

## Ho de diôkei men hapasa psychê kai toutou heneka panta prattei<sup>1</sup>

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As we all know, *ho de diôkei men hapasa psychê kai toutou heneka panta prattei* (R.505d11-e1) is in the *Republic* the idea or form of the Good (R.508e2-3.517b8-9). The platonic Socrates calls it also “that what the Good itself is” (532b1) or “the Good itself” (534c4.540a8-9) or simply “the Good” (R.509b7.519c10). It is also the *megiston mathêma* (R.509a5.519c9-10), that is, “the greatest thing to be learned” or “the greatest lesson”. In the last ten years or so, this greatest thing has found enormous attention in the Plato scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

Alas, we may not only say with the platonic Socrates “... that there are many large controversies (*amphisbêtêseis*) about this” (R.505d2), that is, the Good. There are also many and large controversies about the correct interpretation of what the platonic Socrates did say about the Good. The problem is by no means the scarcity of literature, but that there is so much literature on this topic. The consequence is that possibly nobody can be sure of not saying something which has been said before and perhaps already long ago been refuted. The only means to make some progress in understanding, if possible, is to pay close attention to the text and to make our interpretations so sharp that they can be refuted. In the following, I do not enter directly into the question “What in fact is the Good?”, but I first (I) give an exegesis of the famous preliminary passage 505d11-506a2. Then (II) I attempt to show that we can elucidate some dark points in its meaning with the help of Aquinas before I try to find (III) an uncontroversial starting point for a correct interpretation of the idea of the Good instead of advancing a new one.

### I.

The passage R. 505d1-506a2 is one sentence depending on the relative pronoun *ho*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, I divide it for the sake of clarity into six subsentences:

“[S<sub>1</sub>] *Ho dê diôkei men hapasa psychê kai toutou heneka panta prattei*  
 [S<sub>2</sub>] *apomanteuomenê ti einai*  
 [S<sub>3</sub>] *aporousa de kai ouk echousa labein hikanôs ti pot' estin*  
 [S<sub>4</sub>] *oude pistei chrêsasthai monimôi hoiai kai peri talla*

<sup>1</sup> My sincere thanks go to Lesley Brown, Rachana Kamtekar, Nicholas Smith and Roslyn Weiss for some helpful remarks. All errors are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. F. Ferrari (2003); Szlezák (2003b), Vegetti (1998-2007 V); Dixsaut (2005); Ferber (2003b), (2005); Lisi (2007a), 10-30; Penner (2005), (2007a, b, c); Rowe (2007a), (2007c), (2007d); Seel (2007). The main contributions of the last century are listed in the bibliographies of Lafrance, (1987), esp. 176-188; Brisson (1999), (2004b); Erler (2007). Cf. for an overview Fronterotta (2010b), 143-146.

<sup>3</sup> I owe this observation to Dimitri El Murr, here.

[S<sub>5</sub>] *dia touto de apotynchanei kai tôn allôn ei ti ophelos ên,*  
 [S<sub>6</sub>] *peri de to toioûton kai tosoûton houtô phômen dein eskotôsthai kai ekeinous tous*  
*beltistous en tê polei hois panta encheirioumen;”*(R.505d11-506a2).

“[S<sub>1</sub>] What every soul pursues and for what it does whatever it does,  
 [S<sub>2</sub>] divining that it is something,  
 [S<sub>3</sub>] but is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is  
 [S<sub>4</sub>] or acquire the sort of stable beliefs it has about other things,  
 [S<sub>5</sub>] and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give,  
 [S<sub>6</sub>] will we allow the best people in the city, to whom we entrust everything, to be so in  
 the dark about something of this kind and of this importance?” (Tr. Georges M. A. Grube,  
 revised by C. D. C. Reeve and with modifications by R. F.).

[S<sub>1</sub>] The first sentence states that the Good is what every soul pursues and for what it  
 does whatever it does. We may safely assume that the platonic Socrates implies that “every  
*human* soul pursues the Good and does whatever it does for it”, since only human souls can  
 “divine that it is something (*ti einai*)”.

But what does it mean that every human soul does everything for the Good, that is, the  
 idea of the Good? Here we have two options of translation. Every human soul “goes to all  
 lengths” for the sake of the Good. The sentence has already been translated in this way by the  
 Italian Francesco Gabrieli and the German Wilhelm Wiegand. Gabrieli translates: “O quella  
 cosa che ogni anima persegue e per *cui fa ogni sforzo*” (my emphasis).<sup>4</sup> Wiegand translates:  
 “In betreff also des eigentlichen Guten, wonach jede Menschenseele strebt und dessentwegen  
 sie *alle Anstrengungen unternimmt*” (my emphasis).<sup>5</sup> Otto Apelt translates in the same vein  
 by giving *panta pratein* a negative twist: “Eine jede Seele also strebt dem Guten nach und  
*lässt um seinetwillen nichts ungetan*” (my emphasis).<sup>6</sup> Explicitly, this translation of *panta*  
*pratein* with “to go to all lengths” has been defended by Terry Irwin.<sup>7</sup> But *panta pratein* can  
 also be translated literally that every human soul does everything for the sake of the Good.  
 The majority of translators take this route.

These different translations have different consequences: If every human soul does every-  
 thing for the sake of the Good, each soul — if she does bad things — does bad things for  
 the sake of the Good. Then the platonic Socrates of the 6th book seems to reassume the “intellec-  
 tualistic doctrine” of the platonic Socrates of the *Meno* (cf.78b1-2), *Protagoras* (cf.358c6-d2),  
 and *Gorgias*: “Hence it’s for the sake of what’s good that those who do all these things do  
 them” (Grg.468b7-8), namely, “put a person to death, ... or banish him and confiscate his  
 property” (Grg. 468b4-6. Transl. Zeyl). If we prefer the literal translation, then we have also  
 in the 6th book of the *Republic* the Socratic doctrine that nobody willingly does wrong be-  
 cause he does everything for the Good.

If, on the contrary, every human soul “goes to all lengths” or leaves nothing undone for  
 the Good, then every human soul can also be overthrown just “in consequence of an im-  
 pulse”<sup>8</sup> not to do everything for the Good. In this case, the platonic Socrates of the *Republic*  
 would distance himself with his introduction of the tripartite soul from the platonic Socrates

<sup>4</sup> Gabrieli (1981), 234.

<sup>5</sup> Wiegand (1940), 239.

<sup>6</sup> Apelt (1923), 259.

<sup>7</sup> Irwin (1977), 336, n. 45: “The description of the Good as ‘what every soul pursues and for the  
 sake of which does everything’ (*panta pratei*, 505e1) conflicts with the anti-Socratic view of Book IV if  
 ‘does everything’ means ‘does everything that it does’. But it can also mean ‘go to all lengths’. [---].  
 Plato allows then the existence of incontinence”.

<sup>8</sup> Prichard (2002), 33.

of the *Gorgias*. This is a theory which goes back to Eric R. Dodds and has been reformulated by Gregory Vlastos, Donald Davidson, Terry Penner, Christopher Rowe, Myles Burnyeat, and others.<sup>9</sup>

But also in the story of Leontios of the 4th book, desire itself seems not to be completely blind. It is, rather, a desire which is based on a doxa.<sup>10</sup> Certainly Leontios is “overpowered by the appetite” (*kratoumenos d’oun hypo tês epithumias*) (R.440a1). It is a case of *akrasia*. However, he “pushed his eyes wide open and rushed towards the corpses, saying” (R.440a1-2): “Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight!” (*kalou theamatos*) (R.440a2-3) (Transl. Grube). The eyes of Leontios see the cadavers *as* beautiful. The object of the sight is not an uninterpreted datum of observation. The sight (*thema*) is accompanied by an explicit doxa and value judgment. It is from the point of view of Leontios’ *epithymia* a beautiful sight to see the cadavers because Leontios’ *epithymia* may have “a sexual interest in pale youths”.<sup>11</sup> But what is beautiful or fine is also in some sense good, namely, pleasurable, at least for the appetitive part. Of course, the expression “*kalon*” may be taken ironically from Leontios’ *reason* and means the contrary, namely, “*aischron*”.<sup>12</sup> It is, for reason, *ugly* to see the cadavers, whereas it is *beautiful* or pleasurable for the appetitive part. But just in the moment of acting, Leontios acts driven by his *epithymia* against his better second-order value judgment in accordance with the first-order value judgment “of his wretched eyes”. They see *as kalon* what is *aischron* and are therefore in error. In this sense, Leontios’ appetite is not simply a bodily or good-independent sensation like an itch (sexual), but a good-dependent desire dependent on an implicit if erroneous judgment with a propositional structure on what is good.<sup>13</sup> Sure, Leontios “had at the same time an appetite to look at them but at the same time he was disgusted” (*hama men idein epithymoi, hama de au dyscherainei*) (R.439e9). In the terminology of Harry Frankfurt: Leontios had at the same time a “first-order-desire” to look at the corpses and a “second-order-desire” which opposes his “first-order-desire”.<sup>14</sup> He has synchronic opposite desires although he does not perform synchronic opposite actions. But since synchronic opposite actions would presuppose syn-

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Dodds (1951), 213: “The theory of inner conflict, vividly illustrated in the *Republic* by the tale of Leontios, was precisely formulated in the *Sophist*, where it is defined as psychological maladjustment resulting ‘from some sort of injury’, a kind of disease of the soul, and is said to be the cause of cowardice, intemperance, injustice, and (it would seem) moral evil in general, as distinct from ignorance or intellectual failure [cf. *Sph.*228d-e]. This is something quite different both from the rationalism of the earliest dialogues and from the puritanism of the *Phaedo*, and goes a good deal deeper than either; I take it to be Plato’s personal contribution”. Cf. Vlastos (1991), 45-80; Davidson (2005), 225-6; Rowe (2005), 75-76; Penner/Rowe (2005), 222, note 41; Rowe (2007b), 214, 223; Burnyeat (2006), 18: “This is the break with Socrates, whom I, like many others, take to be the awkward fellow envisaged at 438a as objecting that all desire is for what is good; even thirst, for example, being a desire, not just for drink, but for good drink or which is good (for me here and now)”. *Contra* Weiss (2007), 95: “Third — and most importantly — it is likely that the objector is not just anyone [or the intellectualistic Socrates] but is actually Glaucon, Socrates’ interlocutor”. *Ibid.*, 98: “There is nothing in Socrates’ stand in the *Gorgias* or the *Meno* that is inconsistent with his stand in *Rep.* 4. In all three places people can desire — and choose — anything that strikes them as good in some way”.

<sup>10</sup> *Contra* Penner (1990); cf. Carone (2001), 138: “..., his reason has been weakened and come to adopt the beliefs of the prevailing part”; Morris (2006), 219, n. 52; Brickhouse and Smith (2010), 202: “..., even in Plato’s divided psyche, each part of the soul (and each form of attraction, whether deriving from the rational, spirited, or appetitive parts) continues to be good-dependent, just as we find it to be in Socratic moral psychology”. *Contra* Brickhouse and Smith (2010), 210, I agree with Carone (2001), 139-140, that the story of Leontios is not incompatible with the socratic denial of synchronic *akrasia*.

<sup>11</sup> So Burnyeat (2006), n. 14.

<sup>12</sup> So Burnyeat (2006), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Weiss (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Frankfurt (1971). Cf. Ferber (2003a), 160-161; Lorenz (2006), 16.

chronic opposite opinions and synchronic opposite actions are not possible, it is, in the *moment* of action, a not *clear-eyed* synchronic, but diachronic *akrasia*. Leontios' spirited part is aware of that what reason wants,<sup>15</sup> although the knowledge of reason has been obscured by the appetite in the moment of action. The appetite is overcome by "the power of appearance" (*hê tou phainomenou dynamis*) (Prt.356d4), which causes just in this moment the pleasure to see pale youths to appear greater than it in the long run really is.

It is also not this *clear-eyed*, synchronic and *diabolic* kind of *akrasia* which Augustine has described in the 2nd book of his *Confessions* when as a young boy he steals pears not because of appetite of pears but only because it is forbidden to steal pears (cf. Conf. II.6, 14).<sup>16</sup> This Augustinian example to do the bad not because of appetite for an apparent good, but only because it is bad and therefore not allowed seems to be the crucial counterexample for Socrates' intellectualistic denial of (synchronic and *clear-eyed*) *akrasia*. But explained in the above-mentioned way, the story of Leontios can be put in accordance with the Socratic intellectualistic doctrine: Leontios is in error and does wrong unwillingly because he has a wrong opinion of the Good in the moment of doing it. In this sense, the literal translation of *panta prattein* can be put in accordance with the intellectualistic theory.

In fact, the tripartite psychology is not rejected, but remembered also in the 6th book: "Do you remember when we distinguished three parts in the soul, in order to help bring out what justice, moderation, courage, and wisdom each is? — If I didn't remember that, it wouldn't be just for me to hear the rest" (R.504a4-8. Transl. Grube).<sup>17</sup> If Glaucon remembers the theory of the tripartite soul, the platonic Socrates remembers it, too. The theory reappears in the 8th book (cf. R.553c-d) and in the 10th book (cf. R.588c-d) and the platonic Socrates alludes, with the words "*ou gar hekôn hamartanei*" (589c6), explicitly to the Socratic doctrine that nobody willingly does wrong (cf. R.591b) and speaks, for example, of the *aphrosyne*, that is in some sense the error, to choose the greatest tyranny (cf. R.619b). The Socratic doctrine that nobody does willingly wrong is reaffirmed again with modifications in the Phlb. 22b6-8, Ti.86d7-e3, and Leg.731c3-5.860d1-2. So we could say: Not only every simple soul, but also every tripartite soul, does everything for the good. Thus, the tripartite soul seems to me to be no hindrance for a unitary reading of Plato's theory of human motivation, but rather a supplement: all three parts of the tripartite soul have some knowledge of the Good.<sup>18</sup> Reason would pursue what is really good, "spirit what is admirable, appetite what is physically pleasurable".<sup>19</sup>

[S<sub>2</sub>] introduces the cognitive state of divining. Divining is a state of knowledge, but it is not mentioned in the divided line and seems to correspond to none of its states. It is not unconscious *doxa*, that is, *eikasia* or *pistis*, since it is conscious of its ignorance. It is evidently not *noêsis*, that is, *dianoia* or *nous*. The platonic Socrates has no noetic or dianoetic understanding of the idea of the Good, as he was not able in the *Symposium* "to behold [the divine Beauty in itself in its one form]" (Symp.212a1-2) "by that which he ought, ..." (Smp.212a1-2), for which organ of the soul, that is the *nous*, he does not yet have a name in the *Symposium*.<sup>20</sup> The limits of knowledge of Socrates have already been indicated by Diotima, a fiction

<sup>15</sup> Bobonich (2007a), 41-60, esp. 55-60.

<sup>16</sup> Conf. II.6,14: "*Ecce est ille 'servus fugiens dominum suum et consecutus umbram'. O putredo, o monstrum vitae et monstrum profunditatis! Potuitne libere quod non licebat, non ob aliud, nisi quia non licebat?*"

<sup>17</sup> This point has been made by Sedley, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> This point has been made also by Moss (2008), 83-116, cf. 62: "Each part of the soul desires what it takes to be good, and therefore each person, no matter which part of her soul rules her, pursues things under the guise of the good in all her actions".

<sup>19</sup> Burnyeat (2006), 15. Cf. EN. B3. 1104b30-35, quoted in Burnyeat (2006), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bury (1932), 132.

of Plato perhaps invented to mark the limits of knowledge reached by his master (Smp.209e5-210a2).<sup>21</sup> Here and not in the tripartition of the soul – which could be implied already in the *Gorgias* (cf.493a3-4)<sup>22</sup> – we may find the dividing line between the Socrates of the *Meno*, *Protagoras*, and *Gorgias* and the more platonic Socrates of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*.

This divining describes a status *between* doxa and knowledge and is comparable to the activity of *anamnêsis* for embodied souls (cf. Men.86a6-8). It is a doxa conscious of its doxastic character. Werner Jaeger has called attention to the fact that “presumably it was Plato who first took the notion of inner divination (*manteuesthai*), which the poets were already using in the sense of the presentiment of external events, and stamped it with the philosophical meaning of a divination not of the future but of deep and hidden attributes”.<sup>23</sup> Surely “what every soul pursues and for what it does whatever it does” has “deep and hidden attributes” for the platonic Socrates in the *Republic*. As the remembering of ideas presupposes some knowledge of the ideas, so the *apomanteuesthai* of the idea of the Good presupposes some knowledge of the idea of the Good. But Socrates is neither willing nor able to give the *logos tês ouσίας* which he is demanding from the dialecticians (R.534b3). He compares his *aneu epistêmês doxas* (R.506c6) with the journey of a blind man (R.506b6-9). Nevertheless, the blind man is also a divining man and has a strong presumption in favour of the existence of what he is searching for. If “every soul” is divining that the Good is something (*apomanteuomenê ti einai*), also Socrates’ soul is divining that the Good is something. More exactly, he is making an existential and an essential claim about the Good. In sharper Aristotelian terms not used explicitly by Plato, we could say that the Good belongs to things like the Monas, where we already have a previous knowledge of both (1) the *hoti esti* and (2) its essence and the *ti esti* (cf. An.post.71a11-16). This means that the idea of the Good is for Socrates not a fictional entity like a “goat-stag” (*tragelaphos*) (cf. R.488a6. cf. An.prior.49a24. An.post.92b7). It is not something which does not exist or is a *mê on*. But the existential claim is for Socrates/Plato also a reality claim. This is especially the case because we are all realists concerning the Good, although we may be conventionalists concerning “the just and beautiful things” (*dikaia men kai kala*) (505d5): We want the real good in distinction to “the just and beautiful things” where we may be satisfied with the appearance. If the idea of the Good is happiness (cf. Smp.205a), we would not be satisfied with the appearance of happiness, but only with the real happiness. The Good is for Socrates/Plato therefore not, like happiness for Kant, an “ideal of imagination”.<sup>24</sup>

[S<sub>3</sub>] affirms that every human soul is in a state of *aporia* concerning the final Good and is not able to capture its essence sufficiently. So there is an essence, but every soul and also Socrates’ soul cannot grasp it sufficiently. To be sure, the platonic Socrates has not only defended the principle of priority of definitional knowledge, but also the principle that we desire only the real, but not the apparent Good (cf. R.505d5-9). Nevertheless, he does not sufficiently know its essence. He knows sufficiently only that it is neither pleasure nor reason. It is *here* not to be completely excluded that the essence of the Good can be grasped suffi-

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Cornford (1950), 75: “I incline to agree with those scholars who have seen in this sentence Plato’s intention to mark the limit reached by the philosophy of his master”. But cf. also Bury (<sup>2</sup>1932), 125-126, and Ferber (2007b), 89-106.

<sup>22</sup> Slings (1994), 137, n. 33: “*tês ... psychês touto en hôi epithumiai eisi*. This implies the existence of *to epithumêtikon*; it certainly is much more definitive than the popular distinction between reason and impulse’ [Dodds, *ad locum*]”. But cf. also Brickhouse and Smith (2010), 143, n. 8: “...but he [Plato] nowhere in the early or Socratic dialogues explains what the various parts may be, nor does he in any way argue or attempt to explain precisely why the soul must have whatever parts it may have.”

<sup>23</sup> Jaeger (1948), 159, n. 1. For *manteuesthai* cf. R.506a6.523a8.531d5; Phlb.64a3.66e7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, AA 418 [transl. Paton (1948)].

ciently by the philosopher kings and queens *in the end*. It is not a human impossibility in general, although — given the incarnated status of the imagined best philosophers (cf. R.498d.614a-621d) — this human possibility is hard to reconcile with the Socratic opinion in the *Phaedo*: “... for if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death” (Phd.66e5-6. Tr. Grube).<sup>25</sup> But it is surely for Socrates an impossibility or a Socratic impossibility.

[S<sub>4</sub>] draws a consequence from this, based on the Socratic principle of the epistemological priority of definitional knowledge. If “every soul” does not dispose of a definitional knowledge of the Good, she does not dispose of a *stable* opinion on other things. Of course, every soul may have *changing* opinions *because* our acting for the sake of the Good presupposes some value judgments, as even the case of Leontios shows. Socrates is alluding here to the *Meno* that there is a distinction between right opinion and knowledge and that knowledge stabilizes opinions (Men.98a6). But because we do not have sufficient knowledge of the Good but only insufficient, we do not acquire the sort of *stable* beliefs we have about other things. It is not clear what these other things are. They are probably the “just things and the others” (*dikaia kai talla*) (505a3), that is, the other virtues that “become useful and beneficial” (505a3-4) only by the knowledge of the Good. Because of the definitional priority of the definition of the real Good, the *dikaia kai ta alla* would just be *dikaia* but not really good. They would then be apparent *dikaia*.

[S<sub>5</sub>] explicitly states this consequence: By ignoring the final Good, every soul would miss also the benefit she could take from the other things, probably the other virtues. Every soul would miss the real goodness or so to say “the real taste” of the other virtues or even of other apparent goods like pleasure and reason since it does not know the idea or the paradigm of the Good (cf. R.540a9).

[S<sub>6</sub>] draws the consequence in the form of a rhetorical question: Will we allow the best people in the city, to whom we entrust everything, to be so in the dark about something of this kind and of this importance? “The best people” are the philosopher kings and queens. The best case of knowledge should be for the best of the city a real possibility. But here we have to distinguish two of “Plato’s philosophers” to use an expression of Donald Davidson<sup>26</sup>: Socrates, Plato’s real philosopher in the *Republic*, and the philosopher king or queen, Plato’s imagined philosopher in the *Republic*. What is a Socratic impossibility is not a kingly or queenly impossibility. In the same vein, there are two best cases of knowledge concerning the ultimate Good: the Socratic one and the kingly or queenly one, the divining one and the knowing one.

From these two states of knowledge, we have again to distinguish the platonic one, about which nobody knows anything with certainty. Maybe Plato’s state of knowledge was fluctuating between that of his real philosopher, Socrates, and that of his imagined philosopher king or queen in the *Republic* and came just “very near” (*eggutata*) (cf. R.473a8. Ep.VII.342d1-2) to the second one, that of the “most beautiful human being” (R.472d5).

## II.

That every soul does everything for the sake of the Good sounds to Plato scholars very familiar. But it is in fact also very hard to understand and hard to accept. I mention two objections which have already been formulated in one of the best treatments we have on intentional action, that is, Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae, IaIIae, Quaestio I (de ultimo fine hominis)*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ad locum* Chen (1992), but *contra* Ferber (2005), 167, n. 55.

<sup>26</sup> Davidson (2005).

Aquinas reassumes Aristotelian doctrines which go back to Plato's *Lysis* and are presupposed also in the *Republic*, namely, that there is no infinite regress in final causes but a "first friend" (*prôton philon*) (cf. *Lys.*219c5-d2.220b6-7) or "one aim" (*skopos*) for the sake of which the future philosopher kings or queens have to do everything (*hapanta prattein*) they do in private or public life (*R.*519c2-4).

First, the Good seems not that which every soul pursues and for which it does whatever it does. A man does "many things without deliberation, sometimes even without thinking about them, as when absently he makes a gesture or shifts his feet or rubs his chin" (*ST, IaIIae, q. I, art. 1,3. Transl. Gilby*).<sup>27</sup> The answer is a distinction between "an act of man" (*actio hominis*) and "a human action" (*actio humana*) in the proper sense. Human actions in the proper sense are actions of man insofar as he is man, that is, insofar as he is the master of what he does. Thus, we would have to reformulate the platonic thesis in the following way: Not every "act of man" (*praxis anthrôpou*), but only every deliberate act of man or every "human action" (*anthrôpinê praxis*) in the proper sense is done for the sake of the Good. This clarification was reached in principle also by Prichard in his famous inaugural lecture "Duty and Interest" (1928):

"There is no escaping the conclusion that when Plato sets himself to consider not what should, but what actually does, as a matter of fact, lead a man to act when he is acting deliberately, and not merely in consequence of an impulse, he answers 'The desire for some good to himself and that only' [...]. In the *Republic* this view comes to light in the sixth book".<sup>28</sup>

We could add that the Good to himself is finally also the ultimate good or that the absolute Good is also my good.<sup>29</sup>

But against Prichard, I would also say that by acting like Leontios "merely in consequence of an impulse" a man is acting by the desire for some good to himself. The akratic act of Leontios would then still be an *anthrôpinê praxis* and not only *praxis anthrôpou*. But it is a *anthrôpinê praxis* in which Leontios has given up his mastership of himself or an *anthrôpinê praxis* not in the proper but in the privative sense because the better knowledge of his reason concerning the good has been obscured and paralyzed in the moment of action by the "knowledge" – that is erroneous doxa – of his passion.

But evidently not only every *praxis anthrôpou*, but also not every *anthrôpinê praxis* is done for the sake of the ultimate Good. Just as in travelling to Tokyo, we do not take every step for the ultimate end that is Tokyo, so it is with the Good itself. Or, as Aquinas objects: "We are not expected always to be thinking of our last end whenever we desire or do something in particular" (*ST, IaIIae, q. I, art. 6, 3. Transl. Gilby*).<sup>30</sup> But in the *responsio* to the objection, he replies that "the force of our first intention (*vis primae intentionis*) with respect to it persists in each desire of any other thing, even though it is not adverted to" (*ST, IaIIae, q. I, art. 6. responsio 3. Transl. Gilby*).<sup>31</sup> The reasoning is this: If there were an unending chain of intentions for the sake of the Good, then we would not have any good. With this, he refers to Aristotle's thesis "that to maintain an indefinite is to deny the nature of the good" (*Metaph.*994b12-13). If every intentional act were done for another intentional act, there would be no intentional act at all. But of course we don't actually (*actu*) think always of the ultimate end or real Good if we think about a human action, just as we don't think always of

<sup>27</sup> "*Sed multa homo agit absque deliberatione, de quibus etiam quandoque nihil cogitat; sicut cum aliquis movet pedem vel manum aliis intentus, vel fricat barbam*".

<sup>28</sup> Prichard (1999), 33.

<sup>29</sup> In this way already Demos (1939), 61: "Thus the good is both absolute and relative, both the good *simpliciter* and my good (*Republic*, 352e, 353a, b)".

<sup>30</sup> "*Sed non semper homo cogitat de ultimo fine in omni eo quod appetit aut facit*".

<sup>31</sup> "*Sed virtus primae intentionis, quae est respectu ultimi finis, manet in quolibet appetitu cujuscumque rei, etiam si de ultimo fine actu non cogitetur*".

Tokyo if we are flying to Tokyo. We think of it only virtually, but we could think of it actually. Thus, the teaching of the platonic Socrates could be made more understandable if we presume that every soul is acting from a *virtual* intention to reach the final Good. We want virtually the final Good and if we take instead an apparent good, we act from ignorance of our real or first intention.

Kant has said that we cannot act otherwise than “under the idea of freedom”.<sup>32</sup> The platonic Socrates could have said that we cannot act otherwise than virtually under the idea of the Good. But in distinction to an idea in the Kantian sense to which no possible experience corresponds (cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A320/B377), the idea of the Good is, from the viewpoint of the “blind” Socrates, the object of divining and, from that of the “seeing” philosopher kings and queens, it is the object of a possible experience, that is, the object of an insight or understanding.

### III.

But what is this final knowledge or what is it that we are finally searching for? Typologically, we may distinguish at least three substantive answers. First is the henological one, which goes back to Aristotle (Metaph.N4.1091b13-15.EE.A8.1218a18-20) and points to the neoplatonic one (cf. Plot.Enn.V.1.8.V.3.12-3.V.4.1.V.9.2.VI.7.37.VI.7.40). This interpretation was reassumed and defended by the Tübingen-Milano school.<sup>33</sup>

Then we have the perfectionist answer put forward by Gerasimos Santas and others.<sup>34</sup> The form of the Good would be the *ens perfectissimum*, which is the cause of the essence and reality of the Forms in the sense that the Forms have their ideal attributes by participating in the Form of the Good.<sup>35</sup>

And third, we have the structuralist answer put forward by Horace W.B. Joseph<sup>36</sup> and reassumed by Terry Irwin, Justin C. B. Gosling, Gail Fine, and Gerhard Seel<sup>37</sup> “that the form of the good is not a distinct form, but the teleological structure of forms; individual forms are its parts, and particular sensible objects instantiate it”.<sup>38</sup>

But all these answers have in common that they are going beyond “Plato’s last word” in the *Republic*. From a purely exegetical point, this is a form in which — according to Richard Robinson — misunderstanding “is very common”.<sup>39</sup> I do not say that these interpretations are therefore from a substantive point of view simply wrong. But the fact is that they are not shared unanimously and there is reasonable disagreement. In addition, all three substantive interpretations seem to most philosophers of today as they would have seemed to Aristotle, rather verbal or as a kind of *kenologeia* (cf. Metaph.A9.991.a21-22). That is, we, or at least most of us, cannot connect these interpretations with the experience that the philosopher kings and queens *must* have when they see the Good or that Plato *may* have had. In addition, probably not only Glaucon but many other listeners and readers could not follow the omitted continuation of the story (cf. R.533a1). Who of us has spelled out the structural ordering or given the *pollaplasioi logoi* (R.534a8-9) of the *eidê auta* (R.510b8),<sup>40</sup> under “the sovereignty of the Good”?<sup>41</sup> And who has finally seen, that is understood, this Good or One. Perhaps Plato has

<sup>32</sup> Kant, op. cit., AA 448.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Krämer (1982); Reale (<sup>20</sup>1997); Szlezák (2001, 2002, 2003b).

<sup>34</sup> Santas (2002), 359-378.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Santas, (1985, 2002, 2010), 137-142.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph (1948).

<sup>37</sup> Irwin (1977), 225; Gosling (1973); Fine (2003); Seel (2007).

<sup>38</sup> Fine (2003), 98.

<sup>39</sup> R. Robinson (1953), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ferber (1989), 162-167.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Murdoch (1997).



stretched the meaning of the expression “good” so much that it became too thin to be connected with any personal experience for most of us.<sup>42</sup>

He may have realized this in the *Politicus* where the Eleatic Stranger does not say anything specific about “the demonstration of the exact itself” (*hê peri auto takribes apodeixis*) (Plt.284d1-2), that is (in my opinion), “the demonstration of the Good itself”, but lowers the standard by being satisfied for our immediate purpose with the introduction of “the coming into being of the appropriate” (*hê tou metriou genesis*) (Plt.284d6).<sup>43</sup> This appropriate (*metrion*) is paraphrased as “the graceful (*to prepon*), the opportunity (*ho kairos*), the right (*to deon*)” and “all that has its seat in the middle between two extreme ends” (Plt.284e6-8). Of this “middle between two extreme ends” most people may have some experience and not only a divination.

What can be said from a point of view of the last word in the *Republic* is only that the Good is a third item (*triton*) between *and* above knowledge and being — as the sun (and its product the light) is a third item between *and* above seeing and what is seen (cf. R.507d1.e1). With this third item, the substantive interpretations – henological, perfectionist, and structuralist – are not in contradiction, although this formal “trialistic” interpretation does not satisfy any curiosity about “the deep and hidden attributes” of the Good “for what we are doing everything we do”.

We have here a tension between the Socratic divining (*apomanteuesthai*) (R.505e1) and the kingly “knowing sufficiently” (*gnôsesthai hikanôs*) (R.506a7). The platonic Socrates, who has firm or even *dianoia-like*, that is, very examined opinions on other things, for example, that the just is happy<sup>44</sup> — has only a *doxa aneu epistêmês*, that is, an unexamined doxa of that “what every soul pursues and for what it does whatever it does” (R.505d11-e2). But this is doxa which is aware of itself or remains a divining or *apomanteuesthai*. That this is the final answer of the platonic Socrates to the Socratic question “what in fact is the Good?” (... *hoti pot’estin agathon*) (Phlb.13e5-6) is confirmed by the latest published dialogue on the topic of the Good. What the platonic Socrates claims to know in the *Philebus* concerning the absolute good (*to pantapasin agathon*) (Phlb.61a1-2) or “what in fact in man and in the universe is good by nature” (*ti pote en t’anthrôpôi kai tôi panti pephyken agathon*) (Phlb.64a1-2) is “what one should divine (*manteuteon*) is its form (*tina idean autên einai*)” (Phlb.64a2-4).

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Demos (1939), 65: “It may be questioned whether Plato has not lost the Good by expanding its meaning”.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ferber (1995), 63-75.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ferber (2007b).