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PLATO ON HATRED OF PHILOSOPHY

SYLVAIN DELCOMMINETTE

SINCE ITS INCEPTION, philosophy has aroused both fascination and hostility. What is it about philosophy that provokes such contrasting reactions? Plato's works offer a valuable opportunity to explore this question, not only because of the dialogue form, which makes it possible to present a range of attitudes toward the practice of philosophy, but also because of Plato's persistent efforts to define, describe, and defend philosophy as a radically unique activity. Surprisingly, this matter has received very little scholarly attention up to now, perhaps because the relevant passages are usually considered peripheral to the doctrines and methods thought to be central to Plato's philosophy. In this paper, I collect and organize the evidence in order to show that, although Plato presents a wide array of motives for hostility toward philosophy, these are all based on some form of ignorance that is a source of pain. I will also try to show how, in well-disposed individuals, a special kind of ignorance can become a source of love rather than hatred, and how these people experience a special kind of pleasure—the very pleasure of practicing and loving philosophy. Thus this issue will prove to be bound up with some of the deepest currents of Plato's thought. My approach in this investigation will be resolutely unitarian, for I think Plato's works display a remarkable coherence on these questions.

I

Let us begin by the least controversial, and therefore the least interesting, form of hostility toward philosophy: the general suspicion of the masses toward philosophy as a distinct activity. Here we are talking about people who have no direct experience of philosophy and who see philosophers as holding unconventional values. From their point of view, philosophers seem to live upside down;¹ they have given

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up the pleasures that make life worth living, and thus are already in a way dead and really deserve to die.² Philosophers' ignorance concerning the basic facts of practical life appears to such people as ridiculous and deserving of mockery;³ moreover, if philosophers actively proselytize, that is a subversive act, and it is best to get rid of them altogether by putting them to death. The strength of this hostility is illustrated by the destiny of the philosopher returning to the cave⁴ and, of course, by Socrates' trial.

This kind of hatred is not directed specifically against philosophy; it is simply an antipathy of the masses toward anything different from their own sensibilities,⁵ and it can also be directed against sophistry.⁶ As Socrates explains in the *Apology*, the main source of this attitude is laziness, which takes any disturbance of one's habits and well-ordered life as a nuisance.⁷ In this regard, what makes philosophy especially contemptible is how extremely different it is from the lifestyle and concerns of the masses.

A variant of this reaction regards philosophy as useless⁸ and as something that makes the people who practice it themselves useless, especially when it is pursued immoderately and beyond an appropriate age, because it makes an adult ignorant of the knowledge that is necessary for being a good citizen and thereby leaves one helpless in all the important matters of life.⁹ In other words, philosophy is puerile and does not deserve to be taken seriously by responsible adults. Here, the point is not that philosophy represents any threat to other people, but rather that it is inconsistent with legitimate adult aspirations. It is an unworthy pursuit for any self-respecting citizen. It thus arouses disdain

¹ *Gorgias* 481c1–4, *Phaedrus* 249c8–d2.

² *Phaedo* 64b1–6, 65a4–7.

³ See *Theaetetus* 174a4–b1.

⁴ *Republic* 517a4–6.

⁵ See *Apology* 20c6–8.

⁶ For a recent study of the sources of popular hostility against sophists and philosophers, see James Clerk Shaw, *Plato's Anti-Hedonism and the Protagoras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 191–203.

⁷ *Apology* 30e1–31a8.

⁸ *Parmenides* 135d4–5.

⁹ *Gorgias* 484c4–486d1. This conception of philosophy was common at the time. See Eric Robertson Dodds, *Plato's Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 272–73, who cites notably Isocrates, *Panathenaicus* 28 and *Against the Sophists* 7 and following, and Euripides, *Medea* 294–301.

and contempt, inspiring the urge among nonphilosophers to punish those who indulge in it.¹⁰

The well-known answer to this criticism in the *Republic* is that problem lies not in the uselessness of philosophers but in the city that is unable to use them.¹¹ Of course, this supposes that philosophy is not in truth useless, but that only those who know what true usefulness is can understand it. So the reason for this kind of hatred is ignorance, but it is less ignorance about what philosophy is—although it is certainly that too—than ignorance about what is truly useful.

But the main reason why philosophy appears so disdainful to nonphilosophers, Socrates adds, is that it is practiced by unworthy people. I will not go into the details of the very elaborate explanation of this phenomenon in the *Republic*: corruption of the philosophical nature, desertion of philosophy by the people worthy of it, conquest of the empty place by sophists and mediocre people.¹² The hostile reaction of other people to such characters is, in a way, justified;¹³ but they are wrong to assign these faults to philosophy itself, which has nothing to do with these unworthy practitioners.¹⁴ Here again, the source of hatred is ignorance; but in this case the ignorance consists in mistaking something else for philosophy because the name is assumed by impostors. The remedy prescribed by Socrates is to explain what a true philosopher is; for although it is impossible that the multitude becomes philosophical,¹⁵ Socrates is confident that people will change their opinion if they are presented with an accurate picture of philosophy and philosophers.¹⁶ This presupposes that it is possible to convey what philosophy is to people who will never themselves become philosophers, which does not go without saying. Part of this task is carried out by the *Republic*, which might explain why this dialogue resorts to numerous images to describe philosophy and expressly

¹⁰ *Gorgias* 485d1–3, 486c2–3.

¹¹ *Republic* 487d9–489c7.

¹² See esp. *Republic* 490e1–497a8. On this point, see the analyses of Monique Dixsaut, *Le Naturel philosophe* (Paris: Vrin/Les Belles Lettres, 1985), 263–69.

¹³ See *Republic* 495c8.

¹⁴ See also *Euthydemus* 307a2–c4.

¹⁵ *Republic* 493e2–494a4.

¹⁶ *Republic* 499e1–502a3.

refuses to engage in a properly dialectical investigation about it¹⁷—if such a thing is possible at all.¹⁸

As we can see, hostility of the masses toward philosophy is always grounded in ignorance: either complete ignorance of what philosophy is, which originates from fear of the unknown, or a misrepresentation of it, or ignorance of the usefulness philosophy can have for the city. Such ignorance is a source of pain, not directly, but because it makes philosophy appear to these people as a potential source of nuisance, discomfort, and disturbance. Against such reactions, philosophy's only response is to manifest what it really is, not in order to convert everyone, which is impossible, but simply to reveal itself as benign or even beneficial to the city as a whole.

II

A second source of hostility toward philosophy is envy and jealousy, which at his trial Socrates also cites as the source of animosity that will be the true motive for his conviction.¹⁹ This comes from a very different group of people, namely, the flatterers of those who have a good philosophical nature, that is, of the well-gifted young men.²⁰ They see the philosopher as a competitor who deprives them of their prey and prevents them from gaining universal acclaim; and in response, they spread a negative image of him that might, Socrates fears, influence other people.

Socrates describes these people as follows:

These are the persons, Crito, whom Prodicus describes as occupying the no-man's-land between the philosopher and the statesman. They think that they are the wisest of men, and that they not only are but also seem to be so in the eyes of a great many, so that no one else keeps them from enjoying universal esteem except the followers of

¹⁷ See *Republic* 533a1–9.

¹⁸ It could be argued that the absence of a dialogue called *Philosopher*, which seems to be announced by such passages as *Sophist* 216c2–217c3, 253c6–254b4, and *Statesman* 257a3–258b3, is precisely meant to suggest the impossibility of such a task. For a different view on this nonexistent dialogue, see most recently Mary Louise Gill, *Philosophos: Plato's Missing Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁹ See *Apology* 28a7–9.

²⁰ *Republic* 494d10–495a1.

philosophy. Therefore, they think that if they place these persons in the position of appearing to be worth nothing, then victory in the contest of the reputation of wisdom will be indisputably and immediately theirs, and in the eyes of all.²¹

These people should not be confused with sophists, who also happen to suffer from the same kind of envy. This is what Protagoras explains in his defense of the title “sophist,” which he claims for himself as its progenitor:

Caution is in order for a foreigner who goes into the great cities and tries to persuade the best of the young men in them to abandon their associations with others, relatives and acquaintances, young and old alike, and to associate with him instead on the grounds that they will be improved by this association. Jealousy (φθόνου), hostility (δυσμένειαι), and intrigue (ἐπιβουλαί) on a large scale are aroused by such activity.²²

Here, then, philosophers are set beside sophists as the targets of the attacks of those envious people, who want to shine alone in the eyes of promising youth. The source of such envy is, more precisely, the teaching activity of the sophists,²³ which makes them appear as *sophoi*. Hence Socrates can reply only that he does not, for his part, pretend to teach anything to anyone,²⁴ and that, despite appearances to the contrary, he is not a *sophos*—at least not in the sense the sophists claim to be.²⁵

Here, too, hatred stems from ignorance and, more precisely, from a confusion between philosophy and sophistry. But in the present case, sophistry provokes envy because it is considered to be something good and desirable among talented young men. This actually depends on a triple ignorance: ignorance of what philosophy is, ignorance of what sophistry is, and ignorance of what the good is. This whole complex of ignorance arouses envy. Now, envy is analyzed in the *Philebus* as a pain of the soul.²⁶ So ignorance provokes pain—once again, not directly, but

²¹ *Euthydemus* 305c6–d2, trans. Rosamond Kent Sprague. All translations are taken from *Plato: Collected Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

²² *Protagoras* 316c5–d3, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell.

²³ See also *Euthyphro* 3c7–d2.

²⁴ *Apology* 19d8–20c3.

²⁵ *Apology* 22e7–23c1.

²⁶ *Philebus* 47e1–4, 48b8–10.

through the mediation of envy—and this pain is a source of hatred of philosophy.

III

Thus far we have considered people whose picture of philosophy is distorted because they have no direct experience of it. But this does not mean that a direct experience of philosophy is sufficient to be instantly persuaded of its value. On the contrary, such experience can amount to a confrontation that provokes even deeper hatred of philosophy. In fact, this sort of response is documented in several dialogues.

A first and most obvious case is the person who undergoes Socrates' refutation and is thus led to face his own ignorance on issues about which he professes to be an expert. As Socrates very lucidly analyzes in the *Apology*, this is a major source of enmity toward him, not only on the part of those he has refuted, but also on the part of witnesses who revere the refuted ones.²⁷ When it involves being proven wrong, people simply do not like to learn the truth;²⁸ and they certainly do not want to have to justify the way they live, and will try to dispense with anyone forcing them to do so, even if that means putting him to death.²⁹

Obvious as it may seem, this cause of hatred deserves to be analyzed in greater detail. Why do people who are refuted react so strongly? Clearly, because refutation is painful. But why is that so? For his part, Socrates claims in the *Apology* that examining his fellow citizens is not merely a service to Apollo, but the best favor they had ever received;³⁰ moreover, he goes so far as to say that in performing this task, he was making them really happy,³¹ so that in putting him to death, they would be harming themselves rather than him.³² This did not prevent the Athenians from sentencing him to death, unaware as they were of the happiness with which he graced them. But is it really

²⁷ *Apology* 21b9–23a5.

²⁸ *Apology* 24a4–8.

²⁹ *Apology* 39c4–d8.

³⁰ *Apology* 30a5–7.

³¹ *Apology* 36d9–10.

³² *Apology* 30c7–31a3.

possible to be made happy without noticing it? And how could a painful state contribute in any manner to happiness?

In order to answer these questions, let us turn first to the *Gorgias*, where Socrates reaffirms the benefits of being refuted. He also explains why: being refuted frees the soul from false opinions, which are especially harmful when it comes to the most important questions, that is, how we should live and what we should do.³³ Now this process might not be pleasurable, as Socrates acknowledges;³⁴ but the difference between pleasure and the good is, of course, one of the main themes of the dialogue as well as the principle of differentiation between rhetoric (which pursues pleasure) and philosophy (which pursues the real good).

But even if it is not pleasurable, how is it possible that refutation, being something good, is often experienced as painful? Refutation frees the soul of its mistaken opinions. More generally, it frees the soul of ignorance, and more precisely of the worst kind of ignorance: ignorance that is unaware of itself. As the Stranger explains in the *Sophist*—in a passage, it is true, where he is supposed to define the sophist, but which to my mind presents the very best definition of the Socratic *elenchus*, hence the Stranger's reluctance to attribute to the sophist the resulting definition³⁵—ignorance (ἄγνοια) is of two kinds. One consists in not knowing and yet thinking that one knows, which is the source of all mistakes and the only one that deserves to be called lack of learning (ἀμαθία).³⁶ The other is not described, but Theaetetus says that the part of teaching that gets rid of it is the teaching of crafts (δημιουργικὴ διδασκαλία).³⁷ Thus one can understand that this kind of ignorance simply corresponds to not being an expert in a specific area and being aware of it, which is confirmed by a parallel passage in the *Alcibiades* where both kinds of ignorance are described in similar terms.³⁸ Removing the first—and worse—kind of ignorance is called education (παιδεία).³⁹ The Socratic *elenchus* is, of course, a kind of education thus

³³ See *Gorgias* 458a2–b1, 461a3–4, 470c6–8, 505c3–4, 506b6–c3.

³⁴ See *Gorgias* 521d6–522c3.

³⁵ *Sophist* 230e6–231b2. I will return to this passage in the next section.

³⁶ *Sophist* 229b7–d4; compare *Laws* 863c2–6.

³⁷ *Sophist* 229d1–2.

³⁸ *Alcibiades* 116e5–118b3.

³⁹ *Sophist* 229d2.

understood: its aim is to remove from the soul the ignorance unaware of itself.

Now ignorance is not, by itself, painful, no more than its corollaries injustice, intemperance, cowardice, and, in general, vice.⁴⁰ This is precisely the tragedy of ignorance, which makes it the greatest evil: it can remain unnoticed. In the vocabulary of the *Philebus*, ignorance unaware of itself is an unfelt lack, but a lack arouses pain only when it is felt. Hence ignorance is painful only when we become aware of it in a situation where we would need the corresponding knowledge—just as forgetting becomes painful only when we reflect on this loss in relation to our needs.⁴¹ But this is, of course, exactly what happens in a Socratic *elenchus*: Socrates' interlocutor becomes aware of his ignorance *and* of the extreme importance of what he does not know. Hence the pain he feels might provoke hatred of the person who revealed his ignorance and who is thus seen as the cause of this pain.

IV

This reaction is not inevitable, however, and it is certainly not the one intended. On the contrary, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates declares that he would be pleased to be refuted if he says something untrue:⁴² the genuine philosopher is thankful to eliminate error, because he loves truth more than anything else. Consequently, to the amazement of everyone present, a philosopher also displays genuine pleasure when he receives serious objections, in a spirit of constructive, collaborative inquiry—as is testified both by Socrates' reaction to the objections of Cebes and Simmias in the *Phaedo*⁴³ and by Zeno's and Parmenides' reactions to the objections of the young Socrates in the *Parmenides*.⁴⁴ But even people who are not (yet) philosophers can react to refutation without hard feelings. For example, Nicias says in the *Laches* that there is for him nothing unpleasant (ἀηδέες)⁴⁵ to be put to the test by Socrates,

⁴⁰ See *Gorgias* 477d3–e2.

⁴¹ *Philebus* 52a5–b5.

⁴² *Gorgias* 458a2–7.

⁴³ *Phaedo* 89a2–4.

⁴⁴ *Parmenides* 130a3–b1.

⁴⁵ *Laches* 188b5.

and in the *Theaetetus*, Theodorus assures Socrates that Theaetetus will bear criticism of his views without anger.⁴⁶ Alcibiades' feelings, as he describes them in his speech at the end of the *Symposium*, are more complex: he claims to suffer immensely from having been bitten by the *logoi* in philosophy;⁴⁷ however, this experience provoked in him not hatred but fascination, and drew him irresistibly to Socrates.⁴⁸ Instead of converting his pain into hate, he attributes it to the shame he feels of not being strong enough to follow Socrates' advice after departing from him; for apart from Socrates he cannot resist the appeal of the honors from the many.⁴⁹

This difference in reaction depends, of course, first of all on the character of the person who is refuted. If he has love of wisdom and a nature that yearns for truth—that is, a truly philosophical nature⁵⁰—he will be grateful for the removal of his ignorance, which will provoke pleasure insofar as it at least partly fulfills a desire. Depending on whether this trend conflicts with other desires present in him, this pleasure will be more or less mixed with pain.⁵¹ But really to enjoy this process, one also has to have sufficient capacities and a taste for exertion (*φιλοπονία*), so as not to be discouraged by the difficulty of the task.⁵² For hate can also come from the feeling of one's inherent incapacities, or from an absence of the proper training of one's capacities,⁵³ either of which makes the soul unable to turn toward the true objects of knowledge and thus provokes fear and angst.⁵⁴

The response to refutation by someone in such a condition is described at the end of the sixth definition of the sophist, which I introduced at the end of the previous section. There the Stranger presents the new method of education in contrast to ancient practices of admonition:

[The moderns] cross-examine (*Διερωτῶσιν*) someone when he thinks he's saying something though he's saying nothing. Then, since

⁴⁶ *Theaetetus* 161a5–6.

⁴⁷ *Symposium* 218a2–7.

⁴⁸ *Symposium* 215d6–216c3.

⁴⁹ *Symposium* 216a4–b6.

⁵⁰ See *Republic* 485b10–d5.

⁵¹ I will return to the question whether such pleasure can be completely devoid of pain in section VII below.

⁵² *Republic* 486c1–d3, 535b5–e9.

⁵³ *Republic* 411c9–e3.

⁵⁴ See *Theaetetus* 175b8–176a1.

his opinions will vary inconsistently, these people will easily scrutinize them. They collect his opinions together during the discussion, put them side by side, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects. The people who are being examined see this, get angry (χαλεπαίνουσι) at themselves, and become calmer (ήμεροῦνται) toward others. They lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves that way, and no loss is pleasanter to hear or has a more lasting effect on them. Doctors who work on the body think it can't benefit from any food that's offered to it until what's interfering with it from inside is removed. The people who cleanse the soul, my young friend, likewise think the soul, too, won't get any advantage from any learning that's offered to it until someone shames (εἰς αἰσχύνην καταστήσας) it by refuting (ἐλέγχων) it, removes the opinions that interfere with learning, and exhibits it cleansed, believing that it knows only those things that it does know, and nothing more.⁵⁵

This text is problematic, since it occurs in the course of a definition of the sophist, and could thus be understood as describing a method associated with sophistry—or at least “noble” sophistry (γενναία)⁵⁶—rather than with philosophy. But as I have already said, it seems clear to me that this passage gives a very accurate description of the Socratic method, and this becomes crystal clear when we compare it to the end of the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates says that the benefits of his maieutic art are (1) to render the people it helps ready for conceiving better products, and (2) if they remain intellectually barren, to make them gentler and less tiresome to other people by making them realize that they do not know what they do not know.⁵⁷ Why, then, is this description presented in the context of a definition of the sophist? Precisely, I think, in order to expose the sophist as an imitator of the philosopher. Here, too, there is a confusion between these two characters, but in a way opposite to what happened before: it is no longer the philosopher who is mistaken for a sophist, but the sophist who is mistaken for a philosopher, due to the lack of knowledge of what he really is—Theaetetus is explicitly said not to have encountered any sophist yet⁵⁸—

⁵⁵ *Sophist* 230b4–d3, trans. Nicholas P. White.

⁵⁶ *Sophist* 231b8.

⁵⁷ *Theaetetus* 210b11–c4. There is considerable scholarly debate on the question whether this sixth definition refers to Socrates or not. For a recent, well-informed, and convincing argument in favor of a positive answer, see Nicolas Zaks, “Socratic *Elenchus* in the *Sophist*,” *Apeiron* (forthcoming).

⁵⁸ *Sophist* 239e1.

and to the sophist's talent as an imitator. And this time, the confusion is to the advantage of the sophist rather than the disadvantage of the philosopher.

The important point for our present purpose, however, is that this passage shows how the well-disposed interlocutor attributes the pain caused by the realization of his own ignorance to himself rather than to his examiner. The pain in question takes the form of shame,⁵⁹ which provokes anger at oneself and makes one feel more modest, thus also making one gentler with his fellows. This is certainly an optimistic account, in view of the much more hostile reactions that we can observe in Plato's dialogues; but it corresponds quite well to the reaction described by Alcibiades in the *Symposium*,⁶⁰ and probably also to that of those young people who followed Socrates and became philosophers themselves.

Another text goes even further in the same direction. It occurs in the *Theaetetus*, at the end of what is commonly called "Protagoras's apology." Socrates has just presented the best defense he could of Protagoras's thesis. He concludes, still speaking on behalf of Protagoras:

If you feel prepared to go back to the beginning, and make a case against this theory, let us hear your objections set out in a connected argument. Or, if you prefer the method of question and answer, do it that way; there is no reason to try to evade that method either, indeed an intelligent person might well prefer it to any other. Only I beg that you will observe this condition: do not be unjust in your questions. It is the height of unreasonableness that a person who professes to care for moral goodness should be consistently unjust in discussion. I mean by injustice, in this connection, the behavior of a man who does not take care to keep controversy (ἀγωνιζόμενος) distinct from discussion (διαλεγόμενος); a man who forgets that in controversy he may play about and trip up his opponent as often as he can, but that in discussion he must be serious, he must keep on helping his opponent to his feet again, and point out to him only those of his slips which are due to himself or the intellectual society which he has previously frequented. If you observe this distinction, those who associate with you will blame (αἰτιάσονται) themselves for their confusion and their difficulties, not you. They will seek your company, and think of you as their friend (φιλήσουσιν); but they will

⁵⁹ As is well known, τὸ ἔλεγχος (neutral) means "dishonor, shame" in Homer. On the persistence of this meaning in the Socratic ἔλεγχος, see Louis-André Dorion, "La subversion de l'*elenchos* juridique dans l'*Apologie de Socrate*," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 88 (1990): 311–44.

⁶⁰ See esp. *Symposium* 216a8–b3.

loathe (μισήσουσι) themselves, and seek refuge from themselves in philosophy (φεύξονται ἀφ' ἐαυτῶν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν), in the hope that they may thereby become different people and be rid forever of the men that they once were. But if you follow the common practice and do the opposite, you will get the opposite results. Instead of philosophers, you will make your companions grow up to be the enemies (μισοῦντας) of philosophy.⁶¹

This text is most remarkable, not least because it presents Protagoras as asking Socrates to behave socratically rather than sophistically. For there is, to my mind, no doubt that the method here recommended by Protagoras is the Socratic method, especially as it is displayed in the *Theaetetus* from this passage onward, namely, a serious, critical examination rather than a mere verbal contest. This passage indeed echoes the way Socrates concludes the presentation of his maieutic method earlier in the dialogue, where he asked Theaetetus not to get angry if he is led to throw away that with which he is pregnant, as many of Socrates' interlocutors do, because they do not see that he proceeds with good will (εὐνοίᾳ) and not malice (δυσνοίᾳ).⁶² Moreover, a little earlier, in a passage I shall quote below, Socrates explicitly says that his aim is to make friends (φίλους . . . γίγνεσθαι) with Theaetetus through dialectic (διαλέγεσθαι).⁶³ In the passage presently under consideration, Protagoras asks Socrates to refrain from the art of controversy (see ἀγωνιζόμενος),⁶⁴ which proceeds "antilogically."⁶⁵ Antilogy is an art—or a so-called art—in which the historical Protagoras himself was supposed to be a master, as is well known.⁶⁶

Why, then, is such distinctively "Socratic" advice put in Protagoras's mouth? I think this extends the dialogue's criticism of Protagoras's position: Protagoras himself must want his position to be discussed according to standards different from those he explicitly promotes—and, in fact, incompatible with the implications of his own

⁶¹ *Theaetetus* 167d5–168b2, trans. Margaret Jane Levett and Myles Burnyeat.

⁶² *Theaetetus* 151c5–d3.

⁶³ *Theaetetus* 146a5–8.

⁶⁴ *Theaetetus* 167e4.

⁶⁵ See *Theaetetus* 164c8–d2.

⁶⁶ See *Sophist* 232b6–e2. On this "ironical inversion" between Protagoras and Socrates, see esp. Daniel Babut, "Platon et Protagoras: L'apologie du sophiste dans le *Théétète* et son rôle dans le dialogue," *Revue des Études Grecques* 84 (1982): 49–86 (on the passage quoted above, see esp. 61–69).

view, if we are to believe what Socrates himself said a little earlier.⁶⁷ This passage thus already heralds the self-refutation argument that is to follow, with the difference that it focuses on the method rather than the content of Protagoras's thesis.⁶⁸

If so, then we can use this text as a clue concerning what is supposed to happen to the person who undergoes a proper refutation (provided that he is well disposed): he will attribute his failure to himself, come to hate himself, and want to change; at the same time, he will seek refuge in philosophy and develop friendship with his examiner. Hence hatred is not intrinsically bad: correctly oriented, that is, toward oneself and one's ignorance, it can become a motive for friendship and for the aspiration to philosophy.

If refutation is not performed properly, however, the risks are great. The most dangerous form of hatred of philosophy can develop: misology. Let us now turn to this threat, introduced by Socrates in a famous passage of the *Phaedo*.

V

As Hackforth notes,⁶⁹ the misology passage occurs almost exactly at the middle of the dialogue, which is *prima facie* evidence of its importance. After some hesitation due to their unwillingness to distress Socrates with what is in their eyes something painful,⁷⁰ Simmias and Cebes articulate objections against the previous arguments for the immortality of the soul. These objections do indeed cause trouble, but not to Socrates, who receives them “in a pleasant, kind and admiring

⁶⁷ *Theaetetus* 161e7–162a3.

⁶⁸ Here I side along with Alex Long, “Refutation and Relativism in *Theaetetus* 161–171,” *Phronesis* 49 (2004): 24–40. See also Michel Narcy, *Platon: Théétète* (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1995), 337–38 n. 205, and Zina Giannopoulou, *Plato's Theaetetus as a Second Apology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 78–79. For an opposite view, see notably Paul Stern, *Knowledge and Politics in Plato's Theaetetus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 144–45, who interprets this advice as distinctly Protagorean—which seems impossible to me.

⁶⁹ Reginald Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 109.

⁷⁰ *Phaedo* 84c1–d8.

way” (ἡδέως καὶ εὐμενῶς καὶ ἀγαμένως).⁷¹ Rather, it distresses the rest of the audience:

When we heard what they said we were all depressed (ἀηδῶς διέτεθμεν), as we told each other afterwards. We had been quite convinced by the previous argument (λόγου), and they seemed to confuse (ἀναταράξαι) us again, and to drive us to doubt not only what had already been said but also what was going to be said, lest we be worthless as critics (κριταί) or the subject itself admitted of no certainty (καὶ τὰ πράγματα αὐτὰ ἄπιστα ἦ).⁷²

We can identify three steps in the process described in this passage, all of which cause some pain. First, the persons in the audience lose their confidence in an argument that had formerly been trusted. This is tantamount to the acknowledgment of one’s own ignorance. Second, they come to doubt their own competence in distinguishing sound arguments from unsound ones. This, too, is the acknowledgment of their own ignorance, but ignorance in another sense, that is, not as a deprivation of truth but as being unable to find it. And third, they transfer the responsibility of this complex state of ignorance to the things themselves. This transfer might appear at first as a relief, but it actually arouses despair since it implies that the truth cannot be found by anyone.

Now all the steps in this process can cause pain only to people who value truth; for the feeling of pain originates from the impression that truth is unattainable. But what would have satisfied their initial impulse? Obviously, the truth of a thesis that would mark the end of a search and provide relief from the fear of death. What Socrates’ audience seeks is to be convinced and reassured,⁷³ and thus to stop searching. Now it is doubtful that this is the state of mind of Socrates himself at the present moment. For, if that were the case, how could he feel pleasure when hearing the objections put forward against his previous arguments? Of course, one might say that he is not worried by these objections because he already knows how to counter them. I am not sure this is correct: at least in the case of Cebes’ objection, he will have to think “for a long time” in order to find a way out.⁷⁴ In any case, such a reply might at best explain why Socrates feels no pain in hearing

⁷¹ *Phaedo* 89a3.

⁷² *Phaedo* 88c1–7, trans. G. M. A. Grube.

⁷³ *Phaedo* 77e4–8.

⁷⁴ See *Phaedo* 95e8–9.

these objections, but not why he feels pleasure—unless one supposed that he is proud and confident that he will triumph in the end; however, this would really seem unworthy of Socrates, lowering him to the level of a *philonikos*, a “lover of victory.” If he feels pleasure, I suggest, it is rather because these objections are an opportunity to deepen the matter and to revitalize the inquiry, which is what Socrates values. In other words, the truth Socrates values is not a property of the theses he would happen to hold, but of the method he uses to investigate and defend them.⁷⁵ We may substantiate this interpretation by further consideration of this fascinating passage.

Socrates’ initial reaction to Cebes’ and Simmias’s objections is to warn against the danger of misology, which, he suggests, might develop in a manner similar to misanthropy. He describes the origin of misanthropy in the following way:

Misanthropy comes when a man without knowledge or skill (ἄνευ τέχνης) has placed great trust in someone and believes him to be altogether truthful, sound and trustworthy; then, a short time afterwards he finds him to be wicked and unreliable, and then this happens in another case; when one has frequently had that experience, especially with those whom one believed to be one’s closest friends, then, in the end, after many such blows, one comes to hate all men and to believe that no one is sound in any way at all.⁷⁶

The description of this process—whose best illustration is certainly Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*—is less trifling than it might seem at first. According to it, the source of misanthropy is to be found in the misanthropist himself, who is thus responsible for the bitterness he develops. More precisely, it is to be found in some lack of skill. What skill? Socrates clarifies immediately: a “skill in human affairs” (τέχνη

⁷⁵ On this point I disagree with Raphael Woolf, “Misology and Truth,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2008): 1–16, one of the very few scholars who have devoted attention to this question. According to Woolf, Socrates would have an “ideological” conception of truth and knowledge in the *Phaedo*, by which he means that Socrates “has a specific, contentful idea of what the objects of truth and knowledge are, which provides the grounds for his advocacy of truth and knowledge as the highest goods” (5). Although I agree that, according to Socrates, truth and knowledge are possible only if we hypothesize the intelligible forms, I do not think this hypothesis prescribes a certain kind of content, but rather that it provides the starting point for a method of research. See below.

⁷⁶ *Phaedo* 89d4–e3, trans. Grube.

περὶ τάνθρωποια).⁷⁷ The lesson of this skill is very peculiar: it does not reveal men to be worth loving after all; rather, it is that most of them are worth neither hating nor loving, because the extremely good and the extremely bad are very few in number whereas the majority lies in between.⁷⁸ In other words, the remedy for misanthropy is not philanthropy,⁷⁹ but rather dampening down expectations in human affairs in order to avoid being disappointed. Knowing human affairs actually reduces one's interest in them, and this is not a bad thing, especially if it turns one's interest toward higher and more valuable things.

This is not the point about which there is a similarity between the origins of misanthropy and of misology, as Socrates soon makes clear:

[B]ut arguments are not like men in this particular. I was merely following your lead just now. The similarity lies rather in this: it is as when one who lacks skill in arguments (ἀνευ τῆς περὶ τοὺς λόγους τέχνης) puts his trust in an argument as being true, then shortly afterwards believes it to be false—as sometimes it is and sometimes it is not—and so with another argument and then another. You know how those in particular who spend their time studying contradiction (οἱ περὶ τοὺς ἀντιλογικοὺς λόγους διατρίψαντες) in the end believe themselves to have become very wise and that they alone have understood that there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument, but that all that exists simply fluctuates up and down as if it were in the Euripus and does not remain in the same place for any time at all.⁸⁰

What is similar in the two processes is that they are caused by a lack of skill. But the lesson of the *tekhnē peri tous logous* is very different from

⁷⁷ *Phaedo* 89e6–7.

⁷⁸ *Phaedo* 89e8–90b4.

⁷⁹ According to Leonard Brandwood, *A Word Index to Plato* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 1976), φιланθρωπία and φιλάνθρωπος occur only three times in Plato's dialogues (if one excludes *Definitions* 412e11). At *Symposium* 189d1 and *Laws* 713d6, the adjective applies to a god who is benevolent to mankind. *Euthyphro* 3d7 is the only case of φιλανθρωπία ascribed to a man, namely, Socrates, who justifies his willingness to talk with anyone for free by his love of men, even though he knows that this arouses the hate of his fellow citizens. Given that Socrates presents himself and his mission as a gift of the gods (see above), his philanthropy can be seen as an extension of the gods'. In any case, these instances show that in Plato, philanthropy is not the love of human beings as they are, but rather the willingness to do them some good, possibly against their own (apparent) will.

⁸⁰ *Phaedo* 90b4–c6, trans. Grube.

that of the *tekhnē peri tanthrōpeia*. Most men were neither extremely good nor extremely bad, but somewhere in between. Arguments, however, are of only two kinds: some are true, secure, and discernible, while others seem true at one time and false at another.⁸¹ Not having *tekhnē peri tous logous* makes one think that *all* arguments are of the second kind. Why so? Because even true and secure arguments might appear sometimes true and sometimes false. But whereas some arguments suffer from this condition because they are intrinsically unsound, others appear so because we who deal with them are unsound.⁸² This last kind of unsoundness might be due to our excessive association with *antilogikoi logoi*, that is, contrary or contradictory arguments designed to make the same thing appear in contrary or contradictory ways. Familiarity with these arguments might lead us to think that all arguments are of that kind; and, in order to free ourselves from the responsibility of this state of affairs, we might transfer it to the things themselves and deem arguments to be intrinsically unstable.

Let us recall that this process is not inherently painful; only those who value truth find it painful. However, according to Socrates, the *antilogikoi* are “pleased with themselves” when they mix everything up together,⁸³ and Plato often notes the pleasure one can take in indulging in various forms of sophistic reasoning.⁸⁴ Hence the seductive power that this practice might have, especially among the youth. But the pleasure it arouses does not stem from the very activity of reasoning; rather, it arises from the love of victory⁸⁵ when one does not care for the truth. By contrast, in order to feel pain at the thought that all *logoi* might turn into their contrary, one must desire truth: it is only on this basis that the incapacity to find a solid and stable argument generates despair. Misology is thus a threat only to philosophically disposed individuals, just as misanthropy threatens only those who have a natural and at first unconsidered love for men in general.⁸⁶

⁸¹ *Phaedo* 90c8–d3.

⁸² *Phaedo* 90d3–e3.

⁸³ *Phaedo* 101e3–6.

⁸⁴ See for example *Republic* 539b1–7; *Sophist* 251b6–c6; *Philebus* 15d8–16a3.

⁸⁵ See φιλονίκως at *Phaedo* 91a3.

⁸⁶ There is thus no suggestion that the *antilogikoi* would be themselves *misologoi*, contrary to what Theodor Ebert writes in *Platon: Phaidon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 303–04.

The account of misology in the *Phaedo* is, thus, very different from the one we find in the *Laches*.⁸⁷ In this early dialogue, it is the unphilosophical Laches who declares that he may appear sometimes *misologos* and sometimes *philologos*, depending on the harmony or disharmony he observes between one's *logoi* and one's deeds (ἐργα).⁸⁸ In this context, it is only the content of the *logoi* that is at issue, and whether it is in keeping with one's acts. Hating some *logoi* thus understood is completely justified and does not threaten philosophy at all. However, in the *Phaedo*, misology is an illegitimate move that only drives lovers of truth and wisdom to despair and that stems from an incapacity to discriminate between sound and unsound arguments. It is a hatred that concerns not merely this or that discourse, but the very process of arguing or reasoning itself. Hence it is really a hatred of philosophy.⁸⁹

We should note one further point. According to Socrates in the *Phaedo*, one of the sources of misology is the association with *antilogikoi logoi*. This does not mean that all *antilogikoi logoi* are necessarily inadequate to their objects. Indeed, such arguments might accurately reflect the state of sensible phenomena, which according to Plato are intrinsically *antilogikoi* themselves.⁹⁰ This is important because it means that if there are sound and stable arguments, they cannot refer to sensible phenomena as such but must depend on something else—the intelligible forms, as we shall see presently.

VI

What is Socrates' reply to misology? Actually, he offers two different replies. The first consists in showing that a particular argument, which appears to be sound and contradicts another

⁸⁷ For a comparison of misology in the *Laches* and in the *Phaedo*, see Louis-André Dorion, "La misologie chez Platon," *Revue des Études Grecques* 106 (1993): 607–18.

⁸⁸ *Laches* 188c4–e4.

⁸⁹ For this reason, the author of the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions* seems to have been well inspired when he defined *aphilosophia* as the state of the *misologos* (*Definitions* 415e4).

⁹⁰ On this point, see George B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 67–68.

convincing argument, is actually unsound. This is what Socrates does in response to Simmias's objection: he shows that the objection, convincing as it may at first appear, cannot withstand proper scrutiny.⁹¹ Hence the threat against the previous argument disappears, as well as its appearance of unsoundness.

But such a reply, of course, is limited. In order to banish the threat of misology altogether, one has to teach the very *tekhnē peri tous logous* that will enable us to distinguish sound from unsound arguments. This, I think, is what Socrates does in reply to Cebes:⁹² he shows him how to proceed in order to avoid the troubles provoked by the explanations of the *physiologoi*, namely, shifting back and forth,⁹³ facing contradictory explanations,⁹⁴ and thus becoming confused⁹⁵ or even blind.⁹⁶ The method he proposes here is characterized by its safety, insofar as it prevents one from running into contradiction, no matter how inexperienced he is.⁹⁷ Now, as is well known, this method, which Socrates presents as his “second sailing” (δεύτερον πλοῦν),⁹⁸ consists in “taking refuge in the *logoi*” (εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα),⁹⁹ a process he explains as consisting in—or at least as going along with—hypothesizing intelligible forms.¹⁰⁰ We can now understand why: because it is only with reference to intelligible forms, insofar as they are the only perfectly stable objects, that sound reasoning can take place.

⁹¹ *Phaedo* 91e2–95a5.

⁹² *Phaedo* 95e9–102a3.

⁹³ *Phaedo* 96a9–b1.

⁹⁴ *Phaedo* 96e6–97b7, 101a5–b1.

⁹⁵ *Phaedo* 100d.

⁹⁶ *Phaedo* 96c, 99e. The connection between misology and the so-called method of hypothesis is also emphasized by Kenneth Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 89, whose general interpretation of Socrates' response to misology is nevertheless different from mine.

⁹⁷ See esp. *Phaedo* 100c9–102a1. Hence the importance of the anonymous objection (*Phaedo* 103a4–10), since it expresses fear that the very principle of this new kind of explanation contradicts an argument that has been accepted before. Misology threatens again, and Socrates dismisses it by showing that this objection presupposes a misunderstanding of both arguments (*Phaedo* 103a11–c2)—in other words, a lack of τέχνη περὶ τοὺς λόγους.

⁹⁸ *Phaedo* 99d1.

⁹⁹ *Phaedo* 99e5.

¹⁰⁰ *Phaedo* 100b1–7.

This hypothesis makes it possible to distinguish the contrary aspects of sensible reality in order to avoid contradictions in talking about it too.¹⁰¹

The remedy for misology is therefore the positing of the forms that opens the only space in which sound reasoning will become possible.¹⁰² This might explain a peculiarity of the text, noticed by Gallop,¹⁰³ although I think he interprets it wrongly: at 89d2–3, Socrates says that one could suffer no greater evil than misology, whereas at 83c1–9, the greatest of all evils was said to be considering the visible as what is most clear and most true. Gallop suggests that these alleged evils might be related insofar as “[o]ne who has lost all faith in rational argument will not recognize Forms as the true ‘realities.’”¹⁰⁴ But I think it is the opposite: a lover of truth who does not *begin* by hypothesizing the forms and admits only the existence of the sensible will inevitably fall into misology.¹⁰⁵ Developing a *tekhnē peri tous logous* presupposes turning away from the sensible and recognizing that sound arguments must refer to intelligible forms.

VII

By contrast with the *tekhnē peri tanthrōpeia*, the *tekhnē peri tous logous* transforms hatred not into indifference, but into love. More precisely, it helps a preexisting love of truth to develop, by showing us both that there are sound arguments and how to distinguish them from unsound ones. Although this word is absent from the *Phaedo*, what can then develop is what Plato sometimes calls *philologia*.

The *philologia* in question is not to be confused with the one Laches professes to feel when he meets someone whose *logoi* are in tune with his acts.¹⁰⁶ A *philologia* of this sort is only the love of certain discourses, valued for their content, whereas the *philologia* at issue here is a love for the very process of arguing and reasoning itself. It

¹⁰¹ Compare *Parmenides* 128e6–129d2.

¹⁰² Compare the similar recommendation of Parmenides to the young Socrates at *Parmenides* 135b5–c2, which follows the praise of his *lógmē* ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους (130a8–b1; see also 135d2–3).

¹⁰³ David Gallop, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 153–54.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰⁵ Compare Monique Dixsaut, *Platon: Phédon* (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1991), 123.

¹⁰⁶ *Laches* 188c6–e2.

should also be distinguished from the love of arguing of those Plato calls sophists or eristics, who are really *philonikoi*, lovers of victory, and have no love of truth. The *philologia* at issue here is rather the love of true reasoning, that is to say, reasoning that respects the conditions in which truth can be found, notably in turning toward intelligible forms. From this point of view, *philologia* is really a synonym of *philosophia*, which is confirmed by a passage of the *Republic* in which the *philosophos* and the *philologos* are identified.¹⁰⁷

Hence the truth the philosopher ends up loving is not so much the truth of certain theses that could be secured once and for all, but the very process of reasoning correctly in order to find the truth. In other words, it is the love of dialectic in all its forms, rather than the love of the results of its application to a particular problem. This appears very clearly in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates claims to be *philologos*¹⁰⁸—which at first might seem to mean that he is a lover of rhetorical discourses—but later explains that what he is truly in love with are collections and divisions that give him the power to speak and to think.¹⁰⁹ For one cannot insist too much on the fact that, for Plato, dialectic is not only a method that would lead to knowledge, but it is itself the highest form of knowledge, corresponding to the cognitive state of *nous* or *noēsis*.¹¹⁰

Now we can understand why when he is—at least apparently—refuted, an accomplished philosopher such as Socrates, Zeno, or Parmenides is not simply insensitive to pain, but actually feels pleasure: he considers such a situation to be an opportunity for reasoning further, which is what he truly desires and loves. Can this pleasure be unmixed with pain? I think it can.¹¹¹ True, insofar as philosophy manifests a desire, it presupposes a lack, namely, ignorance, and more precisely a *felt* lack, namely, the acknowledgment of one's own ignorance. But this ignorance can be taken in two ways. On the one hand, it can be understood as the fact of not possessing the truth about the question at

¹⁰⁷ *Republic* 582e8.

¹⁰⁸ *Phaedrus* 236e4–5.

¹⁰⁹ *Phaedrus* 266b3–5; compare *Philebus* 16b5–6.

¹¹⁰ See esp. *Republic* 511b2–e5, 533c8–d6, and *Philebus* 57e6–59d9.

¹¹¹ The following account is grounded on the analysis of pure pleasure of knowledge I proposed in *Le Philèbe de Platon. Introduction à l'agathologie platonicienne* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 470–80.

issue; and if one can be led to understand that the truth that is really worth loving is true reasoning itself, one will not experience this sort of ignorance as painful. Instead, it will provide a Socrates, Zeno, or Parmenides the opportunity to resume a dialectical search and thus to experience truth in the very process of reasoning. This corresponds to the cleansing of the soul performed by the Socratic *elenchus*, which removes the opinions that interfere with learning.¹¹² On the other hand, if true knowledge is dialectic, the corresponding ignorance is merely the fact of not practicing dialectic. This ignorance is a lack, but a lack fulfilled at the very moment dialectic is performed—and only at that moment. Hence the pleasure dialectic arouses is never tarnished with pain, and the pleasures of knowledge are pure pleasures, as Socrates states in the *Philebus*.¹¹³ There he adds that these pleasures do not belong “to the masses, but only to a very few” (οὐδαμῶς τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ τῶν σφόδρα ὀλίγων).¹¹⁴ for they can be felt only by those who value true reasoning more than anything else, that is to say, by true philosophers or *philologoi*.

So the love of truth, which can provoke pain when it is not guided by the *tekhnē peri tous logous* and thus lead to misology, can provoke great and pure pleasure when it is guided by such a *tekhnē*. This pleasure will reinforce the love of truth in the form of the love of *logoi*, that is to say, philosophy: the more one practices philosophy this way, the more one loves it.

We can take this reasoning one step further. Since this activity is dialectic, and since dialectic is usually practiced with a partner, in practicing it one will also develop, perhaps not philanthropy or love of all human beings in general, but at least *philia* for the partner; for each person engaged in dialectic will recognize how good his partner is for him, since he helps him to fulfill his deepest desire. Hence *philologia* can lead to *philia*, as Socrates says:

Theodorus, I hope my love of argument (φιλολογίας) is not making me forget my manners—just because I’m so anxious to start a

¹¹² See *Sophist* 230c4–d4, quoted above.

¹¹³ *Philebus* 51e7–52b9.

¹¹⁴ *Philebus* 52b7–8.

discussion (διαλέγεσθαι) and get us all friendly (φίλους . . . γίγνεσθαι) and talkative together.¹¹⁵

Thus neither philosophy nor the philosopher is doomed to be hated—even though many conditions and a great deal of work are needed in order for them to be loved.¹¹⁶

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¹¹⁵ *Theaetetus* 146a5–8, trans. Levett and Burnyeat. See also *Republic* 498d1–2, where Socrates says that Thrasymachus and himself have become friends after the vivid exchange they had at the beginning of the dialogue—although given Thrasymachus’s own state of mind, one can doubt that he feels the same.

¹¹⁶ I am grateful to Jonathan Lavery for his extensive revision of my English.