the terms of this analogy—the authoritarian doctor-philosopher versus the populist and corrupting rhetor—are more complicated than they initially appear. Though he depicts himself as a doctor and a philosopher, Socrates also admits that he is

¹ An early version of this chapter was published as Ricciardone, C.T. "We Are the Disease": Truth, Health, and Politics From Plato's *Gorgias* to Foucault. *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18.2 (2014): 287-310.

employing rhetorical means. He departs from his short questions and answers to rely on long speeches; he flatters his interlocutors, and he ventriloquizes other voices. How should we read Socrates' use of rhetoric in light of his critique of rhetoric? Is he too only imitating the true care of the soul?

My third contribution is to offer three possible ways to read this ambiguity, developed from within the medical framework that Plato establishes. Socrates' rhetoric may be intended as a placebo, a vaccine, or as contagion. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and help account for the range of interpretive responses to the text. Ultimately I settle on a fourth provisional answer suggested from within the text. I propose that Socrates' use of rhetoric plays out a scenario proposed by Gorgias at the outset: that of a physician who needs Gorgias' skill in rhetoric to persuade his unwilling patient to accept treatment for his illness. In the same way, Socrates uses rhetoric to try to persuade his interlocutors to accept his philosophical treatment of their rhetorical corruption. In this light, Socrates' failure to convince actually proves the success of his claim: that rhetoric cannot make men better.

Instead, Plato's bid to convert his readers comes in the closing eschatological myth of the *Gorgias*, in which the soul's health or disease is the preeminent factor in one's final fate. As he has been saying all along, souls of rhetors and tyrants are diseased and warped by injustice and deceptions, perhaps incurably so, and will suffer eternally as a result. Plato's story of the afterlife makes plain what is invisible in this life: that the health or disease of the soul ought to be every person's central concern. The ultimate function of the medical analogy in *Gorgias*, which runs from first to last, is to distinguish between two ways of life: the corrupting life of politics, and the purifying life of philosophy.

The chapter is laid out as follows. I trace the evolution of Socrates' medical rhetoric in each of his three encounters. I show him contrasting the knowledge of medicine against the power of rhetoric with Gorgias (section I); insisting on rhetoric's corrupting influence with Polus (II), and, with Calicles, assuming the role of the doctor of the sick city (III). In section IV, I assess Socrates' use of rhetoric in light of his critique of rhetoric, offering three possibilities for how to read it, before arguing for a fourth.

In the conclusion (V), I look at how Socrates' final myth relies on and recapitulates his use of medical metaphors to invert the power of rhetoric and philosophy. The conclusion of the *Gorgias* strings contemporary readers between an appealing moral conclusion—to pursue justice above all else—and a repellent political one—that only the pure of soul are competent to engage in politics. I close the chapter by appending a new story that enables us to draw on the moral force of Plato's argument while escaping his political conclusion: to appropriate the position of disease and invert the politics of care.

II. Analysis

A) Doctors versus Rhetors

Socrates states at the outset of the dialogue that his goal is to find out what the *technê* (art, craft) of rhetoric can do and what it is that Gorgias teaches (447c). While he will ultimately claim that the rhetor has no *technê* at all, but only a knack, from the start he represents the doctor as the paradigmatic craftsman. This choice is not necessarily

intuitive, as GER Lloyd has noted.² There was no regulatory agency in Athens, and so fraudulent healers and quacks abounded;³ “scientific” healing existed alongside folk and temple medicine.⁴ All the same, the advance of Hippocratic doctrine meant that doctors were established authority figures, with some cities, including Athens, appointing public physicians. Plato will draw on the authority of the doctor, and above all on the value of his product, health, in positioning the medicine as the supreme *technê*.

The theme of the doctor is introduced by a bit of biographical chance. Chaerephon, serving as Socrates’ mouthpiece, interrogates Polus, who in turn stands in for the master sophist Gorgias. On Socrates’ prompting, Chaerephon asks after the name of Gorgias’ art by asking first, what they would call him if he practiced his brother Herodicus’ craft: a doctor, they agree. Then he asks the same thing with reference to Aristophon: a painter, is the answer. From these models, despite a fancy oratorical evasion from Polus, they eventually agree that Gorgias is called a rhetor, and his craft is called rhetoric (*rhetorikê*) (449a-b). The point of these surprisingly basic opening questions is to define the technical term *rhetorikê*, which quite probably appears here for the first time in Greek literature, as a derivation from the common word *rhetôr*.⁵ The examples of the doctor and the painter lay out a spectrum on which Socrates will locate the new field of rhetoric: while Gorgias may claim that rhetoric can help bring about health, he is closer to the painter who produces only the illusion of health.⁶ The doctor serves as the example of a craft, and painting as the exemplar of imitation.

Plato opens the contrast between rhetoric and medicine via the question of the value of its product.⁷ In the short question-and-answer dialectical style on which Socrates insists, Gorgias declares that rhetoric is knowledge about *logoi*: words, speeches, or ideas. Socrates presses him to define this answer more narrowly: how do the speeches of rhetoric compare with those of medicine, which speaks about diseases? (450a). Rhetoric is concerned with speeches about the “greatest and best of human concerns”, Gorgias

² “Plato uses the model of the doctor to construct his image of the expert in moral and political matters. Yet the real-live doctors of Plato’s day were—to judge from the evidence in the Hippocratic corpus—far from being all the confident authorities that Plato’s ideal would have us believe. Quite the reverse in certain cases.” Lloyd, G. E. R. *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 149.

³ Michael Frede, “Philosophy and Medicine in Antiquity,” in *Essays in ancient philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁴ Lloyd, G. E. R. “Aspects of the interrelations of medicine, magic and philosophy in ancient Greece.” (1975).

⁵ Edward Schiappa, “Did Plato coin *rhetorikê*?” *American Journal of Philology* (1990): 457-470. Schiappa advances one negative argument—that the term does not appear in the 5th century literature where we would expect it to—and one argument from likelihood, noting that Plato has also coined the term *dialektikê* and other words of the same pattern.

⁶ Though I focus on medicine in its contrast with disease, both crafts continue to have a privileged role in defining the limits of rhetoric. For example, see 453c, where Socrates pushes Gorgias to define rhetoric’s object and place of persuasion on analogy with the object and place that Zeuxis paints. Zeuxis was said to be such a master of *skiagraphia*, the technique of shading to create a realistic illusion, that his painting of a boy with grapes attracted birds to try to eat them—to the painter’s dismay, because it showed that he had not rendered the boy realistically enough to scare away the birds. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, Bk. 35, ch. 36.

⁷ Plato’s move is necessary, for texts of Orpheus and Empedocles suggest rather that there is a link between rhetoric and (magical) healing, via incantation or pharmaka. Jacqueline De Romilly, “Magic and rhetoric in ancient Greece” (1977): 14, 20-21.

answers (τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπειῶν πραγμάτων καὶ ἄριστα, 451d).⁸ Socrates challenges him by citing a drinking song that celebrates health as the best of human goods— obviously a common view (451e). To dramatize his challenge, he ventriloquizes a doctor. Through this mask, he calls Gorgias a liar and claims that health is truly the greatest good for humankind (452a-b).

Gorgias counters the mostly personal value of health with the collective value of freedom. He claims that rhetoric produces the actual greatest good, one that “is the source of freedom for humankind itself, and at the same time it is for each person the source of rule over others” (αἴτιον ἅμα μὲν ἐλευθερίας αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἅμα δὲ τοῦ ἄλλων ἄρχειν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ πόλει ἐκάστω, 452d)—that is, “the ability to persuade by speeches” (τὸ πείθειν ἔγωγ’ οἷόν τ’ εἶναι τοῖς λόγοις, 452e) in any political context. Embedded here is the problem of the uneasy coexistence of human freedom (*eleutheria*) and rule over others. How quickly the ability to persuade others to your point of view ceases to be freedom for you and becomes dominion over others! The true issue comes to the fore here: not just the relative *value* of the human crafts, but their political *power*.

The political is personal: Gorgias introduces a thematic of master and slave that will continue to be central to the discussion. He asserts that through the power of rhetoric, “you’ll even have the doctor for your slave (*doulon*)” (καίτοι ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ δυνάμει δοῦλον μὲν ἔξεις τὸν ἰατρόν, 452e). Gorgias’ point is that the rhetor’s power enables him to arrogate the power of the doctor to himself. Plato seems to represent Gorgias as getting carried away, perhaps revealing an unsavory element of his character. Yet speaking of enslaving a doctor is no exaggeration: anyone, including doctors could be captured and enslaved in the Greek wars. The whole economy of Athens was based on slavery, and there were indeed slave as well as free-born doctors.⁹ While today we stereotype doctors as wealthy, intelligent, and authoritative, Gorgias indicates another reality: medical knowledge would not protect your freedom, while rhetoric *can* enable you to protect your health and your freedom. It is no accident that Gorgias gets personal here, shifting from impersonal claims about the arts to the second-person address “*you*.” With this address, he triggers the desire for power (and the fear of its loss) to persuade his audience of the value of rhetoric.

However, Socrates is not interested in political power, but in knowledge and wisdom. Since, they agree, rhetoric produces conviction without knowledge, Socrates wonders when rhetoric is useful at all. What need of an orator to persuade the assembly whether to appoint this or that doctor as public physician, or to adopt a certain military strategy? In these cases, the best an orator can do is to convince the assembly without knowledge, when the better path is to appoint the most accomplished expert or act on the advice of one who knows (455b-d). In essence, Socrates claims that rhetoric’s power is without utility because it is without knowledge. He might have said, if it were not granting too much to Gorgias, that rhetoric may enable you to enslave a doctor, but not to know which doctor can best help you.

In response, Gorgias argues that medicine without rhetoric lacks efficacy, once again shifting the argument from *epistemê* (knowledge) to *dunamis* (power, capacity). His point is

⁸ Translations from the Greek are modified from that of Donald J. Zeyl (Hackett, 1987).

⁹ For the dependence of the Athenian economy on slavery, see MI Finley’s classic Finley, Moses I. *The ancient economy*. University of California Press, 1999. For the latter point on slave-doctors, c.f. Plato Laws IV 720.

that there are situations in which knowledge, bereft of conviction, is useless: it fails to produce the beneficial action. The example he gives becomes key: he tells how he has often accompanied his brother or another doctor and persuaded their patients to accept their prescription when they themselves fail to do so (456b).¹⁰ In short, Gorgias asserts that the doctor is enslaved to the rhetor in a second sense: that the doctor is dependent on the rhetor to make his knowledge useful and realized. Though the rhetor does not know what the doctor knows, he can out-perform the doctor at the bedside as well as in the assembly (456c). The conversation has turned into a contest of the doctor (who has knowledge) and the rhetor (who has power).

But Gorgias is careful to maintain that the rhetor's power does not justify its abuse, and this appeal to ethics rather than politics proves to be his undoing. He closes his praise of the orator's power with this caveat: "the fact that [the rhetor] has the power to rob doctors or other craftsmen of their reputations doesn't give him any more of a reason to do it. He should use oratory justly" (ἀλλ' οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον τούτου ἔνεκα δεῖ οὔτε τοὺς ἰατροὺς τὴν δόξαν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι— ὅτι δύναίτο ἂν τοῦτο ποιῆσαι—οὔτε τοὺς ἄλλους δημιουργούς, ἀλλὰ δικαίως καὶ τῆ ῥητορικῆ χρήσθαι, 457b). Virtue is really Socrates' strength. In the face of Socrates' assault, Gorgias turns out to be unable to sustain the claim that the rhetor teaches justice. He must admit either that he is an ineffective teacher (so that he "teaches" justice but does not produce just men), or that he does not teach justice after all—in which case the question of what he *does* teach resurfaces like a repressed memory. Instead of making this dilemma explicit, Plato has Polus, the young "colt" (463e), step in to defend Gorgias, inaugurating the second third of the dialogue.

In these opening scenes, Plato has set up the contrast between the doctor and the rhetor as the difference between a craft (*technê*) based on knowledge (*epistemê*), and power (*dunamis*). In today's post-Foucauldian discourse, "knowledge" and "power" are commonly closely connected with a hyphen or a slash (power-knowledge or power/knowledge), in order to denote that power produces what counts as knowledge and knowledge in turn is an exercise of power.¹¹ But Plato fiercely defends the distinction between these two capacities. Or rather, he asserts that power without knowledge is useless power, whereas knowledge is the power of doing justice and thus protects the soul. The remainder of the dialogue can be read as promoting the power of knowledge to produce justice and happiness, while demoting the knowledge of how power operates (that is, rhetoric) to a "knack". To do so, Plato will develop and intensify his own medical rhetoric.

B) The Doctor-Philosopher and Rhetorical Corruption

Recall that Chaerephon initially sought to define the art of rhetoric in comparison with medicine and painting (448b-c, pg 1-2 above). With Gorgias, Socrates has established the difference between rhetoric and medicine; in Socrates' conversation with Polus, he now

¹⁰ In fact, Jacques Jouanna argues that oratory was a crucial part of the Hippocratic doctor's art: both in persuading patients, making a name for himself, getting appointed as a public physician, and advancing his views, rhetoric was essential to establishing his credibility. *Hippocrates*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999:75-85.

¹¹ So Foucault, Michel. *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon, 1980.

advances a thesis about the similarity of oratory to the painting or image-making.¹² He claims openly that rhetoric (and its sibling, sophistry) are not crafts at all, but only an *imitation* of the true crafts of justice and legislation, and forms of flattery or gratification.¹³ What effectively distinguishes them from the true crafts is that whereas justice and legislation care for the souls of men and keep them in good condition, rhetoric corrupts the soul with the disease of injustice. Through this discussion of diseased rhetors and tyrants, and the judges who can cure them¹⁴, Socrates intensifies and further politicizes his medical rhetoric.

By feeding questions to the inexperienced Polus, Socrates lays out his views about rhetoric unimpeded. He presents a fourfold schematic of the arts, based on a division between the body and soul and a fundamental distinction between the true arts and their imitators. The true crafts of the body, he says, are medicine and gymnastics—but cookery and cosmetics produce the illusion of health and strength. In the same way, the true soul-crafts are legislation and justice—of which oratory and sophistry are only imitators. Socrates suggests further that there is a parallelism between the soul-craft of justice and the body-craft of medicine (464c), an analogy that he will later develop to mean that applying justice, like medicine, heals a soul sick with injustice.¹⁵ Likewise, Socrates will often use the cook as a stand-in for the rhetor, especially when it is convenient to portray rhetoric as gratifying the base material desires instead of operating on the soul. But here, because the soul is placed higher than the body, the imitation and corruptions of rhetoric are infinitely worse than those of the body.

Socrates' key point is that rhetoric is no craft but only a “knack” or practice (*empereia*), because “it has no rational account by which it presents what it presents, the nature of anything whatsoever, so that it’s unable to state the cause of each thing” (τέχνην δὲ αὐτὴν οὐ φημι εἶναι ἀλλ’ ἐμπειρίαν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει λόγον οὐδένα ᾧ προσφέρει ἃ προσφέρει ὅποι’ ἄττα τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν, 465a). That is, his criterion of craft-ship is that it has an identifiable *logos* about itself and its methods: *not* that it is effective. The contrast between rhetoric and crafts like medicine and philosophy, as Irwin puts it, is that the former is an ability “acquired by habituation and practice alone, not by instruction and theory... the rhetor cannot give an explicit rational justification of what he does.”¹⁶ Socrates' conversations with Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles serve as direct evidence of how rhetoric fails to meet this requirement.

Part of Socrates' indictment of rhetoric is that it obscures the differences and distinctions that philosophy and medicine are concerned with. Both arts considered the

¹² Thus carrying out Plato's signature philosophical process of division (*diarêsis*) and collection (*sunagogê*).

¹³ Like Plato, I do not distinguish in this paper between rhetoric or oratory (ῥητορικὴ) and sophistry (σοφιστικὴ), generally referring to both with “rhetoric”. Although historically distinct—the sophists were something like teachers of higher education and rhetors were lawyer-like ‘public figures’ who spoke in the courts and the assembly—for the purposes of Plato's argument, and thus my own, they are the same. Indeed, Socrates says as much: “They are one and the same, the sophist and the orator, or nearly so and pretty similar” (ταύτόν, ᾧ μακάρι’, ἐστὶν σοφιστὴς καὶ ῥήτωρ, ἢ ἐγγύς τι καὶ παραπλήσιον, 520a7-8). For the historical point see G. B. Kerferd, *The sophistic movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁴ The ideal of psychic health is developed in *Rep.* 444d-e; the comparison between doctors and judges in *Rep.* 408de-10a.

¹⁵ For the analogy between doctors and judges, see *Rep.* 408d-10a.

¹⁶ Irwin, *Gorgias*, 132 n463a-c.

practice of *diarêsis*, or division, central to their self-accounting.¹⁷ If the soul did not discern between medicine and the fake art of cookery, but the body ruled about such things based on its pleasure, “then the world according to Anaxagoras would prevail, my dear Polus, for you are experienced in those subjects: all things would be mixed together in the same place, and *there would be no distinction* between matters of medicine and health and matters of cookery” (τὸ τοῦ Ἀναξαγόρου ἂν πολὺ ἦν, ὧ φίλε Πῶλε—σὺ γὰρ τούτων ἔμπειρος—ὁμοῦ ἂν πάντα χρήματα ἐφύρετο ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ, ἀκρίτων ὄντων τῶν τε ἰατρικῶν καὶ ὑγιεινῶν καὶ ὀψοποικῶν, 465d3-7). Like the Anaxagorean original soup, rhetoric is *a-kritos*, without judgment or distinction.¹⁸ In contrast, philosophical knowledge makes distinctions that preserve the domain of health against the bodily desire for pleasure. Although Plato’s rhetoric of disease marks the difference of rhetoric from philosophy, the disease that rhetoric causes is the obscuring of difference.

The outcome of rhetoric’s imitation and the resulting indistinction are disastrous. Socrates predicts that: “If a pastry baker and a doctor had to compete in front of children or in front of men just as foolish as children, to determine which of the two had expert knowledge of good food and bad, the doctor would die of starvation” (ὥστ’ εἰ δέοι ἐν παισὶ διαγωνίζεσθαι ὀψοποιόν τε καὶ ἰατρόν, ἢ ἐν ἀνδράσιν οὕτως ἀνοήτοις ὥσπερ οἱ παῖδες, πότερος ἐπάξει περὶ τῶν χρηστῶν σιτίων καὶ πονηρῶν, ὁ ἰατρός ἢ ὁ ὀψοποιός, λιμῷ ἂν ἀποθανεῖν τὸν ἰατρόν, 464e). While I am uncertain exactly why the doctor would be deprived of food, the point surely is to demean the ability of common people to judge expertise. Plato means us here and elsewhere in the dialogue¹⁹ to recall the circumstances of Socrates’ trial and death. Staged as a confrontation of doctor and pastry-baker, in fact he stakes the expertise of the philosopher against the pleasure-riding knack of the rhetor.

The point is crucial, for Socrates represents himself as a doctor, and his claims to the power and authority rest directly on the claims of doctor’s superior expertise. So he urges one of his more unruly interlocutors, “Don’t shrink back from answering, Polus. You won’t get hurt in any way. Submit yourself nobly to the argument, as you would to a doctor, and answer me. Say yes or no to what I ask you” (μὴ ὀκνεῖ ἀποκρίνασθαι, ὧ Πῶλε: οὐδὲν γὰρ βλαβήση: ἀλλὰ γενναίως τῷ λόγῳ ὥσπερ ἰατρῷ παρέχων ἀποκρίνου, καὶ ἢ φάθι ἢ μὴ ἄ ἐρωτῷ, 475d5-8). Socrates represents his philosophical argument or *logos*, standing impersonally in for himself, as a physician. The philosopher here assumes the benign authority of the doctor to advance his argument about the good—already revealing his political aspirations in the act of submission that he requires.

Though Plato employs the metaphoric “as” (*hōsper*) to compare the philosophical dialectic to a doctor, the relationship is not a mere simile. Rather, medicine in its proper being is philosophical. Medicine is a *tekhnē* or craft, Socrates says, only insofar as it has “investigated both the nature of the object it serves and the cause of the things it does and is able to give an account of each of these” (ἢ δ’ ἰατρική, λέγων ὅτι ἢ μὲν τούτου οὐ θεραπεύει καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἔσκεπται καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν ὧν πράττει, καὶ λόγον ἔχει τούτων ἐκάστου δοῦναι, 501a1-3, see also 454d-e). That is, doctors practice a craft insofar as they

¹⁷ See *Phaedrus* 270b, where, ironically, Socrates draws a similarity between medicine and “rhetoric”, newly defined to include philosophy, on the basis of the shared procedure of *diaeresis*. Ludwig Edelstein, “Review: M. Pohlenz, *Hippokrates und die Begründung der wissenschaftlichen Medizin*”, in *Ancient medicine; selected papers of Ludwig Edelstein*. Johns Hopkins Press, 1967: 117-9.

¹⁸ See also 501b, on the inability to distinguish good and bad pleasures.

¹⁹ 486b, 521b, 522d-e.

are philosophers, and not insofar as they are *effective* in curing disease. By emphasizing the *knowledge* of health and disease over health-giving *practice*, Socrates subtly dismisses Gorgias' argument that the art of medicine depends on, or is subservient to, the art of rhetoric for its efficacy. Medicine has its own *logos*, the giving of accounts about health and disease.²⁰ If Schiappa is right that the rhetors before Plato understood the object of their art as *logos*, it is particularly acute that this becomes the term that divides rhetoric from philosophy, and links philosophy to medicine.²¹ Plato alternates between presenting medicine as a metaphor for philosophy, and figuring philosophy as the nature of medicine.

The commonality of medicine and philosophy is crucial to Plato's project of transferring power from the rhetors to the philosophers. In doing so, he merely emphasizes an existing relationship between medicine and philosophy. In his time, the new "fields" of medicine and philosophy both concerned themselves with the nature of man in his world. Though scholars disagree over the degree and direction of the influence between the two, the literature as a whole suggests that the relationship between them was a two-way street.²²

What is unique to Plato is the authority he derives from the medical-philosophical nexus. However, even in this he has precedent. In a startling analysis of Indo-European linguistic bones, Emile Benveniste finds a deep resonance between the words associated with doctors, philosophers, and statesmen. Benveniste defines the common root *med, from which we derive "medicine", as meaning "to take measures of order with authority and reflection; to apply a deliberate plan to confused situation."²³ He concludes that the doctor in Indo-European language and culture was a sort of genre of leadership, and moreover, that the authority of both physician and king was underwritten by the capacity for reflection and discernment: that is, by the capacity of the philosopher. Today we speak of a "white-coat effect" to denote the authoritative effect of something said by anyone who is or looks like a doctor. Despite their limited knowledge, the ancient doctor was similarly revered, as we can see from the passages on the art of Asclepius in *Iliad*.²⁴ Thus, by dressing the philosopher in the doctor's clothing, Plato positions Socrates as an authoritative figure.

²⁰ How far is Plato expressing the views of his time? Following Plato and Aristotle, Owsei Temkin hypothesizes a distinction in Greek medicine between the science of the physician and the practical craft of the leech. "Greek Medicine as Science and Craft". *Isis* 44 (1953): 213–25.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/227086>. A more up to date view is offered by Vivian Nutton, who posits a "medical marketplace" of competing theories and practices. "Healers in the medical market place: towards a social history of Graeco-Roman medicine." *Medicine in Society: historical essays* (1992): 15-58.

²¹ Schiappa, "Did Plato Coin Rhetorikê?", 458-60.

²² For treatments emphasizing medicine's debt to philosophy, see G. E. R. Lloyd, "Introduction," in *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd (London: Penguin Books, 1978). For philosophy's debt to medicine, see Michael Frede, "Philosophy and Medicine in Antiquity," in *Essays in ancient philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). For an argument for their mutual influence, see James Longrigg, *Greek rational medicine: philosophy and medicine from Alcmaeon to the Alexandrians* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993). For an account emphasizing the conflict between the two, see W. H. S. Jones, "Introduction," in *Hippocrates, Vol. 1: Ancient Medicine (Loeb Classical Library No. 147)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923), and Susan B. Levin, *Plato's Rivalry with Medicine: A Struggle and Its Dissolution*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

²³ Emile Benveniste, "The medical tradition of the Indo-Europeans," in *Antiquities*, ed. Nicole Loraux, Gregory Nagy, and Laura M. Slatkin, *Postwar French Thought* (New York: New Press, 2001). Benveniste lists such Greek terms as *medomai* (to care for), *mêdomai* (to decide), and *medôn* (chief), as well as their Latin and Sanskrit counterparts, to demonstrate this medical-philosophical-political nexus.

²⁴ Homer, *Iliad* Book 2, 730, and Book 4, 210-219.

As far as Plato is concerned, the true political art is to improve men's souls through the application of justice, just as the doctor heals their bodies with drugs, surgery, and cauterization. Socrates compares injustice in the soul (*adikian*) to disease (*nosos*) of the body; but corruption of the soul is greater and more dangerous than illness in the body, but greater and more dangerous (477b-e). The tyrants and rhetors whom Polus would celebrate for their power are for Socrates the epitome of ill-health:

Their achievements [orators and tyrants] are comparable to those of someone suffering from the most serious illnesses, who manages to avoid giving any account of his physical defects to the doctors and undergoing treatment, because, like a child, he is afraid of the pain involved in cautery and surgery.

τὸ αὐτὸ διαπεπραγμένοι εἰσὶν ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις τοῖς μεγίστοις νοσήμασιν
συνισχόμενος διαπράξαιτο μὴ διδόναι δίκην τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμαρτημάτων τοῖς
ἰατροῖς μηδὲ ἰατρεύεσθαι, φοβούμενος ὥσπερ ἀνὴρ παῖς τὸ κάεσθαι καὶ τὸ
τέμνεσθαι, ὅτι ἀλγυνόν. (479a)

Thus the power of rhetoric to influence is downgraded to the power to avoid treatment, and powerful rhetors are reduced to children. By extension of the metaphor, the art of medicine, and especially cautery and surgery, correspond to the art of justice (477e-478a). Polus is vanquished the moment he agrees that medicine is unpleasant but beneficial, something people undergo for the sake of the health it brings; much more miserable is to be uncured, whether the disease is of body or soul (477d). Irwin points out that the analogy between bodily health and soul's virtue breaks down insofar as "the good condition of the body may be judged by what is best for me, but the virtuous condition of my soul may be judged by other people's benefit."²⁵ The flawed analogy is indeed central, but Polus does not contest the point.

In Socrates' conversation with Polus, the analogy of injustice to a disease supports the claim that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it. Socrates concludes his diatribe in these terms with what Dodds calls a "comic inversion" of common utilitarianism.²⁶ The only possible good use of oratory, he says, is first to accuse oneself, and one's friends and family, of any wrongdoing, so that he

may pay his due and get well; and compel himself and the others not to play the coward, but to grit his teeth and present himself with grace and courage as to a doctor for cauterization and surgery..."

ἵνα δῶ δίκην καὶ ὑγιῆς γένηται, ἀναγκάζειν τε αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους μὴ ἀποδειλιᾶν
ἀλλὰ παρέχειν μύσαντα εὔ καὶ ἀνδρείως ὥσπερ τέμνειν καὶ κάειν ἰατρῶ, 480c-d.

Once again, undergoing treatment, or facing justice, is depicted as a matter of courage (*andreia*). In the opposite case of one's enemies, he should use oratory to prevent the person from seeing justice, scheming to avoid the death penalty so the enemy will live as long as possible in a state of corruption (481a-b). Polus thinks these statements absurd, but cannot escape the conclusion. Via the metaphors of medicine and disease, Socrates reverses Gorgias' arguments for the power and utility of rhetoric. The best use of oratory is to

²⁵ 160, note 477a and b. He strengthens his point by drawing on George Grote, who rests his case for the disanalogy on 2 points: 1) one knows when one is healthy, but not necessarily when one is good, and 2) health is good in itself, but justice is not as obviously desirable. Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates*, vol. ii, 363, in Irwin 160.

²⁶ E.R. Dodds, "Plato, Gorgias. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary" (1961): 257, n480a1-81b5.

maintain the corruption of those on whom you would wish evil; or to bring to justice those you wish to heal or benefit.

C) The Master Doctor, the Slavish Rhetor, and the Sick City

Seeing Polus unable to defeat Socrates' claims about the injustice of rhetoric, Callicles jumps in. With a long speech, he charges Socrates with misusing the distinction between nature (*physis*) and convention (*nomos*). This debate is the most acrimonious yet, and the rhetoric of doctor and disease is correspondingly intense. Socrates sets himself to proving the reverse of Gorgias' claim that the rhetor would enslave the doctor, instead portraying the doctor as master and rhetors as servants. Most importantly, these conversations shift from the realm of the individual body and soul (such and such tyrant or orator), and to the domain of the city as a whole. Whereas before Socrates portrayed individual tyrants and orators as children fearing treatment, he now transfers those images of corruption and infantilism to the Athenian people. Now, in adopting the role of the doctor, Socrates promotes himself to the role of an authority over the collective, rather than over an individual soul. At the same time, he works to evacuate the political power of the rhetors.

Whereas the discussion with Polus was concerned with judicial rhetoric—bringing individuals like tyrants to justice—the conversation with Callicles shifts subtly to the branch of legislative rhetoric—passing laws in the assembly. Or, as Socrates would define it, the branch of rhetoric concerned with flattering and gratifying the masses. Callicles himself lays the groundwork for the transition with his interest in law (*nomos*) and his contention that the law of nature justifies the rule of the superior.²⁷ Socrates' strategy remains in many ways the same. He questions what Callicles means exactly by “superior” (488c, 489d), and maintains that the superior and happier man is the self-controlled, virtuous one (493a-494a). He points out the difference between pleasures and the good (495a-497e)²⁸, and insists that it requires the knowledge of a craftsman to sort out the good and bad pleasures (500a). The reader can see where this is leading: the rhetor, in Socrates' view, has no such knowledge or method of discriminating good and bad pleasures, but panders to the shifting pleasures of the masses in a self-serving way (501a-d, 502d).

Socrates introduces a new aspect of the analogy in the notion of discipline. Callicles, increasingly discomfited and recalcitrant, assents that the healthy body is analogous to an orderly, disciplined soul, and that just as a doctor restricts the appetites of the sick, a corrupt and unjust soul must also be disciplined (504c-505a). At this point he refuses to

²⁷ See Bruno Latour on the similarity between Callicles' and Socrates' position: though one is pro-rhetoric and one is pro-philosophy, both are anti-democratic and believe “the best” should rule. They differ only in that Socrates defines “the best” in terms of virtue, and Callicles in terms of wealth and power. Bruno Latour. “Socrates' and Callicles' Settlement--or, The Invention of the Impossible Body Politic.” *Configurations* 5, no. 2 (1997): 189-240.

²⁸ Incidentally, Socrates relies on the example of the evident difference between health and illness, and how they never concur, to make a (questionable) point about the similarity and simultaneity of pleasure and pain, and their resulting difference from good and bad. The corrupt rhetor, on the other hand, is unable to make such distinctions. 495e-497e. My point is that health and disease are the operative terms in establishing the difference between the pair pleasure/pain and good/bad, while corruption consists in non-distinction.

continue. So Socrates summarizes and continues the discussion, playing both roles himself, and ending up at the same conclusion: that doing what's unjust is worse than suffering it, and that oratory offers no protection against the worst fate, which is doing injustice (508a-509c). To live with a soul diseased by injustice is worse than to die (512a-b).

Two pivotal moments bring Socrates' medical-political analogy to a head. In a rapid one-two, Plato first exploits the trope of disease to discredit the material and democratic power of the rhetors, and then promotes the philosopher, qua doctor, to the role of authoritarian leader. Calicles tries to defend the craft of rhetoric by summoning the example of several revered Athenian leaders known for their persuasive skills: Pericles, Themistocles, and Miltiades. Socrates' first blow falls directly on their heads.

According to Socrates, these legendary statesmen plagued rather than profited Athens. They worsened the city's health by feeding her desires, he says, whereas a wise doctor-leader would have disciplined and controlled them. Socrates suggests that Calicles, in his ignorance of true health and sound politics, has implicitly equated the politicians with wine-vendors, bread-bakers, and cooks: that is, he has confused their achievements with those of the imitating arts of Socrates' four-part schema (464a-466a, p. 6 above). The philosopher's response to his own proposition bears quoting at length:

The men you're mentioning to me are servants, satisfiers of appetites! They have no understanding whatever of anything that's admirable and good in these cases. They'll fill and fatten people's bodies, if they get the chance, and besides that, destroy their original flesh as well, all the while receiving their praise!

διακόνους μοι λέγεις καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν παρασκευαστὰς ἀνθρώπους, οὐκ ἐπαῖοντας καλὸν κάγαθὸν οὐδὲν περὶ αὐτῶν, οἳ, ἂν οὕτω τύχωσιν, ἐμπλήσαντες καὶ παχύναντες τὰ σώματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐπαινοῦμενοι ὑπ' αὐτῶν, προσαπολοῦσιν αὐτῶν καὶ τὰς ἀρχαίας σάρκας (518c3-7).

Inverting Gorgias' now long-ago claim that rhetoric gives the power to enslave (452e), Socrates here paints rhetors as "servants" (*diakonous*), subject to the dictates of the people's desire. They lack understanding of how to discipline and order the appetites according what is good for the body, but instead indulge it, to the body's detriment. The corruption they cause has two forms: the great leaders fill and fatten the people's bodies, or add additional flesh, as well as destroy the original flesh that was there. Though Socrates is still speaking about the Athenian people, the accusation alludes to recent Athenian history: not only did Pericles (for example) worsen the city by adding to her empire, but corrupted the original urban core, presumably by his support of democracy.

Yet these leaders are widely revered. Why? In a time-honored trope used to discredit a politically popular party, Socrates explains the admiration of the great rhetors as a delusion of the people. Because they lack knowledge, the citizens mistake their pleasure for the good and celebrate these leaders/bread-bakers as the cause. Socrates predicts that the Athenians:

will lay the blame for their illnesses (*nosōn*) and the destruction of their original flesh not on those who threw the parties, but on any people who happen to be with them at the time giving them advice. Yes, when that earlier stuffing has come bringing sickness in its train much later, then, because it's proved to be unhealthy, they'll blame these people and scold them and do

something bad to them if they can, and they'll sing the praises of those earlier people, the ones responsible for their ills.

οἱ δ' αὖ δι' ἀπειρίαν οὐ τοὺς ἐστιῶντας αἰτιάσονται τῶν νόσων αἰτίους εἶναι καὶ τῆς ἀποβολῆς τῶν ἀρχαίων σαρκῶν, ἀλλ' οἱ ἂν αὐτοῖς τύχῳσι τότε παρόντες καὶ συμβουλευόντες τι, ὅταν δὴ αὐτοῖς ἦκη ἢ τότε πλησμονὴ νόσον φέρουσα συχνῶ ὕστερον χρόνῳ, ἅτε ἄνευ τοῦ ὑγιεινοῦ γεγονυῖα, τούτους αἰτιάσονται καὶ ψέξουσιν καὶ κακόν τι ποιήσουσιν, ἂν οἷόι τ' ᾖσι, τοὺς δὲ προτέρους ἐκείνους καὶ αἰτίους τῶν κακῶν ἐγκωμιάσουσιν (518c7-e1).

The cause of the error, according to Socrates, lies in the passage of time. When the city's diseases manifest, they blame whoever is leading them at the time, rather than the earlier leaders by whose indulgence the city got fat.

The conclusion of this diatribe is crucial. Though Callicles and other say these orators have made the city great, in fact it is "swollen and festering" (οἰδεῖ καὶ ὑπουλός, 518e4). For the first time in the dialogue, the disease of rhetoric has infected not only the individual, but the body politic. How is the body politic constituted? The passage from individual to social corruption takes place through the material body. Recall that in Plato's schema, rhetoric is supposed to affect the soul. But Socrates's rhetoric of disease has moved from the souls of individual tyrants and orators, through the doubled destruction of citizen bodies, and finally to the deterioration of the political body as a whole. The body politic is constituted only as already corrupted.²⁹ In *Gorgias* the city does not "fall" into disease. Instead, at the same time as the rhetors effect an idea of a political organism, they corrupt it with their flattering speech. Thus it is the "enfleshment" of the city, the rhetorical act of endowing it with a material body, which transfers the individual corruption of the soul to the deterioration of the social whole. In other words, the body for Plato is the *medium of contamination*.

On the foundations of a hierarchy in which the body is a debased realm, Plato's inversion of his own metaphor becomes more than a convenient literary trick. In representing rhetoric's effects in the political body rather than the soul, he accomplishes two aims. First, it allows him to scoff at the genuine material power of the orators, which addresses the unavoidable basic needs of the *demos*, as "merely" satisfying the bodily appetites; in fact, those who appear to be leaders are really only "servants" (518c4). At the same time, however—and this is his second blow—he evacuates the position of influence upon the soul that was originally held by rhetoric, creating a vacancy into which philosophy can step.

That is, from the corrupt constitution of the body politic follows an obvious corollary: the ministrations of the philosopher-doctor will have to assume grander proportions as well. So in what follows, Socrates once again styles himself the lone doctor-philosopher-politician that the sickly Athens needs. He goads Callicles:

Now, please describe for me precisely the type of care for the city to which you are calling me. Is it that of striving valiantly with the Athenians to make

²⁹ David Bates makes a congruent argument about the emergence of a "political physiology" in the 20th century. He shows that political theories of crisis and catastrophe were informed by biological theories of how the organism constitutes itself as a unity in response to pathological stress and shock. "Catastrophe and Human Order: From Political Theology to Political Physiology," in *The Time of Catastrophe*, ed. Austin Sarat et al. (Ashgate, 2015), esp. 115-119.

them as good as possible, *like a doctor*, or is it like one ready to serve them and to associate with them for their gratification?

ἐπὶ ποτέραν οὖν με παρακαλεῖς τὴν θεραπείαν τῆς πόλεως, διόρισόν μοι: τὴν τοῦ διαμάχεσθαι Ἀθηναίοις ὅπως ὡς βέλτιστοι ἔσονται, ὡς ἰατρόν, ἢ ὡς διακονήσοντα καὶ πρὸς χάριν ὁμιλήσοντα; (521a2-5).

The correct answer is the former. In contrast to high-calorie oratory, the power of the philosopher is a higher, transcendent force that disciplines the soul. At the same time, philosophy maintains its own link to the physical through the metaphor of medicine. Thus philosophy becomes the *panacea*: it combats the bodily sickness caused by rhetoric through its superior power over the health of the soul. In this complex chiasmatic exchange between body and soul, rhetoric and philosophy, then, Plato secures for the philosopher a transcendent or metaphysical power that trumps the “merely” physical power of the rhetors. At the same time, the rootedness of medicine in the body lends quiet material heft to his political aspirations. It is on the basis of his similarity to the physician in his care for the soul that Socrates makes one of his most famous boasts: “I believe that I’m one of a few Athenians—so as not to say I’m the only one, but the only one among our contemporaries—to take up the true political craft and practice the true politics” (οἶμαι μετ’ ὀλίγων Ἀθηναίων, ἵνα μὴ εἶπω μόνος, ἐπιχειρεῖν τῇ ὡς ἀληθῶς πολιτικῇ τέχνῃ καὶ πράττειν τὰ πολιτικὰ μόνος τῶν νῦν, 521d6-8).³⁰ In his role of doctor, the philosopher Socrates becomes the “true statesman.”

Paradoxically, although he claims the role of the doctor of the city, Socrates disclaims the role of politician in order to underline the difference of his sort power. “I’m not one of the politicians, Polus” (ὦ Πῶλε, οὐκ εἰμι τῶν πολιτικῶν, 473e), he says, recounting an incident where he was laughed at for not knowing the procedures of the Council. He is uninterested in the rituals and procedures of Athenian courts and assembly. Instead, “I do know how to produce one witness to whatever I’m saying, and that’s the man I’m having a discussion with. The majority I disregard. And I do know how to call for a vote from one man, but I don’t even discuss things with the majority” (ἐγὼ γὰρ ὧν ἂν λέγω ἓνα μὲν παρασχέσθαι μάρτυρα ἐπίσταμαι, αὐτὸν πρὸς ὃν ἂν μοι ὁ λόγος ἦ, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς ἐῷ χαίρειν, καὶ ἓνα ἐπιψηφίζειν ἐπίσταμαι, τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς οὐδὲ διαλέγομαι., 474a-b). In contrast to the rhetors, who can only persuade a group or gathering of non-knowers, the philosopher, like the doctor, deals with the individual. Although he paints the rhetors as corrupters in league with tyrants, the power that he asserts is no less tyrannical: he ignores the many.

In trying to impose such a soul-discipline on his fellow citizens, Socrates acknowledges that he risks death. This makes him a true *parrhesiastes*: one who speaks truly without regard for his safety.³¹ For as the philosopher-doctor-statesman, Socrates dispenses moral and political truth/health, whether the unenlightened *demos* likes it or not: “I’ll be judged the way a doctor would be judged by a jury of children if a cook were to bring accusations against him” (κρινουῖμαι γὰρ ὡς ἐν παιδίῳ ἰατρὸς ἂν κρίνοιτο

³⁰ The line “rhymes” uneasily with Glaucon’s remark in *Republic* III, upon hearing of the god of medicine’s eugenic policy of treatment: “a bit of a statesman, your Asclepius” (πολιτικόν, ἔφη, λέγεις Ἀσκληπιόν, 407e).

³¹ On *parrhesia*, see below, p. 15.

κατηγοροῦντος ὀψοποιοῦ, 521e3-4).³² The vivid image translates a political vision in which an ignorant, infantile mass is lead and improved by a single wise man responsible for their bodies and their souls—a vision that spotlights the anti-democratic and verges on religious fervor.³³ The passion of this line is informed by its resonance with Socrates' political fate. Plato warns that without philosophers like Socrates, the Athenians will, like Callicles, "remain at variance with [themselves]" (482c). The corruption of rhetoric is an internal contradiction; the power and cure of philosophy is to contradict the mass.

In short, through a deft mixing of his own metaphors of body and soul, Socrates has radically displaced the traditional sites of power and prestige of ancient Athens. He casts the materially powerful rhetors as "servants", thus opening up a transcendental position of knowledge/power into which he neatly inserts himself. It seems that we need not venture to *Republic*, then, to find evidence of Plato's authoritarian ideology, advanced in medical terms. However, that Socrates delivers this message in "a real popular harangue" (ὡς ἀληθῶς δημηγορεῖν με, 519d3), as he openly acknowledges, underscores the fact that his bid for philosophical power is thoroughly rhetorical. He attacks rhetoric yet uses rhetoric. And if he is right that rhetoric corrupts the soul and the city, his use of it seems to undermine Plato's authoritarian prescription for social and moral health. This ambiguity complicates the matter of reading his political program.

III. Synthesis: The Doctor's Rhetoric

It does not require any extraordinary acumen to observe that Socrates is infected by the bug of rhetorical trickery, whether construed as long speeches, wearing of masks, or obvious flattery. Indeed, as above (519d3), Socrates openly confesses his rhetorical failings, hamming up his performance of the *parrhesiastic* or truth-telling role. Plato casts him as unwillingly, but at least honestly, employing rhetoric only when it is unavoidable—usually because of the stupidity of his opponent (465e4-6). As Foucault notes, *parrhesia* is "a sort of 'figure' among rhetorical figures, but with this characteristic: that it is without any figure since it is completely natural. *Parrhesia* is the zero degree of those rhetorical figures which intensify the emotions of the audience."³⁴ The core feature of *parrhesia* is that it is truth spoken in spite of some danger, and it is precisely in his medico-political role as a truth-

³² According to Jouanna's magisterial work, this *is* just an image. Although The Hippocratic treatise *The Art* draws on the metaphor of a trial, "physicians in Classical Greece were not responsible in the eyes of the law for the death of their patients." *Hippocrates*, 140.

³³ The crossover of ideas of disease and pollution in the religious realm makes this an unexaggerated claim.

³⁴ Foucault and Pearson, *Fearless Speech*: 21. In fact, Foucault waffles on the question of whether *parrhesia* should be considered a rhetorical device, or whether it is opposed to rhetoric as a basically philosophical practice of truth-telling, depending on whom he is reading. Speaking of Seneca and Quintillian, he describes *parrhesia* as the "naked transmission of the truth", concluding, "in a word, let's say then that speaking freely, *parrhesia*, is in its very structure completely different from and opposed to rhetoric." Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*: 382, 385. But speaking more generally, he expresses the opposite view (372). Philosophically speaking, we might say that *parrhesia* cannot be wholly appropriated by or attributed to rhetoric or philosophy, because and to the same extent that those two cannot be wholly divided from one another. Historically speaking, however, *parrhesia* was a recognizable oratorical device, and hence we can be comfortable in accepting Socrates' use of it as an instance of artful speech.

teller that Socrates invites the revenge of his listeners. It is also as a *parrhesiastes* that Socrates employs rhetoric in the most devious way: his exaggerated performance of truth-telling seems designed to absolve his use of rhetoric.³⁵

In other words, Socrates' confessions and protestations of sincerity may lull the reader into overlooking his fundamental oratorical "corruptions" of philosophical practice. He continually reverts to rhetorical devices, including peppering his speeches with flattering blandishments (every opponent is his most "marvelous friend"); deliberately assuming insincere postures; and, as above, masking his schemas with mixed up metaphors. All of these are compelling and well-known instances of the rhetorical posture of Socrates' philosophy. Trickiest of all, however, is Plato's use of the deceptive masks he himself critiques; that is, the prevalence of *ventriloquism* in the dialogue.

Think of the opening scene, with which we began: from the start the character of Chaerephon seems to exist only to articulate Socrates' questions, while Polus speaks for Gorgias (447c9-448c9). Or later, when Socrates assumes the voices of the doctor (and physical trainer and financial manager) to badger Gorgias into saying what good oratory produces, concluding: "So come on, Gorgias. Consider yourself questioned by both these men and myself, and give us your answer" (ἴθι οὖν νομίσας, ὦ Γοργία, ἐρωτᾶσθαι καὶ ὑπ' ἐκείνων καὶ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ, ἀπόκριναι, 452d1-3). Or when he "instructs" Polus on how to question him dialectically:

SOCRATES: Ask me now what craft I think cookery is.

POLUS: All right, I will. What craft is cookery?

SOCRATES: It isn't one at all, Polus. Now say, "What is it then?"

POLUS: Fine, I'm saying it.

SOCRATES: It's a knack. Say, "a knack for what?"

POLUS: Fine, I'm saying it.

SOCRATES: For producing gratification and pleasure." (462d9-e1)

Thinking in a similar vein, Daniel Boyarin points out the "scriptedness" of this exchange, invoking metaphors of stage, performance, and artifice.³⁶ What is written into this script, however, is Socrates routing his questions through Polus' mouth, just as he makes his voice issue from the doctor or from Chaerephon. He does the same, more strikingly, when he dispenses with the pretense of dialogue with the non-compliant Callicles, saying summarily, "Haven't we agreed many times already that this [looking after the well-being of the citizens] is what a man active in politics should be doing? Have we or haven't we? Please answer me. Yes we have. *I'll answer for you*" (ἦ οὐ πολλάκις ἤδη ὠμολογήκαμεν τοῦτο δεῖν πράττειν τὸν πολιτικὸν ἄνδρα; ὠμολογήκαμεν ἦ οὐ; ἀποκρίνου. ὠμολογήκαμεν: ἐγὼ ὑπὲρ σοῦ ἀποκρινοῦμαι, 515c). In each of these instances—and there are more³⁷—

³⁵ In a related problematic, Ramona Naddaff asks whether Plato's Socrates is a *parrhesiastes* when he censors the use of poetry in *Republic*. *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 8-9.

³⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009): 112-13. Daniel Peralta also suggested in correspondence to me that the passage recalls the repeat-after-me rituals of much Greco-Roman religious initiation, underlining the metaphysical authority that Socrates exudes here.

³⁷ For further examples of Socratic ventriloquism, see also: 455d (where Socrates speaks for potential pupils); 482a (philosophy, Socrates' beloved, speaking through him); 505c- 507c (Socrates finishes the discussion by himself, alternating as questioner/answer).

Socrates forces his words to emerge from another's mouth. Of course, we must not forget the very first order of ventriloquism, in which Plato speaks through his characters.

More than a dialogue, then, the text becomes a rabbit warren of throats, a labyrinth of unlocatable voices. In the *Gorgias*, ventriloquy seems to have "gone viral." Indeed, the life-cycle of a virus is itself a species of ventriloquism, as it expresses itself through others' bodies. Or, put differently, ventriloquism is a metaphor for the operation of the virus: an organism that inhabits another body, expresses itself and lives through the mechanisms of that body. The virus of ventriloquy is one that, unlike healthful philosophy, can never be sincere or true to itself, except by borrowing the voice of another. The prevalence of this practice of oral masking in the *Gorgias* illustrates not only that Socrates is infected by the disease of rhetoric, but, to riff off of Nietzsche, portrays him as a parasite that lives only by multiplying himself in his unwilling hosts.³⁸ In the *Gorgias*, at least, Socrates' *parrhesia* is an interrogation via ventriloquy.³⁹ His medical-philosophical practice of truth-telling is paradoxically expressed in the infectious rhetorical structure of the virus.

The *political* implications of the double-voicedness of the text⁴⁰, however, depend fundamentally on how we decide to read the presence of these multiple voices. It is traditional to approach philosophical texts as though they offer a prescription: for how to live the good life, how to think about problems of good and bad, how to outwit any opponent in a debate. And the *Gorgias* certainly provides answers to these sorts of queries, or can be read as doing so. If we simply take Socrates' words at face value, then the dialogue defines the good life as the moral life, and the moral life as one that pursues not social consensus but eternal philosophical truths.

If Plato writes us a prescription for truth in the *Gorgias*, however, that pill may turn out to be a placebo: a little white and black capsule that cures us of our penchant for rhetorical corruption only by itself employing deceit. In his magisterial study of Hippocrates, Jacques Jouanna points out that such deceptive practices were rare but not unheard of among Hippocratic writers. He recounts "a feat of prestidigitation, which bordered on charlatanism" from *Epidemics VI* in which the doctor tricks the patient with an earache into thinking he has removed some object from the ear.⁴¹ Reading Socrates' rhetoric as a placebo, or a deceit designed to cure, would run parallel to Malcolm Schofield's argument concerning Plato's "noble lie", which, as one commentator colorfully glosses it, holds that "the end of getting Athenian intellectuals to abandon the moral premises on which Athenian society was built was so vital... that it justified the means, even when the means were very far from an approach to truth at all."⁴²

³⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Problem of Socrates," in *Twilight of the Idols and the Antichrist* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

³⁹ David Goldblatt reads ventriloquism as central to art to underline the non-originality of all creation, taking Socrates as well as Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, and others as exemplary. See David Goldblatt, *Art and ventriloquism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006). In contrast, in his cultural history of the subject, Connor more suggestively argues that ventriloquy might be an act of fathering or mothering a self. Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: a cultural history of ventriloquism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ The phrase is from Mikhail Bakhtin. "Discourse in the Novel", in *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Vol. 1. University of Texas Press, 2010: e.g. 324-7.

⁴¹ Jacques Jouanna, *Hippocrates, Medicine & culture* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1999). 134.

⁴² Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbits*: 129; Malcolm Schofield, "The Noble Lie," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

That is, in the text-as-placebo, Socrates' therapy instills a desire for truth that *deceives*. Not only does Socrates himself dissimulate with his masks and maneuvers, as we have seen. Further, the will-to-truth itself disguises itself as technical procedure, as direct a process as cauterization or surgery. Though Socrates admits that he himself is ventriloquized by his “beloved, philosophy”, he positions himself as her faithful recorder: “For she always says what you now hear me say, my dear friend, and she’s by far less fickle than my other beloved [i.e. Alcibiades]” (λέγει γάρ, ὧ φίλε ἐταῖρε, ἃ νῦν ἐμοῦ ἀκούεις, καί μοί ἐστιν τῶν ἐτέρων παιδικῶν πολὺ ἥττον ἐμπληκτος, 482a4-6). But as Nietzsche reminds us in “Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense”, the philosophical drive to truth is fundamentally an impulse that forgets that the primordial human way of being-in-the-world—our language—is always already metaphorical and therefore “false.”⁴³ From the perspective, Socrates' philosophic placebo lies to us in the fundamental sense that it dissimulates our creative capacity as humans. Thus, understanding the text as placebo at least partially undoes the authoritarian truth-cure on offer in the *Gorgias*, by embracing the deception that always-already accompanies truth.⁴⁴

In a related but distinct way of reading the text, one might argue that Socrates' rhetorical or “deceptive” maneuvers in the *Gorgias* do not sugar-coat and disguise the truth, but paradoxically protect it. That is, Plato may have intended Socrates' marked use of oratorical techniques to *immunize* his listeners against Gorgias' rhetorical pathogen: this reading construes the contradiction between content and form in the dialogue as a device deployed to excite the listener's ability to distinguish truth from deception. Indeed, the sea of literature which purports to discover what Plato “really” meant would seem to have been effectively vaccinated in this way.⁴⁵ The Greek doctors, of course, did not have vaccines, but they *did* sometimes employ the principle of homeopathy, or the treatment by like agents.⁴⁶ In understanding the deceit in the text as vaccine or homeopathic remedy rather than placebo, the second accent is conceived positively, as providing immunity against the more virulent forms of oratory practiced by Gorgias and his followers.

A third possibility also exists: that the text itself is the disease, or at least a carrier of it. By this I do not mean that the text is plagued by the confusion of philosophy and rhetoric, but rather, that it *is* the plague: a virus that replicates and transmits itself, always evolving in response to new stimuli and counterattacks. If this is the case, we see the text's symptoms—including its opposition between philosophy and rhetoric and its language of philosophical health—not only in the subsequent Western philosophical tradition, but

⁴³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, “Truth and Lies in a non-moral sense,” in *Philosophy and truth : selections from Nietzsche's notebooks of the early 1870's* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979).

⁴⁴ In a contemporary but surprisingly consonant vein, Ed Cohen has argued that the sugar-pill in Western medicine today represents the capacity for humans to self-heal through the imagination rather than through scientific means: a space that bio-medicine tries simultaneously to deny, contain and appropriate. As such, in his view the placebo represents a populist political alternative, against the hegemony of bio-medicine over American health. Ed Cohen, “The placebo disavowed: or unveiling the bio-medical imagination,” *Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine* (2002).

⁴⁵ In his study of the *Phaedrus*, Ferrari asserts something similar about the function of the speech which Phaedrus presents as coming from Lysias. The scholars who debate the authenticity of the speech, he suggests, are provoked by Plato to consider his very point about the danger of ‘orphan’ writing. As if vaccinated by the ‘antigen’ text, the astute reader thereby better learns Plato's lesson. G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: a Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). 210-11.

⁴⁶ As opposed to the more common practice of treatment by opposites, *allopathy*. Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, 343.

disseminated in literature and discourse far beyond the borders of the Western world. This reading, of course, diverges in at least two further ways. Either the malady at stake here is the drive to truth, as in a Nietzschean formulation; or, conversely, the text infects its readers with the ailment of rhetoric. Perhaps both views are mutations of the same strand, the conceptual *ur-virus* that first made truth a problem. On this reading, the *Gorgias* seeks neither to infect nor to cure, but to instill in its readers a “higher pathology”: that drive to distinguish philosophy and rhetoric at the same time as admitting and locating their admixture. Doctors often produce disease as well as cure it, and not just as an occasional side effect.⁴⁷

These options are not mutually exclusive. Plato’s dialogue easily contains all these possible effects—placebo, vaccination, or infection—when we think of it as the site of the clinic.⁴⁸ In ancient Athens, the physician’s workplace was part office for consultation, part surgical hospital, part pharmacy, part outpatient clinic. Imagine then that the text is this kind of place: a site that puts subjects and objects into order, even while there is space for the idiosyncrasies of the visitors and their ailments.⁴⁹ In a deservedly famous chapter, Jacques Derrida similarly characterizes the *Phaedrus* as a pharmacy, because that is the text in which Plato describes writing as an ambiguous *pharmakon*, in juxtaposition to the medical *diaerêsis* carried out by philosophical rhetoric.⁵⁰ In contrast, the *Gorgias* is concerned with the corruption of rhetoric; here Socrates’ favorite treatments for injustice seem to be the cautery and surgery of philosophy, not diagnosis. However, both texts have the possibility of multiple, contradictory effects, and so are well-described by the physical site that contains those possibilities. Understanding the dialogue-as-clinic is a capacious reading that allows us to make better sense of its various effects.

The idea that the dialogue takes place in a clinic, with Socrates as doctor to multiple patients, plays out a scenario first suggested by Gorgias. Recall how at the beginning of the dialogue he argues that rhetoric is useful to a doctor who is unable to persuade his unwilling patient to accept treatment (456b). Socrates returns to this image in his own way when he pictures the rhetor and tyrant, sick with injustice, who are unwilling to face treatment and be healed of their corruption/achievement (479a). As in the course of the dialogue Socrates more fully inhabits the role of the doctor, it becomes increasingly evident that each of his interlocutors is his unwilling patient, on whom he employs a blend of philosophy (medicine) and rhetoric. In the end, Socrates does not succeed in curing any of

⁴⁷ The classic work on this counterintuitive dysfunction is still Ivan Illich, *Medical nemesis: the expropriation of health*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976). Here Illich classifies iatrogenic, or doctor-produced, disease in three types: *clinical*, which refers to direct side effects and hospital-bred “super-infections”; *social*, which occurs when medical policies reinforce the sickening effects of industrial society; and *cultural*, which is a result of norms and narratives that deplete individuals’ resources for autonomous self-care. Appropriately, Illich is acutely aware of the moral and political aspects of practices of medicine, so much so that he at times equates health with liberty or autonomy (7, 242). He himself was so invested in these views that he is said to have refused treatment for a prominent cancerous growth on his face, surviving far beyond the three months of the doctor’s prognosis.

⁴⁸ Foucault brilliantly explains the emergence of the clinic in the early 19th century France and the political role that doctors then assume. Michel Foucault, *The birth of the clinic: an archaeology of medical perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1975). esp. 33-35.

⁴⁹ On the clinic in ancient Greece see Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, 86.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

his patients perversely proves Plato's point: that rhetoric is neither an aid nor substitute to proper philosophical therapy.

If Socrates' medical rhetoric can be read intra-textually as a response to Gorgias' argument, Plato's choice to focus on images of health and disease may be read intertextually as a response to Gorgias' *Encomium to Helen*. In that epideictic display of his powers, Gorgias famously exonerates Helen by arguing that speech acts on the soul as *pharmaka* (drugs) act upon the body. "The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion" (14).⁵¹ In Gorgias' analogy, rhetoric and drugs are so powerful as to release people from moral responsibility for acts committed under their influence. In contrast, Plato holds people responsible for any injustice they commit from the corruption of rhetoric, even though Socrates famously argues that no one errs willingly, and surely only an extreme minority get sick purposefully. Yet ironically, Gorgias' speech suggests that there is more common ground between them than Plato's polemic would imply: Gorgias, too, blames the persuader as the corrupter of Helen (12). Read intertextually, Plato appears to refashion Gorgias' medical metaphors to diminish the sense of rhetoric's effectiveness and to hold accountable its hearers.

Who wins out? In today's context, the reader who is faced with Socrates the doctor, in the clinic of the *Gorgias*, can have a range of responses. And yet the range is still clearly circumscribed. Whichever way we interpret the double accent—whether we are doctored or infected by the text—we read ourselves into the role of object, not agent. Like Socrates' companions, we remain patients, *passive*. I suggest that our readerly submission to the operation of the metaphor is not only figurative, but also effectively political. That is, despite our power of interpretation, Plato's semiotic system limits us to the subordinate and passive role of the non-knower. In this position, we share the fate of the Athenian multitude in the *Gorgias*. For as we have seen, the physician-philosopher metaphor expands from its dominion of the soul to dominate the city. The corrupted soul morphs into the sick social body, thus justifying an authoritarian philosopher-doctor-ruler who knows best.⁵² With the age-old lure of power, the dialogue tempts its readers to assume the role of the philosopher/doctor. The only other option on offer is passive infection or treatment. Despite the gap I have tried to prop open with the lever of interpretive agency, as readers we remain in the position of the ignorant body.

IV. Conclusion: The Power of Rhetoric between Corruption and Cure

⁵¹ Gorgias, "Encomium to Helen", in Diels, Hermann, and Rosamond Kent Sprague. *The Older Sophists: A Complete Translation by Several Hands of the Fragments in Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*, Edited by Diels-Kranz. With a New Edition of Antiphon and of Euthydemus. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

⁵² Roger Brock similarly claims that Plato's medical analogy has authoritarian results; his solution is to turn back the historical clock to a supposedly earlier, less authoritarian practice of self-care. "Sickness in the Body Politic: Medical Imagery in the Greek Polis," in *Death and disease in the ancient city*, ed. Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

Socrates' arguments aim to show that rhetoric is immaterial to true justice and legislation. So too, his performative use of rhetoric is designed to demonstrate that rhetoric can never persuade someone not to use it. "The master's tools can never dismantle the master's house", as black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde put it, in a very different context.⁵³ To that end, one needs different means. At the close of the *Gorgias*, with his hearers angry but unmoved, Socrates turns to a story, a *muthos*, which he believes and presents as an account (*logos*) (523a). He tells Callicles that after death, the souls of good men go to the Isles of the Blessed and the evil going to Tartarus. In his familiar tale of judgment, one detail stands out: the fate of souls depends on their health, now determined independently from the body.

Socrates describes a politically reformed judgment of the health of souls. Zeus, realizing that his judges were making mistakes, ruled that souls had to appear before the judges naked and unadorned, stripped of whatever material goods they might have attained in life. Freed of the deceptive appearances of the body, true justice can take place. Now, if the judge Rhadamanthus sees the soul of a king, not knowing whose it is, he will "notice that there's nothing healthy in his soul" (κατεῖδεν οὐδὲν ὑγιᾶς ὄν τῆς ψυχῆς, 524e), but that it is scourged and scarred and deformed as a result of injustice and pretense. Seeing such wickedness, Rhadamanthus then decides whether he is either "curable or incurable" (ἐάντε ἰάσιμος ἐάντε ἀνίατος, 526b). The curable are subjected to terrible punishments from which they ultimately benefit (525b), while the even worse fate of the incurable is a warning for all future arrivals (525d). The kings and tyrants that Polus had admired for their worldly power and achievements are foremost in this category of the incurables (525d-526b).

This picture of the afterlife substantiates the reversal of values for which Socrates has been arguing. If we could only see the soul on its own, apart from the body, the story suggests, we too would not fail to guard and value the health of the soul above all other treasures. Convinced by these accounts, Socrates spends his time "think[ing] about how I'll reveal to the judge a soul that's as healthy as it can be" (σκοπῶ ὅπως ἀποφανοῦμαι τῷ κριτῇ ὡς ὑγιεστάτην τὴν ψυχὴν, 526d). That is, he focuses how to live in healthful virtue; and calls on the others to do the same. For in the court of the dead that he imagines, the rhetors will be as helpless as he proves himself to be in the court of the Athenians (526e-527a). Only after practicing a life of justice and deliberation will they be ready to turn to politics without endangering their souls.

The result of the tale is an indefinite deferral of politics. Socrates says: "So then, after we've practiced virtue (*aretê*) together, only then, if we think we should, we'll turn to politics, or then we'll deliberate about whatever subject we please, when we're better at deliberating than we are now" (κάπειτα οὕτω κοινῇ ἀσκήσαντες, τότε ἤδη, ἐὰν δοκῇ χρῆναι, ἐπιθησόμεθα τοῖς πολιτικοῖς, ἢ ὁποῖον ἂν τι ἡμῖν δοκῇ, τότε βουλευσόμεθα, βελτίους ὄντες βουλευέσθαι ἢ νῦν, 527d3-7). Politics comes after virtue, if it comes at all: for having become virtuous and good at deliberating, he implies, we might well choose to avoid the corrupting practice of politics. In his vision, democracy is necessarily corrupting, because it depends on persuasion (and flattery) of others. The antidote is the philosopher, who with his authoritative truth will cure us one by one. Modern readers who live in

⁵³ Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and speeches*. Random House LLC, 2007. 110-114.

democracies may find *Gorgias* morally appealing, in its celebration of justice and personal responsibility, but politically repellent, with its return to authoritarianism. Make no mistake: the delay of politics, like the congressional filibuster, is always a politically conservative tactic, and one that extends present oppressions.

How do we escape or transform the legacy that Plato has left us with?⁵⁴ Diseased by injustice, ignorance, and our very bodies, sensing our own inadequacies, we are easy prey for the various doctors who come along claiming to have the cure. Over a century ago, the socialist Aleksandr Ivanovitch Herzen inverted the terms Plato uses to justify his authoritarianism. Herzen exhorted a group of anarchists about to overthrow the tsar: “We are not the doctors—we are the disease!”⁵⁵ Today, Herzen’s pithy remark is often glossed by leftists as a protest against reformism in favor of total revolution; for a certain species of environmentalist, it is a cue to interpret natural disasters as the earth’s immune system responding to humanity’s cancerous spread. Sometimes, the declaration is simply misunderstood by critics who take it to mean that the U.S. and other bellicose Western governments have become part of the problem rather than the solution. All of these readings reiterate the traditional values that Herzen challenged—namely, that doctors are good, disease is destructive—and so they anesthetize the political substance of his move. For his part, Plato would have seen the tsar as diseased, but also the anarchists and Herzen himself, with his rhetoric.

To me, Herzen’s exhortation shifts the terrain of politics and the possibility of agency in a more fundamental way. With just a slight move, he transforms the passive position (“we are diseased”) to the active one (“we are the disease”). Today, it is especially possible to imagine reclaiming the subject position of disease. A wealth of research points to the benefits of bacteria in the microcosm of the body⁵⁶, to the positive role viruses in evolution and their promise in new gene therapies. Likewise, in the humanities, new theories emphasize the agency of microbes in their interactions with their human “discoverers” and hosts.⁵⁷ In this landscape, we can accept the diseased condition that Plato diagnoses, and identify with it to actively inhabit the position of disease. This interpretive turn allows us to swing away from the overdetermining hierarchy between doctor-patient, and towards the fresh possibilities (agonistic as well as symbiotic) of the virus. This shift would mean accepting that, as ignorant, we are less in need of expert truth than of opinion and debate. But the position of disease is radically ambivalent one. As Michel Serres reminds us, we can never know whether the parasite’s interruption of the system will be small or large, good or bad.⁵⁸

Escaping Plato is no real option. To transform the authoritarian prescription he has left us involves keeping some elements of his imagery, discarding others, and extending or

⁵⁴ Hans Sluga offers a methodological way for political thinkers to transform Plato’s normative legacy by adopting a medically-inspired “diagnostic” methodology. Thus, he draws on Plato’s conflation of philosophy, medicine, and politics, but turns it towards the common good. *Politics and the Search for the Common Good* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 34-40.

⁵⁵ The anecdote is related in John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism: and the Reinvention of the World* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2005). 104.

⁵⁶ Michael Pollan, “Some of my best friends are germs,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 19 2013.

⁵⁷ The paradigmatic work here is Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

transforming still others. This is what Plato did with Gorgias' *Encomium*, and also what I have attempted here. I retain the idea that as long as we live in bodies, our knowledge is fundamentally limited: that we are "sick" with ignorance. But I reject the conclusion that this illness requires medical oversight. Instead, I extend the metaphor and multiply the ways of reading Plato's medical intervention: vaccine, homeopathy, infection, placebo, and clinic. Finally, I hold out hope that coming to awareness of our ignorance can transform us from passively infected patients to actively cultivators of our microbiomes. In this, I think, I am most loyal to Plato's legacy. He too seeks to infect us with disease, rather than cure it outright. Only the terms in which this is accomplished have changed.

Bridge: From *Gorgias* to *Phaedo*

In its allusions to the trial and conviction of Socrates, the *Gorgias* acts as a prelude to the *Phaedo*, with its depiction of Socrates' day of execution. The latter dialogue also closes with an eschatological myth, which reprises in a more detailed and structured form the fate of curable and incurable souls described in *Gorgias*. Both dialogues, like *Apology*, present Socrates in a therapeutic role. But whereas Socrates fails to cure his interlocutors of rhetoric with rhetoric in *Gorgias*, he succeeds in healing his friends of misology, or the despair of truth, in the *Phaedo*. The difference between Socrates' therapeutic failure in *Gorgias* and his success in *Phaedo* lies partly in the malady, partly in the method, and partly in the myth.

Taking the first point first. In *Gorgias*, the corruption caused by rhetoric remains a general analogy and an image: it is like to the fattening and decay of the body (518c3-e1); it appears as scarring on the soul after death (525a); collectively, it causes the soul of the city to swell and fester (518e4). The connection between rhetoric and injustice perhaps gestures towards the disease as one of *pleonexia*, or greediness, taking more than one's own share (see *Timaeus* 82a1-b7, p. 69, below). In contrast, in *Phaedo*, Socrates diagnoses the specific ailment of "misology" (literally, the hatred of reason), or the despair of truth. Significantly, he points to the Sophists as the particular agents of the disease. The disease is caused by repeated experience of arguments that seem to shift between true and false, and results in giving up on the possibility of finding a true argument. The most important parallel between the ailments in the two dialogues is that both involve an emphatic lack of *technê*. As a result of the lack of art, rhetorical corruption and misology both end up in a world of slippery, unstable speech. Both are diseases caused by the inability to make stable distinctions (*Gorgias* 491b8, 465d; *Phaedo* 89d1-e2, p. 34-36 below).

However, there is an important difference between the unspecified corruption of rhetoric in *Gorgias* and the misology of *Phaedo*. While both are diseases of the soul, the former is a political problem, while the latter is an ethical and epistemological concern. In this way, too, the *Gorgias* seems to gesture towards the work involved in the later dialogue. Socrates closes his speech in *Gorgias* with a deferral of politics, calling on his listeners to practice virtue (*aretê*) first and foremost: "And then, after we've practiced it [virtue, *arête*] together, then at last, if we think we should, we'll turn to politics, or then we'll deliberate about whatever subject we please, when we're better at deliberating than we are now" (κάπειτα οὕτω κοινῇ ἀσκήσαντες, τότε ἤδη, ἐὰν δοκῇ χρῆναι, ἐπιθησόμεθα τοῖς πολιτικοῖς, ἢ ὁποῖον ἂν τιμῶν δοκῇ, τότε βουλευσόμεθα, βελτίους ὄντες βουλευέσθαι ἢ νῦν, 527d3-6). The *Phaedo* represents the last collective practice of virtue and deliberation, for Athenian politics gets to Socrates before Socrates gets to politics.

But Socrates does manage to heal his friends before he goes, according to his last words in *Phaedo*. Among his friends in his cell, Socrates returns to his favored dialectical style, purifying his friends' souls by the process of question and answer as well as the

testing of one theory of opposites against the other. In contrast, in *Gorgias* Socrates “fattens” the souls of his listeners, by gratifying them with the speeches they are so fond of. Speeches only make men worse, Plato says in *Timaeus* (p. 73-4, below). In *Gorgias*, Socrates argues this and Plato demonstrates it by the increasing aggression of his interlocutors in response to Socrates’ long harangues: they *are* the disease.

However, it is not dialectic alone but Socrates’ closing myth that finally heals his friends of misology, I argue below. The eschatological myths of the *Phaedo* and *Gorgias* overlap in their content, and are both attributed to outside, probably Pythagorean sources. But whereas the myth in *Gorgias* seems likely to be dismissed as an old wives tale (527a4-5), that of *Phaedo* receives a friendlier reception. In the *Gorgias*, the myth focuses on the post-mortem judgment of souls, which is a recurrent theme of the dialogue. In *Phaedo*, the myth gives a different picture of how curable and incurable souls are sorted, and explains how they are then treated. In this case, the mechanism of discrimination of souls is the geographical system of underworld rivers: two opposing pairs of rivers that reflect and organize the dialogue’s abstract arguments about opposition. Despite the multiple striking similarities between them, then, the narrative of *Phaedo* differs in having a philosophical function as well as a rhetorical one. That myth offers the *technê* for sorting opposites that is needed to prevent the lapse into misology.

Chapter 2: The Illness of Contradiction in *Phaedo*

Abstract: This chapter adopts a literary and philosophical approach to interpreting Socrates' last words in Plato's *Phaedo*. As the hemlock takes effect, Socrates tells Crito not to forget to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius, god of healing, suggesting that some sickness has been cured. I give evidence that Socrates is referring to 'misology', the condition of despair of truth experienced by all the characters in the dialogue and 'healed' by Socrates. Scholars have not noticed the connection between misology, which is caused by the repeated reversal of opposites, and the philosophical substance of the dialogue, which contrasts two opposite ways of conceiving of the relation of opposites. I show how the theories of opposition in the 'antapodosis' argument and the theory of forms form a 'meta-opposition', so that the performative structure of the dialogue also exposes the reader to misology. The play of opposites is only resolved, or healed, in the final eschatological myth. In the end, I argue, Socrates' last words point us to a literary solution to the philosophical problem of opposites.

'Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Pay the debt and do not neglect it.'
ὦ Κρίτων, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρυόνα: ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε.
Socrates, *Phaedo*, 118a7-8

I. The Problem of the *Phaedo*

Famous last words. Socrates' dying exhortation to Crito to remember their debt to Asclepius, god of healing, indicates that some disease has been cured; but there is little agreement over what. In this chapter, I argue that the healed illness is the despair of truth, or 'misology' (literally, the hatred of *logos* or reason). Socrates diagnoses this condition at the crisis of the dialogue, explaining that it is caused by the repeated reversal of opposites: an argument first seeming true and then false, again and again. *Phaedo* reports that Socrates "heal[s]" (ἴασατο, 89a6) the company of this condition, and recounts Socrates' own experience of contradictory truths in his youth. Like Michel Foucault and J. Crooks, I believe that the shared experience of misology makes the best sense of the collective debt to Asclepius.¹ In contrast to them, I connect the invented illness with the philosophical content of the dialogue: the problem of opposites.

¹ J. Crooks, 'Socrates' last words: another look at an ancient riddle.' *CQ* 48.1 (1998), 117-25. M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (the Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège De France, 1983-1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros. (New York, 2011), 107.

Plato first poses the question of how opposites relate in Socrates' opening Aesopian fable. Symmetrically, his best effort at an answer appears in the concluding myth of the world: another example of *Phaedo's* celebrated ring composition.² But opposites also make up the substance and form of the discussion, so that we, the readers, are also implicated in the disease of opposites. Socrates discursively presents misology—Plato performatively exposes us to it. He does so by drawing the greatest contradiction possible: the super or 'meta-opposition' of how opposites are related or opposed. In the 'antapodosis' or cyclical argument of the first half of the dialogue, Socrates argues that opposites are *complementary, temporally sequenced, and co-generative*. In contrast, in the argument from forms, the assumption is that opposites are *absolute, spatially divided, and mutually destructive*. Though not a logical contradiction, neither are these merely two different or varying theories. Both are attempts at a universal theory of cause that can explain the immortality of the soul, yet the first proposition (that all things come to be from opposites) is diametrically opposed to the second (that nothing comes to be from opposites). But this meta-opposition does not doom us to misology; in fact, if we read it rightly, it can inoculate us against the *repeated* instability of truth that induces misology.

The great advantage of my approach is to integrate the literary form and the philosophical content of the dialogue. In doing so, I hope to repay my own debt to the written conversation between Friedrich Nietzsche, George Dumézil, Michel Foucault, Alexander Nehamas, Glenn W. Most, and Jamie Crooks. The 'interest' on the debt lies in showing the disease of misology to consist in abandoning truth to the flow of contradiction, like the Sophists do—not overgeneralization (Crooks) or false opinion (Foucault). Consequently, my understanding of the necessary treatment differs as well: we are healed first of all by taking the unsoundness of contradiction into ourselves—not by hygienic reasoning or truthful speech, as Crooks and Foucault think.³ Only by first differentiating and internalizing opposites, such as that of body and soul, can we develop an art (*tekhnê*) for externalizing and organizing it. Contra Nietzsche and Nehamas, therefore, I do not find that Plato means embodied life is a disease *tout court*.⁴ Rather, humans suffer in life from being caught up in the workings of oppositions without being able to classify or comprehend them. And Plato suffers no less than any of us: 'Plato, I believe, was sick,' *Phaedo* famously reports at the outset of the dialogue (Πλάτων δὲ οἴμαι ἡσθένει, 59b). Glenn W. Most, to whom Jamie Crooks addresses his argument, flags this self-reference as a likelier and more literal candidate for Socrates' last words than the life-is-a-disease argument.⁵ My interpretation reconciles the literal and "allegorical" camps that Most would divide, reading Plato's illness as an instance of the general human condition of sickness (ἀσθένεια, *astheneia*) described in the myth, of which misology is only the most acute form.

Here is a short guide to what lies ahead. I begin my analysis in the middle of the dialogue with the crisis of misology, advancing grammatical, contextual and historical reasons to argue that misology is the best candidate for the referent of Socrates' last words

² On *Phaedo's* ring composition, see G.W. Most, "A cock for Asclepius." *CQ* 43.1 (1993): n8, n13, n69.

³ Crooks (n. 2), 122. Foucault (n. 2), 107-9.

⁴ F. Nietzsche, 'The Problem of Socrates', in *The Twilight of the Idols* (Mineola, NY: 2004), 9-17. Ibid., *The Gay Science* (Cambridge, 2001), §340. A. Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley, 1998), chapter 6, esp. 161-2.

⁵ Most (n.3) suggests that the words reflect Socrates' foreknowledge of Plato's recovery, and thus the writer's intent to designate himself as Socrates' heir; I think Plato is more modest. See discussion below, p. 23.

(II). Because misology is caused by exposure to opposing arguments, I turn to the meta-opposition presented in the dialogue: the ‘antapodosis’ argument and the theory of forms support a single conclusion, but pose opposing premises about opposites (III). In the concluding myth, I show that Plato gives us an image for the meta-opposition in the healing river system of the underworld. I suggest that this means that narrative structure in addition to argument is a necessary purification of misology (IV). I close by briefly recapping the insights and stakes of my argument. Via the language of health and sickness, Plato dramatically synthesizes his metaphysical questions (how do opposites work?), epistemological concerns (what arguments can we trust?), and existential commitments (why should humans care for their souls?) (V).

II. Diagnosing Misology

A) The Crisis

The *Phaedo* recounts the conversation of Socrates and fourteen friends in his prison cell on the last day of his life, as they ‘examine and tell stories’ about the afterlife (διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν, 61e). The crisis, in the medical sense of a turning point, comes exactly halfway through the dialogue, after the Pythagoreans Simmias and Cebes have cast doubt on Socrates’ first arguments for the immortality of the soul. Plato marks the gravity of the situation by breaking the narrative flow, returning us to the dialogue frame. Phaedo, our eponymous narrator, gives his listener Echebrates a detailed, first-hand report of the painful experience that Socrates will shortly diagnose, and heal, as misology.

Now having heard what they [Simmias and Cebes] had said, all of us felt ill at ease, as we told one another later, because, after we had been so powerfully persuaded by the previous argument, they now seemed to shake us up again and to throw us into distrust: not only concerning the preceding arguments, but even what would be said later on, lest we be worthless judges, or even that these matters themselves might be beyond trust!

πάντες οὖν ἀκούσαντες εἰπόντων αὐτῶν ἀηδῶς διετέθημεν, ὡς ὕστερον ἐλέγομεν πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἔμπροσθεν λόγου σφόδρα πεπεισμένους ἡμᾶς πάλιν ἐδόκουν ἀναταράξαι καὶ εἰς ἀπιστίαν καταβαλεῖν οὐ μόνον τοῖς προειρημένοις λόγοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τὰ ὕστερον μέλλοντα ῥηθήσεσθαι, μὴ οὐδενὸς ἄξιοι εἶμεν κριταὶ ἢ καὶ τὰ πράγματα αὐτὰ ἄπιστα ἦ (88c1-7).

Phaedo describes a loss of faith in reason and one’s capacity for it, caused by the transformation of an apparently true and trustworthy argument into its opposite. The symptom is discomfort or even nausea.⁶ The resulting distrust is collectively experienced, and even sympathetic Echebrates, listening to the story well after the fact, echoes their reaction (88d1-2). Even at the third degree, Plato’s sensitive reader may feel similarly destabilized—especially because the immediacy of Phaedo’s ‘direct’ narrative has been

⁶ ἀηδῶς, LSJ (Oxford, 1996).

revealed as an illusion. In this pivotal moment, Phaedo reassures Echecrates that in the end, Socrates successfully ‘healed’ (ἰάσατο) his friends (89a6). The only occurrence of this verb or its cousins in the dialogue, Phaedo’s proleptic assurance is formidable evidence that this healed despair incurs the debt to Asclepius. Moreover, the shared nature of the experience makes sense of the plural verbs Socrates uses at the end, which are three: ὀφείλομεν, “we owe”, and the plural imperatives ἀπόδοτε, “you (all) must pay,” and μὴ ἀμελήσητε, “you (all) must not neglect” (118a7-8). If Socrates were thanking Asclepius for curing him of life, then only he would owe the debt, and Crito alone could satisfactorily dispatch it.⁷

Before Socrates can heal his friends, he first diagnoses the problem and its unhealthy effects. While comforting Phaedo, like a sick child, by stroking his hair, he warns everyone about ‘some condition’ (τι πάθος, 89c11-12), namely, the danger of misology. He introduces the danger by comparison with misanthropy, while insisting that the less familiar danger is the greater, indeed greatest, of evils (89d1-3). Perhaps misology is worse than misanthropy to the extent that *logos* is the divine essence of the *anthropos*. In any event, the two conditions arise from the same source: the repeated experience of the instability of opposites, without an art or *tekhnê* to comprehend them.

Misology and misanthropy arise in the same manner. For misanthropy creeps in from trusting someone excessively without a system (*tekhnê*), and believing the man to be wholly truthful and healthy (*hugiê*) and trustworthy, and then a little later, finding out this guy is good for nothing and unreliable. Then the same thing happens with someone else. And when someone repeatedly suffers this, and especially with people whom one thought one’s closest and dearest friends, then by these frequent stumbles, the person ends by hating everybody and believing there is nothing sound (*ouden hugies*) in anyone at all.

γίγνεται δὲ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τρόπου μισολογία τε καὶ μισανθρωπία. ἢ τε γὰρ μισανθρωπία ἐνδύεται ἐκ τοῦ σφόδρα τινὶ πιστεῦσαι ἄνευ τέχνης, καὶ ἠγήσασθαι παντάπασί γε ἀληθῆ εἶναι καὶ ὑγιῆ καὶ πιστὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἔπειτα ὀλίγον ὕστερον εὐρεῖν τοῦτον πονηρὸν τε καὶ ἄπιστον, καὶ αὖθις ἕτερον: καὶ ὅταν τοῦτο πολλάκις πάθῃ τις καὶ ὑπὸ τούτων μάλιστα οὐς ἂν ἠγήσαιτο οἰκειοτάτους τε καὶ ἑταιροτάτους, τελευτῶν δὴ θαμὰ προσκρούων μισεῖ τε πάντας καὶ ἠγεῖται οὐδενὸς οὐδὲν ὑγιᾶ εἶναι τὸ παράπαν (89d1-e2).

Beginning with the more familiar phenomenon of misanthropy, Socrates paints its cause as the sequence of two contradictory perceptions, a repeatedly disappointed optimism about the safety or reliability of a friend. Similarly, misology arises when someone trusts an

⁷ To the best of my knowledge, Georges Dumézil was the first make this point. Dumézil eventually concludes that the vocative address to Crito means that the plurals are restricted to Socrates and Crito—while this might hold for ὀφείλομεν, this does not account for the plural imperatives, which must address all the company. “On the Last Words of Socrates”, in *The Riddle of Nostradamus: A Critical Dialogue*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999): 102-7. Perhaps the grammar cannot be pushed too far, but I am persuaded by Most (n.3), who compares the use of other verbs directly preceding the final scene to argue that Socrates is referring to some collective obligation of all the friends. 105-6.

argument to be true, then finds it to be false (whether or not this really is the case), repeatedly (90b4-9).

There are three elements of the analogy. The first point of likeness is cause or aetiology: the repeated experience of the reversal or shifting of opposites (from trustworthy to untrustworthy, from true to false). The second point of analogy is the result or symptom: ending up at the negative pole of the contradiction, where no good, truth, or health appears to exist. Socrates himself guards against the confusion of opposites by aligning truth, trust, and health on the one hand, and contradiction, distrust, and the two conditions (*pathê*) on the other.

The third point of analogy between the two misfortunes is the sufferer's lack of skill (ἄνευ τέχνης, 89d5-6, 89e6, 90b7). To blame *tekhnê* is to depart from the traditional scapegoats of plague: chance, fate, or the gods.⁸ If misology and misanthropy are really caused by lack of skill, we have reason for optimism about human agency; we remember that Socrates always represents the care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*) as an artful form of expertise.

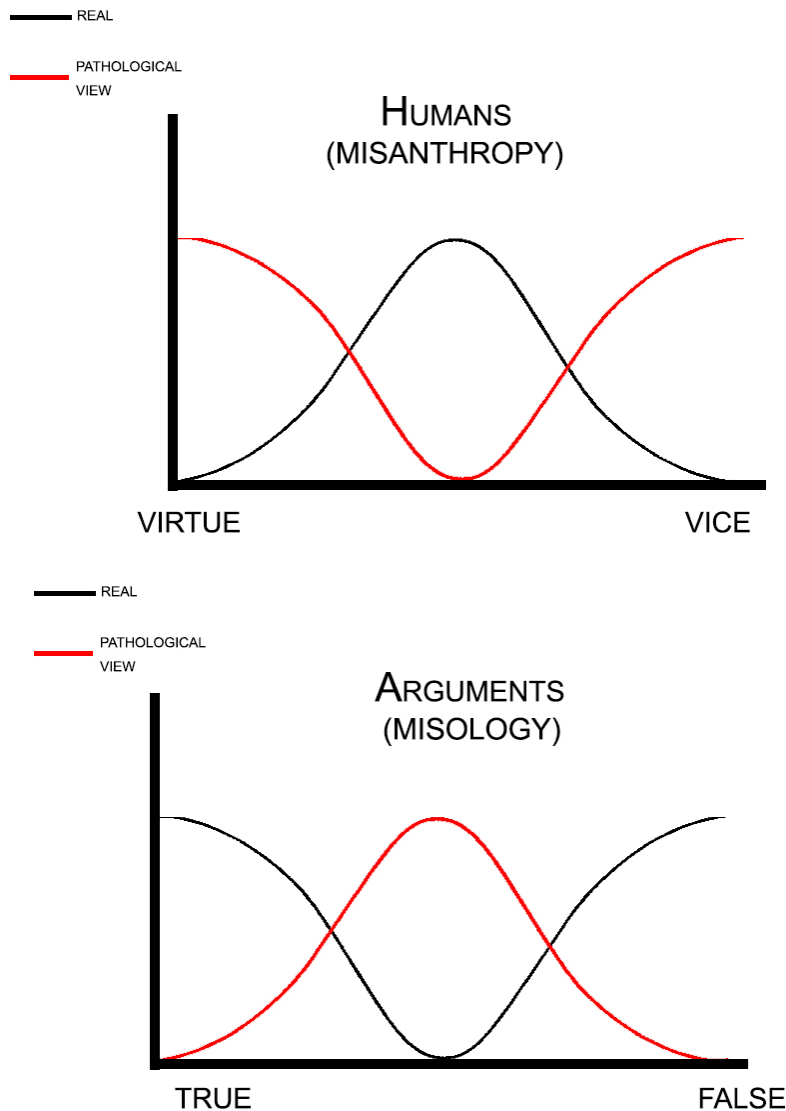
At the same time, the possibility of a technical prevention of misology and misanthropy also highlights a critical *dis*-analogy, involving the error of each. The mistake that leads to misanthropy is failing to perceive that humans are distributed between the extremes of virtue and vice by the law of averages. Socrates says, 'For if someone dealt artfully with human beings, he would believe the case to be as it really is: that the good and the bad are each very few, while those between them are many' (εἰ γὰρ που μετὰ τέχνης ἐχρῆτο, ὥσπερ ἔχει οὕτως ἂν ἠγήσατο, τοὺς μὲν χρηστοὺς καὶ πονηροὺς σφόδρα ὀλίγους εἶναι ἑκατέρους, τοὺς δὲ μεταξὺ πλείστους (89e8-90a2). The point is important enough that Socrates reiterates it (90a8-9), and then elaborates it further with the image of a competition for wickedness with only a few prizes (90b1-2). Then he alludes to the contrast: 'But is not in that respect that arguments are like men; I was only following your lead just now...' (ἀλλὰ ταύτη μὲν οὐχ ὅμοιοι οἱ λόγοι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἀλλὰ σοῦ συνδῆ προάγοντος ἐγὼ ἐφεσπόμεν...) (90b4-5). Socrates does not stop to spell out the difference explicitly, but goes on directly to draw the analogy of cause and result discussed above.

In the gap Socrates leaves, Hackforth supposes that not being alike 'in that respect' (*tautêi*) means that there are only a few terrible men but very many more terrible arguments.⁹ This is quite plausible, but the serious question remains: are there very many bad arguments but very few good ones, so that the graph line drops low and asymptotically toward the truth? Or is it the case, as I believe, that the pointed difference is meant to suggest that the majority of arguments are either true or false, with a gaping hole in between? In this latter case, the graph would resemble a pictograph of the 'law of the excluded middle', the sibling of the Law of Non-Contradiction, which denies the middle ground (figure 1). If this interpretation is right, the representation of misology is the exact converse of misanthropy, so that the line of pathological thinking traces a hill instead of a hollow at the midpoint.

⁸ In *Iliad* the plague is sent by Apollo; in *Oedipus* by fate. Plato's innovation depends on seeing medicine as an art, which was not a foregone conclusion. See G.E.R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination* (Oxford, 2003), 149; M. Frede, "Philosophy and medicine in antiquity," in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, 1987), 225-6.

⁹ R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1955), 107n2.

The evidence does not permit a definitive answer. My point, however, is that the basis for the analogy between misology and misanthropy, and quite possibly their dis-analogy too, is the problematic relationship of opposites. That is, the two maladies are alike in that they are caused by the instability of opposites, but differ in the error they make in response to this experience. In the case of misanthropy, one fails to see that humans fall somewhere between the opposite poles. In the case of misology, one fails to see that arguments are either one or the other. Whether or not this hypothesis holds up, it is plainly not adequate to say that misology is a matter of overgeneralization, as J. Crooks believes.¹⁰ Rather, the misological overgeneralization that “all arguments are false” is the specific result of repeated encounters with ideas that seem to switch between veracity and deception.



¹⁰ 'Misology, like misanthropy, is a function of hasty generalization... The hasty generalization common to misanthropy and misology blurs the line between health and degeneracy so profoundly that one no longer distinguishes between them.' Crooks (n. 2), 122.

Readers familiar with Plato's *Gorgias* will not be surprised that one group is especially at-risk for misology because of their exposure to opposite arguments.¹¹ And really, those in particular who spend their time on contradictory arguments end up believing that they have become the wisest, and they alone have understood that there is no soundness (*hugies*) or reliability in any event or in any argument, but that all that exists fluctuates up and down unsystematically (*atexnōs*), as if it were in the Euripus, remaining still neither in time nor place.

καὶ μάλιστα δὴ οἱ περὶ τοὺς ἀντιλογικοὺς λόγους διατρίψαντες οἴσθ' ὅτι τελευτῶντες οἴονται σοφώτατοι γεγονέναι καὶ κατανενοηκέναι μόνοι ὅτι οὔτε τῶν πραγμάτων οὐδενὸς οὐδὲν ὑγιᾶς οὐδὲ βέβαιον οὔτε τῶν λόγων, ἀλλὰ πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ ἐν Εὐρίπῳ ἄνω κάτω στρέφεται καὶ χρόνον οὐδένα ἐν οὐδενὶ μένει (90b5-c6).

Scholars agree that this passage is a dig at one or more of Plato's contemporaries, especially Protagoras, the prominent sophist and author of two lost works on contradiction (*Antilogoi*), and the anonymous author of the *Dissoi Logoi*, a text which argues several issues (the good and the bad, the just and the unjust) from two contradictory angles.¹²

Whoever occupies the bull's-eye, the target teaches that overexposure to opposing arguments dissolves soundness or health (*hugies*). The image of the Euripus would have been a striking one for Plato's contemporaries: that narrow strait running between mainland Greece and the island of Euboea was famous among Greek mariners for its strong and frequently shifting currents (figure 2).¹³ Whereas the average misologist merely believes all *logoi* are untrustworthy, the antilogicians believe the experience of opposing arguments to reflect reality.



Figure 1. Euripus Strait

At this advanced stage of misology, the emphasis on its unhealthiness intensifies. The antilogicians incur the third use in this short passage of the word *hugies*, which is the root of the English 'hygiene' and is regularly used in a wide variety of ancient Greek contexts to mean healthy, sound, safe, whole (just as today we speak easily of the health of bodies, markets or ecosystems). The Hippocratic typically understood health as a stable balance of opposites. Consistently and conversely, here a 'lack of health' occurs whenever opposites oscillate unstably, as in the Euripus. The essential unhealthiness of misology is this: if one accepts what-is as contradictory (90c4-6), one ends up in a state actually contradictory to what-is. This is a most 'pitiable condition' (*oiktron to pathos*, 90c8-d2).

Socrates drives home the unhealthiness of misology at the same time as he proposes his solution. Following directly after his dig at the Sophists, he urges Phaedo and the others to locate the unsoundness inside themselves:

¹¹ C.T. Ricciardone, "We Are the Disease": Truth, Health, and Politics From Plato's *Gorgias* to Foucault, *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18.2 (2014): 287-310

¹² C.J. Rowe, *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1993), 213-4. Hackforth (n. 9) also rightly refers the reader to the anonymous *Dissoi Logoi*. 108, 110-11.

¹³ Rowe (n. 12) 214, c5.

Then first,' he said, 'let us guard against this, and not allow into our souls the risk that there is no soundness (*hugies*) in discourse—but much rather let us accept that *we* are not yet sound (*hugiōs*), but must strive with the greatest courage and spirit to become sound (*hugiōs*) -- you and the others for the sake of your whole life to come, and I, for the sake of death itself.

πρῶτον μὲν τοίνυν, ἔφη, τοῦτο εὐλαβηθῶμεν, καὶ μὴ παρίωμεν εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν ὡς τῶν λόγων κινδυνεύει οὐδὲν ὑγιᾶς εἶναι, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον ὅτι ἡμεῖς οὐπω ὑγιᾶς ἔχομεν, ἀλλὰ ἀνδριστέον καὶ προθυμητέον ὑγιᾶς ἔχειν, σοὶ μὲν οὖν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ τοῦ ἔπειτα βίου παντὸς ἔνεκα, ἐμοὶ δὲ αὐτοῦ ἔνεκα τοῦ θανάτου (90d9-91a1).

With the condensed, triple repetition of unsoundness (our fourth, fifth, and sixth occurrences of the word *hugies*), the reader feels her anxiety about health pushed to the edge. After the dual threat of the global unsoundness of men (misanthropy, 89e3) or the global unsoundness of arguments and things (misology, 90c3-4), Socrates' option of being unsound ourselves begins to seem quite attractive. When the instability of men and meaning reaches its crisis, the first step is to recognize one's own lack of health, accepting the task of 'striving manfully' to achieve it.

By urging us to 'own' our uncertainty, Socrates initiates a reversal of responsibility, from the external world to the internal subject. Just as Hippocratic medical theory often recommends the application of opposites to correct the body's balance, Socrates shifts the unsoundness from the world of words (misology) to the world of the self. In doing so, Socrates is not merely recommending us to recognize our own limits rather than blame another-- wise though this counsel be. He also binds together the existence of the discussants with the conclusion of the discussion. Notice how Plato expresses the costs and benefits of this exchange in dramatically layered contrasts: at stake is the remaining lifespans of the visitors, as well as 'death itself,' for Socrates. Locating the unsoundness in themselves rather than in *logos* saves the friends from misology, and at the same time recovers their strength to pursue the argument for the immortality of the soul. Earlier, Socrates had suggested that his friends would mourn the argument, not himself, if they did not vanquish the objections of Simmias and Cebes (89b-c). Now, striving to save the argument has become the same task as striving to save their souls.¹⁴

By Phaedo's proleptic remark and by the final debt to Asclepius, we know that the company's 'manful striving' is ultimately successful. But if misology is the disease, how exactly do we strive to become healthy?

B) Misology in the Autobiography

Socrates' autobiographical account of his inquiries into nature in *Phaedo* has puzzled scholars because it appears to contradict his self-defense in *Apology* (19c-d); but it makes excellent sense as a model of a heroic thinker striving against the dangers of misology. He relates how, after seeking the ultimate cause of things in the contradictory

¹⁴ Thus my argument incorporates that of G. Nagy, who has argued that Socrates' last words refer to the resuscitation of the argument. "Socrates' Last Words in the Place where he Died" (March 2014) <http://h24h.chs.harvard.edu/the-last-words-of-socrates-at-the-place-where-he-died/>

world of becoming, he turned to the opposite model of explanation, in the world of forms. Though this striving for distinctions alone will not result in a cure—only internalizing the contradiction will do that, as the myth will show—Socrates’ resolute efforts are a necessary counterbalance to uncertainty. Whereas the crisis scene shows us the ill-effects of misology, Socrates’ life story shows us a man striving bravely against its dangers.

Socrates’ personal story bears all the signs of an encounter with misology: he experiences the repeated fluctuation of opposites, reverses his opinion, and (temporarily) loses hope. He tells us that as a youth, ‘I often used turn myself up and down’ (πολλάκις ἑμαυτὸν ἄνω κάτω μετέβαλλον, 96a9-b1) inquiring about the causes of being, becoming, and perishing. Turning ‘up and down’, like the Euripus (90b5), Socrates’ intellectual tumult causes him to ‘unlearn’ (ἀπέμαθον, 96c6) or reverse his opinion on all he thought was true. He reports enormous disappointment on learning that Anaxagoras’s theory of Mind relies on material as well as teleological explanations: ‘From my marvelous height of hope I was brought low’ (ἀπὸ δὴ θαυμαστῆς ἐλπίδος ὠχόμην φερόμενος, 98b7-8). Plato represents his teacher as struggling against these experiences, not despairing; yet the autobiography and indeed, the early aporetic dialogues, demonstrate that Socrates too has endured the disappointments of reason.

The root cause of Socrates’ early disappointments is duality: the intrinsic feature of opposition and misology, and the thread that links the bafflingly diverse examples of explanations he comes to reject. In particular, explanations of ‘twoness’ or duality itself are problematic. At first, Socrates thought two was caused by ‘the concourse’ of two ones that are brought near to each other, or added (97a). But sometimes the contrary occurs, and one becomes two by being split apart or divided (97b).¹⁵ The two possible forms of twoness, proximity/addition and distance/division, function as a kind of cypher for the meta-opposition that I will present: in the first regime, opposites follow close on each other’s heels, while in the second, they are driven apart. The dual cause of duality is an *especial* problem because two-ness is an intrinsic feature of opposition—as well as, therefore, the root cause of misology. But all the commonly-held accounts that Socrates abandons are subject to this same kind of internal opposition or duality of explanation. As will become clearer below,¹⁶ he rejects the explanation that a human could grow larger by something small, or that a two-foot length could be the ‘double’ of one by ‘half’ of itself, because the fact (large, double) is explained by its apparent contrary (small, half) (96c7-d5).

His struggles with ambiguity lead Socrates to crave arguments that combine necessity and the good in a *coherent* explanation. He complains that most people do not understand the power of accounts that explain what-is as what-is-best, since ‘they do not believe how truly the good and necessary literally bind together and hold fast’ everything (καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ δέον συνδεῖν καὶ συνέχειν οὐδὲν οἴονται, 99c5-6). Traditionally scholars see here a desire for a teleological account, or for causes that are necessary as well as sufficient.¹⁷ That is true, but it is not all. Socrates longs above all to find a durable, teleological cause that accounts for the *coherence* (συνδεῖν καὶ συνέχειν) of what

¹⁵ G. Vlastos sees here a mix-up of physical causes (proximity and distance) with logical or mathematical causes (addition and division), but Plato’s point is that the same phenomenon may admit of both types of explanation, leading to misological confusion. ‘Reasons and causes in the *Phaedo*.’ *PhR* 78 (1969), 97.

¹⁶ *Phaedo* 101a-c, p. 25 below.

¹⁷ e.g. C. C. W. Taylor, ‘Forms as causes in the *Phaedo*.’ *Mind* 78, No. 309 (1969), p. 46.

is and what is best—not their division into particulars and forms, or other sets of opposites. We should keep this in mind as we explore the meta-opposition: the gold-standard of coherence is why the theory of forms is not the final argument of *Phaedo*, and why Socrates will turn to myth-making for a coherent account of the compresence of opposites and a cure from their instability.

C) Why Misology is the Referent of Socrates' Last Words

I have argued that Socrates' last words refer to the malady of misology, thus justifying a turn to the philosophical exploration of opposites in the dialogue. Is this persuasive? A convincing reading of what Plato meant by Socrates' last words (I make no claim about Socrates' own meaning¹⁸) should account for details of grammar and word choice, be historically plausible, consistent with Socratic character, and sensitive to dialogic context. On these criteria, I believe misology to be the strongest candidate for the referent of Socrates' last words: 'Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Pay the debt and do not neglect it' (ὦ Κρίτων, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρούνα: ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε, 118a7-8).

Firstly, the diagnosis of misology justifies the plural form of the three verbs (ὀφείλομεν, ἀπόδοτε, ἀμελήσητε), which is not to be ignored.¹⁹ The entire company suffers the malady of misology, and Echecrates does too (88c-d). Socrates, although he exhibits no signs of distress at the crisis, must also internalize the unsoundness (90e), and he tells us in his autobiography of his own youthful experiences with the contradictions of truth.

Second, such an illness, though invented by Plato, could plausibly have fallen under Asclepius' purview in the historical Greek mind. To be sure, the vast majority of testimonia concern Asclepius' cures of physical diseases like blindness, fever, gout, and so on. But Galen calls Asclepius as a witness when he claims to have healed disproportions of emotions and soul, specifically saying that the god prescribed odes, comic mime skits, and certain songs in such cases²⁰—not unlike Socrates' Aesopian fable at the outset or his "incantation" (ἐπάδειν, 114d6) at the end. In at least one case, Asclepius is said to have healed at least one man's grief, or is mentioned as being unable to heal emotions to underline their severity.²¹ That collective illnesses, too, were within the god's power to heal, is evident: his cult was established in Athens in the aftermath of the plague.²²

Third, this interpretation is consistent with Plato's account of Socrates' character: his concern to rouse others to care for their souls. This theme is especially prominent also in *Apology* and *Crito*, the other dialogues about Socrates' final days. In *Phaedo*, when Crito asks for Socrates' last instructions, Socrates' response then is like a longer draft of his final words: he tells them to care for themselves, for their sake and his own, and using the same

¹⁸ For the distinction, see Most (n.3) 98-99.

¹⁹ See n8, above.

²⁰ Galenus, *De Sanitate Tuenda*, I, 8, 19-21. In E. Edelstein and L. Edelstein, *Asclepius: Collection and interpretation of the testimonia*. Vol. 1. Baltimore: JHU Press, 1998: T. 413, p. 208.

²¹ E. Edelstein and L. Edelstein, *Asclepius*, T478, T480, T481.

²² It is popularly believed that the playwright Sophocles had a hand in importing the cult. See A. Connolly. "Was Sophocles Heroised as Dexion?". *JHS*, 118 (1998): 1-21.

verb as his last breath, warns against ‘being careless’ or ‘neglecting’ this task (ἀμελήτε, 115b5-c1).

Finally, consider the narrative timing: Socrates utters his final words exactly when the effects of the hemlock reach his navel, or the middle of his body. The precision of this moment symbolically returns us to the midpoint of the dialogue, when the *pathos* of misology is introduced. (The analogy between text and body is well-known, as in *Phaedrus* 264c). The parallel between corporeal and textual midpoints directs our attention to the very scene where the only instance of the verb ‘to heal’ (*iaosato*, 89a6) appears—together convincing proof that the answer to the riddle lies here. Add to these facts that in ring composition, of which *Phaedo* is an excellent example, the meaning lies in the middle²³, and the conclusion is as certain as Plato’s ambiguity allows.

Misology is collectively experienced by the audience in *Phaedo*, but Plato goes one step further. By subjecting the reader to oppositional arguments at the grandest metaphysical scale, he exposes the reader, too, to misology. In *Gorgias*, “we are the disease” means that we are souls stuck in ignorant bodies; here it means that we are sick with contradiction. My interpretation of Socrates’ last words is appealing because it makes sense of the dialogue’s literary features *and* points us toward the text’s philosophical substance, structure, and ultimate meaning.

III. The Meta-Opposition: exposure to misology

At the outset of the dialogue, our eponymous narrator alerts us to the theme of opposites via the pair pleasure and pain. As a free man who became a catamite slave and then a free philosopher, Phaedo knows something about the experience of opposites.²⁴ He begins his recollection of Socrates’ last day by telling Echecrates of the bittersweet mix of pleasure and pain he and his comrades experienced (59a6). Socrates’ very first comments extend the motif. His painful bonds just released, he exclaims over the pleasure that follows, remarking how strange it is that the opposites are non-simultaneous yet always seem to entail one another.²⁵ Though Socrates’ point contradicts Phaedo’s recent and quite valid report, it is reasonable enough—what is bizarre is Socrates’ triply fabricated justification for it. He imagines Aesop creating a fable about a frustrated god who, unable to reconcile pleasure and pain, made them into a one-headed, two-bodied beast, so that whenever one comes, the other follows later (60c).²⁶ Though the picture of the one-headed, two-bodied beast is vivid, it is not exactly clear how it fits the notion of one opposite following (ἐπακολουθεῖ, 60c) its other. Perhaps Socrates thinks that the opposites are beaded or ‘sequenced’ like the thorax and abdomen of an ant. In any case, the strange

²³ M. Douglas, *Thinking in circles: An essay on ring composition*. Yale University Press, 2007: 37.

²⁴ D. Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis, 2002), 231.

²⁵ Compare *Philebus*.

²⁶ Multi-headed creatures are by far the Greek mythological norm, and crop up occasionally in nature too. Plato’s Aesopic invention is the inverse of the ἀμφίβαινα, a mythological serpent with two heads who can go both ways (c.f. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1233).

creature is a good mnemonic for the narrative structure of the meta-opposition. Instead of pleasure and pain, in *Phaedo* Plato sequences two contrary hypotheses about opposites, attaching both to a single reason or head: the immortality of the soul.

I call these two theories ‘regimes’ of opposites, to denote a set of rules (a system or *tekhnê*) governing the way opposition takes place, and also to signify the root meaning of ‘regimen.’ A regimen is ‘the regulation of aspects of life that affect a person's health or welfare...a particular course of diet, exercise, medication, etc., prescribed or adopted for the restoration or preservation of health’.²⁷ As we saw above, Plato thinks the technical regulation of contraries is essential to health, and he presents two serious options. One regime of opposition holds that opposites always generate or are generated from their opposites, hence are complementary. The other holds that opposites always destroy or are repelled by their opposites, hence are absolute. The regime of complementary opposition (R1) pertains to things that have genesis; the regime of absolute opposition (R2), to things in themselves.

A skeptic might counter that the meta-opposition is therefore not a logical contradiction, or even a contrary. For one ‘regime’ or set of rules governs the opposition of particular states, while the other concerns the opposition of formal being. So, the skeptic would say, the opposing regimes of opposition pertain to different aspects of what-is: both can be false, and both can be true. The skeptic’s argument is only partially true, and more importantly, does not affect my claim. On the first point, it is worth looking closely to see that, while each theory begins from opposing fields (particulars, forms), each also reaches towards the other. The cyclical regime of opposites also governs the argument from Recollection, so that R1 is the cause of our knowing and recognizing the forms in this life. Similarly, the theory of absolute opposition also applies to certain kinds of particular beings, in which the forms are immanent. It would be easy to ignore these fine distinctions. Yet there good reason not to reduce the conceptual tension of the meta-opposition to a terminological opposition between particulars and forms, nor refer it to the ontological distinction between becoming and being. Both of these familiar oppositions presuppose the profound questions that the meta-opposition asks: how are opposites opposed? Is there a form (*eidos*) of opposition that underlies particular oppositions? And how should we navigate between them, in arguments and experience?

These are the sorts of productive questions that the meta-opposition provokes, and that may help us guard against misology; they do not depend on the existence of logical contradiction or contrariety for their productivity.²⁸ Given the importance of opposites to misology, I set out to prove the simpler claim, that Plato opposes two ways that opposites can relate. The two opposites are comparable because each is presented as a universal theory of cause that can defend the immortality of the soul; and Plato makes sure to highlight their proximity through an anonymous objection (103a4-10). Like Socrates’ two-bodied, single-headed creature, both regimes serve the same function: each grounds an

²⁷ ‘regime’, 1. OED Online. Oxford, 2015. Like Foucault’s concept of a ‘regime of truth’, ‘regime of opposition’ is a set of rules governing truth-statements. E.g. ‘Truth and Power’, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* (New York, 1980), 131-33.

²⁸ Hence, following the plasticity of the Greek *ἐναντίος*, I use opposite, contrary, and contradictory as synonyms in this chapter, explicitly indicating their technical differences where necessary.

argument for the immortality of the soul. Together, they constitute a ‘meta’ opposition: a reflexive opposition ‘beyond’ or ‘above’ everyday oppositions like pleasure and pain.

A) Meta-Opposition I: Correlative Opposites (R1)

Socrates’ opening comment on pleasure following pain narratively prepares the introduction of the philosophical principle of R1: that **opposites always generate their opposites**. The theory launches his response to Cebes’ gloomy challenge: to show that the soul still exists, in some powerful and intelligent way, when a man is dead (70b1-3). The subsequent discussion is often called the *antapodosis* argument, after a word used twice (71e8, 72a12) to mean the returning, correlation or alternation of opposites. In fact, the ‘argument’ alternates between opposite forms, being half argument, half story. Cebes has asked not just for proof (πίστις) of the immortal soul, but for a reassurance or ‘excuse’—*παραμῦθία*, a story besides (70b2-5). The root *muthos*, story, echoes in Socrates’ reply, ‘Shall we tell a more thorough story (διαμυθολογῶμεν) about these things?’ (70b5-7). Rather than dividing ‘story’ from ‘logic’, I interpret the *antapodosis* theory as a persuasive, coherent system of rules about what opposites can do, be, and make.

The first rule is that all things that have opposites come to be from their opposites. The philosophers investigate and affirm: ‘For whatever has genesis, let’s see whether they all come to be in this way: not from anywhere else but from opposites to their opposites, for as many of those that happen to have some such opposite’ (ὅσαπερ ἔχει γένεσιν περὶ πάντων ἴδωμεν ἄρ’ οὕτως γίγνεται πάντα, οὐκ ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων τὰ ἐναντία, ὅσοις τυγχάνει ὄν τοιοῦτόν τι, 70d9-e2). Note that the principle pertains to a restricted set of all things that have becoming and have opposites. ‘All things’ is a regrettably but necessarily vague translation of the Greek πάντων: scholars debate whether the class refers to opposite beings, states, or something else. I hold that the R1 applies not to particular beings—for a unique being like you or me or Plato has no true opposite—but to states or qualities which beings come to hold. This is clear in the examples Socrates provides, both simple (just/unjust) and comparative (bigger/littler, weaker/stronger, etc.) (70e7-71a5).²⁹ But even when speaking of the human soul, Socrates is discussing its state of being living (embodied) or not (not-embodied). In the generative regime, ‘opposites’ are two mutually exclusive but not jointly exhaustive states. That is, opposites cannot both be true of an object at the same time, but there can be some intermediate state in which both are false: the mediocly just man, for example.³⁰

Indeed, the second, corollary rule holds that for all opposites, there are two opposite processes intermediate between them. ‘Aren’t there, for all contraries, since they exist in twos, two processes of generation between them, from one to the other, and from the other

²⁹ Hackforth (n. 9), 64, argues that the relatives like greater/smaller do not support the principle, since they differ in degree rather than being true contraries; likewise, D. Bostock insists the principle holds only for contradictories. *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1986), 49. But the Greek ἐναντίος can mean any of these kinds of opposition, and Plato’s restrictions suggest that he intends to account for the coming into being of converse states.

³⁰ D. Gallop believes defining opposites as not jointly exclusive falsifies the ‘Law of Opposites’, for then it is possible to become just or ugly without having once been unjust or beautiful. ‘Plato’s ‘cyclical argument’ recycled,’ *Phronesis* 27.3 (1982): 213. His reading neglects the corollary of process (below) that allows for intermediate states (somewhat beautiful, non-beautiful) between converse states.

back again?’ (ἔστι τι καὶ τοῖόνδε ἐν αὐτοῖς, οἷον μεταξὺ ἀμφοτέρων πάντων τῶν ἐναντίων δυοῖν ὄντων δύο γενέσεις, ἀπὸ μὲν τοῦ ἐτέρου ἐπὶ τὸ ἕτερον, ἀπὸ δ’ αὖ τοῦ ἐτέρου πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἕτερον, 71a12-b2). Socrates gives a number of examples, such as growth and decay, separating and combining, cooling and heating, and asserts that this corollary holds even when the name for one process is not known (71a9-b9). This supplement allows his theory to explain the change and intermediate states between opposites, and broadens the meaning of opposites from static properties and relations to include dynamic processes or activities. Socrates argues that if this cycle becoming were to halt, all of existence would die or disappear; on this basis, the company concludes that this system of generation from opposites is not only universal, but also eternal (72a8-d4).

Though scholars have pointed out many ways that arguments for the principle of *antapodosis* are not iron-clad, the composite force of the ‘ancient doctrine’ (παλαιὸς λόγος, 70c5-6) and Socrates’ reason is steely. The ancients frequently termed the principle a Law of Nature; later, it forms a significant part of Aristotle’s theory of change in the *Physics*.³¹ But there is a vulnerability to this perpetual system, and a third rule to describe it: ‘things which have genesis are deficient.’ In the argument from recollection, Socrates points out that the equality of two sticks always ‘falls short of’ (ἔχει ἐνδεεστέρας, 74e5, 75a4, 75b2) the equal itself, which especially is (75d1-3, 77a4)—a fact which we perceive because of the cycle of the soul from embodied to disembodied and back again. Take the example of health and disease. These are just the sort of entities that R1 describes: no one escapes the cycle from health into illness and then back again, the process ‘falling ill’ balancing its opposite, ‘getting well.’ This propensity of opposite states to tip over into one another divides what has being from what ‘falls short.’ Socrates does not make the point explicit, but I will: a deficiency of being is what allows another state of being to become. The power to become is balanced by the inability to remain.

The regime of correlative opposites (R1) systematically explains all generation and destruction by the rotation of opposites. Though it might initially resemble the misology of the antilogicians, who believe that reality is as contradictory as the currents of the Euripus (90b5-c6), the R1 is systematic and tidy whereas the misologist’s worldview is turbulent and disorderly (*atekhnōs*). Formally, I define R1 as the principle that for all qualities or states that come to be and have opposites, the universal and constant cause of generation is the two opposite processes between them. In the world of generation, no opposite exists permanently; and without opposition, nothing exists. But the world of generation, on this principle of complementarity, must necessarily also be the world of degeneration. Mark this: the deficiency of R1, as Cebes will point out, is that it cannot account for the eternal persistence of the soul. Conversely, the deficiency of R2 will be that it cannot account for change.

B) Meta-Opposition II: Absolute Opposition (R2)

³¹ Aristotle, *Physics* I.5: “Everything that comes to be or passes away from, or passes into, its contrary or an intermediate state. But the intermediates are derived from the contraries- colours, for instance, from black and white. Everything, therefore, that comes to be by a natural process is either a contrary or a product of contraries.”

Socrates never withdraws or rejects R1 principles. After the critical episode of misology, he even employs the theory of recollection, which both presupposes and proves the cycle of opposites, to defeat Simmias. But when it comes to refuting Cebes, Socrates proposes a new theory: that **opposites always retreat or perish at the sight of each other**. Plato calls special attention to this opposite understanding of opposites. Under this second regime, which pertains both to forms and a special type of particular beings, opposition is destructive rather than generative, and absolute rather than complementary.

The shift to the second pole of the meta-opposition is marked by Socrates' famous 'second sailing' (δεύτερον πλοῦν, 99d1),³² undertaken after the confusion recounted in his autobiography. Now he returns to what we know as the theory of forms, which holds that nothing is beautiful but through its participation in or communion with the beautiful itself. In contemporary formulaic terms: any X will be F only by virtue of F-ness itself. Taylor is only one of those who point out that the safety and surety (ἀσφαλῆς, 100e1, 101d2) of this answer inheres in its uninformativeness, which indeed borders on the tautological.³³ Socrates himself calls it the 'ignorant' answer (ἀμαθῆς, 105c1), and even describes himself as trusting in it 'simply and artlessly and perhaps naively' (ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀτέχνως καὶ ἴσως εὐήθως, 100d4-5). This is not just the famous Socratic irony. Remembering his emphasis on how a lack of *tekhnê* breeds misology and misanthropy, we should remain carefully objective even as Socrates urges his listeners to 'hold fast' to this theory (ἐχόμενος, 100d9, 101d2).

The new argumentative premise about opposites is first signaled by a new and frightening danger. Whereas in R1, bigness came to be quite naturally from something smaller, like the growth of a kitten into a cat, now there is something 'monstrous' (τέρας) and frightening (φοβούμενος, φοβοῖο, 101a5-b1) about the coincidence of contraries. Therefore, it is not enough for Cebes simply to agree that bigness is the cause of the big man. Socrates requires him to reject two terrifying alternatives: a) that the *opposite* states of being big and being small could be caused by the *same* thing, a head, or b) that the state of being big could be caused by an *oppositely* small thing. Laughing, Cebes accepts Socrates' suggestion of the frightfulness of these options (101b4). Vlastos remarks on the weight that hinges on this strange scene: these spurious 'contradictions' are what the theory of forms as causes is supposed to solve.³⁴ In the absence of a good logical explanation—and Cebes' laughter suggests there may not be one—it seems that Plato is using fear tactics to distance his audience from the first pole of the meta-contradiction. Contrary explanations for the same thing, or a pair of contraries within an explanation, are terrifying because they may cause misology, loosening our grip on the self-identity of formal being.

Safety involves knowing the rules, and the first precept of the R2 is apparently straightforward. When faced with their opposites, opposites now either retreat from them or are destroyed by them. Socrates explains the new regime by personifying two opposite forms, bigness and smallness:

³² The phrase means the practice of rowing by oars in the absence of favorable winds (LSJ), but scholars disagree on exactly what it refers to. L. Rose correctly holds that it refers to an explanation of things in terms of formal causes, not the hypothetical method. 'The 'deuteros plous' in Plato's *Phaedo*', *Monist* 50.3 (1966): 464-473. To me the phrase implies a shift to rowing manually over contradictory currents rather than sailing on the natural 'wind' of the cycle of opposites.

³³ C. C. W. Taylor, 'Forms as causes in the *Phaedo*' *Mind*, 78. 309 (1969), 47. See also Vlastos (n. 15), 100.

³⁴ Vlastos (n. 15), 100-101.

Bigness itself is never willing to be big and small at the same time, and moreover the bigness in us never admits the small in addition, nor is it willing to be exceeded. But one of two things happens: either it (bigness) flees and retreats whenever its opposite, the small, approaches it, or it has been destroyed by its approach. But it is not willing, by submitting and accepting smallness, to be other than what it is.

αὐτὸ τὸ μέγεθος οὐδέποτε ἐθέλειν ἄμα μέγα καὶ μικρὸν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν μέγεθος οὐδέποτε προσδέχεται τὸ μικρὸν οὐδ' ἐθέλειν ὑπερέχεται, ἀλλὰ δυοῖν τὸ ἕτερον, ἢ φεύγειν καὶ ὑπεκχωρεῖν ὅταν αὐτῷ προσίῃ τὸ ἐναντίον, τὸ μικρὸν, ἢ προσελθόντος ἐκείνου ἀπολωλέναι: ὑπομένον δὲ καὶ δεξιόμενον τὴν μικρότητα οὐκ ἐθέλειν εἶναι ἕτερον ἢ ὅπερ ἦν (102d6-e3).

Bigness, whether absolute or immanent in us, utterly resists the coexistence or triumph of its opposites. Socrates will reiterate that R2 opposites are 'unwilling' (*ouk ethelein*) to change: just as he remained in prison, despite Crito's urging, not because his muscles were inert but because he was unwilling to flee (98e-99a). Since they are averse to the urgings of change, R2 opposites are left with two options when faced with their opposites: 1) to depart in some way (φεύγειν, ὑπεκχωρεῖν, or ἀπέρχεται) or 2) be destroyed (ἀπολωλέναι). This is universally true for opposite forms, not just bigness and smallness: 'Nor will any opposite which is still what it was, ever become and be its own opposite at the same time. It either goes away or ceases to exist in this experience' (οὐδ' ἄλλο οὐδὲν τῶν ἐναντίων, ἔτι ὄν ὅπερ ἦν, ἄμα τούναντίον γίνεσθαι τε καὶ εἶναι, ἀλλ' ἦτοι ἀπέρχεται ἢ ἀπόλλυται ἐν τούτῳ τῷ παθήματι, 102e8-103a2). This principle directly opposes that of Protagoras, for whom big and small were always measures relative to a man. Instead, one could say Plato that sketches a kind of sympathetic nervous system response for forms: instead of flight or fight, forms flee or cease to be.

Two classic problems about this passage are re-cast in light of the structure of the meta-opposition. First, it is commonly objected that since things-in-themselves are eternal, they cannot be destroyed or cease to be. The truth of this point makes it likely that 'destruction' or 'perishing' is present here to balance (or oppose) the generation of opposites in R1. A second typical question is how being destroyed differs from fleeing, since both entail the absence of the form. In fact, there is no practical difference, though the option will later preserve the possibility of the soul's flight rather than death. However, when a form does absent itself, its participant object can then take on the opposite form—so in what sense is the outcome really different from opposites 'yielding', for the perceiver? In that case, how different are R1 and R2, after all?

Yet via his striking military metaphors, Plato sharply enforces the separation the opposites within R2, and thus the distinction between R1 and R2. In the second regime, opposites 'advance upon', 'withdraw from', and 'submit' to the onset of one another (προσέρχουμαι, ὑπεκχωρέω, ὑπομένω).³⁵ The martial verbs dramatize the opposition of R1 and R2: opposites destroy instead of generate one another, repel and retreat instead of yield; there is no option to negotiate or adapt. Moreover, however, the language of military maneuvers shifts opposition into a new dimension: spatial R2 opposites battle the change

³⁵ J. Burnet also includes ἐπιφέρω, κατέχω, ἔπειμι. *Plato's 'Phaedo'* (Oxford, 1911), 116, 119, 121. The aptness of the metaphor lies in the use of ἐναντίος to mean enemy, adversary. LSJ.

that, in the cycle of time, is inevitable. By conceptualizing absolute opposition in the dimension of space rather than time, Plato plausibly maintains the principle of self-identity.

In case we had failed to notice the meta-opposition on our own, Phaedo reports an interruption that brings it to the attention of all.

When he heard this, someone of those present -- I have no clear memory of who it was -- said, 'by the gods, did we not agree earlier in our discussion to the very *opposite* of what is now being said, namely, that the larger came from the smaller and the smaller from the larger, and that this is simply the coming to be from opposites into their opposites? But now I think we are saying that this would never happen!'

καί τις εἶπε τῶν παρόντων ἀκούσας—ὅστις δ' ἦν, οὐ σαφῶς μέμνημαι—πρὸς θεῶν, οὐκ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἡμῖν λόγοις αὐτὸ τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν νυνὶ λεγομένων ὠμολογεῖτο, ἐκ τοῦ ἐλάττονος τὸ μείζον γίνεσθαι καὶ ἐκ τοῦ μείζονος τὸ ἐλάττον, καὶ ἀτεχνῶς αὕτη εἶναι ἢ γένεσις τοῖς ἐναντίοις, ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων; νῦν δέ μοι δοκεῖ λέγεσθαι ὅτι τοῦτο οὐκ ἂν ποτε γένοιτο (103a4-10).

It is strange that Phaedo, whose detailed recall has not faltered till now, forgets the source of this lucid and memorable objection. Under the protection of anonymity, Plato seems to speak directly to his readers. And it really is an extraordinary question that he raises. How is it, indeed, that we have flipped from finding the very same example, greatness/smallness, to be first plausibly interconnected, and now plausibly divorced? As a youth, Socrates was befuddled that two could be caused by proximity and addition, and then also by distance and division.³⁶ In the same way, we too have seen great and small first brought close together, and now separated as far as possible. All positions, it seems, can be argued from two directions or dimensions, as the sophists—dangerously, in Plato's view—suggest.

Socrates replies with a famous distinction between having opposite attributes, and the opposite itself. The former belong to the regime of complementary opposites (R1), and the latter to the regime of absolute opposites (R2).

'You do not understand the difference (*diaphora*) between what is said now and what was said then. Then it was meant that an opposite *occurrence* comes to be from an opposite *occurrence*; whereas now, that the opposite *itself* could never become opposite to *itself*, neither that in us nor that in its own nature. Then, my friend, we were speaking of the things that have the opposites [in themselves], and naming them by the names of those; but now we are speaking of those opposites themselves, the immanence of which gives the named things their name. And those opposites themselves, we claim, are never willing to accept coming to be from one another.'

οὐ μέντοι ἐννοεῖς τὸ διαφέρον τοῦ τε νῦν λεγομένου καὶ τοῦ τότε. τότε μὲν γὰρ ἐλέγετο ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου πράγματος τὸ ἐναντίον πράγμα γίνεσθαι, νῦν δέ, ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ ἐναντίον ἑαυτῷ ἐναντίον οὐκ ἂν ποτε γένοιτο, οὔτε τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν οὔτε τὸ ἐν τῇ φύσει. τότε μὲν γάρ, ὧ φίλε, περὶ τῶν ἐχόντων τὰ ἐναντία ἐλέγομεν, ἐπονομάζοντες αὐτὰ τῇ ἐκείνων ἐπωνυμίᾳ, νῦν δὲ περὶ ἐκείνων αὐτῶν ὧν ἐνόησαν ἔχει τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τὰ ὀνομαζόμενα. αὐτὰ δ' ἐκεῖνα οὐκ ἂν ποτέ φασιν ἐθέλησαι γένεσιν ἀλλήλων δέξασθαι (103b1-c2).

³⁶ 97a-b, p. 14-15 above.

Ionian science did not make this key distinction, understanding ‘the hot’ (τὸ θερμόν) and ‘the cold’ (τὸ ψυχρόν) as both qualities and substances, both predicates and essences.³⁷ In a philosophical watershed,³⁸ Socrates now distinguishes the quality, property, or state of being hot from a prior power or cause of that quality.³⁹ On the strength of this distinction, he concludes even more strongly: ‘Never will an opposite be the opposite to itself’ (μηδέποτε ἐναντίον ἑαυτῷ τὸ ἐναντίον ἔσσεσθαι, 103c7-8). I still wonder what this means, and why Socrates has shifted from γίγνομαι to ἔσσεσθαι, but the answer satisfies Cebes. From our vantage, Socrates’ contrast between the modality of *having* an attribute and substantive *being* (having wealth versus wealth itself, for example) sharpens Plato’s meta-opposition. The function of the unnamed objector is to point out that R1 and R2 are not merely different, but *opposite* ways of conceiving opposites. What separates an opposite quality from an opposite ‘in itself’ is the way that each opposes other opposites. Socrates’ clarification of this difference presumably removes the “contradiction” without getting rid of the problem of their relationship.

For Plato still faces the problem of how these opposite regimes co-exist, or cohere. To support the immortality of the soul, the principle of absolute opposition must hold not only for forms, but for particular human life. To address this problem, Socrates introduces the second rule of R2, extending the principle of mutual exclusion from transcendent to immanent forms. The thinking is complex, but the examples are simple: in addition to the form of threeness, three ‘brings along’ the form of the odd; as a result, it excludes the opposing form of the equal. His other example is from the physical realm, showing that the second rule covers the material as well as the logical: because snow always contains the form of the cold, it will always exclude the form of the hot. Socrates marks off these cases as special or different from others, without giving them a clear definition or name.⁴⁰ To make up for this omission, scholars have termed this class the ‘immanent forms,’ ‘immanent characters,’ or ‘containers.’ The best name, I think, is the ‘immanent opposites,’ since their principal feature is not to have the characteristic of the relevant form, but rather to bear that form’s object and mode of opposition. Certainly the importance of this new group is that the absolute and logical form of opposition can now be located in (immanent to) particular beings—just as the form-like soul inheres in the body. In terms of Socrates’ search for good explanations, forms can now be a new, ‘more complex’ (κομψοτέρων, 105c2) type of cause. If F and G are opposites, a form F-ness is the cause of X being F, but is also the cause of X being not-G—so long as it is F.

Arguably, the two rules of R2 plus Socrates’ distinction can account for the compresence of relative opposites—a human being can ‘have’ the properties bigness and smallness relative to other people, while the opposite forms themselves exclude one another⁴¹—but the theory fails to account adequately for change. Most particularly, it has nothing to say about how the soul changes from embodied to disembodied. Cebes’ earlier

³⁷ Baldry, H. C. ‘Plato’s ‘technical terms’’, *CQ* 31 (1937), 142-9.

³⁸ Literally, a watershed is a ridge of land separating waters flowing in different directions.

³⁹ A. Nehamas also sees Socrates making this distinction. ‘Self-predication and Plato’s theory of Forms’, *APQ* 16 (1979), 93-103.

⁴⁰ Plato may omit the name because the names of things are derived from their participation in the relevant form (103b1-c2); it would be excessively difficult at this or any juncture to explain the form of immanence or ‘immanence in itself.’

⁴¹ F.C. White, ‘The Compresence of opposites in *Phaedo* 102’. *CQ* 27.2 (1977), 306.

objection showed that the deficiency of R1 opposites was their inability to remain self-same, but Socrates has nothing to say about what determines how, whether or when a being will participate in ‘bigness’ so as to grow bigger. Instead, Socrates marshals the second structure of opposites to make the same argument for the immortality of the soul. Giving a few further examples of immanent opposites, he obtains from Cebes the declaration that soul is what always brings life, and that always bringing life, it will never admit its opposite, death. Together, they conclude that the soul is therefore something deathless, separate from the body (106e4-107a1). The question of how and when a soul changes from a state of embodied life to otherworldly life goes unasked.

Regrettably, I have glossed over some intricacies regarding the forms in *Phaedo* in order to establish a new point of view. In both Socrates’ simple and ‘more complex’ understandings of formal cause, the essential element is that opposites in themselves repel other opposites, as if in a battlefield or other space. He ensures logical if not practical identity by a rule contrary to the first: that opposites negate rather than generate their opposites. This is the heart of the meta-opposition. The two regimes balance one another so well in *Phaedo* that it is a shame that scholarship has weighed so heavily on the side of the forms. Certainly Socrates denigrates the bodily and elevates the forms, but even he indicates that inquiry via facts and inquiry via concepts are both forms of image thinking.⁴² But more importantly, R1 and R2 do not reduce to these familiar prejudicial categories: for particular immanent opposites exhibit R2 absolutism, and the recollection of the forms depends on the R1 cycle (74e-75e). A little further thought shows that the meta-opposition itself cannot be subsumed within either of its halves. R1 and R2 do not absolutely exclude each other nor cyclically generate each other, but are, simply, separate from each other.

This irreducible, undecidable nature of the meta-opposition is why I claim that performatively and structurally, Plato points us to the parity—and, I shall demonstrate in the analysis of the myth, the *coherence*—of these two regimes of opposites. Understood within the meta-opposition, Plato’s theory of forms in *Phaedo* is no final solution, but only one half of painful, potentially sickening duality at the heart of thought.

Table 1: Summary of the Meta-Opposition

<i>Category</i>	R1	R2
<i>Pertains to</i>	things which have genesis	things in themselves
<i>Action of opposites</i>	opposites co-generate	opposites perish
<i>Relation of opposites</i>	opposites yield to one another	opposites repel one another
<i>Process</i>	two complementary processes	none; act or react
<i>Type of difference</i>	difference by degrees	absolute difference
<i>Result</i>	cycle	self-identity
<i>Paradigm</i>	sequence (temporal)	displacement (spatial)

C) The Meta-Opposition: Why?

If the *antapodosis* argument and the theory of the forms truly represent a meta-opposition at the heart of *Phaedo*, then the burden of proof shifts to explaining why such a

⁴² οὐ γὰρ πάνυ συγχωρῶ τὸν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σκοπούμενον τὰ ὄντα ἐν εἰκόσι μᾶλλον σκοπεῖν ἢ τὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις, 100a1-3.

structure exists. I briefly advance three hypotheses. 1) Existential: the meta-opposition, by exchanging the experience of opposites into thoughtfulness about opposites, can purify contradiction into healthful wisdom. 2) Logical: the meta-opposition, as something like the form or *eidos* of contradiction, logically guarantees the local opposition between particulars and forms. 3) Rhetorical: the meta-opposition, as two contrary premises of argument, helps Plato construct a more convincing case for the immortality of the soul.

1) *Existential*. Near the beginning of the dialogue, a telling passage suggests only a certain way of exchanging opposites ensures healthy virtue. Socrates has set out to give a defense of the philosopher's life, arguing that philosophy is the preparation for death, or the separation of the soul from the body. He contrasts the courage of the philosopher, who considers death as a welcome release, and the courage of an ordinary person, who faces death *even though* it is something fearful. The virtue of the latter is 'illogical' (*alogos*) because this bravery arises from its opposite: the greater fear of dishonor (68d). Socrates makes a parallel critique of moderation that arises from its opposite, the desire for other indulgences. Swapping fear for fear and pleasure for pleasure, great ones for small ones, is not the right way to obtain virtue (69a6-7); only exchanging them for mindfulness (*phronêsis*) can promote true integrity (69b). Then Socrates shifts from the language of commerce to health:

But when [pleasures and fears] are separated from mindfulness and are exchanged one for the other, maybe virtue (*aretê*) isn't anything but a kind of shadow-painting and is genuinely suited only for slaves and has nothing in it either healthy or true; while true virtue is really a sort of purification from all these things, and moderation and justice and courage and thoughtfulness itself are nothing but a kind of purifier.

χωριζόμενα δὲ φρονήσεως καὶ ἀλλαττόμενα ἀντὶ ἀλλήλων μὴ σκιαγραφία τις ἢ ἡ τοιαύτη ἀρετὴ καὶ τῶ ὄντι ἀνδραποδώδης τε καὶ οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς οὐδ' ἀληθὲς ἔχη, τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς τῶ ὄντι ἢ κάθαρσις τις τῶν τοιούτων πάντων καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρμὸς τις ἢ. (69b6-c3)

After understanding misology and the meta-opposition, we are primed to notice that unhealthy virtue either exchanges one thing for its opposite (for example, fear for courage), or one thing for the same thing but relatively opposed (for example, greater fear for a lesser fear). Healthy virtue, in contrast, is purification and purifier, transforming both fear and desire into the register of the mind. The meta-opposition, it seems to me, aims to induce this same kind of purification. If we grasp the concept, it has successfully converted into thought both the dizzying experience of fluctuating opposites *and* the contrary comfort of holding fast, fearfully, to tautological truths. The risk is that readers will get stuck in one regime or the other, or despair of truth altogether (misology). But Plato's meta-structural argument prompts us to be thoughtful about what arguments we can trust and about how opposites are understood to function. In this way, it functions to cleanse the mind from the ceaseless experience of contradictory impressions.

2) *Logical*. An equally important reason behind the meta-contradiction is philosophical consistency. Plato regularly argues that an account should resemble the fact

it explains.⁴³ In *Phaedo*, Socrates insists especially that twoness is caused only by participation in duality (101b10-c6). According to this principle,⁴⁴ for any two things (like particulars and forms) to be opposites, their relation must be caused by participation in opposition itself. But how is it possible to conceive of opposition, which is necessarily divided and dual, ‘in itself’? Though modern scholars might dismiss this question as the fallacy of self-predication, there is plausible evidence is that Plato did not see it that way,⁴⁵ and in *Sophist* and *Timaeus* he makes the form of difference a primary kind and cause of differentiation.⁴⁶ Similarly, the meta-opposition functions like an *eidos* of opposition, the consistent cause of all other contraries running through the world (see analysis of the myth, below). By calling special attention to the meta-opposition in the anonymous objection, Plato backs up the difference between becoming and formal being.

3) *Rhetorical*. As I have said, both poles of the meta-opposition serve the same argumentative function, or are joined to the same head: the immortal soul. We can simplify and call them two premises from which the same conclusion is reached. Imagine a blackboard with two premises represented as p and q . If either p or q is true, so is z . Logicians call this an argument from disjunctive premises, and it has the nice feature, when you draw its truth table (figure 3), of having the most possibilities for turning out true, since if *either* of the premises (R1 or R2) is true, so is the conclusion (immortal soul). Only in the case that both premises are false would the immortal soul remain unproven. However, in our case, the disjunctive premises are strictly contraries, so both *can* be false. It could be true that opposites sometimes come to be from one another, and sometimes destroy one another, or it could be there is no pattern or rules linking opposition with generation and destruction, and so on. These latter possibilities Plato carefully disguises as misology, by defining that condition as the lack of a system for contradiction. By alternating the opposite regimes of opposition, Plato risks exposing his readers to misology. But by warning against it, he protects the weakness of his argument. Misology lies exactly at the vulnerable midpoint of the meta-opposition. The rhetorical effect is that Plato appears to cover all his bases: either immortality is proved by R1, or by R2, or we succumb to the unsystematic oppositions of misology. You could say, the result of this grand meta-contradiction is to distract us from the ‘smaller’ contradiction that Plato is trying to prove: that mortals, especially philosophical ones, are immortal.

These, then, are three suggestions for the reason and function of the meta-opposition in the *Phaedo*. It would also be reasonable to suppose an historical context: that Plato is responding to a philosophical problem inherited from Empedocles, who posited the cycle of Love and Strife as the primary cause, and the Pythagoreans, who suggested that ten

p	q	$p \vee q$
T	T	T
T	F	T
F	T	T
F	F	F

Figure 3. Truth table for disjunct propositions (if p or q).

⁴³ This idea occurs e.g. as the principle of verisimilarity in *Timaeus* and in the strictures on narrative in *Republic*.

⁴⁴ The axiom approximates Kant’s Principle of Sufficient Reason, which ensures ‘the logical connection of an item of knowledge with grounds and consequences.’ J. Sallis, *Logic of Imagination* (Bloomington, 2012), 48.

⁴⁵ So G. Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy: Socrates, Plato, and their Tradition* (Princeton, 1995), 188. Though others have taken issue with his conclusion, the debate shows at minimum that Plato explored this line of reasoning.

⁴⁶ On the form of difference in *Sophist*, see Introduction of the present work; on *Timaeus*, see Chapter 3.

pairs of opposites were the original constituents of being.⁴⁷ All of these aspects of the meta-opposition—existential, logical, rhetorical, and historical—are on display in the master-stroke of the *Phaedo*: the concluding myth.

IV. The Myth: the Cure for Contradiction

Like most of Plato's myths, that of *Phaedo* has been both neglected and misunderstood. Yet it contains important clues for understanding Socrates' last words. Socrates' final argument, and his last effort to convince his listeners that a philosopher need have no fear of death, is a story depicting human nature as sickly and slow-witted, unable to grasp the true nature of the world. After death, souls enter the purifying system of rivers in the underworld and are sorted according to their fate: the incurably wicked remain in Tartarus indefinitely; the curable exit to live again; while the pure philosophers ascend to the disease-free heavens. The world as represented in this myth explains the human propensity to misology as well as Plato's strange absence from Socrates' last day. The underworld, on the other hand, is split by the chasm of Tartarus and crisscrossed by two purifying pairs of rivers, which together represent the meta-opposition. Altogether, then, the final narrative gathers and connects misology, Plato's illness, the meta-opposition, and Socrates' last words. The effect is to substantiate Socrates' repeated exhortation to care for our souls, and to offer an effective technique—or charm (ἐπάδειν, 114d6)—for organizing the oppositions that beset us.

Human sickliness is first the pretext for and then the subject of Socrates' myth. After Socrates has completed the argument from forms, Simmias' trust in the argument remains weak: he judges human weakness or sickliness (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀσθένειαν) unworthy of giving a final answer to the weighty matters just discussed (107a8-b3). His reservations serve as an opportunity for Socrates to urge his friends again not to neglect (ἀμελήσει) the care of the soul (repeating the sentiment of 67d-e, 90e, and his final words), and justify the need for the closing story. For Simmias, the trust in the argument has not been wholly restored, and misology therefore still lurks. Arguments always lead to counterarguments, so they alone cannot vanquish the distrust of *logos*; narrative closure is also needed.

Socrates' story justifies and explains Simmias' reservations, as well as Socrates' insistence on caring for the soul. A tale likely deriving from Pythagorean beliefs,⁴⁸ the story holds that, due to the geography of the earth, human life is one of sickliness (ἀσθένεια or *astheneia*). Echoing the very word that Simmias used to account for his remaining uncertainty (107a8-b3), Socrates compares us to creatures living under the sea, who think they breathe air and remain ignorant of the purer regions above, because their 'slowness and sickliness' (βραδυτήτά τε καὶ ἀσθένειαν, 109c9, again at 109d8-e2) prevents them getting to the surface.⁴⁹ On this earth, he says, humans live in many different hollows (τὰ

⁴⁷ Aristotle *Metaphysics* 986a-b.

⁴⁸ See Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Compare *Philebus* 21d, where Socrates says that a life devoid of intellect is that of an oyster or 'pulmo marinus'; and *Republic* 612a, where he urges us to see the soul's true nature by lifting it out of the sea and removing the stones and shells that have barnacled onto it.

κοῖλα) filled with water, mist and air—the sediment of the purer aether above (109b-c)—and our *astheneia* prevents our knowledge of the difference. The thesis explains the ease with which we fall into misology: we can be confused by what is true and false because we mistakenly take our sedimented atmosphere for pure air. Our deceptive, limited life in the hollows obviously parallels the famous parable of the cave in *Republic* VII. But whereas in that dialogue we are bound to the shadows of the cave by external chains, in *Phaedo*, our own illness and inadequacy is to blame.

In this context, the term *astheneia* is typically translated as ‘weakness’, a literal rendering of the etymology, which combines the a-privative with the adjective σθένος (strength, power). But the term also means sickness or disease; somewhere between these two, I have adopted the apt translation ‘sickliness’, connoting that *astheneia* is not just a deficiency of strength but a persistent condition, opposed to health and requiring our care. That is how the word is used elsewhere in the dialogue. Cebes uses *astheneia* to describe the body’s propensity to decay in his argument about soul as cloak (87e), his usage mirroring Socrates’ early argument that the body hampers the soul’s search for wisdom because of its vulnerability to disease (66c-d).⁵⁰

But the human condition of *astheneia* gains particular force by Plato’s use of the word, in its verbal form, to explain his own absence. ‘Plato, I believe, was sick,’ *Phaedo* famously reports at the outset of the dialogue (Πλάτων δὲ οἶμαι ἡσθένει, 59b), in one of only three self-references in the entire corpus.⁵¹ In this instance, the term is never translated as ‘being weak,’ especially given Plato’s reputed *pankration* skills.⁵² Instead, the word invites us to imagine Plato’s state on the day his mentor and guru was executed: his nerves thinned by days of delay, his philosophical commitments contested and perhaps overpowered by his fierce grief. Glenn Most reads this mention, as the only ‘literal’ illness of the dialogue, as the best candidate for the debt to Asclepius, suggesting that Plato thereby writes himself into the dialogue as the subject of Socrates’ last words and his philosophical heir.⁵³ This reading, otherwise attractive, forces him to defend the unlikely supposition that Socrates gained prophetic knowledge of Plato’s recovery at the moment of his transition to death. Instead, I find it more appealing to contextualize Plato’s illness as an instance of the more general human *astheneia* described in the myth. His absence then resonates with the shared human condition of vulnerable ignorance, suggesting a certain modesty, if not solidarity. Like the rest of us, Plato is only human. His illness exemplifies the general sickliness of earthly life, the condition that necessitates the constant guarding of our souls against misology.

Socrates’ story suggests that human sickliness is no fault of our own, but merely mirrors our world. This realm is described as decomposing and corroded (διεφθαρμένα, καταβεβρωμένα, 110a2), in contrast with the beautiful heavens, which are disease-free (άνόσους, 111b3). The lovely and precious things of the world, like gemstones, are in actuality only damaged fragments of their pure (καθαροῖ) heavenly counterparts. They are corrupted (διεφθαρμένοι) and eaten away (κατεδηδεσμένοι) ‘by rot and brine, by all the

⁵⁰ Other Platonic dialogues support this translation. In *Theaetetus* 159, *astheneia* is the opposite of health. In *Statesman* 274b, it is used to describe the state of humans without the care of the gods, meaning ‘unprotected’, ‘uncared for’. In all these cases, “weakness” is an inadequate translation.

⁵¹ The other two are *Apology* 34a1, 38b6.

⁵² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, III.V.

⁵³ Most (n.3), 106-11.

things that have flowed together here, which produces deformities in stones and earth and diseases in the plants and other living creatures' (ὕπὸ σηπεδόνοσ καὶ ἄλμησ ὑπὸ τῶν δεῦρο σννερρηκότων, ἃ καὶ λίθοισ καὶ γῆ καὶ τοῖσ ἄλλοισ ζῳοῖσ τε καὶ φυτοῖσ αἴσχη τε καὶ νόσοσ παρέχει, 110e4-6). As the flow of the Euripus is associated with the disease of misology, the flow of the air and mist and brine on the Earth deforms its inorganic parts and causes diseases in the living.

Life in heaven is healthy, on earth diseased; the chaotic underworld represents the transitional zone of the cure. There the disembodied souls are sorted by their health and purity. The worst go straight to Tartarus, the home of lost, incurable souls (ἀνιάτωσ, 113e2). The decent folks wait for a time in the Acherousian lake, where they are purified (καθαιρόμενοι) of any misdeeds (113e). Souls that are very bad but curable spend only one year in Tartarus, after which they exit and float past Acheron, where they have the chance to persuade their victims to forgiveness and so be purified themselves. If they fail, they cycle back into hell.

The underworld can cure because the opposites counterbalance each other, as in Hippocratic medical theory.⁵⁴ Socrates carefully describes four main rivers that correspond to the four Hippocratic qualities: wet and dry, hot and cold. First there is wet Oceanus, which flows in a circle (112e). In the opposite direction, Acheron flows through the desert, taking on its dry character (113a). The third river, Pyriphlegethon, or fiery stuff, represents the hot. It erupts between the first two and flows perpendicularly to them, and its “torrents of lava vent themselves in volcanic eruptions whenever it happens to reach the earth’s surface” (113b). Opposite to the Pyriphlegethon and running in the contrary direction is the fourth, the dark blue Cocytus River (the name means wailing or dirge), which Plato identifies with the more famous river Styx; it too mixes with no other waters (113c-d). By the pairing not by overt cues, the blue Cocytus represents the cold: in the *Divine Comedy*, Dante imagines it as a frozen lake. Like the ideal Hippocratic body, the balanced elemental structure of the underworld makes it the realm of healing and purification, for those not yet cleansed by philosophy.

However, the four underworld rivers evoke not only Hippocratic theory but also that now much-discussed meta-structure of the *Phaedo*. Just like the meta-opposition, the two pairs of rivers run opposite to each other, and each pair has contrary natures and directions within itself. Further, like absolute R2 opposites, Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus do not mix (113b-c); because they flow in circles, like the cycles of the R1, the Ocean and Acheron implicitly do. In orderly and radiant detail, Plato represents the meta-opposition as two pairs of rivers, opposite in themselves and to one another, which together compose the body and purifying system of the underworld. Contrast Socrates’ simpler Aesopian fable at the opening of the dialogue, which resolved the hostility of opposites by giving them a single head. There, hierarchy trumped opposition. In the closing myth, Plato preserves a complex and formal strife of the opposites, while still holding out the hope of a heavenly escape or cure from opposition altogether. The chasm of Tartarus, the source of all duality, is embedded in the center of the earth—just as Socrates urges his friends to take the unsoundness of contradiction inside themselves.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ ‘Opposites are cures for opposites’, *On breaths*, Ch. 1. See also *On Ancient Medicine*, Ch. 13.

⁵⁵ 90d9-91a1, p. 37-38 above.

The mythical geography that concludes *Phaedo* finally gives us the coherent account of opposition that Socrates has wanted⁵⁶—and the effect is curative. Plato combines spatial or absolute opposition in the underworld with the temporal or sequenced opposition of the levels of the earth, creating an overall picture of an orderly, teleological *cosmos*. Here lies the therapeutic *tekhnê*: an artful, consistent and coherent account of contradiction, in which oppositions compose and give meaning to human life, instead of producing disorder and despair. The human tendency to sickness (*astheneia*) comes from being caught in the middle between the powerful oppositions of the underworld and the self-same purity of the heavens, but there is still human agency and a reward for exerting it properly. Incurable souls will be swept around in the confusing subterranean rivers of contradictions, while purified souls ascend to a clear and disease-free heaven. Although we cannot dispense with the ‘manful striving’ of argument demonstrated by Socrates’ life, in the end both Socrates and Plato turn to *poiesis*. Ultimately, narrative is the only *tekhnê* that can reasonably order the meta-opposition, simultaneously sorting and combining opposing ideas and experiences. Argumentative dialogue is never-ending, but the closure of stories can frame, even if it cannot end, the strife of opposites.⁵⁷

VI. Conclusion

Besides satisfying the basic criteria of a good interpretation—grammar, vocabulary, character, dialogic and historical context—the major advantage of my interpretation of Socrates’ last words is to connect the literary and the philosophical aspects of the dialogue, so that the narrative brings new aspects of the conceptual to light. This is how it should be. Socrates’ last words, understood as a reference to the danger of ‘misology’, are meaningful in light of the whole dialogue and the whole of his project, as conceived by Plato, not just one scene or one prejudice against the body. ‘We owe a cock to Asclepius’ means ‘we have purified our souls sufficiently by philosophy to balance the contradictions of life.’ This task the *Phaedo* undertakes as a whole, accomplishing the cure by sequencing and then combining the two halves of the meta-opposition in the myth. The Greeks used to try to frame their questions to the Delphic oracle as a clear-cut dilemma, so as to receive the most unambiguous answer possible.⁵⁸ In the same way, the *Phaedo* clearly poses the philosophical dilemma of opposition. The stakes of my reading are to reframe the significance of the theory of forms and particulars as two answers to a question about how

⁵⁶ 99c5-6, p. 38-39 above.

⁵⁷ In her study of how Plato’s censorship of poetic forms in *Republic* ultimately subverts itself, Ramona Naddaff attentively discusses the mixed and multiple relationships between myth and dialectic, from dependence to contestation. Building on her insight that poetry “tests the strength of philosophers to remain open at all costs” to what is other, it would seem that the myth in *Phaedo* may test the philosophical faith as much as heal it. *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): Conclusion, esp. 130-34. On this subject see also Kathryn A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Catalin Partenie, *Plato's Myths* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵⁸ J.-P. Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 316.

opposites can be said to be causes. As a bonus, reading closely for the philosophical implications of ill-health also clarifies other mysteries, like Plato's absence and Cebes' strange fears. There will never be a final answer to the mystery of Socrates' last words, and Plato may well have wanted it that way. But above all else, my interpretation shows us how to think about our relation to this complex and subtle dialogue. As readers, we have transformed the contradictions of *Phaedo* into thoughtfulness, escaping misology and preserving a faith in the possibility of good answers in this bewildering world.

Bridge: From *Phaedo* to *Timaeus*

One commentator remarks that “the *Phaedo* gives us a ‘study of death’, the *Timaeus* a theory of life.”¹ The origin story of the cosmos in *Timaeus* seems to form a prequel to the ultimate end depicted in *Phaedo*—or perhaps, if everything is indeed cyclical, its sequel. While the *Phaedo* is biographical and emotional, and the *Timaeus* abstract and methodical, there are substantial parallels between them: in the image of the cosmos, the constitutive role of the meta-opposition, the connection between the cosmos and human life, and running through all of these, the urgent question of disease.

The *Timaeus* takes the *Phaedo*’s fanciful image of the cosmos and gives it a thorough, mathematical grounding, even though the narrator admits that an explanation of such matters can at best remain a “likely account.” By combining the agency of the divine Demiurge with the force of necessity, the later dialogue explicitly provides the kind of picture of the cosmos that Socrates wants in the *Phaedo* (and that he faults Anaxagoras for not providing):² one that combines “what is necessary” with “what is best” (96a-99c, see above, p. 38-39). Timaeus’ theory of human well-being is designed to prove the coherence of these two causes, as he argues that a healthy life is one of proportionality. For both dialogues, the picture of the cosmos embodies the coherence of necessity and intelligence, expressed in terms of the human ideals of health and disease.

In both dialogues, what I call the meta-opposition is crucial in connecting the micro and macrocosm. In *Phaedo*, the opposition of complementary and absolute opposites is represented in the two pairs of underworld rivers of the underworld. It symbolizes both the danger of misology, and the promise of purification through the internalization and balancing of opposites. In *Timaeus*, the meta-opposition is re-conceived as Difference and Sameness, explicitly governing disease and health respectively, and playing an even more fundamental role in the universe. Here, the Demiurge builds the world soul from Sameness (*to auto*) and Difference (*to heteron*), but Timaeus tempers the opposition by adding a third, Being (*to on*), and dividing each of these three primary materials of the world into three further types: the divided, undivided, and intermediate sorts (35a-b). Together Sameness and Difference govern the motions of the universe and constitute the ultimate proportion. Timaeus’ recommendation for both physical and psychic health is to imitate their motions and proportion. For Plato, grasping abstract intellectual differences like that between Sameness and Difference, or between absolute and complementary opposition, is central to protecting the mind from disease and ignorance.

Plato remains preoccupied in both dialogues with a similar kind of disease, but his aetiology changes. In *Timaeus*, the gravest disease that can be suffered is mindlessness or ignorance (44c, 88b), especially ignorance of what is the same and what is different (44a). This is not far from the misological despair of truth diagnosed and healed in *Phaedo*.

¹ R.D. Archer-Hind, *The Timaeus of Plato* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1888), 330-1n12.

² On this point see also D. Sedley, “Teleology and myth in the *Phaedo*”, in J. Cleary and D. Shartin (eds.) *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1989-90), Lanham, Mass., 359-83.

However, the alternation of *opposites* that caused misology is replaced in *Timaeus* with a theory of the pathogenic quality of *differences*. In his concluding catalogue of diseases, Timaeus moves away from a Hippocratic emphasis on opposite extremes and towards an innovative theory of disease based on the sorts of differences that can affect the body and soul. These include differences in elemental composition, organ formation, bodily flows, and disproportions within and between body and soul.

Though distant in their accounts of diseases, the dialogues are closer together when it comes to health. The *Phaedo*'s emphasis on balanced opposites is converted into *Timaeus*' celebration of proportional difference. In *Timaeus*, where disease is caused by differences, health is correspondingly a matter of remaining in or recovering a state of self-sameness. The treatment program here is a regime of exercising body and soul in due proportion, which sorts out and balances what is the same and what is different. The meta-opposition of Sameness and Difference, which produces the *stasis* of the primordial *khôra* and which the god eventually composes into the harmonious cosmos, also governs the establishment of health in the human body. The myth of the earth in *Phaedo* illustrates the model of internalizing and balancing the meta-opposition; in *Timaeus*, the cosmos provides the model of how to properly exercise body and soul to restore their proportionality of Sameness and Difference.

In final but significant coincidence, *Timaeus*' very first word is "*astheneia*", sickness (17a)—the same word used in *Phaedo* to describe the human condition in the myth, as well as to explain Plato's absence (p. 58-60, above). This repetition is probably what caused the ancient commentator Dercylidas to conclude that the absent interlocutor in *Timaeus* is again Plato.³ Though the identity of the absent fourth is at best a matter of rigorous guessing, the significance of his *astheneia* can be more productively examined. Stylistically, the opening sickness foreshadows the final catalogue of diseases: the accidental and unwilling absence of the fourth interlocutor is finally explained, like other diseases, in terms of the universal force of difference. His illness is also the marker of the difference between "yesterday's" discussion and "today's." This difference incurs a debt that the others must not fail to repay (17b). However, as in *Phaedo*, *astheneia* is an unwilling condition that rescues the patient from full responsibility for his absence—an important theme in Plato's description of diseases of the soul. As the human sickness of *Phaedo* accounts for Cebes' residual skepticism about their discussion, in *Timaeus* the sick and absent fourth stands for all that cannot be known and said. So our narrator reminds us to be content with the "likely account."

This reliance on probability seems to chart a moderate course between the aporia of philosophy and the flattering reassurances of rhetoric. In this dialogue, Timaeus reprises the concern with the ill effects of rhetoric of *Phaedo* and *Gorgias*, saying that bad speeches exacerbate illnesses of the soul (87a). However, his focus here is more physical and metaphysical than social and political. The local conditions of illness, whether it is exposure

³ Other guesses about the fourth's identity include Philolaos (Burnet and Taylor), Theaetetus (Aristocles) and Cleitophon (Ptolemy). In John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 10-11. The wisest commentators, from Proclus to Cornford, have refrained from speculation on this subject. However, for a stimulating account that hypothesizes that the absent individual is Alcibiades, see Laurence Lampert and Christopher Planeaux, "Who's Who in Plato's 'Timaeus-Critias' and Why", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 52.1 (1998): 119. Their account has the additional virtue of connecting the opening illness to war (*stasis*), but remains inconclusive.

to sophistry and tyranny or bad air, interests him far less than the ultimate principles that govern both the micro and macrocosms.

That is perhaps the greatest similarity of the dialogues. In *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, the picture of the universe tells us both why and how to achieve the health of the human soul. In *Phaedo* the myth motivates us to avoid hell and ascend to the disease-free heaven, by internalizing and balancing disease-causing opposites. The “likely story” of *Timaeus* ends with the explicit instruction to imitate motions of Sameness and Difference to repair the disproportions of body and soul, lest the ill-health of our soul causes us to be reincarnated in “lower” forms like women and animals. In both, too, the picture of the universe explains why and how we are always, already, the disease.

Chapter 3: Disease as the Expression of Difference in *Timaeus*

Abstract: This chapter focuses on the catalogue of diseases that concludes the *Timaeus*, Plato's dialogue about the genesis of the cosmos. I argue that *difference* is the unseen principle underlying Timaeus' analysis and classification of diseases; in tandem, *sameness* is the principle of health. According to Timaeus, diseases are caused by (1) differences at the level of the composition of the body, (2) disruptions in the sequential formation of the body's parts, (3) irregularities in the passage of air, bile, and phlegm, and (4) disproportions in and between body and soul. These differences are often represented through the metaphor of conflict or *stasis*. Health, on the other hand, is the "safety" guaranteed by remaining self-same in each of these respects. Timaeus' treatment focuses on restoring the sameness of parts and wholes by establishing the right proportions among them. This focus on the role of Sameness and Difference has the local merit of clarifying Timaeus' obscure taxonomy of disease. More broadly, it reveals the connection of the discussion of diseases to the dialogue as a whole. Like the *khôra* and the Demiurge's cosmic construction, human well-being is governed by the motions of Sameness and Difference. Indeed, rightly identifying what is the same and what is different is the lofty task of intelligence, whether of the human or world soul. Understood in relation to Sameness and Difference, Timaeus' speech on health and disease exhibits the dialogue's celebrated parallelism of micro- and macrocosm, and ultimately substantiates the coherence of the Divine and Necessary causes laid out in the first two parts of his speech.

I. Introduction

Of the three dialogues selected in this study, the connection between disease and difference is clearest of all in the *Timaeus*. The dialogue opens with a trace of disease that marks the difference of the day's conversation (17a), and it closes with a catalogue of diseases organized by the type of difference that causes them (82a-88c). Despite the prominence of Sameness and Difference (and Being) as the prime components of the universe, the relationship of physical disorders to the philosophical principle has never been seen, and its significance is not immediately obvious. In general, the role of disease in the cosmological dialogue has long been neglected; when it is addressed, it has been understood as derivative¹ or philosophically unimportant.² Harold Miller is surely right

¹ The old commentary by R.D. Archer-Hind covers precursors like Philistion, Celsus, and the Hippocratics, as well as Plato's medical legacy as inherited by Aristotle and Galen. *The Timaeus of Plato* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1888). A.E. Taylor sees in the section on disease as elsewhere the combination of Pythagorean and Empedoclean ideas, and speculates that T. is reproducing the theories of Philolaos. *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 587-589. Francis Cornford notes the similarities with Diocles, suggesting a common influence by Philistion and a shared root in the four qualities of Empedocles, rather than the four humors commonly associated with Hippocratic doctrine. *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of*

that we fail to do justice to Plato if we think he plagiarizes some medical writer. But whereas Miller finds that he is primarily interested in the *physical* principles that cause disease, I suggest that Plato's truly essential concern is with the *metaphysical* or eidetic principles underlying disease.³ In this chapter, I argue that the theory of health and disease in *Timaeus* depends upon and develops Plato's concepts of Sameness and Difference, respectively. By revealing the connection of disease and health to these cosmic principles, I clarify the structure and purpose of the section on disease, as well as reveal a new degree of the parallelism between microcosm and macrocosm for which the *Timaeus* has long been celebrated.

The connection between disease and difference is thickened and enriched by doubling the metaphor. Plato takes up the common Greek association between disease (*nosos*) and internal conflict (*stasis*)⁴ and tacks both to the concept of difference.⁵ For instance, he equates *disease* with the *conflict* of the components of the body, while elucidating the cause as some *difference* in the body's composition (82a1-7). Or, elsewhere, he explains that *difference* in the cosmos would lead to *conflict* and *disease*, and decay (33a1-b1); instead the god chose to make a single universe. Interchanging the vocabulary of disease and war is not new, though Plato "carries the politicization of the body much further" than his predecessors, as G.E.R. Lloyd points out.⁶ The disease-battle analogy is also still with us, though we tend to think of the disease as an Other (virus or bacteria) within us, rather than the body divided against itself. Over time, the connection between the physical and political body has become so intuitive that it resists good analysis. It seems to me that in *Timaeus*, the conflation of disease and war supports Plato's theory that

Plato (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1937), 334. Vivian Nutton notes the similarities to and departures from Philistion, and traces the continuing influence of the medical ideas in *Timaeus*. *Ancient Medicine (2nd edition)*, (London: Routledge, 2013), esp. pp. 116-119.

² I am happy to be a part of a recent uptick in interest in disease's philosophical dimensions, with the recent appearance of Brian D. Prince, "The Metaphysics of Bodily Health and Disease in Plato's *Timaeus*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22.5 (2014), and Laura Grams, "Medical Theory in Plato's *Timaeus*," *Rhizai. A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* VI.2 (2009): 161-192. An earlier predecessor was Laurent Ayache, "Est-il vraiment question d'art medical dans la *Timée*?" in *Interpreting the Timaeus-Critias*, eds. Thomas Calvo and Luc Brisson, (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1997), 55-64.

³ Harold Miller, "The Aetiology of Disease in Plato's *Timaeus*," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 93 (1962): 177.

⁴ I will generally translate *stasis* as "conflict", which should be understood as a general term for a violent encounter. Typical translations include "civil war" and "revolution"; also "party formed for seditious purposes, faction; division, dissent" (LSJ, III). Kostas Kalimtzis explains the difficulty of transporting the word out of the ancient Greek *poleis*: "The events that *stasis* described were very diverse, from the slaughter of political opponents and their families, to political disputes of every variety and shade of expression.... The modern political vocabulary of conflict, which includes terms like 'revolution,' 'civil discord,' 'strife,' 'sedition,' is inadequate, because each of these captures only a portion of the many meanings that the Greeks had assigned to the word, and each suggests meanings that the original term does not always suggest." *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 3-4.

⁵ To provide a few of the *loci classici*: Solon, Frag 3, "Eunomia", 17-20; Herotodus 5.28.15-17; Thucydides 2.47.2-3, 3.82. In the opening of Homer's *Iliad*, the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon is the root cause of the plague sent by Apollo (Book I). See also Kalimtzis, *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease*, 1-13; G.E.R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7; Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 25.

⁶ Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease*, 156.

diseases are caused by all kinds of differences, rather than the Hippocratic theory of opposites (which are only one type of extreme difference). At the same time, the double metaphor offers us a double-handed vessel (like the classic Greek *amphoreus*) for grasping the abstract idea of difference, which plays a crucial role in the dialogue. The twofold metaphor is not only richer, but very appropriate. Plato insists in *Timaeus* as elsewhere that an explanation should resemble that which it explains.⁷ So just as difference has a necessarily dual or multiple nature—because it is the difference between two or more things—it too has a dual image. As I pursue the connection between disease and difference in this chapter, I will point out how the metaphor of *stasis* for *nosos* doubles the bond, intensifying the urgency of the struggle for health and clarifying the nature of difference.

I begin this task at the end, examining the theory of bodily health and disease that concludes the dialogue. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to showing how disease is caused by conflictual difference, how health is defined by guarding the self-sameness of an entity, and how sameness and difference organize the hitherto confusing account (II). *Timaeus'* closing recommendations for health hinge on imitating and assimilating the way that Sameness and Difference work in the *khôra* and the universe. I sketch the role of these concepts in the macrocosm and highlight the parallels with the theory of disease (III). I conclude that to compose (*sunistêmi*) something, whether the singular universe or of the healthy self, is an act of making-like (resemblance, imitation)—that is, the arrangement of likenesses and differences in ideal proportion. Disease, on the other hand, is the ongoing, generative conflict (*stasis*) within the composition (*sustasis*). Healthy, self-same composition and diseased, differentiating decomposition are the two axes that give the measure of the universal Living Thing and human life alike (IV).

Dialogue Overview

The legendary status of the *Timaeus* is partially indicated by the fact that it is the only Platonic dialogue which necessitated its own verb: Τίμαιογράφω, to write a *Timaeus*. Even though the verb was coined to relate the old tale that Plato borrowed its contents from elsewhere⁸, the authenticity of the dialogue has almost never been called into question.⁹ Often the dialogue is believed to be a part of an unfinished trilogy, together with the fragment of the *Critias* and a nonexistent *Hermocrates*, the two other characters, along with Socrates, of the dialogue. The dialogue itself falls into three unequal parts, and the number three features significantly throughout.¹⁰ First comes a prelude in which Socrates briefly reprises “yesterday’s conversation”, which includes several key precepts of the ideal

⁷ Anne Freire Ashbaugh convincingly argues that *Timaeus* requires the *explanans* to resemble the *explanandum*, or for the explanation and thing explained to be “verisimilar.” In Plato’s terms, *Timaeus'* likely story (*eikos muthos* or *eikos logos*) is an appropriate vehicle for cosmogony because the cosmos itself is an image (*eikôn*) of the eternal Living Thing. Ashbaugh, *Plato's Theory of Explanation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

⁸ Probably apocryphal. The satirist Timon of Phlius, fr. 828. καὶ σὺ, Πλάτων· καὶ γὰρ σε μαθητεῖς πόθος ἔσχεν, πολλῶν δ' ἀργυρίων ὀλίγην ἠλλάξαο βίβλον, ἔνθεν ἀπαρχόμενος τιμαιογραφεῖν ἐδιδάχθης. “You too, Plato! After all, you were seized by desire to learn, and for a great deal of silver you acquired a little book, beginning from which you were taught to “write a *Timaeus*.””

⁹ Taylor, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, 1.

¹⁰ Sallis, *Chorology*, 7-9.

city described in books II-V of *Republic*, such as the division of classes, the role and education of the philosopher kings, and the unusual organization of women and the family. What Socrates now wishes is to see such a theoretical city come to life and see how it conducts war (19b-20c). Next, in response to this desire, Critias tells an abbreviated story of a forgotten war between Athens and Atlantis, offering that ancient Athens as a model and actuality of the city Socrates has imagined. The group's plan, he says, is that Timaeus should speak first, beginning with the origin of the world and concluding with the nature of man. No mention is made of any contribution by Hermocrates. Only when Critias has Timaeus' report, along with Socrates' account of the education of the philosopher kings, will he be able to tell the full story of Atlantis as actual historical fact (20c-27d).

The rest of the dialogue, by far the majority, is devoted to Timaeus carrying out his part of this scheme. In three stages, he gives a "likely account" of how the universe and its creatures came to be.¹¹ In the first part of his discourse (29d-47e), he tells of a divine craftsman (the Demiurge) who creates a single and whole universe as a Living Thing, on the model of some truly eternal paradigmatic Living Thing. Out of his innate goodness, the god builds the world soul out of a mixture of Being, Sameness, and Difference, each including an unpartitioned, partitioned, and intermediate form; and then the world's body out of a proportionate mixture of all the fire, earth, water, and air. In the second part of his speech (48a-69a), Timaeus explains that the universe is a hybrid of the divine Intellect and the force of Necessity. This force manifests in the *khôra*, or space, which holds the invisible chaos of pre-elemental traces. Following the law of like-to-like and different-from-different, a shaking motion sorts the chaos into the four regions that the God organizes into the four elements. These elements are constituted out of two kinds of right-angled triangles, whose geometric properties govern their characteristics and inter-transformations.

In the third and final part of Timaeus' "likely account" (69a-92c), he promises to combine the two types of cause he has already discussed, divine intelligence and the wanderings of necessity. He briefly recaps how the god gave order to the universe, and how his auxiliary gods imitated him to create humans. Then he gives a detailed exposition of the healthful arrangement of the human body and soul, followed by an equally careful catalogue of human dysfunctions. The section and the dialogue as a whole close with Timaeus' recommendations for preserving health, and a description of how diseases of the soul ultimately generate new forms of life.

Commentators¹ have struggled to explain the relation of Socrates' and Critias' two introductory speeches to Timaeus' substantive discourse, but perhaps the contrast rather than the relation is the first lesson. The speeches differ in the kind of knowledge they present, their subject matter, and the temporal index of that subject. Speaking theoretically, Socrates describes an ideal *polis* of the future. Critias, presenting his war story as actual fact, projects that ideal backwards into the forgotten past. And Timaeus, demurring to give more than a "likely account," descends even further back in time to explain the ultimate origin of the universe. With this series, I take Plato to mean something like, "This is what *would have to be true* about the universe in order for the story of Atlantis and Socrates' ideal city to be able to be(come) true." For the philosopher-kings to be the legitimate rulers

¹¹ Likely story: *eikos logos* or *eikos muthos*. Plato uses *muthos* at 29d, d, 30b, 59c; *logos* at 29c, 53d, 55d, 56a, 56b, 57d. On the difference and possible transition between these two modes, see John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 97 n6. See also: 72d4-9.

of Kallipolis, it is not enough even to make Critias' legend into history. The authority of wisdom is grounded, for Plato, in the construction of the whole—even if that construction is only likely at best.

The diversity of the three parts of *Timaeus* challenges us to comprehend the ultimate integrity and interconnectedness of all things: the very task of Timaeus' speech. At the same time, its repetitions, especially of the number three, promise us we will find a pattern if we look. The dialogue has long been understood to express of the reflection of the macrocosm in the microcosm. This study of the role of diseases in the dialogue reveals that it is the concepts of Sameness and Difference that connect and coordinate the different scales of meaning.¹² These principles of motion determine everything from the overarching revolutions of the planets to the movements of the elements; from the workings of the intellect to the holistic health and disease of living things. In the cosmos and human being alike, the ongoing war of difference means disease, while health is a matter of remaining self-same.

II. Classification of Diseases

As summarized above, the finale of the *Timaeus* is a detailed catalogue of human diseases and a brief encapsulation of their cures. The density and variety of this section has made it difficult to see its organizing principles and philosophical importance. In what follows, I argue that Timaeus' theory of disease and decay demonstrates the ways that differences affect the body, while his definition of health depends on the body remaining self-same. This represents a departure from Hippocratic and Empedoclean medical theories, which were based around the (im)balance of opposites. Uncovering the principles of Sameness and Difference in the third section reveals its consistency with the preceding discourses on the *khôra* and the creation of the universe. That connection is why Timaeus can claim that the human body, though prone to sickness (*astheneia*), is proof of the coherence of divine and necessary causes.

Timaeus' discussion of decay and growth precedes and foreshadows his theory of disease and health, for this pair of opposites is likewise mapped onto difference and sameness. He explains decay and growth in terms of the atomic triangles that follow the supreme law of the universe: like moves towards like (ἦν τὸ συγγενὲς πᾶν φέρεται πρὸς ἑαυτό, 81a3-4).¹³ In the case of growth, the invisible triangles of the creature's food join their kind within the body, replenishing them and nourishing the creature (81c4-6). At the same time, triangles in its environment draw away their kind, dissolving and dividing (τήκει τε ἀεὶ καὶ διανέμει, 81a5) the creature's body. Environmental attrition by triangles is unavoidable, because there is no void in Timaeus' universe (58b, 80c). Both decay and growth are ongoing, but decay wins out whenever there is more leaving a body than

¹² Luc Brisson and F. Walter Meyerstein interpret this binary as symmetry/complexity, and in this form, see the same principles at work in the Big Bang Theory. *Inventing the universe: Plato's Timaeus, the big bang, and the problem of scientific knowledge*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 10-11.

¹³ The principle of like-to-like also appears in Democritus and Leucippus. Francis Macdonald Cornford, *The Laws of Motion in Ancient Thought: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34-40. In the discussion of *khôra*, Timaeus adds the corollary that the different repels the different. 53a4-7 and below, p. 84.

coming in to replenish it (81b4-5). Timaeus illustrates his hypothesis as a conflict at the atomic level to maintain the uniformity of the body. When a creature is young, its triangles are able to “cut up and dominate” (ἐπικρατεῖ τέμνουσα, 81c5) the entering triangles and assimilate them in order to grow. But when it grows older, its triangles are weak from having fought so many battles (ἀγῶνας, 81c9) over its lifetime. Then:

they are no longer able to cut the entering triangles of the food into conformity with themselves, but are themselves easily divided by those which enter from without. Overpowered in this struggle, every animal decays, and the condition is named ‘old age.’

τὰ μὲν τῆς τροφῆς εἰσιόντα οὐκέτι δύναται τέμνειν εἰς ὁμοιότητα ἑαυτοῖς, αὐτὰ δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν ἕξωθεν ἐπεισιόντων εὐπετῶς διαιρεῖται: φθίνει δὴ πᾶν ζῷον ἐν τούτῳ κρατούμενον, γῆράς τε ὀνομάζεται τὸ πάθος (81d1-4).

Although Timaeus frames the process of decay as following the law of like-to-like, the subtext is that what is not-like—e.g., the triangles that enter from outside (81c3, 81d3)—must be forced to conform, else their difference overpowers the composition of the creature. Thus, the cosmic law of like-to-like is, for living beings, a double-edged sword. Life is the struggle to maintain the homogeneous composition of the body: growth is a temporary victory of assimilation, and decay is the inevitable surrender to difference and division. However, because both nourishment and decay follow the law of like-to-like, both are *kata phusin*, or natural. So decay results in a good death, a pleasant release of the soul from the body (81e1-5). Together, nourishment and decay constitute the intermediate, natural processes between health and disease.

Though diseases are also caused by differences and also portrayed in terms of *stasis*, or conflict, they are unnatural, *para phusin*. Following the discussion of decay and the good death, Timaeus introduces his theory of disease tersely, as though his point is obvious: “How diseases are contracted, I take it, is plain to all” (τὸ δὲ τῶν νόσων ὅθεν συνίσταται, δῆλόν που καὶ παντί, 81e6). The “clarity” (*dêlon*) of this explanation, which has befuddled commentators, comes from its contrast with the preceding topic: whereas decay is results from differences among the atomic triangles, disease results from differences among the more visible elements. We have moved “up” a level in the construction of the universe.

Four basic differences of the arrangement of the elements bring about disorder in the body, but *any* departure from sameness results all kinds of difference and disease, according to Timaeus. Though lengthy, I find it helpful to quote the passage in full before taking it piece by piece.

Since there are four kinds out of which the body has been compounded—earth, fire, water, and air—of these, contrary to nature, there occurs an excess or a deficiency, or a transposition from the native place to that of a stranger. And moreover, since there happens to be in fact more than one kind of fire and the other elements, each might admit a kind that is not appropriate for it. And these and all similar changes bring on conflicts and disease (*staseis kai nosous*). Because each of these occurrences and transpositions of kinds is contrary to nature, the body grows hot as much as it previously was cooled, while what is dry later becomes moist, and so on also with light and heavy, and the body accepts all changes in every way. Indeed, we maintain, only when the same kind is added or removed to the same kind, in the same order and in the same way and in proper proportion,

will that element let the body remain the same as it is by itself, safe and healthy. On the other hand, any element that sounds a wrong note by coming or going outside of these conditions of uniformity will bring on differences of every variety and boundless diseases and degenerations.

τεττάρων γὰρ ὄντων γενῶν ἕξ ὧν συμπέπηγεν τὸ σῶμα, γῆς πυρὸς ὕδατος τε καὶ ἀέρος, τούτων ἢ παρὰ φύσιν πλεονεξία καὶ ἔνδεια καὶ τῆς χώρας μετάστασις ἕξ οἰκείας ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρίαν γιγνομένη, πυρὸς τε αὖ καὶ τῶν ἐτέρων ἐπειδὴ γένη πλείονα ἐνὸς ὄντα τυγχάνει, τὸ μὴ προσῆκον ἕκαστον ἑαυτῷ προσλαμβάνειν, καὶ πάνθ’ ὅσα τοιαῦτα, στάσεις καὶ νόσους παρέχει. παρὰ φύσιν γὰρ ἕκαστου γιγνομένου καὶ μεθισταμένου θερμαίνεται μὲν ὅσα ἂν πρότερον ψύχεται, ξηρὰ δὲ ὄντα εἰς ὕστερον γίγνεται νοτερά, καὶ κοῦφα δὴ καὶ βαρέα, καὶ πάσας πάντη μεταβολὰς δέχεται. μόνως γὰρ δὴ, φαμέν, ταύτῳ κατὰ ταύτῳ καὶ ὡσαύτως καὶ ἀνὰ λόγον προσγιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπογιγνόμενον ἑάσει ταύτῳ ὃν αὐτῷ σῶν καὶ ὑγιᾶς μένειν. ὃ δ’ ἂν πλημμελήσῃ τι τούτων ἐκτὸς ἀπὸν ἢ προσίον, ἀλλοιότητος παμποικίλιας καὶ νόσους φθοράς τε ἀπείρους παρέξεται, 82a1-b7.

Commentators have focused on the first part of this passage, taking excess, deficiency, transposition, and variation of type to constitute the first category of disease, and ignored its last sentences. However, the health of the body depends not only on the elements that compose it, but *how* it is composed. Timaeus first lists the possible differences in the elemental composition of the body. But he broadens his etiology to include other departures from the normal state of the body, including differences of order, manner, and proportion.

More on that in a moment. First it is unavoidable to mention that Plato highlights the connection of disease and difference by interleaving the image of war. Timaeus quite simply and naturally couples *nosos* with *stasis*, so that the two are interchangeable.¹⁴ But also, the three of the four causes he lists have both a political and a physical register. First is *pleonexia*, greed, excess. Solon (a prominent figure in the dialogue and one of the earliest Greek writers to describe *stasis* as *nosos*¹⁵), uses this term in his political diagnoses of the collapse of the city. Plato too invokes this term in *Republic* in connection with injustice and the decline of the city.¹⁶ Alongside *endeia* (want, need), the term evokes the push-pull of class conflict at the core of Athenian political life. The third cause is *metastasis*, from *meta-histêmi*. Like all words with the *stasis* root, this term has both medical and political meanings: for an element or disease to change its seat (as when a cancer *metastasizes*), but also migration of place, vote, division in the senate, change of constitution, and even

¹⁴ In Greek, the copulative *kai* intensifies or heightens the second term, thus “conflicts, namely diseases” or “conflicts, that is diseases.” It can also correct or specify the first term, translating “conflicts or diseases” to denote an interchangeable but intensified case of the first term (not an alternative to it). Smyth 2869-70. Compare *Sophist* 228a: “Perhaps you have not considered that disease and conflict are the same thing?” νόσος ἴσως καὶ στάσις οὐ ταύτῳ νενόμικας. See the Introduction of the present work, p.12.

¹⁵ Solon, Frag 3, “Eunomia”, 17-20. Critias (21c4-d1) reports that Solon received the story of Atlantis from the ancient Egyptians, but never wrote it down, turning instead to statesmanship because of the *stasis* between rich and poor in pre-democratic Athens.

¹⁶ *Rep.* IX, 586b1. Compare also *Laws* 906c: “But we assert that the sin now mentioned, of profiteering or “over-gaining” (*pleonexia*) is what is called in the case of fleshly bodies “disease” (*nosêma*) in that of seasons and years “pestilence” (*loimos*), and in that of states and polities, by a verbal change, this same sin is called “injustice.”

counter-revolution. The effect of employing a vocabulary of war and politics is to intensify the “otherness” of the differences that beset the body. The physical elements are also factions or nations, and every change in their numbers or position is comparable to an increase, decrease, or migration of political-military strength. Such language, it seems to me, dramatizes the struggle to maintain the self-sameness associated with health.¹⁷

Timaeus insists on that self-sameness of the healthy body with striking precision. It is impossible not to notice Plato’s heavy use of (*to*) *auto*, “the same,” using the term six times in four different constructions in the penultimate sentence. He could easily have varied his speech with words like *homoion* (like, similar). Instead, the monotonous repetition hammers home his point: health is a matter of self-sameness. In contrastingly elaborate language, Timaeus pairs “differences of every variety” (ἀλλοιότητος παμποικίλας) with “boundless diseases and degenerations” (καὶ νόσους φθοράς τε ἀπείρους, 82b5-7). *Alloiotêtês*, “difference, otherness”, is a *dis legomenon*, its rarity underlining just how different it is.¹⁸ *Pampoikilas*, “all-variegated, manifold”, is almost superfluous, amplifying the sense of diversity and extending it with the prefix *pan-*, all.¹⁹ When the passage is read in its entirety, therefore, Timaeus is not simply introducing a single category of disease or its four causes. Rather, he is laying the groundwork for the conditions of self-sameness that guarantee health, and the corresponding differences that cause disease.

To be exact, there are four conditions of uniformity that any instance of intake or excretion must fulfill in order to be healthful. What comes or goes (προσιγγνόμενον καὶ ἀπογιγνόμενον) from the body must: 1) be of the same kind, *tauton tautôi*, 2) occur in the same order, *kata tauton*, 3) occur in the same manner, *hôsautôs*, and 4) in the right proportion, *ana logon*. The Greek, with its repetition of *tauto*, is dense and difficult, and the many translations vary widely. It is especially difficult to know how to interpret the second item, *kata tauton*, which might mean nearly anything: it is generically translated “in the same respect”, with a wide range of what the specific respect might be.²⁰ My translation, “in the same order”, is like that of W.R.M. Lamb’s 1925 edition, combining the sense of direction and manner while distinguishing the meaning of *kata tauton* from the adverb

¹⁷ In the reverse case of describing *stasis* as *nosos*, Nicole Loraux diagnoses the opposite result: “Whenever Greek civic thought condemns *stasis*, it must erase its *political* origin -- for example, by assimilating it to an illness (*nosos*) malevolently fallen from the sky -- in order to preserve the consensual form of the political, which is supposedly the political itself. What becomes of Greek consciousness of the political during this rescue operation that looks so much like denial?” Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 25.

¹⁸ Significantly, perhaps, the only other known use is in the Hippocratic corpus, in a text on flatulence, which posits a single form and cause of disease, with different locations responsible for the different manifestations of it: Τῶν δὲ δὴ νόσων ἀπασέων ὁ μὲν τρόπος ὁ αὐτὸς, ὁ δὲ τόπος διαφέρει· δοκεῖ μὲν οὖν τὰ νοσήματα οὐδὲν ἀλλήλοισιν εὐκνεῖναι διὰ τὴν ἀλλοιότητα καὶ ἀνομοιότητα τῶν τόπων. “While the character of all diseases is the same, the site differs. It just seems that the diseases in no way resemble one another because of the extreme difference (*alloiotêta*) and dissimilarity of their positions.” Hippocrates, *de flatibus liber*, 2.

¹⁹ Johansen also notes that “poikilia” is a feature of the beauty of democracy, “adorned with every species of human trait”, in *Rep.* 557c5-7, as well as a feature of the material culture of Atlantis. Thomas Kjeller Johansen, *Plato’s Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20-21.

²⁰ Other possible meanings of *kata tauton* include “the same throughout,” “the same by itself,” “in the same direction,” “for the same purpose,” “in the same way.” LSJ B I-IV. Most translators escape the difficulty but do readers a disservice by not rendering it very precisely as a separate condition.

hōsiautōs, “in the same way.”²¹ Given the range of possibilities, my translation takes its cue from the categories that follow, so that the four ways of being non-self-same reflect a roadmap to Timaeus’ classification of disorders. As we have seen, he first ascribes disease to differences in elemental composition, or failing to be *tauton tautōi* (C1). Second, he describes diseases caused by the reversal of the process of formation, a failure to develop *kata tauton*, in the same respect or order (C2). Third, Timaeus outlines disorders that arise from the manner in which (*hōsiautōs*) air, phlegm, and bile enter or exit (*prosgnomenon kai apognomenon*) the body, or fail to do so (C3). Finally, he discusses the effects of disproportions in body and soul (C4), and recommends exercises to maintain proportionality and health. Only when these four conditions of sameness are met is the body safe, healthy, and self-identical (ταυτόν ὄν αὐτῷ σῶν καὶ ὑγιᾶς, 82b4-5); any departure results in extravagant difference and disease.

A) Diseases of Differences in the Composition of the Body (C1)

In the first place, diseases result from differences in the body’s composition out of the four elements: fire, water, air, and earth. An incoming or outgoing element fails to be *tauton tautōi*, the same as itself, when there is an excess, deficiency, transposition, or variation of kinds, for there is more than one type of fire and the others. Cornford and others suggest that this category is based on Philistion of Locri’s first category of disease, which, however, speaks only of excess and “weakness” of the qualities associated with the elements.²² Instead of a historical precedent, I find that what unites this class is that it deals with irregularities in the elemental composition of the body.²³ The universality of the elements means that this type of cause will necessarily manifest in *all* disorders of the body, but this category does not form a genus to the other “species” of disease that follow.²⁴ The ways of being non-self-same are overlapping and horizontally organized. Within this first category, Plato groups together the first three causes—excess, deficiency, and transposition—with *kai*, suggesting that these are three ideas of the same order. Then, additionally, a fourth type is introduced with *au* (moreover): errors or irregularity of type. This non-incidental conjunction structure²⁵ thus separates the first three causes—irregularities in the quantity or location of the element, or its secondary qualities—from the last cause, which involves irregularities in the primary type of element itself. Together, the four causes serve as a summary of all possible differences in substance or composition: differences of quantity (plus or minus), differences in location, and differences in quality or kind. If we take baking a pie as an analogy, these would be errors like adding too much or too little salt, the filling seeping below the crust, or using bread flour instead of pastry flour.

Timaeus suggests that differences in the elemental composition of the body lead to changes in its qualities.

²¹ LSJ III, IV.

²² Philistion, frag. 4, in Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology*, 333.

²³ As does Laura Grams (2009), 166.

²⁴ As Brian Prince argues (2014), 914-19.

²⁵ Smythe 2878: “in a series of more than two ideas *kai* is used before each, where English would use *and* only before the last.” The *te...kai* in the last clause links fire and the other elements, leaving only “*au*” to denote the relation between the previous three causes and this one. Grams distorts the Greek by grouping excess and lack together as one kind of cause, counting three altogether (2009, 166).

Because each of these occurrences and transpositions of kinds is contrary to nature, the body grows hot as much as it previously was cooled, while what is dry later becomes moist, and so on also with light and heavy, and the body accepts all changes in every way.

παρὰ φύσιν γὰρ ἐκάστου γιγνομένου καὶ μεθισταμένου θερμαίνεται μὲν ὅσα ἂν πρότερον ψύχεται, ξηρὰ δὲ ὄντα εἰς ὕστερον γίγνεται νοτερά, καὶ κοῦφα δὴ καὶ βαρέα, καὶ πάσας πάντη μεταβολὰς δέχεται (82a7-b2).

Although Timaeus invokes the widespread medical framework of the inter-relation of opposites, his language does not restrict diseased changes to the four primary opposites (hot and cold, dry and wet), but also gestures towards the light and heavy and other pairs. Indeed, he may not be committed to differences between opposites in general. Rather, the transition between opposite states seems to say that since these most extreme changes are taking place, *a fortiori* all changes in all directions (πάσας πάντη μεταβολὰς) may also take place.²⁶ Thus, though his four *elements* seem to parallel Empedocles' four roots, he leaves room for the theory of Alcmeon of Croton, who suggested that the domination of any *quality*—moist, dry, cold, hot, bitter, sweet, etc.—leads to disease. When any difference occurs *para phusin*, all changes are possible. This manifold nature of disease also distinguishes it from decay, in which the encounter with difference has only a single effect, the gradual dissolution of the body.

B) Diseases Caused by Differences in the Sequence of Formation (C2)

Changes of composition continue to feature in all kinds of disease, but some disorders are more properly traced to differences or interruptions in *how* the elements are composed. The constitution of all living things “goes through an ordered series of stages” (89b), and diseases occur when this same sequence (*kata tauton*) is not observed. Specifically, diseases in Timaeus' second category are caused by reversals in the process of formation of flesh, sinew, and bone. Commentators have sometimes thought Plato's second category of disease refers simply to diseases in these secondary structures.²⁷ This understandable mistake is corrected by pinpointing the difference and relation between C1 and C2, as described by Timaeus:

Furthermore, since there is a class of secondary structures to be found in nature, anyone who intends to understand diseases will have a second set of subjects to study. Since marrow and bone, flesh and sinew are composed of the elemental stuffs— from which blood has also been formed, though in a different way²⁸— most of the diseases are brought on in the manner just

²⁶ Alcmeon: Longrigg, *Greek Medicine*, III.2, p. 31, and Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 47. On Empedocles' roots, see Longrigg III.14-15, and Nutton 46-7.

²⁷ Cornford uses “diseases of the secondary tissues” as his section heading though he recognizes the cause as reversal of the process of formation, 335; Lloyd also suggests the organs are the primary feature of this category (2003), 154.

²⁸ For how the god made and arranged the bones, sinews, and flesh from marrow see 73b1-75d5. Contra the natural sequence described here, in which marrow is the last and highest product, the god made the marrow first as the starting point and universal seed of life. Timaeus then describes the making of bone, then sinews and flesh. How the gods set up the circulation of blood is discussed at 77c-78e (continuing with the interaction of respiration and blood circulation in the “fish trap”, 78a-79a); blood is described “watering” and replenishing” the parts of the body through the food ingredients in it at 80e-81a.

described [i.e., excess, deficiency, etc.]. However, the gravest and most dangerous diseases are contracted in the following way: *whenever the genesis of these secondary parts proceeds in reverse, then they are corrupted.*

δευτέρων δὴ συστάσεων αὐτὰ κατὰ φύσιν συνεστηκυῶν, δευτέρα κατανόησις νοσημάτων τῷ βουλομένῳ γίγνεται συννοῆσαι. μυελοῦ γὰρ ἐξ ἐκείνων ὅστοῦ τε καὶ σαρκὸς καὶ νεύρου συμπαγέντος, ἔτι τε αἵματος ἄλλον μὲν τρόπον, ἐκ δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν γεγονότος, τῶν μὲν ἄλλων τὰ πλεῖστα ἥπερ τὰ πρόσθεν, τὰ δὲ μέγιστα τῶν νοσημάτων τῆδε χαλεπὰ συμπέπτωκεν: ὅταν ἀνάπαλιν ἢ γένεσις τούτων πορεύηται, τότε ταῦτα διαφθείρεται (82b8-c7).

Diseases of these secondary structures—bone, marrow, sinews and flesh—can still arise from the previously discussed elemental causes, so the body part alone does not determine the “second set of subjects to study.” The second class of diseases is also marked by the severity of the affliction, but many diseases are severe. What defines the distinctiveness of the category is their *cause*: the reversed sequence of formation.²⁹

Timaeus clarifies his point by describing concretely, for the first time, the natural sequential formation of these parts. First, sinew is formed from the fibrous part of the blood; when the remaining blood congeals, flesh develops. Together sinew and flesh produce a sticky oily stuff that glues the flesh to the bone. Lastly, the purest part of this substance filters through the bone and feeds the bone marrow (82c7-e2).³⁰ Then Timaeus repeats: “Now when each of these substances is produced in this order (*kata tauta*), the majority result in health; but when in the reverse order, diseases” (καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα μὲν γιγνομένων ἐκάστων ὑγεία συμβαίνει τὰ πολλά: νόσοι δέ, ὅταν ἐναντίως, 82e1-2). In the reverse process, decaying flesh discharges its waste back into the veins, contaminating them with a great variety of products that leads to the development of many kinds of bile, serum, and phlegm. All of these differences in the blood are “instruments of disease” (νόσων ὄργανα, 83e2), rather than causing or determining the type of disease, as is common in Hippocratic theory.³¹ For Plato, the contaminants are less important than the root cause, which is the divergence from the same sequence that nature intended.

The sequence of formation also determines the severity of the disease. Disorders are more serious when the reversal occurs further along in the proper sequence. Thus, diseases that affect the flesh can be easily healed; worse is when the “glue” that binds flesh to bones is affected; still worse are those diseases that affect the bone, and worst of all is when the marrow becomes diseased (83e-84c). This last case “produces the most serious, the most critically fatal disease, in which all the bodily processes are made to flow backward” (τὰ μέγιστα καὶ κυριώτατα πρὸς θάνατον τῶν νοσημάτων ἀποτελεῖ, πάσης ἀνάπαλιν τῆς τοῦ

²⁹ Prince (914) also correctly interprets this category as diseases of reversed process. In a minor but important variation, Grams understands C2 as diseases caused by “the reversal of nutritive flow” (168-77). This allows her to maintain her emphasis on *motion* (here, inward motion) as the common feature of all three categories, but is not quite right; her term “flow of nutrition” obscures the (more literal) process of generation and confuses this section with the discussion of nourishment and decay that precedes it (80d-81e, p. 70-71 above).

³⁰ The stages of the sequence are marked by clauses beginning with *de* and containing *au*.

³¹ Bile and phlegm were the two most commonly cited of the Hippocratic ‘humors’ (*xumoi*), probably because of their visibility; however, authors differed on whether they alone caused disease, or caused disease in conjunction with other factors, or were normal products of the body and caused disease only when they appeared in excess. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 79-80.

σώματο, 84c). This case is fatal, presumably, because the reversal of all bodily processes causes diseases in all the body's systems and structures. When difference infiltrates at the core, it produces reversals throughout.

This causal theory is unique to Plato. Cornford underlines its singularity: "I cannot find evidence that any medical writer had formulated this notion of a reversal of the normal course of nutrition as the cause of a special class of diseases."³² The innovation on Plato's part, I suggest, results from his philosophical working-out of the types of self-sameness, which led him to posit that a natural *order* of composition as well as a natural arrangement of composition of the body. It is likely, too, that he would showcase his originality in his initial list of the four ways of being self-same. But why does Plato focus on *reversals* of the process of generation, and not merely variations of it? Cornford suggests that it is based on the opposition between growth (*auxêsis*) and decay (*phthisis*). It seems to me that Timaeus' account of the second category of disease helps to explain the way that (unnatural) diseases often accompany the (natural) decay of the human body. When the natural products of decay unnaturally reverse direction and enter the bloodstream, they initiate a backwards process of corruption and disease.

The second category of disease represents a higher-order complication that can be triggered by C1 type changes (eg. 84c, excess or deficiency, and transposition, 83a). For Timaeus, phlegm and bile, which in Hippocratic theory are two of the four disease-causing "humors", are "instruments of disease" arising from a single type of cause: the reversal of the natural order of the body's becoming. They bring disease because they result from some inversion of the natural order of things. Plato's innovation in positing this category of disease results from distinguishing disease-causing differences in substance (excess, deficiency, transposition, variety) from differences in the process of composition, which are gradated based on how deeply the natural process is affected.

C) Diseases Caused by Differences in Manner of Entry and Exit (C3)

The third category of disease situates the body in its environment, and emphasizes the manner (*hôsiautôs*) in which air, phlegm, and bile enter and exit the body, or fail to do so. It may initially be confusing when Timaeus introduces the third class of diseases, itself threefold: diseases coming to be from air, from phlegm, and from bile (84c8-d2). The confusion comes from the fact that Timaeus has already spoken of bile (83b9-c8), and phlegm (83c9-e2), and their interaction with air (83d1-6). Furthermore, bile and phlegm are only two of the four Hippocratic humors, and it is unclear what they have in common with *pneuma*, air, which has a natural and positive function in the body. Professor Grams makes good headway when she suggests that diseases of this category result from the blocked removal of these waste products, rather than the substances themselves. However, this characterization makes a serious omission: it fails to notice that these diseases also arise when such substances enter or exit in the wrong way.³³ Instead, I suggest that the

³² Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 336.

³³ "The single cause uniting the third class is the failure to purge destructive elements or fluids through the normal channels," 177. Grams' theory also must face the problem that air is not a destructive element, nor is it a purging mechanism as she wishes to suggest (178-9). Zeyl (2000) lxiv also characterizes these diseases as arising through blockages; Longrigg (1988) 113, and Miller (1962) 184, distinguish them on the basis of the bodily structures involved.

class character (*triton eidos*) of this type of diseases comes from the *manner* in which these substances or elements enter or exit the body. They cause disease because they fail to come and go in a like manner (ὡσαύτως προσγιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπογιγνόμενον, 82b3-4) to the body's natural rhythms.

The breath is Timaeus' entry into these diseases of passage. "When the lungs, the dispensers of air to the body, are obstructed by humors, they do not permit a clear passage" (ὅταν μὲν γὰρ ὁ τῶν πνευμάτων τῷ σώματι ταμίας πλεύμων μὴ καθαρὰς παρέχη τὰς διεξόδους ὑπὸ ῥευμάτων φραχθεῖς, 84d2-4). The issue is not that the lungs block the breath entirely, but that the passageways (*diexodous*) are not clear (*katharas*), distorting the proper flow of air. In such cases, two things might occur. In some cases, the breath fails to enter where it should, causing the body to rot (84d5). In other places, too much air enters, "forces its way through the veins and twists them together like strands" (τῶν φλεβῶν διαβιαζόμενον καὶ συνεπιστρέφον, 84d6). The excess of air continues until it reaches and is trapped in at the midriff, where it causes the dissolution of the body and "countless painful diseases" (μυρία δὴ νοσήματα ἐκ τούτων ἀλγεινὰ, 84e1). Instead of air passing naturally through the body in respiration, an excess of sweat exits the body (84e2).

Then there are the cases when air forms within the body from the decay of flesh, and is unable to exit (84e2-5). These cause swelling, stretching, and the stiffness and spasms of lockjaw tetanus (84e9), which is known today for interfering with the ability to breathe. In short, air causes disease through its failure to enter and arrive where it is needed; through its excessive entry and its distorting passage through the veins, and only in the last instance by being trapped or blocked from exiting. The common element then is *not* the blockage of air, but is best described as disorders in the coming and going of air.

Similarly, white phlegm is dangerous "when hemmed in" (*apolambainô*, 85a1), and also, though more mildly, when it "has vents to the outside" or "recovers its breath" (τὸ δὲ λευκὸν φλέγμα διὰ τὸ τῶν πομφολύγων πνεῦμα χαλεπὸν ἀποληφθέν, ἔξω δὲ τοῦ σώματος ἀναπνοᾶς ἴσχον ἢ πῶτερον μὲν, 85a1-3). In the first case it creates air bubbles; in the second, it engenders white leprosy spots. When phlegm is mixed with black bile and scattered it disrupts the divine circuits of the brain, causing epilepsy (85a6).³⁴ Phlegm is literally the fountain (*pégê*) from which comes all diseases of catarrhs, or the passage of fluids (φλέγμα δ' ὄξυ καὶ ἀλμυρὸν πηγὴ πάντων νοσημάτων ὅσα γίγνεται καταρροϊκά, 85b4-5). The many places it flows into give rise to its many names. Like diseases that arise through air, phlegm is dangerous when blocked, when vented, when scattered in the brain, or when it flows out into various places—the essential factor is a disorder in the way that it flows.

Like air and phlegm, bile is toxic whether it is vented to produce boils and tumors, or shut up to cause inflammations (85b5-7).³⁵ It affects the fibers in the blood that preserve the balance of thickness and thinness. When bile "overpowers" those fibers, it penetrates to the very marrow to loosen the soul to death (κρατήσασσα, 85e1). In the other case, when the body is more powerful than the bile, the invader "is expelled from the body like an exile

³⁴ The Hippocratic text "On the Sacred Disease" also explains epilepsy by way of phlegm. There the cause is the excess retention of phlegm that blocks respiration, but its passage to particular parts of the body determines its expression and effects. "On the Sacred Disease", in G.E.R. Lloyd, *Hippocratic Writings* (Penguin, 1983), §7-10, p. 241-44.

³⁵ Despite the name (*phlegmainein*), inflammations are caused not by *phlegma* but *kholê*. Archer-Hind, *The Timaeus of Plato*, 319 n19.

from a city in civil strife”, producing diarrhea, dysentery, and other similar maladies (οἷον φυγὰς ἐκ πόλεως στασιασάσης ἐκ τοῦ σώματος ἐκπίπτουσα, 83e10-86a1). Note that the expulsion is not seen as the end or remedy of the strife, but as bringing diseases of excessive flow. Hence, diseases of this subkind, too, are best understood not as blockages of substances that should be expelled, but as disorders resulting from the manner in which those substances enter or exit the body, or fail to do so.

Classifying disease by causes is a messy business, for behind a single disease may be a concatenation of causes. For example, the bile, when confined, mixes with the blood and leads to a *deficiency* of the fibers that maintain the proper *proportion* of density in the blood (*summetrôs*, 85c4). So we see that the other causes still play a role in C3 diseases, even though the first, superseding factor is the manner of passage of bile, air, or phlegm.

D) Diseases of the Soul Caused by Differences in the Body (C1, C2, and C3)

Timaeus' fourth and greatest category will concern those diseases caused by disproportions between and within body and soul. However, as the vehicle of the soul, the bad condition of the body can also lead to psychic diseases, irrespective of proportionality. Instead, the same three causes that lead to the physical disorders discussed above have corresponding illnesses of the soul. By way of transition, he says, “So that is the way that bodily diseases arise, while psychic diseases [that] come from the condition of the body [arise] in the following way” (καὶ τὰ μὲν περὶ τὸ σῶμα νοσήματα ταύτη συμβαίνει γιγνόμενα, τὰ δὲ περὶ ψυχὴν διὰ σώματος ἔξιν τῆδε, 86b1-2.) The Greek may be taken in either a strong sense to mean *all* diseases of psyche arise from a bodily condition (ignoring the words in brackets), or in an attenuated sense to mean a subset of psychic diseases that arise from the body, as Christopher Gill points out.³⁶ He argues for the stronger meaning, while Cornford qualifies that “it is not stated that *all* mental disorders are *solely* due to bodily states.”³⁷ Despite the generality of the discussion of psychic diseases that follows, I think this is a due reminder— given that Timaeus goes on to discuss diseases of soul that arise from a disproportion with the body, rather than bodily condition as such. What is important about this opening sentence is that it establishes a basis for the parallelism between the categories of bodily disease and the diseases of the soul. Like Laura Grams, I see these diseases of the soul following the pattern laid out in the three categories above (even though, as I have noted above, we differ in some details about what those categories are). And, as in the strictly bodily diseases, there is some overlap in the categories.³⁸ In general, Timaeus takes as given that mindlessness or witlessness (*anoia*) is a disease of the soul; and that *mania* (madness) or *amathia* (ignorance or inability to learn) are the two species of mindlessness (86b2-5). Then he sets out to describe bodily disorders that give rise to either or both of these.

The gravest of the causes of bodily-induced psychic diseases are excessive pleasures and pains: the “elements”, as it were, of the connection between body and soul. Heedless pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain prevents humans from seeing and hearing

³⁶ Christopher Gill, “The Body's Fault? Plato's *Timaeus* on Psychic Illness” in MR Wright (ed.), *Reason and Necessity: Essays on Plato's Timaeus* (London: Duckworth, 2000): 59-84.

³⁷ Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 346.

³⁸ Grams (2009), 183-4.

rightly— those two senses, which, when directed toward the heavens and harmonies, align us with the rational order of the cosmos. As a result, someone who indulges such excesses enters into a frenzy, altogether lacking reason (λυττῶ δὲ καὶ λογισμοῦ μετασχεῖν ἤκιστα τότε δὴ δυνατός, 86c2-3). Excessive pleasure and pain, paralleling the excess elements of C1, lead to madness, and so must be called a disease.

Sexual intemperance is a type of madness related to excesses of pleasure and pain. But more specifically, its disease nature comes from the flow of sperm (a part of marrow) from the bones: “in truth, sexual intemperance is a disease of the soul, for the most part arising from a single substance which, owing to the porosity of the bones, flows within the body and moistens it” (τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς ἢ περὶ τὰ ἀφροδίσια ἀκολασία κατὰ τὸ πολὺ μέρος διὰ τὴν ἐνὸς γένους ἔξιν ὑπὸ μανότητος ὀστέων ἐν σώματι ῥυώδη καὶ ὑγραίνουσιν νόσος ψυχῆς γέγονεν, 86d). This is the reverse of how the god constructed it: Timaeus said earlier that “to preserve all of the seed, [the god] fenced it in with a stony enclosure” (καὶ τὸ πᾶν δὴ σπέρμα διασώζων οὕτως λιθοειδεῖ περιβόλῳ συνέφραξεν, 74a4-5). Incontinence is thus based in the C2 type of difference-disease.

The wandering passage of phlegm and bile cause excessive pains and lead to a great variety of soul-diseases, in an example of a blending of C3 and C1 categories. The unique and constitutive disease factor is the wandering and blocking of phlegm and bile that was the signature of C3:

Whenever any of a man’s acid and briny phlegms or any bitter and bilious humors wander up and down his body without finding a vent to the outside and remain pent up inside, they mix the vapor that they give off with the motion of the soul and so are confounded with it. So they produce all sorts of diseases of the soul, some more intense and some more frequent than others.

ἔτου γὰρ ἂν ἢ τῶν ὀξέων καὶ τῶν ἀλυκῶν φλεγμάτων καὶ ὅσοι πικροὶ καὶ χολώδεις χυμοὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα πλανηθέντες ἔξω μὲν μὴ λάβωσιν ἀναπνοὴν ἐντὸς δὲ εἰλλόμενοι, τὴν ἀφ’ αὐτῶν ἀτμίδα τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς φορᾶ συμμείζαντες ἀνακερασθῶσι, παντοδαπὰ νοσήματα ψυχῆς ἐμποιοῦσι μᾶλλον καὶ ἥττον καὶ ἐλάττω καὶ πλείω, (86e5-87a3).

Though it remains unclear exactly how the bodily products of bile and phlegm, even vaporized, might mix with the motions of the soul, it is clear that Timaeus thinks that the same disorders of passage that resulted in fevers, tumors, and leprous spots can also produce disorders in the soul. Just as the location of phlegm produced different types of catarrhs, the location of the vapors produces different ailments such as bad temper (*duskolia*), melancholy (*dusmuthia*), recklessness (*thrasutês*), cowardice (*deilia*), forgetfulness (*lêthê*) and stupidity (*dusmathia*) (87a5-b1).³⁹

Although all these psychic diseases are rooted in the condition of the body, Timaeus also adds that they can be worsened by poor education, bad government and bad speeches (86e2, 87a7-b8). He thus anticipates the nature/nurture paradigm of illness, while weighting his account significantly towards nature. In both respects, however, the point is that we fall ill unwillingly. “Unwillingness” is a crucial feature of Plato’s account of disease,

³⁹ Archer-Hind rightly understands these disorders as arising from attacks on the three sites of the soul: attacking the liver gives rise to *duskolia* and *dusmathia*; attacking the heart, *thrasutês* and *deilia*; attacking the brain, *lêthê* and *dusmathia*. He traces the idea that mental deformities arise from physical deformities to Socrates via Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, III, xii, 6. *Timaeus of Plato*, 326n8.

making it a good excuse for why the fourth interlocutor is absent from the discussion of Timaeus: “not willingly would he have missed our meeting” (οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐκὼν τῆσδε ἀπελείπετο τῆς συνουσίας, 17a4-5). However, then as now the label of “disease” gives rise to discussions about moral responsibility. For Timaeus, the long and short of it is that we are not responsible for our vices/diseases, though we *are* responsible for becoming better:

it is the begetters far more than the begotten, and the nurturers far more than the nurtured, that bear the blame for all this. Even so, one should make every possible effort to flee from badness, whether with the help of one’s upbringing or the pursuit or studies one undertakes, and to seize its opposite.

ὧν αἰτιατέον μὲν τοὺς φυτεύοντας ἀεὶ τῶν φυτευομένων μᾶλλον καὶ τοὺς τρέφοντας τῶν τρεφομένων, προθυμητέον μὴν, ὅπη τις δύναται, καὶ διὰ τροφῆς καὶ δι’ ἐπιτηδευμάτων μαθημάτων τε φυγεῖν μὲν κακίαν, τούναντίον δὲ ἐλεῖν (87b4-8).

Timaeus regards this tantalizing nub of moral discourse “as subject for another speech” ταῦτα μὲν οὖν δὴ τρόπος ἄλλος λόγων (87b8-9); perhaps a gesture towards the guidelines for education of the philosopher-kings in *Republic*. Here he stays focused on the physical (and metaphysical) principles of disease and health. Now that he has isolated diseases of the soul caused by disruptions of bodily composition, processes, and flows, he can turn toward those diseases that involve changes in the proportional relationships of body and soul.

E) Diseases of Disproportion

Properly speaking, the subject of proportionality arises only when Timaeus turns from diseases to the therapies that can “save” (σώζεται, 87c2) the body and soul from the three causes of disease and conflict discussed so far. Invoking both the moral principles of good and the aesthetic criterion of beauty, Timaeus applies them to animal life: “Everything that is good is beautiful, and what is beautiful is not disproportionate. Hence we must take it that if a living creature is to be in good condition, it will be well-proportioned” (πᾶν δὴ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καλόν, τὸ δὲ καλὸν οὐκ ἄμετρον: καὶ ζῶον οὖν τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐσόμενον σύμμετρον θετέον, 87c4-5). Balance is a nearly universal standard among the various Greek theories of health⁴⁰, and also a common aesthetic principle. As usual, however, Plato innovates on the theme. For him, a healthy balance does not only involve the elements, the excess and deficiency of which has been adequately covered by C1 causes of disease. Instead, his discussion of proportionality includes the balance among the parts of the body, among the parts of soul, and between the body and soul together.

The idea of a proportionality between body and soul is the most novel, and for Timaeus the most important. He seamlessly combines the question of health of the body and virtue of the soul under the rubric of symmetry or measure:

We can distinctly perceive the smaller proportions, and so calculate them, but the great and most consequential proportions we are unable to calculate.

⁴⁰ Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 47-48, 80-82. The origin of the idea is usually attributed to Alcmeon of Croton, who posited health as an “isonomia” of the body’s forces (see n26, this chapter). See also e.g. *The Nature of Man* (4), in which health is discussed as the proportion of humors.

In determining health and disease or virtue and vice, no proportion or lack of it is more important than that between the soul itself and body itself.

συμμετριῶν δὲ τὰ μὲν σμικρὰ διαισθανόμενοι συλλογίζομεθα, τὰ δὲ κυριώτατα καὶ μέγιστα ἀλογίστως ἔχομεν. πρὸς γὰρ ὑγιείας καὶ νόσους ἀρετᾶς τε καὶ κακίας οὐδεμία συμμετρία καὶ ἀμετρία μείζων ἢ ψυχῆς αὐτῆς πρὸς σῶμα αὐτό (87c6-d3).

Timaeus here declares that the proportions of body and soul, being of the more important sort, will not be subject to the precise calculations of intervals that characterized the mixture of the world soul and the creation of the elements.⁴¹ Instead he refers in general terms to an overstrong soul, which can churn the body, filling it with disease, or wear it out with excessive studying (87e-88a). As in the case of bodily diseases, Timaeus again invokes the analogy of conflict, describing how an overstrong soul may engage in “verbal battles” (μάχας ἐν λόγοις, 88a) that inflame and rock the body. Here we have a different case from above: instead of the body affecting the soul with disease, the overstrong soul produces discharges in the body that “trick most doctors into making erroneous diagnoses” (τῶν λεγομένων ἰατρῶν ἀπατῶσα τοὺς πλείστους, τὰνάϊται αἰτιᾶσθαι ποιεῖ, 88a6-7). Presumably, the mistake doctors make is to treat the body alone, instead of perceiving that the cause here is the imbalance between body and soul.

In the opposite case, of an overstrong body, the bodily desires render the soul dull, stupid, and forgetful, “thereby bringing on the gravest disease of all, ignorance” (τὴν μεγίστην νόσον ἀμαθίαν, 88b5). This is the second time Timaeus has singled out ignorance (*amathia*) as the worst disease. The other instance, at 44c1-2, is also a case of the soul being overwhelmed by the body’s *pathêmata*, or sensations. Though it is an exaggeration to say that for Plato the body is a disease, here as elsewhere the state of being embodied leaves us vulnerable not only to physical decay but to diseases of the soul, brought on by the confusing effect of pleasures, pains, and sensations in general. As the worst disease, ignorance also represents the highest stake of Timaeus’ argument: ignorance is the disaster his treatment can save us from. For what really interests Timaeus about proportionality is not the diseases caused by its lack, but its capacity to heal and restore the body to health.

III. Timaeus’ Treatment

For the myriad of diseases he describes, Timaeus recommends a single course of treatment. All types of imbalance, whether in the soul, the body, or between the two, can be remedied by appropriately proportioned exercise. His medical recommendations are a reflection and summation of the entire dialogue. In the case of physical exercise, Timaeus encourages us to imitate the motions of the *khôra* (space, earth): the primordial medium from which the Demiurge composes the universe. To exercise the soul, we should imitate the revolutions of the heavens, representing the thoughts and motions of the entire cosmos.

⁴¹ The mixture of Being, Sameness, and Difference are divided into seven portions that are in a precise proportionate relationship to each other, which form the basis for the orbits of the planets. 35e-36-d. See Donald Zeyl, *Plato’s Timaeus* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 20-21 n25, n26. The God makes the elements as proportionate to one another as possible (32b, 56c), from two basic right-angled triangles selected for the proportions of their sides and angles (53d-56c).

The true beauty and parallelism of his account comes to the fore in these recommendations. The human body should vibrate like the proto-earth, and the human psyche should synchronize with the world soul. In effect, Timaeus' treatment program calls us to replicate the cosmic balance of necessity and divinity in the microcosm of the human. At the most fundamental level, whether in both body, soul, and cosmos, achieving a healthy balance involves knowing how to sort out Sameness and Difference.

Timaeus' most original contribution to medicine is to insist that health requires a proportion between body and soul. As quoted above, he introduces his discussion of treatment with the importance of proportionality in general, while emphasizing that: "In determining health and disease or virtue and vice, no proportion or lack of it is more important than that between the soul itself and body itself (πρὸς γὰρ ὑγείας καὶ νόσους ἀρετὰς τε καὶ κακίας οὐδεμία συμμετρία καὶ ἀμετρία μείζων ἢ ψυχῆς αὐτῆς πρὸς σῶμα αὐτό, 87d1-3). Therefore, in the case of an overstrong body or soul, one is "not to exercise the soul without exercising the body, nor the body without the soul, so that each may be balanced by the other and so be healthy" (μήτε τὴν ψυχὴν ἄνευ σώματος κινεῖν μήτε σῶμα ἄνευ ψυχῆς, ἵνα ἀμυνομένω γίγνησθον ἰσορρόπῳ καὶ ὑγιῇ, 88b5-c1). That is, intellectuals should do gymnastics, and athletes should study philosophy and the arts, to balance their capacities. Plato's idea of a balance between the body and the soul is a novel one: for Alcmeon, Philistion, and the Hippocratic theories of health, the harmony obtains between the body's qualities, powers, or humors.⁴² The bulk of the following discussion is devoted to the ideal exercise of the body and of the soul, with each modeled on the motions of the matter and psyche of the universe, respectively. At the bottom, these two motions are also alike: both follow the ultimate principle of like-to-like and different-from-different.

To properly exercise the body, humans should imitate the motions of the *khôra*, the principal — and problematic⁴³ — subject of the second part of Timaeus' speech. The *khôra* (space, place, land⁴⁴) is the area filled with powers of heating, cooling, moistening, and drying that pre-exists the universe; the god organizes these powers into the orderly and

⁴² In the *Charmides*, in which Critias promises the titular character that Socrates can heal a persistent headache, Socrates quotes a Thracian doctor conveying a similar precept from their king/god Zalmoxis: "just as one should not attempt to cure the eyes apart from the head, nor the head apart from the body, so one should not attempt to cure the body part from the soul." But in this case the soul is ultimately primary: "the soul is the source both of bodily health and bodily disease for the whole man, and these flow from the soul" (156e, trans. Rosemary Kent Sprague). On the physical theories of balance, see J. Longrigg, *Greek Medicine from the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age* (Routledge, 1998): 31-32.

⁴³ Given its characterization as mother and wet-nurse, *khôra* has been central concept for European female philosophers such as Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 19-30; 38-61, and Luce Irigaray, "Plato's Hystera," *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1994): 243-364. Jacques Derrida treated *khôra* as a site to develop his notion of *differance*. "Khôra", in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford, CA: 1995). John Sallis made *khôra* the centerpiece of his reading of *Timaeus* in his well-regarded volume *Chorology*, cited above. Zina Giannopolou argues contra Derrida that the formlessness and receptivity of *khôra* do not mean a loss of identity nor of a certain agency. "Derrida's *Khôra*, or Unnaming the Timean Receptacle", in *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2010), 167, 175. Emmanuela Bianchi points out that the reproductive capacity can be part of the feminine without essentializing women as childbearing, and highlights the mobility of *khôra* as a positive legacy for women. "Receptacle/*Chôra*: Figuring the Errant Feminine in Plato's *Timaeus*", *Hypatia*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Autumn, 2006), pp. 124-146.

⁴⁴ In addition to space, place, and land, the Greek range of meaning also includes: spot, post, station, field, country, territory, province, place in the body. The related verb can mean: make room for, withdraw, go, come, travel, wander, pass, flow, advance, spread, have room for, contain. LSJ, *khôra*; LSJ, *khôreô*.

recognizable elements. Timaeus introduces this “receptacle” and “wet-nurse” (ὑποδοχήν, τιθήνην, 49a6) of the cosmos to explain how the force of Necessity, or the “Wandering Cause”, contests and balances the god’s rational Intelligence. Permit me to reduce somewhat the fascinating complexity of *khôra*, and say that conceptually it represents potentiality. Imagistically, we can think of it as an invisible land: *khôra* provides the plane of earth in which the atomic triangles can be sketched, manipulated, and changed, much like the dirt in which the Pythagoreans and Socrates were known to scratch figures (*Meno* 82b). This rather literal shorthand helps us make sense of how *khôra* is said to be both space (like a receptacle or womb, 49a6) and stuff (like gold or wax, which can be molded or imprinted with a given form, 50a6, 50d1-2). Thinking of *khôra* as the invisible site of the incipient cosmos also directs us towards the feature which is most salient for Timaeus’ recommendations for health: its motions.

The *khôra* is defined by two sorts of motion. Recall that this ‘invisible land’ is filled with a chaos of pre-elemental powers: not fire but heating, not water but moistening, and so on. Because of their dissimilarity and disproportion, these powers continually shake the *khôra*, and the resulting irregular swaying motion shakes the powers in turn (52d4-53a2).⁴⁵ Together, these two motions cause a drift that sifts out the elemental traces, separating the dense and heavy from the rare and light (52e-53a).⁴⁶ Using the image of winnowing grain, Timaeus concludes that this is how the receptacle “divides the kinds most unlike each other furthest apart, and pushes those most like each other closest together into the same region” (τὰ μὲν ἀνομοιότατα πλεῖστον αὐτὰ ἀφ’ αὐτῶν ὀρίζειν, τὰ δὲ ὁμοιότατα μάλιστα εἰς ταύτῳ συνωθεῖν, 53a4-7). Although the motions of *khôra* are irregular, there is nonetheless a logic to them: the principle of like-to-like and different-from-different.⁴⁷ The result of the choral shaking is that the four kinds of powers are sorted into different regions. Before this motion, the four kinds lacked all balance and proportion; after it, they are still only godless “traces” (ἴχνη, 53b2) of the elements (53b). Timaeus will go on to explain how, by constructing the elements from atomic triangles, the god gives them their distinctive, mathematical and recognizable shapes (54a1-55c6) and qualities (55d7-68d7). The role of *khôra* is a preliminary gathering and sorting of like and different kinds.

The *khôra* is not a model for proportionality in the body, since it is not itself proportional or balanced. Rather, it gives us a picture of the continuous battle of different elements, and the way in which a proto-order *comes to be* established from this war, through the dual motions of like-to-like and different-from-different. Although there are not yet any organisms to get sick, the *khôra* is marked by a continuous *stasis* that is the

⁴⁵ Timaeus says: “Because it was filled with powers that were neither alike nor evenly balanced, there was no equipoise in any region of it, but it was everywhere swayed unevenly and shaken by these things, and by its motion shook them in turn.” 52d4-53a2

⁴⁶ See Mitch Miller for an account that emphasizes not the general principle of like-to-like and different-from-different, but the specific oppositions between compressedness and tendency to settle (tangibility) and dispersedness and tendency to rise (visibility). Mitchell Miller, “The *Timaeus* and the ‘Longer Way’: ‘God-Given’ Method and the Constitution of Elements and Animals”, in *Plato’s Timaeus as Cultural Icon*, ed. Gretchen Reydam-Schils (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 36-7.

⁴⁷ Democritus and Leuippus also argued for the principle of like-to-like, but their systems contained both atoms and void. Francis Macdonald Cornford, *The Laws of Motion in Ancient Thought: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34-40.

signature of disease. The weak and strong trace elements battle one another nonstop (ἦττον ὄν κρείττονι μάχεται, 57a5). Plato's language continues to be unambiguously military. In this battle, the smaller corpuscles:

will dissolve continuously until they are either completely squeezed and broken apart and driven to their own kind; or defeated, and from being many are assimilated and made one with the victorious kind, remaining in one region with them.

λυόμενα οὐ παύεται, πρὶν ἢ παντάπασιν ὠθούμενα καὶ διαλυθέντα ἐκφύγη πρὸς τὸ συγγενές, ἢ νικηθέντα, ἐν ἑκ πολλῶν ὅμοιον τῷ κρατήσαντι γενόμενον, αὐτοῦ σύνοικον μείνη, 57b4-7.

The state of potentiality before the god's composition (*sustasis*) of the universe is one of conflict (*stasis*). Plato replaces the agricultural "winnowing" metaphor for the sorting of *khôra* with a military language that represents a battle of different kinds, in which victory means absorbing and assimilating the other, and defeat means fleeing or being assimilated.

Timaeus has alluded earlier to this primordial war between different types, in the course of explaining how the god formed the universe to be "disease-free." This is the first moment that Plato connects disease/*nosos* and conflict/*stasis*, and it turns out to be fundamental to the entire conception of the cosmos. Timaeus says that the god made the universe singular and whole so that:

it should not get old and diseased, since he realized that when hot or cold things or anything else that possesses strong powers surrounds a composite body from outside and attacks it, it destroys that body prematurely, leading to disease (*nosos*) and old age and causing it to waste away. So, according to that cause and reasoning, as one whole, entirely out of all wholes, and free of old age and disease, he made the world.

ἔτι δὲ ἴν' ἀγήρων καὶ ἄνοσον ἦ, κατανοῶν ὡς συστάτω σώματι θερμὰ καὶ ψυχρὰ καὶ πάνθ' ὅσα δυνάμεις ἰσχυρὰς ἔχει περιστάμενα ἕξωθεν καὶ προσπίπτοντα ἀκαίρως λύει καὶ νόσους γῆράς τε ἐπάγοντα φθίνειν ποιεῖ. διὰ δὴ τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ τὸν λογισμὸν τόνδε ἕνα ὅλον ὅλων ἐξ ἀπάντων τέλειον καὶ ἀγήρων καὶ ἄνοσον αὐτὸν ἐτεκτῆνατο (33a2-b1).

Timaeus presents an axiomatic situation in which composite bodies are vulnerable to strong powers, described in clear military terms (surround, attack, destroy), that result directly in old age and disease. As we saw above (section II), both decay and disease in humans is caused by an ongoing battle between different kinds. Because Timaeus' universe is a Living Thing, it too would be subject to such attacks of difference, if the god had left anything outside the universe to contest it. This passage, read in conjunction with the description of the battle of powers in the *khôra*, suggests that the god had to organize a hegemony over the domain of powers in order to ensure the health of his animal cosmos. In other words, the primordial state of the world is one of a disease-causing conflict between different kinds. The entire organization of the cosmos, from top to bottom, is geared towards creating a healthy state of singularity and sameness, proportionality and peace. Thus, humans imitate the Demiurge in seeking to bring a healthy regularity to their bodies, though no hegemony is possible for us.

It is precisely because of its state of conflict that the *khôra* serves as a model for healthful exercise for the human body. Like the *khôra*, the body is subject to heating and cooling, and drying and moistening, and these changes, left to themselves, ruin the body

(88d1-5). But by exercising and shaking his body all over, a man “defends” (ἀμύνηται, 88e1) it, restoring the elements that wander—those that cause disease by transposition—to their proper place. The one who exercises “will not allow one hostile element to position itself next to another and so breed wars in the body and disease. Instead, he will have one friendly element placed by another, and so bring about health” (οὐκ ἐχθρὸν παρ’ ἐχθρὸν τιθέμενον ἐάσει πολέμους ἐντίκτειν τῷ σώματι καὶ νόσους, ἀλλὰ φίλον παρὰ φίλον τεθὲν ὑγίειαν ἀπεργαζόμενον παρέξει, 88e4-6). In the body as in the *khôra*, elements that are different are hostile or enemies, while health and peace are ensured by relations of similarity. The battle between the powers in the *khôra* shows us how exercising the body is to wage the battle for ordered difference, providing whatever modicum of regularity that the flesh allows. As long as it is self-directed, exercising the body also resembles the activity of the cosmos. In contrast to agitation of the body by travelling in a vehicle or by drugs, self-directed exercise proceeds from the body and acts on the body, and so “bears the greatest similarity to the understanding and the motion of the universe” (τῶν δ’ αὖ κινήσεων ἢ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὑφ’ αὐτοῦ ἀρίστη κίνησις—μάλιστα γὰρ τῆ διανοητικῆ καὶ τῆ τοῦ παντὸς κινήσει συγγενής, 89a1-3). Exercise thus represents the curative action of the soul upon the body, in contrast to the pathogenic effect of poor bodily condition on the soul (IID, above).

Like the body, the soul is internally divided as well as subject to external pressures that threaten its health. Timaeus has explained how the tripartite soul is distributed in the body, so that the reason, spirit, and appetite lie in the head, heart, and belly respectively (69c5-72e1).⁴⁸ Though the military metaphors are more subdued in the soul than the body, still he portrays the head as a “citadel” that gives the orders (ἀκρόπολις, 70a9); the spirited heart is located in the “guardhouse” of the chest (τὴν δορυφορικὴν οἴκησιν, 70b2), so that it can listen to the dictates of reason and “restrain by force the tribe of appetites” (βίαι τὸ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν κατέχοι γένος, 70a5-6). These three parts of the soul must be proportionate to remain healthy (89e6-90a2). But just to begin with, the soul is thrown off balance when it is first implanted in the body. All the motions of the external world strike through the infant’s body to the soul, producing the turbulence of the sensations. The result is that the natural orbits of the Same and Different that compose the soul⁴⁹ are “violently shaken” (σφοδρῶς σείουσαι, 43d1), “twisted” (στρέψαι, 43e1), and “mutilated and disfigured in every possible way” (πάσας δὲ κλάσεις καὶ διαφθορὰς τῶν κύκλων ἐμποιεῖν, 43e1-2). At this stage, when a person is young, the rational part of the soul has not yet taken control over the other parts (44a4-5), and lacking the this proper proportion of the three parts, he suffers the worst disease: that of unintelligence (44c1-2).

The exercise of the soul is designed to address the disorder and imbalance caused by the body or poor nurturing, by attention to the proper divisions. Each part of the soul has its own role and motions. As a result,

Any type which is idle and keeps its motions inactive will necessarily become very weak, while one that keeps exercising becomes very strong. And so we must keep watch so that their motions remain suitably proportionate to each other.

τὸ μὲν αὐτῶν ἐν ἀργίᾳ διάγον καὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ κινήσεων ἡσυχίαν ἄγον ἀσθενέστατον ἀνάγκη γίγνεσθαι, τὸ δ’ ἐν γυμνασίοις ἐρρωμενέστατον: διὸ

⁴⁸ See also *Republic* IV 435-441.

⁴⁹ See 41d-e.

φυλακτέον ὅπως ἂν ἔχωσιν τὰς κινήσεις πρὸς ἄλληλα συμμέτρους (89e6-90a2).

For Plato, suitably proportioned (συμμέτρους) in this case can mean only one thing. Because human intelligence is the lordliest (τοῦ κυριωτάτου, 90a2) and divine (τὸ θεῖον, 90c4) part of us, appointed to lead the others (ἡγεμονεῖν, 70c1), it is the part we must exercise above all. Timaeus is not concerned that the appetitive or spirited parts will atrophy; all his energy is directed towards how to exercise the mind.

The proper way to exercise the reason is to imitate the thoughts and motions of the all (*to pan*). Because of the similarity or “kinship” (συγγενεῖς, 90c8) between the motions of our minds and the thoughts and revolutions of the universe, “these are the ones that each of us should follow” (ταύταις δὴ συνεπόμενον ἕκαστον δεῖ, 90d1). Imitating what we are most like has the power to correct the wildly different sensations that disorder the soul.

We should redirect the revolutions in our heads that were thrown off course around the time of our birth,⁵⁰ by coming to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, and so bring into conformity with its objects our faculty of understanding, as it was in its original condition.

τὰς περὶ τὴν γένεσιν ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ διεφθαρμένας ἡμῶν περιόδους ἐξορθοῦντα διὰ τὸ καταμανθάνειν τὰς τοῦ παντὸς ἁρμονίας τε καὶ περιφοράς, τῷ κατανοουμένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἐξομοιωῶσαι κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν (90d1-5).

The “harmonies and revolutions” of the universe are those of the cycles of the bands of Sameness and Difference, as described in the first part of Timaeus’ speech. The Demiurge composes the world soul out of a mixture of Being, Sameness, and Difference—a mixture that is proportionate within each of its ingredients and in the overall composition. In the final step, he arranges a band of Sameness in a circle revolving to the right, and just within it and connected to it, a band of Difference, revolving to the left. Sameness remains undivided, but the band of Difference is divided into seven unequal circles that determine the orbits of the planets (35a-36d). Exercising our intelligence means to study how the revolutions of the universe repeat over time, and where they differ.⁵¹ As with the self-directed exercise of the body, it is the *conformity* or *similarity* of the human mind to the divine that brings health, and the opposite that brings disease.

Indeed, to be able to sort same and different things is the essence of intelligence. When the soul is first placed into the body and disoriented by sensations, this is exactly what it is unable to do (44a1-3). Over time, when the soul’s revolutions are set straight, “they then correctly identify what is same and what is different, and render intelligent the person who possess them” (τό τε θάτερον καὶ τὸ ταύτὸν προσαγορεύουσαι κατ’ ὀρθόν, ἔμφορα τὸν ἔχοντα αὐτὰς γιγνόμενον ἀποτελοῦσιν, 44b6-7). When someone can do this, they mimic the world soul herself. She, whenever she comes into contact with something, whether in the world of being or becoming, is able to “declare exactly what that thing is the same as, and what it different from, and in what respect and in what manner, as well as when” (λέγει κινουμένη διὰ πάσης ἑαυτῆς ὅτω τ’ ἂν τι ταύτὸν ἦ καὶ ὅτου ἂν ἕτερον, πρὸς

⁵⁰ See 43a-44a.

⁵¹ Recall Simplicius’ well-known report: “Plato had set this problem to those engaged in these studies: What uniform and ordered motions must be hypothesized to save the phenomenal motions of the wandering stars?” *De Caelo* 488.21-4. See Gregory Vlastos, *Plato’s Universe* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.

ὄτι τε μάλιστα καὶ ὄπη καὶ ὄπως καὶ ὄποτε, 37a-b). Only this capacity, of exercising intelligence of differentiation, ensures the health of the soul. If a person also gets good nourishment in addition to this education, “he’ll turn out perfectly whole and healthy, and will have escaped *the most grievous illness*” (ὀλόκληρος ὑγίης τε παντελῶς, τὴν μεγίστην ἀποφυγῶν νόσον, γίγνεται, 44c1-2)—that is, mindlessness (*anoia*), the most general disease of the soul.

We saw above that exercising the body involved sorting the same elements together and the different elements apart, as in the *khôra*, or cosmic substratum. In exactly the same way, exercising the soul means to be able to distinguish same and different ideas and sensations, along the pattern of the revolutions of *to pan*, the universe. While the soul is not subject to the state of war or *stasis* that besets the body, nonetheless the steady attack of the sensations is transmitted to it and disorders its revolutions. In order for reason to regain control, and restore the understanding, we must devote ourselves to wisdom and true learning, and especially to the harmonies and revolutions of the universe.

The remainder of Timaeus’ speech, in which he recounts how the other living creatures came to be, is properly, proportionately brief (οὕτω γὰρ ἐμμετρότερός τις ἂν αὐτῷ δόξειεν περὶ τοὺς τούτων λόγους εἶναι, 90e4-6). In it he recounts how men who were cowardly or unjust—who suffered from a disproportion of body and soul—are reborn as women. And how in turn, the birds are born from men who studied the heavens but remained foolish, and land animals came from men who failed to study philosophy at all (91d-e). The ones who suffer most from mindlessness (*anoia*), that aforementioned disease of the soul, are reborn as animals that are drawn towards the ground, and those who suffered the illness of ignorance, must live their next lives in the murky depths of the water (92b-c). In short, the dialogue ends with a warning that those who fail to maintain the healthy proportions of the soul may be reborn as the subjugated sex or the languageless animals. The universe is created as an imitation of the eternal model, but its final completion—its full complement of creatures—comes from the devolution of man through the diseases of the soul. Yet Timaeus’ universe is harmonized even down to this level. In a novel insight for his age, Plato recognizes the similarity of diseases to living things: “For the constitution of every disease in a certain way resembles the nature of living things” (πᾶσα γὰρ σύστασις νόσων τρόπον τινὰ τῆ τῶν ζώων φύσει προσέοικε, 89b4-6); that is why they should not be irritated with drugs. Here Plato describes the makeup of diseases with same word, *sustasis* or composition, that repeatedly designates the Demiurge’s creation of the earth. In the Timaeus’ perfectly arranged cosmos, even the diseases that make war (*stasis*) on the carefully composed unity (*sustasis*) of the universe have their place.

IV. Conclusion

Timaeus’ final recommendations for health in both body and soul invoke the standard of proportion. Proportionality, the fourth and final condition of “sameness” that is necessary to health, turns out to be the most important of the four and the one to actively pursue. One might object that proportionality is not actually a measure of sameness: it denotes the fitting relation of different amounts, not necessarily the *same* relation between

two different entities.⁵² For Timaeus, however, the ideal proportion is “the same” proportion. When he tells how the Demiurge composed the body of the universe, he says that the best bond between unlike things is created by proportion (ἀναλογία). Specifically, in a group of three, proportions should be arranged so that the relationship between the first and the middle term is “the same” as the relationship between the middle and the last term. For example, consider the series 2:4::4:8, in which the second term is double the first in both pairs. In the ideal bond, the reverse should also be true, so that “they will necessarily all turn out to have the same relationship to each other, and, being interchangeable [lit, becoming the same as one another], all will become one” (πάνθ’ οὕτως ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὰ αὐτὰ εἶναι συμβήσεται, τὰ αὐτὰ δὲ γενόμενα ἀλλήλοις ἐν πάντα ἔσται, 32a).⁵³ The unity of the universe depends on binding its different elements into proportions such that the relationships between them can be called the “same.”⁵⁴

Timaeus is interested above all in the proportion between Sameness and Difference—though he doesn’t say so, surely one of “the more important proportions, which are of the greatest consequence, [and which] we are unable to figure out” (συμμετριῶν δὲ τὰ μὲν μικρὰ διαισθανόμενοι συλλογιζόμεθα, τὰ δὲ κυριώτατα καὶ μέγιστα ἀλογίστως ἔχομεν, 87c7-d1). In each stage of Timaeus’ speech, Sameness and Difference play the crucial organizing role. The universe is composed from Sameness and Difference, which regulate its motions, and the primordial motion of the *khôra* sorts the traces into same and different kinds. The healthy body should imitate the motions of the *khôra*, and the healthy soul should understand and come into conformity with the revolutions of the universe, as directed by the bands of sameness and difference. Thus, Timaeus’ instructions for health are to bring the Sameness and Difference within us (back) into divine proportion, a recommendation that connects human life to the origin of the universe, and even before. In short, Sameness and Difference turn out to be the axes of the grid on which the universe, the *khôra*, and the human body are all measured and put into proportion.⁵⁵ The Hippocratic authors would agree that human health and disease follow the same principles of the rest of the natural world, of which we are only a part, while strict Pythagoreanism would place number at the root of both natural and human worlds. Plato’s philosophical achievement is to plausibly connect the cosmic and the human by two philosophical concepts, the Same and the Different, which are the materials of creation as well as the standards of intelligence. At the same time, he is sure to mix and modulate them to avoid an oversimplistic binary.

⁵² For example, there is an ideal proportion between earth and water in clay, but water softens and dissolves the earth, while the earth resists the water.

⁵³ The example is from Kalkavage, *Plato’s Timaeus* (Newburyport MA: Focus Publishing, 2001) p. 17 n21. 2:4::4:8 (the first (2) is to the middle (4) what the middle (4) is to the last (8). Likewise, the last (8) is to the middle (4) what the middle (4) is to the first (2)), which can be transformed into 4:2::8:4 (or 4:8::2:4). Thus, the middle turns out to be first and last, the first and last turn out to be middles. The universe, however, is composed of four elements so that there are two middle terms.

⁵⁴ A very similar but more complex version of this same principle is at play when the god divides his mixture in the creation of the world soul. The seven portions of the soul are filled with intervals with two middle terms, “one exceeding the first extreme by the same fraction of the extremes by which it was exceeded by the second, and the other exceeding the first extreme by a number equal to that by which it was exceeded by the second.” Cornford explains how the division reflects three types of proportionality known to the Greeks: geometric ($a:b=c:d$, as in 2,4,5,10), arithmetic ($b-a=d-c$, as in 2,3,4,5), and harmonic ($1/b - 1/a = 1/d - 1/c$).

⁵⁵ Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, Routledge, 74.

Sameness and Difference are ultimate measure of the universe: of how closely this universal Living Thing resembles the eternal Living Thing, its model. The chain of resemblance and imitation (the activity of making one thing resemble another), put into the sequential order that Timaeus' discourse avoids, is as follows. The shaking of the *khôra* sorts the traces of the elements into same and different kinds. Using a mixture of Sameness and Difference (and Being), in their partitioned, unpartitioned, and intermediate forms, Demiurge makes the universe as a Living Thing to resemble the eternal Living Thing. He creates the auxiliary gods, and they imitate him in making the remaining mortal creatures, so that the resemblance of this Living thing to the eternal Living Thing might be more complete. In turn, humans should imitate the shaking of the *khôra* to harmonize their bodies, and conform to the revolutions of Sameness and Difference in the universe to balance their souls. Each stage of creation is an imitation: a balancing out of Sameness and Difference; so that the resemblance comes closer and closer to the eternal model (e.g. 37d, 39e). On the other hand, disease, decay, and *degeneration* comes to be through the action of difference.

In a universe in which there is an ongoing, constant battle of different triangles and elements against one another, to remain perfectly self-same is impossible. True health is lost from the moment the soul is placed in the body, leading to its disorientation. And so health is positioned as something we are always striving to regain, to return to our "original condition of excellence" (εἰς τὸ τῆς πρώτης καὶ ἀρίστης εἶδος, 42d1-2). In this sense, we are all, always, in recovery, from the disease-producing encounter with difference. The technique of recovery is to exercise body and mind in imitation of the highest proportions: the Sameness and Difference that order and guide the universe. By modeling the microcosm of the body and soul on the macrocosm of the universe, we sort our elemental and mental chaos into properly differentiated kinds.⁵⁶ For humans, the cycle of reincarnation never ends until this highest of proportions is achieved (42c1-d1).

Plato's *Timaeus* presents a theory of human and cosmic health that is based on the principles of Sameness and Difference. The body of the cosmos is disease-free because, being the total sum of everything in the world, it is free of the battles with difference that characterize the primordial *khôra*. In the human body, by contrast, differences in composition, in the process of coming-to-be, in the internal and external flows cause all kinds of disease; even the ordinary encounter with different external elements causes ongoing decay. But above all, disease is caused by the lack of proportion between and within the human being. The project of health— which is the same as the project of wisdom— is one of attaining ultimate proportion by aligning the microcosmic human with the motions of the macrocosm. Our bodies should imitate the primordial *khôra*, with its motions of like-to-like and different-from-different. Our souls should synchronize with the cycling of the bands of Sameness and Difference that coordinate the supreme revolutions of the planets. Via proportionality, Plato resolves the meta-opposition between Sameness and

⁵⁶ In making this cosmic parallelism the basis of its ethical recommendation, the *Timaeus* enacts on an even grander scale what Plato carries out through the analogy of city and soul in *Republic*. As G.R.F. Ferrari understands it: "the symmetrical correspondence of city and soul, soul and city, contains instruction on how to live in society... The correspondence recommends a joint awareness of political macrocosm and microcosm, of society and self as organized wholes, at the expense of one's habitual focus on self in society." *City and Soul in Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 79. [see also 104: a model laid up in heaven.]

Difference, and closes the gap between human and divine. Unalloyed difference causes disease; but discovering its basic proportional relationship with Sameness is the essence of intelligence, and therefore of human divinity. That is why the connection between disease and difference transforms our sensitivity to difference into a “higher pathology.”

Conclusion: Plato's Philosophy as 'Higher Pathology'

"I'm a bit of a joke as a doctor—my cure makes the disease worse!"

εἰμί τις γελοῖος ἰατρός: ἰώμενος μεῖζον τὸ νόσημα ποιῶ.

—Socrates, *Protagoras* 340e

As I pressed to finish this study of Plato's diseases, I was beset by a sore throat, a leaky nose and fits of explosive sneezes. It was the same time of year and the same set of symptoms that had directed me to my dissertation topic, six years earlier; producing an entirely unwilling ring composition. Now it seemed to me that the earlier virus had been my body's manifestation of an unworked out difference between rhetoric and philosophy. But my subsequent study had neither cured me nor granted me any immunity from the disease's return. Life's poor attempt to imitate art had raised, I realized, the proper question for a conclusion. If I have successfully established the link between difference and disease in Plato, *what changes?*

In the beginning I set out to track down the meaning of disease in Plato, thinking that there I would find the rationale for his medico-philosophical cure. And I discovered that his diseases uniformly manifest a difference, a significant result. But to my much greater surprise, I found that Plato's philosophy cures nothing at all. Rather, in *Gorgias* Socrates corrupts us with his rhetoric. In *Timaeus*, the reader is invited to occupy the position of the sick and absent interlocutor. In *Phaedo*, the meta-opposition threatens to cause a severe case of misology. Perhaps that is why Nietzsche wrote, with his usual flair, "By teaching *Phaedo* I have the opportunity to infect my pupils with philosophy."¹ In these three dialogues, readers do not read about diseases at a distance, and cognitively or unconsciously associate them with other negatives. Rather, Plato's diseases touch us. His rhetorical strategies put us in the position of the infected patient—sometimes forcefully, sometimes more gently. Reading Plato becomes a risky endeavor.

Why would Plato write in such a way? One fairly standard answer is that Plato aims to make us think for ourselves. By avoiding and indeed obstructing our path to any easy, clear-cut answers, this position holds, Plato wants to set us on the path of the philosophical cure. By now, this reply has become quite facile, its wide acceptance effectively forestalling the inquiry it claims is so important. Most of us write some version of this idea, or offer it to our students, all unthinkingly. We give it without suspecting our own desire to gain agreement and esteem when we do.

Plato was different. His philosophy is, in the words of the Romantic poet Christian Friedrich Hebbel, a "higher pathology."² For Plato amplifies the differences that cause

¹ In a letter to his colleague E. Ritschl. Quoted in David Farrell Krell, *Infectious Nietzsche* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): 81.

² Friedrich Hebbel, *Diaries*, vol. 1, 1835-1839, ed. Werner, 1903, fr. 1170, p. 250. I gratefully acknowledge Peter Hanly's assistance in tracking down this quote.

conflict and diseases, rather than giving an answer that settles and cures them. As Socrates admits in the epigraph above: "I'm a bit of a joke as a doctor. My cure makes the disease worse!" (εἰμί τις γελοῖος ἰατρός: ἰώμενος μείζον τὸ νόσημα ποιῶ, *Protagoras* 340e). His remark is a graceful response to Protagoras, who has accused him of committing a greater error than the one he sought to fix. The disease in question is self-contradiction, of which Protagoras has accused the poet Simonides. Socrates' attempted cure, to save the consistency of Simonides by drawing a distinction between being and becoming good, only deepens the difference.

Likewise, Plato's work, through aporia or ambiguity, never cures the disease of ignorance; at its best, it leaves us more conscious of all we do not know. It merits the designation of a "higher" pathology because it consists of a sickness along with the awareness of being sick. The philosopher knows what she does not know: her mindlessness (*anoia*), the "greatest disease", is elevated by this border of consciousness. In contrast, the apparently healthy are those who are sick (ignorant) without knowing it—precisely, *without knowing the difference between being sick and well*. Though philosophers attain a margin of divine awareness through their higher pathology, they remain ill: there can be no complete eradication of non-knowing. Unlike the Stoics, who idealize philosophy as a release from the sufferings caused by the reversals and transitions of life, Plato sharpens uncomfortable differences in order to extend our capacity to endure and even pursue them with awareness.

If Plato's philosophical project is better understood as a higher pathology than a therapeutics, Socrates is a more iconic figure than ever. He both suffers and diagnoses the disease of difference in an exemplary way. In *Hippias Minor*, Socrates refers self-deprecatingly to a paroxysm of his disease when he is temporarily swayed from his usual position by the argument, which actually enables them to pursue the question more deeply (372d-e). In *Theaetetus*, Theodorus complains of the vigor with which Socrates is pursuing his dialectical inquiry. In response, Socrates compares his passion for exercising the mind to a disease (*nosos*) (169b). In this scene, Socrates is modeling the treatment recommended by Timaeus, of exercising the mind to sort out what is the same and what is different; but here, he suffers the treatment as though it were a disease. Despite Plato's depiction of Socrates as a doctor, his dialogues are less of a prescription for attaining health, and more of an account of how best to be ill.

Nietzsche famously diagnosed Socrates with decadence,³ but modern medically minded readers have seriously proposed that Socrates suffered from temporal lobe epilepsy (not the more famous convulsive epilepsy). The visits from Socrates' *daimonion*, beginning in childhood, resemble the onset and effects of simple partial seizures, and the periods of his unresponsiveness as related in *Symposium* could be well explained by complex partial seizures.⁴ Some of his unique character traits, and even his physical ugliness, may be related to the condition.⁵ One might question such attempts to

³ Friderich Nietzsche, "The Problem of Socrates." In *Twilight of the Idols and the Antichrist*, trans. Thomas Common (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004): 11-13.

⁴ Osamu Muramoto and Walter G. Englert, "Socrates and Temporal Lobe Epilepsy: A Pathographic Diagnosis 2,400 Years Later" *Epilepsia*, 47(3):652-654, 2006.

⁵ William Naso and Christian Vera, "Did Socrates Have the Sacred Disease?" *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 39:3 (1996), pp. 373-379

retrospectively diagnose a biological basis for Socrates' personality on a number of grounds. Yet it is striking that the ancients used to call epilepsy the "sacred disease"—an apt analogue indeed for a "higher pathology." Both phrases point to a touch of the supra-human in an unwilling, unusual, and painful condition.

Plato too was touched by illness. It is highly significant that the only thing he tells us about himself is what he says in *Phaedo*: "Plato, I believe, was ill" (Πλάτων δὲ οἶμαι ἡσθένει, 59b). Whether or not this was historically true, Plato represents himself as suffering in the same way as the slow and sickly humans who breathe this world's air without realizing they are living underwater.⁶ With this difference: that he knows that he is sick, and therefore depicts himself that way. Like Theages, his illness saves him from a career in politics so that he becomes a lifelong lover of wisdom (*Republic* VI, 496c). Plato was sick with a passion for difference, and he wrote, not to cure or convince anyone, but because his disease, like Socrates' *daimôn*, required him to. Thus his disease replicates itself in writing. Plato writes the way he does not to make us think, but to make us philosophers—an important difference, because thinking without love of truth can result in mere destructive cleverness. Confronting the differences within ourselves, by identifying our discomfort and diseases with difference, is the first step on this higher path.⁷

Whereas the interpretation of philosophy-as-a-therapy means the goal of philosophy is to eradicate or at least ameliorate disease, philosophy-as-a-higher-pathology means to be sick and be getting better at once: to be able, like Nietzsche, to sustain that difference. If the worst disease from which humans suffer is ignorance, as Plato repeatedly claims, then therapy means finding and clinging to knowledge, an answer. "Higher pathology" means continually seeking the answer, because perpetually recognizing our ignorance. The best philosophers, like the best doctors, are those who themselves have suffered the most from illness (*Rep.* III, 408e).

It would be possible to conduct a whole genealogy of philosophical pathology that would counter Foucault's history of the care of the self. The counter-series would include Novalis⁸, G.W.F. Hegel⁹, George Canguilhem¹⁰, Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea* and Albert Camus'

⁶ See chapter 2, p. 49-51 above.

⁷ Brooke Holmes makes a similar point in historical rather than philosophical terms: she argues that the ancient medical invention of the symptom is related to the creation of an ethical subject, or the interior conscience. *The Symptom and the Subject: The Emergence of the Physical Body in Ancient Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁸ To take just one example, Novalis says: "Illnesses are certainly an extremely important subject for humanity... We are still imperfectly acquainted with the art of using them. They are probably the most interesting stimulus and material of our reflection and action. There are no doubt many fruits to be harvested here, especially, it seems to me, in the intellectual field, in the area of morality, religion and God knows in what other wonderful areas. What if I should become the prophet of this art?" "Late Fragments (Fragments and Studies, 1799-1800)", in *Novalis: Works, Diaries and Letters*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel, 3 volumes, Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978. Vol. 2, p. 828, fragment 390.

⁹ See Rebecca Comay's *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 2011). She gives a psychoanalytic reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a melancholic expression of the traumatic failure of revolution; she sees Hegel as both doctor and patient.

¹⁰ For Canguilhem, the healthy body is not defined by self-sameness or homeostasis; rather, it is plastic, able to establish new and potentially superior norms in response to the crisis of disease. "The Normal and

The Plague, Jacques Derrida¹¹, and most of all, Nietzsche, whose lifelong suffering was, he tells us many times, the basis for his self-overcoming. In *Ecce Homo: How to Become What One Is*, Nietzsche writes: "to be able to look out from the optics of the ill (*KrankenOptik*) towards *healthier* concepts and values, and again the other way around.... if I became the master of anything, it was this. I have a hand for switching *perspectives*: the first reason why a 'revaluation of values' is even possible."¹² As rhetoric and philosophy have formed the two poles of this study, for Nietzsche health and disease are the two poles of a three-dimensional vision. He credits his signature project of transforming human values—of "making a difference"—to this capacity to see from the two opposed perspectives of health and illness, without collapsing their distinction.

So what has changed? It turns out that disease and difference, more than sound, self-identical concepts, are fundamental to philosophical life. Plato's philosophy is not therapeutic: it's infectious. The germ of it is difference. Very often, we respond to difference (and disease) with fear; to indifference, with boredom.¹³ On the contrary, Catherine Malabou argues, the true affect of difference is *wonder*. She quotes Luce Irigaray: "Wonder must be the advent or the event of the other."¹⁴ Wonder (*thauma*), according to Plato's ancient and unforgettable claim, is the only origin of philosophy (*Theaetetus* 155d). If Plato and Malabou are right, then philosophy is simply the loving wonder of difference.

And might not this passion for difference look like a kind of divine madness—that is, a higher pathology?

the Pathological," in *A Vital Rationalist: Selected Writings from Georges Canguilhem*, ed. Francois Delaporte, 321-84. New York: Zone Books, 2000.

¹¹ In a late interview, Derrida says: "All I have done ... is dominated by the thought of a virus, what could be called a parasitology, a virology, the virus being many things...." "The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida", in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, eds. Brunette and Wills, (Cambridge University Press, 1994): 12.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 1, in *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Translated by Judith Norman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For further references see also Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Attempt at a mythology*, trans. Robert E. Norton (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009): Ch. 6, "Illness", p. 107-120.

¹³ For one take on how the passions of difference and indifference play out in matters of law, see Marianne Constable's perceptive commentary: "Law's Love of Difference: Commentary on James Martel's *States of Indifference*." *Quinnipiac Law Journal* (2010) 28:3, 659-667

¹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993.): 75, in Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference*, trans. Carolyn Shread. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011): 11-12.

Appendix A: Classification of Diseases in Plato's *Timaeus*

The Four Ways of Failing to Remain Self-Same (82b2-5)

A. Bodily disease

- I. Diseases caused by **differences in bodily composition** by the four elemental constituents of the body (fire, water, air, earth) (82a1-7)
 - a. Unnatural excess of an element (82a2-3)
 - b. Unnatural deficiency of an element (82a3)
 - c. Unnatural *metastasis* or transposition of one element from its usual place to a strange one (82a3-4)
 - d. Presence of wrong variety of an element (82a4-7)
- II. Diseases caused by **reversals of the natural sequence of formation** of body parts (82b8-84c7). *Severity increases based on stage of sequence that is disrupted.*
 - a. Decay of flesh passes variegated blood, containing bile, serum, and phlegm, back into the veins (82e2-83e5). *Mild*
 - i. General process, as hostility to stable constituents of body (82e2-83a5)
 - ii. Decay of oldest flesh burns and turns black and bitter; sometimes becoming acidic, red, or green (83a5-b6)
 - iii. Decay of younger flesh creates yellowish-orange bile, and white acid phlegm and foam (83b6-e2)
 - b. Decay of what binds flesh to bone (83e5-84b3). *Moderate*
 - c. Decay of the bones and bone marrow (84b4-c6). *Severe, fatal*
- III. Diseases caused by **variations from the norm in the way substances enter, exit, or are trapped** in the body (84c8-86a9)
 - a. Air (84d2-85a1)
 - i. Lack of incoming air causes decay
 - ii. Excess of air enters and is trapped within the body, causing decay and pain and perspiration; or excess air is produced and trapped within the body, causing decay and painful swelling
 - b. Phlegm (85a1-b-5)
 - i. Trapped within the body, produces air bubbles
 - ii. Vented, causes white leprous spots (but is milder)
 - iii. Mixed with black bile and affecting the brain, causes sleep disorder and epilepsy, or the "sacred disease"
 - iv. Source of all diseases of catarrhs, or flows
 - c. Bile (inflammations) (85b5-86a9)
 - i. Vented, creates tumors
 - ii. Trapped, creates inflammations

1. Disrupts the density of the blood (balance of thinness and thickness) by overheating the blood's fibers
 - a. If it overpowers and penetrates the marrow, it is fatal
 - b. If overpowered by the body, causes diarrhea, dysentery, etc.
 2. Results in different types of fevers depending on predominant element in the bile:
 - a. fire (continuous fever)
 - b. air (fevers that recur daily)
 - c. water (fevers that recur every other day)
 - d. earth (fevers that recur every fourth day, difficult to get over)
- B. Soul disease (*anoia*, *amathia*, *mania*) caused by bodily conditions I-III (86b2-3)
- I. Excessive pleasure and pain, causes *mania* (86b4-c3)
 - II. Sexual incontinence: species of *mania* caused by flow of marrow out of the bones (86c3-d5)
 - III. Bad tempers: caused when vapors of trapped acid, phlegm, or humors mix with the motions of soul. Depending on location, produces melancholy, recklessness, cowardice, forgetfulness, stupidity (86e3-87a7)
 - a. Exacerbating factors: poor government, bad speeches, no education (86d5-e3, 87a7-b4)
- C. Diseases of body and soul caused by **disproportion** (87c4-88b5)
- I. Overstrong soul: churns the body and fills with diseases, or wears it out with study, or creates discharges through verbal debates (87e6-88a7)
 - II. Overstrong body: greater desires for food render the soul stupid, bringing on ignorance (88a7-b5)
- D. Treatment: healthful proportions (88b5-90d7)
- I. Proportion between body and soul by exercising both together (88b5-c6)
 - II. Bodily proportions: by exercise, establish equilibrium between inner and outer motions and sort same and different elements, like the *khôra* (88c7-89a1)
 - III. Psychic proportions: exercise the reason by following the motions and revolutions of the universe (89e3-90d7)

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