

Thrasymachus' *katabasis*: Relations of power and ideological struggle in Plato's *Republic* Book I

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"The philosophic and the class bases of relevance are even more crucial when it comes to the area of critical approaches and interpretations. For the critic, whether teacher, lecturer, interpreter or analyst, is a product of a class society. Each child by birth, family or parents' occupation is brought up in a given class. By education children are brought up in the culture, values and world outlook of the dominant class which may or may not be the same as the class of their birth and family. By choice they may opt for one or the other side in the class struggles of their day. Therefore their interpretation of literature and culture and history will be influenced by their philosophical standpoint, or intellectual base, and their conscious or unconscious class sympathies In struggle is our history, our language and our being. That struggle begins wherever we are; in whatever we do."

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o¹

Forms of Refutation, Forms of Subjugation

"[T]his kind of answer does have some effectivity, and that it should therefore be used when the aim is to defeat ideology on the terrain of ideology, i.e., when the aim is ideological struggle strictly speaking; for it is an *ideological answer*, one which is situated precisely on the opponent's ideological terrain. In major historical situations it has happened and may happen again that one is obliged or forced to fight on the terrain of the ideological opponent, when it has proved impossible to draw him onto one's own terrain, if he is not ready to pitch his tents there, or if it is necessary to descend onto his terrain. But this practice, and the mode of employment of ideological arguments adapted to this struggle, must be the object of a *theory* so that ideological struggle in the domain of ideology does not become a struggle governed by the laws and wishes of the opponent, so that it does not transform us purely into subjects of the ideology it is our aim to combat."

Louis Althusser²

It has become a well-established tradition among professional philosophers who publish on Plato to argue and take a stand on the dramatic features of his dialogues, on how literary, narrative and rhetorical devices shape and impact on his doctrines.³ It has also become a less established (and younger) disciplinary tradition among

¹ *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1981), pp. 104 and 108.

² Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (Part I), trans. B. Brewster, (London: NLB, 1970), pp. 56-57.

³ A first introduction to these historiographical aspects is Gerald A. Press (ed.), *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). In her contribution to the volume, Debra Nails, "Mouthpiece Schmouthpiece", pp. 15-26, highlights some of the rewards at stake in the quarrel between developmentalists and antidevelopmentalists (in terms of professional narcissism and reproduction of Plato Studies): "... willingness to resort to developmentalism is linked to a goal he approves, 'trying to know the mind of the philosopher who wrote the dialogues.' Such a goal, however, is neither philosophical nor realizable; and the substitution of that goal for genuinely philosophical ones — trying to know how one ought to live, or what is real, or the nature of knowledge — is to idealize a *person*, the all too common result of which is to enshrine as his *doctrine* what is rather a vital corpus with contemporary power to aid our making philosophical progress on a number of fronts. It is to defer to the imagined mind of Plato, in short, to treat his words as authoritative." (p. 22)

academic philosophers who work on Plato to argue and take a stand on his gender discrimination, thanks to feminist readings of his works.⁴ It is becoming an established disciplinary tradition among philosophy scholars (and hopefully it will happen faster than for the two aforementioned), to critically assess the extent to which Plato's philosophy manifests and is based on racist and colonial assumptions.⁵ The acceptance and academic establishment of these ways of reading and treating Plato are directly connected to how both the hegemonic Platonic field, and the speculative citadel it represents, perceive and feel threatened by readings and approaches that do not share their disciplinary matrices when it comes to celebrating Plato's works as foundational moments for the history of Western philosophy as well as academic practice.

In this article I analyse what we traditionally call Book I of Plato's *Republic* to investigate how the modulation of his *dialeghesthai* takes shape through a progressive series of refutations of characters (Cephalus, Polemarchus and Thrasy-machus); an argumentative modulation which, first and foremost, relies on a much larger strategy of subjugation of what those three characters represent politically and symbolise philosophically. Book I will be read as a multi-layered rite of (blocked) passage among socio-political boundaries, understood as argumentative limits whose main aim is to consecrate class divisions and division of labour within the *kallipolis*.⁶

Right from the beginning, the old Socrates leads the scene in *Republic I*, whose stage is Polemarchus' house in the Piraeus, the busy port of Athens. Cephalus, Polemarchus' father, is a metic whose family comes from Syracuse, a powerful Greek colony in southern Italy, and while he inherited some wealth as merchant owning a shield manufacturing company, he has been able to accumulate more capital than received. In fact, the aged Cephalus enjoys a privileged status among Athenian metics: he has been allowed to own land and property – quite an exception at the end of the fifth century in Athens. As such, he represents both the *moderate* use of capital and *authorised* accumulation of wealth; in short, he enjoys a good, happy life in a foreign *polis*. Cephalus embodies the paradigm of the good metic: he always pays taxes and

⁴ See for instance Nancy Tuana (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Natalie Harris Bluestone gives us a historical account of patriarchal motives within Platonic historiography in her "Why Women Cannot Rule: Sexism in Plato's Scholarship", pp. 109-130; Sabina Lovibond, "Feminism in Ancient Philosophy: The Feminist Stake in Greek Rationalism" in Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 10-28, esp. pp. 14-18; David M. Halperin, "Why is Diotima a Woman? Platonic *Erōs* and the Figuration of Gender", in David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 257-308; Luce Irigaray, "Plato's *Hystera*", in Id., *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G.C. Gill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 243-364.

⁵ George Klosko, "'Racism' in Plato's *Republic*", *History of Political Thought*, 12(1), 1991, pp. 1-13; Rachan Kamtekar, "Distinction Without a Difference? Race and *Genos* in Plato", in Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (eds.), *Philosophers on Race. Critical Essays*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 1-13; Mika Ojakankas, *On the Greek Origins of Biopolitics: A Reinterpretation of the History of Biopower*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), in particular chs. 4, 5 and 6; and Michael Cloete, "Plato and the Modern African State: Some Thoughts on the Question of Justice", *Phronimon*, 9(1), 2008, pp. 85-99, for an attempt to revive Plato within the postcolonial framework.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "Rites of Institution" and "Social Space and the Genesis of 'Classes'" in Id., *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. G. Raymond and M. Adamson, (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 117-126 and pp. 227-251.

takes part in religious practices; he pays his debts; and he does not complain about the exclusion he suffers from the political life of the city.⁷ But his lawful conduct is the other side of the privileged status Periclean Athens granted him—a status that can instantly be revoked in the midst of civic conflicts and political struggles among city factions (*stasis*). The constitutive instability of Cephalus' position in the civic order, the permanent chance of status reversal and, therefore, the constant threat of losing his substances, inform his precarious condition as legitimate discussant when it comes to analysing and defining the conceptual structure of justice in Book I. Another aspect of Cephalus' constitutive inferiority in terms of philosophical prowess lies in his socio-economic function as merchant or tradesman (*chrematistes*) wholly devoted to the art of acquiring wealth through commercial activities (*chrematistike*), which immediately puts him in the lowest civic strata according to Plato's hierarchy of classes—Cephalus' life journey simply cannot be taken as a paradigm for the just philosophical life, and the brief cross-examination Socrates has with him is there to prove it.

The metaphors of journey is what makes Cephalus Socrates' first interlocutor. He is an old patriarch at the end of his life in a foreign land and, as such, he can no longer embark on any upward journey from the Piraeus to Acropolis, from the cave to the sun. What he is left with is the pleasure of conversation to compensate for his lack of libido—*logos* as consoling sublimation (328d). This expedient signals—right from the beginning—Cephalus' position in the argumentative economy of Book I's philosophical battleground: he is trapped in his own comforting underworld and cannot escape it as he is physically and speculatively too weak. He has become weak because he has been spending his whole life getting rich in the Piraeus cave. However, the old Cephalus still values and yearns for philosophical conversations—a compensative erotics of conversations. His wisdom and moderation (*sophrosyne*) come from pragmatic and economic reasons; they do not show any sign of the philosopher's vocation, a professional birthmark that, Platonically, manifests itself during adolescence and ought to be actualised through constant research which, in turn, progressively decreases the emergence of the lowest drives in philosophical young souls.⁸ This unactualised philosophical disposition leads Cephalus to the conclusion that the true aspect of one's happy life (*eudaimonia*) is moderation (*sophrosyne*), a virtue that—if entertained in its existential simplicity even by youngsters—will make any stage of life just, bearable and thus happy.

But this simple and direct definition of the just life and justice, coming directly from someone belonging to the unphilosophical third class, cannot satisfy Plato. What Socrates immediately objects to is the class privilege Cephalus unconsciously enjoys, that is, the social imperturbability which comes from his wealth; a wealth that for being inherited indirectly from his grandfather and directly from his father has saved him—Socrates argues—from fetishising money, as opposed to those who by becoming rich by themselves are fixated on money. The other side (*l'envers*) of this first confutation of Cephalus is Socrates and Plato forgetting the class privilege and

⁷ Lysias gives us in his oration delivered in Athens in 403 against Eratosthenes, one of the Thirty, a picture of his father Cephalus consistent with how Plato describes him in Book I; see *Greek Political Oratory*, trans. A.N.W. Saunders, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p. 43.

⁸ The haunting role played by the proportionality of this Platonic *jouissance* among aged men should not be underestimated as Socrates' confutation of Cephalus takes place among "young men" (328d). Unless stated otherwise, I use Jowett's translation of *Republic* Book I from *The Dialogues of Plato*, 5vo., trans. B. Jowett, (London: Oxford University Press, 1871).

citizenship they themselves enjoy as material source for their freedom to philosophise. Nonetheless, Cephalus adds that his freedom from constantly accumulating wealth, the peaceful administration of inherited substances and thus absence of tactical manipulations of other people to keep one's possessions in check are the true privilege of a life without major socio-economic torments – it is true *agathon*. This peaceful form of life is what makes Cephalus certain that he could die hoping that his soul, because it is centred on *metron* (moderation), will face the judgment of his actions centred on *mesos* (the mean) without any real fear of being punished in the underworld.

To this modest yet well-rounded account of a pragmatic just life, portrayed by a man satisfied with his journey and socially regarded as wise, to this third class morality, Socrates cannot but deny Cephalus' existential fulfilment, first by rejecting what has appeared to count as justice and, secondly, through a series of paradoxical objections to it. Cephalus' move, deriving justice/*agathon* from an external substance/*ousia*, goods/*chremata* in his case, cannot be accepted by the philosopher as legitimate source of ethical self-sufficiency, even though Cephalus himself is adamant on having lived a just life as good metic in Athens – it is actually Socrates who is directly looking for *agathon* out of *ousia* in Cephalus' arguments (330d2). And once Cephalus agrees that "speaking the truth and paying your debts" (331c) cannot be accepted as a working definition for justice, for it does not cover all possible situations in life, he is shown being unable to discuss any further Socrates' *Grundfrage*, "what is justice?"

Due to his dialectical inexperience, Cephalus cannot sustain the sequence of questions posed by Socrates' paradoxical and abstract *elenchus*: What if always paying your debts puts you or your debtor in untenable positions (as if a metic could actually question the rules of the *polis* she resides in)? What if by telling the truth you actually do wrong to your friend (as if resident aliens do not face on a daily basis these unpredictable dilemmas more than full-status citizens)? What if the virtuous act of giving back what was given to you in a contract becomes the source of ethical wrongdoing – because your friend has in the meantime gone mad (as if these logico-cognitive tests can predict what one will ever do, metic or full citizen, or, as if foreigners are not exposed to and experience even more of these unexpected subtleties and erratic reversals)?

The underlying assumption here is, while abstracting from concrete situations and structural ambiguity, that the metic's practical moderation (*sophrosyne*) can only achieve the status of true justice (*dikaiosyne*) once the philosopher's test for universal consistency has been successfully passed. The good old Cephalus at this point is unable to answer any further and, once defeated, he must exit – not without laughing away, though, and entrusting his son Polemarchus with the protection of his (conceptual) capital from additional (philosophical) delegitimation.

Cephalus' form of life, symbolising those non-philosophical, third-class natures centred on *epithymia* (lust or irrational desire) who have spent their lives in material, practical or economic achievements, has proven to be useless except for materially hosting and theoretically setting the initial stage of the dialogue. His traditional conception of justice and ethical norms will be incorporated and assimilated in the hierarchical functioning of Plato's theory of justice in Books II to X. Slaves, farmers, workers, technicians, producers, artisans and tradesmen (*technitai*) are not only to be blamed for their lack of philosophical awareness, this conceptual deficiency ultimately proves why their third class is to be politically subjugated when

it comes to establishing and replicating the relations of power of the rational city. Their nature, desires and activities must be constantly curbed, perpetually educated and unquestionably directed by the philosophical first class, the only group which truly knows how to refute their partial and incomplete ethical claims about their own lives.

Polemarchus' first act in Book I is ironically using force, via his slave-boy, to keep Socrates in the Piraeus area and walk him to his house. After all, his name (*polemos* and *archon*, lord of the war) metonymically represents the Platonic second class he belongs to and anticipates the role he is going to be playing in the rest of the Book. But before even starting the confutation, the character Polemarchus is already caught in a dramatic portrayal full of historico-philosophical meanings: he is diegetically depicted with his family as a happy metic who will be, later in his life, extradiegetically imprisoned and then killed by the Thirty in 404 to 403. He represents a soul, a shade in the Piraeus Underworld whose tragic destiny has already been written off by the Peloponnesian War and its violent aftermath in Athens. It is the political struggle and the ideological conflicts between dominant factions in the city, between oligarchs and democrats, which are the historical reasons that will bring Polemarchus to his death sentence; but it is the philosophical confutation of his insufficient notion of justice as partisan acts towards friends and enemies (332b) that will bring Polemarchus to argumentative silence in Book I. His philosophical death sentence is the necessary tactical step to acknowledge his previous conceptual wrongdoings and start an existential conversion whose rebirth eventually puts him alongside Socrates to subsequently defend and fight for the Platonic *agathon*. The metic-warrior gains philosophical citizenship only and only after he has submitted to the only true definition of justice which, from now on, he will be defending on the argumentative battlefield with other good *phylakes*, the guardian-soldiers of the rational city.

Polemarchus' argument not only follows Cephalus' account of justice, it articulates its presuppositions and ties them to the common conception of male agonistic sociality in Athens (*dike* as *andreia*): one's ethical duty is part of a much larger context whose relational, reciprocal and antagonistic relations to other social groups make it paradigmatic. From Cephalus to Polemarchus, the meaning, scope and consequences of one's actions shift from the individual to the collective as the act of "re-paying" semantically moves from the legal *opheilein* (paying back a debt) to the ethical *apodidonai* (giving back) and, eventually, to the more traditional *to prosekon* (what should be done/proper conduct as duty) (332b). It is the Homeric ethical code of warriors, the tactical target in Polemarchus' confutation of Book I, a traditional set of moral principles epitomised by the maxim of "helping friends and harming enemies" and socially assumed as operative content of justice/*dikaion*; whereas the strategic aim is to reinscribe the Homeric warrior's ethics into the second-class guardians, the watchdogs employed to defend the *kallipolis*. What Plato seems to transcend in terms of moral values haunts back every aspect of both his *dialeghesthai* and *logon didonai*. From a recurring metaphors of argumentative fighting to diegetic exclusion, assimilation and subjugation of those characters who do not comply with the specific order it requires, it is *logos agonistikos* that eventually prevails in the dialogue. What we see in Book I is a series of agonal exchanges among different characters competing for their versions of justice; a philosophical battle between forms of morality within a much larger agonistics of justice made of conflicting definitions

for what should count as just. This confrontational space of ethico-political *logoi* becomes fully evident with the Socrates-Polemarchus dialogical exchange.

In *Republic* I, Plato's *dialeghesthai* is often described as clashing and fighting on a battlefield (335e7-10; 342d2; 344d6) and throughout his dialogues dialectical disputes among interlocutors are usually compared to a combat between two or more warriors. Refuting opponents' arguments and argumentations is fighting against their argumentative power in a close-range combat. What must be emphasised here is how the philosopher's *logos dialektikos* forms and becomes part of a larger *logos agonistikos*, which Plato constantly recontextualises using the hoplitic fight (*mache*) as its paradigm. More specifically, it is the individual fight hoplites engage with each other that Plato uses as model; a short yet cruel fight which epitomises one's life.⁹ In this philosophical assimilation, *l'envers* of the Athenian soldier's equipment and tactic on the battlefield, is the Thracian soldier with his lack of *taxis* (good order). This dichotomy calls for a binary taxonomy of values in terms of existential behaviour: hoplitic *sophrosyne* and virile courage (*andreia*) become for each Athenian citizen supreme examples of socio-political cohesion.¹⁰ Often the hoplite's ordered *sophrosyne* is indirectly depicted and conveniently juxtaposed by Plato against the peltast's chaotic *eris* (disharmony): the Athenian form of life vs. the Thracian form of life, the authentic and direct close-range weaponry vs. the inauthentic indirect long-range weaponry (344d6). Among Athenians, Thracian peltasts immediately evoke barbaric and mercenary signifiers due to their lighter, guerrilla-like equipment and absence of civic trust. More specifically, Thracian soldiers, for classic Athenians, are bellicose mercenaries and Plato's quarrel with the sophists is also a dialectic fight against a *logos* based on salary, not to mention the speculative limits Cephalus embodies as *chrematistes*. The citizen-soldier fighting as fearless hoplite in the phalanx is ultimately opposed to a horde of barbaric mercenaries and becomes the paradigm for the Platonic philosopher fighting against a horde of rhetors, sophists and ideologues.

There is no space in Polemarchus' understanding of ethical life for a not-fractured ideological space between groups of friends and groups of enemies; for a military accord between soldiers from different city-states fighting to dominate Hellas. Socrates' confutative tactic to disarm him is twofold: on the one hand, he introduces individual intentions to transform friends into good people and enemies into evil people (332a-334b); on the other hand, he makes use of the distinction between appearing fair or good as opposed to really being fair or good (334c-335e) in order to completely dismantle the old warrior-morality centred on external results and agonistic *arete*. However, neutralising politico-economical conflicts into stable demarcations grounded on definitive definitions of good and bad (people) does not solve the conflicting space of politics wherein groups and classes fight with each other to hegemonise the city; it only moves it to the elemental composition of the (Platonic) soul. Furthermore, Socrates' ethics of (intrinsic) authenticity, as opposed to

⁹ Nicole Loraux, *The Experiences of Tiresias: The Feminine and the Greek Man*, trans. P. Wissing, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), ch. 8 "Therefore, Socrates is Immortal" and ch. 9 "Socrates, Plato, Herakles: A Heroic Paradigm of the Philosopher"; Lucia Loredana Canino, "La Battaglia", in Platone, *La Repubblica*, Vol. 1: Libro I, trans. and comment by M. Vegetti et al., (Milan: Bibliopolis, 1998), pp. 209-221.

¹⁰ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "The Tradition of the Athenian Hoplite", in Id., *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, trans. A. Szegedy-Maszak, (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 85-105.

Polemarchus' ethics of (extrinsic) achievements, cannot overcome the political struggle in the city unless it unambiguously produces, relies and eventually grounds itself on a phenomenology of desires and intentions capable of univocally representing them as the only authentic sources of political good actions – something that, once again, only the frozen and classist ontology of the (Platonic) tripartite soul will epistemically claim to do in *Republic* II to X.

In the end, Polemarchus agrees with Socrates that in no case harm should be done to anyone, a final agreement on what the just man should do, an agreement only produced after an *elenchus* whose consistency and correctness have been questioned by several scholars.¹¹ Ironically enough, this pacifist thesis is immediately followed by an antagonistic plan of action which shows Socrates and Polemarchus ready to cause harm to any opponent of their newly acquired truth: "Then you and I are prepared to take up arms against anyone who attributes such a saying to Simonides or Bias or Pittacus, or any other wise man or seer? I am quite ready to do battle at your side, he said" (335e). Socrates' tactical refutations of Polemarchus serve Plato's strategy to philosophically produce the second class of warrior-guardians (*phylakes*) who will be trained to automatically recognise enemies and friends and act accordingly – the perfect watchdogs (375c-376b). As such, first Cephalus and then Polemarchus synecdochically embody Plato's strategy towards the third and second class of his envisaged politico-philosophical order; a strategy that through their dialectical refutations aims at subjugating the social groups and classes they represent, together with any possible claim about a different approach to justice than his own.

Once the philosophical dispute on justice has reached a collective, political dimension, and once the good soldier Polemarchus has joined the Socratic battlefield, the character of Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, the scary wolf-sophist, makes his entrance through a dramatic break-in (336b-c). The historical Thrasymachus was a well-established rhetor and logographer active in ancient Greece during the second half of the fifth century, and Plato presents him in Book I as a sophist with genuine philosophical interests, in other words the true enemy of his ideological struggle for the univocal conception of justice held by the members of the first class of his *kallipolis*, the true philosophers.¹² Thrasymachus immediately requests a methodological change in the discussion; he uncovers and rejects Socrates' reductions and assimilations of one concept to another in his previous refutations. This move stops

¹¹ See, for instance, John Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates: A Defense of the Interlocutors in Plato's Early Dialogues*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 203-219; Kimon Lycos, *Plato on Justice and Power: Reading Book I of Plato's Republic*, (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 31-39 and pp. 83-105; Alexander Tulin, "On the Refutation of Polemarchus: Analysis and Dialectic in *Republic I*", *Elenchos*, 25(2), 2005, pp. 277-316, esp. pp. 292-295 to see how, at the crossroad between ethical and formal argumentations, "contrariety and negation" are conveniently bended by Plato.

¹² Thrasymachus is mentioned by Plato in the list of the most skilful rhetors presented in *Phaedrus* 267c-d: "For tearful speeches, to arouse pity for old age and poverty, I think the precepts of the mighty (*sthenos*) Chalcedonian hold the palm, and he is also a genius, as he said, at rousing large companies to wrath, and soothing them again by his charms when they are angry, and most powerful in devising and abolishing calumnies on any grounds whatsoever." (Fowler trans.) Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (1400b) mentions the onomatopoeic topos traditionally referred to Thrasymachus ("you are always bold in fight, *thrasymachos*"), and credits him with formalising some rhetorical devices (1404a, 1409) and exemplary choice of metaphors (1413a). Unless stated otherwise, when I mention Thrasymachus I always refer to the Platonic character. For a rhetorical analysis of Plato's dramatisation of Thrasymachus in Book I, including the above passages from *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, see J.H. Quincey, "Another Purpose for Plato, 'Republic' I", *Hermes*, 109(3), 1981, pp. 300-315.

Socratic metonymical identifications of concepts to characters, his ironic recourse to myths, revelations and poetry, and, at the same time, forces him to engage in a conversation based on “clearness and accuracy” (336d). Two vocabularies face each other here: sophistic inquiry on political legitimacy against paradoxical arguing on notions, and when Thrasymachus puts forward his first account of justice as being “nothing else than the interest of the stronger (*to tou kreittonos xympheron*)” (338c), a whole new dimension of ethical relations, philosophical truths and political dynamics emerges. Laws and natural constitutions, relations of power and antagonistic classes, justice as inextricably tied to right and ideology – all these aspects will be part of the cruel dispute between the Chalcedonian sophist and the Athenian philosopher.

In fact, Thrasymachus adds to his initial thesis an important clause: “... different forms of government make laws democratical, aristocratical, and tyrannical, with a view to their several interests” (338d10).¹³ He does that in order to make clear that his theorising only focuses on the actual functioning of power in relation to ruling (*to archon*) and its multiple ideological and jurisdictional mediations. The functioning of power (*arche*), beyond and underneath its different constitutional form (*politeia*), lies in the fact that the dominant group has proven to be (politically) powerful enough (*kreitton* as *kratos*) to have established itself as the ruling class which, consequently, controls the dominated through convenient sets of just (*dikaion*) norms and laws (*nomoi*). Against any archaic reminiscence of (political) power understood as a natural gift (*physei*) in terms of psychophysical attributes, which can only be inherited by superior men (*aristoi*), Thrasymachus' analysis places “the stronger” (*kreittones*) as the final (but not definitive) results of a power struggle among competing groups in the political arena, the city-state.¹⁴ It is only in the aftermath of this collective struggle that their political power takes the shape of and reproduces itself through force, norms, laws and ideology, through both repressive and ideological apparatuses.

Chronologically speaking, the spheres of justice and right, together with their deliberative levels and institutional mediations, represent a secondary moment for any political power establishing itself as the only legitimate one. In other words, Thrasymachus' logic of power shows to Socrates that the foundational moment of (any form of collective) justice cannot be disentangled from political domination and ideological replication. To this Socrates replies, in his first wave of *elenchus*, by highlighting the potential fallibility of rulers who mistakenly make laws against their

¹³ Shorey translates as: “... some cities are governed by tyrants, in others democracy rules, in others aristocracy? ... And is not this the thing that is strong and has the mastery in each – the ruling party?”; from Plato, *The Republic*, 2vo., trans. P. Shorey, (London: Harvard University Press, 1930).

¹⁴ P.P. Nicholson, “Unravelling Thrasymachus' Arguments in *The Republic*”, *Phronesis*, 19(3), 1974, pp. 210-232, esp. p. 223; F.E. Sparshott, “Socrates and Thrasymachus”, *The Monist*, 50(3), 1966, pp. 421-459, esp. pp. 429-434 where he analyses how and why Thrasymachus' doctrine cannot be compared to Callicles' and concludes his argument stating that: “Thrasymachus is apparently going one step further than Callicles had. Callicles thought of power as the prerogative of those whose superiority is shown in other ways than in their hold on power. But to Thrasymachus the superiority of the unjust man is simply his superior control of the means to power (and hence to all other goods), and he is not susceptible to the arguments that brought Callicles down by appealing to his ideal of gentlemanly conduct (494e ff.). Unlike Callicles, he does not commit the error which Aristotle censures (*Pol.* 1255a5 ff., 1280a22 ff.) of supposing that superiority in one respect entails superiority in all respects. It follows from Thrasymachus' view that the wisdom and strength that constitute excellence may belong collectively to a class as well as individually to a man. In thus denying any extra superiority to the strong ...” (434).

own interests, that is, laws that for being understood as just by the ruled could eventually harm the rulers. In the event of such harmful laws being followed, Thrasymachus explains that this mistake would simply signal the end of those rulers as stronger (340d-341a). What is at stake here is the production of a theoretical account of power and ruling; in short, the art of politics that “provide for the interests of their subjects” (346e)—what *Republic* II to X tries to philosophically illustrate while unfolding Plato’s ideal *politeia*.

Then, Socrates’ second wave, his second attempt at refuting Thrasymachus, draws on professional expertise, skills and arts (*technai*) and how each of them teleologically aims at their objects’ perfection as primary interest. When Socrates is told by the Chalcedonian that each expert or skilful technician performs her ability primarily for her own interest and only secondarily for her objects, he shifts the discussion from the alleged intrinsic value of each *techne* to a new, specific one called the art of receiving pay and salary (*misthotike*, 346a-347a). He does that in order to prove that professional expertise, and the art of ruling above all, can be dissociated from monetary retribution. However, Socrates’ famous *techne*-analogy overcomes only surreptitiously the brute materiality of Thrasymachus’ empirical analysis: if the art of payment is a real art, salary haunts back at least one art; if it is not, receiving pay remains a constitutive element of one’s *techne*.

Socrates’ focus turns now to power itself, to the art of ruling in relation to the moral fabric of those who exercise it. Only the best citizens are willing to rule without profiting from their position, not caring for ambition nor money. They feel compelled to take charge of the *polis* as a necessary action to avoid the “punishment” of being “ruled by one who is worse than” them (347c). This further objection has surreptitiously moved the argumentative space from actual relations of power to ethical principles forged in an undisputable ontology, which still needs to be proven exempt from political interests, that is, interests tied to existing forms of domination. The normative force of Socrates’ premise has been assumed as a cogent fact (“in very truth the true ruler/*to onti alethinon archon* is not meant by nature”, 347d4-5) even though, first, he cannot bring forward any historical example and, secondly, his objection connects an alleged intrinsic divide within human souls. There is an ontological and epistemic rift between good soul, with their libidinal reluctance to be socially punished (good men do not strive for power except for ...), and bad souls, where both levels of this rift prove to be viable only ideally speaking.¹⁵ This aporetic solution, the lack of a convincing refutation of Thrasymachus’ main thesis on power,

¹⁵ The whole passage is worth reading: “And not being ambitious they do not care about honour. Wherefore necessity must be laid upon them, and they must be induced to serve from the fear of punishment. And this, as I imagine, is the reason why the forwardness to take office instead of waiting to be compelled, has been deemed dishonourable. Now the worst part of the punishment is that he who refuses to rule is liable to be ruled by one who is worse than himself. And the fear of this, as I conceive, induces the good to take office, not because they would, but because they cannot help—not under the idea that they are going to have any benefit or enjoyment themselves, but as a necessity, and because they are not able to commit the task of ruling to any one who is better than themselves, or indeed as good. For there is reason to think that if a city were composed entirely of good men, then to avoid office would be as much an object of contention as to obtain office is at present; then we should have plain proof that the true ruler is not meant by nature to regard his own interest, but that of his subjects; and every one who knew this would choose rather to receive a benefit from another than to have the trouble of conferring one” (347b-347d).

politics and ideology, will no longer be examined in the remaining pages of Book I,¹⁶ which now show Socrates resolutely questioning the Chalcedonian on the value of conducting a just, happy life opposed to an unjust, unhappy life—where unjust simply means being stronger and excelling in *pleonexia*, the will to exceed which Plato metonymically identifies Thrasy Machus with.

This last battery of Socrates' arguments focuses on how each thing (from horses to eyes, from daggers to ears) performs its own function (*ergon*) only when it achieves its specific excellence (*arete* as *dynamis*). As soon as this understanding of (non-human) virtue as performativity is transferred to the human soul, whose ultimate function is to rule over the body and its chaotic drives,¹⁷ human life is apparently assumed to be the soul's most important function. This has two major consequences: first, the good soul rules fairly and the evil soul rules badly and, secondly, justice is assumed to be the soul's only virtue, with the immediate corollary of injustice being "the defect of the soul" (353e). The final inference of Book I is that those who have *justice* in their *soul* are just men who *live well* and therefore are *happy*, thus they are the only possible candidates for ruling. This problematic ethical deduction of the just ruler has been criticised by many commentators for presenting several fallacies.¹⁸ What should be emphasised here is how this conception of the just ruler, which is grounded on an implicit hierarchical necessity within the soul, will be presupposed by Plato when he later defines justice as "minding one's business/rendering each his own" (*ta heautou prattein*) in Book IV.¹⁹

The ultimate meaning of this reduction of Thrasy Machus' major thesis to ethics is Plato's philosophical attempt to seal off the huge cracks produced in the philosophical texture of Book I by the sophist.²⁰ The Chalcedonian, with his empirical genealogy about relations of power and sociological descriptions of constant struggles between dominant groups, offers no transcendent solutions to overcome the general agonistics in the city; there is simply no transcendental solution, no anabatic journey in his materialist sophistic²¹ to save the socio-political phenomena.²² In Thrasy Machean terms, what we are left with is an endless politics of justice which is

¹⁶ "So far am I from agreeing with Thrasy Machus that justice is the interest of the stronger. This latter question need not be further discussed at present" (347d-e).

¹⁷ "Well; and has not the soul an end which nothing else can fulfil?, for example, to superintend and command and deliberate and the like. Are not these functions proper to the soul, and can they rightly be assigned to any other?" (353d).

¹⁸ E.L. Harrison, "Plato's Manipulation of Thrasy Machus", *Phoenix*, 21(1), 1967, pp. 27-39; Joseph P. Maguire, "Thrasy Machus—or Plato?", *Phronesis*, 16(2), 1971, pp. 142-163, esp. pp. 149-153 and pp. 160-163; Harold Zyskind, "Plato's Republic Book I: An Equitable Rhetoric", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 25(3), 1992, pp. 205-221, esp. pp. 216-221; Tulin, "On the Refutation of Polemarchus", esp. pp. 296-298.

¹⁹ "You remember the original principle which we were always laying down at the foundation of the State, that one man should practise one thing only, the thing to which his nature was best adapted; now justice is this principle or a part of it. Yes, we often said that one man should do one thing only. Further, we affirmed that justice was doing one's own business, and not being a busybody" (433a).

²⁰ Maguire, "Thrasy Machus—or Plato?", pp. 151-152.

²¹ Sophistics is the name for the sophists' theoretical practice once it is no longer understood in Platonic and Aristotelian terms. For the meaning of this shift in both philosophical philology and contemporary scholarship, see Barbara Cassin, *Sophistical Practice: Towards a Consistent Relativism*, trans. M. Syrotinski, A. Goffey et al., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); see also the short entry "Sophist" by Michel Narcy in H. Cancik and H. Schneider (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World Vol. 13: Sas-Syl*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 636-640.

²² See Sparshott, "Socrates and Thrasy Machus", pp. 427-431.

made of permanent ideological struggles among conflicting classes. Plato has to fill up these cracks and, above all, neutralise the political as the primary space where the distribution of power, division of labour, ideological devices and ethical arrangements are still fluid elements as they originate from clashes between individual and collective entities, from unavoidable conflicts between rulers and the ruled. Diegetically speaking, the ethical turn at the end of Book I does not refute Thrasymachus, who has stopped engaging with Socrates before he even starts his last chain of arguments due to lack of agreement on premises and conclusions. Furthermore, the ethical deduction of the just ruler does not satisfy Socrates himself, as we read in the last lines of Book I (354a-c). However, the chief result of these last pages – underneath and beyond the tactical incoherence and inconsistencies of both Socratic and Thrasymachean preceding arguments and counter-arguments – lies in their symmetrical argumentative subjugation. The paradigmatic unjust man portrayed by Thrasymachus amounts to a silly, despotic tyrant (not very different from Callicles'), while Socrates' eristic account of the just ruler is based on an undeveloped and incomplete set of arguments that only the successive Books II to X will supplement and transcend (thus making him Plato's harmless mouthpiece for the rest of *Republic*).

Which Hades, Whose *Katabasis*, What Sort of *Jouissance*?

“At least I've already spelt out in previous sessions what regression confirms. There is still the question of how to articulate it. I articulate it by suggesting that it's the choice of signifiers that gives an indication of regression Desire, far from being natural, is always formed by a particular position the subject takes in relation to the Other. Helped by this fantasmatic relation, man finds his bearings and situates his desire. Hence the importance of fantasies. Hence the rarity of the term 'instinct' in Freud – it's always a question of the drive, *Trieb*, the technical term we give to this desire insofar as speech isolates it, fragments it and places it in this problematic and disjointed relationship to its aim that one calls the direction of the tendency, and whose object is, moreover, subject to substitution and displacement or, indeed, to all forms of transformation and equivalents, but is also offered to love, which makes it a subject of speech.”

Jacques Lacan²³

From being the deuteragonist and one of the most lucid interlocutors Socrates ever faces in a Platonic dialogue, at the end of Book I Thrasymachus is abruptly described by Socrates as his newly acquired friend since the sophist has “left off scolding” and “grown gentle towards” him (354a). This sudden alliance comes right after the Chalcedonian has once again mocked Socrates' conclusion about the uselessness of injustice with a sarcastic remark on his autistic chain of arguments.²⁴ These are the last words uttered by the untamed sophist, before he is relegated to the argumentative underworld he will be placed in, before he takes up the role of the silent shade in the philosophical Hades Plato leaves him to in Books II to X.²⁵ Thrasymachus' inability to

²³ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V: The Formations of the Unconscious 1957-1958*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), p. 403 and pp. 418-419.

²⁴ “Let this, Socrates, he said, be your entertainment at the Bendidea” (354a).

²⁵ Thrasymachus is described as gentle interlocutor in Book V 450a-b; his other indirect occurrences in the *Republic* are 357a, 358b-c, 498c-d (“Do not make a quarrel, I said, between Thrasymachus and me, who have recently become friends, although, indeed, we were never enemies; for I shall go on striving to the utmost until I either convert him and other men, or do something which may profit them against the day when they live again, and hold the like discourse in another state of existence”), 545b, 590d.

demote the political, his unwillingness to domesticate the general agonistics in acceptable ethical terms signal, in Plato's progressive narrative, his blocked destiny he is going to be entrapped into from now on.

In terms of irony and argumentative relations of power, and compared with Socrates in the opening scene, the Chalcedonian's last entrance in Book I marks a complete katabatic reversal, as he is not going to take part in any religious and philosophical celebration at the Piraeus. Thrasymachus shall not receive any revelation from a goodness, a narrative device that in traditional katabatic plots marks the beginning of the return to the upper world. Whereas Plato depicts both Socrates' and readers' *katabaseis* at the end of Book I with an aporetic yet temporary break in the voyage, a break which only momentarily stops the underground journey to the upper world, to light, to *episteme* and true justice started in the opening pages of *Republic*, Thrasymachus' *katabasis* stops where Book I ends, there is no *anabasis* available for him: he will be ventriloquised by Glaucon in Book II or, whenever he speaks again, he is no longer the untameable wolf of Book I, but rather a friendly dog, a pale ghost relegated to the dark Underworld of non-being, *doxa* and *pleonexia*.

Compared to the philosopher-guardians of the first class, what Thrasymachus represents is a different philosophical approach to social questions as the importance of his role, range of discussion and urgency of his refutation in Book I abundantly demonstrate. Sophistics should be condemned and subjugated because, through Thrasymachus, it shows how (Platonic) philosophy itself forms and is part of a larger ideological field of struggle between dominant groups and classes in fourth-century Athens and Hellas.²⁶ This ideological field of struggle goes from geopolitical conflicts among regional powers (Persia, Macedonia, Sparta, other Greek city-states and colonies), to competing philosophical canons of education within the *polis* (traditional norms, Protagoras' civic artanship, Isocrates' *paideia*, etc) and, eventually, to eristic battles among students of rhetoric, sophistics and philosophy inside and outside their schools—while each of these levels at the same time reflects and is structurally connected to specific class-interests or partial elements of them. These ideological aspects are not added to (Platonic) philosophy as external and secondary features; they are part of and mutually codetermine the extent to which (Platonic) ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and politics favour or neglect one's class-interests.

In particular, Plato's *Politeia* is a machinery of (self)legitimation for the philosopher's role in the (ideal) city, for his undisputable leading position when it comes to determine how each class and their partial and incomplete ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics must always submit to the true scientific knowledge (*episteme*) held by those *just* and *impartial* intellectuals who circularly embody it.²⁷

²⁶ Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Social Context*, (Suffolk: Basil Blackwell, 1978); Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, (London: NLB, 1974), esp. chs. 1-3; M.M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction*, (London: Batford Academic and Educational, 1977); Mohammad Nafissi, "Class, Embeddedness, and the Modernity of Ancient Athens", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46(2), 2004, pp. 378-410; Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Class Struggle", in Id., *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, (New York: Zone Books, 1990), pp. 11-27; John R. Wallach, "The Platonic Moment: Political Transpositions of Power, Reason, and Ethics", in Kyriakos N. Demetriou and Antis Loizides (eds.), *Scientific Statesmanship, Governance, and the History of Political Philosophy*, (New York/London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 9-23.

²⁷ The Greek term *politeia* exceeds the semantic spectrum of the Latin *res publica* as it signifies not only constitutional and legal arrangements; it points, more directly, to the conscious and unconscious self-

Republic I is then the necessary preliminary stage for both the construction and institutionalisation of this philosophical machinery of circular consecration. The third and second class's genuine claims to philosophically represent their own class-interests (that is, their definitions of justice) must be theoretically delegitimised, and those who happen to be dialectically strong enough to challenge the first class's philosophical domination must be either assimilated or forgotten in an argumentative Hades.²⁸

The opening lines of Book I, "I went down (*kateben*) yesterday to the Piraeus" (327a1), have been extensively analysed in their "symbolism of depth and descent".²⁹ The immediate reference here is Odysseus' *katabasis* and Plato is replacing Hades with the Piraeus, the Athenian port, as opposed to the Acropolis, the higher place from which Socrates is walking down. We know that his descent happens at night and the fourth-century Piraeus is a vibrant area where all sorts of transactions among citizens, slaves, workers, artisans, merchants, metics and barbarians take place. For the Platonic philosopher, this liminal urban space represents an irrational, ambiguous place not only in speculative terms, but it is the recurring threat of social mobility of both the *Lumpenproletariat* and the working-class that gives it a horrible chthonian aspect.³⁰ His way down into this metropolitan Hades is what opens the *Republic* and the official reason Socrates, together with Glaucon, descends to the Piraeus is to "offer up my

articulation of human beings into communities through relations of power, their legitimacy and reproduction. As explained by Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1953): "The classics called the best society the best *politeia*. By this expression they indicated, first of all, that, in order to be good, society must be a civil or political society, a society in which there exists government of men and not merely administration of things. *Politeia* is ordinarily translated by 'constitution'. But when using the term 'constitution' in a political context, modern men almost inevitably mean a legal phenomenon, something like the fundamental law of the land, and not something like the constitution of the body or of the soul. Yet *politeia* is not a legal phenomenon. The classics used *politeia* in contradistinction to 'laws'. The *politeia* is more fundamental than any laws; it is the source of all laws. The *politeia* is rather the factual distribution of power within the community than what constitutional law stipulates in regard to political power. The *politeia* may be defined by laws, but it need not be. The laws regarding a *politeia* may be deceptive, unintentionally and even intentionally, as to the true character of the *politeia*. No law, and hence no constitution, can be the fundamental political fact, because all laws depend on human beings. Laws have to be adopted, preserved, and administered by men. The human beings making up a political community may be 'arranged' in greatly different ways in regard to the control of communal affairs. It is primarily the factual 'arrangement' of human beings in regard to political power that is meant by *politeia* *Politeia* means the way of life of a society rather than its constitution When speaking of constitution, we think of government; we do not necessarily think of government when speaking of the way of life of a community. When speaking of *politeia*, the classics thought of the way of life of a community as essentially determined by its 'form of government'" (135-16).

²⁸ George F. Hourani, "The Education of the Third Class in Plato's Republic", *The Classical Quarterly*, 43(1-2), 1949, pp. 59-60; Vidal-Naquet, "A Study in Ambiguity: Artisans in the Platonic City", in Id., *The Black Hunter*, pp. 224-245; Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. J. Drury, C. Oster and A. Parker, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), ch. 1, "Plato's Lie".

²⁹ Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 16: *Order and History*, Vol. III: *Plato and Aristotle*, (Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press), 2000, pp. 105-118; Charles Segal, "The Myth Was Saved: Reflections on Homer and the Mythology of Plato's Republic", *Hermes*, 106(2), 1978, pp. 315-336; M. Vegetti, "Katabasis", in Plato, *La Repubblica*, Vol. 1: Libro I, pp. 93-104; John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 313-378.

³⁰ Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter*, pp. 7, 9, 274-275, for the socio-economic reasons behind Plato's philosophical rejection of the Athenian fleet, "maritime trade" and those who materially make them possible – see also *Laws* IV 704a-705b.

prayers to the goddess; and also because I wanted to see in what manner they would celebrate the festival, which was a new thing. I was delighted with the procession of the inhabitants; but that of the Thracians was equally, if not more, beautiful. When we had finished our prayers and viewed the spectacle, we turned in the direction of the city." (327a2-b1)

This proem presents several traditional signifiers that Plato employs and reverses in ironical terms. The traditional poetics of *katabasis*, although presenting variations in figures, meaning and motivation, relies on the literary genre of epic poetry which canonically shows a god or hero traveling to the end of the known world to descend into the Underworld/Hades, where he meets with divine creatures and souls (symbolising true knowledge and justice) who eventually transfer and share with him eschatological doctrines or crucial messages on the living and the dead, on death and life. Other recurring *topoi* are successful fights with monsters, encounters with wrongdoers, sinners and evil souls as well as blessed souls, catalogue of women and heroines, the judgment of the dead (with punishments and rewards) and, finally, the return of the hero to the upper world (*anabasis*) to disseminate the newly acquired knowledge. It is an allegoric ritualistic cycle that symbolises how previous forms of life undertake a process of purification, renewal or rebirth (self-transcendence) through internalisation of higher, dangerous or inexplicable revelations (initiation).³¹ The *katabasis-anabasis* cycle became crucial for Orphic and Pythagorean traditions and Plato, like any other educated Greek, was familiar with the symbolic importance of

³¹ Although the narrative structure of literary *katabaseis* was never explicitly codified in ancient Greece, stories about an exceptional hero or shaman-poet visiting the land of the dead progressively showed speculative overtones and philosophical reconfigurations: both Odysseus' *nekyia* to visit Tiresias in Hades about his destiny and Orpheus' journey to the Underworld became fundamental for the shamanistic tradition about *katabaseis*; Heracles' katabatic cycles were incorporated in the Eleusinian Mysteries; katabatic backgrounds are present in Hesiod, *Theogony* 729-46; Epimenides' legend follows some katabatic *topoi* (downward journey and the long sleep in which he met with Aletheia and Dike); several stories about Pythagoras are clearly modelled on the poetics of *katabasis*; Parmenides' poem shows a philosophical initiation that follows a katabatic pattern. See Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), chs. 2 and 5; Fritz Graft and Rudolf Brändle, "Katabasis", in Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), Vol. 7: K-Lyc, pp. 27-29; José Luis Calvo Martínez, "The *Katábasis* of the Hero", in Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge and Emilio Suárez de la Torre (eds.), *Héros et Heroïnes dans les Mythes et les Cultes Grecs*, (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2000), pp. 67-78; Alberto Bernabé, "What is a *Katábasis*? The Descent to the Netherworld in Greece and the Ancient Near East", *Les Études Classiques*, 83, 2015, pp. 15-34; Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, "Pathein and Mathein in the Descents to Hades", in Gunnel Ekroth and Ingela Nilsson (eds.), *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), pp. 103-123; Miguel Herrero De Jáuregui, "Priam's Catabasis: Trace of the Epic Journey to Hades in *Iliad* 24", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 141, 2011, pp. 37-68; Radcliff G. Edmonds III, "When I Walked the Dark Road of Hades: Orphic *Katábasis* and the *Katábasis* of Orpheus", *Les Études Classiques*, 83, 2015, pp. 261-279; Noel Robertson, "Heracles' Catabasis", *Hermes*, 108(3), 1980, pp. 274-300; Annie Verbanck-Piérard, "Round Trip to Hades: Herakles' Advice and Directions", in *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition*, pp. 163-193; Ivana Petrovic and Andrej Petrovic, "Divine Bondage and *Katabaseis* in Hesiod's *Theogony*", in *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition*, pp. 57-81; J.S. Morrison, "Parmenides and Er", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 75, 1955, pp. 59-68; Joseph Owens, "Knowledge and *Katabasis* in Parmenides", *The Monist*, 62(1), 1979, pp. 15-29; Maria Michela Sassi, "Parmenide al bivio. Per un'interpretazione del Proemio", *La Parola del Passato*, 43, 1988, pp. 383-396; M. Vegetti, "Katabasis", esp. pp. 94-99; Walter Burkert, "Pleading for Hell: Postulates, Fantasies, and the Senselessness of Punishment", *Numen*, 56(2-3), 2009, pp. 141-160; Tobias Reinhardt, "Readers in the Underworld: Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 3.912-1075", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 94, 2004, pp. 27-46.

otherworldly journeys. The proem of his *Politeia* immediately signals a structural continuity with older forms of shamanistic knowledge and rites of mystical initiation, which find their first philosophical formulation in Parmenides and the Pythagoreans, whose works are extensively used and deconstructed by Plato throughout his dialogues, and which also contain several katabatic stories.³² The urban and secular reconfiguration of Socrates' *katabasis* in Book I depicts Plato's hero descending to the infernal areas of Athens to satisfy his intellectual curiosity about the new goodness of the pantheon, the Thracian Bendis, thus enjoying the official celebrations her followers have organised for the whole day.³³ What the philosophical initiand will then face is a series of dialectical encounters with more or less frightening, ignorant and misguided phantasms (Cephalus, Polemarchus and Thrasymachus) about the true account of what counts most in life, of how one should live, of what justice is. It is only when the Platonic hero has successfully defeated these phantasms and overcome the argumentative pain they caused him, that he will be able to return to the upper world and finally narrate his story about what he saw and experienced – in sum, to theorise, establish and run the ideal city on earth.

If we look at the whole scene of Book I from a different angle, it is Thrasymachus' forced, permanent and inverted *katabasis* which Plato also gives us – and one does not exclude the other.³⁴ The talented sophist who comes to Athens from the Megarian colony of Chalcedon in Bithynia is put in a philosophical Hades, wherein he has to endlessly endure and continually fight against the ethico-ontological reductions of his materialist logology. Banned from all speculative venues of the *kallipolis*, the Chalcedonian wolf is displaced as dialectical Cerberus waiting at the Gates of Hades for generations of philosophers to perform their cycle of ideological purification. What his *logomachia* against Socrates, the sage-hero, initiates and allows from Book II to Book X is an anabatic journey for philosophy students and lecturers of the Academy on the safe and luminous paths of institutional (self)legitimation. However, this is not an attempt to rescue either the historical Thrasymachus or the fictional Chalcedonian from where he has been relegated to: we simply do not have enough extant materials from the former to start a rescue mission

³² Vegetti, "Katabasis", pp. 94-96, where he lists all terminological and mythological occurrences of *katabainein* and katabatic figures in Plato's works (*Gorgias*, *Theaetetus*, *Republic*, *Sophist* and *Laws*); see Adrian Mihai, "Hades in Hellenistic Philosophy (The Early Academy and Stoicism)", in *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition*, pp. 194-214, esp. pp. 197-199 for a brief outline of Plato's conceptions of the Underworld; for a more nuanced analysis of Plato's conscious use of stories about the afterlife, Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 4 "The Upward Path of Philosophy: The Myth in Plato's *Phaedo*", pp. 159-220.

³³ On the historico-philosophical significance for the presence of a Thracian goddess in Athens, see Silvia Campese and Silvia Gastaldi, "Bendide e Panatenee", in Platone, *La Repubblica*, Vol. 1, Libro I, pp. 105-131; Corinne Ondine Pache, "Barbarian Bonds: Thracian Bendis among the Athenians", in S.R. Asirvatham, C.O. Pache and J. Watrous (eds.), *Between Magic and Religion: Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Society*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), pp. 3-11; Petra Janouchová, "The Cult of Bendis in Athens and Thrace", *Graeco-Latina Brunensia*, 18(1), 2013, pp. 95-106.

³⁴ In *Phaedo* 107e4-108a6 we read: "And the journey is not as Telephus says in the play of Aeschylus; for he says a simple path leads to the lower world, but I think the path is neither simple nor single, for if it were, there would be no need of guides, since no one could miss the way to any place if there were only one road. But really there seem to be many forks of the road and many windings; this I infer from the rites and ceremonies practiced here on earth" (Fowler trans.).

for the latter and, incidentally, to really do justice to both, for what happens in Book I, one ought to rewrite, line by line, a whole alternative *Politeia*.³⁵

In these final remarks, I would rather focus on what the character Thrasy-machus symbolises in Plato's libidinal organisations of philosophical (relations of) power. It is no secret that several aspects, notions and arguments put forward by the Chalcedonian in Book I are largely incorporated, strategically employed and extensively implemented by Plato in several places of the *Republic* or other dialogues to secure the production and reproduction of the first class.³⁶ This can be verified every time power needs to construct and secure the ethical, social, political and economic structures of the *Republic*. Thrasy-machus, as powerful *pharmakon* for the erection and reproduction of the *kallipolis*, marks the return of repressed phantasms in Plato's text. First, Thrasy-machus' sophisticated *jouissance* needs to be curbed, delegitimised and subjugated; only then can it be incorporated into Plato's own divided³⁷ philosophical *jouissance* and, subsequently, invested where it is more

³⁵ It would be interesting to imagine an untamed Thrasy-machus arguing with Socrates in each Book of the *Republic*. Although Cary J. Nederman, "Thrasy-machus and Athenian Politics: Ideology and Political Thought in the Late Fifth Century B.C.", *Historical Reflections*, 8(2), 1981, pp. 143-167, discusses the impact of Athenian historico-political climate on Plato's characterisation of the Chalcedonian, something that must be praised as almost exceptional in the Thrasy-machus literature, his attempt to merge the historical Thrasy-machus with the Platonic character into one single coherent author is far-fetched as the only short fragment we have from the historical Chalcedonian, the *patrios politeia* fragment, is from a speech he wrote as logographer and it does not fit easily with his major thesis on justice from *Republic* Book I. I find Mario Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, trans. K. Freeman, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), portraying a more effective yet general account of both the historical Chalcedonian and Platonic character, especially when he writes: "Thrasy-machus interprets a fact by stating it. He does not put forward any rule to be followed, but merely suggests conceptual explanations Whoever reads his speech attentively will see how bitterly he speaks We can understand, therefore, how his inner love of justice, in spite of the realistic and tragic picture of it which he had to give But alas, the struggle against the tyranny of a concept too vast, which is, or may easily become, that of *nomos*, must have led him to abandon the idea of either panhellenism or cosmopolitanism. His realism prevents him from rising to the great ideal of Antiphon and Hippias, but in compensation his grief, deep, hidden and reserved, makes him a man quick to feel sufferings and to represent them in such a way that others are moved by them. His rhetorical teaching takes on a deeper vibration because inspired by philosophical thought" (327-328).

³⁶ Nicholson, "Unravelling Thrasy-machus' Arguments in *The Republic*", discusses the underlying politics of ideals between Plato and Thrasy-machus, understood as his "mirror image", in the ideological struggle of Book I and subsequent Books: "*The Republic* deals with the doctrine that justice is the advantage of another, including the idea that justice for subjects is the advantage of the ruler, and not the latter solely or even mainly When Socrates sets out to reply to their demands in the remainder of *The Republic*, he is also making his reply to Thrasy-machus, and making it by a method that Thrasy-machus cannot ignore, that of *μαχρολογία*. Plato, unlike Socrates, seems to agree with Thrasy-machus over method. He knows that he cannot 'prove' Thrasy-machus wrong ... and that to rebut his characterisation of justice he must resort to Thrasy-machus' methods and produce a rival and more appealing characterisation. In their debate, Socrates and Thrasy-machus in effect swap definitions of the key terms (art, ruling, wise, strong, happy, advantage, etc). Neither can be confuted provided that his own set of definitions is adhered to The importance of the debate with Thrasy-machus is that it sets many themes for the book as a whole Thrasy-machus, in fact, has set up an ideal which is the *mirror image* of Plato's (a procedure pursued in the *Gorgias* through the opposition between Socrates and Callicles). That is to say, their ideals are often the same yet turned back to front at the vital point Overall, Thrasy-machus' tyrant is the mirror image of Socrates' Philosopher Ruler ... there is nothing elsewhere in *The Republic* which leads us to abandon the line of interpretation of Thrasy-machus' arguments Neither, I would argue, does *The Laws* 714b-d" (230-232).

³⁷ George Klosko, "Thrasy-machos Eristikos: The Agon Logon in *Republic* I", *Polity*, 17(1), 1984, pp. 5-29:

needed, that is, the dialogical production and material securisation of both the Law and the Name-of-the-Father. Political and ideological struggles must be reduced to professional ethical training, while at the same time they covertly form the unquestionable kernel of Plato's partisan master signifier *to agathon* – as the long and unstopable Socrates' monologue of Books II to X bears witness to.

One of the challenges we are currently facing within South African academic philosophy is the permanence of white supremacy in discourses of decolonisation and transformation. There is an ideological (pre)disposition among white philosophy scholars to promote repressive and conservative forms of decolonisation and transformation, while claiming to be engaging in progressive and transformative work within our discipline. Reading Plato's master discourse on relations of power and ideological struggle against itself, with an aim to understand how it tactically and strategically constructs its own tools against his enemies in Book I – (foreign) tradesmen, soldiers and intellectuals – could not only highlight the ways in which the white philosophy discourse extracts knowledge from the slave-student,³⁸ it could also show how a regressive philosophical division of labour still grounds itself on a conservative division of philosophical labour in the South African academia.

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"As many authorities have argued, one major purpose of Book I is to raise themes dealt with later in the work. If this is true, Plato does not *have* to depict Thrasymachos as a powerful philosophical thinker, with a startlingly original, fully worked out doctrine of justice. What is best in Thrasymachos' jumbled view can be left for Glaucon to resuscitate for purposes of discussion in Book II. Similarly, though the arguments with which Socrates batters Thrasymachos into silence are generally fallacious – and, as I have argued, intentionally so – they serve admirably to raise many subsequent themes of the work [Plato] uses Socrates' fallacious arguments in *Republic* I to unveil fundamental themes of the later Books – he uses Thrasymachos' series of arguments to present variations on a shocking, sophisticated doctrine of justice" (28-29). Sparshott, "Socrates and Thrasymachos": "Plato is thus not so much acquiescing in bourgeois ideology as capturing its slogan and putting it to a fresh use. This he does with other slogans too, and his discourse incorporates an equivalent for all the catchwords that his fellow disputants have proposed. 'The interest of the stronger' becomes the interest of the ruling mind and (a fortiori) the whole against its parts; 'returning to each what he is owed', interpreted dynamically, becomes the social mobility, the apt allocation of roles, that makes 'minding one's own affairs' possible; 'helping friends and harming enemies' becomes suppressing the worse elements in oneself in favor of the better; 'not meddling' (*mê polupragmosunein*) becomes not dissipating one's energies on unsuitable tasks; 'another's good' becomes a good that is alien (*allogtrion*) not because it is someone else's but because it is impersonal Finally, the slogan neatly inverts the way of life that Thrasymachus has recommended: instead of attending solely to one's own advantage, one attends solely to one's own potentialities." (456-458); F.E. Sparshott, "Plato and Thrasymachus", *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, 27, 1957, pp. 54-61, after poignantly analysing how six major theses put forward by Thrasymachus are in fact defended by Plato in his *Republic* and other dialogues, he concludes that "Plato in the *Republic* writes as a man whose mind and affections are deeply divided; and we are perhaps justified in saying that his own attitude to his character Thrasymachus is as ambiguous as that which he worked to produce in his readers" (61).

³⁸ See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis 1969-1970*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, (New York/London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), chs. 1, 2, 6 and 12.