



## Plato's Sound Language against the Harm done to Language

Magali Année

STL – Savoirs, Textes, Langages (Université de Lille – CNRS), France

### **Abstract**

*“To speak in a harmful way (τὸ μὴ καλῶς λέγειν) is not only a false note towards language itself (εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο πλημμελές), it is also to infuse some evil within souls.” This worrisome statement in the Phaedo (115 e 5–7) should be considered as a key of Plato’s dialogues. But how shall we understand the harmfulness of a “false note” inside the very language thought of as having its own autonomy? Does it have to do with “stasis between names” (Cratylus 438 d 2), and if so, where to find, inside language, the “right note” capable of preventing the disaster of souls?*

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## **Keywords**

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## **I. Anthropological Philology to Find out “What it Is Like to Speak Harmfully”**

How does one understand the texts of ancient Greek poets and thinkers in archaic and classical times—all of them genuine craftsmen of the peculiar Greek language—if not by “start[ing] to believe in what [it is said]”?<sup>1</sup> That is to say, by starting to research the conception they had of the particular language which was theirs, and by doing so, adopting the basic “emic” viewpoint of an anthropological philology: a viewpoint which is as much as possible on the side of indigenous users (the “emic” side), while assuming the positive retroactive effect of the scientific reflexive dimension (the “etic” side).<sup>2</sup>

From the “emic” viewpoint—which should mean neither post-Aristotelian, nor neo-Platonist—, Plato is not the origin of Western philosophy, which leads to the reign of reason and the primacy of writing.<sup>3</sup> Like some others of his contemporaneous and predecessors, he is only a perfect *polymath*, a multi-learned expert in all non-strictly delineated areas of

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<sup>1</sup> See M. L. Gemelli Marciano, “Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenide’s Aletheia,” *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008): 21–48. “we must give up our preconceptions about ‘literariness’ and ‘fiction’ and start to believe in what [it is said]” (ibid., 26).

<sup>2</sup> On these notions, see Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (The Hague-Paris: Mouton, 1967 [2<sup>d</sup> reviewed ed.; 1954, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.]); Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, “Émique,” *L’Homme* 147 (1998): 151-166.

<sup>3</sup> See C. Calame, “Civiltation et Kultur: de Friedrich August Wolf à Sigmund Freud,” *Cahiers “Mondes anciens”* 11(2018): <https://journals.openedition.org/mondesanciens/2063>; § 10-14.

knowledge, who must be replaced in its own time and culture: its polytheistic mental frame; its “receptive consciousness” and specific “regime of truth”<sup>4</sup>; its neighborhood influences and owns poetic inheritance; and its often synesthetic mode of communication which disregards any boundaries between genres and types of speeches (verbal, “(in)vocative,” musical, iconographic, epigraphic).

Now, to this particular socio-cultural context also depends on a specific “state of language” that must be thought as *sound* (ever-sonorous) because it is not so much *oral* as much more alien to any dichotomy between oral and written literature or text: neither oral nor written, it was a kind of “precipitate” of the two, their natural fusion, which met the cultural need to communicate any form of knowledge by an oral performance. That implied, from part of Greek speakers, a *non-phonological*, *prescriptive*, and *receptive* awareness of language, which was basically felt as a phonic-syllabic rhythmic flow. This is evidenced by so many phenomena such as: haplology, resyllabation (or “miscutting”); permeability of boundaries between derivation and composition leading to “hypostatic” forms<sup>5</sup>; morpho-phonetic contaminations in border areas<sup>6</sup>; the sometimes indifferent use, in inscriptions, of several letters for the same sound (allophones) or of the omission of letters<sup>7</sup>; or the simple conception of writing as “rhythm” in the Greek sense of the term ῥυθμός.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to the theoretical and genealogical language of Aristotle’s treatises, Plato’s dialogues, which are all attempts to perpetuate the participative sound experience of a vivid λόγος (“spoken-exchanged language”),<sup>9</sup> keep on *directly* pertaining to this sonorous state of archaic and classical Greek language. This is why they should deserve an emic-philological approach that takes care not only of the sound rhythm of this language, but also of its communicational *efficiency*.

That is the point. Indeed, the sound dimension of ancient Greek language gave it a specific, synesthetic ability of meaning, so powerfully performative that it could *really* make it a weapon in the strict sense.<sup>10</sup> Since the Homeric epics, the Greek language has the power to hurt and harm in *real life*.<sup>11</sup> Emerging rhetoric, with the development of eristic as reflected

<sup>4</sup> See Paul Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes ? Essai sur l’imagination constituante* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> About this phenomenon of substitution of one grammatical category for another, see Nathalie Rousseau, *Du syntagme au lexicque: sur la composition en grec ancien* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, C. Brixhe, “De la filiation à l’héritage. Réflexion sur l’origine des langues et des dialectes”, in *Peuplement et genèses dialectales dans la Grèce antique*, eds. Claude Brixhe, Guy Vottéro (Nancy: ADRA, 2006), 7-37: 23-24.

<sup>7</sup> See J. Méndez Dosuna, “Once again on allophonic spellings in Ancient Greek”, in *Miscellanea Indogermanica. Festschrift für José Luis García Ramón zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Ivo Hajnal et al. (Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, 2017), 487-498.

<sup>8</sup> See Herodotus, V, 58, 5: τὸν ῥυθμὸν τῶν γραμμάτων. See Claude Calame, *Sentiers transversaux. Entre poétiques grecques et politiques contemporaines* (Grenoble: Jérôme Million, 2008), 210.

<sup>9</sup> For the significance of this meaning of λόγος, up to and including Plato, see Henri Fournier, *Les verbes “dire” en grec ancien* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1946), 220; Gaetano Messina, “Λόγος come archetipo dell’idea di ragione,” in *Dalla Fisica di Senofane all’Empedocle di Strasburgo* (Bari: Levante, 2007), 11-39.

<sup>10</sup> For theoretical considerations, in ancient societies, on the forms of politico-ideological violence, always corresponding to “*un progetto*” and therefore to the discourse which goes with it, see Daniele Foraboschi, *Violenze Antiche: Testo pubblicato postumo a cura di Silvia Bussi* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2018): 51-120.

<sup>11</sup> See Laura Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis and Selected Essays* (Washington DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2011), 120-138; Francesca Piazza, *La parola e la spada. Violenza e linguaggio attraverso l’Iliade* (Bologne: Il Mulino, 2019).

both by Aristophanes' comedies<sup>12</sup> and sophistic dialectic,<sup>13</sup> was particularly able to take advantage of this violent potential. However, as is evident from different apparently anecdotal statements in the Dialogues, it is not this sort of violence that has the most serious consequences for Plato's philosophical thought. A thorough contextual examination of expressions of the type *κακῶς/καλῶς λέγειν*, *κακουργεῖν* (ἐν τοῖς λόγοις), *ὀρθότατα λέγειν*, or *πλημμελής/πλημμελέω* enables showing that Plato had his own idea of violent, harmful language. Since developing such an examination would be too long for the current paper, I will focus here only on few of them, starting with the warning Socrates addresses to Crito at the end of the *Phaedo* and confronting it to the wishful thinking he expresses in the *Meno* right after Anytos's violent reaction to him:

*Phaedo* 115 e 5-7

{ΣΩ.} εὖ γὰρ ἴσθι, ἦ δ' ὄς, ὃ ἄριστε Κριτῶν, τὸ μὴ καλῶς λέγειν οὐ μόνον εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο πλημμελές, ἀλλὰ καὶ κακόν τι ἐμποιεῖ ταῖς ψυχαῖς.

Socrates: Know it well, Criton, my dearest, to speak in a way that is not beautiful and favorable is not only a **false note towards language itself**, it is also to infuse some evil within souls.

*Meno* 94 e 3–95 a 1

{ΑΝ.} ἼΩ Σώκρατες, ῥαδίως μοι δοκεῖς κακῶς λέγειν ἀνθρώπους. Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ἂν σοι συμβουλεύσαιμι, εἰ ἐθέλεις ἐμοὶ πείθεσθαι, εὐλαβεῖσθαι· ὡς ἴσως μὲν καὶ ἐν ἄλλῃ πόλει ῥᾶόν ἐστιν κακῶς ποιεῖν ἀνθρώπους ἢ εὖ, ἐν τῇδε δὲ καὶ πάννυ· οἴμαι δὲ σὲ καὶ αὐτὸν εἰδέναι.

Anytos: Socrates, you seem to me to speak badly of men very easily. I would therefore be happy to advise you, if you would believe me, to be careful. If, in another city, it is as easy to harm men as to do good to them, this is perfectly the case here; and you know it yourself personally, I'm sure!

*Meno* 95 a 3–6

{ΣΩ.} οἶεται γὰρ με πρῶτον μὲν κακηγορεῖν τούτους τοὺς ἀνδρας, ἔπειτα ἡγεῖται καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι εἷς τούτων. Ἀλλ' οὗτος μὲν ἐάν ποτε γῶ οἷόν ἐστιν τὸ κακῶς λέγειν, παύσεται χαλεπαίνων, νῦν δὲ ἀγνοεῖ.

Socrates: He first believes that I slander these great men and then he thinks that he himself is one of them. Come on! If he one day comes to know **what it is like to speak harmfully**, he will cease to be unpleasant, but for the moment he ignores it.

If the worrisome statement of the *Phaedo* should be considered as a capital reading key of Plato's dialogues, the ending of the impossible dialogical exchange between Socrates and Anytos in the *Meno*, makes us sure that, in Plato's mind, τὸ κακῶς λέγειν “the harmful use of language” had nothing to do with the mere common idea of “slander” that most of Greek speakers of his time and the young Athenian *kalloi k'agathoi* in particular, believed it to be.

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<sup>12</sup> See Daphne E. O'Regan, *Rhetoric, Comedy, and the Violence of Language in Aristophanes' Clouds* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Jean Taillardat, *Les images d'Aristophane: études de langue et de style* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1965), 282-283. “words are projectiles you can overwhelm your interlocutor with” (ibid., § 502).

<sup>13</sup> For the Aristotelian distinction between philosophy, dialectic, and sophistic, see E. Berti, “Philosophie, dialectique et sophistique dans Métaphysique Γ 2,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* Vol. 51, No. 201/3 (1997): 379–396. As for the prototypical example of Plato's Protagoras, see Robert C. Bartlett, *Sophistry and Political Philosophy: Protagoras' Challenge to Socrates* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2016). See also, *infra*, n. 19.

Given the overwhelming dimension of sound in the archaic and classical Greek state of language, we may pay an “emic” attention to the fact that Plato’s talking of the philosophy he is inventing as “the greatest music of all”<sup>14</sup> and of Socrates as an “ode singer” (ἐπῳδός)<sup>15</sup> and one who knows how to “make an *aulos* out of his mouth” (στομαυλῆσαι),<sup>16</sup> is far from being metaphorical and there is an urgent need for considering the true harm against language as a *serious musical dissonance* (πλημμελές) within the language *itself*. Speaking harmfully, in a way that is not beautiful is not making language a weapon; it is instead leading it to its own doom.

## II. What about “*Stasis* between Names”?

Significantly, the phrases that best express the idea of harm and violence made in and out language—the verb *κακουργεῖν*, literally to “do harm, work at evil,” along with βιάζειν “compel by violence,” and the syntagm *κακῶς λέγειν* “speak in a bad way”—are used not by Socrates (or The Foreigner), but by those of his most reticent interlocutors, who accuse himself precisely of being a linguistic troublemaker, guilty of perpetrating violence through his language.

The occurrences of *κακουργεῖν*, on one side, and of *κακῶς λέγειν*, on the other side, are not many, but their context is proving instructive as it finally highlights the paradoxical importance of the *name* in Plato’s conception of the harm done to language. More exactly, it puts us on the track of a particular role of the name in linguistic dissonance.

### A. *Κακουργεῖν*

In a verbal context, we find a total of seven occurrences of the verb *κακουργεῖν* in the *Gorgias*, one in *Hippias Minor*, and three in the *Republic*:

In the *Gorgias*, Callicles first accuses Socrates of being “badly deceitful in his speeches” (*κακουργεῖς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις*, 483 a 3) by playing on the inherent contradiction that exists between things according to nature and things according to law. Socrates’ reaction arrives quick: by taking up the very terms of Callicles, he introduces into the dialogical exchange an annular symmetry, which is like turning back the discourse in the opposite direction, enclosing it on itself:

*Gorgias* 489 b 1-3

{ΣΩ.} κινδυνεύεις οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγειν ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεσιν οὐδὲ ὀρθῶς ἐμοῦ κατηγορεῖν λέγων ὅτι ἐναντίον ἐστὶν ὁ νόμος καὶ ἡ φύσις, ἃ δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ γινούς κακουργῶ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις (...)

Socrates: I am afraid that you did not tell the truth a while ago and that you wrongly accused me by claiming that law was the opposite of nature and that it was by knowing it fully that I made me deceitful in my speeches (...)

In the second dialogue, Hippias addresses Eudicos as follows: ἀλλὰ Σωκράτης, ὦ Εὐδικε, αἰεὶ ταράττει ἐν τοῖς λόγοις καὶ ἔοικεν ὥσπερ κακουργοῦντι, “Sure, Eudicos, Socrates keeps on confusing speech and looks like one who seeks to do harm” (*Hippias Minor* 373 b 5).

<sup>14</sup> See *Phaedo* 61 a 3: φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὐσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς.

<sup>15</sup> See *Phaedo* 78 a 1–7.

<sup>16</sup> See *Cratylus* 417 e 8. On the skilled, multifaceted *aulism* of Socrates, see Marie-Laurence Desclos, *Les dialogues de Platon entre tragédie, comédie et drame satyrique* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2020), 25–40 (but also the book as a whole).

As for the *Republic*, Thrasymachus, who in turn has just maintained that justice is the interest of the strongest, repeatedly attacks Socrates in terms reminiscent of those of Callicles:

*Republic*

I, 338 d 3–4

{ΘΡ.} Βδελυρὸς γὰρ εἶ, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ ταύτη ὑπολαμβάνεις ἢ ἂν κακουργήσαις μάλιστα τὸν λόγον.

Thrasymachus: How impudent are you, Socrates, with this way of taking things that completely annoys my speech!

I, 341 a 7-b 2

{ΣΩ.} Οἶε γὰρ με ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις κακουργοῦντά σε ἐρέσθαι ὡς ἠρόμην;

{ΘΡ.} Εὖ μὲν οὖν οἶδα, ἔφη, καὶ οὐδὲν γέ σοι πλέον ἔσται· οὔτε γὰρ ἂν με λάθοις κακουργῶν, οὔτε μὴ λαθῶν βιάσασθαι τῷ λόγῳ δύναιο.

Socrates: So you think it is by deliberately trying to be harmful in my speeches that I question you as I questioned you?

Thrasymachus: Yes, I know it perfectly, he said. And you won't gain anything! Now, as it does not escape me that you are doing the harmful, so you will not be able to do me violence by your speech without appearing to do so!

And again, right after Socrates asks him to clarify what he is saying (τὸν ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἢ τὸν ἀκριβεῖ λόγῳ, “is it a manner of speaking or a precise language?”):

I, 341 b 8–10

{ΘΡ.} Τὸν τῷ ἀκριβεστάτῳ, ἔφη, λόγῳ ἄρχοντα ὄντα. πρὸς ταῦτα κακούργει καὶ συκοφάντει, εἴ τι δύνασαι – οὐδὲν σου παρίεμαι – ἄλλ' οὐ μὴ οἷός τ' ἦς.

Thrasymachus: I mean, “the one who governs”, he said, most strictly. Be harmful to it and vilify it if you can in anything. I do not neglect anything coming from you; unless you are not able to.

All these violent reactions to Socrates are better understood by this following example, which indirectly intersects with the immediate aftermath of the passage from the *Gorgias*: here, it is about specifying a λόγος, a “statement”; there, after Socrates responds word for word to Callicles, this one bursts out in anger as follows:

*Gorgias* 489 b 6-c 1

{ΚΑΛ.} ...εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ τηλικούτος ὢν ὀνόματα θηρέων, καὶ ἂν τις ῥήματι ἀμάρτη, ἔρμαιον τοῦτο ποιούμενος;

Callicles: Tell me, Socrates, are you not ashamed, at your age, to be a **“name hunter”** and to make the most of a find as soon as anyone gets the expression wrong?

For Socrates' opponents, it is obviously “name hunting” along with looking for precision that they think hurt language. What they do not see, actually, is that it *only* hurts *their* language.

## B. Καῶς λέγειν

Besides the two examples we have already mentioned in the *Meno*, the other few occurrences of this expression are divided into three types of context which make it possible to clarify the meaning given to it by Plato.

First and foremost, two of them, one in the *Laws*, the other in the *Republic*, significantly stigmatizes one type of discourse: that of “the crowd of ignorant people” and of all “the bad talkers,” of which poets are a part, and who are just as ignorant: **οἱ πολλοὶ κακῶς λέγοντες** (*Laws* XI, 916 d 8-e 1); **καὶ ποιηταὶ καὶ λογοποιοὶ κακῶς λέγουσιν** (*Republic* III, 392 a 9-b 2).

Secondly, from *Ion* 531 d-e, it appears that everyone cannot speak the best way and that distinguishing between good and beneficent speech and harmful and nasty speech requires a *τέχνη*, a specific skill.<sup>17</sup> The latter is also, consequently, what makes possible a non-harmful way of speaking.

The last example, in the *Euthydemus* (284 c 10-e 10), while keeping with the *Ion*'s issue on the ability to speak of things expertly and appropriately, takes us back to the previous uses of *κακουργεῖν* by bringing us to the heart of the sophistical battle which opposes Ctesippus and Dionysodorus. Playing on the dichotomy between the two adjectives *κακός* “bad” and *ἀγαθός* “good,” the latter manages to make Ctesippus say the very opposite of what he is claiming to say:

*Euthydemus* 284 c 10-d 7

{ΔΙΟ.} Πῶς λέγεις, ἔφη ὁ Διονυσόδωρος, ὃ Κτήσιππε; **Εἰσὶν γὰρ τινες οἱ λέγουσι τὰ πράγματα ὡς ἔχει;** {ΚΤ.} Εἰσὶν μέντοι, ἔφη, οἱ καλοὶ τε ἀγαθοὶ καὶ οἱ τάληθῆ λέγοντες. {-} Τί οὖν; ἢ δ' ὅς: **τὰ γὰρ οὐκ εὖ, ἔφη, ἔχει, τὰ δὲ κακὰ κακῶς;** {-} Συνεχώρει. {-} Τοὺς δὲ καλοὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς ὁμολογεῖς λέγειν ὡς ἔχει τὰ πράγματα; {-} Ὅμολογῶ. {-} **Κακῶς** ἄρα, ἔφη, **λέγουσιν,** ὃ Κτήσιππε, **οἱ ἀγαθοὶ τὰ κακὰ, εἶπερ ὡς ἔχει λέγουσιν.**

Dionysodorus: What do you mean, O Ctesippus, replied Dionysodorus? So are there people to talk about things as they are? — Ctesippus: There are certainly, he said, they are the good men, those who tell the truth. — And so, he said? Are not good things good and bad things bad? — He granted it. — And you agree that good men talk about things as they are? — I do. — In this case, he continues, O Ctesippus, **good men talk about bad things in an evil way** [= speak badly of evil], if precisely they talk about them as they are!

Realizing that Dionysodorus makes him say that men who *tell truth* are the same who *speak badly* (*i.e. wrongly*) of bad things, Ctesippus immediately gets mad at him, so that Socrates is finally compelled to step in to calm things down in a peculiar way:

*Euthydemus* 285 a 1–6

Ἐγὼ οὖν, ἐπειδὴ μοι ἐδόκουν ἀγριωτέρως πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔχειν, προσέπειζόν τε τὸν Κτήσιππον καὶ εἶπον ὅτι Ὡ Κτήσιππε, ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ χρῆναι ἡμᾶς παρὰ τῶν ξένων δέχεσθαι ἃ λέγουσιν, εἰάν ἐθέλωσι διδόναι, καὶ **μὴ ὀνόματι διαφέρεσθαι.**

So I, finding them too mad at each other, I began to joke Ctesippus by telling him: “it seems necessary to me, O Ctesippus, with regard to foreigners, to accept what they say, if they will donate it to us, **without attaching too much importance to the letter of a word.**”

<sup>17</sup> This is not unimportant since Plato's *techné* appears as a way of reasoning opposite to that of *empeiria*, following the parallel dichotomy of good and pleasure. See S. Ariza, “La diferenciación de *Empeiria* y *Techné* en el *Gorgias* de Platón,” *Méthexis* 32/1 (2020): 45–62.

C. "No matter" the Word!

This seemingly negligible intervention by Socrates is, in my view, fundamental to understanding Plato's conception of what it is like to speak beautifully, not doing violence to language. The contrary sophistic use of the same verb διαφέρειν/διαφέρεσθαι, "import, make a difference," by Euthydemus shortly after in this dialogue and also by Protagoras in the dialogue devoted to him, can help to clarify it.

Euthydemus 293 c 2–4

{EYΘ.} Οὐκοῦν ἐπιστήμων εἶ, εἶπερ ἐπίστασαι; {ΣΩ.} Πάνυ γε, τούτου γε αὐτοῦ.  
{-} **Οὐδὲν διαφέρει:**

Euthydemus: So you are a man of *knowledge* if you *know*? —Socrates: Absolutely, *at least from that point of view*. —No matter!

As we can suspect in this brief excerpt, what makes no matter for Euthydemus is not the specific words he is using, but the way Socrates comes to agree, which, on the contrary, seems to be not at all unimportant for Socrates himself as it is evident from his repetitive use of the particle γε in two different meanings: first assertive, and then restrictive ("at least"). Socrates agrees but actually not entirely, and this is just what makes no difference to Euthydemus. That is a first point, which is at the diametrical opposite of what is, for both Socrates and Plato, the basis of dialogical exchange: (συν)ὁμολογεῖν, "speak together in agreement," and even more "co-construct a common discourse by *adjusting* it together."<sup>18</sup>

But what could mean, in the present case, "adjusting"? Could it be, as it appears, what Socrates exactly agrees to, that is only the sound matching of the two verbal forms used by his interlocutor: the noun ἐπιστήμων and the verb ἐπίστασθαι, one phonically involving the other? But if so, is it not quite paradoxical, almost contradictory to his previous advice not to attach too much importance to the words used?

Facing Protagoras, who shows successive indifference, first to acknowledging or not acknowledging necessary relationship between "justice" and "piety" (τὴν τε δικαιοσύνην ὅσιον εἶναι καὶ τὴν ὁσιότητα δίκαιον, *Protagoras* 331 b 2-3), secondly to follow or not follow the speech of the crowd, Socrates reacts differently in a way that turns back the discourse in the opposite direction, exactly as in the above passage from the *Gorgias*.

*Protagoras* 331 c 3-d 1

{ΠΡ.} **ἀλλὰ τί τοῦτο διαφέρει:** ἔφη· εἰ γὰρ βούλει, ἔστω ἡμῖν καὶ δικαιοσύνη ὅσιον καὶ ὁσιότης δίκαιον. {ΣΩ.} Μὴ μοι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ· οὐδὲν γὰρ δεόμεναι τὸ εἰ βούλει τοῦτο καὶ εἴ σοι δοκεῖ ἐλέγχεσθαι, **ἀλλ' ἐμέ τε καὶ σέ** τὸ δ' ἐμέ τε καὶ σέ τοῦτο λέγω, οἰόμενος οὕτω τὸν λόγον βέλτιστ' ἄν ἐλέγχεσθαι, εἴ τις **πῶ εἴ** ἀπέλοι αὐτοῦ.

Protagoras: **But what does it matter?** he said, for if that is what you want, do for us that pious may be justice, and just piety! —Socrates: Certainly not for me, I say! I do

<sup>18</sup> The idea of "inter-understanding" a common λόγος that conveys ὁμολογεῖν in Heraclitus' fragments, is not so much stranger to Plato's one: see G. Grammatico Amari, "El *homologeîn* en los fragmentos de Heraclito," in *Aetas del VIII Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos (Madrid, 23 al 28 de septiembre de 1991)* (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos y Ediciones Clásicas, 1994), 145-151, vol. 1. For Plato's "community of discourse" project, see Ch. Long, "Socrates and the Politics of Music: Preludes of the *Republic*," *Polis* 24 (2007): 70–902 and J. Bailey, "Socrates as Midwife and Mediator: On the Political Dimensions of the *Cratylus*," *Polis* 33 (2016): 356–378. On how Plato's *philosophical* dialectic demarcates from the *sophistic* rhetoric, see A. Nehamas, "Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato's Demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7/1 (1990): 3–16.

not need “if you want this” or “if it seems to you that” to build my demonstration, **only you and me at the same time**; and I say “you and me at the same time” being convinced that this is the best way to build the discourse, provided that “if” is removed.

*Protagoras 333 c 3-9*

{ΣΩ.} Πότερον οὖν πρὸς ἐκείνους [*i.e.* πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων] τὸν λόγον ποιήσομαι, ἔφην, ἢ πρὸς σέ; {ΠΡ.} Εἰ βούλει, ἔφη, πρὸς τοῦτον πρῶτον τὸν λόγον διαλέχθητι τὸν τῶν πολλῶν. {ΣΩ.} **Ἄλλ' οὐδὲν μοι διαφέρει**, ἐὰν **μόνον σύ** γε ἀποκρίνη, εἴτ' οὖν δοκεῖ σοι ταῦτα εἶτε μὴ: **τὸν γὰρ λόγον ἔγωγε μάλιστα ἐξετάζω**, συμβαίνει μέντοι ἴσως **καὶ ἐμὲ τὸν ἐρωπῶντα καὶ τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον** ἐξετάζεσθαι.

Socrates: Is it for them (the crowd of people), I say, that I should compose my speech, or for you? — Protagoras: If it pleases you, then begin the discussion first with that which the crowd is saying. — Socrates: **But I don't care**, so long as you answer me, whether it seems so to you or not. For **what I examine more than anything else is only language**, and it is precisely to this extent that what turns out to be examined is **both myself being asking and the one being answering me**.

In the same way that, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates responds word for word to Callicles (*κακουργεῖς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις / κακουργῶ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις*), similarly here, he reverses Protagoras' questioning into a resounding categorical exclamation beginning with the same pragmatic particle ἄλλά:<sup>19</sup>

ἄλλά τι τοῦτο διαφέρει; / Ἄλλ' οὐδὲν μοι διαφέρει

This ring-shape symmetry of the two expressions creates a kind of loop inside the dialogue, a forward and backwards movement between them which implies an enclosement effect inside language: what matters most for Plato's Socrates is the way of speaking *together*, of searching *together, within the language*, the way of tuning *together*, the way of making language resonate *together* on a good chord.

This is something quite essential because it involves the whole person of the speakers (“myself being asking and the one being answering me”) and therefore has consequences on the very possibility of reaching knowledge. Being as serious towards what Socrates calls a linguistic “false note,” that is the ability to infuse evil within souls, it brings us back straight back to the *Phaedo*. Always staying enclosed in language, and to anchor the search for truth *in it*, is indeed exactly what is clearly claimed twice by Socrates around the end of this dialogue.

First, this is the “second navigation”<sup>20</sup> that he chose to search for the causes and the truth of things (τὸν δευτέρου πλοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν, 99 d 1), rather than that of staring at them: Ἐδοξε δὴ μοι χρῆναι **εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα** ἐν ἐκείνοις σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν, “then it seemed to me that it was necessary **to find refuge in speeches** and to examine in these speeches the truth of what is” (99 e 4). Further, near the very end of the dialogue, Socrates sums up what he knows to be his sole *raison d'être*, which follows as: Οὐ

<sup>19</sup> On the basically pragmatic role of ἄλλά, see L. Basset, “Ἄλλ' ἐξόλοισθ' αὐτῷ κοῦξ. Réexamen des emplois de ἄλλά à la lumière de l'énonciation dans les *Grenouilles* d'Aristophane,” in *New Approaches to Greek Particles*, (Proceedings of the colloquium held in Amsterdam, January 4–6, 1996, to honour C. J. Ruijgh on the occasion of his retirement), ed. Albert Rijksbaron (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1997), 75–99.

<sup>20</sup> See H. Y. Ausland, “La “seconde navigation” dans la philosophie politique de Platon”, *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques* 16/2 (2002): 275–93; F. Fisher, “La ‘méthode’ et les ‘hypothèses’ en *Phédon* 99d–102a,” *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 100/4 (2002): 650–680.

πειθω, ὃ ἄνδρες, Κριτωνα, ὡς ἐγὼ εἶμι οὗτος Σωκράτης, ὁ νυνὶ διαλεγόμενος καὶ διατάπτων ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων, “I cannot convince Criton, dear men, that what I am is this Socrates who is at the moment exchanging his speeches with you and ensuring the correct order of each of his words” (115 c 6–8).

For Plato's Socrates, as it has been said, *logoi* are “the ground of an improbable striving which knows itself to be always on-the-way to an unachievable goal, and strives anyway.”<sup>21</sup> The crucial problem, highlighted by the above “κακῶς λέγειν” occurrences, is that it may happen that the speaker and interlocutor use the same words and expressions of language either without taking heed of their speech, in their own way, or even in a completely contrary way. In other words, it may happen that, inside dialogue, inside the sharing of language, words start to become seditious: Ὀνομάτων οὖν στασιασάντων. Κακῶς λέγειν and to commit a “false note” towards language, it is to use words in a seditious manner, without being concerned with their tuning and adjustment. But how does one adjust words, as we learned from the passage in the *Cratylus* (438 d 2–439 d 1), words that are unstable, swirling and unreliable, as they are in themselves, to search the truth of things?

The Greek definition Socrates gives of himself, along with this statement of the *Cratylus* about *stasis* between names may give us a clue.

*Phaedo* 115 c 6-7

ὁ νυνὶ διαλεγόμενος καὶ διατάπτων | ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων (“this one who now dialogues with you and regulates the order of each of the words he says”)

*Cratylus* 438 d 2

Ὀνομάτων οὖν | στασιασάντων (“So words becoming seditious”)

υ υ υ - - | υ υ υ - -

As we can see, the two phrases are strongly ordered by weaving a multitude of corresponding sounds that give them a veritable phono-syllabic rhythm, enclosed on itself by a whole system of echoes and symmetries. As it is more evident in the second example—not only for the special discursive autonomy, as it has as an absolute genitive, but also because of the symmetrical temporal rhythm it actually shows by repeating the three shorts and two long pattern (υ υ υ - -)—the way they are phonetically shaped makes them sound like a real “linguistic music.”

The names taken in themselves are imperfect and that is why we should not attach too much importance to them: if we have to agree (ὁμολογήσασθαι) that we must not start from them (οὐκ ἐξ ὀνομάτων) to reach knowledge,<sup>22</sup> that means that we cannot start from them *as such*, because we must first ensure the correct order of what is said—that is to say, to speak beautifully, without doing violence to language.

By contrast, as it appears, the “elements” (στοιχεῖα) of which names are made, their phono-syllabic material can be shaped and reshaped (ideally together) in order to re-tune them like real musical instruments. It is probably no coincidence that the chosen aorist form of the participle στασιασάντων makes one hear a loud repetition of the “elements” σ, τ, α (στα-σια-σάντ). Coming up right after the mention of the two categories of words (“those that relate to **στάσις** “rest”, and those that relate to **φορὰ** “momentum”,” 438 c 8) as if it were directly entailed by it, the form στασιασάντων works, here, as purely sound re-tuning the verb cognate

<sup>21</sup> J. Bailey, “Socrates as Midwife...: 365.

<sup>22</sup> See *Cratylus* 439 b 4–8.

to the noun *στάσις*, according to what has been said previously in the dialogue about *σ*, *τ*, and *α*: *σ* generally expresses “agitation,” “shaking” (τὸ *σειεσθαι* καὶ ὄλως σεισμόν, 427 a 5); *τ* conveys up the idea of “chaining,” “stopping” (τοῦ δεσμοῦ καὶ τῆς *στάσεως*, 427 b 2); and *α* is devoted to what is “big” (τὸ δ' αὖ ἄλλα τῷ *μεγάλῳ*, 427 c 3). By being so, the form *στασιασάντων* is just reshaping its own meaning, restoring it in its whole fulness: some *freezing* or *crystallization* doomed to the *big* burst of an erratic and conflictual *movement*.

This means that, to the erratic flowing of names, it must be opposed to another kind of flowing: that of some “musical” reshaping from inside of them—but inside of them, not in themselves, inside of them according to their “sequencing” (*συμπλοκή*), which is indeed what basically gives birth to the discourse that is to be built together.

### III. Give Language the Right Chord from *Inside*

#### A. The Flowing Ballet of the Syllables

As it is known, at this moment of Plato’s *Cratylus*, Socrates is about to introduce the “flowing daydream” that often visits him<sup>23</sup> about the necessary stability of each of the things themselves in themselves, which is ultimately the prerequisite of knowledge. This internal re-tuning, this musical reshaping of language by its own sound elements, regardless of the strict accuracy of this or that word, appears to be the only way to make words most faithful to the things they express and, beyond, to their knowledge—since knowledge is only searchable and trackable *inside discourses*, ἐν λόγοις.

Of this, *Cratylus* seems to have neither awareness, nor memory. Nor does he seem to understand why Socrates leaves him, at the end, by recommending Hermogenes’ escort (προπέμψει δέ σε καὶ Ἑρμογένης ὄδε, 440 e 5). The latter is, however, the benevolent interlocutor with whom the method was previously described:

*Cratylus* 414 c 4–415 a 2

{ΣΩ.} Ἦ μακάριε, οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅτι τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα τεθέντα κατακέχωσται ἤδη ὑπὸ τῶν βουλομένων τραγωδεῖν αὐτά, περιτιθέντων γράμματα καὶ ἐξαιρούντων εὐστομίας ἕνεκα καὶ πανταχῇ στρεφόντων, καὶ ὑπὸ καλλωπισμοῦ καὶ ὑπὸ χρόνου. Ἐπεὶ ἐν τῷ “κατόπτρῳ” οὐ δοκεῖ [σοι] ἄτοπον εἶναι τὸ ἐμβεβλησθαι τὸ ῥῶ; Ἀλλὰ τοιαῦτα οἶμαι ποιοῦσιν οἱ τῆς μὲν ἀληθείας οὐδὲν φροντίζοντες, τὸ δὲ στόμα πλάττοντες, ὥστ' ἐπ-ε-βάλλοντες πολλὰ ἐπὶ τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα τελευτώντες ποιοῦσιν μὴδ' ἂν ἓνα ἀνθρώπων συνεῖναι ὅτι ποτὲ βούλεται τὸ ὄνομα ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν Σφίγγα ἀντὶ “φικῶς” “σφίγγα” καλοῦσιν, καὶ ἄλλα πολλά.

{EPM.} Ταῦτα μὲν ἐστὶν οὕτως, ὦ Σώκρατες.

{ΣΩ.} Εἰ δ' αὖ τις ἐάσει καὶ ἐντιθέναι καὶ ἐξαιρεῖν ἅττ' ἂν βούληται τις εἰς τὰ ὀνόματα, πολλὴ εὐπορία ἔσται καὶ πᾶν ἂν παντὶ τις ὄνομα πράγματι προσαρμόσειεν.

{EPM.} Ἀληθῆ λέγεις.

{ΣΩ.} Ἀληθῆ μέντοι. ἀλλὰ τὸ μέτριον οἶμαι δεῖ φυλάττειν καὶ τὸ εἰκὸς σὲ τὸν σοφὸν ἐπιστάτην.

{EPM.} Βουλοίμην ἂν.

{ΣΩ.} Καὶ ἐγὼ σοι συμβούλομαι, ὦ Ἑρμογένεες. ἀλλὰ μὴ λίαν, ὦ δαιμόνιε, ἀκριβολογοῦ, “μὴ μ' ἀπογυιώσης μένεος.” (*Il. VI*, 264-65)

<sup>23</sup> *Cratylus* 439 c 7: ὁ ἔγωγε πολλάκις ὄνειρώττω. As we learn from the *Republic* (VII, 533 c), the verb *ὄνειρώττειν* denotes a vague and distant conception, as opposed to a direct vision. According to the general understanding, this dream would be that of Plato’s “Ideas.”

Socrates: O blessed, do you not know that the names which are the first to have been established have since then been buried by those who wanted to make them “tragic”, decking them out with letters or amputating them, for the sake of good elocution, and turning them all around, both by affectation and under the effect of time. So in “*katoptrō*”, doesn’t it seem out of place to you to have inserted one *rō*? In any case, I believe that these people acted in this way with no regard for the truth, contenting themselves only with shaping their pronunciation; thus by over-embarrassing in many ways the first names, they ended up making so that no human being can understand what the word may mean. The same goes for the Sphinx which they call “*sphinga*” instead of “*phikos*”, and again for many others.

Hermogenes: Yes Socrates, that is fine as it goes.

Socrates: ***Instead, let it be allowed to add to the names and remove from them everything one wants, then it will be gained a lot of clarity and any name can happen to harmonize with anything.***

Hermogenes: You’re telling the truth.

Socrates: Of course it is true! But to ***measure***, I believe, and to ***appropriateness*** you must watch, as the wise supervisor you are.

Hermogenes: I would like to.

Socrates: And I want it too, along with you, O Hermogenes. But please, my *daemon*, in your speeches, ***do not indulge too much in acribia***, “lest I break in my ***heat***”.

Here it is clearly stated the three necessary preconditions to “harmonize” (προσαρμόττειν), or to adjust words, in order to give them the good chord: τὸ μέτρον, “measure,” which has a musical as well as an ethical meaning; τὸ εἶδος, “appropriateness”; and “no rigorous accuracy.” On the other hand, by making Socrates: **(1)** denounce the “tragic” use of language; **(2)** call Hermogenes wise ἐπιστάτης (“supervisor”), a word that shares the same phonic beginning as ἐπιστήμη (“knowledge”); **(3)** and quote a line from the *Iliad* that ends with the word μένος, the warlike equivalent of the aedic Muse *i.e.* divine Memory,<sup>24</sup> Plato seems to be suggesting an indirect parallel with his *Meno*.

As we know, this dialogue is devoted to another form of divine memory, *anamnesis*, which is the soul-specific recollection and the way towards knowledge. While Socrates, in the first part, denounces again the same kind of “tragic,” overused speaking which appeals to Meno and the other young apprentice sophists like him,<sup>25</sup> he also comes to show, by the end of the dialogue, how a peculiar musical readjustment of words together can be the way to make the right opinion stable and long-lasting, so that it changes into knowledge. This “tuning” is the definition he gives to Daedalus’ statues with which he compares right opinions and which he shapes in the form of a kind of phono-syllabic “elegiac” couplet, organized not by meter but by the four-beat rhythm of the “cognitive-anamnetic” syllable μεν — the syllable of μένος and “memory,” as well as (παρὰ)μένειν:<sup>26</sup>

*Meno* 97 d 9–10

Ὅτι καὶ ταῦτα,

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<sup>24</sup> See E. J. Bakker, “Epic Remembering”, in *Orality, Literacy, Memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman World*, ed. Anne E. Mackay (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008), 65–77: 76.

<sup>25</sup> *Meno*, 76 e 3: Τραγικὴ γὰρ ἐστὶν, ὧ Μένων, ἢ ἀπόκρισις.

<sup>26</sup> On the importance of the syllable μεν (not only in the *Meno*), which is most often linked to the Indo-European polysemic stem \*men-, and that could mentally convey up the notion of “thought” in all its forms (“thinking”, “memory”, and “madness”) as well as that of “resistance,” see Magali Année, *La musique linguistique de la réminiscence : le Ménon de Platon entre réinvention cratyléenne de la langue commune et réappropriation de l’ancienne langue parénétiq*ue (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2018).

ἐάν μὲν μὴ δεδεμένα ἦ, / ἀποδιδράσκει καὶ δραπετεύει, //  
 ἐάν δὲ δεδεμένα, / παραμένει ///

Are they not tied up, they run away and leave; once tied up, they stay there firmly anchored.

Flowing to remedy flowing... To stem the wandering flowing of right opinions as well as the wandering flowing of words, it is necessary to get to the core of language and work on the moving material of its own sounds. At first sight, this might appear paradoxical, but it actually explains why Socrates claims his own discourses, when co-created with his interlocutor, to be genuinely similar to Daedalus' statues.

### B. The Circular Ballet of Sound Daedalic Discourses

*Euthyphro* 11 d 3-7

{ΣΩ.} Κινδυνεύω ἄρα, ὃ ἐταῖρε, ἐκείνου τοῦ ἀνδρὸς δεινότερος γεγονέναι τὴν τέχνην τοσοῦτω, ὅσῳ ὁ μὲν τὰ αὐτοῦ μόνα ἐποίει οὐ μένοντα, ἐγὼ δὲ πρὸς τοῖς ἑμαυτοῦ, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ τὰ ἄλλότρια. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μοι τῆς τέχνης ἐστὶ κομψότατον, ὅτι ἄκων εἰμὶ σοφός·

Socrates: So I'm afraid, my fellow, of being even more skillful than that man in his art: while he only made his own works non-fixed; I do so with my own works, and also, as it appears, with those of others. And what is really most elusive in this art which is mine, is that I am learned despite myself.

*Euthyphro* 15 b 7-10

{ΣΩ.} Θαυμάση οὖν ταῦτα λέγων ἐάν σοι οἱ λόγοι φαίνωνται μὴ μένοντες ἀλλὰ βαδίζοντες, καὶ ἐμὲ αἰτιάση τὸν Δαιδαλον βαδίζοντας αὐτοὺς ποιεῖν, αὐτὸς ὢν πολὺ γετεχνικώτερος τοῦ Δαιδάλου καὶ κύκλω περιμόντα ποιῶν; ἢ οὐκ αἰσθάνη ὅτι ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν περιελθὼν πάλιν εἰς ταῦτόν ἦκει;

Socrates: And you will be surprised, so speaking, that your discourses turn out to be themselves moving as they please, without standing still; and it is me that you will accuse of making them come and go like a Daedalus, when you yourself are much more expert than this Daedalus since you make them turn in a circle! Do you not realize that **our discourse**, by turning on itself, has come to return to the same point?

As it is the case in the *Euthyphro*, not standing still, constantly going around in circles, Socrates' shared λόγοι allows for the end of the dialogue by becoming its beginning again: Ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἄρα ἡμῖν πάλιν σκεπτόμενοι τί ἐστι τὸ ὅσιον, "So we need to go back and resume from the beginning our investigation into the nature of what is pious" (15 c 11). The backwards (πάλιν) movements we have seen in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* have something to do with this phenomenon.

Now, with such a necessary flowing back and forth, both between the different steps of the dialogue as a whole and through the very phonic material of its language, Hermogenes is not only the chosen ἐπιστάτης, he is also the *daemon*, of the same semi-divine kind as the one whose "voice" (φωνή) Socrates hears.<sup>27</sup> That is why he is also the one who should be able to guide, to escort (προπέμψει) Cratylus' soul (ψυχή) through the meanders of language,<sup>28</sup> just

<sup>27</sup> See *Phaedrus* 242 c.

<sup>28</sup> On Socrates' final exhortation to Cratylus, πορεύου εἰς ἄγρον (440 e 4), as an underlying incentive to go hunting inside language, see Catherine Dalimier, *Platon. Cratyle* (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1998), 190,

like Hermes, the god *Psychopompos* (ψυχοπομπός), whose name he finally turns out to bear very well. He is the one capable of helping him to go back and stay inside language in order to look, in it, for a way to readjust it altogether, again and again, so as not to risk committing a false note and doing harm to the soul.

As such, he probably is even still the one that Socrates urges Meno to seek: ζητητέον ὅστις ἡμᾶς ἐνὶ γέ τῳ τρόπῳ βελτίους ποιήσῃ, “the one who, *in some ways (by some way of ‘turning’, of shaping his speech)*, will be able to make us better” (*Meno* 96 e 1). That is to say, he may be potentially of the caliber of the only true poets (or “rhapsodes”),<sup>29</sup> those who are both philosophers and politicians by nature and education (ἅμα φιλοσόφων ἀνδρῶν ἢ καὶ πολιτικῶν, *Timaeus* 19 e 5), and who know how to give their speeches the right chord.

Let us listen to the opening words of Timaeus, at the beginning of the *Critias*, before giving the floor to his fellow Critias, the next “poet-speaker.” These are a significant invocation to the god he has just resuscitated in his discourse so that he ensures, like an internal god in the dialogue, the ceaseless, sound and harmonious continuation of this very dialogue:

*Critias* 106 a 1-b 8

{TI.} Ὡς ἄσμενος, ὃ Σώκρατες, οἷον ἐκ μακρᾶς ἀναπεπαυμένος ὁδοῦ, νῦν οὕτως ἐκ τῆς τοῦ λόγου διαπορείας ἀγαπητῶς ἀπήλλαγμαί. Τῷ δὲ πρὶν μὲν πάλα ποτ' ἔργω, νῦν δὲ λόγοις ἄρτι θεῶ γεγονότι προσεύχομαι, τῶν ῥηθέντων ὅσα μὲν ἐρρήθη μετρίως, σωτηρίαν ἡμῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῶν διδόναι, παρὰ μέλος δὲ εἴ τι περὶ αὐτῶν ἄκοντες εἴπομεν, δικὴν τὴν πρέπουσαν ἐπιτιθέναι. Δίκη δὲ ὀρθὴ τὸν πλημμελοῦντα ἐμμελῆ ποιεῖν· ἴν' οὖν τὸ λοιπὸν τοὺς περὶ θεῶν γενέσεως ὀρθῶς λέγωμεν λόγους, φάρμακον ἡμῖν αὐτὸν τελεώτατον καὶ ἄριστον φαρμάκων ἐπιστήμην εὐχόμεθα διδόναι, προσευξάμενοι δὲ παραδιδόμεν κατὰ τὰς ὁμολογίας Κριτία τὸν ἐξῆς λόγον.

Timaeus: How cheerful I am, O Socrates, and as completely rested at the end of a long journey, now that I am most happily separated from the progress of my speech. And this god, born indeed, one day, a long time ago, and just born now in my speeches, I invoke him, so that all those words that were said in the **right measure**, he grants us himself their safeguard; and if, in their surroundings, there is anything we have formulated unintentionally **against their melody**, so that he imposes the necessary sentence on us. The right sentence, in this case, is **to put the false note maker back in the right chord**; and so that's why, in order to lead rightly what remains to be composed—the discourses on the genesis of the gods—we beg him to grant us the most accomplished and noble drug of all medicinal substances: knowledge; then, fortified by this invocation, it is in Critias' hands that, according to the terms of our concordance, that we hand over the “so-on”<sup>30</sup> of the discourse.

280–281, n. 460; Magali Année, *Tyrtée et Kallinos. La diction des anciens chants parénétiqes (édition, traduction et interprétation)* (Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2017), 330–332.

<sup>29</sup> In the *Critias* (108 b 4–7), indeed, by referring to Timaeus as “the poet who came before” Critias (ὁ πρότερος ποιητής), Socrates explicitly intends to designate his interlocutors as poets of a special kind. About *Timaeus-Critias* as rhapsody, see M.-L. Desclos, “Les prologues du *Timée* et du *Critias*: un cas de rhapsodie platonicienne,” *Les Études platoniciennes* II (2006): 175–202.

<sup>30</sup> See *infra*, n. 33.

The first sentence sets the tone right away: not only does it resonate in unison with the primordial  $\alpha$  of hymnic singing ( $\acute{\alpha}\delta\omega$ )<sup>31</sup> and with the symmetrical repetition of the phonosyllabic group  $\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ , which leaves multiple  $\mu\epsilon\nu$  echoes thereafter, but it is also shaped as a real musical phrase, ordered according to a veritable decreasing metric-rhythmic movement:

Ὠς ἄσμενος, ὃ Σώκρατες, / οἷον ἐν μακροῦς // ἀναπεπαυμένος ὁδοῦ, // νῦν οὕτως ἐκ τῆς  
 // τοῦ λόγου διαπορείας // ἀγαπητῶς / ἀπήλλαγμαι.  
 - - - - - - - - - - // - - - - - - - - - - // - - - - - - - - - - // - - - - - - - - - -  
 = *irregular anapestic system* // *creto-ponic sequence* // *holospondaic hemiepes* // *pherecratean* // *ionic meter* / *iambic dimeter*

The prosodic sequence Ὠς-ἄσμενος, along with the symmetry of the two participles ἄσμενος and ἀναπεπαυμένος, is particularly worthy of attention. Not only does it sound like a chiasmic ring-shaped phonic figure (Ὠς-ἄσ|μενος), but it also joins in its center all the constituent “elements” of the name *anamnesis* (Ὠς-ἄ-σ-|μ-ε-ν-ος), which are immediately repeated and echo in the rhyming participle ἀναπεπαυμένος. Here too, although not in the same way as in the above passage from the *Meno*, the syllable  $\mu\epsilon\nu$  organizes the rhythm. Three rhyming sequences can be suggested:

(1) The triptych of the medio-passive participle ἄσμενος/ἀναπεπαυμένος/προσευξάμενοι. With the former and the latter taken in their sound prosodic context, we can see that the third makes a perfect ring-shaped synthesis of two first that entails another sort of backwards movement of the speech:

Ὠς-ἄσμενος / ἀναπεπαυμένος  
 -ναι-προσευξάμενοι

(2) The triptych of verbs with first-person plural ending εἶπομεν / λέγωμεν / παραδίδομεν, which rhymes not so differently from the participle’s triptych. Similarly, too, the third makes a peculiar contrast with the first two, which implies instead of a backward movement the ceaseless perpetuation of the speech. While it follows two verbs of “speech” being itself a verb meaning “handover,” it is the tool of a modal and temporal transition: following an aorist form expressing a past supposition, close to unreal modality (εἶπομεν), then a goal subjunctive that almost sounds like an optative (λέγωμεν), it moves the discourse to the imperfective of a pure performative present.

(3) The triptych μέν/μὲν/-μην. As in the two others, the third element brings about a change or a shift. Here, on the one hand, it is the opening and lengthening of the vowel tone /e/ that makes a kind of phonic emphasis; on the other hand, it is no longer the same autonomous particle μέν, but instead a lexically dependent syllable which is part and parcel of a keyword if any: ἐπιστήμη, “knowledge.”

As we can see then, the multi back-and-forth movement of language up towards knowledge is perfectly tuned. Instead of a round four-beat syllabic rhythm, Timaeus’ phonorhythmic invocation is based on a system with three times three-beat syllabic rhythm as it was to mean four times four-beat rhythm in which the fourth element would be missing each time. While this seems to allude directly to the beginning of the previous dialogue, the *Timaeus*,

<sup>31</sup> See J. Katz, “The Hymnic Long Alpha: Μούσας ἀείδω and Related Incipits in Archaic Greek Poetry,” in *Proceedings of the 24th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*, eds. Stephanie Jamison, Brent Vine, Craig Melchert, Angelo Mercado (Bremen: Hempfen, 2013), 87–101.

where the fourth of the “poet-speakers” is missing,<sup>32</sup> this is further a way of inviting to pursue together the search for knowledge within the sound (phono-syllabic) language of a common discourse devoid of any false note (τὸν πλημμελοῦντα ἔμμελῆ ποιεῖν).

But what is probably even more successfully tuned in this opening speech by Timaeus is that, being shaped as a true Daedalic round-dance, it makes the dialogue actually go on and on endlessly in a similar way, up to and back from its very point of incompleteness: regardless of whether the *Critias*' incompleteness is intentional or not,<sup>33</sup> it is a fact that the ring-composition it gives it is shaped on a perfect chord:

*Critias* 121 b 7-c 4

Θεὸς δὲ ὁ θεῶν Ζεὺς ἐν νόμοις βασιλεύων, ἅτε δυνάμενος καθορᾶν τὰ τοιαῦτα, ἐνόησας γένος ἐπεικῆς ἀθλίως διατιθέμενον, δίκην αὐτοῖς ἐπιθεῖναι βουληθεὶς, ἵνα γένοιτο ἔμμελέστεροι σωφρονισθέντες, συνήγειρεν θεοὺς πάντας εἰς τὴν τιμιωτάτην αὐτῶν οἴκησιν, ἣ δὴ κατὰ μέσον παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου βεβηκυῖα καθορᾶ πάντα ὅσα γενέσεως μετέληφεν, καὶ συναγείρας εἶπεν –

And the god Zeus, reigning over all other gods according to the laws, having the power to embrace all of this with his gaze, having realized that the quite balanced disposition of their race was turning miserably, and having made the decision to impose on them a sentence in order to settle them down and **put them back in a more right tune**, he gathered all the gods in the most venerable of their abode—which, from the center of the whole cosmos where it is fixed, it embraces with its gaze all that is part of the generation; and once this gathering done, then he says:...

In this passage, where the *Critias* ends, we find again, along with a variant of the μενος-triptych (δυνάμενος/διατιθέμενον/κατὰ μέσον), the imperative necessity of the right chord and the sentence which is necessary to restore it (or establish it). Then the aorist infinitive εἶπεν takes us right back to the first aorist εἶπομεν, and so we remain enclosed in a discourse beautifully spoken, that does not harm language with a false note nor do violence to souls.

#### IV. The Crucial Importance of not Harming Language

Anytos, like Socrates' other opponents, do not know what it is like to speak harmfully, just as they are wrong to believe that Socrates would pretend to be a name hunter. Plato's Socrates, and beyond Plato *tout court*, is nothing but a master *logos*-tuner, perpetually hunting the right chord. Since in his time, in the peculiar state of ancient Greek language, the λόγοι encompassed everything, including the *kosmos*,<sup>34</sup> and because of the very flowing nature of

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<sup>32</sup> Socrates, after counting up to three (εἷς, δὴ, τρεῖς), is astonished by the absence of the fourth (ὁ δὲ δὴ τέταρτος) of his guests from the day before. See H. W. Ausland, “Who Speaks for Whom in the *Timaeus-Critias*?” in *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies for Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Oxford-New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000), 183–198: 195, n.41.

<sup>33</sup> This is of course a thorny issue, most debated. In favor of some intentional process by Plato, we must mention M.-L. Desclos, “Les prologues...: 194-195. It is worth suggesting here one further argument: the formula τὸν ἐξῆς λόγον, with which Timaeus' invocation ends, is indeed not so far from the formula καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς often used by doxographers to mean ‘et caetera’ (‘and so on’, ‘and what follows’), namely when interrupting a quote. Although it is not written, the *Critias*, as it is, seems well to end with a suspended *et caetera*.

<sup>34</sup> The god of the *Critias*' opening invocation is nothing but the divine *kosmos* to which the *Timaeus* is dedicated (See *Timaeus* 92 c 4–9: the four-term equation τέλος...λόγον / ὅδε ὁ κόσμος / θεός / οὐρανός ὅδε) and it is a *kosmos* of word (“just born in λόγοις”). As a “rhapsody” (See M.-L. Desclos, “Les

Greek language, we can understand why it was for him a *primary necessity*, not at all a mere “pedagogical lying.”<sup>35</sup>

The never-ending, never definitive readjustment of the flowing internal material of language was the price of the acquisition of stable and lasting knowledge of all things in the world. Not knowing what it is like to do harm to language, amounts to not knowing how to readjust it again and again, and always risking committing false note within it, which is most serious and worrisome: it threatens to make it impossible to identify and know the things of the world, oneself and one’s soul as well as the entire cosmos. This is the path to chaos.

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prologues...”), “a fest of speeches” (see S. Slaveva-Griffin, “A Feast of Speeches’: Form and Content in Plato’s *Timaeus*,” *Hermes* 133/3 (2005): 312–327), the *Timaeus* is doubly a *kosmos* of words. On another ordering of the universe via discourse ordering (ἐπέων ἐπέων), see A. Macé, “Ordering the Universe in Speech. *Kosmos* and *Diakosmos* in Parmenides’ Poem,” in *Cosmos in the Ancient World*, ed. Phillip S. Horky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 42–61.

<sup>35</sup> See C. Vieira, “Etymologization as a Case of Pedagogical Lying in Plato,” *Méthexis* 32/1 (2020): 63–85.

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