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How Plato overcame the cosmopolitans

Detlef von Daniels

It's just a jump to the left/ And then a step to the right ...
 With a bit of a mind flip/ You're there in the time slip
 And nothing can ever be the same

Introduction

At the beginning of his lectures on the history of philosophy Hegel notes how strange it is that philosophy, unlike other scientific disciplines, has a history that has an immediate presence in systematic thought. To Hegel philosophy was a discipline whose progress could not be matched straightforwardly to a time line and whose knowledge could not be easily accumulated in condensed form. At the very least, he regarded philosophy as a discipline where narratives of accumulated progress are always challenged by new readings of the tradition. From the perspective of contemporary political philosophy, Hegel's dictum may seem outdated. Not only would it seem possible to tell the story of steady progress in contemporary political philosophy starting – inevitably – with the publication of the *Theory of Justice* and culminating in current avant-garde discussions on global justice and human rights.¹ Even further, the history of political philosophy appears to be reduced to *mere* history as it only serves to illuminate certain aspects of the liberal tradition² or to accumulate our positive knowledge of past times or other traditions.³

¹ This optimistic narrative does not refer exclusively to the normative thesis of Francis Fukuyama but is meant as a sociological observation. It underlies countless syllabi on the history of political philosophy and writings about liberalism. I have yet to see a syllabus where the history of liberalism is presented – in the fashion of the cultural pessimists of the 1920s – as a history of decay. Kant was well aware that history could *always* be written either as a history of progress, or of decay, or of ever changing fate. His philosophical history is written in the practical interests of reason, not to better the world but to avoid misology – despair of reason.

² Even the Cambridge School, distinguished by its historical awareness, concentrates exclusively on the liberal or republican tradition in the Anglophone world. In an ironic twist Quentin Skinner was appointed by Royal warrant to the Regius Chair of Modern History; consequently, republicanism is not the only political tradition that exists in Great Britain; and, of course, there are other countries where liberalism is not a part of modern history or a relatively newcomer when compared to the Anglophone world.

³ Studies about political thinking that is not part of the liberal philosophical tradition, e.g. reforms by enlightened monarchs such as Frederick II or Joseph II, tend to be written by historians rather than philosophers, even though enlightened monarchs, e.g. Abdullah II of Jordan, still make an impact today.

This rough and ready assessment is confirmed if we look at current discussions on liberal cosmopolitanism.⁴ These discussions pay little attention to the history of philosophy.⁵ If history is presented at all, it is only for pedagogic reasons in the form of the pre-history of current ideas, not unlike the practice in the history of the sciences, and not as a challenge or counterpart to them.⁶ Liberal cosmopolitanism typically presents two reasons for rendering philosophy the way. First, the real impact of globalization only occurred in the final years of the 20th century, thus, the world to which philosophy responded has changed dramatically.⁷ Second, liberal cosmopolitanism is modest in its aims and therefore receptive to many traditions, not only the established traditions of 'Western' philosophy but also religious, non-Western, and even metaphysical traditions.⁸ In response to the charge that despite its pretensions to hold true across all cultures and philosophical traditions, liberal cosmopolitanism is ultimately based on a thin textual corpus consisting mostly of the Anglo-American liberal tradition, advocates of liberal cosmopolitanism respond by arguing that *all* other traditions are at least potentially integrable – of course only as long as they are 'reasonable.' In this way liberal cosmopolitanism appears to be always one step ahead of any criticism, a step ahead of historical assessments, since it is directed towards the future, a step ahead of 'realist' challenges since it is ideal, and a step ahead of 'metaphysical' criticism since it is pragmatic, and thus non-metaphysical.

However, despite such self-assuredness, a certain measure of uneasiness remains, the kind of uneasiness that may even be a sign of philosophical worry. I would like to articulate this worry by reflecting the current state of affairs in ancient times. My thesis is that the beginning of philosophy was marked by very similar pragmatic cosmopolitan sentiments, and that Plato while establishing philosophy as a specific kind of inquiry, became, in effect, the first anti-

⁴ The most important protagonists in the debate are Charles Beitz, Simon Caney, Martha Nussbaum, Thomas Pogge, and Peter Singer, all of whom promote some version of cosmopolitanism or global justice. David Miller, Thomas Nagel, and John Rawls are liberals, although skeptics about the feasibility or desirability of global institutions.

⁵ None of the authors mentioned above explicitly reflects on the question why cosmopolitanism is more convincing now than when it was first formulated in theory (e.g. in Kant) or first found practical support (after 1918).

⁶ See for instance the entry on global justice in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown, "Cosmopolitanism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/cosmopolitanism/>, last modified November 28, 2006.

⁷ This narrative of globalization is most explicit in Peter Singer, *One World. The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 1-14. It should be noted that the narrative of globalization has been challenged by economists and historians.

⁸ Simon Caney states that principles of cosmopolitanism are affirmed in a kind of overlapping consensus by many philosophical and religious traditions. See Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders. A Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4. However the overlapping consensus does not bind people who stress different aspects of a tradition. To claim that all Jews are bound to and can be judged by specific secular political principles because "their tradition" affirms them would not persuade everybody.

cosmopolitan philosopher. However, I will argue that Plato does not just present an 'anti-cosmopolitan argument' to weigh the pros and cons of cosmopolitanism but instead, through his dialogues, demonstrates that this kind of debate— though a necessary beginning – is insufficient ('sophistic') and must be overcome.

I will first show that the current discourse on cosmopolitanism relies on three premises that it takes for granted. I will then argue that very similar ideas can be found in writings of the sophists, a movement that has effectively been silenced by Plato. The challenge I intend to present in this way is that we may see our contemporary leanings reflected in ancient times, however with the front lines reversed, with the side of the 'unphilosophical' sophists having the upper hand. Finally, I will also examine the limitations of Plato's 'anti-cosmopolitan' position. Whether this reflection is still within the tolerable realm of the 'reasonable' is to be seen. My hope is that a more profound understanding of by examining our entire history will open up ways to a better understanding of others.⁹

I. Since my thesis is that contemporary cosmopolitanism can be reflected in ancient times, it is necessary to briefly characterize it. Cosmopolitanism refers to all those liberal political theories that were developed or became prominent in the last decades of the 20th century that apply on a global scale principles and ideas previously developed for national societies. The most prominent theories are various Rawlsian schemes of global justice; however, utilitarian theories and theories that contain a mixture of various strands also belong to this class. Since the definition carries a time stamp, it would exclude classical authors like Kant (i.e. his whole philosophy ranging from his theoretical philosophy to the philosophy of religion), but include theories inspired by Kant that defend a specifically contemporary interpretation of Kant's cosmopolitanism.¹⁰

One may question this definition as too general and too broad; too general, since all liberal political theories apply some principles on a global scale, and too broad, since it includes too many different theories, arguably even some theories that consider themselves to be explicitly anti-cosmopolitan. It might thus appear that the definition delineates not cosmopolitanism but

⁹ Karl Jaspers' observation of similar developments in different cultures during the axial age (roughly the 8th to the 2nd century BC) may serve as a common point of reference for an intercultural dialogue. See, for various approaches to this question, *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, ed. Robert Bellah and Hans Joas (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Pogge explicitly reinterprets Kant's theory in the framework of Rawlsian theory as being political but not metaphysical. Thomas Pogge, "Is Kant's Rechtslehre Comprehensive?" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 36 (1998): 161-187.

contemporary political philosophy in general. However, we should recall two aspects. First, the extension of moral and political principles on a global scale under the heading of cosmopolitanism is, indeed, a recent phenomenon of the post-Cold War era. The 1964 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* does not even have an entry on "Cosmopolitanism" and under "International Relations" only refers to related articles on Empire, Hegemony, Imperialism, Mandate, Protectorate, Spheres of Influence, and Suzerainty.¹¹ In official Marxist terminology, on the other hand, "cosmopolitanism" was regarded as a camouflage strategy on the part of US imperialism.¹² Therefore, left-leaning political theories that kept an eye on official Marxism, such as the Frankfurt School in Germany, did not pursue this line of thought before 1989.¹³ It is easy to imagine the kinds of criticism Rawls' distinction between liberal, decent, and outlaw regimes (under the presumption that they all must yield to a liberal notion of human rights) would have provoked under Cold War premises.

Second, the history of liberal political philosophy with its current spearhead in cosmopolitanism should not be taken to represent philosophy as a whole. Even among liberal-minded thinkers and in a liberal culture the very idea of cosmopolitanism was received ambivalently in the 19th and 20th century, or even regarded as irrelevant.¹⁴ Moreover, realist theories in international relations, inspired by Schmittian thinking through Hans Morgenthau, and deconstructivist theories that take their lead (also unacknowledged) from Heidegger, pursue lines of thought that cannot easily be subsumed under contemporary cosmopolitan. And so, it is, indeed the first characteristic of contemporary cosmopolitanism that it presumes that a basic cosmopolitan outlook or some cosmopolitan pretensions is an integral part of contemporary political theory. This may be labeled "historicism," taking for granted a Whig narrative of liberalism, while leaving out a reflection on the conditions of its own tradition, and failing to even include other traditions in its considerations.¹⁵ This first characteristic of contemporary cosmopolitanism is external or sociological. From an internal point of view, this first characteristic might be considered to be

¹¹ Previous editions had a short entry on stoic cosmopolitanism but not on Kant, let alone the cultural cosmopolitanism of German Romanticism.

¹² The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* recounts the history of cosmopolitanism beginning with the stoics, including the teachings of the Catholic Church, and continuing all the way to German idealism and explains: "Cosmopolitanism is an inseparable part of the ideology of imperialism, such as in bourgeois political science. Proletarian internationalism is opposed to bourgeois cosmopolitanism." *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, vol. 13, transl. of the third edition (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 190.

¹³ See Sigrid Thielking, *Weltbürgertum. Kosmopolitische Ideen in Literatur und politischer Publizistik seit dem achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (München: Fink, 2000), 242-251.

¹⁴ For a historical account of the various facets of cosmopolitan discourses see Thielking, *Weltbürgertum*.

misguided or irrelevant. Instead, different features will be named as decisive elements of cosmopolitanism. Thomas Pogge writes:¹⁶

Three elements are shared by all cosmopolitan positions: First, individualism: the ultimate units of concern are human beings, or persons – rather than, say, family lines, tribes, ethnic, cultural, or religious communities, nations, or states. The latter may be units of concern only indirectly, in virtue of their individual members or citizens. Second, universality: the status of ultimate unit of concern attaches to every living human being equally – not merely to some subset, such as men, aristocrats, Aryans, whites, or Muslims. Third, generality: this special status has global force. Persons are ultimate units of concern for everyone – not only for their compatriots, fellow religionists, or such like.

Similar characterizations can also be found in other authors.¹⁷ At this point it would be possible to further differentiate between different strands of cosmopolitanism within the contemporary debate, distinguishing, for example, between moral, legal, cultural and political or institutional cosmopolitanism, according to how much power and which kind of institutions are theoretically assigned to the global level. Expanding on various modalities of cosmopolitanism would be helpful for answering specific criticisms such as neglecting the importance of national identities or overestimating the transformative power of administrations with regard to economic or cultural forces. It would also allow a rough differentiation between strong and weak cosmopolitan approaches in political theory, for example, grouping Pogge, Nussbaum, and Singer on one side, and Nagel, Miller and Rawls on the other side.

However, these distinctions would cloud a second premise that is taken for granted by all cosmopolitan approaches; they are all egalitarian theories. Once again, this may sound little surprising, since we are told that "every plausible political theory has the same ultimate source, which is equality."¹⁸ Yet, when reflecting on the premise of equality by imagining alternative historical positions, it becomes obvious that the premise is specific to contemporary

¹⁵ This point has also been marked by Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed. Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 22-24.

¹⁶ Thomas Pogge, "Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty," *Ethics* 103 (1992): 48-49.

¹⁷ See Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders*, 3-5.

¹⁸ Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy. An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 4-5.

cosmopolitanism. In contemporary discourse, the value of equality is usually taken as a given,¹⁹ a "rock-bottom ethical premiss ... [that] cannot be derived from anything else"²⁰ or a human end that "cannot be defended or justified, for it is itself which justifies other acts."²¹ As long as the aim is to defend a certain conception of equality within a society that considers itself to be liberal, the more interesting debate is, indeed, explicating what it means to treat citizens as equals (the 'equality of what?' question). However, in cosmopolitan debates egalitarianism becomes a more prominent premise since cosmopolitan theories aim not only to be acceptable by liberal societies but also by others, by decent societies²² or by collectivistic moralities.²³ The fundamental problem of contractarian approaches is that the "international contracts" only include liberal peoples and decent non-liberal peoples. This strategy presupposes that certain regimes are illegitimate, even though this is precisely the question that is at stake. Relying on the notion of reasonableness is no way out of the quandary, as long as reasonableness is defined in terms of what people (who are taken to be free and equal) would consent to. Yet, my point here is not to criticize egalitarian approaches but to draw attention to a characteristic premise of cosmopolitanism.

However, there may be a reason that this premise cannot be or need not be explicitly defended, which leads us to the third characteristic of contemporary cosmopolitanism. One might think that all non-egalitarian theories depend on some 'metaphysical views' that cannot be defended within the limits of a 'reasonable empiricism'. Pogge alludes to this argument by suggesting that all approaches that do not share the values of cosmopolitanism must presume a 'metaphysical' view of arbitrary differences such as between men and women, commoners and aristocrats, blacks and whites, compatriots and others, etc.²⁴ Contemporary cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is characterized by taking a strictly non-metaphysical attitude. This attitude may be defended in a variety of ways, either as a requirement of reasonableness within political theories or as an

¹⁹ With regard to the question of how to justify equality in human rights, the same observation has been made by Allen Buchanan, "Equality and Human Rights," *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* 4 (2005): 69-70. On the 'groundlessness' of egalitarian theories in various authors see John Kekes, "A Reasonable Alternative to Egalitarianism," *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Christiano and John Christman (Oxford: Blackwell), 179-194. Kekes however uses his observation to serve a one sided political agenda.

²⁰ Brian Barry, "Equality," in Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, eds., *Encyclopedia of Ethics* (New York: Garland, 1992), 324.

²¹ Isaiah Berlin, "Equality," in *Concepts and Categories*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), 102.

²² John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples with „The Idea of Public Reason Revisited“* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 59-62.

²³ Allen Buchanan shows against Rawls that human rights are acceptable by collectivistic moralities. See *The Ethical Pluralist Challenge to Human Rights*, manuscript 2012.

²⁴ Pogge, "Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty," 48.

(empirical) result derived from human experience.²⁵ In any case, the theory is presented as being based on very lean, easily acceptable premises, for which 'non-metaphysical' may be the label.

Taken together, these three premises are sufficient to characterize contemporary cosmopolitanism. Given certain historical and philosophical narratives about our time, faith in egalitarianism and an anti-metaphysical attitude, cosmopolitanism appears to be the logical consequence of political thinking. The definition is broad as it is meant to capture both sides of a particular debate. Thus, Nagel, Rawls and Miller would not dispute the fact that cosmopolitan developments are in the line of contemporary political theory but would only question certain normative claims. One might be concerned that it is not possible to arrive at interesting insights by reflecting on such very general characteristics, but instead, only by engaging in this debate and promoting some aspect of global justice or instead, taking a historical point of view by discovering some antecedents of this noble aim. However, I will try to show how it is possible to reformulate the terms of this debate so that it appears in a different light.

II. At the beginning I claimed that historical reflection may not only provide more details but may also serve to call our certainties into question. However, the official genealogy of cosmopolitanism does not offer any revealing insights. When looking at the first mention of the word cosmopolitanism, one is informed that it was coined by Diogenes²⁶ while the first full fledged theory was arguably formed in the third century B.C. by Chrysippus.²⁷ He might have been a pupil of Diogenes, who elaborated the frugal, kynic²⁸ side of Socrates' life and teachings. Thus, there is a direct line from Socrates and the early sophists to cosmopolitan theory. Chrysippus holds that all people on the earth share a common humanity and that the wise man is not a citizen of a particular polis but of the earth. Therefore he should show "cosmopolitan concern" to others and work to benefit human beings as such as far as circumstances allow. Details of this account, particularly the ascription of these views to Chrysippus or earlier authors

²⁵ Martha Nussbaum claims that her account of human capabilities "is articulated in terms of freestanding ethical ideas only, without reliance on metaphysical and epistemological doctrines." *Frontiers of Justice. Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006), 163.

²⁶ Diogenes Laertii, *Vitae philosophorum*, vol.1, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1999-2002), VI 63.

²⁷ *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* vol. 2, ed. Hans von Arnim (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1964) II 32; 328.

²⁸ I use the spelling kynic instead of cynic to indicate that Chrysippus and Diogenes challenged the Athenians not with materialistic explanations of normative vocabulary in the way that the modern word 'cynic' might suggest, but rather by showing ostentatious contempt for ease and pleasure.

are a matter of historical dispute, since we mostly know about them from later Stoic reconstructions.²⁹

From the perspective of contemporary cosmopolitanism, ancient cosmopolitanism may be patronized as being informative but as philosophically deficient, since it fails to fully spell out principles and arguments, and particularly to reflect on institutional requirements. Moreover the stoics can be accused of favoring a quietist attitude towards injustice, failing to develop fundamental political alternatives to existing imperial regimes, and especially for being silent about the most unjust institution of the ancient world, namely slavery.³⁰ Thus, even though contemporary cosmopolitanism may readily grant the influence of ancient cosmopolitanism on later doctrines, its fundamentally anti-historic attitude is confirmed by this reading. History of philosophy is *mere* history, since earlier views (being silent about slavery) cannot stand up to later insights.

III. However, there is another way to read the ancients that allows them to become directly relevant to us. I will argue that Plato was the first anti-cosmopolitan philosopher, who reacted against cosmopolitan philosophers of his time. This may seem like an impossible claim, given the historical account just presented. How can Plato react to cosmopolitan theory if it only evolved 100 years after his death? Eric Brown writes apodictically that there is no reliable evidence for programmatic cosmopolitan claims before the early stoics.³¹ He specifically rejects the idea that Alexander the Great was driven by a cosmopolitan impulse.³² It is a truism that Alexander's campaign dramatically changed the fact of the ancient world, not only in terms of political change but also in the how people thought about politics. After Alexander it was possible to imagine a Hellenic empire ruling the whole world, something that was previously unimaginable. Yet, Alexander's campaign not only brought about the age of Hellenism but at the same time destroyed something else, namely a different image of cosmopolitanism, an image of a peaceful

²⁹ I am following Eric Brown's account, in *Stoic Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). A short version has been published in German, "Die Erfindung kosmopolitaner Politik durch die Stoiker," *Kosmopolitanismus. Zur Geschichte und Zukunft eines umstrittenen Ideals*, ed. Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, et. al. (Weilersvst: Velbrück 2010), 9-24.

³⁰ For the criticism see Martha Nussbaum, "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 5 (1997): 8, 14.

³¹ Eric Brown, "Die Erfindung kosmopolitaner Politik," 23.

³² This claim has been advanced by W. W. Tarn, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 19 (1933), 123-166. For a comprehensive critique see Ernst Badian, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," *Historia* 7 (1958): 425-444.

confederation of free and autarchic³³ cities. In the 4th century and thus at the time when Plato wrote his major works, this image was the real alternative, situated between the outdated ideal of a small and autarchic polis and the Persian model of a more comprehensive empire.³⁴

Elements that contributed to this form of Panhellenic cosmopolitanism can be found particularly in the writings of two authors, Isocrates and Xenophon.³⁵ Both men were famous contemporaries of Plato and presented thoughts that were prominent at this time. However neither of them presented a complete theory of cosmopolitanism comparable to modern day theories. Yet, if we combine elements from both writers together with other ideas around at this time, we can conjecture that such a theory or such thoughts were possible, or, so to speak, in the air. Thus, I read Isocrates and Xenophon not strictly philologically as sources but ask what kind of philosophical theory one could assemble from their thoughts and those of other of their contemporaries. In particular, I want to make plausible that Panhellenism is not necessarily a proto-nationalistic idea erected to oppose the 'inferior race of barbarians, but instead can truly be interpreted as having been inspired by cosmopolitan considerations.

In the early 4th century, Isocrates was the head of the most famous school in Athens³⁶ and an ardent promoter of Panhellenic cosmopolitanism.³⁷ In his speeches he clearly analyses the perils the Greek world faced in the fourth century. After its victory in the Peloponnesian war Sparta could not establish a position of permanent supremacy but became despised as a tyrannical city due to its harsh treatment of defeated enemies. Athens had earlier lost its reputation as a defender of Greek freedom and its numerous hostile expeditions in best imperialistic fashion did little to

³³ It is a commonplace that the freedom of the ancients is not the same as modern freedom. However the same applies to the notion of autonomy. Actually the ancient catchphrase was not *autonomía* but *autárkeia*. As this idea channels our thinking in a specific way I will from time to time use the phrase "free and autarchic city." See Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Autonomous City State. Ancient Fact or modern Fiction?" in Mogens Herman Hansen and Kurt Raaflaub, *Studies in the Ancient Greek Polis* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1995), 21-43.

³⁴ These were the only alternatives at this time. The Roman solution to combine city state structure with imperial form of governance was developed only later.

³⁵ Popper states that among the philosophers Antisthenes was Plato's most prominent opponent. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2nd ed. (reprinted London: Routledge, 1995), 153. Popper relies on 19th and early 20th century German scholarship that discovered implicit references to Antisthenes throughout Plato's texts. However these attributions are mostly conjectural as hardly any actual writings by Antisthenes are known. Therefore, I will not try to reconstruct his position.

³⁶ Isocrates claims to have had "more pupils than all the rest together who are occupied with philosophy." *Antidosis*, 41. All quotations are from the Loeb Classical Library edition, *Isocrates*, transl. and ed. by G. Norlin, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928). Plato's academy on the other hand had a rather shaky beginning. The ridicule by Gorgias "the philosopher talks in a whisper with three or four pupils" (*Gorgias* 485d) can be read as a description of the early days of the academy.

³⁷ For the following see especially his speech *On the Peace*. Aristotle rendered it in his *Rhetoric* III, 17 under the title *On the Confederacy*. Isocrates has changed his view according to historical circumstances. However my main point is not to pinpoint a specific view to a specific date but to show what kind of theory Plato was opposed to.

restore it. Meanwhile, other cities tried to step in whenever a power vacuum emerged, and no power was ashamed to accept help from the Persian king or to employ mercenary forces. Constant civil strife, often fueled by third-party interests, and countless wars between cities and coalitions threatened to destroy the prosperity, peace and culture of the Greek commonwealth. As an alternative Isocrates proposed to form a confederation of free and autarchic cities, a brotherhood of culture, transcending the bonds of race.³⁸ He argued that peace not only among Greeks but with all of mankind would be the precondition for striving for true aims, namely being respected by others and raising the standards of living for all.³⁹ He criticizes realist principles of power politics as unjust and serving only short-term interests.⁴⁰ In the long run it would be in everyone's interest to uphold peace, end the suffering among Hellenic people and support burdened societies, i.e. refugees from destroyed cities.⁴¹ Insisting that these principles are in "everyone's interest" is for Isocrates not just a *façon de parler* but is specifically addressed at Athens, a relatively strong player. Isocrates also criticizes the common enemies of mankind. These are the mercenaries who commit atrocities that make peace impossible.⁴² Thus, simple, solid political judgment based on a fair assessment of effects should convince Athenians and everyone else to pursue this worthy cause.⁴³ It is noteworthy that Isocrates was not just a lofty theoretician or a soapbox orator but a highly visible and influential public figure. As a result, the idea of a peaceful federation among free and autarchic cities was well known in Athens and the intellectual circles of the ancient world.⁴⁴

From a historical point of view Xenophon recounted the formation of the Chalkidian League and suggested that it was at the brink of becoming the most powerful federal state in Hellas (circa 385-383 B.C.).⁴⁵ However he did not favor Panhellenism but put the dangers of forming such a powerful state in the mouths of the envoys from two states that felt threatened by the league. The interesting point of this episode is that the Chalkidian communities had not merged into a new political body or been subjected by a powerful state but had instead retained their local,

³⁸ *Panegyricus*, 50.

³⁹ *Peace*, 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 133-139.

⁴⁴ Whether federal regimes actually did promote social stability is a different question. The positive evaluation by Montesquieu and the Federalists has been refuted by contemporary historical scholarship, see Beck, *Polis und Koinon. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Struktur der griechischen Bundesstaaten im 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1997), 251-254.

⁴⁵ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, ed. and transl. Gisela Strasburger (Zürich: Artemis, 1988), V. ii. 11-19.

autonomous identity, since the league was based on the principle of dual citizenship (*sympoliteía*). Therefore, the envoys warned that Olynthus, the head of the league, would become even more powerful as the states had granted each other reciprocal rights of intermarriage and property, and other communities would soon realize the advantages of belonging to this league. Thus, speculations about new kind of federal regimes based on dual citizenship and reciprocal economic and social rights were not confined to grand speeches but were grounded in actual political developments.⁴⁶

It is more difficult to articulate the philosophical foundation underlying these considerations. Nevertheless it is possible to assemble some elements that bolster the Panhellenic cosmopolitanism. For both Isocrates and Xenophon the negative part of the theory can be easily asserted. They each invoke Socrates as a founding figure, but go on to advocate (and ascribe to Socrates) a strict anti-metaphysical attitude. Isocrates holds that education should have only a practical value and that all sciences should serve this end. Therefore abstract theory or philosophy would only be useful as "gymnastics for the soul" but should not be studied in their own right. These lines are obviously directed against the Platonic Academy. Xenophon similarly portrays Socrates as someone who gives good and well-reasoned practical advice, for instance that Athens should invest in a proper cavalry, trained not by politicians or philosophers but by experienced cavalymen. In addition, he depicts Socrates as being ignorant or hostile with regard to metaphysical speculation about the good itself. Xenophon's Socrates says: "I don't know nothing that is not good for anything and I do not wish to know it either."⁴⁷ Again Plato is accused of forgery: the "real" Socrates never discussed "metaphysics" or ideas that are not good for any practical end.

It is more difficult to ascertain the specific philosophical principles underlying this form of cosmopolitanism. This is part of the general problem that no major philosophical treatise apparently existed about Greek democracy.⁴⁸ Popper solves this mystery by attributing a cosmopolitan political theory to the early generation of sophists whom he calls the "Great

⁴⁶ The actual history of the Chalkidian league is less glorious. It lost a bitter war against Sparta and was then dissolved. Toynbee refers to this episode to speculate whether instead of the reactionary monarchical model of Macedonia the federal city state model of Olynthus could have prevailed in Hellas and as a consequence Olynthus could have become the Rome of Hellas.

⁴⁷ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. E.C. Marchant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), III, 8, 3.

⁴⁸ This assessment was widely shared among historians and philosophers up to the middle of the 20th century. See e.g. Moses I. Finley, "Athenian Demagogues," Moses I. Finley, ed., *Studies in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge, 1974), 9. However, Kurt Raaflaub shows that by drawing on various sources, the democratic theory prevalent at this

Generation".⁴⁹ In his reading the school of Gorgias – Antisthenes, Alcidamas and Lycophron – held egalitarian theories and believed in a brotherhood of all men.⁵⁰ He particularly credits Antisthenes for being the only true pupil of Socrates because he defended egalitarian and cosmopolitan principles. Popper argues that Antisthenes is the implicit target of Plato's scorn at many places in the *Politeia* and in other works.⁵¹ In trying to find a positive counter image to Plato, Popper clearly overshoots the mark, as when he portrays Xenophanes as a critical rationalist,⁵² Lycophron as a libertarian⁵³ and claims that 5th century cosmopolitanism was linked to an anti-slavery movement.⁵⁴ Plato's representation of the sophists as swindlers and real corrupter of the youth is obviously one-sided, but simply reversing the negative value judgment doesn't do justice to the movement.⁵⁵ What can be said is that the sophists questioned traditional authority, favored education over noble origin, and appeared in Athens at a time when egalitarian and democratic principles were widely held.⁵⁶ Thus, all of them shared the optimistic belief that success is based on individual effort and can be taught. At least some of them defended the political principles on which Athens was based, legal and political egalitarianism (*isonomía*), the equal right to address the assembly and bring charges (*isegoría*), equal representation in government by lot (*isokratía*) and freedom of speech (*parrhesía*).⁵⁷

IV. I have painted Panhellenic cosmopolitanism in broad strokes in order to show what kind of theorizing Plato faced. At this point it would be possible to use historical and philological studies to elaborate on the variety of views held by different sophists, try to determine how people in various places reacted to political changes, and how social life evolved in the 4th century.

time can be reconstructed. Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Contemporary Perceptions of Democracy in Fifth-Century Athens," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 40 (1989): 33-70.

⁴⁹ Karl Popper, *Open Society*, 185.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 614-615.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 572.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁴ Popper frequently refers to an anti-slavery movement that was "well on the way" (*Ibid.* 562, 573) but he never quotes any sources. He may have had the remark of Gorgias' pupil Alcidamas in mind that god has freed all people and nature has not enslaved anyone. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I 13, 1373b.

⁵⁵ Hegel was the first who reevaluated the sophists as a form of Greek enlightenment. On the subsequent 19th and early 20th century debate on the role of the sophists see William K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists: A History of Greek Philosophy. Vol. I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 10-16.

⁵⁶ Oddly enough, the best known documentation for widespread democratic beliefs is the anti-democratic pamphlet by the so-called Old Oligarch. For a reconstruction of democratic political theory see Raaflaub, "Contemporary Perceptions," *ibid.*

⁵⁷ On the field of words surrounding *isonomía* see Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology*, transl. J. A. Crook (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1999), 81-84.

However, even when concentrating on Athens, it is difficult to integrate Plato in a historical narrative of this kind. On the one hand he is the founding father of philosophy and has shaped the whole of Western culture, but on the other hand, he is an exceptional figure of his own time. The question I would like to focus on is not historical or exegetical but philosophical, and it emerges from today's perspective. The idea of history as social and moral progress culminating in the culture of Athens,⁵⁸ the prevailing anti-metaphysical attitude, the celebration of equality, and last but not least the general cosmopolitan spirit look like a mirror image of contemporary cosmopolitanism. We might ask, then, how the development of philosophy as a discipline related to this historical context. How is it possible that ideas and principles that seem self-evident today and characteristic of our age actually predate the formation of philosophy as an academic discipline in Plato and Aristotle? And why has political philosophy in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle ignored these cosmopolitan roots, and instead, taken a very different route than the one outlined by the sophists, rhetoricians and historians?

V. As a first approach I should point out that this is actually not a new question; indeed this question emerged right along with the beginning of academic philosophy around the time Plato lived. Even though we have no source that posed the question in precisely this way, we can find a response to this question in the letters handed down under Plato's name. These letters were known and discussed in antiquity but only received closer attention again in the late 19th century.⁵⁹ The seventh letter is the longest and most central, in which the author, presumably Plato or someone speaking in Plato's name, defends himself against accusations of befriending a tyrant, accusations that were evidently widespread in Athens. The nature of the accusation becomes clearer upon reading the thirteenth letter, which was obviously written during Plato's lifetime (all the details about Plato, his family and friends are correct) but written with the aim of discrediting Plato. In the letter addressed to Dionysius II Plato asks for money for himself, his

⁵⁸ Hansen argues that most people at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 4th century held a progressive view of history. Of course Plato is an exception. See Mogens Herman Hansen, "Solonian Democracy in Fourth-Century Athens," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 40 (1989): 71-99.

⁵⁹ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf was the first to argue that the letters were like a building block that has been thrown away but becomes the cornerstone of the new interpretation of Plato. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon*, vol 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1919), 299. On Wilamowitz and the debate since the 19th century over the biographical interpretation of Plato see E.N. Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 36-51. A contribution published in 1906 by a high school teacher in his school's yearbook remains a very incisive interpretation of all the letters and their authenticity : Rudolf Adam, "Über die Echtheit der platonischen Briefe," *Wissenschaftliche Beilage zum Jahresbericht des Falk-Realgymnasiums zu Berlin* 110 (1906): 3-29. On the current

family, and his friends and implicitly offers to work in return as an informant about affairs in Athens. The thirteenth letter 'reveals' Plato as a self-serving, unpatriotic, tyrant-friendly charlatan. Most of the other letters elaborate on topics mentioned in the seventh letter but do not offer any new philosophical arguments (and sometimes even confuse events or persons, which can be taken as a sign of forgery). As a result, they are often ignored in philosophical interpretations, however, they are an important source about the reception of Plato.

The seventh letter recounts Plato's journeys to Sicily but also reflects in more general terms on the relation of philosophy to politics, the importance of friendship, trustworthiness of politicians and on Plato's motives. The other letters also touch upon these topics, but in addition they stress certain aspects that are not central in the seventh letter. When we read the letters together like an epistolary novel⁶⁰ a specific picture of Plato emerges. He appears to be a very practical-minded political advisor, someone with a broad knowledge of different constitutions who proposes constitutions specifically appropriate for various local circumstances.⁶¹ The overall aim of his engagement in Syracuse was establishing peace⁶² throughout Sicily by striking a compromise between different factions and setting up an arbiter for settling disputes.⁶³ Plato's proposal is based on the rule of law, stressing equality of all,⁶⁴ aims at securing Greek freedom⁶⁵ and benefitting all people. It is notably a constitution not just for the city of Syracuse but for all the cities of Sicily.⁶⁶ Their union should not be achieved in an imperial fashion⁶⁷ but by establishing bonds between friends in various cities.⁶⁸ Yet the regime Plato proposes is not just a *modus vivendi* but intends, for the first time in history, to realize the unlikely union of philosophy and political power.⁶⁹ For this reason the events in Syracuse are carefully observed not only in Athens but also by people all over the world.⁷⁰ The Platonic Academy plays a central role in this narrative. Plato is depicted as sending and receiving letters to different areas and places in the

debate, see arguing against their authenticity Ludwig Edelstein, *Plato's Seventh Letter* (Leiden: Brill, 1966) and in favor, the critical review by Friedrich Solmsen, *Gnomon* 41 (1969): 29-34.

⁶⁰ For the idea to read the letters as a whole see Hartmut Längin, "Erzählkunst und Philosophie in den Platon Briefen," *Grazer Beiträge* 22 (1998): 101-144.

⁶¹ Epistles 8.356d, 5.

⁶² Epistle 8.356c

⁶³ Epistles 8.353e, 8.356d, 7.337c

⁶⁴ Epistles 7.337c, 7.336d.

⁶⁵ Epistle 7.336a,

⁶⁶ Epistle 3.315d

⁶⁷ Epistle 7.351b

⁶⁸ Epistle 7.332b

⁶⁹ Epistles 7.328d, 7.335d, 4.320a, 2.310c

⁷⁰ Epistle 4.320d

Hellenic world (to Perdikkas, King of Macedonia,⁷¹ to friends of the academy in Asia Minor,⁷² to Archytas of Tarent, a Pythagorean philosopher king⁷³) and establishing friendships between philosophers and politicians.⁷⁴ Therefore Plato's Sicilian adventure is not an isolated event or a misstep but can be read as a paradigm intended for other areas, or even for all of Hellas. The ultimate danger looming at the horizon is that if Platonic justice is not realized, Greek language and culture could vanish from the world after a barbarian conquest.⁷⁵

Thus the subtext of the letters is that Plato is the spiritual center of a wide-ranging intellectual community that tries to foster the Panhellenic cause as an intellectual and a well-reasoned military and political alliance through practical advice.⁷⁶ However, the letters where this idea is most evident (Epistles 4, 5, 8, 11) are the ones most scholars consider to be *not* genuine.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, they are germane, since they were written around Plato's lifetime, arguably in the context of the academy, and thus by persons who supported (or intended to support) Plato's cause. So we might imagine that people during Plato's lifetime thought: "This is what he should have written: constant civil strife is destroying our civilization and Panhellenic cosmopolitanism (and possibly, peace with Persia) is the obvious solution." But this is not what Plato actually wrote in his philosophical dialogues. On the contrary: The rhetorical, historical and sophistic tradition I have just described, which appears like a mirror image of contemporary cosmopolitanism, is precisely what Plato opposed. Thus, we are confronted with a *renversement des alliances*. The tradition of political philosophy that has started with Plato, turns out not to be a natural friend of contemporary cosmopolitanism at all, but may actually be its archenemy.

VI. In a more detailed interpretation of the *Politeia*, I will now show how Plato managed to silence these cosmopolitan voices, namely by inventing philosophy as dialectic endeavor. In this way, I propose to read the Platonic dialogues as conscious interventions in the discourses of his time.

⁷¹ Epistle 4

⁷² Epistle 6

⁷³ Epistle 9

⁷⁴ See especially Epistle 6.

⁷⁵ Epistle 8.353e

⁷⁶ It is to be noted that this is the story line of the letters. Some people believe that this actually describes the influence of Plato and the Academy. From a historical point of view Kai Trampedach shows that no such influence can be confirmed. See *Platon, die Akademie und die zeitgenössische Politik* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994), 278-283.

⁷⁷ Authenticity is claimed mostly for the seventh letter, and sometimes also the eighth.

The question I ask is not simply 'historical' (which of the sophists could be correctly categorized as cosmopolitan) nor merely 'systematic' (thereby presupposing our philosophical premises and historical views as the only correct ones). Instead, I want to use a contemporary horizon of understanding to ask questions whose answers might change our understanding not only of Plato but of ourselves as well.⁷⁸ To establish a fair playing field, Plato's cosmopolitan opponents can be given all manner of support from today's cosmopolitan majority. Plato's philosophy is particularly well suited for this kind of systematic discussion through a historical lens since he uses the same method himself. Like most of his other early and middle dialogues, the *Politeia* is clearly set in the past. However, the *Politeia* is not a piece of historical scholarship, and no historical novel either. Instead, Plato shows that philosophy can be enacted through various voices in different historical settings. This not only separates positions and arguments from persons, but also allows historical time to become a variable.⁷⁹ Thus, there is no natural necessity to speak in one's own name like the rhetoricians, or to speak only about present people and the present time. These are all variables that need to be taken up in the dialectical reflection.

One might object that this line of interpretation confronts an apparently insurmountable difficulty from the outset. Apart from a few strategic remarks⁸⁰ Plato barely addresses the problem of inter-polis relations, nor does he deal directly with Isocrates' Panhellenic ideals or make use of Xenophon's histories in his speculations. This has led philosophers to conclude that Plato (and Aristotle) were simply unaware or uninterested in these questions, that they were not anti-cosmopolitan but utterly un-cosmopolitan.⁸¹

Against this common assumption I will try to show that it is still possible to read Plato with these questions in mind, either in their ancient or in their contemporary form. Moreover, I would suggest that Plato played with this kind of expectations from his audience. Thus, the dialogue is not directed at Glaucon and Adeimantus, who were both dead at the time the dialogue was written,⁸² but at readers and listeners in the fourth century, who were concerned about political

⁷⁸ Hans Georg Gadamer has labeled this hermeneutical method "Horizontverschmelzung" (fusion of horizons). Since his paradigm for understanding was the arts he did not address the irritating political implication of understanding past moral or political views through a *Horizontverschmelzung*. See on the fundamental idea Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1997), 302.

⁷⁹ It is most obvious in the *Menexenos*, Plato's parody of Pericles' funeral speech, where historical events are freely mixed up.

⁸⁰ *Politeia* IV 422a-423b, V 471b-c and *Nomoi* III 684a-b.

⁸¹ See article Cosmopolitanism in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, opt. cit.

⁸² Harold Bloom argues the dialogue shows how Socrates cures Glaucon from the desire to rule. However he does not bother to reflect on the meaning of the dialogue in the 4th century, a time when Socrates was dead, "dialogues of

affairs in Hellas.⁸³ The political questions on people's minds were whether Sparta could maintain its supremacy, whether Athens could rise again or perhaps another city, and what would part powers at the periphery and the Persians would play in their future. To put the expectations of Plato's likely audience in a nutshell, we could say: The prize is Hellas. What is the future of the Hellenic world and how will we fare in it?

VII. Plato's opening scene plays with these expectations. It has been often remarked how the first few sentences foreshadow the structure of the dialogue, first grabbing Socrates (the archetype of the philosopher), playfully forcing him to come back (and rule), then offering additional arguments to support the quest, to which Socrates gives in for his own reasons.⁸⁴ However the setting of the dialogue also carries a clear political message. The first meeting takes place on the way from Piraeus to Athens, literally in the shadow of the long walls built as part of Pericles' grand strategy to secure Athens' position as a land power. Moreover, Piraeus, the scene of the dialogue, is Athens' cosmopolitan harbor city, a meeting place for people from all parts of the civilized world, the stronghold of the democratic party and the place where resident aliens (Metics) were allowed to settle. In this setting Cephalus, the representative of tradition, has the first say. One has to keep in mind that at the time of the dialogue, the prevailing tradition was already the democratic tradition. Given this context and Cephalus' standing as a respected elder of his community, the reader might expect something like Pericles' funeral speech, or in any case a speech about the wealth and honor of the city, how they reflect on each man living in the city and how the personal grace of being rich and having sons contributes to a good life.⁸⁵ As he so often does, Plato plays with the reader's expectations only to disappoint them. Cephalus talks

Socrates" was a well established literary genre and everybody knew that Glaucon has left no impact on political or cultural life in Athens. So saving Glaucon from politics is a non-starter. See Allen Bloom, "Response to Hall," *Political Theory* 5 (1977): 315-330.

⁸³ The question what audience Plato had in mind is a complicated one. In any case the *Politeia* cannot easily be read by ordinary citizens let alone recited like a Homeric epos, as understanding the *Politeia* requires profound philosophical schooling and elaborate discussion.

⁸⁴ See on this aspect the detailed interpretation by Thomas A. Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie. Interpretation zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), 271-283. Harold Bloom takes up another motif. He argues that the introduction of a new goddess by the Athenians themselves is an oblique reference to the accusations against Socrates. However this does not reflect the charge and would sell Socrates' teachings short. Socrates did not just introduce any new god or goddess but according to the charge dismissed the existence of the city gods and set his own god (what Socrates called his *daimonion*) above all. See *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed., trans with notes and an interpretive essay by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 311. All quotations from the *Politeia* are based on this edition.

instead about sex life in old age and his personal salvation. In this way, Plato demonstrates right from the outset that ordinary expectations regarding the proper subject of a book about the *Politeia*— something along the lines of the historical development of institutions, their functions and benefits for people living under them – completely misses the mark.⁸⁶ Instead Plato starts with a very introspective discussion about justice as a way to gain personal salvation and never gets back to the question of Athens' place in the Hellenic world. Thus Plato's first move is to irritate the cosmopolitans by introducing the representative of the traditional democratic elite of Piraeus and letting him ask a question that shatters the self-assurance of the traditional way of life. Cephalus' question recalls Martin Luther's justification of his stubborn heretical stance: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?"⁸⁷ Cephalus' question is similarly heretical if we read it from the foil of cosmopolitan sentiments. Cephalus responds to these political considerations as follows: "The rise of democratic Athens to greatness, its leadership by example rather than force and its mission of uniting Greek cities to a civilized commonwealth⁸⁸ – all this is meaningless to me if my soul would suffer." The same metaphysical theological question about personal salvation and life after death reappears at the very end of the *Politeia* in Book 10. This indicates that Cephalus' question is not merely an introduction to prepare us for the 'real' question of the *Politeia*, about 'what the best regime is,' but instead, reveals the true dimensions of the question of justice. If the question were limited from the outset to the 'political domain,' Cephalus' question ("What's in it for me, for my soul?") would still be looming in the background and might justify withdrawing from the discussion altogether. However, Cephalus is not interested in personal salvation alone, but prepares the discussion by presenting (together with his son Polemarchus) the traditional view of justice as "saying the truth and giving back what is due," a position that is then disputed by the sophist Thrasymachus.

⁸⁵ Herodotus reports that Solon answered when questioned by Croesus who the happiest man on earth is: Tellus of Athens. He lived at a time when the city flourished, saw his sons and grandsons growing up and died as a hero on the battlefield. Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. A D Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 1.29–33.

⁸⁶ Arguably the genre of writing a book about with the title *Politeia* was already established at Plato's time. Usually those treatise were about Sparta or Spartan like constitutions but nothing like Plato's *Politeia*. See Malcolm Schofield, *Plato. Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

⁸⁷ Luther quotes Matthew 16,26. His German translation "Was hülfte es, wenn ich die Welt gewönne und nähme doch Schaden an meiner Seele?" has become an emblem of Protestantism and arguably also transfigured into German idealism.

⁸⁸ This alludes to the delusive self image of the Athenians Thucydides recounts in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, see especially Pericles' funeral oration, *History* 2.34-2.46. In Kagan's contrafactual speculations Athens could indeed have become the "leader of the free world" if it were not for Pericles' strategic mistakes – and I would add – if the ancient world could be more easily convinced than the modern to be led by the champions of freedom. See Donald Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1991), 423-425.

VIII. In the dialogue, the sophist Thrasymachus intervenes directly after the traditional defense of justice. Implicitly, Plato casts the sophistic movement in a specific way, namely as ruining the tradition. However in historical terms, that is, in terms of the historic progression of philosophical theories, one would have to say that the first sophists questioned the tradition but generally supported a democratic and cosmopolitan lifestyle.⁸⁹ Only the second generation of sophists challenged morality and developed realist or immoral theories of the kind we know from Callicles and Thrasymachus. One reason that Plato presents the sophists as immoralists is obviously to give them a bad name, and reserve the notion of philosophy for the good side, or at any rate, the side opposed to the immoralists.⁹⁰ It would have been much harder for Plato to argue directly against a democratic cosmopolitan who, at the time the *Politeia* is set (around 423 BCE), still had the rise of Athens as an economic and cultural power on his side to support his claims. Instead, Plato uses the historical setting and the persons to present a systematic argument applicable to his own time. I would suggest that we can best assess the force and method of this argument if we consider the cosmopolitan consequences of the positions attacked by Plato, that is, by imagining a 4th century reader familiar with the sophistic tradition, the teachings of Isocrates, and, like Xenophon, interested in contemporary politics.

Over the course of the argument in book I and II, Plato basically presents three different views regarding justice: 1. Justice means saying the truth and giving back what is due (Cephalus and Polemarchus), 2. Justice is a convention out of fear (Glaucou as *advocatus diaboli*), and 3) Justice is what serves the stronger (Thrasymachus). I do not want to repeat the argument in all its intriguing details. Instead, I would like to single out two aspects.

First, all of the principles presented could also govern relations between various poleis. It is to be noted that at this point of the dialogue justice is discussed in a general way but not yet restricted to the analogy of city and soul. Plato proposes a definition and then tests it by using different examples ("Is it just to return a sword to a madman?") or by putting it in context ("Has every art a specific end or is earning money the end of every art?"). In principle one could also ask, for instance, whether circumstances exist where no city owes anything to another city,⁹¹ whether just

⁸⁹ On the history G.B. Kerfed, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁹⁰ Plato largely succeeded in discrediting the sophists. Only in the 19th century starting with Hegel the sophists were recovered from Plato's shadow.

⁹¹ The term for "owing" *apodidomi* is also used in a monetary sense, so "giving back what is owed" is an undifferentiated blend of a moral and economic principle.

behavior of cities is merely conventional, a sign of fear or indeed illusion or stupidity. (One might think of the famous Melior dialogue where these questions are raised). The Panhellenic or cosmopolitan dimension of the discussion is even mentioned explicitly. Thrasymachus explains his definition of injustice as wisdom and virtue by arguing that those who practice it can "subjugate cities and tribes of men to themselves" (I 348d), thus citing a kind of government (power) that includes not just different cities but even different peoples. He is thereby arguably alluding to the Persian Empire, which usually serves as the archetype of an (unjust) tyranny in Greek literature.⁹² However, as a good sophist, Thrasymachus turns the value judgment around by arguing that this kind of regime is indeed a prudent one. Thus, Thrasymachus' thinking is not confined to the world of independent cities. Instead, Thrasymachus is arguing as a realist, and contends that an imperial regime will be the future of Hellas and might even, at some time, be called 'just'. (In hindsight he was right. The flourishing Hellenic commonwealth of free and politically independent cities turned out to be only a brief episode.)

However, such cosmopolitan implications are not explicitly spelled out. Socrates even cloaks this dimension by mostly using examples from the sphere of personal ethics or human behavior. While disputing Thrasymachus, though, he does cite the example of a city that attacks or oppresses another without justification. (I 351c) This example is important, for it shows that Socrates does not restrict the term justice to individuals or to the order of a polis, but uses it instead as a general term also applicable to relations between poleis and other groups. Of course, this does not mean that Plato had anything like a theory of "Hellenic justice", let alone "global justice" in mind; quite the contrary (as I will show later). It is merely evidence that in terms of the ordinary, pre-philosophical or sophistic discussion Socrates is engaged in at this stage, inter-poleis relations are not a special case, only to be discussed in a 'second step' after justice is established in the polis, but rather, a part of the broad range of examples one is talking about.

The second aspect I would like to single out is the nature of the discussion demonstrated in Book I and the beginning of Book II. One might think that Plato is selling the different sophistic theories of justice short, that somehow principles such as truthfulness and reciprocity (mentioned by Cephalus) must feature in the definition of justice, that a social contract theory (mentioned by Glaucon) is a useful explanatory or justificatory device, and finally that Plato ostensibly appears

⁹² The Persian Empire was however not demonized but to some degree even admired. Arguably Athens learned imperial techniques it employed from Persia. See Kurt Raaflaub, "Learning from the Enemy," *Interpreting the Athenian Empire*, ed. John Ma et al. (London: Duckworth, 2009), 89-124.

to be turning a blind eye to the central quality of justice, namely equality.⁹³ It is certainly possible to pursue any of these lines. The way Plato presents the discussion, though, shows that he has something quite different in mind. At the end of the discussion with Thrasymachus (I 354b-c), Socrates declares that no conclusion has been reached, and moreover, that no positive conclusion could ever be reached in this way. This confession by Socrates should be taken seriously. The innovative idea or milestone achieved by the *Politeia* is precisely to show that *all* 'sophistic' discussions, even those by Socrates⁹⁴ are aporetic and that real inquiry (which later turns out to be philosophy) consists of something else.

IX. The follow-up question, of course, is what the additional insight provided by philosophy is, and why Socratic inquiry is insufficient; after all, it seems to help unmask false generalities, and even comes up with some positive principles, such as "doing harm can never be an act of justice as no art makes its subject worse." It would appear that Socrates suggests that real philosophy only starts at a later stage. However, he does not state in terms of a 'theory' the difference between 'real philosophy' and 'sophistic arguing'.⁹⁵ After the aporetic result in book I Socrates has to be 'held on to' and 'forced' to continue developing his argument in response to the challenges brought forward by Glaucon and Adeimantus. What can be said is that in terms of content, the question is now posed in a more demanding way: Socrates is asked to show that justice is one of the aims that is pursued for its benefits and for its own sake (II 367b-d) and that the just man is the happiest man. In terms of method, a superficial reading would suggest that Socrates gives up the dialectical or discursive style of argumentation after Book I, since he no longer engages in a discussion with strong-minded interlocutor but mainly presents his view monologically. The question of what kind of inquiry Socrates wants to turn his attention to remains open. At this point, it is only a promise: real philosophy will come later.

Yet Socrates' promise has repercussions on the cosmopolitan perspectives implied by the setting of the initial arguments. If the overall argument is that sophistic argumentation is a deficient kind of arguing then spelling out cosmopolitan consequences and defending them in the same, sophistic or traditional way would do little to promote the course of the cosmopolitan. If all

⁹³ Equality of rights (*isonomia*) is only mentioned in VIII 563b, as something "we almost forgot to mention". Popper argues that Plato malignantly concealed it in the previous discussion. See *Open Society*, 89-93.

⁹⁴ The Socratic discussion is only pointless for sophists or people with a wrong mindset. "Good philosophical natures" like Glaucon and Adeimantus will realize its insufficiency and pursue the inquiry further.

⁹⁵ On the role of the definition of philosophy (V 476c-480a) see section IX below.

sophistic arguments end up in an *aporía* regardless whether they pursue the "good" cosmopolitan or the "evil" immoralist course, then the most important task is to pursue the single course that promises a way out of the quandary, and not to expand upon the details of wishful thinking. In this first set of arguments, similar to the opening scene, Plato plays with the cosmopolitan expectations of his audience but he does not refute them by presenting 'anti-cosmopolitan arguments.' Instead, he silences them by posing a question more radical than any posed by the sophists (is justice good in itself) and by demanding a more fundamental theory (is the just man the happiest man even in unhappy circumstances?).

X. A possible criticism of this line of interpretation might be to claim that the setting of the dialogue in a cosmopolitan context and some scattered hints about other cities are insufficient evidence for the claim that cosmopolitan theory functions as an implicit counter position. A further objection might insist that Socrates by presenting ideas about the best city over the various stages excludes the question of a cosmopolitan order from the outset. However, I will show that a cosmopolitan interlocutor is a useful device throughout the entire dialogue to elicit the consequences of Plato's position and is even explicitly presumed by Plato himself. In other words, one has to be careful not to read too much Aristotle into Plato.

Plato develops the idea of a just city as an analogy to the soul, in order to be able to observe justice as being written in big letters. (II 368c-d) Even though he starts with a description of human relations (II 369 b-d) he doesn't start with the idea of a 'society' (let alone a closed society of free and equals) nor does he presume the polis as the natural aim of man. Instead, he argues it is more convenient for people if each one specializes in what he does best. (369e-370a) Thus a 'loner' who lives completely on his own would have a difficult life but is not ruled out.⁹⁶ Plato then shows that the various professions emerge from the needs people have for each other. (II 369e-371e) The city of bare necessity or the healthy city that evolves in this way is often quickly dismissed in discussions of Plato to focus exclusively, over the intermediate step of the feverish city, on the complete city. I would argue instead that the first two models of the city are important, even with respect to the two subsequent ideal models (the guardians' city and the philosophers' city). Both the healthy city and the feverish city can be read as implicit responses to

⁹⁶ Otherwise Plato would have been an easy target for ridicule by Antisthenes, the kynic pupil of Socrates, who took pride in demonstrating his autarchic lifestyle.

cosmopolitan pretensions. The model of the healthy city would even be (to use an anachronistic idea) universalizable.

If all peoples on earth lived the 'healthy lifestyle' prescribed by Socrates for people living in the healthy city, and complied with some form of traditional ethics, including provisions for hospitality, the main causes of war, poverty, and large-scale migration would be absent. Plato does not specify any provision regarding traditional ethics, including hospitality, however the desire for the arts suggests that people are civilized.⁹⁷ This model vaguely recalls Rawls' society of liberal peoples⁹⁸ who all practice justice but never go to war; the difference is that in Plato's healthy stadium of mankind, political institutions seem to be absent. One can only speculate whether decisions that need to be made are arrived at unanimously, as in primitive or pre-statal societies. In any case, Plato's spokesman Socrates doesn't say that this kind of life is impossible. It is Glaucon who denounces this life as a "city of sows" (II 372d) or, as one may translate loosely, rules for keeping livestock of the human kind.⁹⁹ Moreover it is also Glaucon and not Socrates who demands more luxuries to satisfy his human desires for luxuries. Plato argues that the need for conquest, an army and all the sciences that deal with human ills emerge out of the spirited desire of wanting-to-have-more. His argument is not meant as an exhaustive explanation of the origins of wars and illnesses; there may be an indefinite number of additional causes.

The more interesting question is how this development appears to the eye of the philosopher. The people living in healthy circumstances¹⁰⁰ practice justice as "minding one's own business" and maintain a moderate lifestyle that would certainly please Socrates. They actually have more luxuries than Socrates' kynic pupils would grant themselves (figs for dessert). (II 372c) One could ask whether Socrates could be satisfied with this state of affairs. Could this be a home for a philosopher? It is Glaucon who states the philosophical problem about this primitive form of cosmopolitanism (or 'cosmo-anarchism'): Justice and injustice is not seen "unless it's somewhere in some needs these men have of one another." (II 372a) Justice is happening behind these

⁹⁷ The only uncivilized characteristic is that the citizens do not eat meat (372b), which means that they do not sacrifice properly to the gods. Since sacred meat was distributed equally, the vegetarianism practiced in the healthy city could be considered as an example of antidemocratic hubris. On the relation of formation of the city and public feasts see Nicole Loraux, "La cité comme cuisine et comme partage," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 36 (1981): 614-622.

⁹⁸ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 54-58. Unlike Kant, Rawls never addresses the question why peoples *should* seek each other's company and not choose to live in the splendid isolation of the original position.

⁹⁹ With the help of the Human Development Index such rules could be formulated in an even more sophisticated way today.

¹⁰⁰ I try to avoid the term city at this point as the notion of the city has not yet been explicitly introduced and cities other than the ideal city should not be called "city" but by "more splendid names". (IV 422e)

people's backs, so to speak, but its principle is not obvious *to* them. For this reason there can be no philosophy in this place and it is arguably for this reason that Socrates gives in so quickly to Glaucon's demand instead of trying to teach him (like Xenophon's Socrates) to have only 'reasonable' desires.¹⁰¹ One interesting point in the argument is that indirectly even the philosopher would have an interest in the evolution of the healthy city into the feverish city, because only after this change do the social conditions of justice as "minding one's own business" become institutionalized in such a way as to become discernible.¹⁰²

Of course, the story Plato tells of the development of the healthy city into the feverish city is a story of degeneration, and the miseries faced by the feverish city sets the stage for the purging of the city by the guardians. Still, it is worth noting that the feverish city is not merely an intermediate step but also expresses one variety of cosmopolitanism, which becomes the constant counterfoil for the rest of the dialogue. It is not out of evil intentions but out of practical necessity that the feverish city practices something we might call economic cosmopolitanism. This form of cosmopolitanism is easily paired with an imperialistic strategy. One may object that imperialistic cosmopolitanism is a *contradictio in adjecto*, as every variety of cosmopolitanism is opposed to aggressive wars or violent takeovers. However, in these short passages, Plato is presenting a materialistic theory of the development of societies. Presumably, the feverish city will not regard itself as imperialistic but will sail under false colors, e.g. like Rome, think of itself as a republic with nothing more in mind than the moral improvement of the world. In terms of policy and outlook this city resembles and satirizes the politics of 4th century Athens. Even modern historians have trouble keeping up with the many wars Athens fought or financed abroad, most of them arguably launched out of purely economic calculations. Nevertheless, the feverish city represents a precondition for the emergence of a warrior class that can be subsequently used to purge the city from all of its ills. It is to be noted that Plato explicitly reserves the term polis in the true sense to the purified city of warriors. Thus the construction of the ideal polis can truly be seen as a response to two kinds of cosmopolitan pretentions.

XI. At this point one might still think that exploiting possible cosmopolitan consequences of Plato's presentation is a far-fetched argument and that in presenting his ideal of the closed city,

¹⁰¹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II.

¹⁰² For the Greeks this materialistic genealogy was arguably less surprising, since Greek mythology lacks the notion of an 'ideal' or 'innocent' beginning. Even the 'good and innocent' Horae (Eirene, Eunomia, and Diké, i.e. peace, good order, and justice) are fathered by Zeus, a god with questionable character and motives.

Plato did not overcome the cosmopolitans but simply ignored them. One might reason the model of a closed society has shaped philosophical discourse ever since, and Plato's theory been the endlessly recurrent subject of study for so many generations of young lads. However this is not the way that the *Politeia* was always received over the course of the history of philosophy¹⁰³ nor was it Plato's aim to propose an 'ideal theory' of a closed society that can then be applied to 'non ideal circumstances'. The model of the city is only one part of a dialogue that is once again filled with implicit references to other ideas and to other Platonic dialogues.

So what do we make of Plato's construction of the ideal city? One way to approach the question is to ask why anyone, especially his cosmopolitan contemporaries, should be convinced by Plato's construction? In the dramatization of the argument it is striking that Socrates repeatedly takes pleasure in upsetting his interlocutors by piling one absurd detail upon the other (e.g. men and women practicing together naked V 457b). And yet, his interlocutors remain silent for the rest of the dialogue. Couldn't they have responded to Socrates' suggestions or – in best sophistic manner – let the weaker case appear stronger? In what sense, then, is the *Politeia* intended as a *philosophical* exploration of justice in distinction to a sophistic short trip?

These questions can be answered by following the course of the dialogue. Socrates complains jokingly that he has to overcome three waves of attacks, first justifying the equality of men and women, second the community of men and women, and third the philosopher's rule. (V 473c) Before he starts with this line of argument, he had to be forced to continue in a way that echoes the introductory scene. So the question is what do these stages, so clearly marked, signify? This is a far-reaching question, since Socrates would seem to have already finished his task of explaining the analogy of city and soul at the end of Book IV. What do these additional elements – the equality and community of men and women, and especially the education of philosophers – tell us?

One way to evaluate Plato's theory would be to ask whether the analogy of city and soul is convincing, taking the fully-developed city as Plato's definite model.¹⁰⁴ However, this reading would not explain the function of the argument with regard to other 'sophistic' approaches. The

¹⁰³ In modern times reading the *Politeia* only became a part of classical education again in the 19th century. For the Anglophone world see Frank M. Turner, *The Greek heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 369-446. For a more comprehensive perspective see Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato*.

¹⁰⁴ See Bernard Williams, "The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's Republic," in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, ed. E.N. Lee et al. (Assen, Van Gorcum, 1973), 196–206 and for a detailed defense of Plato's idea, Otfried Höffe, "Zur Analogie von Individuum und Polis," in *Platon. Politeia*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie, 1997), 84-93.

Politeia would then appear as just one theory among many, and, due to its complicated multi-layered structure, not even a particularly convincing one. So it is easy to imagine that neither the modern-day reader nor the reader in Plato's world would swallow the argument. If Plato's aim was to propose the ideal of a constitution for a city with oligarchic tendencies then why did he present his claims in this way? And what is the source of his confidence that there is nothing a sophist could possibly say against it?

We initially find the answer to the second part of the question, the basis for Plato's confidence, in the form of an assertion: unlike the sophist, the philosopher is defined as the one who can distinguish between mere opinion and (true) knowledge. (V 476c-480a) Thus, Plato is confident that he is the first person to practice philosophy as a *Wissenschaft*,¹⁰⁵ i.e. to seek knowledge in a comprehensive and systematic way. (VI 486e) The philosopher is the person who realizes that everything that has been presented thus far is connected and who doesn't stop his quest before he has grasped the truth entirely. (VI 485b)

Yet, providing a specific definition of philosophy does not prove that such a thing really exists. Anyone could make the same claim, including Plato's opponents, and state that their view is *Wissenschaft* as well. We should recall that the sophists were not just political journalists and orators but also taught science (astronomy, mathematics, musical theory), and some, like Protagoras, had ideas about linguistics as well. It is particularly instructive to realize that Plato *concedes* this point, not only that such a dispute exists, but also that philosophy as *Wissenschaft* has no conclusive means to stop this discussion. In the *Politeia* the dispute is referred to in Book VI, just before the allegories that culminate in the ascent from the cave are presented. Here, there are oblique references to all of Plato's contemporary opponents, including the cosmopolitans. And it is at this moment in the dialogue where the distinctive feature of Plato's philosophy is introduced, enclosed in the allegory of the cave.

After refuting the sophists, and after developing the analogy of city and soul, Socrates still concedes that "the many" will be unable to distinguish the true philosopher from false sophists. On the contrary, the many will falsely blame philosophers for pupils who turn out badly (VI 487c-d), when in fact, those pupils were taught by sophists. Moreover, Socrates points out that there are teachers or intellectuals (easily identified as Gorgias and Isocrates) who claim to be philosophers and even use a technique of argumentation that resembles philosophical practice,

¹⁰⁵ I use the German term *Wissenschaft* since it is a generic term for the natural and social sciences plus humanities (*Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*), including theology as one of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.

although it consists only in hairsplitting, stubbornness and pointless quarrels. (VI 498e-499a) Even Thrasymachus is briefly mentioned as a possible opponent, although not allowed to speak for himself. (VI 497d) Of course, Socrates' assurance that "Thrasymachus has become his friend" and is therefore only listening obsequiously is ironic; in real life, Thrasymachus would join the cosmopolitan-minded sophists while attacking the philosopher from the other side. At this point Plato also explains that even the very best philosophical nature can go astray by trying to mind the business of "both Hellenes and barbarians." (VI 494c) Thus Plato explicitly introduces a cosmopolitan opponent, even granting he might have a good philosophical nature, but insisting that, like all the sophists, rhetoricians and historians, he is fundamentally mistaken.

It is pointless to speculate about exactly whom Plato had in mind as this opponent. It may not even be a real person, and Plato may simply be raising the systematic possibility of a cosmopolitan position that is characterized by "minding the business of Hellenes and barbarians." Thus, after having presented his 'theory' Plato grants there could be someone responding to it in the style of a 'liberal' cosmopolitan – but he would not be counted among the philosophers.

However we are still left with the question of how to explain the distinction between the true *philosophous* and false *philodoxous* (V 480a). Plato's claim is that philosophy is a fundamentally different *kind* of endeavor. Therefore, what Plato develops is not an anti-cosmopolitan theory; this would presume that there are two kinds of theory, one cosmopolitan and one anti-cosmopolitan, and that both can argue for their claims on an even playing field. Plato is taking the discussion beyond this stage, so he is not anti-cosmopolitan but *über*-cosmopolitan. Yet, how can this position be achieved?

XII. This step is again marked by the motif of holding on to the philosopher. (VI 505a) Plato shows that the way to get to *philosophy* as *Wissenschaft* is in the form of a simple question, namely, *after* justice has been introduced and explained, asking: but is it *really* good. (VI 506a) This question sounds simple but in fact, it is very powerful, for it requires digging into the foundations of one's own theory. The question insists on inquiring whether the theory is based only on sentiments we may have at a certain moment in history or on the latest 'score' in an ongoing sophistic quarrel. Alternatively the theory could explain its own relationship to its time and surrounding world in such a way as to let us understand ourselves and others in a more comprehensive (Plato would say dialectical) way. Plato's strategy is to demarcate philosophy from sophistic theories by asking the additional question "is it really good" and, while answering

the question, providing his theory with deeper foundation, a foundation that can in retrospect be called 'metaphysical'. (VI 506a) But what exactly is this 'metaphysical' foundation that is prompted by the quest for the good? At first, Plato only offers a criterion, that there must be some overall systematic interconnection, names a method (dialectic), and then goes on to introduce his famous allegories (the sun, the line, and the cave). What Plato is doing in these examples is foremost not introducing a positive theory of metaphysics but instead, demonstrating a practice that has already informed the whole dialogue, albeit subliminally. Plato's allegories provide us with an answer as to why Plato presents his theory in this particular way, even though he knows that it will be unconvincing (for sophists). He presents his theory in this way because he wants to *demonstrate* that above all, philosophy is something that has to be *practiced* among like-minded people.

It is notoriously difficult to explain what exactly Plato's 'metaphysical' theory is, in particular, the specific nature of the highest good, and how it relates to the theory of ideas, which Plato frequently mentions but never really explains. In the *Politeia* Socrates remarks incidentally "let's leave aside for the time being what the good itself is" (VI 506e) (and this time nobody holds on to him!). One could, of course, explain Plato's theory of ideas as best as possible, examine the historical critique, and ask whether the theory is convincing. However, the same question would reappear: why does Plato present the 'metaphysical' theory in this way? The question is further reinforced when Socrates admits in the dialogue that the highest ideas cannot be grasped by everyone (at least not by Glaucon) or even be fully explained. (VI 506b-507a) The Plato of the seventh letter even states explicitly: "there neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on this subject."¹⁰⁶

Given our reading up to this point, Plato's confession may seem particularly disappointing. He has omitted a more detailed institutional exposition of the best city and a defense against rival theories by suggesting a deeper foundation – and now, this deeper foundation has turned out to be elusive. Yet, Plato's metaphysics is not simply an artfully constructed mysticism aimed at concealing his outright oligarchic leanings.¹⁰⁷ Instead, he has introduced us to a certain kind of questioning.

¹⁰⁶ Epistle 7.341c Those passages are central for the claim of the Tübinger school of interpretation that Plato has an "unwritten doctrine." I make the more modest point that within the *Politeia* a central doctrine is either not elaborated or explained in an indirect way.

¹⁰⁷ Hans Kelsen makes this point most forcefully in his meticulous interpretation of the *Politeia*. Unlike Popper he holds as a legal positivist that *all* accounts of justice are illusions and takes Plato as a proof of his thesis. See *Die*

XIII. After sketching the allegory of the cave, Plato presents a second education program (*paidèia*), this time not for all guardians but only for the philosopher. As illustrated by the allegory, the objective is to "turn the soul around" and "guide it from the becoming to the being." (VII 521c-d) Plato explains that there are different way leading to this kind of questioning, and thus, the question after the good is not the only way into philosophy. Plato starts with arithmetic and then proceeds through various disciplines. (VII 522b-531c) The leading idea is always the same and may be explained by using the example of arithmetic. The technique of calculating numbers for practical purposes was already known in Mesopotamia and Egypt. However it was the Greek mathematicians who realized that it was also possible to ask pure theoretical questions about arithmetic. (VII 525c) We might argue that with his discussion of arithmetic (VII 522b-526c) Plato is suggesting that the way we conceive of numbers (in modern terminology: following the logicistic or intuitionistic program) has consequences for the way we recognize ourselves and our relation to the world.¹⁰⁸ Therefore arithmetic is "one of those things we are seeking that by nature lead to intellection." (VII 523a) It is not my intention here to delve into the philosophy of mathematics, but it may be worth pointing out that similar questions were asked only again during the foundational crisis in mathematics that took place at the beginning of the 20th century. In any case, the ensuing question of why the physical world is ordered according to mathematical laws in the first place, and how we can have access to both worlds has certainly not been 'solved by modern science'.¹⁰⁹

Thus, Plato is not making claims just based on shaky mysticism but instead, provides examples for the kind of proofs and discussions he is thinking about. He also offers a criterion for how research ought to be conducted, by looking for systematic coherence among all the sciences that are jointly illuminated by the *agathón*. Thus systematic coherence is a criterion for philosophy as *Wissenschaft*, but coherence is not the sole or principal criterion. If this were so, Plato's theory would be similar to the natural sciences, where the challenge is to assemble different building

Illusion der Gerechtigkeit. Eine kritische Untersuchung der Sozialphilosophie Platons, ed. Kurt Ringhofer and Robert Walter (Wien: Manz, 1985), 335-376.

¹⁰⁸ For an attempt to reconstruct Plato's view of mathematics in contemporary terms see Vittorio Hösle, "Zu Platons Philosophie der Zahlen und deren mathematischer und philosophischer Bedeutung" in *Platon interpretieren* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2004), 138-143.

¹⁰⁹ The question has been explicitly asked this way by Kant. Roger Penrose tackles it from the point of view of contemporary physics, see e.g. his *Shadows of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

blocks in the best possible way. The important feature of *philosophy* as *Wissenschaft* is the practice to which it belongs, namely the dialectical education of the philosopher.

"Only the dialectical way of inquiry proceeds in this direction, destroying the hypotheses, to the beginning itself in order to make it secure; and when the eye of the soul is really buried in a barbaric bog, dialectic gently draws it forth and leads it up above, using the arts we described as assistants and helpers in the turning around."
(VII 533d)

Instead of presenting a 'theory of everything' Plato demonstrates how philosophy proceeds as a dialectical discipline that has its ultimate end in the *paidèia*, the formation or redirecting of the philosophical soul.

XIV. I have avoided presenting Plato's actual 'metaphysics' and only marginally discussed his 'political theory' because my main point was to show how Plato first took up the cosmopolitan sentiments and then overcame them. The initial assumption that Plato developed a theory of a closed society that as a matter of fact became influential turned out to be too simple. Yet, even the answer we have now come to, that the clue to Plato's philosophy is providing his political theory with a 'metaphysical' foundation, which in turn serves an educational end, only explains some things but does not answer everything. It explains that Plato's typology of political systems in Book VIII is not intended as a rudimentary form of political science but rather, as indicated through the introduction ("let the Muses tell us"), a playful ironic enactment of how such a science might proceed. (VIII 545e) Simply collecting constitutions would be an important task but would not begin to exhaust what philosophy is about. Only if we made it part of a complete system (as an ideal) would it lead us to understand ourselves *and* others.¹¹⁰ The Myth of Er at the end of Book X is also a way to open the text toward a dialogue with religious ways of thought. Finally, the harsh ban on the arts (X 595a-608b) may serve to remind the reader that cultural dispositions can be changed in principle even if they are deep seated at a particular historical moment. Yet, there are also totalitarian tendencies, and the history of Plato's reception and

¹¹⁰ This does not mean that philosophy has to be presented as a system.

influence reveals that different aspects of his thought have dominated the discussion at different times over the course of the centuries.¹¹¹

XV. The present interpretation raises again a different question: why didn't Plato develop his own 'über-cosmopolitan' theory, including a 'metaphysical' basis, and explain how it related to the Hellenic world? His openness to influences from other cultures, his awareness of cultural relativity, and even the dialectical method all seem to point in this direction. Moreover, he is not just addressing Athenians but the learned audience all over the Hellenic world. It has been indicated earlier that even the writers of Plato's inauthentic letters had this point in mind.

One answer is given by Plato himself. He constantly stressed that only "the few" would be able to grasp the idea of philosophy. (VI 494a) This assumption in itself may result in an oligarchic view, but it would not preclude developing a Panhellenic or cosmopolitan perspective perhaps by elevating Athens as the 'leader of the free world'. However, in Plato the oligarchic view is sustained by a tragic idea of history. It is best captured in his allegory of the two ages introduced in the *Statesman*.¹¹²

In this allegory, Plato draws on motifs from different traditions – the reversal of the course of the universe, the golden time, the clash between two gods, etc. – to sketch a dark image of the state of man. In the golden time people lived the life of paradise under the rule of the gods, didn't have to bother about food, housing or clothes as there was always a mild breeze. They were born asexually as old people and became younger over the course of their lives. When the gods abandoned their reign, the world became like a ship whose steersman has let go of the steering wheel so that the ship is tossed about with no direction and ultimately doomed to be shipwrecked. During this time people procreate, are born young, and have to work for their food. Our time and our world is thus not the 'natural' or even a good course of the world, but the 'unnatural', reversed course that is doomed. In this allegory, the contrast between the soul, or the world of ideas, and the body, or the physical world, is pictured as a contrast in time between an earlier state of the world and the present. There is nothing in this world or our course of time that is worth preserving, and our only hope is that the gods will take up the wheel again to rescue the ship from the surrounding horror of nature. The allegory depicts Plato's tragic view of the trajectory of the

¹¹¹ The historical awareness that Plato is always 'our' Plato but not the 'real historical one' is already present in Nietzsche's lectures on Plato from his time as a classicist in Basel (1871/72). See *The pre-Platonic philosophers*, transl. and ed. Greg Whitlock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

¹¹² *Statesman*, 268d-274e.

world. It is not just that some people or political regimes are unjust or some practices should be reformed. It is the trajectory of the world that is wrong. Only if someone with a god-like soul assumed total power over some people and reversed the entire order of things might it be possible to save the world by setting an example.

It should be noted that in Plato's allegory, the backward course of the world *could* be purposefully changed, and so there is no eternal battle between two principles, nor the view that good and evil are equiprimordial, or as Plato refers to it, that both good and evil given by the gods. (II 389c)¹¹³ In Plato, the 'enlightened' hope that the world can be changed is pushed to its extreme, for even fundamental aspects of the human condition such as the incest taboo are depicted as alterable through teaching.¹¹⁴ On the one hand, philosophy presumes an enormous imaginative power and, by its ability to transform the individual soul to go against various bodily leanings, and an enormous erotic power as well. On the other hand, it is hard to conceive of philosophy's fundamental activity as being nothing less than to be the savior of mankind when its highest aim, conceiving the good, cannot be 'properly' defined, taught as a technique, or even written down as a normative guideline. Instead, philosophy appears to be an evasive practice, and even a modern day reader is never quite certain whether he is in the philosophical mode seeking insight or just caught up in one of Plato's traps.¹¹⁵

XVI. Again, it would be possible to pursue this line of thought further and try to make sense of Plato's critique of writing and elusive presentation of the highest ideas.¹¹⁶ However, the aim of the inquiry was to show why Plato did not simply state his 'cosmopolitan ideal theory on metaphysical grounds'. Yet reflecting on Plato's presentation of the practice of philosophy draws the reader not only to the brink of mysticism but reveals at the same time a limitation of Plato's philosophy. There is one thing that can be said with certainty about the way Plato conceives of the practice of philosophy: One must have a teacher, and to be precise, not just any teacher, but Socrates as a teacher. Philosophy is not an activity everyone can practice in isolation, learn from

¹¹³ Plato struggles with the question how to describe the relation of good and evil throughout his life, see *Theaetetus*, 176a where evil appears to have an existence of its own.

¹¹⁴ The speculations about 'totalitarian' transformation of human nature may serve as a reminder that all empirical studies of happiness depend upon some fundamental though alterable social concepts.

¹¹⁵ To cite but one example: The cast in the *Parmenides* resembles the one in the *Politeia* except that it has no connection to the matters discussed in the dialogue and instead of Socrates the narrator is Antiphon, a famous horse breeder. It is as if Plato wanted to poke fun of my elaborate interpretation of the *Politeia's* opening scene.

¹¹⁶ Phaidros 278 b8 - e4. Plato's critique of writing and his mysticism are explained in the seventh letter. Even if it is not genuine it shows that these are since ancient times central problems of each Plato interpretation.

books or from different teachers but instead, a practice that requires initiation. For the way Plato brought philosophy to the world, it is not an unhappy fact that Socrates was already dead at the time, but a necessary precondition. Even as Plato wrote his dialogues, no one could not ask the historical Socrates, "what do you think about this?" or "Plato wrote this, do you agree with it?" Thus, the Platonic pathway to philosophical education never allows for competing opinions of equal standing. Moreover real insights are often postponed, withheld, or as by Socrates in the *Symposium* uttered in someone else's name.

In terms of real world politics, concentration on one mythical founding figure together with the establishment of an institution to guarantee the authenticity of interpretation can easily be translated in a claim for leadership of the Platonic Academy.¹¹⁷ Real insight can only be found there and requires secret initiation. However, due to the lack of direct evidence, especially any evidence from Plato himself, our characterization of the Platonic Academy must remain vague and is only useful to explain the historical context. Yet the evasive reverence to an undefined center is a feature of Plato's philosophy that has consequences for its reception. One could say that just as there can be only one initiated philosophical practice there can only be one Kallipolis. This is an important finding for the present interpretation of Plato as an über-cosmopolitan philosopher. From Plato's point of view, one could grant that the whole Hellenic world serves as a backdrop or sounding board, more explicitly, that Panhellenic or cosmopolitan views are part of that intellectual universe. Plato might even acknowledge that at some time or at some place, democratic forms of government might turn out to be beneficial, or that formation of federal alliances might be necessary for economic or military reasons. However, from Plato's point of view all these aspects of Hellenic political life, in which we may recognize us and our own contemporary world, would be completely irrelevant as long as it lacked philosophy. It is for this reason that Plato does not find it necessary to explicitly refute cosmopolitan theories or engage in debates with democratic or cosmopolitan views, since no debates of this kind can ever be on equal terms, but at best will only serve as preliminary or educational discussions leading to the point of view of real insight.

¹¹⁷ The description of the life of real philosopher (VI 496b-497a) can be read as alluding to the Academy with the "great soul" (Socrates) as founder and Plato himself as being among the ones "coming from another art" (drama). Winspear suggests "the Academy was first of all a political organization, ... [and] its primary function and purpose was the defense of international conservatism." A.D. Winspear, *The Genesis of Plato's Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York: Russell, 1956), 306. Kai Trampedach's finding that the Academy did in fact not play this role does not disprove the thesis that it might originally have been conceived this way. See Trampedach, *Platon*, 278-283.

XVI. Plato confronts us with the tragic choice of either continuing with sophistic, historical, or rhetorical quarrels, which may please our materialistic inclinations and sophistic prejudices, or trying to overcome those prejudices by delving into the very foundations of being (*agathón*). However, to do this, we have to first accept the leadership of Socrates. Accepting Socrates' leadership might appear to be a small price to pay, since he never required (qua Platonic personae) blind obedience but demonstrates what philosophical reversion of life through insight means.

Yet, the figure of Socrates reveals a systematic weakness in Plato. Plato uses Socrates as an indispensable intermediary for finding the way through the intricate practice of philosophy, but he never explains how the man, Socrates, could arise in the first place.¹¹⁸ If everyone needs guidance from the initiated there needs to be the first initiator, someone who initiated himself or who gained insight out of himself. So we might ask how the Athenian citizen Socrates could ever become the philosopher Socrates and why self-recognition should be confined to the case of Socrates, who then must serve as a 'medium' for everyone else. Perhaps Plato implicitly acknowledged this problem in his later dialogues, when the younger Socrates or the Athenian stranger lead the discussion. However, these figures form at least a literary continuum with the Socrates of the earlier dialogues.

It might be at this juncture that one could challenge Plato's illusion that initiation through discipleship with Socrates is a necessary condition for practicing philosophy. One could imagine a dialogue between Socrates and the Athenian stranger, in which the protagonists have different backgrounds and disagree about some question. This dialogue would have moved toward and even necessitated a reflection on the self-formation and the relationships between those two. However, a dialogue of this kind is glaringly missing.¹¹⁹ In Plato the *paidèia* (philosophical formation of body and soul) is limited to the teacher-pupil relationship and never happens between two persons of equal standing who are both philosophers in the best sense. This also has important political consequences, in Plato's terminology, consequences for the way we conceive the individual soul or the individual city.

Plato invented philosophy as a giant vortex that readily draws bits and pieces from all sides into itself. Even though nearly all topics of philosophical discourse are presented dialectically – thus

¹¹⁸ Socrates short autobiographical remark in *Phaedo* 96a-102a is not helpful to this end.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Szlezák makes the same observation but offers a different explanation. He argues that such a debate would have inevitably led to a discussion about first principles, a doctrine Plato wanted to confine to his esoteric teaching. See his *Platon lesen* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1993), 144.

in a way that is not just a statement, position or claim but a mini dialogue in its own right – and even though there is a drift towards the good as an unascertainable center and a corresponding urge to watch the formation of other souls, there is ultimately a strange disregard of individual human beings. For the most part they are referred to as sheep, dogs, or puppets that need to be formed. Similarly, other cities appear as external threats or resources for practical studies but never as possible philosophical sites in their own right. Thus, one could say that the internal limit that precludes Plato from developing the idea of a Hellenic commonwealth of independent cities is a philosophical limit. Plato has expressed philosophy by dramatizing the person of Socrates, thus demonstrating a particular form of philosophical practice, but he failed to develop the underlying principle that might allow us to conceptualize the relationship between different individuals as subjects or between different autonomous cities in a commonwealth.

XVII. I began this essay by suggesting that current liberal convictions that appear to lead naturally to a cosmopolitan theory or a theory of global justice are not as firmly grounded as one might think, and that ancient thought might serve as a mirror of the current discourse. The challenge I want to present in this way – challenge understood as both provocation and trial – is that the fronts have turned around. The ancient philosophical tradition does not merely represent a pre-cosmopolitan junior stage, but instead, turns out to be the old trapper of ancient cosmopolitan sentiments. Since ancient thought is not just history "over and forgotten" but a constant companion of modern thinking,¹²⁰ this reflection shows that political philosophy has lost its innocence and challenges the self evidence of its alliance with the 'noble cause' of cosmopolitanism. If we want to accept Plato's suggestion that philosophy may show us a way out of sophistic quarrels by providing us with a foundation and a more dialectical or comprehensive understanding of ourselves and others, we must also to face up to totalitarian "spell of Plato". We cannot respond to it by simply reaffirming contemporary liberal convictions¹²¹ but only by tackling the philosophical problems left over by Plato.

Obviously, I have not tried to give answers to contemporary problems, let alone give normative recommendations about how to build a just world, but merely attempted to explore the

¹²⁰ This is true not only for occidental philosophy but for religious thinking as well. The reflection is thus a way back into the axial age as common point of reference for an intercultural dialogue.

¹²¹ In a footnote to his chapter on Plato, Popper proves his liberal confidence in social contract theory by claiming that the "engineering problems" of securing international peace and preventing human rights violations are "really not so difficult once they are squarely and rationally faced." Popper, *Open Society*, 113.

dimensions of the question of a cosmopolitan order. My aim was not to argue in favor of a 'history of decay of liberalism' or to pinpoint 'the ancients' or 'the true Plato' against 'the moderns' but to open up a new kind of discourse. I have also not defended Plato's 'metaphysics,' given directions for a way out of the cage, so to speak, but only illuminated it in a different light so that a desire to leave it may arise.

Since Plato charms his readers with his lively images it might be necessary to end with a different one. We think of ourselves that we live in a secular age, in which the bright light of scientific theories and enlightened philosophy have expelled all the gods, and in which freestanding political ideas combined with reasonable distinctions between public and private spaces enable us to live a life that is good if it is lived according to a plan. By casting a different light on our secular age, I have made a troubling suggestion. The reasonable and perfectly styled distinctions may end up looking more like the small world in the movie *The Truman Show*; a golden cage of polished artificial reality. However there is hope in this picture. The discovery of our true self (with a little help from eros) might lead us to the edge of our small world and let us poke our heads out into the beyond.