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SOME REMARKS ON SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN THE *PHAEDRUS*
AND HERMIAS' COMMENTARY*

In this paper I want to discuss the place Plato confers to self-knowledge in the *Phaedrus*. One of the reasons for doing so is that while, on the one hand, it has been stated that after the *Republic* Plato had little, if any, interest in self-knowledge¹, on the other, self-knowledge has also been considered a major, even a main theme in the dialogue. In what follows I shall (1) present the two extreme positions above, (2) continue with an analysis of the *Phaedrus*' passages on self-knowledge together with Hermias' commentary and, finally, (3) finish with a conclusion which, I think, is of considerable importance for appreciating Plato's philosophy as such, especially what is taken to be the very core of platonism.

I

It is Julia Annas who has claimed that, after the *Republic*, Plato's interest in self-knowledge lessens². Annas doesn't speak about the *Phaedrus* directly³ since her article is about two early dialogues, the *Lovers* and the *First Alcibiades*. Yet, she claims explicitly that

[o]f the terms in the equation, justice has come to interest Plato a lot more than sophrosune, and correspondingly his interest in self-knowledge lessens; in the later [than the *Republic*] dialogues we find only a few passing remarks⁴.

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¹ I take it for granted that the *Phaedrus* was written after the *Republic*. This is what is commonly admitted.

² J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*.

³ J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, refers to the *Phaedrus* once, in a footnote (n. 52): *In the Phaedrus the lover sees the counter-eros to his own in his lover's eyes, and his own vision is infected by it, as though he had caught ophthalmia. This tasteless conceit has little in common with the Alcibiades' attempt to use mirroring as an image for the gaining of self-knowledge.*

⁴ J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, p. 127 [underlining is mine].

As her statement is not categorical and includes the qualification of a small number of remarks¹, it is necessary to clarify how Annas understands self-knowledge. As a matter of fact, in her view

*self-knowledge is knowledge of one-self in relation to others. Thus, a correct conception of myself is far from being revealed by scrutiny of my individual personality, for it requires a correct conception of my role in society, among others, and what this is, does not depend entirely on me [...]*².

She goes as far as giving self-knowledge a social dimension which is spelled out as follows:

If I am, for instance, a free Athenian citizen, then knowing who I am and what is appropriate for me will involve knowing, among other things, that I may expect certain sorts of deference from slaves but not from free men³ etc.

She further claims that self-knowledge rather than subjective is objective and has no meaning of inquiry into individual personality:

*Self-knowledge is thus far from being an interest in my individual personality; it is something objective [...]*⁴.

All in all she affirms that self-knowledge is about a self that is – this is what Annas makes clear – impersonal, as when she states, for example:

*My true self will not just be my soul (which, for all that has actually been shown in the passage might be individual to me) but soul conceived of impersonally, a “self-itself” or impersonal self which, like a Form, is the same in all of its instances. [...] my true self is not just my soul but impersonal soul [...]*⁵.

One of reasons for dismissing self-knowledge is that Plato shows a growing interest in knowledge understood as science⁶. We find therefore in Annas'

¹ See also p. 126: *We should not, of course, conclude that the ancients were not interested in this kind of knowledge of one's personality; but it seems clear that they did not take this to be the kind of self-knowledge that could be identified with a virtue, such as sophrosune is always taken to be.*

² J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, p. 122 [underlining is mine].

³ J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, p. 123.

⁴ J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, p. 127.

⁵ J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, p. 131 [underlining is mine].

⁶ See J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, p. 135: [...] *in the middle dialogues, where the preferred model of knowledge is mathematics, and it is one of the main features of what we mean by “platonism” as a philosophical position. The demand plays a role, though an unobtrusive one, in many of the passages where Plato establishes Forms and mathematical objects as objects of knowledge. Here we find a further reason for the demise of self-knowledge as a central concern for Plato. For the more he thinks of knowledge on the model of something like mathematics, the less he will be able to accept self-knowledge as genuinely being knowledge. The self is not the required kind of distinct object that knowledge, given this model, requires.*

reading a Plato who refuses to deal with self-knowledge in his later dialogues, the *Phaedrus* included; or even if there is any interest in self-knowledge, it is mostly understood as knowledge of an individual of her place in society and/or knowledge of a self taken impersonally. (I wonder whether these latter considerations are not inconsistent, since knowledge of an individual of her place in the society can hardly be impersonal insofar as there is a matter of such and such individual in such and such society.)

Annas' view has been shared to some extent by J. Brunschwig. In his authoritative paper on the cave where he explains why

Plato's mention of the B-shadows [prisoners' own shadows] at 515a is so brief, so isolated in the context, so quickly forgotten [by Plato himself]¹,

Brunschwig says:

[i]n conclusion, I would suggest that the mention of the B-shadows in 515a5–8 is meaningful not only by its contents, but also by its brevity, its location, and its isolation. Its brevity seems to warn the reader that B-shadows cannot and will not play a very important role in what follows. Its location at the first rank (πρώτον μὲν) seems to do justice (perhaps only to pay lip-service) to the Delphic motto and its familiar interpretation: first get rid of your self-ignorance. Its isolation seems to indicate that it fleetingly refers to something of the past, whether it is a stage of Plato's own views which he now thinks outdated (as Annas thinks) or a step in the reading order he considers as the best one for his pupils.²

From the minor role of these shadows³, Brunschwig infers – thus following Annas, although Annas is included by Brunschwig among the commentators who omit the neglected detail – the diminished role of the Delphic dictum from the *Republic* on.

We have therefore an interpretation denying either self-knowledge in Plato's later dialogues entirely or, at the least, its being associated with the personal, individual and subjective self. As it is put by Annas once again, *it turns out to be knowledge of the self itself, the precisely non personal self*⁴. And Brunschwig, at the end of his analysis, subscribes to J.–P. Vernant's

¹ J. Brunschwig, *Revisiting Plato's Cave*, p. 168.

² J. Brunschwig, *Revisiting Plato's Cave*, p. 171 [underlining is mine].

³ See J. J. Cleary, *Introduction*, p. xxiii: *Brunschwig concludes that Plato has given some indication of the minor role of B-shadows by means of the brevity of his reference to them. But, in view of their minor role, one might be forgiven for wondering why Brunschwig thinks it is important to draw attention to them in Plato's Republic.*

⁴ J. Annas, *Self-knowledge in Early Plato*, p. 133.

opinion on the *caractère radicalement non-introspectif de l'image grecque du soi*¹.

This is what I want to discuss. To some, the Annas – Brunschwig' thesis seems so striking that they may wonder if the thesis is grounded at all; hence the gist of my paper. Yet, before engaging in the discussion, let me refer shortly to a contrary position sustained in C. Griswold's book *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*². Griswold's work is at the opposite end because he insists on the fact that we find the self-knowledge theme in every section of the *Phaedrus*. For him, self-knowledge is a most important theme of the *Phaedrus*, as it is confirmed by the very title of his book. According to Griswold, there are several places in Plato³ where he manifests his interest in self-knowledge, but in the *Phaedrus* we find the strongest evidence:

*Socrates [there] declares in extremely strong terms that he cares only about knowing himself, every other pursuit being "laughable" to him so long as self-knowledge is lacking.*⁴

Now, if it is in the *Phaedrus* that we find the most clear and obvious position of Plato in this regard, i.e. developing and sustaining his views on self-knowledge, then by this alone Griswold contradicts Annas' thesis⁵. And this is so even if in Griswold's view self-knowledge is not limited to knowing one's own nature but expands to knowing human nature as such. Griswold says to us, for instance:

*Since in this instance the soul divines something about the true nature of man, "the soul" seems to make self-knowledge possible. [...] self-knowledge must extend to a knowledge of human nature, and not just remain a commentary on oneself as a particular individual.*⁶

Thus, self-knowledge is, in the first place, in a close relation to a way of life⁷, and second, it never loses sight of the individual, as it can be confirmed by the following statement:

¹ In an earlier (1997) version of his paper, see p. 9 du manuscript. See also J. Brunschwig, *Zaniedbany szczegóły w Jaskini Platona*, p. 12 & J. Brunschwig, *Un détail négligé dans la caverne de Platon*, p. 75.

² C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*.

³ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 243, n. 2, points out to *Alcibiades I* 128e, *Protagoras* 331c, 348a, *Laches* 187e–188c, *Apology* 20d, *Charmides* 164d–165b, 166d–e and also *Theaetetus* 174b3–6.

⁴ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 2.

⁵ In Griswold's book, published one year after Annas' paper, there is no mention of Annas' paper. However, we can maybe assume that he got acquainted with Annas' paper because the same volume includes a paper of his (C. Griswold, *Plato's Metaphilosophy*).

⁶ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 79. See also p. 66: *Thus the shift from "self-knowledge" as "understanding myself" to "self-knowledge" as "understanding general issues relevant to me and others of the same kind as myself" has already taken place in this speech.*

⁷ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 122: *Self-knowledge includes, then, the ability to affirm a certain way of life and to live it.* & p. 231: *[...] self-knowledge is the goal of the philosophical life.*

[a]lthough the *Phaedrus* tries to show that self-knowledge must include discourse about the soul, it also insists that self-knowledge always returns to the level of the individual¹.

If Griswold tells us a thing different than Annas & Brunschwig, one has to wonder who is right. More specifically, is it true that after the *Republic* the Delphic motto is no longer of importance in Plato? Or is it true that it is only verbal, a kind of paying lip-service? Should we think that this is what we must seriously believe given Socrates' way of referring to the Delphic motto in the *Phaedrus* 229e5–230a3?

My position is that although the self-knowledge theme obtains in the *Phaedrus* (contra Annas & Brunschwig), it is not the main theme of that dialogue (contra Griswold). What I mean when I say that this is not the main theme of the *Phaedrus* is that the main theme can be defined in other terms – after all, the unity of the dialogue is debated even if Griswold thinks that the theme of self-knowledge is what unites both parts of the dialogue. However, the purpose of my analysis is not to go against Griswold's claims. I rather want to make use of two passages of the *Phaedrus* and analyze them in order to arrive at a more general claim (different from Annas and Brunschwig's) about Plato's philosophy's character (which is not the purpose of Griswold's work).

II

I start with a confession Socrates puts forward in the prologue of the *Phaedrus*. The text in support of the presence of Delphic motto in the later than the *Republic* dialogue runs as follows:

But I have no leisure for them at all; and the reason, my friend, is this: I am not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself [γνῶναι ἑμαυτόν]; so it seems to me ridiculous, when I do not yet know that, to investigate irrelevant things. [...]
*I investigate not these things, but myself [σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ' ἑμαυτόν] [...]*².

There are two points Socrates links his words with. First, he makes his statement because he needs to explain *that* he is not interested in examining the nature/form of mythic tales and characters, e.g. Centaurs, Chimaera, Gorgons and Pegasus. Second, *the reason* of his not being interested in them is that, before explaining the nature of *strange, inconceivable, portentous natures*, he should be *able to know himself*. According to this order of things' importance it would be ridiculous to investigate outer (τὰ ἀλλότρια, literally: (LSJ) *of or belonging to another*, then *foreign, strange*) instead of

¹ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 148 [underlining is mine].

² Transl. H. N. Fowler. Plato, *Phaedrus* 229e3–230a3: πολλῆς αὐτῷ σχολῆς δεήσει. ἐμοὶ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὰ οὐδαμῶς ἔστι σχολή· τὸ δὲ αἴτιον, ὦ φίλε, τούτου τόδε. οὐ δύναμαι πῶ κατὰ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα γνῶναι ἑμαυτόν· γελοῖον δὲ μοι φαίνεται τοῦτο ἔτι ἀγνοοῦντα τὰ ἀλλότρια σκοπεῖν. [...] σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ' ἑμαυτόν [...].

inner matters. This obviously contradicts Annas – Brunschwig’s claim about Plato’s lack of interest in self-knowledge in later dialogues. Regarding Annas’ claim about self-knowledge’s being social and/or impersonal, Socrates himself seems to contradict it when he gives details about what knowing oneself is about.

Since Socrates is using personal pronouns, such as (γνῶναι) ἑμαυτόν, (σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ’ ἑμαυτόν), and never a general term referring to, say, a human being, a man, etc., one can be sure that what he has in mind is knowing himself as himself, as Socrates, as such and such individual, an individual being so and so, etc., and not to himself taken as a genus represented by that particular individual with no consideration of that particular individual.

The corollary is that, as he puts it,

I investigate not these things, but myself [σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ’ ἑμαυτόν] *to know whether I am* [εἴτε [...] ὄν τυγχάνω]¹ etc.

Socrates wonders if he is

*a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or [rather] a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature*².

This provides us with another evidence of his speaking on his own behalf, because the verb he uses is put in the 1st person of the singular again (τυγχάνω). With *myself* twice and two verbs in the 1st person of the singular there can be, I think, no doubt about how Socrates understands himself or whom he refers to.

Now, someone may still deny that Socrates is thinking of himself as himself, i.e. an individual with an individual being, and may ask for more evidence, for it is true that Socrates’ talk is not explicit as one would wish. He does not spell out in an univocal way, for example, that he does *not* think about himself as a human being (without considering himself as individuality), but does think about himself as social being, i.e. referring to his place in society (*vide* Annas), and/or taken as an objective and impersonal self (*vide* Annas *cum* Brunschwig). I could just say that given personal pronouns and personal forms of verbs the burden of proof lies on those who deny the individual and personal character of self-knowledge. However, there is still, as it seems to me, more evidence for the reading according to which the self in the Delphic motto is understood as subjective and individual by Socrates and, hence, by Plato. Take look once again at:

[...] *to know whether I am a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature*³.

¹ Transl. H. N. Fowler. Plato, *Phaedrus* 230a3–4.

² Transl. H. N. Fowler. Plato, *Phaedrus* 230a4–6.

³ Transl. H. N. Fowler. Plato, *Phaedrus* 230a3–6: σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ’ ἑμαυτόν, εἴτε τι θηρίον ὄν τυγχάνω Τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον καὶ μάλλον ἐπιτεθυμμένον, εἴτε ἡμερώτερόν τε καὶ

In Socrates' image of being either *a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon* or rather *a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature*, we can hardly find a hierarchy of god – man – animal, in which case such an image would be about opposing human nature to god's, on the one hand, and to animal nature, on the other. It is true that Socrates makes an opposition of two living beings (ζῶον), one of which has a divine lot. Yet, Typhon, at the least in the mythology, is a monster, a son of Gaia. Thus we should rather consider the opposition in view of its adjectives – *more complicated and more inflamed* (i.e. *violent* ?) vs *gentler and simpler* – and take the two elements of the *comparans* in view of their adjectives. Of four adjectives, two refer to composition (either *more complex* or *more simple* – but only relatively, no absolute complexity nor absolute simplicity: only more this or more that), another two refer to the character of being (more violent or more kind/soft). It turns out that the more complex the more violent and the simpler the gentler. How to know if Socrates refers to himself as himself only or to himself as the genus of human being as a whole? True, the remark is isolated and there is not, as Annas says, a separate treatment of the *know thyself* in Plato in this case. Furthermore, the supporters of reading *thyself as a human self taken as impersonal* could point out to Socrates' words:

*You see, I am fond of learning. Now the country places and the trees won't teach me anything, and the people in the city do.*¹

Here, in fact, it seems as if Socrates wished to meet other people in order to know – but to know what? From the *Apology* we know that this was his way of life, meeting and speaking with people included. For he declares:

*the god gave me a station, as I believed and understood, with orders to spend my life in philosophy and in examining myself and others*².

We also know from the *Apology* that he was interested in knowing what the meaning of the Delphic oracle's saying that Socrates was the wisest was. From his discussions with the Athenians he learnt that many pretended to know but knew in fact nothing, not even that they were in ignorance³. What then is that he learnt about human nature? Nothing general, I would say. In this particular respect, his nature as Socrates' nature is so different from other people's nature that he introduced the threefold and a well-known distinction between god – philosopher – ignorant:

those who are already wise no longer love wisdom, whether they be gods or men; nor again can those be lovers of wisdom who are in such ignorance as to be

ἀπλούστερον ζῶον, θείας τινός και ἀτύφου μοίρας φύσει μετέχον.

¹ Plato, *Phaedrus* 230d3–5, transl. H. N. Fowler.

² Plato, *Apology* 28e4–6, transl. W. R. M. Lamb. This time, we have a clear distinction between himself and others (ἐξετάζοντα ἑμαυτὸν και τοὺς ἄλλους) and the category of humankind as such.

³ E.g. Plato, *Apology*, 21d6–8.

*bad: for we know that a bad and stupid man is no lover of wisdom. And now there remain those who, while possessing this bad thing, ignorance, are not yet made ignorant or stupid, but are still aware of not knowing the things they do not know. It follows, then, that those who are as yet neither good nor bad are lovers of wisdom, while all who are bad, and all the good, are not [...].*¹

Therefore, epistemologically speaking, god and sage are as distant from him, Socrates (he is a lover of wisdom), as a human being when engulfed by his ignorance. Hence, at the least epistemologically, there is no such a thing as a human nature at all here, since we cannot speak about the human being generally who is ignoring, or wise or loving of wisdom. It could be said, that human nature is threefold but, then again, provided we agree that being ignoring, wise or wisdom-loving is what lies in human nature, it is each individual man who should investigate about his own case. This is what results from Socrates' remarks related to his own task. If this is correct, then his self-knowledge and the self-knowledge he speaks about to others Athenians is to be understood in individual and subjective terms. And the same goes regarding his words in the *Phaedrus*.

Now, I have to recognize that the only ancient commentary on the *Phaedrus* does not seem to support my interpretation. Hermias rather claims the same as Annas. For we read:

*Didn't Socrates know himself? Who else did know himself in this way as Socrates? Two things should be admitted: either that "as the god himself knows and according to Delphic saying, I don't know myself" or that "as the soul-itself being pure I don't know yet myself: I am still in body and as such, being in body I know myself but as the pure soul-itself I didn't get acquainted". Therefore, "as god knows I didn't know yet myself" or "as the pure soul-itself".*²

If Hermias is right I am wrong. Thus, there is an interpretation supported by Hermias and followed by Annas. But what if Hermias is wrong? What if Hermias – Annas' interpretation is simply neoplatonic, and how to know if it is?

No matter how much one sympathizes with a neoplatonic reading of Plato, he must admit that *autopsyche* [LSJ: *absolute soul*] is absent from the

¹ Plato, *Lysis* 218a1–b3, transl. W. R. M. Lamb. See also Plato, *Symposium* 204a1–7, transl. H. N. Fowler: [...] *no gods ensue wisdom or desire to be made wise; such they are already; nor does anyone else that is wise ensue it. Neither do the ignorant ensue wisdom, nor desire to be made wise: in this very point is ignorance distressing, when a person who is not comely or worthy or intelligent is satisfied with himself. The man who does not feel himself defective has no desire for that whereof he feels no defect.*'

² Hermiae Alexandrini, *In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia, ad loc.*: Ἄρ' οὖν οὐκ ἔγνω ἑαυτὸν ὁ Σωκράτης; Καὶ τίς ἄλλος οὕτως ἔγνω ἑαυτὸν ὡς ὁ Σωκράτης; Ἡ διχῶς ἐκδεκτέον· ἢ ὅτι «ὡς αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς οἶδε καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα, οὐκ οἶδα ἑμαυτὸν», ἢ ὅτι «ὡς αὐτοψυχὴ καθαρὰ οὐπω οἶδα ἑμαυτὸν· ἔτι γὰρ ἐν σώματι εἰμι, καὶ ὡς μὲν ἐν σώματι ὧν οἶδα ἑμαυτὸν, ὡς δὲ αὐτοψυχὴ οὐπω ἔγνωκα». Ἡ οὖν «ὡς ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν οὐπω ἔγνωκα ἑμαυτὸν», ἢ «ὡς αὐτοψυχὴ».

Phaedrus (and, more generally, from Plato's dialogues) and that *kathara* (*pure*) doesn't refer to *psyche* in the *Phaedrus*. More specifically, the neoplatonic system of emanations seems to not be applicable to the *Phaedrus*, because this is the dialogue – and the only one – where the soul is said to be *agenetos* (LSJ: *uncreated, unoriginated*, see 246a1–2: ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀγέννητόν τε καὶ ἀθάνατον ψυχὴ ἂν εἴη). If so, the soul doesn't originate from anything else for it doesn't originate at all. Its status is similar to that of ideas. This does hardly fit the neoplatonic interpretation and one must be surprised that Hermias in his commentary doesn't focus on *agenetos* at all¹.

This fact of Plato's applying *agenetos* to the soul in this only dialogue, provided it is not a mere chance, makes of the *Phaedrus* a unique dialogue regarding Plato's view on the soul². It allows us to consider Plato's philosophy in a different light, i.e. not to limit it to his idealism only³.

Furthermore, if the fact of being in body ruled out self-knowledge, as it is suggested by Hermias, then it would be nonsensical to recommend it to any bodily person unless we think of it as an epistemic progress only (in a similar way to a moral progress). But in the case of epistemic progress we should admit, in turn, that self-knowledge is possible, at the least in a minimal degree, regardless of embodiment. But if it is possible as such at all, this amounts to saying that the rigorous (? ascetic) interpretation of Hermias is too narrow since it doesn't include the bodily person.

I continue with the prayer closing the dialogue⁴. I use it here because, though it does not contain a direct reference to self-knowledge, it contains the inner – outer distinction and this distinction is applied to an individual personality:

*O beloved Pan and all ye other gods of this place, grant to me that I be made beautiful in my soul within, and that all external possessions be in harmony with my inner man. May I consider the wise man rich; and may I have such wealth as only the self-restrained man can bear or endure.*⁵

If the text above is meant to be a prayer, this is either a private prayer for oneself or a general prayer for everybody, say the whole genus of humankind (if we wanted to follow the Hermias – Annas – Brunschwig's approach). Yet, here again, as in the prologue, we find personal pronouns referring to the 1st

¹ On the other hand, in Plotinus, for example, *agenetos* is attested twice – *Enn.* II, 4, 5, 26 & V, 4, 1, 18 – the later being a kind of reworking the *Phaedrus* 245d3. It is an epithet of *arche* as opposed to *soma*, and *psyche* is not mentioned by Plotinus. This shows the liberty of treating Plato's text by the neoplatonists.

² This is not all. As it is shown by R. Zaborowski, *Some Neglected Details in Plato's Chariot Allegory*, the *Phaedrus* allegory has been generally misinterpreted as for the structure of the soul.

³ See below, p. 32.

⁴ See C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 226, who, as for the final lines of the dialogue, assumes that [t]he prayer summarizes, in an extraordinarily compact form, the major themes of the dialogue.

⁵ Transl. H. N. Fowler. *Phaedrus* 279b8–c3: ὦ φίλε Πάν τε καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσοι τῆδε θεοί, δοίητέ μοι καλῶ γενέσθαι τάνδοθεν: ἔξωθεν δὲ ὅσα ἔχω, τοῖς ἐντὸς εἶναι μοι φίλια. πλούσιον δὲ νομίζοιμι τὸν σοφόν: τὸ δὲ χρυσοῦ πλήθος εἴη μοι ὅσον μήτε φέρειν μήτε ἄγειν δύναιτο ἄλλος ἢ ὁ σῶφρων.

person of the singular (thrice) as well as verbal forms in the 1st person of the singular (twice). I don't see how these forms could generally refer to human-kind as such. It is true that the prayer appears to be Phaedrus' as well (*Let me also share in this prayer; for friends have all things in common*, says Phaedrus). Still it turns out to be Phaedrus exactly, and not just anyone, who appropriates it in the name of friendship. Can we say that all people are friends of each other? That Socrates' praying is for all of the human genus? I take it that it is more accurate to assume that, for many, Socrates' wish is not what they wish for themselves. Hence, when Socrates talks about man as such and such, with such and such feature, this is about an individual or individuals – Socrates in this case or Socrates and Phaedrus, since Phaedrus expresses that wish too.

As for Hermias' commentary he introduces the soul¹ vs body distinction as the one rendering, I think, the inner – outer (τᾶνδοθεν vs τοῖς ἐντὸς) distinction in Socrates' words. Yet, he doesn't insist on either the subjective or the objective meaning of the soul. How to know if Hermias means the individual or the universal sense of both soul (inner) and body (outer)? Of course we cannot know. But we can ask if there is any general body at all, I mean, a body-itself. More: we can ask if there are any general richnesses or possessions (*plousion, echei*). With all the qualifications Hermias introduces (e.g. *hoste, ina*), which mean that this or that does or doesn't happen, I suppose these things are said individually and not generally because they are put in relation to *some individual only*.

Let me resume.

The book whose author focuses on self-knowledge, i.e. Griswold's book is, first, limited to the *Phaedrus* itself, without reconstructing a more general context for Plato's works (this is what I intend to end with in a moment) and, second, it contains general and unclear claims in my opinion since, to some extent, everything is self-knowledge for Griswold. Let me give some examples:

Self knowledge is, in other words, intelligent self motion.²

or:

*To “fall from heaven” means, in the Phaedrus, to be separated from a condition of wholeness and knowledge.*³

or:

*The dialectic of the myth's self-limitation is the dialectic of self-knowledge. We are told by the myth that self-knowledge is both erotic madness and sophrosyne [...]*⁴ etc.

¹ Remark that *soul* is the word absent in the prayer.

² C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 111 [italics in the text].

³ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 144.

⁴ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 154.

or again:

*Reflection on that difference [i.e. difference between the written and spoken word] is an exercise in self-knowledge and so an antidote for the self-forgetfulness entailed by myth as well as techne.*¹

On the other hand, Annas – Brunschwig's or Hermias – Annas – Brunschwig's interpretation can be taken either in its weak or strong version. The strong version, according to which self-knowledge is exclusively to be understood in objective and impersonal terms is, as I believe I have proven, wrong because too restrictive. Within the weak version, according to which self-knowledge is both subjective and objective, personal and impersonal, there is room for what I have been suggesting: in a word, it is hard to dismiss entirely a reading on which the self is understood as individual.

In any event, what is obvious is that Plato's *interest in self-knowledge* doesn't *lessen in the later* [than the *Republic*] *dialogues* unless one considers that what we find in the *Phaedrus* are just and no more than *a few passing remarks*. I have referred to two passages – these are few, of course – but far from simple remarks, for how Socrates could have been more explicit about the matter of self-knowledge?

Given what we are told about the soul, i.e. that it is unoriginated, the soul is granted a similar status to that of ideas. The soul is not less important ontologically than the ideas and remains ontologically independent from them. Hence, in his search to know his soul, Socrates must have in view, it seems to me, his personal soul. This is so, because if we were to favour the impersonal soul-reading, it would no longer make sense to speak about *anamnesis*, which corresponds to an individual history; for there is no general history of all human beings (here lies, I think, a difference vis-à-vis the story in the *Book of Genesis* according to which all people share the same prehistory represented by Adam & Eve). Think about *erotikon omma* experience (*Phaedrus* 253e5) which is, again, not a general remembrance but a personal one, a remembrance based on personal memory, built, in turn, on personal experience. Socrates is therefore looking for the kind of person he is, the kind of soul he is and the kind of history is his. His task is to reflect on his personal character whose core is, true, a pure soul; still, it is his own and not a universal soul detached from non-soul, i.e. the bodily element.

III

I have touched on two passages in the *Phaedrus* – a confession made in the prologue and a prayer appearing at the very end of the dialogue. Although it is not impossible to confess and pray for what is impersonal and universal, I have maintained that, because of their content and context, the two passages speak in favour of the subjective and personal character of soul. There is neither a direct proof of the objective and impersonal meaning of what Socrates is confessing and praying for nor any indirect evidence that they

¹ C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 201.

should be read in this way. Put in other words: if both passages are not explicit enough to support what I have been defending, without a doubt much less can they be a corroboration of the opposite view, which I have been challenging in these pages.

A last word. The self-knowledge theme is an important piece in *Twin pillars of platonism* dossier. According to Cornford (1941), these pillars
*are the belief in a world of intelligible Forms or 'Ideas' existing independently of the things we see and touch, and the belief in an immortal soul existing in separation from the body, before both birth and after death.*¹

Nevertheless, if the *Phaedrus* holds a unique place in Plato's corpus because it grants the soul with a special and unique status (as unoriginated as well as immortal), we could ask whether would not be more appropriate to follow Lutosławski's interpretation² and say that platonism included two, not synchronic but diachronic theories: first the theory of ideas and, then, the theory of the eternal soul³. I refer to this solution only in order to explain better why in the *Republic* the prisoners' own shadows are so shortly described by Plato while, in the subsequent dialogue, the inner self – i.e. the personal soul – becomes so important. *Plato's mention[ing] of the B-shadows* [i.e. prisoners' own shadows] *being so brief, so isolated in the context, so quickly forgotten* [by Plato himself]⁴ should not be taken as an evidence of his lessened interest in self-knowledge but, rather, as an evidence of the fact that idealism does not deal with the inner world⁵. So, if we are right to think that Plato's philosophy changes after the *Republic*, we can say that the *Phaedrus* makes this change all the more clear and that this second stage in Plato's philosophy is more than his idealism focused on the psyche⁶. In this sense, self-knowledge is not an issue within idealism but is a central issue within Plato's new philosophy, within platonism's *second pillar*, of which the *Delphic motto* is a manifest abridgment.

¹ F. M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato*, p. xxv.

² See W. Lutosławski, *The Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic ...*, pp. 424–425: *Any unprejudiced reader who remembers what is said in the Phaedrus about the soul as origin of movement, and in the Laws about the stars as bodies of individual gods (967 A–E), must infer from this passage that here true Being means no longer ideas but souls, including human souls [...]. In Phaedrus and Laws the cause of movement is the soul. Here equally in the whole passage the soul is identified with true Being.* & p. 525: *Plato altered his primitive idealism into a more comprehensive philosophy, recognising the soul and a definite number of souls as the chief active powers of existence.*

³ The latter has been named by Lutosławski *individualism* or *spiritualism* or *personalism*.

⁴ J. Brunschwig, *Revisiting Plato's Cave*, p. 168.

⁵ See R. Zaborowski, *Sur un certain détail négligé dans la caverne de Platon*, pp. 224–225.

⁶ See W. Lutosławski, *Plato's Change of Mind*.

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