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A revised German version, stripped of Greek quotations but with an additional section on the definitions of courage in Plato's *Laches* and *Republic*, is my "Deduktion und Dialog" (2004).

Deduction and Dialogue.

Reflections On Plato's Assessment of Writing (*Phdr.* 274 sqq.)

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When assessing the relative merits of writing – its fittingness or unfittingness for given purposes¹ – Plato, in the *Phaedrus*, comes to the following conclusion: Writing is inappropriate to teaching, that is, to the transmission of knowledge.² Its usefulness is confined to producing a stock of mnemonic aids (*hypomnēmata*),³ thus facilitating the recollection of knowledge.

I shall not presently go into the details of Plato's discussion. Instead some preliminary remarks (to which, as a matter of fact, the present paper shall be confined) are in order.

1. Knowledge, for Plato, is something in – or a certain state, or quality, of – one's soul. Hence, teaching and learning are described as a transmission of knowledge from one soul to another. The role played by verbal accounts (*logoi*) is subordinated to this. In particular, to know something – viz., some truth – entails not only the ability of describing the truth in question by an appropriate statement but also the ability of defending that statement in any suitable way.

¹ *Phrd.* 274b6 sq.: Τὸ δ'εὐπρεπείας δὴ γραφῆς πέρι καὶ ἀπρεπείας, πῆ γιγνόμενον καλῶς ἂν ἔχοι καὶ ὅπη ἀπρεπῶς.

² It may be disputed whether the term "transmission" adequately describes Plato's account of teaching. Yet, in *Phdr.* 274 sqq., Plato leaves no doubt that the teacher knows the thing that is taught (cf. 276a5: μετ' ἐπιστήμης). Socratic ignorance is set aside. Hence, teaching is a process as a result of which some knowledge is shared by teacher and student which at the beginning the teacher possessed alone. And why not use the phrase "transmission of knowledge" to refer to this kind of process?

³ Cf. *Phdr.* 275d1 sq.: ... τὸν εἰδότα ὑπομνήσαι περὶ ὧν ἂν ἦ τὰ γεγραμμένα, 276d3: ἑαυτῷ τε ὑπομνήματα θησαυρίζομενος.

As a shorthand, Plato says that, in this case, a *logos* is "able to defend itself".⁴ Obviously, this would make no sense when being claimed of verbal accounts or statements as such. Rather, the claim applies to a *logos* insofar as it is a feature in knowledge (*epistēmē*) and, hence, is "vivid and animated".⁵ Knowledge, as such, can "defend itself" by defending any statement that accounts for it.

2. The trouble with the doctrine thus reported is that it seems to understate the essential linkage of knowledge to statements.

On the one hand, Plato may be right in suggesting that knowledge (*epistēmē*) as such – unlike opinion (*doxa*), or even true opinion in support of which some reasoning is presented⁶ – is not a propositional attitude. Further, it may be also assumed that the subject matter for knowledge is something "true" which is or has a "nature" of its own and which is distinct from – and is incapable of being construed of – any linguistic object by which it is described.⁷

Yet, on the other hand, in rational discourse about knowledge-claims verbal accounts are indispensable. In particular, criteria for assessing knowledge-claims must refer both to statements by which pieces of knowledge are exhibited and to descriptions by which the underlying realm of facts is described. Hence, when philosophy attempts to make explicit and to assess the criteria in question and to clarify the semantical and epistemological issues involved, its "refuge to the *logoi*" is inevitable.⁸

⁴ *Phrd.* 276a6: δυνατὸς ... ἀμῦναι ἑαυτῶ. Cf. 276e7 sq.: genuine teaching implants λόγους, οἱ ἑαυτοῖς τῶ τε φυτεύσαντι βοηθεῖν ἱκανοὶ.

By contrast, any written account is οὐτ' ἀμύνασθαι οὔτε βοηθεῖσαι δυνατὸς αὐτῶ (275e5); writing operates μετὰ λόγων ἀδυνάτων μὲν αὐτοῖς λόγῳ βοηθεῖν (276c8 sq.). Accordingly, "philosophic" (278d4) writers are able to "support" their written account by exhibiting its deficiencies: ... βοηθεῖν, εἰς ἔλεγχον ἰὼν περὶ ὧν ἔγραψε, καὶ λέγων αὐτὸς δυνατὸς τὰ γεγραμμένα φαῦλα ἀποδείξει (278c5 sqq.).

⁵ *Phdr.* 276a8: ζῶς καὶ ἔμψυχος.

⁶ Cf. *Tht.* 201c9 sqq.: ... τὴν μὲν μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι, τὴν δὲ ἄλογον ἐκτὸς ἐπιστήμης.

⁷ "Something true", i.e. an "idea", cf. Plato's use of ἀλήθεια at *Rep.* 508d sqq. On the linkage of "ideas" with "natures", see my "Methodological Issues from Medicine in Plato", in: *Greek Philosophy and Epistemology*, ed. by K. Boudouris, Vol. II, Athens: 2001, S. 91-99. "Truth" vs. "linguistic objects": cf. Plato's *Seventh Letter*, 342a sqq.

⁸ Cf. *Phd.* 99e4 ff.: ἔδοξε δὴ μοι χρῆναι εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα ἐν ἐκείνοις σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

3. Here, dialogue, as an essential feature of rationality, comes into consideration. Assume that Plato is right that all verbal accounts are somehow inadequate.⁹ Still, it is hard to deny that any account of knowledge, taken together with the additional statement that all such accounts are inadequate, is self-refuting.

Hence, verbal accounts of knowledge must be taken seriously. The appropriate way to do so is by criticism and by defense. That is to say, once that an account of knowledge is presented it may be shown to be inadequate and, thus, the statement may be refuted. Yet, in turn, the refutation may be rejected; knowledge may be re-stated in some way that accounts for the criticism and, thus, may become the target of novel criticism, and so forth.

It is pointless, in rational discourse, to propose a statement without expecting that it may be criticized. No less futile, however, is criticism when no defense is allowed. To be involved in rational discourse entails to be committed to not deciding in advance whether to agree or to disagree in the event. Sure, to aim at agreement is a requirement for dialogue. To avoid hasty agreement, however, is a requirement for rationality, and is the very habit by virtue of which knowledge-claims are assessed. The notion of knowledge-claims being warranted presupposes this habit and makes no sense at all otherwise.

4. This is a fallibilist account of knowledge. But is Plato a fallibilist? I think he is, in a sense. Two qualifications are in order.

The first qualification is that Plato, by contrary, seems to insist that knowledge is infallible. His infallibilism, however, applies to knowledge as such. It does not apply to knowledge insofar as it takes the form of verbal accounts being supposed to be adequate, and of statements being claimed to be true. That is to say, Plato is an infallibilist with regard to knowledge (*epistêmê*), but he is a fallibilist with regard to verbal accounts of knowledge (*logoi*).

The second qualification is that, while in recent philosophy of science fallibilism is usually linked with empiricism, Plato is certainly no empiricist. The linkage of fallibilism with empiricism, however, is superficial. In particular, fallibilism is misconstrued when being re-

⁹ Sure, Plato claims that lack of βεβαιότης καὶ σαφήνεια (*Phrd.* 277d8 sq.) is a peculiarity of written accounts. Yet, insofar as a written account and its oral counterpart are the same linguistic object, the claim applies to the latter as well. The lack of adequacy isn't removed by speaking as such but by taking the opportunity of defending any given account which is peculiar to oral discourse.

According to Michael Erler ("Hilfe und Hintersinn. Isokrates' *Panathenaikos* und die Schriftkritik im *Phaidros*", in: *Understanding the Phaedrus*, Proc. II. Symposium Platonicum, ed. by L. Rosetti, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag 1992, 122-137), this is a point of controversy between Plato and Isocrates. Yet, the claim that βεβαιότης and σαφήνεια may be attested to verbal accounts as such isn't as explicit in Isocrates as Erler suggests.

duced to the doctrine that every statement which is supposed to be true nevertheless may be refuted by novel experience. Thus understood, fallibilism would be unable to account for the fact that statements, as such, may even be claimed to be invariants in the development of science. Rather, on the long run, conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches wherein statements are embedded are subject to criticism and change. Sophisticated fallibilism, therefore, is the doctrine that no conceptual framework for science is final, and no scientific approach is free from hidden assumptions which may turn out to be misleading and, hence, to be in need of reworking when novel experience is made or novel questions are asked.

In short, sophisticated fallibilism is the doctrine that "criticism" may "turn background knowledge into knowledge".¹⁰

5. I shall do here without examples from mathematics and from natural science. A fine example from Plato is the statement, that

- (a) in view of that which by nature is just (*to physei dikaion*, *Grg.* 484c1 and *passim*, *Rep.* 501b2), justness proves to be a requirement for happiness.

This statement is endorsed both by Callicles in the *Gorgias* and by Socrates in the *Republic*.¹¹ Yet, its conceptual frameworks in either context are diverse. This change may be explained when two other statements are taken into consideration. One of them is the statement, endorsed both by Socrates in the *Gorgias* and by Thrasymachus in book I of the *Republic*, that

¹⁰ Imre Lakatos, *Proofs and Refutations. The Logic of Mathematical Discovery*, ed. by J. Worall and E. Zahar, Cambridge: U. Pr. 1976, p. 45 n. 3.

¹¹ As regards Callicles, (a) is a tacit conclusion from two premises, viz.,

- unlimited acquisition (*πλεονεξία*) is a requirement for happiness (see below, (c)), and
- in view of that which by nature is just (*τὸ φύσει δίκαιον*), justness proves to be quite the same thing as unlimited acquisition by anyone who can afford it (cf. *Grg.* 483c8-484c3, see below, (d)).

As regards Socrates, cf. *Rep.* 367c5 sqq. where it is proposed for proof that the "nature" of justness is such as produce happiness - note that *δι' αὐτήν* (d3) echoes *τῆ αὐτῶν φύσει* (d2) and *τίνα ἔχει δύναμιν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ ἔνδον ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ* (358b5 sq). The same task is set again at *Rep.* 506a4-6: *Οἶμαι γοῦν, εἶπον, δίκαιά τε καὶ καλὰ ἀγνοούμενα ὅπη ποτὲ ἀγαθὰ ἐστίν, οὐ πολλοῦ τινος ἄξιον φύλακα κεκτηθῆναι ἂν ἑαυτῶν τὸν τοῦτο ἀγνοοῦντα· μαντεύομαι δὲ μηδένα αὐτὰ πρότερον γνώσεσθαι ἱκανῶς.*

Here (*Rep.* 506a6-8) Socrates also claims that it is impossible to know what is just and beautiful unless it is also known that just and beautiful things are good (that is, are contributory of happiness). This claim reappears in the analogy of the sun, according to which both being and knowability are derived from goodness (*Rep.* 509b6-8).

(b) justness is essentially linked with moderation.¹²

The other statement, taken as evident by both Callicles and Thrasymachus, is that

(c) unlimited acquisition (*pleonexia*) and, hence, the very contrary of moderation is a requirement for happiness.¹³

Taken together, the three statements are inconsistent. Hence, one of them must be denied. In particular, if (c) is taken for granted then (a) and (b) must contradict each other. Accordingly, Callicles who endorses (a) must deny (b) and, rather, claim that

(d) justness is essentially linked with unlimited acquisition by anyone who is fit for that;¹⁴

Thrasymachus who endorses (b) must deny (a).

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates is surprisingly silent about (a); instead, he takes (b) for granted and attempts at directly establishing that

(e) justness and moderation are necessary and sufficient conditions of happiness,¹⁵

thus refuting (c).¹⁶ In the *Republic*, however, Socrates insists that (a) and (b) are true and, hence, (c) must be denied. Accordingly, two things are done in the *Republic*.

On the one hand, in books III and IV, the concepts of 'justness' and of 'moderation' are re-defined within a psychological framework.¹⁷ This leads directly to establishing (b) and, in book IX, to refuting (c) by a series of arguments which still are similar to those in the *Gorgias*.

¹² As regards Socrates, compare his use of the phrase δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ σωφροσύνη at *Grg.* 504d3 and *passim*; see also 478d6 and, particularly, 492a8-c1, where the linkage of δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη is a commonplace to which Callicles opposes.

Thrasymachus, by contrast, endorses the common view that unlimited acquisition, if it is successful on a large scale (cf. *Rep.* 344a1: τὸν μέγαρα δυνάμενον πλεονεκτεῖν), is "completed unjustness" (*Rep.* 344a4: τελεωτάτη ἀδικία). Since unlimited acquisition and moderation are opposites, (b) is entailed by this.

¹³ See *Grg.* 491e5-492d3 (the phrase πλέον ἔχειν appears at 491d2) and *Rep.* 343e7-344c2, respectively.

¹⁴ Cf. *Grg.* 483d1 sq.: δίκαιόν ἐστιν τὸν ἀμείνω τοῦ χειρόνος πλέον ἔχειν καὶ τὸν δυνατώτερον τοῦ ἀδυνατωτέρου. "Fit for that": cf. 484a2 sq.: φύσιν ἰκανὴν ... ἔχων ἀνήρ, which may allude to to *Anonymus Iamblichi*, DK 89, c. 6.

¹⁵ *Grg.* 508b1 sq.: δικαιοσύνης καὶ σωφροσύνης κτήσει εὐδαίμονες οἱ εὐδαίμονες. Cf. also 507a-c where justness is taken to be a special case of moderation (= τὰ προσήκοντα πράττειν, a8) and 470e9 sqq.: τὸν μὲν γὰρ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα εὐδαίμονα εἶναί φημι, τὸν δὲ ἄδικον καὶ πονηρὸν ἄθλιον.

¹⁶ Since unlimited acquisition and moderation are opposites, (e) entails not-(c).

On the other hand, in books V-VII, still another framework is suggested. Here, at last, statement (a) – which was already proposed for proof in book II – is taken seriously. The crucial terms in (a) are 'nature' and 'happiness'.

In the relevant passages of the *Gorgias*, 'nature' is the catchword for the methodology followed by Callicles. In the middle books of the *Republic*, the concept is so stretched as to allow that the phrase

'that which by nature is just'

(to *physei dikaion*, *Rep.* 501b2) refers to the "form" or "idea" involved and, hence, 'nature' now is the catchword for a novel methodology followed by Socrates.

Further, it is suggested that the concept of 'happiness' shall be re-defined in such a way that its meaning directly derives from the "idea" of the good.¹⁸

As a result, statement (a) takes the form of a claim concerning the way that "ideas" are related to each other; the ethical issue raised by Callicles and Thrasymachus is transformed into a case that falls into competence of dialectic.

6. Thus, a statement may be defended by embedding it into a theory that refers to something deeper and, as Plato has put it in the *Phaedrus*, more "honourable".¹⁹ This is also the clue to Plato's so-called method of *hypothesis* which first appears in the *Meno* and then is fully described in the *Phaedo* and in the analogy of the line in the *Republic*.²⁰

Sure, both in the *Phaedo* and in the *Republic* Plato suggests that dialectic²¹ – i.e., the procedure of accounting for,²² and thus abolishing,²³ *hypotheses* – may lead to some principle²⁴ which is

¹⁷ Accordingly, in book II 'nature' (*Rep.* 367d2: φύσις) does not yet obviously refer to a "form" or "idea" (as it does in book VI) but, rather, to the causal properties (cf. 358b5: δύνάμις) which may be attributed to being just.

¹⁸ The reduction is effected by the claim that happiness is – or: directly results from – the acquisition of that which is good (*Symp.* 205a1: κτήσει ... ἀγαθῶν οἱ εὐδαίμονες εὐδαίμονες), which is tacitly presupposed in *Rep.* 504e sqq.

¹⁹ *Phdr.* 278d8: τιμιώτερα. Cf. Thomas A. Szlezák, "Was heißt 'dem Logos zu Hilfe kommen'? Zur Struktur und Zielsetzung platonischer Dialoge", in: *Understanding the Phaedrus*, Proc. II. Symposium Platonicum, ed. by L. Rosetti, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag 1992, 93-107, p. 97 sqq. (with particular emphasis on Plato's method of ὑπόθεσις).

²⁰ *Men.* 86e sqq., *Phd.*, 100a sq., 101d sq., *Rep.* 510c sqq.; cf. Wolfgang Wieland, *Platon und die Formen des Wissens*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1982, p. 150 sqq.

²¹ *Rep.* 511b4: τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύνάμις.

²² *Phd.* 101d6: δίδοναι λόγον, cf. *Rep.* 510c6 sqq. (of mathematics, as opposed to dialectic): ... ποιησάμενοι ὑποθέσεις αὐτά, οὐδένα λόγον οὔτε αὐτοῖς οὔτε ἄλλοις ἔτι ἀξιούσι περὶ αὐτῶν δίδοναι ὡς παντὶ φανερῶν. Similarly, *Rep.* 533c2 sq.: ... μὴ δυνάμεναι λόγον δίδοναι αὐτῶν.

adequate²⁵ and where the procedure comes to an end. Plato's point, however, is that subordinate *hypotheseis* must not be skipped. Rather, philosophy must combine its "refuge to the *logoi*" (*Phd.* 99e5) with the adoption of an *hypothesis* proper to the issue in question.²⁶ And once that an *hypothesis* was adopted it must not be abolished until its explanatory power has been exhausted.²⁷ Accordingly, to start from subordinate *hypotheseis* is indispensable for philosophy. Principles are no starting-points but, rather, results. It may be even left open whether principles can be fixed independently of the *hypotheseis* that, in a given case, are the starting points for the dialectical approach. Rather, principles are but the turning marks for philosophy on its way back to the real issues from which it started.²⁸

7. The methodology thus described depends of the assumption that no verbal account is adequate and that no statement is true without qualification. No *logos*, according to this doctrine, can be self-contained. Rather, every *logos* needs "support" and "defense" by another *logos* and, hence, is but a transitory event in a series of *logoi*.

This observation also accounts for Plato's assessment of oral discourse and of writing. In oral discourse, the transitory character of *logoi* is obvious. A *logos* being presented is an event in time, and is a past event once that the presentation was finished. There is nothing enduring about it except in the memories of the participants. This enduring result, however, is no *logos* in the strict sense but in the best case is knowledge.

Hence, insofar as writing is the transformation of a *logos* into something that endures, Plato can claim that teaching is writing on one's soul,²⁹ as opposed to writing on paper. And since souls, as opposed to all usual writing materials, according to Plato are immortal, the latter is even compared to writing on water.³⁰

²³ Cf. *Rep.* 533c8: τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀναιροῦσα.

²⁴ *Rep.* 510b7: ἀρχὴ ἀνυπόθετος, 511b7: τοῦ παντός ἀρχή.

²⁵ *Phd.* 101e1: ἱκανόν.

²⁶ *Phd.* 100a3 sq.: ὑποθέμενος ἑκάστοτε λόγον ὃν ἂν κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον εἶναι. Cf. *Rep.* 510b7: ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ἰοῦσα, 511b5 sq.: τὰς ὑποθέσεις ποιούμενος οὐκ ἀρχὰς ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι ὑποθέσεις, οἷον ἐπιβάσεις τε καὶ ὀρμάς.

²⁷ Cf. *Phd.* 101d3 sqq.: εἰ δέ τις αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἔχοιτο, χαίρειν ἐφῆς ἂν καὶ οὐκ ἀποκρίναι οἷος ἂν τὰ ἀπ' ἐκείνης ὀρμηθέντα σκέψαι οἷ εἰ σοὶ ἀλλήλοις συμφωνεῖ ἢ διαφωνεῖ.

²⁸ It should be noted, however, that Glaukon, at *Rep.* 532e2 sq., believes that dialectic is a place where to arrive and to rest (... οἱ ἀφικόμενοι ὥσπερ ὁδοῦ ἀνάπαυλα ἂν εἴη καὶ τέλος τῆς πορείας).

²⁹ *Phdr.* 276a5 sq.: μετ' ἐπιστήμης γράφεται ἐν τῇ τοῦ μανθάνοντος ψυχῇ.

³⁰ *Phdr.* 276c7 sq.: ἐν ὕδατι γράψει μέλανι σπειρών διὰ καλάμου.

In a written textbook,³¹ by contrast, the *logos* presented acquires a seeming of finality. In fact, being self-contained is a requirement that textbooks ought to meet. Once that a *logos* was fixed in a textbook and published, there isn't another opportunity for "support" and "defense".³² Hence, all "support" and "defense" that may be required must be provided in advance.³³ Plato's claim is that no such thing can be accomplished.

8. In particular, Plato's account of the way that *hypotheses* work in rational discourse is meant to correct a certain misconception of deductive science inherent in contemporary mathematical practise. I mean the idea that the relation of knowledge to principles may be represented by a deductive structure given to its systematic accounts and, hence, that the place of principles in science is at the beginning. As regards mathematics, Imre Lakatos, in his celebrated *Proofs and Refutation*, aptly coined the term "Euclidian programme" for this (and, in fact, demonstrated its failure even to account for mathematics adequately). Yet, the same idea was usually seen to prevail in Aristotle's *Analytics*, and has haunted modern philosophy, starting from Descartes, for so many years.

Sure, says Plato, there must be starting-points for deductive reasoning. To be a starting-point for deductive reasoning, however, only means to be a premise to which the procedure of accounting for – and thus abolishing – *hypotheses* has not yet been applied. Hence, the notion of a logical structure of science (or even philosophy) that accords the rules of deductive reasoning is inadequate. It fails to account for the dialectical approach that is required by knowledge and is characteristic of rational discourse.

³¹ "Textbook": cf. *Phdr.* 275c5: τέχνη ... ἐν γράμμασι. – It goes without saying that Plato's criticism does not refer to writing as such. The essential features of dialogue may also be present in the exchange of letters or in a series of treatises written in response to each other. One may even imagine the case that a student is deaf and writing (e.g., on a wax tablet) is an inevitable means of conveying any λόγος to him or her.

³² That's why, according to Plato, textbooks don't teach. He or she who wants to learn will ask additional questions, yet will be given no novel answers (cf. *Phdr.* 275d8 sq.: ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρη τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος μαθεῖν, ἔν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταῦτόν αἰεῖ).

³³ Modern writers of textbooks on, say, mathematics usually are well aware both of the indispensibility of oral teaching (that's why most textbooks are designed for use in classroom) and of the fact that completeness is never attained and "familiarity" with a certain set of topics must be presupposed. See again Lakatos, *Proofs and Refutations*, loc. cit., 45n3).