

Plato, the Mirror of the World and the Book

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There is a hint of paradox in opening this collection of texts on the procedures for totalizing knowledge in Antiquity by calling to witness the Platonic dialogues.¹ What might they contribute, besides a critique of Sophistic polymathy, Socrates' nescience, his way of jumping in and interrupting long discourses, the disconcerting interlude of preliminary questions, and the aporetic collapses? A host of questions does not make a book, much less a library – unless the Socratic stratagem defines some entirely new conditions, or unless Plato's argument authorizes, beyond a program of study, a way of constituting knowledge with its hierarchized elements and the articulations called for by this program. A few remarks are in order here.

The Platonic dialogues quote, comment on, or criticize a book more often than one might spontaneously assume. Outlined in reverse in the dialogues is a new genre, with its imprescriptable requirements and specifications set by counter-examples. These may include the case of a book that disappointed, such as that of Anaxagoras, or an obscure book, such as Parmenides' poem or some production of the Ionic Muses, or a book that is contested in its very principles such as the writings of Protagoras, or again a pseudo-book, a discourse that, like that of Phaedrus, is incapable of being constituted as a book. We know how Socrates came to hear Zeno read his teacher's defense, which assumes a familiarity with Parmenides' writings (that books were read aloud changes nothing, since this was common practice up to and much later than Augustine). The same Socrates, relaying a text cited by one of his pupils, has Protagoras speak in his own voice. He buys Anaxagoras' treatise for a modest price at the agora. And it is no

anecdotal incident, as we shall see, that a philosophical conversion or decision is linked to the acquisition of a book, which disseminates his teachings at a lower price and to more auditors than the aristocratic Hippias or the charming Ion.² Reading allows Socrates to compare the book's promises to its achievements, to comment on a passage, to reread a formula, and to precisely locate not an objection, but the point at which his comprehension breaks down. It is no longer a matter of what form of education is apt to lead to success or happiness, but a discussion of some principle of universal intelligibility such as "*nous ekosmesen panta*" (the intellect has put everything in order), for which the series of dialogues will unremittingly seek a human inflection.

We also learn that the Platonic school kept certain manuscripts at the disposal of listeners, to whom slaves would read aloud: thus the *Theaetetus* is the reading of itself. Here Plato, revealing something of his method of composition, explains how the dialogue is constructed and sharpened by successive reworkings. Or again, the legislator recommends to young men the use of a few good books, "either of poetry, or of texts in the relaxed style that is natural to conversation (*kata logon eiremena monon*)" (*Laws*, VII.810b and 811d, where the Athenian pays homage to himself on this point...). To consider a detail that is more often than not neglected in the character of the Platonic Socrates, his role is also, and perhaps essentially, that of the dissatisfied listener or reader – a development to which he gave his name. Pressing his doubts beyond all likelihood, he returns to earlier moments of the dialogue. Named as the author of the *muthoi* in the *Phaedo*, and of long discourses (the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*), he develops a whole program of reading and criticism, along with new paradigms of exposition; thus he inserts geometric analogies into the dialogue.³ The end of this dialogue, albeit after Socrates' eviction, makes clear the injunction of the *Laws*, which assumes at the very least a minimal and canonical collection of books. Whatever the constraints implied, they will soon be stretched or contravened; the shift from oral instruction to a reliance on books for study was complete. If we are to understand the Platonic meaning of the dialectic – that is, its intentions and its attainments, taking into account what it excludes – then we must trace the episodes in the dialogues where

books and interlocutors make their appearance, rather than proceeding from the other direction, from a preconceived Platonism. In addition, following this guiding thread – good dialectic as the weft of a good book – will enable us to identify twice over the successive approximations that modified the *dialogue* as a genre, from its Socratic forms to the trilogies termed “scholastic.”

Besides the permanence of the dialogues that have come down to us in one collection, which we agree to think of as complete, we also note that the *Platonic book* as the invention of an intellectual genre was destined for a long history, in the course of which it was to be diminished or aggrandized by being designated, respectively, as the *Socratic mime* – that genre “for which there is no common name” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapt.1) – or as the *libri platonici* of Late Antiquity. As humble as the former is, Aristotle credits it with two decisive traits: the abandonment of poetic form, and the adequation of the expository mode to its subject, in a context in which he recommends identifying a work by its theme (*pragmateia*) rather than by its meter. A treatise on Nature must not by any means be characterized by its poetic scansion. From these reasons derives the poetics of *mimesis*: we imitate because we like to recognize. It is thus necessary that imitation convey sufficient clues for recognition. This implicit program implies, over and above the Platonic books that I would presently like to identify, that reading entails some constraints on the constitution of the book of prose. Aristotle, in *Metaphysics A*, makes the same argument: the investigation of cause is rewarded in the same degree as the means of understanding and expression called for by this inquiry. Rather than a critique of Platonism, this is an amplification of its teaching – Plato had not given himself the analytic means sufficient for his intentions. In the expression of final causality, the syllogism of the cause was still missing. Nonetheless, with Plato a threshold was crossed, and there was no going back.

The *Platonic book* was also, and perhaps more obviously, used as an instrument of conversion to philosophy. It is said that Zeno of Citium, the founder of the Stoa, had the Platonic books sent from Athens to Phoenicia, or even, according to another version, that he acquired them on the occasion of a providential shipwreck off the coast of Attica. In either case, we are to understand that the

dialogues were published and sold. But above all, Zeno's action repeated that of Socrates in procuring for himself the treatise of Anaxogoras at the agora. At the same time, Zeno was reversing the direction in which philosophical authority traveled: henceforth it was directed from Attica towards the Ionic lands. This reversal is not contradicted by the creation of the library in Alexandria, which it was considered desirable to entrust, as much as possible, to some Athenian scholars: if, at the initiative of the Diadochi, the Athenians were required to create in the land of Egypt a new kind of pyramid and a library that outstripped all the arts of measurement, their uncontested mastery of intellectual means was recognized. The Athenian legacy seems to have prevailed until the *terminus ad quem* marked by Husserlian questions on the crisis of knowledge and the origin of geometry. Put more simply, there was here an "invincible" Platonism, which can still be heard in Horace: *Graecia capta, ferocem victorem cepit* (Greece taken, it took hold of its fierce victor). To confine ourselves to the reputation of the *libri platonici* discussed by Augustine, and without making assumptions as to what they might have been (according to the convincing arguments of Pierre Courcelle, they were neo-Platonic books), the genre was to endure, allowing philosophical conversion to occur by means of a book more than once – as with Malebranche reading Descartes, or others reading the *Phaedo*. In these extreme cases, a book relates conversion by means of a book. There is a doubling back here of the book upon its own deontology, perhaps also a reflection on the finality of the book of philosophy as marked by the intentions and the circumstances of its invention in Athens.

In the end, whatever form was chosen for the totalization of knowledge – and no one would claim that it was fixed in Alexandria without theoretical hesitations or decisions that were ultimately of a pragmatic sort – it rests on the articulation, whether tacit or explicit, of different types of knowledge. This articulation governs the exposition of these types by reproducing the units in which intelligence takes shape. "What is knowledge?," asked Plato. For lack of anything better, Theaetetus responds: *doxa meta logou*, which can be rendered: an opinion supplied with a reasoned exposition, translated into a proper enunciation. This last calls for giving dimensions to knowledge *kath anthropinen dunamin* (accord-

ing to human capacities). Through its articulation in books – which is to say, in scrolls – the library confirms an intelligibility bit by bit, proposition by proposition. Beneath its architecture and classification appears, ultimately, the articulated construction of a linear text. Upon this articulation depends learning as well. And if the procedures of Platonic anamnesis – often underscored by an interruption (“tell me Hippias, what do you mean by...”) – stipulate, in effect, a way to read, to teach and to write, they initiate a project in which Platonic education resonates with the organization of the library. Like the philosopher-kings’ list of required sciences (*Rep.* VII), which came to be seen by some as a virtual prospectus for the Academy, this organization claims completeness – one of the meanings implied by *enkyklios paideia*. That this first Platonic encyclopedia was still only a preparation for philosophy, and that the dialectic later came to compete with this first list, and with the Alexandrian approach to totalization, are other matters that do nothing to discount the significance of this episode.

With the invention of Platonism, we thus see the progression of a new type of book, perhaps the paradigm of the book of study and philosophy. I will now focus on this new book, even if it ended up, not as the instrument of erudition, but returned to its original intentions. But the tension between two possible libraries, that of polymathy – the term appears in the passages of the *Laws* cited above – and that required by philosophical practice, this tension, with all the possible forms of reconciliation or opposition it entailed, was henceforth to remain an integral part of the enterprise.

What remains to be shown is the Platonic book not only as a threshold between Homeric education and Athenian education as modeled after Pericles, between the polymathy of Hippias and the culture of the philosopher-kings, but also and rather the conditions of which these well-known themes were merely consequences. The Platonic dialectic, with its grammatical schemes and its analytic referents, traces a path that leads from the haughty teaching of the pre-Socratics to a way of settling human matters according to a mode of thought that appropriates for itself whatever can be reached of the language of the gods – which is to say, the expression of *phusis* (nature). This is what the middle Acad-

emy would remember when it said that Socrates made the gods come down to earth. To define an ethics and a politics whose every formula would retain something of the cosmological order, to entrust this memory to a manner of saying: such was the project of the Platonic dialectic.

The Platonic dialogue can be understood all the better through an identification of the specifically intellectual problem that is posed and not resolved by sophistry. What follows from this is a movement of regression occurring within sophistry itself, which remains the context of Socrates' teaching. The rupture is consummated in the *Phaedo* and in the dialectic defined in the *Sophist*, which is a patent correction of the *Phaedo*. To sum up the argument in a nutshell, after flagging the shortcomings of sophistry with regard to thought and exposition, we will compare these two dialogues as two successive projects, two paradigms, or two approximations of those books that Plato recommended for the public library of his imaginary city.

A century separates the projects of the Academy from those of Alexandria – a long time, one might think, but in fact barely three generations of philosophers, of schools that turned into rivals; a very short time in the history of literary culture, and still less in that of its philosophical determinations.

Let us take up again the stages of the Platonic proof. In order to dramatize this history as Plato wished, with a parade of characters, let us follow that Platonic Socrates, a Sophist among Sophists and the one charged with teaching them their own incompetence. Let us start with the two *Hippias* dialogues, which the tradition of the Platonist school placed at the beginning of the collection. Without a doubt, Hippias was of lesser stature than other teachers such as Protagoras or Gorgias, who were authors of published treatises and discourses. Hippias thus serves the Platonic proof all the more effectively in that he exposes, without embellishment and in utterly good conscience, the weaknesses that undermine the Sophists' knowledge in the public eye and invalidate their books. From him we learn how and in view of which deficiencies, magnified as they are by Hippias' remarks, the Sophists are all

refutable. Certain grievances appear, which were to provide lasting ammunition to the Platonic critique against sophistry.

Socrates stigmatizes a disjunctive type of knowledge that juxtaposes disparate themes and aims to persuade by the use of *ad hominem* arguments. Hippias' mathematics is that of singular solutions, obtained by *ad hoc* methods. The mechanical construction of the quadratrix is a good example. Moreover, when Hippias dissolves the distinction between practice and science, he eliminates a dimension of understanding that might have provided a method by eventually serving as a model for the art of the proof. Unlike Thales, Hippias would prove incapable of transferring his plane geometry to the understanding of celestial phenomena, much less to the economic forecasting made possible by meteorological observation.

But above all, the Sophists' way of teaching falls victim to the very property that gave Homeric storytelling its force (*Ion*). In function and effectiveness, their approach remains in the grip of the epic mode. The effect of recognition is achieved by a directly adjectival characterization of things and of men. Of Homer, the Sophists seem to have retained only genealogical memory, the use of catalogues, and the descriptive epithets. And when Hippias responds to the question *what is beauty*, citing the quality inhering in a *beautiful* young woman or a *beautiful* pot, he uses – but improperly – the Homeric epithet, as anger defines Achilles, or as elegant greaves define the Achaean foot soldiers. The argument that diverts Hippias from the geometry to which he aspires towards a pale imitation of Homeric grammar and memory is generalized. The Sophists of noble lineage, such as Protagoras or Gorgias, in turn reveal themselves to be incapable of exploiting for our sake the teaching of the physicists of Ionia or of *Magna Graecia*, to which they unabashedly aspire. Yet Protagoras could do no better than Heraclitus, nor Zeno than Parmenides. The responsibility devolves upon the pre-Socratic philosophers, who were either incapable or not at all desirous of establishing a connection between their knowledge of the world and opinion – whence Parmenides, given what we know of his poem, but also given what Plato tells us of it. Zeno saw himself as merely refuting objections raised against the Eleatic philosophers. And when Plato entrusts the defense of his thesis to Parmenides, he multi-

plies the inconsistencies of any exchange between Eleatic knowledge and empiry.

In contrast to the Eleatic book, the Platonic book endeavors to grasp and show the thing itself in the world, thus to institute a reliable and indissoluble relationship between what is said and the manner in which it is said. This enterprise explains its successive attempts at defining a *logos* that would be a scientific proposition and at the same time able to accord human actions with the cosmological order which it reflects by the very conditions of its constitution. The moment without hypothesis that is sought by the dialectic is less (and perhaps not at all) an absolute knowledge, than it is the native, and therefore paradigmatic, moment of its adequation. According to the same eternal question: *quid ad nos?* what of us, what of our world and human concerns? Thus, the way in which the Sophists attempted to capitalize on the teachings of the Physicists – that is, by joining them to the teachings of Homer and the Tragicists – cancelled out their undertaking. Anaxagoras, cited by Euripides, had been put in the service of a tragedy that this time did not make do with the “crumbs of Homer’s feast.”⁴ The Sophists were no different. Plato protests: the unmediated application of pre-Socratic physics is useless and specious. Even if this was a first form of the totalization of knowledge, he saw it as wrapped up in rhapsody and analogy, without fulfilling any of the functions that the philosopher requires of the world’s intrusion in the government of the city.

Socrates had read Anaxagoras, demanded a tribunal other than that of the city, and attempted proofs that necessitated a mode of exposition freed from “Homeric grammar.” From the *Phaedo* to the *Republic*, the mouth of Socrates is used to hazard reflections on a *logos* capable of being at once the language of men, a mirror of the world and a measure for action. The opposition *logos/muthos* grew out of this debate, effacing all the half-measures and various roundabouts used so elegantly by the Sophists. As elements of an education, the forms of knowledge were to be considered compatible, simultaneously manageable, if each one among them and all of them together partook of the same analytics, for which Platonism established the necessity and attempted the first canon. The necessity is that of the *Phaedo*; the formulation, adapted to the physical

determinations that analyze with reference to cosmology, is that of the *Sophist*. It will suffice here to consider these two aspects, and in so doing, the Platonic library's connection to teleology.

Disappointed by his reading of Anaxagoras, whose book is bogged down in material explanations, Socrates commits himself to searching for the cause and for this purpose decides to "consider the truth of the beings in the *logoi*" (*Phaedo*, 99 d-e). The ambiguity – for us – of the term *logos* is essential here, since it manifests the intention of uniting Thales' geometry to the expression of causality, in particular a causality that could serve a choice of life – none other than the Socratic choice. In the absence of the dialectic, which is not yet present, the Platonic program is suggested in half-tones: to take over from myth, to integrate human life into the tribunal of its cosmic participations, to define for it the discursive form capable of urgently calling to mind physical participation, to teach another picture of the relationship between human things and divine things. Unable to fulfill Anaxagoras' program, which gets mired in contingent causalities through contact (*efficient* in Aristotle's terminology), Socrates undertakes to rewrite it, or rather, to initiate another genre, which he does not see through to completion. The dialogue ends with a myth.

While it pays homage to Thales, who had geometrically demonstrated the eclipse of the sun by studying its reflection on a plane of water, the *Phaedo* also establishes the status of the book, the human image of a natural image which is thus saved or lost according to whether it follows the rule and the dimensions of good images. No matter that it was also the acceptance of a detour – *deuteros plous*, the text says. From this scheme, in which things themselves draw their shadows with light, the *logos* retains a promise of realism. Defining the list of specifications for a book that is the reflection of things, a book underwritten by Nature, the *logos* thereby combines its functions of spiritual exercise and protreptic with that of a form of knowledge. Each one authorizing the other, their conjunction aids in the resolution of life choices. Three possibilities take shape here, whose functions Plato himself was later to distinguish in the *Sophist*.

In the *Republic* (Books VI and VII), each type of knowledge is indexed by a type of utterance. The ascent through the degrees of knowledge is made simultaneously by analogies between discourses and analogies between objects. From this, we note that the ontological determination of the *logos*, its being as thing or as image, yields to its epistemological determination. This outcome is confirmed by the *Cratylus*, the stakes of which are known to us, as is the conclusion: there is, for things, a natural way of saying and being said. The formula would be opaque if it did not sustain the *Phaedo*'s promise by changing the discursive unit that must honor it – no longer nouns and eponyms, but ways of saying of which the *Republic* draws up an inventory. These ways of saying imply a theory of the proposition. Things retain the initiative here, but it is in displaying the physical reason that pervades them – in short, their way of being and seeming – that they trace the outlines of their recognition and their enunciation. Having performed one last service by refuting both sides, Cratylus and Hermogenes, on the question of nouns, and having proclaimed the discursive dimension of the *logos* (of which this inveterate author of protreptic fables and speeches gives no examples), Socrates is dismissed. The *logos*, made to explain its character as the good image, confirms the power of its realism in a naturalization whose dialectical solution is developed in the *Sophist*.

The *Sophist* had therefore to distinguish between the good image and the bad. This dialogue will remain enigmatic as long as we ignore the continuity of problems and half-solutions in which it arises. Now Socrates gives way to the Stranger, who plays a strictly opposing role. When Socrates interrogates his interlocutor to the point of disconcerting him, the Stranger answers. Better yet, fulfilling an ambassadorial mission, he comes bearing a lesson that he will deliver in the terms and the language of his hosts. Thus, having come, like Zeno, from Elea, he does not refute, but rather teaches the art of defining, with recourse to the example of the line fisherman. As a consequence, he defines the Sophist by taking his cue from the general notion of *doing* (*poiein*), which is a case of movement, a physical and already human reality specified as an action and a fabrication, taken at the very point where human activity meets that of the gods. Simultaneously, the defini-

tion has acquired the use of the verb and has reflected in its propositional texture the way in which the scrambled things of down here refract the web of action, that is, of nature, that determines them. Here the *logos*, as the image of a new genre produced by man, acquires a discursive structure with a grammatical dimension unheard of in sophistry. At the same time it conveys the general conditions by which the dialectic is achieved. What the Stranger does in this example, therefore, is to translate the language of the gods into the speech of men, and his lesson resumes the project of the good image, this time obtained under utterly precise discursive conditions.

To recapitulate: five genres cooperate in the definition of the *logos*, itself a sixth genre. Thus *being*, that is to say, all beings as well as the whole of being, receives *rest* and *movement* under the conditions of attribution governed by the *same* and the *other*. A universal (meta-)physics supplies a discursive template, and this *logos* as a sixth genre coincides with the human *logos*, as the analysis of the utterance *Theaetetus is seated* brings to the fore (263a 2). Theaetetus, having recognized that it is a question of his definition and acknowledging that the utterance appropriately describes him (*logos sou kai peri sou*), therefore accepts that the definition includes the manner of being. His formula, in keeping with the scale provided him by distribution of the genres of being, is also the disavowal of Protagoras. The reign of the Sophists is here brought to an end: Plato supplies them with a dialectic that carries out their claim and simultaneously nullifies their Homeric pretensions. And if the formula that defines Theaetetus does not convey his immortality, as the Socrates of the *Phaedo* would have wished, at least it utters him in terms of *being*, of *rest* and *movement*, that is, in the terms we use when we speak of divine things. The dialectic here finds its principle, which is also the palimpsest of every book, the rule of its writing, and the principle of its anamnesis. This must be kept in mind when the speeches in the *Phaedrus*, like the Gardens of Adonis, were later criticized.

Such is the lesson of the Stranger. Teaching what no Sophist ever managed to do, he imposes an analytics that can claim to be the exact reverse of the constitution of things, a way of saying that does not betray the way of being that it intercepts and answers, an

art of images doubled by their recognitions. At last, a way to “save the phenomena” that comprises the template of all the phenomenologies to come. The gain of a supplementary grammatical dimension, the predicative constitution of the utterance, brought the position of the utterance a step closer to the real. Rather than “third after the king,” the image constituted on the paradigmatic articulation proposed by the *Sophist* comes immediately after the thing.⁵ From the analytics of the world, the image borrows the rules by which the world accepts to be uttered. At the threshold of the Academy, the propitiatory injunction – *None shall enter here if he be not a geometrician* – now finds itself subordinated by right to another that includes it: *None shall enter here if he be not a dialectician*. Even so, the formulation of the *Elements* of geometry, organized by definitions, common notions, and postulates, had in all likelihood awaited the Stoic development of the dialectic. The *Sophist* would open up a potential, or an intellectual destiny, for several Alexandrias. Before tracing certain consequences of the Platonic invention, then, it is worth pointing out its scope.

Three types of writing found their form and status in the Platonic book. The first, emphasized as such by Plato, was the good version of sophistry that was dedicated to those imitations taking the form of an inquiry and deserving of the term science (*mimesis tis historike met'epistemes*, 267e). The prototype and discursive unity of this type were given in the example *Theaetetus is seated*. Conforming to this prototype are all the treatises, natural histories (*ta phusika*) and human histories (*ta anthropina*) to come, not to mention the categorical determinations that would later support their development. Such treatises in no way invalidate the singular task of the philosopher. Decisions about what is, about the essential determinations that articulate and govern the world and the aspects of the world, are left to him; to him falls the supreme science, that of the dialectician, who holds the key to the knowledge of free men. “We, who seek the Sophist, have we not discovered first the philosopher?” (253c 7-8). The priority is appropriate since it establishes the constitution of the *logos* that all other types of knowledge would use. This specific function, which from this time on set apart both the philosopher in his metaphysical and architectonic work and the books of primary philosophy, is abun-

dantly illustrated in the first part of the *Sophist*. The same dialogue also announces a definition of the man who gives laws to the city.

The *Statesman*, which seems to have followed shortly after the writing of the *Sophist*, would try to apply the dialectic to political matters. Interweaving the genres in a texture other than predicative, preferring the methods of approximating just measurement to the supreme physics of the *Sophist*, this draft includes a reflection on the types of government. All this leads us to think that Plato here reaches the limits of his analytics and is aware of the failure. He will attempt to compensate for it without being able to complete the project of the *Laws*. These political inquiries were thus to pave the way for another type of book, in which the investigation veers inward to moral determination and political choice in the framework of a city whose finalities borrow from the world's order without renouncing their specificity. And since men must be convinced, the immortality and happiness promised by the succession of generations elicits, in a preamble, their acceptance of the *Laws* regime. Thus was opened up the third type of writing that Platonism sponsored, those *politeiai* that for a long time occupied center stage. All of which is not to omit the effects of this organization on the evolution of both rhetoric and the dialogue as forms of exposition, philosophical or non-philosophical.⁶

It remains that all the books owing up to a Platonic genealogy forever depend on the powerful protreptic that was Socratic dialogue. Let us return again to Socrates, the Platonic character. He is the bearer of Sophistic nescience and its reversal, he voices the questions and the dissatisfaction of the answers, and he exhibits both naïveté and the art of circumlocution. It is up to him, in the *Republic* and the *Symposium*, to exalt the sublime function of the protreptic; and in the *Phaedo* it is up to him to initiate the tradition of *libri platonici*, books of conversion in that they promise or deliver another way to consider the tangible world. This desire still tacitly animates every book of philosophy, even if Neoplatonism took over from Platonism in Late Antiquity. In the end, Socrates is involuted into the figure of the Stranger, who liberates him from his Athenian singularity but accedes to the demand that Socrates had never relinquished. The Stranger actually acknowledges the necessity of transferring the philosophical operation of

the dialectic and of knowledge to that human language of ours which is recalled by the "bizarre Euryclea" – the ventriloquist whose voice protests against the Parmenidian prohibitions and anticipates their defeat. Yet the development of philosophy, and with it the development of those first school libraries created at the Academy and at the Lyceum, and later by the Ptolemies, is so obviously dependent on this ennoblement of ordinary language that one always forgets to mention it. This is where the grammatical meticulousness of Platonism, the dialectical rules that earned it Aristophanes' derision, find their justification. We will not therefore forget those moments of discursive invention introduced by Socrates or the Stranger, those moments that Plato situated in the singularity of *poiein*, in the very place where the involuntary activity endured by the world shifts into its human version, and where human capacities for understanding renew themselves. The peril of Scholasticism, as ancient as philosophical invention, is always banished by its renewal, just as the Eleatic philosopher made contact with the placeless Euryclea.

Let us recapitulate the Platonic invention and its future in books. By proposing an analytics buttressed by genres of Being, empowered to express participation, to validate primary definitions and primary utterances, the *Sophist* bowed to the reader's point of view and to his demands for clarity. Future categorizations, those of Aristotle and those of Stoicism, were to confirm this *sine qua non* condition for the book. For this they paid the price of certain consequences, among them the definition of a common sense. It is here, to summarize the operation of the Platonic *poiein*, that the equation between thought, things and statements is constituted. Naturalism laid down a psychology and the rudiments of a subjectivity.⁷ Forgotten was the mythical part of Platonism, the paradigm of the *logos* as a reliable image projected onto the water in the manner of the solar eclipse – a sun whose brilliance was muted on the geometry of a plane of water. Also to be forgotten was the operation of the *Sophist* that filters Parmenides' fireball poem through a specter of utterances. Plato had diffracted the blaze of Being and the One onto the grammatical divisions and

processes that were already in existence, guaranteed by conventional enunciation. We would do well to recall this today in order to bring to a close the post-Platonic history of a strictly transcendental subjectivity doomed to the conditions of enunciation of a knowledge that it does not produce.

The *Theaetetus*, which, we have seen, functioned as a reading of itself, this dialogue whose text was available in the library of the Academy, is introduced by a *tolle lege*⁸ that thus inscribes in its first lines the protreptic of the Platonic book. The formula is well suited – up to the glory conferred on it by Augustine – to safeguarding the act of teaching and the thesis that philosophy is learned from and sustained by what is “outside.”

But we should not forget either that later consequence, invoked in the long term to moderate the earlier one. At stake this time is that fortunate constitution of the book of knowledge, a plane of water and mirror of the world. A seductive formula, it was to contain knowledge for a long time within the dimensions of Euclidean intuition and phenomenological categorization, the history of which could not outreach the very conditions whose protection it sought. But then, all the books reinvented beyond this immense Platonic past, though they commit in their turn some parricide, will pay in that instant the same tribute of homage that Plato showered upon Socrates (whom he had dismissed) and the Eleatic philosopher – from whom he begged indulgence.

*Translated from the French by
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Notes

1. The reader will find herein elements of a lecture given at the conference, *Les procédures de totalisation du savoir dans l'Antiquité*. The same hypothesis, regarding the unity and the character, as new as it was singular, of the philosophical and intellectual institutions of Classical and Alexandrian Antiquity, will be developed in *Domus aurea, Logique et langage dans le stoïcisme*. The method has been presented in *Phénoménologies et langues formulaires* (1992), particularly in chapters III, VII, XIII.
2. *Parmenides*, 127e, 128a, 128c; *Theaetetus*, 143b; *Phaedo*, 97b-c.
3. *Gorgias*, 465b 7: "To abridge, I am going to speak to you in the language of geometricians."
4. Anaxagoras, fr. LXII (Diodores of Sicily), and fr. XCI, Seneca and the same Diodores (Dumont, *Les Présocratiques*, pp. 625, 639).
5. See the double-columned table that compares, on the one side, the productions of the gods, including images of trees and mountains reflected on the surface of a lake, and on the other, the productions of men and the images of men (*Sophist*, 265e-266b).
6. On this last point, see. C. Imbert, "Le dialogue platonicien en quête de son identité," *Rhetorica*, 1994, no. 4.
7. On this question, see Aristotle, *De anima*, III, 5. The common sense is "the one that perceives, thinks and says."
8. "Labe to biblion kai lege," *Theaetetus*, 143c 11.